

Research on the Construction of Aesthetic Education Courses in Universities from an Interdisciplinary Integration Perspective: A Case Study of Sichuan University

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Abstract: Higher education increasingly emphasizes the unique role of aesthetic education in cultivating virtue and morality. From the perspective of integrating aesthetic education with teaching, this study develops an analytical framework to explore the theoretical foundations, practical pathways, and teaching mechanisms involved in interdisciplinary aesthetic education course construction at Sichuan University. Employing literature analysis and case studies, the paper systematically examines the theoretical basis of aesthetic education and its contemporary demands in higher education. Specifically, it focuses on Sichuan University's initiatives in aesthetic education curriculum reform, covering practices such as curriculum design, faculty team development, resource coordination, and collaboration between internal and external institutions. Findings suggest that interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses enrich the content of aesthetic education in universities and enhance students' overall competence; however, these courses also face challenges like insufficient faculty and inadequate evaluation mechanisms during implementation. Consequently, this paper proposes strengthening top-level design, refining the curriculum system, enhancing faculty training, and improving evaluation mechanisms as recommendations for future improvement. This research aims to provide valuable references for aesthetic education reform in higher education in the new era, significantly contributing to interdisciplinary synergy and the comprehensive educational goal of integrating moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education.

Keywords: Aesthetic education; Interdisciplinary integration; Curriculum construction; Teaching reform

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1. Introduction

In the context of the new era, the construction of aesthetic education courses in higher education has received unprecedented attention. Aesthetic education constitutes a crucial component of talent cultivation in universities and should be integrated throughout the entire educational process^[1]. By immersing students in natural, social, and artistic beauty, aesthetic education contributes significantly to enhancing students' aesthetic literacy and

overall quality. It not only enhances students' aesthetic abilities but also significantly promotes their mental health and personality development by meeting emotional needs such as autonomy, competence, and belonging, thus guiding their spiritual pursuits and cultivating moral character ^[2,3]. Currently, however, many universities' aesthetic education courses suffer from issues such as limited content, restricted design, and inadequate integration, making it difficult to effectively fulfill the demand for well-rounded talent cultivation in the new era ^[4]. Exploring pathways to construct interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses and innovating aesthetic education teaching models has thus become an urgent topic for reform in higher education.

Interdisciplinary integration, through combining knowledge, methods, and resources from different disciplines, breaks traditional disciplinary boundaries and expands the breadth and depth of aesthetic education courses, effectively cultivating students' comprehensive abilities and innovative awareness. Particularly, intersections among art, technology, and humanities, exemplified by STEAM education models, significantly enhance students' creativity and innovative thinking ^[5,6]. Collaborative interdisciplinary teaching enriches classroom formats and strengthens students' teamwork and communication skills ^[7]. Furthermore, incorporating artistic elements into other disciplinary courses can increase classroom engagement and participation, fostering a more open and inclusive learning environment.

Constructing aesthetic education courses through interdisciplinary integration aligns with the intrinsic shift in talent cultivation from specialized expertise towards holistic development in the new era, embodying the philosophy of "broad aesthetic education," and promoting coordinated growth in humanistic literacy and innovative thinking. Universities can integrate aesthetic education into all aspects of general and specialized education, bridging the gaps between arts and sciences, humanities and technology, thereby enabling students to enhance their aesthetic appreciation and humanistic qualities while mastering professional knowledge, ultimately cultivating innovative talent with comprehensive development.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The connotation and educational value of aesthetic education

Aesthetic education is an educational approach that enhances individuals' aesthetic capabilities and promotes emotional development through aesthetic activities and artistic practices. Its core objective is to cultivate students' abilities to perceive, appreciate, and create beauty, thereby facilitating personality perfection and spiritual enrichment. Contemporary aesthetic education theories assert that aesthetic education extends beyond mere artistic skills training, highlighting instead the positive impact of aesthetic experiences on individual personality integrity. Aesthetic activities nourish students' emotional lives, contributing significantly to their spiritual freedom and personality development. This perspective aligns closely with contemporary humanistic educational philosophy, emphasizing that education fundamentally serves to realize individuals' self-worth and personality growth. It advocates fully respecting students' emotional experiences and developmental needs throughout the educational process. University-level aesthetic education directly responds to these educational demands by facilitating students' spiritual freedom and comprehensive personality development through aesthetic and artistic experiences.

2.2. Theoretical support for interdisciplinary integrated education

Interdisciplinary integrated education aims to overcome the limitations of traditional single-discipline teaching models by integrating knowledge and methods from diverse fields, thereby fostering students' comprehensive abilities and innovative consciousness. The theoretical underpinnings of interdisciplinary integration can be summarized in three aspects:

- (1) Constructivist learning theory: Constructivism emphasizes that knowledge results from learners actively constructing understanding based on prior experiences. Teachers should create authentic interdisciplinary contexts to guide students in actively exploring and experiencing, thus constructing their aesthetic knowledge systems and fostering interdisciplinary cognitive integration abilities.
- (2) Theory of multiple intelligences: Proposed by the American psychologist Howard Gardner, the theory of multiple intelligences suggests that individuals possess diverse forms of intelligence, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. Traditional education often neglects the development of artistic intelligence, whereas interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses integrate the arts with other disciplines, unlocking students' potential across multiple intelligences and promoting holistic development.
- (3) Pragmatic educational philosophy: Represented by John Dewey, pragmatism stresses that education must be grounded in authentic life situations. Dewey argued that aesthetic experiences are inseparable from daily life, viewing artistic activities as inherently practical processes. Interdisciplinary aesthetic education integrates aesthetic instruction into everyday practice, enabling students to gain rich, holistic life experiences, thus achieving an effective unity between aesthetic education and practical living.

2.3. The contemporary theoretical demands of university aesthetic education reform

Universities, as crucial institutions for talent cultivation, bear significant responsibilities in enhancing students' humanistic literacy and comprehensive quality. Aesthetic education has risen to become one of the “five educations,” standing equally alongside moral, intellectual, physical, and labor education. Consequently, universities must systematically construct aesthetic education curricula to cultivate talent equipped with humanistic literacy and innovative capabilities suited to the new era. Currently, higher education faces a profound transformation in its concepts of talent cultivation and teaching modes, with increasing emphasis on comprehensive student development, innovative capability, and spiritual-cultural needs. Promoting interdisciplinary integration in university aesthetic education courses represents an intrinsic requirement for the ongoing educational reform and development within higher education institutions.

3. Teaching reform practices at Sichuan University

As a comprehensive research-oriented university, Sichuan University leverages its multidisciplinary strengths to undertake effective reforms in aesthetic education courses. During the implementation of interdisciplinary integrated aesthetic education curriculum construction, the university established a clear working process, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. The specific practical experiences are reflected primarily in the following aspects.

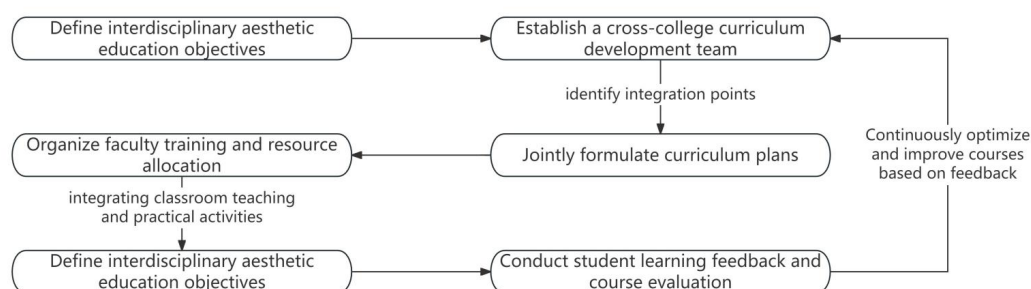


Figure 1. Implementation process of interdisciplinary aesthetic education

3.1. Top-level planning and improving the aesthetic education system

Sichuan University formulated the Implementation Plan for Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in the New Era. The university incorporated aesthetic education into its overall talent cultivation framework, clearly defining the positioning and objectives of aesthetic education in cultivating morality and character. Within the general education curriculum, Sichuan University offers mandatory aesthetic education courses such as Chinese Culture (Arts Edition), integrating content from literature, history, philosophy, and the arts to systematically enhance students' humanistic and artistic literacy. Additionally, Sichuan University established the Art Education Center as a coordinating institution responsible for the planning and implementation of public art courses, promoting resource sharing and collaborative teaching across colleges. This university-wide strategic design, supported by specialized aesthetic education departments, provides essential organizational guarantees for the sustainable construction of aesthetic education courses.

3.2. Enriching course offerings and creating integrated course modules

Sichuan University actively diversifies course offerings and establishes integrated course modules across multiple disciplines, providing public elective art appreciation and practical courses in fields such as music, fine arts, drama, and film accessible to students from various departments, as illustrated in **Table 1**. For instance, the elective course Symphonic Music Appreciation, offered by the Art Education Center, is popular among students due to its integration of historical and cultural contexts, and has been selected among the Ministry of Education's first batch of national first-class undergraduate courses. The university's original stage drama on revolutionary themes, Sister Jiang at Sichuan University, combining artistic practice with ideological education, has been recognized as an outstanding case by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the university established cross-college collaboration mechanisms, encouraging faculty from different disciplines to jointly offer interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses. For example, the course Introduction to Digital Media Arts, a collaboration between the College of Art and the School of Computer Science, integrates programming technology with visual arts, effectively cultivating students' interdisciplinary abilities in art and technology. Through abundant and innovative course offerings, Sichuan University students typically enroll in two to three aesthetic education courses during their studies, creating favorable conditions for comprehensive improvement in aesthetic literacy.

Table 1. Examples of interdisciplinary integrated aesthetic education course modules at Sichuan University

Course module	Course name	Participating colleges	Integrated disciplines	Credits	Teaching method
Art Appreciation Module	Symphonic Music Appreciation	College of Art	Music, History, Culture	2	Lectures, practical sessions
Artistic Practice Module	Introduction to Digital Media Arts	College of Art, School of Computer Science	Digital Technology, Visual Arts	2	Project-based practice
Integrated Innovation Module	Design and Engineering Aesthetics	College of Engineering, College of Art	Engineering Technology, Aesthetic Design	3	Project collaboration
Professional Integration Module	Introduction to Art Therapy	College of Art, West China Hospital	Art, Medicine, Psychology	2	Practical workshops

3.3. Building a diverse teaching team

The successful implementation of interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses relies on a high-quality and diverse teaching team. Sichuan University actively fosters such a team by combining internal faculty training with external talent recruitment, as illustrated in **Table 2**. Faculty members from different colleges within the university are

encouraged to participate in aesthetic education teaching. For example, teachers from the College of Literature and Journalism collaborate with those from the College of Art to jointly deliver public art courses, achieving interdisciplinary collaboration among literature, history, philosophy, and the arts. Additionally, faculty members from engineering disciplines who possess artistic skills are invited to teach courses such as photography and industrial design aesthetics, thereby integrating aesthetic elements from a professional perspective.

Furthermore, the university actively recruits industry experts and social art talents as adjunct teachers or guest lecturers. For instance, renowned artists and designers are invited to deliver master classes, and symphony orchestra musicians offer music appreciation courses. This combined “internal and external” faculty model significantly enhances teaching quality and promotes interdisciplinary communication and collaboration among faculty members within the university.

The university regularly organizes teacher training sessions and teaching workshops to share aesthetic education experiences. At the institutional level, the university explicitly stipulates that the interdisciplinary aesthetic education course teaching team must consist of members from at least two different disciplines. Additionally, collaborative teaching achievements are incorporated into faculty evaluation and incentive mechanisms, providing strong human resources support for course integration.

Table 2. Composition of the aesthetic education teaching team at Sichuan University

Teacher type	Source	Examples of disciplinary background	Courses or activities	Number (persons)
Full-time	College of Art (Internal)	Music, Fine Arts, Drama	Public Art Appreciation Courses	25
Part-time	Other Colleges (Internal)	Literature, History, Philosophy, Science and Engineering	Interdisciplinary Integrated Aesthetic Education Courses	30
External	External Art Institutions	Artists, Designers	Master lectures, workshops	15

3.4. Collaborative construction and resource sharing

Sichuan University fully leverages internal and external resources to build aesthetic education practice platforms, promoting collaborative education.

- (1) Internal interdisciplinary collaboration: Relying on its own museums, art galleries, and other on-campus resources, Sichuan University has developed these venues into a “second classroom” for aesthetic education. For example, exhibitions of calligraphy, painting, seal carving, and historical artifacts are regularly organized, enabling students to visit and study, effectively integrating campus cultural activities with aesthetic education. The university also utilizes engineering laboratories to offer practical courses such as “Art and Materials” and “Design and Engineering Aesthetics,” integrating engineering experimental teaching with artistic creativity.
- (2) University-local cooperation: Sichuan University collaborates with local cultural institutions in Chengdu to carry out aesthetic education through social practice programs. Students participate in volunteer docent roles at museums and science centers, extending aesthetic education beyond campus boundaries. Additionally, the university cooperates with institutions such as the Sichuan Provincial Song and Dance Theatre and Symphony Orchestra, inviting these art groups onto campus for performances and lectures, enriching students’ artistic experiences.
- (3) Interdisciplinary research and project practice: Notably, the College of Art at Sichuan University has launched an interdisciplinary experimental art project titled “Art × Design × Psychology,” in collaboration with West China Hospital and other institutions, exploring innovative models of art therapy. The

project brings together experts, scholars, faculty, and students from various fields, including medicine, psychology, painting, design, dance, and music, using experimental art to aid in the rehabilitation of individuals with psychological disorders. This initiative has created a collaborative platform between the medical and art colleges and has also resulted in elective courses such as “Introduction to Art Therapy,” effectively achieving the integration and practical application of interdisciplinary knowledge.

Through the aforementioned collaborative initiatives, aesthetic education at Sichuan University extends beyond traditional classroom boundaries, establishing an integrated educational framework that combines classroom teaching, campus culture, and social practice.

3.5. Teaching mechanisms and evaluation innovations

During the implementation of aesthetic education courses, Sichuan University commonly adopts flexible and diversified teaching methods and evaluation mechanisms. In courses focused on music and art appreciation, interactive appreciation sessions, scenario-based experiences, and artistic creation activities are introduced, emphasizing students’ participation and practical abilities. Project-based learning methods are implemented, requiring students to collaborate in groups to complete interdisciplinary art projects or research reports, thereby cultivating their teamwork and innovative thinking skills. Additionally, to stimulate students’ interest, certain courses employ blended online and offline teaching models, leveraging high-quality MOOC resources to expand students’ autonomous learning opportunities.

Regarding course evaluation, Sichuan University shifts the focus away from traditional written examinations and emphasizes a combination of formative and comprehensive evaluations, as illustrated in **Figure 2**. Students’ class attendance and participation, art creations or practical reports, and classroom discussion performance are all included in assessments, collectively constituting a significant proportion of the final grade. This diversified evaluation system better aligns with the characteristics of aesthetic education courses, comprehensively reflecting improvements in students’ aesthetic competencies. Furthermore, the university has established a feedback mechanism for course quality, regularly collecting student opinions and expert observations to continuously enhance teaching content and methods.

In terms of administration, Sichuan University incorporates aesthetic education courses into the talent cultivation quality monitoring system, tracking aspects such as course offerings, student enrollment numbers, and teaching effectiveness. Outstanding courses and teachers are recognized and rewarded, while problematic courses are promptly revised or phased out, ensuring the sustainable and positive development of the aesthetic education curriculum construction.

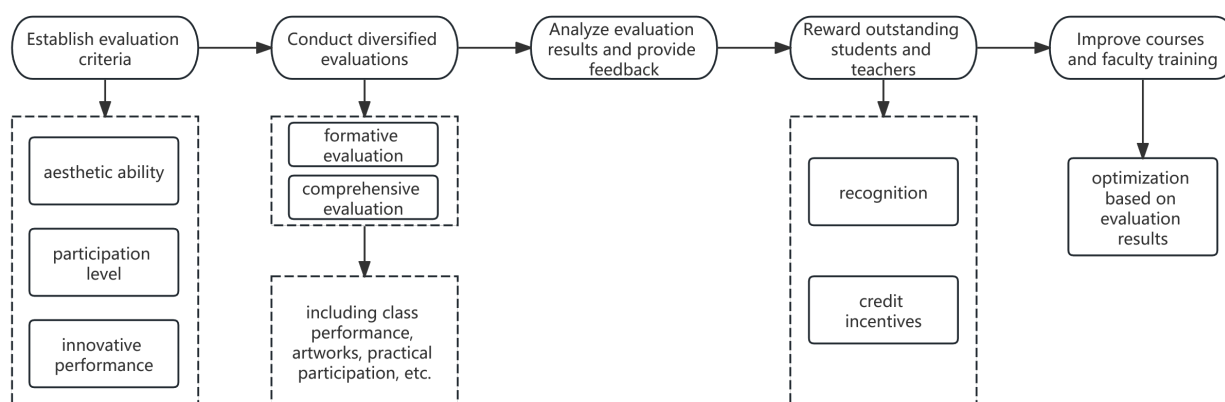


Figure 2. Innovative evaluation system

4. Existing problems and suggestions for improvement

Despite the notable achievements of Sichuan University's aesthetic education curriculum reform, several shortcomings remain, offering universal insights for other institutions. Key issues include:

- (1) Insufficient faculty resources: Currently, the number and professional composition of aesthetic education teachers do not fully meet the demands. There is a notable shortage of teachers with interdisciplinary backgrounds capable of delivering aesthetic education. Many courses rely heavily on faculty from art disciplines, with limited participation from other departments. Additionally, faculty members' abilities to innovate in aesthetic education teaching require further improvement.
- (2) Inadequate course coverage and depth: Although the number of aesthetic education courses has increased, their coverage and relevance for students across different majors remain limited. Engineering and science students, for example, often face heavy academic workloads and are thus hesitant to enroll in elective aesthetic education courses. Some courses still focus primarily on teaching artistic skills, lacking sufficient interdisciplinary integration and consequently failing to fully engage non-art students.
- (3) Incomplete evaluation and incentive mechanisms: Aesthetic education courses often carry relatively low weight in performance evaluations and credit systems, sometimes resulting in insufficient commitment from both students and faculty. Students often prioritize their GPA from professional courses over aesthetic education electives. Moreover, the recognition of aesthetic education teaching outcomes in faculty evaluations and promotions remains limited, affecting teachers' motivation and enthusiasm.
- (4) Insufficient long-term collaborative education mechanisms: Interdisciplinary aesthetic education practices across colleges and departments primarily rely on short-term or temporary projects, lacking sustained collaboration. External resources, though introduced, often lack consistent integration into long-term teaching frameworks; collaborations with art institutions and community groups, for instance, are largely event-based without stable practice bases.
- (5) Underdeveloped student evaluation and feedback system: There are insufficient quantitative indicators to measure improvements in students' aesthetic literacy. Student feedback and individualized needs are not adequately reflected in course improvements. The university-wide monitoring and evaluation system for aesthetic education requires further enhancement to identify issues promptly and disseminate successful experiences.

Based on these challenges, the following suggestions for improvement are proposed:

- (1) Strengthening policy support and top-level design: Universities should refine institutional documents related to aesthetic education, integrating aesthetic education courses as mandatory elements within the training programs. For instance, establishing explicit graduation requirements where undergraduate students must complete a certain number of aesthetic education credits. Establishing dedicated university-level funds to support interdisciplinary course development and faculty training can also help. Through institutional support, departments can better prioritize aesthetic education, fostering comprehensive participation throughout the university.
- (2) Expanding faculty teams and teaching capabilities: Universities should enhance aesthetic education teacher training by encouraging faculty from diverse disciplines to participate in aesthetic education training, learning fundamental artistic and aesthetic methodologies to integrate into their courses. Creating mechanisms for mutual teacher exchange and collaborative teaching—for example, between liberal arts and engineering faculties—can facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration. Additionally, hiring industry experts as adjunct teachers while enhancing young faculty members' aesthetic teaching skills,

and incorporating participation in aesthetic teaching as a positive factor in faculty evaluation and promotions, can further encourage greater faculty involvement.

- (3) Optimizing curriculum structure and content integration: The university should systematically review existing aesthetic education courses, categorizing them into modules such as art appreciation, artistic practice, and integrated innovation. For students majoring in fields other than art, more accessible and engaging general education courses, like “Beauty and Creativity in Science” or “Fundamentals of Aesthetics in Engineering Design,” could be introduced to lower participation barriers. Identifying aesthetic elements within professional courses and integrating aesthetic education with ideological education (“Curriculum Ideology and Politics”) can further enrich the educational experience. Courses should also integrate deeper interdisciplinary content—for example, incorporating historical and cultural stories into music appreciation classes or aesthetic theories into calligraphy courses—to enhance their appeal and educational depth.
- (4) Enhancing evaluation and incentive mechanisms: The university should refine the student aesthetic education evaluation system, integrating aesthetic literacy assessments into the overall student evaluation framework. Tools could be developed to quantitatively evaluate students’ artistic appreciation abilities, aesthetic expression, and practical participation. Students who excel or actively participate in aesthetic activities should receive recognition through academic credits or honors, fostering a positive atmosphere for aesthetic education. Faculty members’ aesthetic teaching outcomes should be incorporated into their performance evaluations, with incentives and recognition given to teams offering interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses, thus enhancing faculty enthusiasm and commitment.
- (5) Deepening collaborative construction and practical education: A stable collaborative education platform should be established internally and externally. For example, long-term cooperation agreements with local cultural and art institutions could be formalized to jointly create aesthetic education practice bases, regularly sending students for practice experiences with mutual recognition of academic credits. On-campus collaborations across colleges should also be encouraged through events such as interdisciplinary aesthetic competitions and cultural salons. Moreover, leveraging modern information technology to establish an aesthetic education resource-sharing platform, providing access to high-quality aesthetic education resources and event information for faculty and students, can further expand learning opportunities. Mechanisms for sustained collaboration will help integrate aesthetic education deeply into campus culture and social practice, forming a long-term educational network.

By implementing these measures, universities can significantly enhance the quality and impact of aesthetic education courses, truly achieving comprehensive aesthetic education objectives involving all students throughout their educational journey, in every aspect of campus life.

5. Conclusion

The construction of interdisciplinary aesthetic education courses represents an essential direction for teaching and educational reform in universities in the new era. The experiences at Sichuan University demonstrate that effectively integrating aesthetic education into multiple disciplinary contexts not only enriches curriculum content and enhances students’ aesthetic literacy and humanistic qualities but also fosters innovative talent, embodying the value of a comprehensive approach to aesthetic education within higher education. Nevertheless, reforming aesthetic education courses is a systemic endeavor, requiring sustained improvements in faculty

resources, curriculum design, and institutional mechanisms.

Higher education institutions should draw lessons from pioneering universities such as Sichuan University, adapting these insights to their unique disciplinary strengths, and exploring innovative paths for integrating aesthetic education with professional training. By persistently advancing aesthetic education initiatives and establishing new collaborative educational models, universities will better cultivate well-rounded talent, addressing the moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor development requirements of contemporary society.

The journey of aesthetic education reform in higher education remains long and demanding, calling for continued exploration and practice among educators. Future reforms should consistently uphold the fundamental educational mission of fostering virtue and cultivating individuals through beauty, ensuring that aesthetic education deeply influences the minds and hearts of young students. With deeper implementation of interdisciplinary integration concepts, aesthetic education in higher education institutions is poised to flourish even more brilliantly in the new era.

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Disclosure statement

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