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# The Development of Aesthetic Education in Higher Vocational Colleges of China

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## Abstract

The importance of aesthetic education is widely recognized, as it plays a key supporting role in promoting the enhancement of the overall quality of university students and fostering the level of moral education. It not only supports balanced personal growth but also enhances sensory perception, creativity, concentration, and observation (Musa, 2018) while shaping their spiritual and cultural identity (Shiriyeva, 2020). In addition, it helps to inculcate moral values and ethics. This study focuses on the implementation and challenges of aesthetic education in higher vocational institutions in China and identifies key challenges and influencing factors. The findings suggest that aesthetic education is of strategic importance, driven by national policies, an improving policy framework, steady progress in educational reform, strengthening of infrastructure, and increasing diversification of activities. However, more attention needs to be paid to students' academic performance to ensure its effectiveness in improving their aesthetic literacy and overall competence. By analyzing these issues, this study aims to provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for future aesthetic education reforms.

## Keywords

higher vocational education, aesthetic education

## Introduction

Higher vocational education is closely linked to the needs of social development, advances with the times and serves the society, and its core objective is to cultivate high-level skilled talents at all levels and specialties. In recent years, China has gradually established the status of vocational education as an educational specialty, and has set up a complete vocational education system from vocational secondary schools to undergraduate education (Ministry of Education, 2022). This system focuses on improving the quality of vocational education, enhancing the value and influence of vocational education, and playing an important role in the cultivation of technically skilled personnel (Sun, 2021).

Vocational education is an important part of China's education system and human resource development, which provides an important pathway for social mobility and talent cultivation, as well as an important way for young people to achieve success (Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences, 2023). The Annual Report on the Quality of Vocational Education in China (2023) shows that China's vocational education has made breakthroughs in optimization, iterative system structure, and innovation in the mode of educating people, and that its social recognition index has grown significantly (Department of Vocational and Adult Education, Ministry of Education, 2023). According to the 2022 enrollment data monitoring of vocational colleges and universities showed a significant growth in enrollment share of 41.7%, and a variety of forms of enrollment in vocational colleges and universities across the country, including new modes such as the integration of middle and high school education (Ministry of Education, 2023). Among them, the total number of students enrolled in higher vocational colleges and universities has reached 5,389,800, exceeding that of undergraduates for four consecutive years, which shows that vocational education is playing an increasingly important role in cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents.

In this context, aesthetic education, as an important part of higher vocational education, not only helps to cultivate the vocational quality and professional spirit of the educated (Wang, 2018), but also serves as an important driving force to cultivate students' creativity (Lv, 2020). In vocational colleges and universities, aesthetic education plays an important role in helping students to comprehensively improve their overall quality and moral cultivation (Tan, 2022), and can promote the cultivation of talents to a deeper level (Ministry of Education, 2020). Therefore, vocational colleges and universities should pay more attention to the shaping of students' inner qualities when cultivating highly skilled talents with artistic and aesthetic qualities so as to realize the dual construction of both professional skills and a rich spiritual world (Ministry of Education, 2020). Fully activating the potential value of aesthetic education in vocational education further enhance the cultural literacy and comprehensive quality of students (Zhao, 2019), and cultivate composite talents with both technical skills and elegant aesthetic interests to meet the needs of the continuous development of society (Chinese Society for Vocational and Technical Education, 2021).

## Problem Statement

According to the report, China's higher vocational education is getting more and more attention from the public. School-enterprise cooperation continues to promote the integration of vocational education and industry. With the successive release of the "Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education," "Measures for Promoting School-Enterprise Cooperation in Vocational Schools," and other documents, which emphasize the need to optimize and adjust the five core elements of vocational schools' specialties, curricula, teaching materials, faculty members, and training bases, it has provided an opportunity for the promotion of vocational education to better serve local development. This has pointed out the direction to promote vocational education to better serve the local development strategy. However, higher vocational colleges and universities still face many challenges in the process of aesthetic education and teaching practice. The main aspects are in the classroom teaching strategy, student classroom participation, learning environment, and information technology transformation.

One of the problems is the limitations of classroom teaching strategies. At present, the aesthetic education program is still in the exploratory stage, and the traditional teaching strategies are not enough to meet the modern classroom teaching. Some educators fail to combine the traditional teaching mode with modern digital tools (Zhang, 2024); thus, the teaching method is relatively monotonous and thus cannot fully attract students' attention. In addition, in the current era of digital informatization, students are increasingly susceptible to external distractions, and as a result, their attention span decreases and their mastery of course knowledge decreases. This situation further negatively affects both students' academic performance and the overall effectiveness of the aesthetic education program (Adamu, Olayinka & Usman, 2024).

Besides, according to surveys, poor student academic achievement and low engagement have become a global educational challenge (Gandarillas, Elvira-Zorzo & Rodríguez-Vera, 2024). Low student engagement in learning and poor academic outcomes. In aesthetic education classrooms, student engagement is generally low, and learning outcomes are not met. Many students have little interest in the aesthetic education program and lack the intrinsic motivation to actively

participate, thus also affecting classroom interactions, and the teaching effect is not obvious or even declined. Enhancing students' learning motivation and classroom participation is still an important challenge that needs to be urgently tackled in the current reform of aesthetic education.

Thirdly, the reform of the aesthetic education curriculum is still in the exploratory stage, and a scientific, standardized and unified assessment system has not yet been established. The current evaluation framework lacks systematicity and fairness, which makes it difficult to make an accurate measurement of students' learning outcomes in aesthetic education (Xia, 2024; Zhang & Liu, 2024). Studies have shown that inconsistency and unharmonized evaluation criteria for aesthetic education are not conducive to accurately measuring the quality of teaching and learning. may also be detrimental to students' learning experiences and development paths (Liu, 2024; Ye & Zhao, 2022; Qing, 2021). Thus, in order to promote the high-quality development of aesthetic education, it is crucial to start improving a set of scientific, reasonable and uniform evaluation system.

The challenge of the digital teaching environment is one of the current issues. The rapid development of information technology has brought new tests to vocational education. The intelligent transformation of the learning environment in colleges and universities poses a challenge to whether students can adapt to changes in the form of teaching. Digital learning environments place new demands on student engagement (Xu & Guo, 2023). The main reason is that students' increased reliance on devices and software ignores the importance of basic learning skills and face-to-face communication, leading to a decrease or even lack of interaction between teachers and students. Thus, how to use the digital teaching environment to promote education and teaching has become an important issue that needs to be studied urgently.

## Background and Current Situation of Aesthetic Education in Higher Vocational College in China

As an indispensable part of the education system, aesthetic education has continued to be highly valued from ancient times to the present. Plato believed that aesthetic education is an indispensable part of upbringing or education, and emphasized the important role of aesthetic education in shaping

students into free men. Schiller (1795) elaborated on the educational theory of aesthetic education in *The Simplified Book of Aesthetics*, arguing that aesthetic education is an education about emotions. and further proposed that only through aesthetic education can educational goals be truly realized, emphasizing the central position of beauty in art education, and arguing that aesthetic education not only enriches the spiritual world of human beings but also has a key influence on cultivating personality and fostering humanistic consciousness. Since 1999, when aesthetic education was formally incorporated into the national education policy, aesthetic education has gradually become the focus of education reform in Chinese universities (Liu, 2020). In recent years, under the leadership of relevant national policies, the strategic significance of aesthetic education in China has been increasing, the policy framework has been gradually improved, educational reforms have been steadily promoted, teaching conditions and infrastructural equipment have been improved, and aesthetic practice activities have become increasingly colorful.

## The Historical Development and Policy Evolution of Aesthetic Education

The history of aesthetic education in China can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty, during the "Kui Mao School System" period. During the Republican period, Cai (1917) put forward the idea of "replacing religion with aesthetic education," thus emphasizing the important role of aesthetic education in the cultivation of civic literacy. He also believed that there is an essential difference between aesthetic education and art education, which lies in the different educational targets of the two, and that the scope of aesthetic education is much larger than that of art education. Wang Guowei (1902) first proposed "aesthetic education" in China when he translated the education textbook of Japanese scholar Koichiro Makise. This laid an important foundation for the construction of the theoretical system of aesthetic education in China.

In April 1918, Mr. Cai Yuanpei initiated the founding of China's first national art school in Beijing, called the National Academy of Fine Arts (now the Central Academy of Fine Arts), which marked the formal entry of aesthetic education into the national education system. In 1942, Comrade Mao Zedong put forward the idea of "art for the people" in his "Speech at the Yan'an Literary and Artistic Symposium," emphasizing the

importance of aesthetic education to the people. In his "Speech at the Yan'an Literary and Artistic Symposium" in 1942, he highlights the key role of aesthetic education in social development.

Comrade Mao Zedong believed that art was not only an important part of an individual's spiritual life, but also an important tool in the construction of socialist culture, and that through aesthetic sensibilities and artistic creation, individuals could internalize the goals of national development and thus promote social progress.

In 1986, aesthetic education began to seek independent disciplinary status. In accordance with the "Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China", the former State Education Commission clearly defined music and art as the core parts of the aesthetic education curriculum in primary and secondary schools in the draft relevant teaching plan, laying a policy foundation for the standardized development of aesthetic education.

Internationally, UNESCO released the "Arts Education Roadmap" at the first World Conference on Arts Education in 2006, which clearly defined the goals and implementation plans for art education; in 2010, the Second World Conference on Art Education released the Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Art Education, which emphasized the important role of art education in cultivating the creativity, cognitive ability, emotional literacy and sense of social responsibility of students. The important role of art education in developing students' creativity, cognitive ability, emotional literacy, and sense of responsibility was emphasized, which not only provides a grounding role for the development of global art education, but also provides directional guidance for the development of global art education.

Refer to the "Notice on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education" issued by the General Office of the State Council in October 2015, which clearly emphasizes that aesthetic education includes aesthetic education, sentiment education and spiritual education, and aesthetic education plays a vital role in improving people's aesthetic quality, and also has a subtle influence on people's character, emotions, interests, values, and other aspects. It also has a subtle influence on people's character, emotions, interests, values, and other aspects. The "Opinions" suggest that the core objective of implementing socialist aesthetic education

is to cultivate moral character and to focus on "comprehensive development" (General Office of the State Council, 2015).

### Status and development trend of aesthetic education in Chinese higher vocational colleges and universities

In recent years, with the support of national policies, the development of aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges and universities has made remarkable progress, the strategic position of aesthetic education in schools has been consolidated (Wang, 2021), the policy system has been gradually improved, the education and teaching reform has been steadily promoted, and the practical activities of aesthetic education have become increasingly rich (Chen, 2023).

Referring to the "Notice on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era" issued by the Ministry of Education on April 11, 2019, it emphasized the need to expand the coverage of aesthetic education in colleges and universities, and at the same time build a complete set of aesthetic education curriculum framework for colleges and universities (Ministry of Education, 2019). So as to make aesthetic education become an important part of the talent training system. The document provides a clear policy basis for the reform and development of aesthetic education in colleges and universities in the new era, and puts forward a specific implementation path. It provides clear direction for the development of aesthetic education in schools.

referring to the Ministry of Education further issued the Circular of the General Office of the Ministry of Education, In June 2019, on the Implementation of the Action Plan for Physical Education and Aesthetic Education Immersion, thus promoting the transformation of aesthetic education from traditional classroom teaching to practical teaching of art and immersion experience (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In 2020, the state emphasized the need to comprehensively strengthen and improve aesthetic education in schools in the new era, which explicitly put forward the basic formation of a "full-coverage, diversified, and high-quality" system of modern aesthetic education in schools with Chinese characteristics by 2035, and emphasized the need for aesthetic education to be combined with social practice and cultural activities in order to improve students'



aesthetic literacy. It also emphasizes that aesthetic education should be combined with social practice and cultural activities, with the aim of improving students' aesthetic literacy. It emphasizes that aesthetic education should be combined with social practice and cultural activities to comprehensively improve students' aesthetic literacy and cultural confidence (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2020).

In December 2023, the Ministry of Education of China issued a notice requiring the adoption of detailed measures to reform aesthetic education, including strengthening aesthetic education in terms of curriculum, faculty, activities, teaching evaluation, and facility construction. The document emphasized that aesthetic education should not only focus on theoretical teaching, but also strengthen artistic practice so that students can enhance their artistic cultivation and aesthetic ability through practical activities (Ministry of Education, 2023).

In July 2024, the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education issued a circular on the Guangdong Provincial Three-Year Action Plan for Promoting the High-Quality Development of Physical Education, Health, Arts, and National Defense Education in Schools (2024-2026), which further emphasized the importance of aesthetic education in schools. The document points out that higher education institutions should fully implement the Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative, and promote the high-quality development of aesthetic education by focusing on three core aspects: the quality of aesthetic education teaching, teachers' aesthetic education quality, and art practice activities (Guangdong Provincial Department of Education, 2024).

In summary, in recent years, under the support of national policies, the reform of aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges and universities is in full swing, and aesthetic education has gradually moved from "marginalization" to "coreization" (Wang, 2021), becoming an important part of the school talent training system. In the future, China's higher vocational colleges will further deepen the reform of aesthetic education, and build a more diversified, practical and personalized aesthetic education system. With the in-depth advancement of aesthetic education, it will play a greater role in promoting the all-round development of students' moral, intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic, and physical exertion, cultivating their

aesthetic ability, and enhancing their sense of cultural identity, etc., and ultimately realizing the educational goal of "educating people with beauty and culture" (Zhu, 2018)

## The future development of aesthetic education teaching in higher vocational colleges and universities

In recent years, with the increasing attention of the state to the work of aesthetic education, the research on the teaching of aesthetic education in vocational colleges and universities has flourished like a spring breeze (Committee on Aesthetic Education of the Chinese Society of Higher Education, 2023). Scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on topics such as the construction of the curriculum system, innovation in teaching practice, the construction of teachers and the improvement of the assessment mechanism, and have also achieved remarkable research results (Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences, 2023).

## The richness and diversity of the curriculum system.

In the future, the aesthetic education curriculum of vocational colleges and universities will pay more attention to the interdisciplinary integration of art disciplines and other disciplines and synergistically promote the setting of aesthetic education courses related to vocational skills (Li, 2022), and deeply excavate the value of aesthetic education in the curricula of various majors so as to form an interdisciplinary aesthetic education curriculum system. Meng & Liu (2022) put forward the innovative idea of constructing a "five-teaching integration" curriculum system, advocating optimizing the curriculum structure, appropriately reducing the proportion of academic courses, increasing the proportion of labor education and aesthetic education courses, and strengthening the implementation of moral education and physical education courses. Shao (2022) further expands this idea, emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary curriculum construction, and suggests integrating aesthetic education elements into professional courses to enhance students' aesthetic quality and innovation ability while cultivating their professional knowledge. In addition, scholars emphasize the need to use modern information technology to innovate the teaching methods of aesthetic education and build a

diversified aesthetic education resource base to provide strong support for the teaching of aesthetic education (Bian et al., 2020). At the same time, the deep integration of aesthetic education and professional skills education is promoted to cultivate students' creativity and comprehensive quality. In addition, it is also necessary to focus on the combination of "curriculum + hidden cultivation", to build a system that combines the explicit aesthetic education curriculum with the implicit aesthetic education environment, and to create a whole-time, whole-environment atmosphere of aesthetic education through campus cultural construction, club activities, and aesthetic education lectures (Yi, 2021).

In short, the curriculum system will be diversified and breaking the boundaries of traditional disciplines and incorporating interdisciplinary content. The curriculum is diversified in the form of both traditional and theoretical integration of aesthetic education practice. In addition, the current curriculum system pays more attention to keeping up with the development of the times and aims to cultivate excellent talents (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Cultivate students' artistic theoretical literacy and aesthetic ability; focus on improving students' practical ability and aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934).

### Teacher construction increasingly optimized.

The optimization of the teacher team of aesthetic education is an important link in promoting the high-quality development of aesthetic education (Ministry of Education, 2023). In the current education system, the integration of aesthetic education with digital technology, the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge, and the promotion of teaching methods suitable for the current students urgently need to cultivate teachers with an international outlook and the ability to educate emotionally. The Academic Affairs Office of Shanxi Finance and Economics Vocational and Technical College (2023) put forward a systematic solution in the area of faculty development. They emphasize the need to enhance teachers' interdisciplinary teaching ability and aesthetic literacy through the "Integration of Five Education" professional training program; vocational colleges and universities will also enrich their aesthetic education teaching teams by employing external art teachers, hiring non-genetic inheritors, and other means of joint cultivation with colleges and universities, and promote

exchanges and cooperation among teachers, so as to explore innovative teaching practices that integrate aesthetic education into the curricula. and jointly explore innovative teaching practices that integrate aesthetic education into the curriculum. With policy support and social recognition of the value of aesthetic education, more attention is now being paid to the construction of a "dual-teacher" teaching team, with teachers having both a solid background in art education and a certain amount of industry experience (Ministry of Education, 2022). Emphasis is placed on comprehensiveness and innovation in education and teaching. This will make the teaching force more in line with the requirements of educational development, helping teachers improve their aesthetic teaching level and professional ability plays a key role in the development of the current education situation and the improvement of students' comprehensive quality (Jin & Gao, 2019).

### Campus culture construction will be developed in a multidimensional manner.

Campus culture construction is a key link in the education system, especially in the aesthetic education system (Ministry of Education, 2023). campus culture can deepen the influence of students in terms of thoughts, feelings, and values through the shaping of environment, activities, and atmosphere (Zhao, 2021). On the one hand, aesthetic education will be integrated into every corner of students' daily life through the optimization of campus architecture, environmental greening, cultural walls, and other details (Shao, 2022; Graham, 2019). On the other hand, the artistic atmosphere of the campus will be enhanced through rich art and cultural competitions, etc., to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in aesthetic education (Wang, 2022; Heiland et al., 2023). It can also organize regular traditional art courses, lectures, activities, etc., and organize art practice activities, etc., so that students can improve their art literacy in appreciation. Shao (2022) explored the strategy of aesthetic environment. He suggested creating an artistic campus atmosphere, organizing various cultural activities, and combining aesthetic education with ideological and political education. In addition, he encourages students to participate in multicultural exchange activities to cultivate an aesthetic outlook that is compatible with contemporary society. This approach is of great guiding significance in improving students' aesthetic and moral literacy. Campus culture can not only provide students with artistic inculcation,

but also shape their character, way of thinking, and worldview and enhance their comprehensive literacy. Campus culture construction will also start from multi-dimensions to form a harmonious, innovative, and energetic campus culture environment. Thus, it will promote students' aesthetic enhancement and cultivate good comprehensive literacy in a subtle way.

### The evaluation mechanism for the needs of educational development.

The improvement of the evaluation mechanism of aesthetic teaching is a key link in improving the quality of aesthetic education (Ministry of Education, 2023), which can promote the overall development of students, stimulate artistic creativity, and improve the teaching level of teachers. The traditional evaluation of aesthetic education teaching mostly favors the assessment of skills and knowledge. However, with the continuous updating of educational concepts, the evaluation mechanism needs to be more comprehensive and diversified (He, 2023). In terms of evaluation mechanism, Meng & Liu (2022) emphasize the importance of establishing a diversified evaluation system. They proposed including aesthetic education in the assessment of students' comprehensive qualities, combining formative and summative evaluation to comprehensively reflect students' aesthetic ability and creative development (Xian, 2021). This evaluation model is an important reference for improving the assessment system of aesthetic education (Wang, 2022). The improvement of the evaluation mechanism of aesthetic education teaching should focus on the combination of process evaluation and summative evaluation, emphasizing students' participation, creative expression, and aesthetic experience in the process of art learning. In addition, the evaluation ability of teachers will be improved to ensure the scientific and standardized evaluation criteria. Through flexible adjustment and dynamic feedback, a comprehensive, objective, and differentiated evaluation system will be established to promote the overall development of students in the teaching of aesthetic education (Xian, 2021).

Overall, as society's requirements for the comprehensive quality of talents continue to increase, the teaching of aesthetic education in vocational colleges needs to be constantly innovated in the curriculum, teacher construction, campus culture, and evaluation mechanism to help aesthetic education develop in a more diverse and in-depth direction

(General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2022). This can not only enhance students' artistic cultivation but also promote the comprehensive improvement of their innovation ability and professionalism (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

Research shows that, driven by national policies, aesthetic education occupies an important strategic position in China, has been continuously elevated, the policy framework is becoming more and more perfect, and the educational reform is steadily advancing (General Office of the State Council 2020). The educational resources and support system are gradually improving, and the practice of aesthetic education is becoming more and more abundant (Zhao, 2021; Bian et al., 2023). Although vocational colleges and universities have made certain achievements in carrying out aesthetic education teaching, enhancing students' learning outcomes is still a key issue that needs to be further researched. In order to promote the continuous development of aesthetic education in vocational colleges and universities, it is necessary to explore the key factors affecting the effectiveness of aesthetic education teaching and provide scientific guidance for future teaching practice and reform direction. Therefore, future research should focus on elements such as teaching strategies, learning environment, students' perseverance, students' engagement, and learning motivation. Exploring their specific effects on students' aesthetic education achievement will promote the deep integration of aesthetic education and informed vocational education and provide empirical evidence and practical guidance for the optimization and improvement of aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges and universities. It will provide stronger support for students' comprehensive development.

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