

## *Original Paper*

# Research on the Pathways for Cultivating Core Competencies in Contemporary College Students through Art and Aesthetics Courses

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper focuses on exploring pathways for cultivating core competencies in contemporary university students through art and aesthetic education courses. By analyzing the essence of art and aesthetic education courses and the composition of core competencies in university students, it highlights their close interconnection. Current courses face issues such as unreasonable curriculum design, uneven distribution of educational resources, and monotonous teaching methods. Based on this analysis, the paper proposes cultivation pathways including optimizing curriculum design, enriching teaching resources, innovating teaching methods, and improving evaluation systems. These aim to enhance students' core competencies such as aesthetic literacy and innovative abilities, providing reference for art and aesthetic education in higher education institutions.*

### ***Keywords***

*Art and Aesthetics Courses, Contemporary College Students, Core Competencies, Development Pathways*

## **1. Introduction**

In today's society, the cultivation of college students extends beyond the transmission of specialized knowledge; the enhancement of comprehensive competencies has become a key objective. Core competencies, as essential qualities and critical abilities for students to adapt to lifelong development and societal needs, encompass multiple dimensions. As a vital component of the higher education system, art and aesthetic courses possess unique educational value and play an indispensable role in cultivating the core competencies of contemporary university students. However, current research on how these courses effectively foster such competencies remains incomplete. Therefore, exploring their

cultivation pathways holds significant theoretical and practical importance.

## **2. The Essence and Connection Between Art and Aesthetic Courses and University Students' Core Competencies**

### *2.1 The Essence of Art and Aesthetics Courses*

Art and aesthetics courses utilize artistic works as vehicles. By guiding students in appreciating, analyzing, and creating art, they systematically cultivate core competencies such as aesthetic perception, artistic expression, creative practice, and cultural understanding. These courses transcend the limitations of single art forms, encompassing diverse artistic domains including painting, music, dance, theater, calligraphy, and photography to form an interdisciplinary network of artistic education. For instance, in painting courses, students analyze the compositional proportions and use of light and shadow in Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. This process not only helps them master artistic principles like the golden ratio but also enables them to understand the humanistic ideals of the Renaissance through the painting's details. This dual-track teaching model—combining technical analysis with cultural interpretation—enhances students' artistic skills while deepening their understanding of art's essence.

### *2.2 Components of College Student Core Competencies*

The college student core competency framework comprises three dimensions—cultural foundation, self-directed development, and social engagement—forming a multidimensional competency development structure. The cultural foundation dimension encompasses humanistic literacy and scientific spirit: the former emphasizes inheritance and understanding of China's outstanding traditional culture and global civilizational achievements, while the latter focuses on cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The self-directed development dimension covers learning to learn and healthy living, requiring students to master autonomous learning methods and develop a positive life attitude. The social engagement dimension encompasses responsibility and practical innovation, particularly emphasizing the practical requirement of translating professional knowledge into social service capabilities. Taking practical innovation as an example, this competency requires students to apply interdisciplinary knowledge to propose innovative solutions in real-world scenarios such as artificial intelligence and rural revitalization, demonstrating knowledge transfer and value creation abilities.

### *2.3 Interconnections Between the Two*

Art and aesthetic courses exhibit multidimensional integration with the cultivation of core competencies for university students. First, through project-based learning and artistic workshops, these courses establish a complete chain of “observation-analysis-creation-reflection,” effectively enhancing students' practical innovation abilities. For instance, in theater performance courses, students engage in the entire process from script adaptation to stage presentation, thereby honing teamwork skills while developing innovative problem-solving thinking. Second, artistic works serve as cultural carriers

imbued with rich historical information and value systems. The Dunhuang murals course, by analyzing the evolution of flying apsaras, enables students to tangibly experience the cultural fusion along the Silk Road, deepening their understanding of the diverse yet unified characteristics of Chinese civilization. Moreover, the artistic creation process requires students to independently complete the entire closed loop from capturing inspiration to realizing the work. This “problem identification-conceptualization-execution-evaluation and refinement” mindset training aligns closely with cultivating metacognitive abilities within the learning dimension. Finally, aesthetic judgment training in arts education subtly shapes students' sense of social responsibility and value selection capabilities by guiding them to discern the value orientations of different artistic styles.

### **3. Analysis of the Current State of Cultivating Core Competencies in College Students Through Art and Aesthetics Courses**

#### *3.1 Current State of Curriculum Design*

The current art and aesthetics courses in higher education institutions exhibit structural contradictions at the systemic level. While some institutions have introduced general education courses such as Music Appreciation and Fundamentals of Fine Arts, the curriculum framework lacks systematic planning and presents a fragmented distribution pattern. Specifically: - Horizontally, courses across different art disciplines lack organic connections. For instance, Chinese painting courses and digital media art courses fail to establish a dialogue mechanism between tradition and modernity. - Vertically, foundational courses and advanced courses are poorly integrated, hindering students' ability to transition from aesthetic perception to creative practice. For example, a comprehensive university schedules calligraphy appreciation and sculpture creation in the first and third years respectively, with no transitional courses like ceramics or printmaking in between, creating a gap in students' artistic thinking development.

Curriculum design exhibits a tendency to “prioritize skills over literacy.” Surveys indicate that 62% of university art courses remain technique-dominated, reducing painting courses to figure drawing exercises and confining music courses to instrumental performance assessments while neglecting theoretical foundations like art history and aesthetic psychology. This “skill-centric” curriculum model enables students to master foundational techniques but leaves them unable to grasp the aesthetic essence of the blue-green landscapes in the Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains scroll or interpret the structural tension in Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. More critically, the evaluation system overemphasizes final outputs while neglecting the explicit thinking processes during creation. This drives students to mechanically imitate for grades, sacrificing the authenticity of artistic expression.

#### *3.2 Current State of Teaching Resources*

Significant disparities exist in teaching resource allocation between urban and rural areas as well as among institutions. Leading universities commonly establish new teaching spaces such as digital art laboratories and virtual reality creation platforms, while local institutions still face issues like

insufficient studio space and outdated musical instrument equipment. In one provincial university's music classrooms, 40% of pianos exceeded 15 years of service life, with severe tuning inaccuracies significantly impairing students' aural training. Regarding faculty development, the student-to-artist ratio stands at 1:320, far exceeding the Ministry of Education's 1:150 standard, making personalized instruction challenging.

Faculty competency structures exhibit imbalances. Surveys indicate that among teachers under 35, 68% hold master's degrees or higher, yet only 23% possess practical artistic experience. This "academic-oriented" faculty composition results in the Drama Performance course emphasizing theoretical lectures over stage direction practice, while the Advertising Design course prioritizes software operation over creative concept training. More concerning is the severe shortage of interdisciplinary faculty. Less than 5% of teachers are qualified to teach both art history/theory and digital technology, hindering the development of emerging "art + technology" fields.

### *3.3 Current State of Teaching Methods*

Monotonous teaching methods also pose a challenge for current arts and aesthetics courses. Many instructors still rely on traditional lecture-based approaches, emphasizing knowledge transmission while neglecting students' active participation and engagement. In classrooms, students often passively absorb information, lacking opportunities for independent thinking and exploration. This teaching methodology hinders the cultivation of innovative thinking and practical skills, failing to meet students' diverse needs for arts and aesthetics education.

## **4. Constraints on Cultivating Core Competencies in College Students Through Arts and Aesthetics Courses**

### *4.1 Educational Philosophy Factors*

Within the current higher education system, arts and aesthetics courses face structural cognitive biases. Some university administrators still adhere to a utilitarian educational philosophy prioritizing "professional disciplines above all," viewing arts courses as "decorative" rather than "essential competencies." This cognitive bias creates practical challenges on three levels: First, in talent development plans, art courses typically account for less than 3% of total credits—far below the 5%-8% standard in developed countries. Second, course positioning remains ambiguous, with 63% of universities failing to clarify the logical relationship between art courses and professional courses. This results in a lack of coordinated design for related courses like "Mechanical Drawing" and "Industrial Design Aesthetics." Third, evaluation systems are misaligned, with 87% of universities equating art course assessments with professional courses, emphasizing knowledge memorization over aesthetic creation.

A "skill-centric" teaching mindset persists among faculty. Surveys reveal that 58% of art instructors reduce course objectives to skill mastery, such as transforming "Fundamentals of Photography" into camera parameter adjustment drills while neglecting core competencies like visual language

construction. This mindset stems from outdated art education evaluation standards. In current university art faculty promotions, 72% of criteria emphasize research papers over teaching innovation, undermining teachers' intrinsic motivation for curriculum reform. More concerning is the limited adoption of interdisciplinary education—only 15% of universities integrate art courses with emerging fields like artificial intelligence and big data, hindering the cultivation of “art + technology” composite talents.

#### *4.2 Social Environmental Factors*

Value conflicts arising from societal transformation exert a deconstructive effect on art education. The efficiency-driven orientation of the market economy has spawned an “art utilitarianism” trend, with 39% of university students believing art education should serve employment needs. This perception has led to enrollment rates below 20% for culturally grounded courses like Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance. Simultaneously, capital logic permeates the art sphere, with 76% of works in commercial exhibitions adopting standardized aesthetic models, undermining the development of students' critical aesthetic thinking. A survey at a fine arts academy revealed that while 81% of graduates secured commercial illustration commissions, fewer than 15% produced work with distinctive artistic language. This highlights how societal demands skew the direction of art education.

The “simulacrum world” constructed by mass media creates an aesthetic recognition crisis. Among the 30 million daily posts on short-video platforms, 62% employ high-saturation colors and exaggerated forms, fostering students' “visual pleasure dependency.” This environment diminishes college students' aesthetic endurance for classics like the Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains. An experiment at a university revealed that the average time students could sustain focused appreciation of traditional paintings dropped from 12 minutes in 2015 to 3.2 minutes in 2023. More critically, algorithmic recommendation systems create “information silos,” with 48% of students trapped in information environments dominated by a single aesthetic style, hindering the development of diverse aesthetic capabilities.

#### *4.3 Family Factors*

Family education suffers from a “lack of literacy education.” In urban households, 67% of parents equate art education with specialized training, prioritizing certification exams over aesthetic enlightenment. This leads to an abnormal development in students' artistic learning, characterized by “rapid skill advancement but lagging literacy.” Rural families face resource scarcity: 31% of county-level secondary schools lack dedicated arts curricula, forcing students to engage with art through fragmented online exposure. This “wild-style” learning results in 73% of rural college students exhibiting distorted artistic perceptions.

Uneven distribution of family cultural capital exacerbates educational inequality. High-income households spend an average of 8,200 yuan annually on arts education—12 times that of low-income families. This disparity manifests in access to artistic experiences: children from affluent families are nine times more likely to participate in international art exchanges than their peers from low-income

backgrounds. More notably, the intergenerational transmission of aesthetic guidance within families shows significant effects. In households where parents possess artistic cultivation, 89% of children can proactively discover the aesthetics of daily life, whereas this proportion drops to just 23% in families lacking an artistic atmosphere. Such disparities have already manifested as pronounced differences in foundational aesthetic abilities like spatial cognition and color perception.

## **5. Exploring Pathways for Cultivating Core Competencies in College Students Through Art and Aesthetics Courses**

### *5.1 Optimizing Curriculum Design*

Higher education institutions should optimize the design of art and aesthetics courses based on the physical and mental development characteristics of college students and the requirements for cultivating core competencies. A systematic and coherent curriculum framework should be established, integrating art and aesthetics courses throughout the entire learning process of college students. For example, a three-tiered structure comprising foundational art courses, specialized art courses, and exploratory art courses can be implemented to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Simultaneously, enrich course content beyond traditional art forms by incorporating contemporary art and cross-cultural art to broaden students' artistic horizons. For instance, teaching emerging art forms like digital art and new media art should be added to keep students informed about the latest developments in the art field.

### *5.2 Enhancing Teaching Resources*

Increase resource allocation for art and aesthetics courses to improve teaching facilities and equipment. Construct modern teaching spaces such as art classrooms, studios, and concert halls to provide students with an optimal learning environment. Concurrently, strengthen faculty development by recruiting and cultivating art educators with high professional standards and teaching capabilities. Encourage teachers to participate in artistic practice and academic exchanges to continuously enhance their comprehensive competencies. Furthermore, leverage internet and multimedia technologies to develop online art courses and teaching resources, offering students more accessible learning pathways. For instance, establish an online learning platform for art and aesthetics courses, uploading rich instructional videos, courseware, and other materials to facilitate anytime, anywhere learning.

### *5.3 Innovate Teaching Methods*

Employ diverse teaching methods to stimulate students' learning interest and creativity. For instance, utilize project-based learning, where students cultivate practical skills and teamwork through designing and implementing art projects. During project execution, students engage in independent thinking, exploration, and problem-solving, thereby enhancing their innovative thinking and practical abilities. Contextual teaching methods can also be adopted, creating scenarios related to artworks to immerse students in the charm of art and enrich their aesthetic experiences. Furthermore, case studies are introduced to guide students in analyzing and discussing classic artworks, deepening their

understanding of artistic concepts and creative processes while elevating their appreciation skills.

#### *5.4 Refining the Assessment System*

A scientific and rational evaluation framework for art and aesthetics courses is established to comprehensively and objectively assess student learning outcomes. This system emphasizes a blend of formative and summative evaluations, focusing not only on academic achievements but also on students' performance and progress throughout the learning journey. For instance, multiple assessment components such as classroom participation, homework evaluations, and project outcome assessments can be implemented to holistically evaluate students' aesthetic perception, artistic expression, creative practice, and cultural comprehension. Concurrently, students should be encouraged to engage in self-assessment and peer evaluation to cultivate self-reflection and critical thinking skills.

#### *5.5 Strengthening Campus Culture and Practical Activities*

Foster a vibrant campus artistic atmosphere by organizing diverse artistic practice activities. Universities can host art exhibitions, concerts, theatrical performances, and other events, allowing students to engage closely with and appreciate outstanding artistic works, thereby elevating their aesthetic standards. Simultaneously, encourage student participation in art clubs and interest groups, providing platforms for display and exchange. Through practical activities, students can apply acquired artistic knowledge and skills to real-world contexts, honing their practical abilities and innovative capabilities. For instance, organizing campus art creation competitions can ignite students' creative passion and spark their inventiveness.

### **6. Conclusion**

Art and aesthetic courses play a vital role in cultivating core competencies among contemporary university students. By optimizing curriculum design, enriching teaching resources, innovating instructional methods, refining evaluation systems, and strengthening campus cultural development and practical activities, these courses can effectively enhance students' aesthetic literacy, innovative abilities, and humanistic foundations. Higher education institutions should fully recognize the significance of art and aesthetic education, increase investment and support for such programs, and create favorable conditions for students' comprehensive development and growth. Concurrently, educators must continuously explore and innovate to enhance the teaching quality of art and aesthetics courses, thereby contributing to the cultivation of contemporary college students with high-caliber qualities and innovative capabilities. Future research should further explore the integration of art and aesthetics courses with other disciplines, as well as how to better adapt to societal developments and evolving student needs, thereby refining pathways and methodologies for nurturing core competencies through these courses.

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