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Empowering Aesthetic Education: A Study on Practical Approaches to Guiding Vocational College Students' Ideological Orientation and Managing Their Spontaneous Behavior

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Abstract: Under the dual framework of the" five-fold education" policy and the" enhancing quality and cultivating excellence"[1] initiative in vocational education, aesthetic education emerges as a vital vehicle for shaping well-rounded personalities and fostering professional ethics among students. Its significance in guiding the ideology and managing the behavior of vocational college students is increasingly evident. This paper analyzes existing challenges in vocational institutions' aesthetic education, including its marginalized positioning, disconnect between specialized programs and practical training, inadequate teaching resources, and conflicts between management and spontaneous student engagement. Drawing on relevant theories, it proposes practical pathways across three dimensions—curriculum, ideological guidance, and management mechanisms—to address these issues. These include: These approaches are complemented by safeguards for faculty, resources, and collaborative coordination, aiming to provide vocational institutions with a reference for enhancing students' ideological cultivation and optimizing management effectiveness through aesthetic education.

Keywords: Vocational Institutions; Aesthetic Education; Ideological Guidance; Student Management; Integration of Aesthetics and Specialized Education

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1. Introduction

Following the release of the "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era", aesthetic education is no longer merely an "elective course" but has become an integral part of schools' educational philosophy. For vocational institutions, aesthetic education not only enhances students' aesthetic literacy but also serves as a key solution to the imbalance of "prioritizing skills over literacy," fostering professional ethics, and optimizing management mechanisms. While vocational institutions pursue" enhancing quality and cultivating excellence", they often overlook the issue of" passive constraints" in student management. The "permeative" and 'spontaneous' nature of aesthetic education can counterbalance the "coercive" aspects of management, creating a complementary relationship that supports optimized management models. However, vocational institutions still face challenges such as "insufficiently versatile faculty" and "disconnect between management and aesthetic education." Drawing on literature review, this

paper explores practical pathways for aesthetic education to empower ideological guidance and spontaneous behavioral management among vocational students, thereby assisting schools in achieving the goals of “cultivating, guiding, and managing through aesthetics.”

2. Current Situation

2.1. Foundational Advantages in Aesthetic Education

(1) From a policy perspective, the nation has shifted its stance on aesthetic education from a” supplementary component” to an “essential requirement.” Some institutions have launched pilot programs integrating” professional studies with aesthetic education,”[2], such as incorporating architectural aesthetics into architecture and design programs. These initiatives teach students how to create architecturally significant works with aesthetic value and cultural significance through design and construction. The goal is to enhance architectural aesthetic appreciation while emphasizing the harmonious beauty between architecture and nature.

(2) From the perspective of educational needs, cultivating professional ethics must be integrated into “aesthetic appreciation within occupational contexts.”[3] Aesthetic education, through its concrete artistic forms, can effectively transform professional virtues such as” dedication to one’s post, commitment to one’s work” into tangible aesthetic experiences for students. This approach aligns seamlessly with the requirements for guiding students’ ideological development.

2.2. Dilemma

(1) Aesthetic education is positioned as” marginalized.”[4] Some vocational colleges still treat aesthetic education as an “art appreciation elective”, failing to integrate it with students’ professional values and work ethic, and lacking ideological guidance. Vocational aesthetic education prioritizes art courses over” core competencies,”[5] struggling to resonate with students about the” beauty of professions” and failing to serve as an effective vehicle for ideological guidance. For instance, aesthetic education courses in mechanical engineering focus solely on art appreciation without connecting it to the structural beauty of components or the “craftsmanship spirit.” Students perceive such courses as irrelevant to their majors, reducing aesthetic education to a mere credit-filling exercise that does not contribute to cultivating professional qualities.

(2) The disconnect between aesthetic education and professional development. Currently, aesthetic education suffers from insufficient integration with specialized fields, as course content fails to incorporate the aesthetics of specific professions. This disconnect between ideological guidance and students’ professional development is evident. For instance, architectural design programs neglect architectural aesthetics, making it difficult for students to connect their aesthetic studies with career demands, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of educational guidance.

(3) Management systems have become overly rigid. Vocational school student management suffers from a lack of flexibility, relying excessively on manual oversight rather than aesthetic self-awareness. The inherent spontaneity of aesthetic education has not been translated into management effectiveness. For instance, behavioral management relies solely on disciplinary demands from class officers or counselors, failing to cultivate students’ self-awareness through aesthetic standards for attire. This results in coercive and adversarial management practices.

(4) Vocational institutions face a shortage of well-rounded arts education faculty: art teachers lack industry knowledge, making it difficult to design” vocational scenario-based arts education” content; while specialized instructors lack arts education teaching skills, hindering their ability to integrate aesthetic elements into professional instruction. Additionally, some institutions have limited resources allocated to arts education, lacking “school-enterprise collaboration arts education bases” that provide practical support for guiding students’ thinking and managing their self-directed behavior.

3. Theoretical Support

3.1. Marxist Theory of Holistic Developmental Education

Marx proposed that the comprehensive development of individuals involves the unity of physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and other aspects. Education must transcend narrow skill training to cultivate well-rounded individuals. As one of the five pillars of education, aesthetic education is crucial for addressing the limitations of skill-focused instruction. The core mission of vocational institutions is to cultivate technical and skilled professionals, but they must nurture "people" rather than "tools." Teaching only skills risks students mentally viewing themselves as mere tools (lacking professional pride) and behaviorally focusing solely on task completion (lacking motivation for self-improvement). By supplementing humanistic and aesthetic literacy, aesthetic education can help students:

(1) Ideological Guidance: Establish a" comprehensive professional outlook integrating skills and aesthetics," recognizing that" technology can create beauty and professions can realize aesthetic value" (e.g., the creative beauty of designers, the craftsmanship beauty of technicians).

(2) Self-Directed Behavior Management: Driven by an intrinsic desire for" holistic development", they proactively regulate behavior (e.g., enhancing the" refinement" of skills, actively engaging in humanities learning) rather than passively accepting management.

3.2. Interdisciplinary Framework for Aesthetic Education Practice

Wu Bo, building upon Dole's postmodern curriculum theory of 4R (Richness, Return, Relevance, Rigour), proposes a four-tiered practical framework of" root system—trunk—branches—ecosystem"[6]. This framework emphasizes the deep integration of art and science, forming a systematic educational guidance methodology.

Applied to vocational institutions' aesthetic education contexts, this framework's guiding principles concretely manifest as follows: The "Root Layer" establishes foundational objectives, aligning with vocational education's core principle of" integrating training with education." It synthesizes professional competencies with aesthetic literacy to lay the groundwork for aesthetic practice. The" Trunk Layer" focuses on curriculum design, featuring cross-disciplinary knowledge integration and multi-sensory project-driven approaches to embed aesthetic education within vocational skill development. The" branch layer" emphasizes on-demand adaptation, breaking traditional teaching models by adjusting strategies based on students' professional classifications and aesthetic needs; the" ecosystem layer" constructs an assessment system that transcends the limitation of" results as the sole benchmark," comprehensively measuring the effectiveness of aesthetic education guidance through the dual dimensions of" empirical data + emotional experience."

3.3. The "Three-Pronged Approach to Education" Concept

The "Three-Pronged Approach to Education" philosophy requires vocational colleges to integrate education throughout "all personnel, the entire process, and all dimensions." In aesthetic education-empowered management, this philosophy can be leveraged to establish a management system featuring "full-staff collaboration (aesthetic education teachers + professional faculty + industry experts), full-process immersion (orientation education—practical training empowerment—career guidance), and full-spectrum coverage (academic life—daily life—practical experience)[7]." This approach breaks down the barrier between "management and aesthetic education operating as two separate entities," achieving the unified integration of "aestheticization in management" and "management in aesthetic education."

4. Practical Pathways

4.1. Developing an Integrated Arts and Finance Curriculum System

(1) Stratified Course Content Design[8]. Adopting an" aesthetics-specialization integration and multi-party collaboration" system, it establishes a three-tiered course framework:" Aesthetics Core + Specialization Integration + Electives." Core courses include Introduction to Professional Aesthetics, which breaks down

industry-specific modules to explain aesthetic standards and conceptual frameworks in occupational settings. Aesthetic elements are integrated into specialized courses—for instance, architectural design classes analyze" architectural aesthetics." Electives include Nursing Aesthetics and Humanistic Care, enabling students to develop aesthetic competencies that enhance both professional practice and quality of life.

(2) Multisensory Project-Based Learning. Leveraging a "multi-sensory project-driven" strategy, vocational aesthetics projects are designed following the logic of" sensory experience—hands-on practice—aesthetic perception—ideological alignment." For instance, hotel management students participate in the" Business Hospitality Scenario Aesthetics Full-Process Practice" project, enabling them to perceive" the beauty of vocation" and" the beauty of innovation" through practical application. This fosters alignment with the professional ethos of" shaping careers through aesthetics, empowering through innovation, and establishing oneself through quality."

4.2. Innovative" Activity Immersion" Guidance Model

(1) Organize aesthetic education themed activities. Guided by the principle of integrating aesthetic education with vocational training[9] and ideological education, two types of activities are designed: First, professional ethics aesthetic activities. For service-oriented majors," human etiquette scenario simulations" are conducted to refine service details through" scenario aesthetics" and embody the professional ethic of" humanistic care.[10]" For technical majors," product aesthetic redesign" activities are implemented to practice focused innovation and embody the professional ethic of" pursuit of excellence." Second," Red Aesthetic Practice Activities" for all students. These integrate revolutionary spirit with visual, auditory, and tactile aesthetic forms through red-themed artistic creation and revolutionary artifact exhibitions. Students experience aesthetic appeal while deepening their understanding of red culture, conveying patriotic ideals through aesthetic education.

(2) Cultivate an immersive aesthetic education environment on campus. Create" immersive aesthetic education spaces" where every corner becomes a" classroom for aesthetic education":

① In hallways and stairwells, establish" aesthetic cultural walls." Organized into sections featuring traditional culture, professions, and revolutionary spirit, these walls will display tangible artworks, component close-ups, and heroic figures through murals, reliefs, and exhibition frames. As students pass by daily, they will naturally encounter these physical representations of beauty while absorbing the underlying values of culture, professions, and revolutionary history—transforming the space itself into a teaching resource.

② Create teaching spaces that integrate aesthetics and specialization in classrooms and training labs. For instance, nursing training labs can feature display cabinets showcasing nursing aesthetics, displaying standardized nursing procedure flowcharts and warm patient communication cards, complemented by soft pink and white decor to convey "the beauty of detail." By embedding aesthetic education into core learning and training scenarios, students simultaneously grasp professional skills while recognizing the connection between aesthetics and their field of study.

4.3. Improve the management mechanism for" aesthetic standards"

(1) Promoting the Aestheticization of Daily Management. Addressing the issue of" rigid management systems", integrate aesthetic standards into governance: Dormitory management launched a" Dorm Aesthetic Design Competition", requiring designs to balance functionality and visual appeal, using the pursuit of beauty to foster tidiness and self-discipline.

(2) Establish a Collaborative Management System for Holistic Education. Based on the concept of holistic education, create a coordinated mechanism involving" university + secondary colleges + enterprises": At the institutional level, assemble teaching teams integrating" aesthetic education + academic disciplines + industry expertise" to jointly participate in student management; at the process level, incorporate" occupational aesthetic awareness" into orientation programs, emphasize" aesthetics of operational procedures" during practical training, and strengthen"

professional image aesthetics" in career guidance; at the comprehensive level, integrate campus environmental aesthetic education with off-campus corporate aesthetic practice to form a closed-loop management system.

(3) Add a dual-dimensional evaluation of" empirical data + emotional experience." Incorporate aesthetic education literacy into students' comprehensive quality assessment: The" empirical data" dimension examines students' grades in aesthetic education courses, activity participation rates, and aesthetic behavior performance; the "emotional experience" dimension uses questionnaires and interviews to gauge students' identification with "professional beauty" and satisfaction with management, avoiding a" sole reliance on scores" in evaluation.

5. Building a Support System for Aesthetic Education Empowerment

5.1. Faculty Support

To address the issue of insufficiently versatile faculty, two measures have been implemented: First, dual-qualified teacher training, where arts education teachers participate in industry practice while subject teachers undergo arts education training. Second, teaching team development, inviting industry experts to join teaching teams to jointly develop curricula and design activities, thereby enhancing collaborative educational capabilities.

5.2. Resource Allocation Guarantee

On campus, establish a vocational aesthetic education practice center and a curriculum resource repository. Off campus, collaborate with art galleries, museums, and intangible cultural heritage workshops to create" aesthetic education practice bases", providing students with hands-on aesthetic education opportunities in professional settings to address the challenge of limited resource investment.

5.3. Coordinated and Integrated Safeguards

The university has established a collaborative mechanism linking the Academic Affairs Office, Youth League Committee, and Student Affairs Office to clarify each department's responsibilities in curriculum development, ideological guidance, and management. For industry-academia collaboration, enterprises are invited to participate in course design and activity evaluations, integrating industry aesthetic standards into teaching practices. Regarding home-school collaboration, parent workshops and online sharing sessions communicate the importance of aesthetic education for career development, guiding families to support aesthetic education initiatives.

6. Conclusion

Aesthetic education is not an" add-on" to vocational education but a vital link connecting students' mindsets with institutional management. Against the backdrop of" enhancing quality and cultivating excellence", vocational institutions must integrate aesthetic education into all educational processes by: Guiding efforts with Marxist theories on holistic development; - Pursuing pathways of "integration of aesthetics and specialization"; Ensuring implementation through" all-round education." This approach addresses the challenges of" prioritizing skills over literacy" and" emphasizing constraints over immersion." Moving forward, efforts should deepen school-enterprise collaborations in aesthetic education and refine the" cultivating through aesthetics" system. This will foster versatile talents who are" skilled, well-rounded, and morally upright", thereby propelling the high-quality development of vocational education.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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