Student Attitudes and Teacher Strategies in the Aesthetic Education in Chinese Middle School Music Classes

Tingyu Yan[1,a,*], Hong Yu[1,b]

[1]*School of Music, South China Normal University, 378 Waihuan Road West, Higher Education Mega Center, Panyu District, Guangzhou, China*
a. roseyan2030@gmail.com, b. honggb2019@163.com
*corresponding author

Abstract: This study aims to explore the current state of music education in Chinese middle schools within the context of aesthetic education. It focuses on middle school students' attitudes toward aesthetic education and the challenges and strategies music teachers face when implementing aesthetic education in their classrooms. Through questionnaires and interviews with 13 music teachers and 1032 students from 7 middle schools in Guangdong Province, this research reveals that students generally have a positive attitude toward aesthetic education, considering it an essential part of their holistic development. However, the study also identifies multiple challenges teachers face in implementing aesthetic education, including varying interests and levels of understanding among students, curriculum design and textbook selection, and a lack of adequate teaching resources and support. In response to these challenges, teachers have adopted a series of strategies, such as innovating teaching methods, utilizing technological tools, and enhancing teacher-student interaction, to improve the effectiveness of aesthetic education. This study provides an empirical basis for improving the quality of music education in Chinese middle schools and offers suggestions on how music teachers can effectively implement aesthetic education.

Keywords: Aesthetic Education, Chinese Middle Schools, Music Education, Attitudes, Challenges

1. Introduction

Aesthetic education, as an educational philosophy, aims to cultivate individuals' sense of beauty, creativity, and artistic appreciation through experiences of art and beauty. Campbell emphasizes that aesthetic education is crucial for achieving educational goals and highlights the educational function of aesthetics in enriching, cultivating, and developing genuine humaneness [1]. The international academic community has widely recognized and researched the importance of aesthetic education. Silva points out that aesthetic education helps students develop creative thinking and expressive abilities and enhances their quality and interdisciplinary thinking skills [2]. Lee believes aesthetic education can promote emotional development and social skills, fostering students' cultural confidence and global perspective [3]. Moreover, aesthetic education contributes to emotional development and mental health, helping students establish positive life attitudes and values [4]. Through learning about art and culture, students can better understand and appreciate different

cultural forms, enhance cross-cultural communication and understanding, and develop a global perspective and competency [5].

In recent years, aesthetic education has received significant attention in China. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council issued "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era" on October 15, 2020, emphasizing the state's high regard for school aesthetic education [6]. This initiative demonstrates the government's recognition and support for aesthetic work. As education reforms deepen, more research has focused on middle school students' attitudes toward and acceptance of aesthetic education. Shih's survey shows that most middle school students have a positive attitude toward aesthetic education, believing it enhances their artistic cultivation and aesthetic abilities, which is beneficial for their future development [7]. Jesionkowska found that middle school students prefer engaging in practical artistic activities, considering learning methods more interesting and practical [8]. However, some students believe that the arrangement of aesthetic courses is too concentrated and wish for more flexibility to match individual interests and strengths [9]. Hurley found that the acceptance of aesthetic education among some middle school students is significantly influenced by their family cultural background and personal interests, calling for better cooperation between families and schools to promote students' holistic development [10]. Therefore, schools must focus more on individualized needs in the arrangement of aesthetic courses.

The study points out that aesthetic education faces several challenges in implementation. Some schools experience an imbalanced allocation of aesthetic resources, preventing some students from accessing high-quality aesthetic education. The content and setup of aesthetic courses often do not align with students' actual needs and interests, lacking specificity and appeal [11]. The lack of awareness and support for aesthetic education among some parents and society affects its promotion and development [12]. Moreover, the construction of the aesthetic education teacher team faces issues, with some teachers needing to improve their professional level and teaching ability, affecting the quality of aesthetic education [13]. The integration of aesthetic education with other subjects is insufficient, lacking interdisciplinary teaching models, affecting aesthetic education's comprehensiveness and depth [14]. Therefore, to better promote aesthetic education, it is necessary to comprehensively address these issues to improve the quality and effectiveness of aesthetic education.

While extensive, existing research on aesthetic education has notable limitations, including a focus on theory over practical teaching analysis, insufficient consideration of diverse student needs, a narrow scope that overlooks its application across various educational stages and subjects, and a lack of long-term evaluation. Future studies are encouraged to address these gaps to understand the impact of aesthetic education better. Therefore, future research needs to overcome these limitations to explore the role and impact of aesthetic education in education more comprehensively.

Empirical research on music education in China is limited compared to global standards. This study aims to investigate music education within Chinese middle schools, focusing on student attitudes toward aesthetic education and the challenges and strategies music teachers face. It seeks to enrich the literature and offer insights into global music education by examining China's unique educational landscape. The research will address two key questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Chinese middle school students towards aesthetic education?

2. What challenges do teachers face when implementing aesthetic education in music classrooms, and how do they respond?

Exploring these questions will help to gain a deeper understanding of the actual situation of music education in China, providing an empirical basis and suggestions for improving the quality of music education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

This study encompasses 13 music teachers and 1,032 students from seven middle schools in Guangdong Province. The teacher participants consist of seven females and six males, with an age range from 28 to 52 years old and teaching experience varying from 3 to 25 years. The student participants span grades seven through twelve, comprising 482 males (46.7%) and 550 females (53.3%). The distribution of students across grades is as follows: 156 in Grade 7, 195 in Grade 8, 167 in Grade 9, 185 in Grade 10, 174 in Grade 11, and 155 in Grade 12.

2.2. Materials and Data Collection

The research instruments comprise two main components: a student questionnaire and an interview guide for teachers. The student questionnaire is designed as a quantitative survey, covering perspectives on the importance of aesthetic education, satisfaction with the school's aesthetic education curriculum, preferences for different aesthetic activities, and suggestions for improvements to the school's aesthetic education courses. The questionnaires were distributed online for data collection to ensure anonymity and voluntariness. The questionnaires were disseminated through official school channels, achieving a response rate of 94%.

The teacher interview guide focuses on exploring the challenges encountered during the implementation of aesthetic education and the strategies adopted in response. The researchers collected teacher data using semi-structured interviews via video conferencing, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded with participant consent. The interview includes a series of open-ended questions to guide the discussion (including, but not limited to):

1. How do you understand and practice aesthetic education in your music classroom?
2. What are your most common challenges when implementing aesthetic education?
3. What importance do you place on aesthetic education for student development? Do you have any success stories or case studies to share?
4. In your opinion, what skills and qualities should teachers possess to implement aesthetic education effectively?
5. What strategies or methods have you used in your practice of aesthetic education, and what were the outcomes?
6. How do you think schools and educational institutions can support teachers in better implementing aesthetic education?
7. What are your expectations and suggestions for the future development of aesthetic education?

2.3. Data Analysis

The student questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis to reveal students' overall attitudes toward aesthetic education and the relationships between different variables. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, including the calculation of basic statistical measures such as frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations, as well as correlation and regression analyses to explore critical factors affecting students' attitudes towards aesthetic education.

Teacher interview data were processed through content analysis, beginning with transcribing recordings into text, followed by open coding to categorize and summarize the data. Analysis was assisted by NVivo software to identify the main challenges encountered in the implementation of aesthetic education and the strategies adopted, as well as the effectiveness and limitations of these

strategies. The findings aim to provide in-depth insights and practical guidance for improving music education in middle schools.

3. Results

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of Chinese middle school students towards aesthetic education?

Table 1: Quantitative and Percentage Distribution of Aesthetic Activity Preferences Across Different Grades.

Aesthetic Activities	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
Music courses	34 (21.8%)	43 (22.1%)	37 (22.2%)	38 (20.5%)	45 (25.9%)	81 (52.3%)	278 (27.0%)
Fine arts courses	45 (28.8%)	33 (16.9%)	38 (22.8%)	30 (16.2%)	29 (16.7%)	36 (23.2%)	211 (20.5%)
Artistic performances	21 (13.5%)	19 (9.7%)	22 (13.2%)	18 (9.7%)	24 (13.8%)	61 (39.4%)	165 (16.0%)
Film and video production	11 (7.1%)	15 (7.7%)	15 (9.0%)	11 (5.9%)	14 (8.0%)	11 (7.1%)	77 (7.5%)
Design and fashion courses	9 (5.8%)	11 (5.6%)	13 (7.8%)	13 (7.0%)	13 (7.5%)	10 (6.5%)	69 (6.7%)
Creative handicraft activities	6 (3.8%)	9 (4.6%)	10 (6.0%)	9 (4.9%)	17 (9.8%)	16 (10.3%)	67 (6.5%)
Photography courses	5 (3.2%)	7 (3.6%)	10 (6.0%)	8 (4.3%)	10 (5.7%)	13 (8.4%)	53 (5.1%)
Recording production	8 (5.1%)	7 (3.6%)	9 (5.4%)	6 (3.2%)	8 (4.6%)	8 (5.2%)	46 (4.5%)
Concert visits	3 (1.9%)	6 (3.1%)	5 (3.0%)	5 (2.7%)	6 (3.4%)	9 (5.8%)	34 (3.3%)
Museum visits	2 (1.3%)	3 (1.5%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (1.6%)	5 (2.9%)	5 (3.2%)	21 (2.0%)
Literary creation	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.5%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.6%)	1 (0.6%)	2 (1.3%)	11 (1.1%)

The survey results revealed that most middle school students consider aesthetic education significant to their lives, with an average importance rating reaching 4 points. This finding highlights the general emphasis students place on aesthetic education. Despite expressing moderate to high satisfaction with the aesthetic courses offered by schools, with average satisfaction scores ranging between 3 and 4 points, students still see room for further improvement. In terms of preferences for aesthetic activities, a rich diversity was observed, especially music courses (278 responses), fine arts courses (211 responses), and artistic performances (165 responses) emerging as the most popular types of activities.

Students generally believe that music and fine arts courses play a positive role in promoting their personal development, particularly in enhancing creativity (406 responses), aesthetic sensibility (314 responses), and cultural literacy (253 responses). In suggestions for improvements to aesthetic courses and activities, students expressed a strong demand for more practical and interactive courses

(139 responses), particularly showing interest in creative crafts (269 responses), photography (149 responses), and film and video production (78 responses).

Furthermore, students emphasized the significant impact of aesthetic resources outside of school, such as family and community (149 responses), in providing diverse learning opportunities and practical platforms for their aesthetic education. These findings highlight the high regard and positive attitudes middle school students have towards aesthetic education and point out their specific expectations for improvements in course content and teaching methods.

Research Question 2: What challenges do teachers face when implementing aesthetic education in music classrooms, and how do they address these challenges?

Table 2: Challenges and Countermeasures in Implementing Aesthetic Education in Music Classrooms.

No.	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Most Common Challenge	Strategies
1	Female	35	8 years	Low student interest	Developing engaging lesson plans and increase interactive segments
2	Male	42	15 years	Insufficient time	Flexibly adjusting teaching content, reducing non-essential courses
3	Female	28	3 years	Lack of resources	Utilizing online resources to find free or low-cost teaching materials
4	Male	50	20 years	Difficulties in student comprehension	Explaining from multiple perspectives and provide demonstration examples
5	Female	45	18 years	Inadequate artistic literacy	Regularly organizing art appreciation events to enhance students' artistic literacy
6	Male	30	5 years	Classroom management challenges	Establishing solid class rules to increase student participation
7	Female	38	12 years	Lack of parental understanding	Strengthening communication with parents to explain the importance of aesthetic education
8	Male	48	22 years	High exam pressure	Guiding students to treat exams properly, focusing on holistic development
9	Female	32	7 years	Difficulties in interdisciplinary integration	Collaborating with teachers of other subjects to design joint teaching activities

Table 2: (continued)

10	Male	40	14 years	Insufficient student creativity	Offering creativity-stimulating activities, encouraging free student expression
11	Female	36	10 years	High teaching pressure	Finding psychological adjustment techniques to maintain teaching enthusiasm
12	Male	52	25 years	Significant differences in student backgrounds	Providing personalized tutoring, paying attention to each student's characteristics
13	Female	42	16 years	Insufficient school support	Making suggestions for improvements to gain more support

Overall, teachers believe that aesthetic education is beneficial in the field of music education, with an average score of 4.13 (SD =1.06) (from 1 = 'highly disagree' to 5 = 'highly agree'). In understanding and practicing aesthetic education, some teachers mentioned during interviews that aesthetic education encompasses aesthetic learning and involves emotional, consciousness, and cognitive aspects, an essential component of students' holistic development. They focus on cultivating students' aesthetic emotions, capabilities, and attitudes in classroom teaching. Teachers generally consider that one of the most significant challenges in aesthetic education practice is students' varying interests and levels of understanding, making it challenging to benefit all students. Additionally, course design and material selection are frequent challenges faced by teachers. To address these challenges, teachers have adopted a variety of strategies and methods to promote students' aesthetic education, such as multimedia teaching, classroom interaction, and practical activities, among which multimedia teaching is regarded as an effective instructional tool that can attract students' attention and enhance their learning interest.

Teachers unanimously agree that aesthetic education can cultivate students' aesthetic emotions, capabilities, and tastes, improve their creativity and innovation skills, and enhance their overall quality. To achieve good results in aesthetic education practice, teachers should possess a wealth of professional knowledge and experience, be able to apply various teaching methods flexibly, be adept at stimulating students' interest and potential, and have good communication skills and a spirit of teamwork. Regarding future expectations and recommendations, teachers suggest that schools and educational institutions should increase their investment in aesthetic education, for example, by expanding the setup and diversification of aesthetic courses, strengthening the construction of aesthetic education faculty, introducing a variety of aesthetic activities and projects and enhancing the interdisciplinary integration of aesthetic education with other subjects.

4. Discussion

4.1. Chinese Middle School Students' Perspectives on Aesthetic Education

The findings reveal that Chinese middle school students overwhelmingly perceive aesthetic education as crucial to their lives, with an average importance rating of 4. Spivak asserts that individuals can find a way out of emotional and physical isolation through the humanities and literature, guiding them toward the ideal of a well-rounded human being [15]. Deer highlights the crucial role of visual arts

in enhancing cognitive and non-cognitive skills, such as creativity, self-esteem, communication, cognition, and self-awareness, among middle school students [16]. Moreover, Bahar Karaman Guvenc suggests that aesthetic education enhances students' ability to interpret art from multiple perspectives, increasing their empathy, self-expression, and artistic application. It underscores the importance of integrating aesthetic education into middle school curriculums to foster diverse thinking and personal development [17].

Regarding satisfaction with aesthetic education courses, scores ranged between 3 and 4, indicating students' recognition of these courses' value and seeing room for improvement. This aligns with Cheng's findings, which indicated that despite improvements in China's aesthetic education curriculum over the past few years, issues such as outdated teaching materials and monotonous teaching methods persist. Challenges in China's aesthetic education curriculum manifest not only in teaching materials and methods but also in teacher training and curriculum setup [18]. In our survey, a student mentioned that the aesthetic education curriculum lacks up-to-date content, failing to engage students' interest. A teacher interviewed expressed that the teaching methods for aesthetic education are traditional, necessitating more innovative and diverse teaching approaches.

Students' preferences for aesthetic activities exhibited a rich diversity, with music, fine arts courses, and artistic performances receiving favor. This is consistent with D'olimpio's finding, which emphasizes the importance of diverse aesthetic activities in nurturing students' varied interests and skills [19]. Furthermore, participation in art exhibitions and concerts also found favor among students, reflecting their broad interest in cultural arts. Notably, students expressed a strong desire for more practical and interactive courses, especially in creative crafts, photography, and film and video production, indicating that traditional teaching methods of aesthetic education might not fully meet students' needs, necessitating the integration of more practical and experiential learning elements.

Furthermore, students emphasized the importance of family and community in providing diverse learning opportunities and practical platforms, further validating that learning and experiencing aesthetic education extends beyond the school environment, requiring participation and support from all sectors of society. This aligns with the findings from Sunassee, which highlighted the significance of constructing an aesthetic education cooperative network across schools, families, and communities to enrich students' aesthetic experiences [20]. This approach values families' expertise about their children and recognizes the community as an indispensable part of the learning ecosystem. Evans states that engagement in the arts is vital to the human experience, emphasizing that involvement in the arts correlates with behaviors that contribute positively to civil society, such as increased civic participation and social tolerance [21].

In summary, the findings of this study highlight the high regard and positive attitudes of Chinese middle school students towards aesthetic education while also pointing out areas for improvement in content renewal, teaching method innovation, and integration of social resources in aesthetic courses and activities. Future research should further explore how to effectively integrate resources and innovate teaching methods to meet students' aesthetic education needs better.

4.2. Challenges and Measures to Implement Aesthetic Education in Music Classes

The results of this study underscore the evident benefits of integrating aesthetic education into music teaching, with teachers expressing strong agreement on its value (mean = 4.13, SD = 1.06). By infusing aesthetic education into music education, teachers encounter multifaceted challenges and adopt various strategies to address them. Current research identifies that teachers face challenges in implementing music education, including differences in student interests and backgrounds, limited educational resources, and the limitations of traditional teaching methods [22]. To overcome these challenges, teachers can employ personalized teaching strategies, utilize digital resources to enrich instructional content and enhance teaching quality through professional development. Personalized

teaching strategies involve selecting musical pieces and adjusting teaching depth based on student's interests and capabilities to meet individual needs. Implementing such strategies helps attract and retain student interest, improving learning motivation and outcomes. Using digital resources, such as online music libraries and music production software, enriches instructional content, interactivity, and enjoyment of teaching. For instance, employing technological tools like iPads and educational applications allows students to engage in music learning creatively [23]. Moreover, some music education technology trends indicate that through online services and mobile devices, teachers can create assignments with extensive music libraries. In contrast, music-sharing services offer students a platform for receiving feedback on a wider scale [24].

In summary, by implementing personalized teaching strategies, leveraging digital resources, and engaging in professional development activities, music teachers can effectively address teaching challenges, improve teaching outcomes, and better integrate aesthetic education with music education.

4.3. Future Directions and Recommendations

For the future, it is recommended that educational institutions enhance their commitment to aesthetic education by adopting innovative teaching methods, utilizing emerging technologies, and focusing on the ongoing development of teachers. Innovative approaches like project-based and interdisciplinary teaching can enrich learning, encouraging creativity and critical thinking by integrating music with subjects such as literature and history. Technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can offer immersive experiences, making music education more engaging by enabling virtual performances and participation in music creation. Artificial intelligence (AI) could also revolutionize music education through automated performance assessments and personalized learning suggestions. Essential to these advancements is the continuous professional development of teachers, who can participate in seminars, workshops and form learning communities for knowledge exchange and improved teaching practices. Ultimately, the goal is to advance music education by fostering students' aesthetic literacy and innovative skills through diverse teaching strategies, technology integration, and teacher development.

In conclusion, future music education should prioritize the integration of diverse teaching methods that incorporate aesthetic education, actively explore the application of emerging technologies, and reinforce teachers' professional development to nurture students' aesthetic literacy and innovative capabilities.

5. Conclusion

The study's conclusions on music education in Chinese middle schools within the context of aesthetic education underscore the students' positive attitudes towards aesthetic education, viewing it as a crucial component of their holistic development. Despite challenges such as limited class time, diverse student needs, and a scarcity of resources, strategies like innovative teaching, technology integration, and enhanced teacher-student interaction have effectively improved teaching outcomes. The research emphasizes the need to increase investment in aesthetic education resources, innovate teaching methods, promote interdisciplinary integration, and strengthen teacher professional development to enhance music education quality and support students' comprehensive development.

Funding

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