

# Concepts and Approaches in Constructing an Aesthetic Education Curriculum System: Perspectives from Applied Universities

Liqin Zhan

Beijing Union University, Beijing, 100101, China

## ABSTRACT

Under the vigorous promotion of national aesthetic education policies, the importance of aesthetic-education in higher education has become increasingly prominent. However, applied universities' aesthetic education curriculum system still faces numerous challenges, such as confusion between aesthetic education and art education concepts and unreasonable course design. This paper analyzes the current state of aesthetic education courses in applied universities from a policy perspective, identifies key issues, and proposes strategies for constructing a scientific and reasonable aesthetic education curriculum system. The study proposes establishing multi-tiered course objectives, enriching content and formats, and adopting diverse assessment methods to enhance the quality and effectiveness of aesthetic education courses. It elaborates on the philosophy and implementation pathways for constructing an aesthetic education curriculum system in applied universities. These measures aim to promote students' holistic development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor, achieve profound outcomes in aesthetic education, and lay a solid foundation for cultivating well-rounded applied talents.

## KEYWORDS

Applied universities; Aesthetic education curriculum; Curriculum system; Implementation pathways; Holistic education

## 1 Introduction

Aesthetic education constitutes a vital component of the educational system, playing an irreplaceable role in enhancing students' comprehensive qualities, shaping noble character, and preserving outstanding cultural heritage. In recent years, the nation has placed significant emphasis on aesthetic education. The Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education, issued by the General Office of the State Council in 2015, underscored the importance of precisely defining aesthetic-education objectives and establishing diverse, high-quality aesthetic-education courses, highlighting aesthetic education as a crucial pathway for elevating the overall quality of the populace. The 2020 "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era" further underscored its pivotal role in contemporary educational reform.

Aesthetic education possesses deep historical roots in China, traceable to the "literacy education and "music education" of the Western Zhou Dynasty. The term "aesthetic education" originates from German classical aesthetician Friedrich Schiller's Letters on Aesthetic Education. In China, the development of aesthetic education is closely tied to the advocacy of educators such as Cai Yuanpei, Wang Guowei, and Liang Qichao. They positioned aesthetic education as emotional or aesthetic sensibility education, forming a uniquely Chinese interpretation of its essence and emphasizing its positive role in cultivating noble character. Over the past two decades, the conceptual scope of aesthetic education has expanded further to encompass "holistic education," "an educational ideal," and "humanistic spiritual education." In essence, aesthetic education is an education for whole-person development. It is of considerable importance to the strategies of building a strong education system and a talent-rich nation, enhancing public aesthetic literacy, fostering national cultural confidence, and promoting society's healthy and comprehensive development.

Within higher education, aesthetic education has gained increasing prominence as a vital component of holistic education. Applied undergraduate education, guided by societal talent demands, focuses on cultivating high-level applied talents who advance social development and serve regional economies. The Outcome-Based Education (OBE) philosophy aligns closely with the talent cultivation objectives of applied universities, centering on students and outcomes while constructing curricula through backward design methodologies. However, the aesthetic education curriculum systems in many applied universities remain underdeveloped. There is a tendency to substitute aesthetic education with a few elective art-appreciation courses and lenient assessment methods, resulting in suboptimal teaching outcomes. To address this, it is imperative to establish a scientifically sound, rigorous and comprehensive curriculum system tailored to the societal demands and professional requirements for graduates of applied universities.

Aesthetic education constitutes a vital "soft" guarantee for cultivating high-caliber talent. A scientifically sound and comprehensive aesthetic-education curriculum will support talent development in applied universities. Therefore, exploring the conceptual framework for building aesthetic education curricula and pathways to achieving aesthetic education objectives in applied universities holds significant importance and value for enhancing talent cultivation and promoting graduates' adaptability to societal demands. This involves the scientific positioning of curriculum objectives,

the richness of course content, the innovation of teaching methods, and the development of a high-caliber faculty. Through these measures, aesthetic education can fulfill its essential role within applied universities, cultivating socialist builders and successors who possess both professional skills and noble sentiments.

## **2 The Philosophy of Building an Aesthetic Education Curriculum System for Applied Universities**

### **2.1 Challenges Facing the Aesthetic Education Curriculum System**

The aesthetic-education curriculum in Chinese higher education faces two significant challenges: an ambiguous understanding of the essence of aesthetic education and an incomplete curriculum system.

#### **2.1.1 Ambiguous Understanding of the Essence of Aesthetic Education Essence: Art Education Replacing Aesthetic Education**

Despite their fundamentally different nature, China's higher education often confuses aesthetic education with art education. Art education focuses on cultivating professional skills and industry experts, whereas aesthetic education is a multidisciplinary field that encompasses the appreciation of natural, artistic and spiritual beauty. It is a comprehensive educational approach grounded in emotional education and aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic education in higher education should transcend the transmission of artistic skills, emphasizing emotional cultivation, enhancement of aesthetic abilities, and the inheritance of traditional culture to achieve holistic individual development and foster cultural confidence. Universities must deeply recognize the unique value of aesthetic education and treat it as a vital pathway for cultivating well-rounded talents.

#### **2.1.2 Incomplete Curriculum System**

Aesthetic education curricula in domestic universities face three primary issues: First, their learning objectives are often overly general and one-dimensional. Some universities design their programs reactively, ignoring the cultivation of aesthetic judgment and value education—two core missions of aesthetic education. Severe course homogenization persists, widespread homogenization persists because resources are rarely developed in line with each university's distinctive mission; applied universities, in particular, should craft courses that foreground regional culture. Applied universities should develop courses highlighting regional cultural characteristics. Second, implementation varies sharply in method and intensity. Some institutions offer only introductory appreciation courses or rely solely on extracurricular activities, with lax evaluation leading to poor outcomes. Third, certain applied universities leverage education commission projects—such as the "High-Level Participation in Primary Education" initiative—to establish robust aesthetic education programs, creating a sustainable ecosystem where learning and application coexist.

### **2.2 Exploring a Scientific and Rational Aesthetic Education Curriculum Framework for Applied Universities**

Constructing a scientifically sound aesthetic education curriculum system requires addressing three dimensions: curriculum objectives, content and format, and evaluation methods.

#### **2.2.1 Establishing Multi-Layered Aesthetic Education Objectives to Define Curriculum Direction**

Curriculum objectives serve as guidelines for realizing educational intent and determining content. Recent scholarly focus emphasizes how aesthetic education fosters scientific worldviews and values. Aesthetic education objectives encompass compensatory and developmental goals. Compensatory goals involve mastering foundational aesthetic knowledge; developmental objectives guide individual growth, aligning with the essence of aesthetic education. The curriculum cultivates fundamental aesthetic literacy and creativity, fostering holistic physical and mental development. Specific objectives are structured across three tiers: knowledge acquisition, skill development, and the cultivation of emotional attitudes and values. Knowledge acquisition underpins skill development, which supports the cultivation of emotional attitudes and values. Ultimately, this process establishes a scientific outlook on life and values, nurturing a healthy personality and noble character.

#### **2.2.2 Prioritizing Curriculum Content and Delivery Methods to Enhance Implementation**

The implementation of aesthetic education courses relies on both content and delivery models. Course content encompasses three categories: aesthetic education theory, aesthetic art appreciation, and aesthetic education practice.

Aesthetic education theory courses impart foundational knowledge; aesthetic art appreciation courses cultivate independent appreciation and creative abilities; aesthetic education practice courses guide students in applying knowledge to practical activities. Delivery models combine required and elective courses, scientifically tailored to students' majors, academic years, and career aspirations. Traditionally, theoretical courses are predominantly required, while practical courses are electives, potentially leaving students underprepared for application. A balanced approach involves offering required and elective courses within each category: required courses emphasize foundational and comprehensive knowledge to broaden students' horizons, while electives focus on specialized depth to extend specific knowledge points. Practical course content can integrate local cultural elements and intangible cultural heritage assets, leveraging institutional resources and regional cultural strengths to diversify instructional formats. For instance, Beijing Union University developed school-based aesthetic education courses through its "High-Level Participation in Primary Education" initiative, expanding the scope of aesthetic education offerings.

### **2.2.3 Employ Diverse Course Evaluation Methods to Enhance Effectiveness**

Course evaluation directly impacts implementation outcomes, with its core focusing on "what to evaluate" and "how to evaluate." Evaluation must align with course content and objectives. Content-wise, it should assess foundational knowledge mastery and learning outcomes regarding skill acquisition and application. Methodologically, quantitative exams can evaluate knowledge retention. At the same time, qualitative assessments—drawing from international contextual evaluation practices—can gauge knowledge application and course outcomes through observation and documentation within specific practical settings. Simultaneously, evaluation should diversify its subjects. Beyond instructor assessments, student self-evaluation and peer assessment should be incorporated to observe course performance and enhance student autonomy comprehensively. Currently, research on the evaluation of aesthetic education courses in Chinese universities remains limited. Establishing a scientific and systematic evaluation framework is essential to improving course effectiveness.

## **3 Pathways for Building Aesthetic Education Programs at Applied Universities**

### **3.1 Refining an Aesthetic Education Curriculum System Centered on "General Education Courses"**

General education is crucial for cultivating well-rounded competencies; aesthetic education, as a core component, enhances students' aesthetic appreciation and humanistic literacy. Currently, insufficient credit allocation for aesthetic education courses hinders their effectiveness. A curriculum system integrating aesthetic theory, art appreciation, and practical training should be established, combining required and elective courses to meet students' individual needs. It is recommended that applied universities allocate six credits, with required courses covering aesthetic education theory and appreciation. Elective courses should be tailored to disciplinary specializations, and participation in aesthetic education clubs may count toward practical credits. Courses such as "Aesthetic Education in Higher Education" should reflect regional cultural characteristics and serve local development.

### **3.2 Constructing a Diversified Curriculum System**

In developing aesthetic education curricula at applied universities, establishing a diversified system is key to enhancing teaching effectiveness. Curriculum content should integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines, breaking down disciplinary barriers to leverage the strengths of each field. Through interdisciplinary comprehensive teaching, students gain innovative learning experiences that elevate their aesthetic and moral sensibilities. Teaching methods must emphasize theory and practice, moving beyond traditional classroom models to prioritize practical component design. Activities such as artistic creation, aesthetic experiences, and cultural field studies enable students to deepen their understanding and perception of beauty through hands-on engagement, enhancing their practical aesthetic education capabilities. Textbooks should feature diverse content and formats, prioritizing local culture while incorporating the essence of multiple cultures to form comprehensive materials. Content must emphasize practical knowledge transfer, integrating theory with practice in accessible ways to help students develop sound aesthetic concepts and cultivate abilities to discover, perceive, and create beauty. Through interdisciplinary curriculum design, teaching methods that balance theory and practice, and optimized diverse textbook formats, the applied university's aesthetic education curriculum can provide students with a comprehensive and innovative aesthetic experience. This enhances their quality and supports the cultivation of high-caliber talents who meet societal development needs.

### 3.3 Building a High-Quality Faculty Team Highlighted by "Internal Cultivation and External Manifestation of Competence"

High-caliber faculty is crucial for aesthetic education. The knowledge structure and aesthetic literacy of university aesthetic-education teachers require enhancement. Educators must cultivate their own refinement to become conveyors of aesthetic knowledge, promoters of advanced culture, and nurturers of positive life perspectives, guiding student growth through exemplary conduct. Simultaneously, they must possess robust external communication skills, master profound aesthetic knowledge and professional expertise, innovatively apply modern teaching methods, and stimulate student engagement. Through continuous learning, teachers should refine instructional approaches, optimize curriculum content, elevate teaching quality, establish scientific evaluation systems, and foster an ecological teaching environment for aesthetic education. Through internal and external cultivation, a high-caliber teaching team adapted to modern aesthetic education demands will be forged, providing robust support for curriculum development.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper focuses on constructing an aesthetic education curriculum system for high-level applied universities, proposing core concepts such as establishing multi-tiered educational objectives, optimizing content and delivery formats, and innovating diverse assessment methods. The implementation pathway unfolds across three key dimensions: refining general education courses, constructing a diversified curriculum system, and cultivating a high-caliber faculty team. Through systematic design, this approach aims to elevate the aesthetic education standards of applied universities, nurture well-rounded, high-caliber talents, and provide theoretical and practical references for the high-quality development of aesthetic education in higher education. It is of considerable practical value.

## About the Author

Liqin Zhan, M. A., Lecturer. Research Interests: Aesthetic Education for College Students, Traditional Chinese Music, Opera Art, and Intangible Cultural Heritage Music.

## References

- [1] General Office of the State Council. Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools: Guo Ban Fa (2015). No. 71 [Z/OL]. Beijing: General Office of the State Council, 2015-12-25. [https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-09/28/content\\_10196.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-09/28/content_10196.htm).
- [2] General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, General Office of the State Council. Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era: Zhong Ban Fa (2020). No. 36 [Z/OL]. Beijing: General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, General Office of the State Council, 2020-12-25. [https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2020/content\\_5554511.htm](https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2020/content_5554511.htm).
- [3] Schiller, F. On the Aesthetic Education of Man [M]. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 1795.
- [4] Zhu, J. N., et al. (Eds.). Encyclopedia of Education [Z]. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1930.
- [5] Li Ming. Construction and Practice of an Aesthetic Education Curriculum System in Applied Universities [J]. Research in Higher Education, 2021, (2): 67-72.
- [6] Zhang Hua. Construction and Implementation of an Evaluation System for Aesthetic Education Courses in Higher Education Institutions [J]. Educational Research, 2022, (4): 89-94.