

Investigation and Research on the Development and Implementation of Aesthetic Education Curriculum in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Core Competency Framework

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Abstract: The role of aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges has garnered increasing attention, as it not only enriches students' campus cultural life but also enhances their innovative and practical capabilities. Higher vocational colleges should provide diversified aesthetic education platforms and encourage students to participate in artistic activities and social practices, thereby achieving the organic integration of knowledge, skills, emotions, and values. This study investigates and analyzes the current status of aesthetic education curriculum implementation in Chinese higher vocational colleges, examines students' perceptions, interests, and demands for such courses, identifies existing challenges, and proposes targeted solutions. The findings reveal that most students perceive aesthetic education as crucial for personal growth. However, issues such as homogeneous course formats and tedious teaching content persist. This research aims to provide insights for improving the quality of aesthetic education curricula in higher vocational institutions.

Keywords: Higher vocational colleges; Aesthetic education curriculum; Current status investigation; Countermeasure suggestions

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1. Introduction

(1) Definition and significance of aesthetic education

Aesthetic education, or artistic cultivation, refers to educational activities that foster students' aesthetic sensibilities, capabilities, and values through exposure to art, culture, and nature. Its core lies in enhancing students' aesthetic literacy and nurturing innovative thinking and practical skills through

artistic and cultural immersion. In Western vocational education systems, such as Germany’s dual-system model, aesthetic elements are integrated into vocational training through industry-academia collaborations, such as craft design workshops and music programs. In China, aesthetic education has become a cornerstone of the “Five Domains of Education” framework in higher vocational institutions, elevating students’ artistic cultivation and comprehensive development. The *Outline for Building a Leading Educational Nation (2024-2035)* issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on January 19, 2025, explicitly states:

“Deepen quality-oriented education, refine the comprehensive cultivation system integrating moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education, and advance the immersive integration of aesthetic education in schools”^[1].

This policy underscores the strategic importance of aesthetic education in vocational education.

(2) Distinctiveness of aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges

Higher vocational colleges, as hubs for cultivating technical and skilled professionals, require unique approaches to aesthetic education^[2]. Compared to general universities, these institutions prioritize practical skill development. Thus, their aesthetic curricula must balance theoretical knowledge with hands-on practice, enabling students to appreciate beauty, embrace multiculturalism, and refine professional competencies. Through aesthetic education, students not only acquire technical expertise but also cultivate sensitivity to aesthetics and intercultural understanding.

(3) Research objectives and significance

This study investigates the current implementation of aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges, identifies systemic challenges, and proposes actionable strategies. By analyzing students’ perceptions, demands, and feedback on existing curricula, the research aims to provide theoretical and practical guidance for optimizing aesthetic education programs. Its significance lies in advancing the role of aesthetic education in nurturing a new generation of high-caliber professionals who possess both technical proficiency and refined aesthetic sensibilities, thereby aligning with national educational reforms and societal development goals^[3].

2. Investigation results and problem analysis of aesthetic education curriculum implementation in higher vocational colleges

This study employed a questionnaire-based survey to examine the current status of aesthetic education curriculum development and implementation in higher vocational colleges. The survey addressed key aspects including students’ awareness, interest, teaching content, and evaluation methods. The research team selected five higher vocational institutions, comprising vocational undergraduate colleges and “Double High Plan” institutions. A total of 1,522 valid questionnaires were collected via Wenjuanxing, achieving a 100% response rate. The 22-item questionnaire focused on curriculum development, implementation, and synergies between aesthetic education and ideological-political education.

2.1. Students’ awareness and interest in aesthetic education

The findings reveal that approximately 58% of respondents consider aesthetic education “crucially important” for personal growth, 35% deem it “moderately important,” and only 2% perceive it as “unimportant.” This indicates strong student recognition of aesthetic education’s significance. Additionally, 65% express active interest in

aesthetic education, 25% adopt a neutral stance (“depends on circumstances”), and 9% show disinterest. While enthusiasm for aesthetic education is generally high, a subset of students remains ambivalent.

2.2. Current status of aesthetic course offerings

Music, art, and drama appreciation dominate existing curricula, whereas practical courses (e.g., choir, instrumental performance) account for only 47.77%. This highlights an over reliance on theoretical instruction and insufficient emphasis on hands-on artistic engagement.

2.3. Curriculum formats and teaching methods

Approximately 55% of students access aesthetic courses through online platforms, 33% via blended learning (online and offline), and 13% attend in-person lectures. Regarding teaching preferences, 63% favor experiential learning, 61% prefer teacher-led instruction, and 41% advocate for group collaboration. These results underscore students’ inclination toward interactive and participatory pedagogical approaches.

2.4. Student feedback on curriculum challenges

Key issues identified include underdeveloped curricula (24%), outdated pedagogical concepts (26%), faculty shortages, and insufficient institutional investment. Notably, 26% criticize the disconnect between theory and practice, while 24% describe course content as monotonous. These findings reflect systemic deficiencies in practical course offerings and curricular innovation.

2.5. Integration of aesthetic and ideological-political education

While 87.45% of students report exposure to integrated aesthetic-ideological courses, 57.16% acknowledge their developmental value. However, 26% lack awareness of such initiatives, and 8% dismiss their relevance. This signals the need for enhanced promotion and strategic refinement of interdisciplinary synergies^[4].

3. Implementation strategies for improving the construction quality of aesthetic education courses in higher vocational colleges

Through data analysis, we have comprehensively understood the current situation of aesthetic education courses in higher vocational colleges and put forward targeted improvement suggestions on this basis. Mainly, in combination with the characteristics of higher vocational college education and the actual needs of students, excellent traditional Chinese culture should be incorporated into the teaching content of aesthetic education courses to enhance students’ understanding of excellent Chinese culture. For example, teaching contents such as calligraphy, Chinese painting, ocarina, and Jiangnan silk and bamboo music can be added. It is also necessary to keep up with the development trends of modern aesthetics, update the course content in a timely manner, and add teaching contents in emerging fields such as contemporary art and digital art. A hierarchical teaching system should be established. According to students’ interests and cognitive development, beginner, intermediate, and advanced courses should be set up to meet the needs of students at different levels, enrich the course system, and improve the participation and practicality of the courses. The specific measures are as follows:

3.1. Strengthen the practicality of aesthetic education courses

Surveys show that current aesthetic education courses are mainly theory - based, and practical courses are

relatively weak. Higher vocational colleges should increase the proportion of art practice courses, such as chorus, instrumental performance, and dance, promote the aesthetic education infiltration action, and strengthen the practical links of aesthetic education to enhance students' practical ability and sense of participation. At the same time, an aesthetic education venue that combines education and training should be constructed, promoting school - enterprise cooperation to integrate multi - party resources and break through the dilemma of weak practical links in aesthetic education in higher vocational colleges. In addition, aesthetic education courses with industry - specific characteristics should be offered, combining industry development trends and enterprise needs, such as highly targeted aesthetic education courses in art appreciation, design aesthetics, and cultural creativity.

3.2. Enrich the teaching forms of aesthetic education courses

Students in the new era prefer teaching methods with strong interactivity and high participation. Teachers should reduce single - style lecture teaching and increase diversified teaching methods such as group cooperation and experiential learning to improve students' enthusiasm for learning. Modern educational technologies, such as multimedia teaching, virtual reality, and aesthetic education platforms, should be actively introduced to enhance the interactivity and practicality of teaching, and enrich teaching resources and learning methods. A strong artistic atmosphere can also be created on campus, art practice activities can be carried out, and a variety of second - classroom teaching forms can be offered, such as setting up art exhibitions, holding art competitions, establishing art clubs, and organizing art lectures and salons, to improve students' practical ability and aesthetic experience, so that students can be subtly influenced by beauty^[5].

3.3. Strengthen the teaching staff of aesthetic education courses

Surveys show that the shortage of teaching staff for aesthetic education courses is one of the main problems faced by most schools. Higher vocational colleges should strengthen the training of aesthetic education teachers, establish and improve a training mechanism for aesthetic education teachers, and regularly carry out professional training and exchange activities to improve the professional qualities and teaching abilities of aesthetic education teachers^[6]. In addition, off-campus experts and artists should be invited to participate in the teaching and guidance of aesthetic education courses to enrich the course content. High-level aesthetic education talents should be introduced, and school-enterprise cooperation should be carried out to strengthen the teaching staff and improve the quality of aesthetic education teaching. Schools should set up an incentive mechanism for aesthetic education teachers, incorporate the teaching achievements of aesthetic education into the teacher title evaluation system, stimulate the enthusiasm for teaching innovation, and improve the professional level of the teaching staff.

3.4. Promote the collaborative education mechanism of “aesthetic education plus ideological and political education”

The combination of “aesthetic education plus ideological and political education” is an inevitable trend in implementing the project of cultivating people with moral integrity in the new era. Higher vocational colleges need to further promote courses that combine aesthetic education and ideological and political education to enhance students' ideological and political qualities and aesthetic abilities. At the same time, activities such as special lectures and art exhibitions can be held to improve students' awareness and interest in the combination of aesthetic education and ideological and political education^[7]. A perfect aesthetic education course system that promotes the coordinated progress of aesthetic education and ideological and political education should be constructed, following the characteristics of aesthetic education, highlighting value shaping, and giving full play

to the main-channel role of aesthetic education courses in the school's ideological and political education. The aesthetic education value and functions contained in each discipline should be deeply explored, and the organic unity of teaching and practice should be strengthened^[8].

3.5. Improve the evaluation system of aesthetic education courses

Surveys show that 58.08% of students hope to use a multi-aspect evaluation method (intra-group, teacher, and self-evaluation) to evaluate their performance in aesthetic education courses. It can be seen that the establishment of a diversified evaluation system is in line with students' psychology and can avoid a single exam-based evaluation method. The existing evaluation focuses on knowledge memory and skill mastery, with a relatively single evaluation dimension. The evaluation indicators for assessing students' internalization of values, music review writing ability, and creative adaptation and display ability are not perfect. It is necessary to break through the traditional assessment and evaluation model and establish a diversified and multi-dimensional evaluation system. An evaluation mechanism mainly based on student evaluation can be added, highlighting the teaching concept of "student-centered". Through evaluation, students' learning interest can be stimulated, their aesthetic ability and comprehensive quality can be promoted, and the teaching quality can be guaranteed^[9].

4. Case studies of aesthetic education curriculum in higher vocational colleges and international experience reference

4.1. Aesthetic education practices at Shanghai Science and Technology Innovation Vocational College

During the first semester of the 2024–2025 academic year, Shanghai Science and Technology Innovation Vocational College prioritized integrating theory with practice in its aesthetic education curriculum. By offering diverse art practice courses and establishing robust artistic exchange platforms, the college achieved notable outcomes. A detailed analysis of this case is provided below:

4.1.1. Distinctive curriculum design with emphasis on practice and experience

As a high-quality vocational institution co-established by municipal and district authorities, Shanghai Science and Technology Innovation Vocational College balances specialized skill training with general education anchored in aesthetic development. Leveraging both internal and external resources, including the National Academy of Education Administration's China Education Cadre Online College platform, the college has pioneered blended online-offline teaching models. These efforts align with the practical needs of higher vocational students while delivering high-caliber, multidimensional aesthetic courses. Key initiatives include:

Integration of first and second classroom activities: The college offers art practice courses such as choir, dance teams, ceramic flute clubs, creative rope skipping, and rhythmic gymnastics. These cater to diverse student interests, stimulate artistic potential, and emphasize hands-on engagement over mere theoretical instruction.

Innovation-driven learning: Students are encouraged to incorporate creative elements into artistic practices, such as composing original music, choreographing dance dramas, editing musical accompaniments, and synchronizing music with visual media. These activities cultivate innovative thinking and practical skills.

4.1.2. Expansion of artistic exchange platforms to broaden horizons

The college regularly hosts art exhibitions and performances, providing students with platforms to showcase

their talents, build confidence, and enrich campus cultural life. Additionally, it organizes lectures and salons featuring renowned artists and scholars, enabling students to engage with masters and explore cutting-edge artistic trends^[10]. Partnerships with external art organizations further expand off-campus practice opportunities, enhancing students' social adaptability^[11].

4.1.3. Significant outcomes in curriculum development and holistic student growth

Participation in foundational and practical aesthetic courses has markedly improved students' artistic literacy and aesthetic competence, enabling deeper appreciation of artworks and spiritual enrichment. Collaborative art projects foster teamwork, communication, and leadership skills, while creative endeavors enhance imagination and problem-solving capabilities. These initiatives not only cultivate a vibrant campus artistic atmosphere but also promote the comprehensive development of students' moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor-related qualities.

In conclusion, Shanghai Science and Technology Innovation Vocational College has conducted pioneering explorations in aesthetic education, yielding substantial results. Moving forward, the institution is poised to deepen curricular reforms, innovate teaching models, and contribute to nurturing high-caliber technical professionals with ethical values, creativity, and practical expertise.

4.2. Cases of combining aesthetic education and ideological and political education in “Double-High” vocational colleges

Some “Double-High” vocational colleges have actively explored the combination of aesthetic education and ideological and political education^[12]. Against the backdrop of the “Double-High Plan”, Jiangsu Maritime Institute has based itself on the cultural genes and educational functions of traditional Chinese opera. By offering the “Opera plus Ideological and Political Education” course, it combines opera appreciation with ideological and political education, and constructs a trinity ideological and political education model for the opera appreciation course, namely “cultural inheritance-value guidance-practical empowerment”. It has formed a replicable typical case, helping students understand the ideological values and cultural connotations contained in opera works while appreciating them. This teaching method not only improves students' aesthetic ability but also enhances their ideological and political qualities. The following is an in-depth analysis of the case:

4.2.1. Curriculum reconstruction and implementation path

In terms of curriculum content, classic opera works containing traditional Chinese virtues, patriotism, and craftsmanship spirit are carefully selected. For example, the Peking Opera “Mu Guiying Takes Command” interprets female responsibility and patriotism; the Kunqu Opera “The Peony Pavilion” explores the beauty of human nature and the philosophy of life; the local opera “Jiao Yulu” links the red spirit with the values of the era. A content matrix of “historical classics plus red themes plus modern innovations” is formed. Through the interpretation of the background of the opera, the analysis of roles and types, and the decoding of singing and music, the essence of traditional Chinese culture such as “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith” and the core socialist values such as “hard work” and “dedication” are naturally integrated into the opera appreciation. In terms of teaching mode, the innovative “New Opera Creation and Performance” project is carried out. Students are guided to adapt traditional operas. For example, “The Orphan of Zhao” is adapted into a short play with the theme of integrity, or modern opera sketches with the themes of “rural revitalization” and “craftsmanship spirit” are created to promote the creative transformation of values. Topics such as “Dialogue

between Opera and Contemporary Youth” are set, such as “The Commonality between Traditional Concepts of Loyalty and Filial Piety and Modern Civic Responsibilities”. Gender equality issues are explored in combination with the Huangmei Opera “A Woman from Huizhou” to stimulate students’ critical thinking. In terms of industry - education integration, a “Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance Workshop” is jointly established with local opera troupes. Intangible cultural heritage inheritors are invited to tell the craftsmanship spirit of “one minute on the stage, ten years of hard work off the stage”. “Opera plus Cultural and Tourism” practical projects are developed. For example, opera-themed study tour routes are designed for rural scenic spots, allowing students to practice cultural confidence in cultural services.

4.2.2. Educational achievements and characteristic innovations

Remarkable achievements have been made in value guidance. Through the chain of “role substitution-emotional resonance-behavior imitation”, abstract ideological and political theories are transformed into perceptible artistic images. For example, by experiencing the singing and movements in the Henan Opera “Hua Mulan”, students deeply understand the contemporary value of “women can hold up half the sky” and spontaneously organize a campus forum on “Female Career Development”. The evaluation system is multi-dimensional. A “Four-Dimensional Evaluation Model” is constructed: artistic aesthetic ability (singing analysis reports), cultural understanding ability (interpretation of opera symbols), value judgment ability (analysis of the ideological and political implications of opera works), and practical innovation ability (scoring of original scripts). Rich achievements have been made in resource construction. An “Opera plus Ideological and Political Education Case Database” has been established, which includes the analysis of the ideological and political implications of more than 50 opera works. For example, the enlightenment of the awareness of the rule of law in the Pingju Opera “Yang Sanjie Brings a Lawsuit”. A series of micro-courses on “The History of the Communist Party in Opera” has been developed. Taking the Peking Opera “The Eve of the Expedition” as the carrier, the micro-course “Learn the Roles in Peking Opera and Pass on the Spirit of Heroes in the Anti-epidemic” is produced, which tells the dedication, responsibility, and strong sense of social responsibility of medical workers who sacrifice their small families for the big one, and has won awards in the provincial micro - course teaching competition for vocational colleges.

4.2.3. Promotion value and enlightenment

On the basis of the reform of aesthetic education courses, Jiangsu Maritime Institute has broken through the bottlenecks of traditional aesthetic education. Through the specific learning mode of “singing, reciting, acting, and fighting” in opera, it has solved the contradiction between “theoretical indoctrination” and “emotional alienation” in traditional ideological and political courses, providing a new paradigm of “dynamic inheritance with ideological and political empowerment” for courses on intangible cultural heritage inheritance. In highlighting the characteristics of vocational education, the training of opera skills is combined with the cultivation of professional qualities. Through the training of “hand, eye, body, method, and step” in Peking Opera, students’ concentration and teamwork ability are cultivated, reflecting the educational orientation of “simultaneous cultivation of morality and skills”. In terms of radiating social service effectiveness, the student team goes to the community to carry out the tour performance of “Chinese Spirit in Opera”, combining the classic segment of “Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy” with anti-fraud publicity, realizing a chain reaction of “art dissemination-value transmission-social governance”. This case uses the unique advantages of opera art of “conveying the spirit through form and influencing people through emotion” to construct an educational closed-loop of “from artistic infiltration to value internalization to behavior externalization”. It not only provides methodological reference for

the ideological and political construction of traditional cultural courses but also explores a characteristic practical path for vocational colleges to implement the “Strategy of Building a Strong Cultural Country”. The core inspiration is that ideological and political education in courses should be rooted in professional genes. Through “creative transformation”, ideological and political education should move from “abstract preaching” to “concrete infection”, and finally achieve the educational effect of “seeing, hearing, understanding and acting”.

4.3. Integration of aesthetic education in German vocational education

Germany’s dual-system vocational education is an educational model that jointly cultivates talents through enterprises and schools, emphasizing the combination of theory and practice^[13]. In recent years, Germany has gradually integrated aesthetic education elements into vocational education, forming a unique aesthetic education integration model. This integration not only improves the quality of vocational education but also provides broader space for students’ career development and the cultivation of comprehensive qualities. The following is an analysis of the integration of aesthetic education in Germany’s dual-system vocational education:

4.3.1. Background and motivation of aesthetic education integration

Economic and Social Demands: With the adjustment of Germany’s economic structure and the rise of emerging industries, the market’s demand for technical talents with innovation ability and aesthetic qualities has increased. The integration of aesthetic education is a catalyst for cultivating students’ creativity and aesthetic ability, enabling them to better meet the needs of modern industries.

Educational policy support: Policies issued by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research emphasize the integration of vocational education and higher education, focusing on the improvement of students’ comprehensive qualities. This policy orientation provides institutional guarantee for the integration of aesthetic education into vocational education.

Influence of cultural tradition: Germany’s speculative tradition and emphasis on art and culture make its vocational education focus on students’ all-around development while paying attention to skill training.

4.3.2. Specific practices of aesthetic education integration

Curriculum design and teaching content: In the dual-system vocational education, aesthetic education courses are incorporated into the curriculum system of vocational schools. For example, vocational schools offer courses such as art design and basic aesthetics, and integrate aesthetic education elements according to the characteristics of different majors. The architectural design major may add aesthetic design courses, and the horticulture major may integrate landscape aesthetics content.

School-enterprise cooperation and practical teaching: As an important part of the dual-system vocational education, enterprises actively participate in the integration of aesthetic education. Enterprises provide students with practical opportunities, allowing them to feel the value of beauty in actual work. For instance, in manufacturing enterprises, students not only learn technical operations but also participate in the appearance design and process beautification of products. Germany’s “learning factory” is an upgraded version of the dual-system vocational education, integrating the learning place and the workplace. In this model, students can learn aesthetic knowledge in a real production environment and apply it to product design and the production process.

4.3.3. Significance and value of aesthetic education integration

Cultivation of Comprehensive Talents: The integration of aesthetic education enables students to improve their

aesthetic ability and innovative thinking while mastering vocational skills, which helps to cultivate compound-type talents and enhance students' comprehensive qualities^[14].

Enhancing the Attractiveness of Vocational Education: The addition of aesthetic education makes vocational education more attractive, changes the traditional social perception of vocational education, and attracts more students to choose the dual-system vocational education.

Promoting Industrial Upgrading: Technical talents with aesthetic qualities can better meet the requirements of modern industries for product design and process aesthetics, promoting the upgrading of Germany's manufacturing and service industries.

Although Germany's dual-system vocational education has achieved remarkable results in the integration of aesthetic education, it still faces some challenges. The integration of aesthetic education courses and traditional vocational education courses needs to overcome disciplinary barriers to ensure their organic combination. Some small and medium-sized enterprises have insufficient understanding of aesthetic education integration and low participation, which affects the comprehensive promotion of aesthetic education integration. There is a shortage of "dual-qualified" teachers who are proficient in both vocational education and aesthetic education. Globally, similar problems are faced. The specialization of professional teachers in aesthetic education or the vocationalization of aesthetic education teachers may be a major trend for future vocational colleges to improve their educational concepts. Further improvement of the aesthetic education integration model in vocational colleges can provide useful references for global vocational education reform.

5. Conclusion

This paper reveals the main problems in the current aesthetic education in vocational colleges through an investigation of the current situation of the establishment and implementation of aesthetic education courses in vocational colleges and proposes corresponding countermeasures. The research shows that the construction and implementation of aesthetic education courses in vocational colleges still face many challenges and need to be further optimized and improved in terms of the curriculum system, teaching content, teaching staff, and teaching resources. Special attention should be paid to strengthening the practicality of aesthetic education courses, enriching teaching forms, enhancing the teaching staff, strengthening the combination of aesthetic education and ideological and political education, and improving the evaluation system to promote the optimization and development of aesthetic education course construction. Only by continuously deepening the reform of aesthetic education and innovating the aesthetic education teaching model can aesthetic education truly play an important role in cultivating high - quality technical and skilled talents with both professional skills and aesthetic interests in the new era, laying a solid foundation for students' all - around development and lifelong learning and contributing to the sustainable development of society^[15].

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