

# A Study on the Strategies to Enhance the Quality of Master of Fine Arts Professional Degree Theses: Based on the CNKI Data Analysis of X University

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**Abstract:** The quality of the dissertations for the Master of Fine Arts professional degree not only reflects the academic proficiency and research capacity of graduate students but also embodies the teaching quality and academic reputation of the training institutions. This research is based on the data from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) of the dissertations for the Master of Fine Arts professional degree at X University. Through analyzing the quantity of the dissertations, the distribution of publication years, the download frequency and the citation frequency, in combination with in-depth literature reading, the main factors influencing the quality of the dissertations for the Master of Fine Arts professional degree are dissected. Targeted quality enhancement strategies are proposed from four aspects: the graduate students themselves, the guidance of supervisors, the training institutions, and the external environment, with the aim of providing references for the quality improvement of the education of the Master of Fine Arts professional degree.

**Keywords:** Master of Fine Arts; Professional degree dissertation; Strategies for quality enhancement

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## 1. Introduction

Concurrent with the rapid growth of China's economy and the continuous progress of society, the demand for high-level and application-oriented specialized talents is increasing daily. Professional master's degree postgraduate education, as a crucial component of postgraduate education, is aimed at cultivating high-level application-oriented talents who possess solid professional theoretical knowledge, strong practical capabilities, and favorable professional ethics <sup>[1]</sup>.

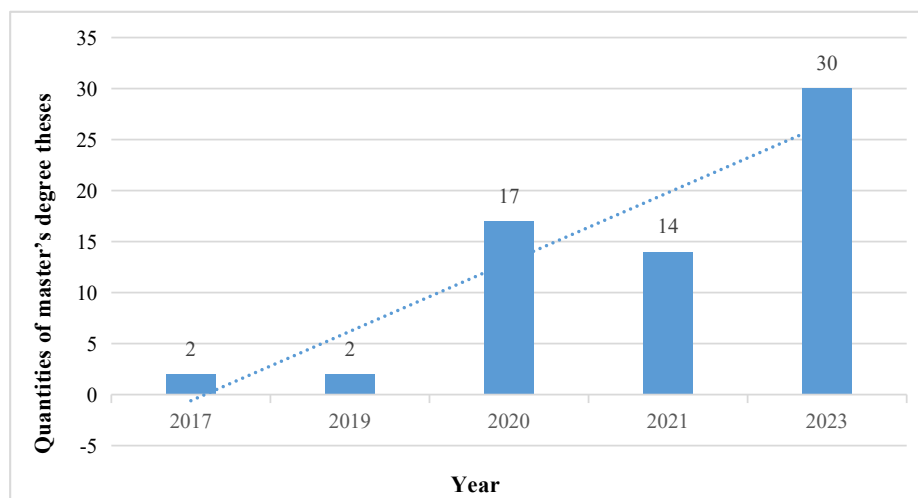
The Master of Fine Arts (MFA) professional degree, since its establishment, has consistently constituted a vital element in the cultivation of high-level artistic talents. The quality of MFA dissertations not only demonstrates the academic proficiency and research capabilities of graduate students but also reflects the teaching quality and academic reputation of the training institutions. However, in parallel with the rapid development of MFA education, the problem of inconsistent quality of dissertations has gradually emerged prominently. Some dissertations are plagued by outdated topic selection, a lack of innovation, non-standard research methods, and insufficient reasoning, thereby exerting an influence on the overall quality and reputation of MFA education<sup>[2,3]</sup>.

At present, in both the academic and educational fields, there is a scarcity of surveys and research on the current quality status of Master of Fine Arts (MFA) theses. The principal factors influencing the quality of MFA theses remain unclear, and targeted improvement measures are lacking, thus failing to provide effective guidance for MFA education and thesis composition<sup>[4,5]</sup>. In view of this, based on the data of MFA theses from X University available on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), by analyzing the quantity of theses, their distribution in publication years, download frequencies, and citation frequencies, and in combination with in-depth literature review, this study dissects the main factors influencing the quality of MFA theses and proposes targeted quality enhancement strategies, with the expectation of providing a reference for the quality improvement of MFA education.

## 2. Analysis of the current quality situation of Master of Fine Arts professional degree theses

### 2.1. The publication year and quantity of degree theses

On October 31, 2024, the relevant data of the Master of Fine Arts professional degree theses of X University from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) were collected. A total of 65 theses were retrieved. Among them, there were two each in 2017 and 2019, 17 in 2020, 14 in 2021, and 30 in 2023. The data indicates that the number of the Master of Fine Arts professional degree theses of X University has been increasing year by year, suggesting that with the continuous advancement of the Master of Fine Arts education, the investment and scale of postgraduate training in the college are expanding. Simultaneously, it reflects that the college is attaching increasing importance to the quality of postgraduate education (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.** The distribution of the publication years and quantities of the Master of Fine Arts theses at X University

## 2.2. Analysis of download frequencies of degree theses

The download frequency constitutes a significant indicator of the degree of attention a thesis attracts. The data disclose that 72.3% of the theses in the Master of Fine Arts program at X University had over 100 downloads, with four theses having more than 1,000 downloads, indicating that the theses in this program have gained widespread attention and recognition within the academic community. Among the top ten theses in terms of download frequency, Professor Zang WJ ranked first with five theses he guided, followed by Xi H with two theses he guided, while Yu JJ, Wang L, and Qi D shared the third place (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** The top ten Master of Fine Arts degree theses with the highest download frequency at X University

No.	Download frequency	Supervisor	Student	Thesis title
1	1732	Xi H	Chen QY	A Design Research on the Application of Patterns of Miao Ethnic Costumes in Cultural and Creative Products
2	1392	Zang WJ	Jiang SX	“Jiao Lv” - A Research on Picture Book Design Based on the Cognition and Filtration of Anxiety Emotions
3	1083	Xi H	Wang YF	A Study on the Design of Interactive Picture Books for Children
4	854	Zang WJ	Chen Y	The Application Design of Oracle Bone Script in Cultural and Creative Products of the Chinese Character Museum
5	843	Yu JJ	Yuan YF	Research on Campus Landscape Design under the Contemporary Cultural Background - Taking Xijing University as an Example
6	833	Zang WJ	Zhou RX	The Application Research of Graphic Design in Shaanxi Xi'an Dialect
7	807	Wang L	Yang QY	The Application of Traditional Phoenix Graphics in the Design of Museum Cultural and Creative Products
8	796	Qi D	Su RX	Research on Community Reconstruction Design under the Concept of Urban Sharing - Taking Liuxuanyuan Community in Yangliuqing Town, Tianjin as an Example
9	719	Zang WJ	Zhao JH	Research on the Design Composition of Ku Shulan's Paper-Cutting and Its Effective Utilization
10	674	Zang WJ	Xu J	Research on the Modeling Art and Design Application of Huaiyang Nini Dog

Further analysis of the average download volume of the theses for the Master of Fine Arts degree reveals that the top ten in descending order of frequency are Pang YH (frequency = 651.0), Zang WJ (frequency = 571.5), Xi H (frequency = 515.8), Wang Y (frequency = 462.0), Wang L (frequency = 409.3), Yu JJ (frequency = 315.0), Zhao YA (frequency = 260.8), Li C (frequency = 252.7), Qi D (frequency = 249.6), and Guo HJ (frequency = 166.0), which, to a certain extent, objectively reflects that the theses guided by these supervisors have high academic and practical value.

## 2.3 Analysis of the citation frequency of academic degree theses

Citation frequency constitutes a key indicator for evaluating the quality of academic papers. Through the statistical analysis of the citation frequency of the master's theses within the art discipline at X University, an initial comprehension of the academic influence and quality level of the theses can be obtained. As can be noted from **Table 2**, the total citation count and average citation count of the students' theses guided by supervisors Xi H, Zang WJ, and Wang L are ranked among the top three, suggesting that these students' theses have received recognition from the academic community. Naturally, due to factors such as the quantity of guided theses and

variations in research directions, a relatively low citation frequency (including download frequency) cannot be unreservedly regarded as an indication of the poor quality of the dissertations. A comprehensive assessment is still required by taking into account the average citation frequency, average download frequency, opinions of blind review experts, and the content of the theses.

**Table 2.** The cumulative and average citation frequencies of the thesis supervisor within the Master of Fine Arts professional degree program at X University

No.	Supervisor	Total citation frequency	Average citation frequency
1	Xi H	36	4.5
2	Zang WJ	25	2.3
3	Wang L	19	2.1
4	Zhao YA	6	0.8
5	Yu JJ	2	0.7
6	Qi D	2	0.4

### 3. The principal factors influencing the quality of the thesis for the Master of Fine Arts degree

Via data analysis and in-depth scrutiny of theses, it is affirmed that the graduate students themselves, the guidance offered by their supervisors, the training institutions, and the external environment constitute the predominant factors influencing the quality of theses for the Master of Fine Arts professional degree.

As the principal entity involved in thesis creation, the factors inherent in postgraduate students also exert a crucial function, predominantly manifested in domains such as academic foundation, learning attitude, innovation ability, and time management. Some postgraduate students lack a solid professional fundamental knowledge and a broad knowledge range prior to enrollment, making it arduous for them to grasp the research direction when choosing topics and being incapable of accurately identifying research problems, thereby restricting the depth and breadth of thesis creation.

A supervisor is by no means merely an academic guide but rather a crucial supporter and supervisor for postgraduate students throughout their thesis composition. Factors such as the supervisor's academic proficiency, guidance modality, investment in guidance, and communication and interaction with students jointly exert a substantial influence on the quality of the Master of Fine Arts professional degree thesis. Supervisors of high caliber typically boast profound academic attainments and extensive research experience, being capable of furnishing students with avant-garde academic perspectives and in-depth research approaches.

The training institution, serving as a prominent entity accountable for ensuring the quality of the Master of Fine Arts professional degree thesis, furnishes elements such as the academic environment, resource support, management system, and cultural ambience, which exert a considerable impact on the thesis quality of the Master of Fine Arts. The academic environment and resource support constitute the bedrock for the Master of Fine Arts to undertake academic research and compose their theses. A rich and vibrant academic atmosphere can stimulate the research enthusiasm and innovative thinking of graduate students.

Although external environmental factors do not directly exert an influence on each and every aspect of thesis creation, their overall impact should by no means be disregarded and they exert profound and indirect effects on

the quality of the thesis. A salutary social ethos can stimulate the academic enthusiasm and innovative spirit of graduate students, facilitating their active involvement in academic research and thereby generating high-quality theses.

#### **4. Strategies for elevating the quality of Master of Fine Arts theses**

In response to the principal factors that influence the quality of theses for the Master of Fine Arts degree, strategies for enhancing thesis quality at four levels have been put forward, namely graduate students, supervisors, training institutions, and the external environment.

At the graduate level, the quality of art master's professional degree theses can be enhanced in four respects: intensifying academic consciousness and sense of responsibility, elevating research ability and innovation capacity, consolidating academic norms and integrity awareness, and enhancing time management and self-regulation capabilities. Regarding the intensification of academic consciousness and sense of responsibility, graduate students should be guided to establish the correct academic notion, augment their love and pursuit of the art discipline, and stimulate their intrinsic academic impetus. Concerning the elevation of research ability and innovation capacity, research method courses should be initiated to systematically introduce the commonly utilized research methods and tools in the art discipline, thereby enhancing the research ability of graduate students. With respect to the consolidation of academic norms and integrity awareness, academic norms courses and lectures on academic integrity should be launched to strengthen the academic norms awareness and integrity awareness of graduate students. In terms of the enhancement of time management and self-regulation capabilities, graduate students should be guided to formulate detailed time schedules based on their actual circumstances and thesis creation requirements, and rationally allocate their time.

At the supervisor level, the quality of master's theses can be enhanced in four domains: augmenting the academic guidance competence of supervisors, fortifying the sense of responsibility and mission of supervisors, elevating the innovation and practical capabilities of supervisors, and intensifying the academic ethics and integrity education of supervisors. Concerning augmenting the academic guidance competence of supervisors, invite renowned scholars and seasoned supervisors to share their guidance experience and academic frontier tendencies, and enhance the academic level and guidance ability of supervisors. With regard to fortifying the sense of responsibility and mission of supervisors, formulate a detailed list of supervisors' responsibilities, clarify various tasks and responsibilities of supervisors in the graduate student training process, and heighten their sense of responsibility. Regarding elevating the innovation and practical capabilities of supervisors, encourage supervisors to actively engage in artistic creation, project research and other practical activities to improve their own practical ability and innovative thinking. In terms of intensifying the academic ethics and integrity education of supervisors, establish a supervisors academic integrity file to record and assess the academic integrity of supervisors.

At the level of training institutions, the quality of master's degree theses can be elevated in three aspects: combining management systems and training programs, reinforcing thesis process management and quality supervision, and advancing school-enterprise cooperation and the integration of production and teaching. Regarding combining management systems and training programs, the college should refine the management system for art postgraduate students to ensure the standardization and efficacy of thesis work. Concerning reinforcing thesis process management and quality supervision, establish a comprehensive thesis process

management system, delineate the requirements and standards for each link, and intensify supervision and guidance for the thesis selection, proposal, mid-term inspection, and defense. Regarding advancing school-enterprise cooperation and the integration of production and teaching, actively establish cooperative ties with enterprises and industries, undertake joint training projects, practice base construction and other undertakings, and provide more practical opportunities and platforms for graduate students.

At the external environment level, the quality of the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) professional degree theses can be elevated in three aspects: optimizing the policy environment, fostering a propitious academic environment, and intensifying international cooperation and exchange. Concerning optimizing the policy environment, the government and educational authorities are obliged to expedite the formulation and refinement of relevant policies, reinforce supervision and evaluation of the MFA professional degree education, and facilitate the implementation of relevant policies. Regarding fostering a propitious academic environment, it is indispensable to advocate for integrity in academic research, strengthen supervision and sanctions for academic misconduct, and cultivate a clean and upright academic atmosphere. With respect to intensifying international cooperation and exchange, it is advisable to actively establish cooperative ties with renowned foreign universities and art institutions and jointly conduct joint training, academic exchanges, and other activities to enhance the internationalization level of graduate students.

## **5. Retrospect and prospect**

This paper undertakes an in-depth exploration of strategies for enhancing the quality of Master of Fine Arts (MFA) theses. Firstly, graduate students are obliged to embrace a correct academic attitude and values, and perpetually enhance their academic proficiency and research capacity. Secondly, educational institutions are expected to supply art master's degree students with a preeminent learning and research environment to efficaciously enhance the quality of their theses. Thirdly, strengthening the construction of the supervisor team and augmenting the supervisor's guidance ability constitutes the crux for improving the quality of art master's degree theses. Finally, optimizing the policy environment, fostering an academic ambience, elevating social and cultural awareness, and intensifying international cooperation and exchange can stimulate the students' learning initiative and innovative spirit.

In conclusion, the elevation of the quality of Master of Fine Arts theses constitutes a systematic enterprise and a continuous course, demanding collective efforts and support from supervisors, training institutions, graduate students themselves, along with the external environment. In the forthcoming period, efforts should be initiated from the perspectives of continuous improvement and innovation, reinforcing interdisciplinary cooperation and exchange, promoting international development, and concentrating on social demands and industrial growth to provide more powerful support and guarantee for the improvement of the quality of Master of Fine Arts theses.

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## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Author contributions

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