

Construction and Implementation Path Exploration of General Aesthetic Education System in Universities

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of deepening educational reform in the new era, general aesthetic education in universities has become an indispensable core component of quality-oriented education for college students, determining whether institutions can cultivate high-quality talents. Distinct from the skill-oriented training model of professional education, university general aesthetic education targets all non-art majors and focuses on humanistic education centered on quality cultivation and cultural immersion. It carries epochal significance for improving college students' comprehensive literacy, perfecting the university education system, and fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. This paper analyzes the core philosophy of university general aesthetic education, constructs its curriculum system, sorts out and explores its implementation paths, demonstrates the value of aesthetic education, transforms theoretical research into practical educational measures, and offers references for advancing general aesthetic education and elevating college students' comprehensive literacy.

KEYWORDS

Universities; Aesthetic education; General education

General aesthetic education constitutes a vital component of university education, bearing the distinctive mission of delivering aesthetic education by cultivating students' aesthetic judgment and artistic literacy. Since the issuance of the Notice on Fully Implementing the Campus Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative in 2023, universities nationwide have attached greater importance to campus aesthetic education. Guided by Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the state has put forward the general guideline of "nurturing schools through aesthetic education to build a vibrant, elegant and dynamic campus culture and create an all-time, all-space and all-student aesthetic education environment". This highlights the rising status of general aesthetic education in universities and underscores the urgency of advancing its curriculum construction.

1 Core Philosophy of General Aesthetic Education in Universities

Scholars hold divergent definitions and viewpoints on university general aesthetic education, yet its core functions remain consistent: on the one hand, broadening students' comprehensive literacy and knowledge horizons; on the other hand, fostering a service mindset through diversified teaching content. China issued two pivotal documents successively between 2015 and 2019: the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Universities and the Guiding Document on Effectively Enhancing University Aesthetic Education in the New Era, which reflect the state's growing emphasis on this field.

Aesthetic education has long adopted artistic instruction as its primary form both in China and Western countries. Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, argued that immersion in natural beauty reveals the essence of artistic beauty and cultivates the noblest moral character. Therefore, aesthetic education leverages vivid artistic images, stimulates imagination, creativity and meticulous observation, guides students to express emotions appropriately, and elevates their aesthetic sentiment and spiritual realm. In China, aesthetic education is a crucial educational initiative, and universities offer general art courses to facilitate all-round student development. The core philosophy is structured as follows:

Root: Aesthetic Experience

Purpose: Cultivate People through Aesthetics, Edify People via Culture

Approach: Immersion

Method & Strategy: Cultivate Sentiments, Nourish the Soul

Mechanism: Spontaneous Self-improvement

Goal: Holistic and Free Personality Development

Four Core Dimensions of General Aesthetic Education Philosophy:

(1) For All Students: Emphasizing universality. It removes major barriers, covers all undergraduates, breaks disciplinary boundaries, and ensures every student receives aesthetic edification, rather than only catering to art majors.

(2) Literacy-Centered: Rejecting skill-based training. Teaching prioritizes cultivating aesthetic perception, appreciation ability and humanistic accomplishment, focusing on emotional development and value shaping beyond simple

knowledge or technical training.

(3) Integration of Knowledge and Practice: Integrating theoretical learning with artistic practice to stimulate innovative thinking and creativity through experiential learning.

(4) Integrated Coexistence : Highlighting comprehensiveness. It promotes deep integration of aesthetic education with moral, intellectual, physical and labor education, links fine traditional Chinese culture with global diverse cultures, and cultivates well-rounded talents with a sense of home and country as well as global vision.

In short, university general aesthetic education takes aesthetic education as its foundation, adopts an immersive teaching model, addresses the fundamental question of “what kind of talents to cultivate”, and ultimately aims to shape complete personalities.

2 Construction of General Aesthetic Education System in Universities

University general aesthetic education designs aesthetic curricula based on diverse artistic theories and practical activities. As a vital cultural medium for human emotional communication, music occupies a core position in general aesthetic courses, laying a foundation for students to acquire basic artistic knowledge and skills. Its system construction is elaborated in three dimensions below:

2.1 Establish Foundational Supporting Status to Improve the University Education System

The core connotation of university general aesthetic education lies in normalization, popularization and universal coverage, breaking the professional barriers of art education to deliver aesthetic edification to all students. At present, aesthetic education suffers from immature curriculum frameworks, with deficiencies in textbooks, teaching content, faculty and assessment mechanisms.

Music general aesthetic education boasts unique strengths: wide adaptability, broad audience, easy implementation and profound immersion, requiring no prior artistic foundation from students. It serves as a foundational pillar for realizing “universal aesthetic education”. However, the shortage of professional aesthetic educators leads to shallow content, fragmented curricula and disconnected education frameworks, with most courses limited to fragmented art appreciation and hobby-oriented learning lacking systematic training frameworks. As a core carrier of public aesthetic education, music general courses should build systematic aesthetic education frameworks drawing on the complete historical context and repertoire of Chinese and Western music, standardize immersive aesthetic teaching, remedy the deficiencies of the general aesthetic education system, consolidate the curriculum foundation of universal aesthetic education, perfect the overall university aesthetic education system, and advance its high-quality development.

2.2 Take Cultural Confidence as a Frontline Position to Fulfill the Mission of Cultural Education

The construction of university general aesthetic education lays a solid foundation for fostering young people’s cultural confidence and promoting the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education, responding to national strategic demands and the new-era requirements for campus aesthetic education. General aesthetic education bears dual attributes of aesthetic cultivation and cultural inheritance: it facilitates personal growth while bridging artistic education and cultural edification, undertaking the social responsibility of cultural inheritance and innovation and forming a frontline for cultural immersion education.

To fulfill cultural education goals, universities must abandon outdated teaching misconceptions and integrate four major modules: world classical music, traditional Chinese music, revolutionary red music, and ethnic folk music. Teachers should systematically sort out thousands of years of Chinese musical heritage, explore the national spirit, humanistic connotations and aesthetic wisdom embedded in traditional music, and absorb outstanding global artistic achievements from a rational, inclusive international perspective. In appreciating musical works, students can deeply perceive the unique charm of Chinese art and the spiritual essence of red culture, strengthen their recognition and sense of belonging to national culture, and consciously resist cultural nihilism and blind aesthetic worship. Through regular immersive general aesthetic education, universities can truly realize “cultivating people through aesthetics and edifying people via culture”, and shoulder the epochal mission of inheriting fine Chinese culture and nurturing young people’s cultural confidence.

2.3 Act as a Core Bond for Integrated Five-Dimensional Education to Fulfill the Fundamental Task of Fostering Virtue through Education

The goal of university general aesthetic education lies in cultivating all-round talents integrating morality, intellect, physical fitness, aesthetics and labor within the “five-dimensional education” system. It possesses unique empowering functions for interdisciplinary integration. Scholars proposed a century ago that the integration of moral, aesthetic and intellectual education forms the core bond of holistic education and a critical starting point for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. Key integration strategies include:

First, general aesthetic education transcends isolated aesthetic instruction by constructing a three-dimensional “Four-in-One Aesthetic Education” framework that realizes multi-dimensional educational value integration.

Second, red music, ethnic music and traditional opera music deliver silent ideological and political education through edification, integrating patriotism into general aesthetic courses to cultivate students’ sense of responsibility and noble moral sentiments.

The “Four-in-One Aesthetic Education” framework operates as follows: Aesthetics nourishes the soul and empowers personal growth; it cultivates morality and enlightens wisdom.

Furthermore, sorting through music history and analyzing diverse musical works enable students to interpret creative techniques and profound connotations of artistic pieces. Aesthetic education relieves academic pressure, shapes positive mental states, nourishes spiritual life and heals inner turmoil through improved aesthetic taste. As general courses open to students of all majors, general aesthetic education breaks barriers between quality-oriented and professional education, unifying knowledge transmission, ability cultivation, value guidance and aesthetic shaping, and becomes a vital support for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and advancing university general aesthetic education.

3 Exploration of Implementation Paths for University General Aesthetic Education

3.1 Renew Educational Philosophies and Establish Non-Skill-Oriented Curriculum Systems

Most university general aesthetic courses revolve around music, fine arts, dance and other highly specialized artistic disciplines. However, target learners are non-art majors with no prior artistic training or professional equipment. Therefore, general aesthetic education must abandon pursuit of professional technical proficiency, renew educational philosophies, and build curriculum systems centered on aesthetic literacy cultivation, sentiment refinement and spiritual nourishment to accommodate ordinary undergraduates and stimulate their internal creativity.

3.2 Case Study 1: Shanghai University of Electric Power

The School of Humanities and Arts of Shanghai University of Electric Power optimizes its humanistic and aesthetic curriculum system centered on humanistic literacy and artistic appreciation. It builds two major platforms: general aesthetic courses and online shared courses, developing four groups of elective courses: Chinese Culture Series, Art Aesthetic Literacy, Art Practice Training, and Online Shared Courses. Since 2021, the school has offered 1,171 aesthetic courses for all undergraduates, attracting 36,960 student enrollments. The extensive coverage realizes campus-wide universal aesthetic education.

3.3 Innovate Teaching Modes and Build Interdisciplinary Teaching Platforms

Against the backdrop of digital educational transformation and revised curriculum standards, breaking disciplinary barriers, promoting integration of art with science and humanities, solving complex problems through artistic thinking, and innovatively integrating resources to build intelligent teaching platforms have become critical approaches to improving educational quality. Constructing a four-in-one interdisciplinary integration ecosystem integrating “technology, resources, space and faculty” effectively boosts students’ core literacy and innovative capacity.

3.4 Case Study 2: Southwest Jiaotong University

The General Education Center under the Undergraduate School of Southwest Jiaotong University explores interdisciplinary integration of aesthetic education, building a three-dimensional aesthetic platform combining “AI + curriculum”, “online + offline”, “theory + practice” and “tradition + modernity”. Its innovative course Transportation Aesthetics, supported by AI technology, was officially launched in 2024 and open to all majors, with over 3,000 enrollments. Rooted in the university’s strengths in transportation disciplines, the course establishes a full-scenario knowledge system centered on eight core aesthetic dimensions of transportation. Through classic case appreciation and immersive design practice, it comprehensively improves students’ aesthetic literacy and innovation capacity. Since its launch, students have won numerous awards in disciplinary competitions, realizing deep integration of aesthetic education and professional development.

3.5 Tap Internal Faculty Resources and Refine Immersive Education Paths

In the context of high-quality higher education development, immersive education serves as a vital carrier to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. Exploring high-quality on-campus faculty resources and constructing a comprehensive, whole-process immersive education system enables mutual progress of teachers and students. Therefore, tapping internal faculty potential and perfecting immersive education pathways constitute systematic projects prioritizing teacher ethics, professional competence, cultural heritage and institutional mechanisms. Multi-party coordination and sustained efforts can realize synchronous development of teachers and students.

3.6 Case Study 3: Longdong University

Longdong University integrates intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into general education, centering on Huandao Daoqing Shadow Puppetry to build a public art curriculum system combining “theory, craftsmanship and practice”. The Department of Physical and Aesthetic Education offers optional cross-major courses including Daoqing Shadow Puppetry and Longdong Paper-Cutting, requiring no prior music or fine arts foundation for all non-art majors, aiming to improve students’ aesthetic literacy and cultural confidence.

The university adopts a dual-teacher teaching model pairing university instructors with ICH inheritors, who co-teach classes to interpret cultural connotations alongside core craftsmanship. Course content covers the historical evolution and artistic characteristics of ICH, as well as practical sessions including opera singing, shadow puppet carving and paper-cutting, transforming passive viewing into hands-on creation. To date, more than 1,000 students have enrolled in these courses.

In summary, general aesthetic education takes art as its carrier to fulfill the mission of aesthetic cultivation. Its ultimate goal transcends mere technical training to deliver profound educational value: “cultivating people through aesthetics, refining people via beauty, nourishing the soul with aesthetics, and nurturing integrity through art”. Its core lies in transforming professional artistic skills into a general education pathway for shaping sound personalities and improving comprehensive literacy, cultivating new generations with independent aesthetic judgment, rich inner emotions and innovative vitality.

4 Conclusion

As a campus-wide educational carrier for all undergraduates, university general aesthetic education centers on basic aesthetic theories, art history and artistic appreciation courses, serving as a core instrument to cultivate comprehensive talents with profound humanistic heritage. Current university aesthetic curricula feature prominent interdisciplinary characteristics; nevertheless, relying solely on public art courses to bear the full weight of campus aesthetic education risks weakened educational functions and superficial coverage, failing to exert the full value of general aesthetic education.

Therefore, it is necessary to theoretically clarify the internal connection between university aesthetic education and public art education and carry out supporting practical exploration. From the perspective of new-era aesthetic education development, this paper systematically elaborates the epochal value and practical significance of constructing university general aesthetic education systems across four dimensions: curriculum framework construction, faculty development, classroom teaching innovation, and multi-dimensional evaluation system improvement. It continuously optimizes classroom teaching effectiveness of general aesthetic education, promotes its standardized and long-term development, and supports the cultivation of versatile high-quality talents with balanced moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor education.

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