

# *The impact of school art education on the aesthetic ability of students in less developed areas: A case of a public high school in Hubei Province, China*

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**Abstract:** Art education plays an important role in cultivating students' creativity and aesthetic ability. However, schools in less developed areas of China face challenges such as lack of resources and marginalization of curriculum when implementing art education. Based on a public high school in Hubei Province, qualitative research methods were used to investigate the influence of fine arts education on students' aesthetic ability in this environment through in-depth interviews and classroom observation. Although school administrators and teachers generally recognize the value of fine arts education, due to the lack of evaluation standards and funds in high schools, fine arts courses are often marginalized, and teaching resources and class hours are severely limited. Art teachers strive to improve students' interest and aesthetic understanding of art through the teaching strategies of appreciation and analysis of art works, multimedia display and so on. However, due to the short course time, limited equipment and insufficient support of family concept, there are great differences in the aesthetic development of students. The research shows that strengthening the policy support, optimizing the curriculum design, increasing the input of teaching resources and the professional training of teachers can effectively improve the implementation effect of fine arts education in underdeveloped areas, and promote the development of students' comprehensive artistic accomplishment and aesthetic ability.

## **1. Introduction**

Art education is widely recognized for its ability to foster creativity, critical thinking, and emotional development in students<sup>[1]</sup>. However, in some economically underdeveloped regions of China, art education often faces significant challenges due to limited resources, a shortage of specialized teachers, and a lack of proper facilities. These constraints undermine students' exposure to artistic disciplines and, consequently, hinder the development of their aesthetic abilities. This paper examines the impact of art education on the aesthetic abilities of students in a public high school located in an economically underdeveloped region of Hubei Province, China.

Hubei Province, some place even not rural, faces economic challenges that affect educational

opportunities, particularly in its less developed areas. Despite the national curriculum emphasizing the importance of art education, schools in these regions frequently allocate limited resources to core subjects such as Chinese, mathematics, and Foreign language due to academic pressure and the focus on Gaokao (Chinese National College Entrance Examination). As a result, art education often becomes marginalized, and students have few opportunities to engage deeply with the arts<sup>[2]</sup>. This lack of access to quality art instruction limits not only students' artistic skills but also their broader intellectual and emotional development.

This study posits that enhancing the aesthetic abilities of students through art education can contribute significantly to their overall growth, even in economically disadvantaged areas. This research seeks to understand the current status of art education in economically underdeveloped regions and to evaluate its role in shaping students' aesthetic perceptions, creativity, and self-expression. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, the study will assess both the challenges faced by students and educators in this context and the potential benefits of art education for students' holistic development. The findings of this study aim to provide a deeper understanding of how art education can be adapted and integrated into the curricula of schools in economically underdeveloped regions.

Ultimately, the paper advocates for a more inclusive approach to education, one that recognizes the value of aesthetic education as an integral part of students' intellectual and emotional growth, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

## 2. Methodology

The study is designed as a case study, focusing on a public high school in Hubei Province. This case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of the local context and provides rich, detailed data on how art education is implemented in a less developed region. Through qualitative research, the study aims to understand the challenges and opportunities of art education in such settings, as well as its impact on students' aesthetic abilities.

Participants in this study were selected based on their role in the school's arts education program. A total of 13 participants participated in this study: 10 students were selected for this study through purposeful sampling to ensure a diverse representation of students with varying degrees of involvement in arts education. These students provide a cross-sectional view of how arts education affects students at different stages of their high school education. 2 teachers were chosen because they are directly involved in the delivery of arts education in the school. Their insights into teaching practices, challenges, and student engagement are critical to understanding the dynamics of arts education in underfunded school Settings. An interview with a school leader provides an institutional perspective on the role of arts education within the wider educational framework of the school, including its importance in the curriculum and the school's attitude towards arts education implementation.

This study relies on two primary qualitative data collection methods: interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, allowing for open-ended responses while maintaining focus on key areas of interest. The researcher conducted direct observations of art classes over a period of three months. The observations aimed to capture the teaching practices employed by the art teachers, student participation, and the overall classroom environment. The researcher focused on understanding the types of art activities being conducted, the level of student engagement, and the ways in which art lessons were structured and delivered. Notes were taken during each observation session to complement the interview data and provide additional context for the findings.

Based on the research theme, the impact of art education on aesthetic ability, and the local

economic and social characteristics, the researchers designed a series of different interview questions for different subjects. The different interview questions relate to each other as much as possible.

For school leader, the researcher asked the following questions:

- 1) In your school, how is the discussion and exploration of aesthetic theory integrated into the fine arts curriculum?
- 2) How do you think aesthetic theory affects students' ability to participate in and appreciate art?
- 3) What specific influence do you observe on students' aesthetic ability in the local social situation?

For art teachers, the researcher asked the following questions:

- 1) How would you integrate discussion and exploration of aesthetic theory into your fine arts course?
- 2) In what ways do students demonstrate their understanding of aesthetic values through their responses to and creations of art?
- 3) What specific influence do you observe on students' aesthetic ability in the local social situation?

For students, the researcher asked the following questions:

- 1) Provide an example of a lesson or activity that successfully addressed aesthetic concepts in your art class.
- 2) Provide examples of how your grasp of aesthetic concepts has evolved as a result of art education.
- 3) What influence do you think local social conditions have on your aesthetic abilities?

The main limitation of this study is its reliance on a single case study, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other schools in less developed areas of China. Additionally, the subjective nature of qualitative research means that the findings are based on participants' perspectives, which may be influenced by personal biases. Future research could explore multiple schools or use longitudinal methods to examine how the impact of art education develops over time.

### **3. The impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability**

Art education plays a critical role in shaping students' aesthetic abilities, a process that encompasses the development of perception, appreciation, and expression of beauty<sup>[3]</sup>. In less developed areas, where access to art education is often limited by economic constraints, the role of school art education in nurturing students' aesthetic understanding and creative abilities becomes even more significant.

Aesthetic ability can be broadly defined as the capacity to perceive, appreciate, and evaluate beauty in the world<sup>[4]</sup>. It involves more than just an appreciation for visual art—it extends to the ability to interpret artistic forms, understand cultural and historical contexts, and engage in reflective thinking. It enables students to make connections between art, culture, and the world around them, encouraging them to view problems from multiple perspectives and think creatively.

Art education promotes psychological and emotional growth, which is closely tied to aesthetic development. A study by Mastandrea et al. (2019) found that engaging with visual arts reduces stress and fosters well-being by activating cognitive and emotional processes essential for aesthetic appreciation. Art-based activities help students develop empathy, a deeper appreciation of beauty, and the ability to process complex emotions through creative expression<sup>[5]</sup>. A study from Jin Xuguang (2022) explored how arts education can improve mental health, creativity, and emotional intelligence. It emphasizes the importance of creative activities in cultivating students' aesthetic ability and personal growth<sup>[6]</sup>.

Creativity serves as a vital link between art education and aesthetic ability. Research by

Romanescu and Özlem (2020) revealed that art education integrates physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions, cultivating students' creative and critical thinking skills. This integration enables learners to express their personal vision, which is fundamental to aesthetic engagement. By fostering imagination and innovative thinking, art education helps students perceive and appreciate beauty in unique ways<sup>[7]</sup>.

Research suggests that aesthetic development is not merely a passive process but an active engagement with art that shapes how individuals perceive and interact with their environment. The more exposure students have to art, the more likely they are to develop refined aesthetic judgments. This process is facilitated through the study of different artistic forms—such as visual arts, music, and literature—which encourage students to engage with diverse perspectives and ideas. In schools in economically underdeveloped regions like Hubei, however, the opportunities for such engagement are often limited, resulting in gaps in students' aesthetic development. A review by Samaniego et al. (2024) noted that emerging technologies could further democratize access to cultural resources, bridging gaps in underdeveloped educational contexts. This aligns with broader educational goals of fostering inclusivity and equity in aesthetic education<sup>[8]</sup>. A systematic review by Usca et al. (2024) highlights the transformative potential of digital tools in enhancing creativity and accessibility to art education. While these technologies bridge gaps in traditional methods, challenges such as inadequate teacher training and resistance to change remain barriers to their widespread adoption. In economically underdeveloped regions, however, the challenges to effective art education are considerable. Limited art resources, lack of trained teachers, and the emphasis on College Entrance Examination often result in a reduced focus on art education. Nonetheless, even with such constraints, research has shown that students exposed to art education, regardless of the setting, demonstrate an enhanced ability to interpret and engage with aesthetic experiences<sup>[9]</sup>. This suggests that, when properly implemented, art education can significantly contribute to the development of aesthetic awareness and emotional intelligence in students<sup>[10]</sup>.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of incorporating cultural heritage into arts education to enrich students' understanding and appreciation of their cultural identity. In China, ethnic and regional cultures are being incorporated into school curricula to create a more relevant and engaging art education experience. These practices not only develop students' artistic abilities, but also deepen their connection to local traditions and help them overcome limited access to a wider range of artistic resources. A study from Li Xin (2020) explores the integration of regional ethnic cultures into art education to enhance students' appreciation of local traditions and artistic creativity. It highlights the challenges of limited resources and the benefits of harnessing local cultural assets in an educational setting<sup>[11]</sup>.

Art education, as a structured discipline, serves as a key pathway for enhancing students' aesthetic abilities<sup>[12]</sup>. By engaging with various forms of art, students learn to appreciate and critically analyze beauty, form, and meaning. Art education introduces students to the diverse elements of visual culture, teaching them to recognize artistic styles, techniques, and historical periods, all of which broaden their understanding of beauty and creativity. Moreover, art education promotes emotional expression and self-awareness. As students engage with artistic forms, they are encouraged to reflect on their emotions, thoughts, and experiences. In turn, this emotional maturity supports the development of more complex aesthetic judgments, as students become better at identifying and articulating what they find meaningful or beautiful in the world.

#### **4. The cognition of different groups in school on the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability**

The perception of art education and its role in enhancing students' aesthetic abilities varies among

different groups within a school setting, including students, teachers, and school leaders. These groups, influenced by their respective roles and experiences, contribute to the implementation and reception of art education in distinct ways. Students' understanding of art education often revolves around its immediate enjoyment or creative expression<sup>[13]</sup>, while teachers focus on its pedagogical challenges and the constraints of curriculum delivery. On the other hand, school leaders can view arts education through the lens of resource allocation and institutional priorities<sup>[14]</sup>. How these different perspectives affect the implementation and results of art education in public high schools in Hubei Province, China. By researching the cognition of these groups, the study aims to identify gaps in understanding and opportunities for enhancing the aesthetic education experience. The findings will provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within the school, offering recommendations for optimizing art education in similar socio-economic contexts.

#### 4.1 School leader's cognition of the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability

School leader play a critical role in shaping and implementing art education policies and practices, particularly in economically underdeveloped regions where resources and opportunities for art education are limited. Their perspectives reveal both the challenges faced in integrating aesthetic education into the curriculum and the potential benefits that such education can bring to students. The interview results of target school leader are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: School Leader's answer for the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability

Emerging Theme	Exemplar
Art Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Art education based on national policy.</li> <li>- An important part of interdisciplinary learning.</li> </ul>
Aesthetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aesthetics helps students improve their perception and sensitivity to the beauty of life.</li> <li>- Aesthetic education helps students better understand and appreciate the beauty of native cultures as well as those of other cultures.</li> </ul>
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social and economic conditions are limited, and students are exposed to relatively scarce cultural, artistic and aesthetic resources.</li> <li>- Families and communities may pay more attention to practical livelihood and life skills and neglect the cultivation of art and aesthetics.</li> <li>- Infrastructure in poor areas is underdeveloped and students have limited access to outside information. As a result, students' aesthetic concept is relatively conservative and lack diversified vision.</li> </ul>

The interviewed school leader mentioned that in the past teaching practice, aesthetic theory has not been specifically incorporated into school art education. As to why aesthetic theory has not been specifically incorporated into school art education, school leaders said that the current high school evaluation system is still deeply tied to China's college entrance examination system, and high school education is highly focused on college entrance examination subjects such as Chinese, Mathematics and English. As a non-college entrance examination subject, art courses are often marginalized and the class hours are reduced, which makes it difficult for schools to spare time for aesthetic theory teaching, and even the art courses prescribed by the state will be crowded out<sup>[15]</sup>. Although the state has issued art curriculum standards, the specific teaching content and implementation methods of aesthetic theory are less stipulated in the documents, resulting in schools paying more attention to artistic practice and historical knowledge in teaching, while ignoring the systematic teaching of aesthetic theory.

However, on December 20, 2023, the Ministry of Education issued the "Notice of the Ministry of Education on the Comprehensive Implementation of the Action of Aesthetic Education in Schools"<sup>[16]</sup>, which emphasizes the impact of aesthetic education on students, teachers and schools, and proposes to comprehensively improve students' core qualities, including cultural understanding, aesthetic cognition, artistic expression and creative practice. Although the policy sets goals for the improvement of curriculum quality in aesthetic education, the establishment of student art display mechanism and the construction of interdisciplinary high-quality aesthetic education resource system, because the policy has just been released, the school has not yet formed a specific practice method for aesthetic theory to enter the classroom, and it is still being gradually explored. In other words, at present, the discussion and exploration of aesthetic theory in schools have not been fully integrated into the fine arts curriculum, and the specific teaching design and implementation need to be further developed.

The researcher also learned that the local government still evaluates high schools based on the entrance rate of the college entrance exam. Although fine arts is a compulsory subject, it is not included in the total score of the college entrance exam, so it is natural that schools do not pay attention to it<sup>[17]</sup>.

As for aesthetic ability, school leaders believe that systematic learning of fine arts and aesthetics can guide students to pay attention to details in daily life, such as natural scenery, architectural design, color matching, etc., so as to stimulate their perception of the beauty of life. Students' powers of observation and sensitivity are improved, and it is easier to find beauty around them.

Studies have shown that art learning requires students to observe and analyze in detail in art appreciation and creation<sup>[18]</sup>, such as the composition, light and shadow changes, material texture and so on. This training directly increased their sensitivity to similar elements in real life. Learning about color theory, perspective principles and design constructs strengthens students' sensory perception and enables them to recognize aesthetic elements in their real-world environment<sup>[19]</sup>. Aesthetic education enables students to understand the basic standards of beauty<sup>[20]</sup>, such as symmetry and balance, harmony and contrast. These standards can be applied in architectural design, product appearance and interior decoration. After learning these standards, students will unconsciously evaluate and judge the beauty of the environment in life.

Regarding aesthetic education, school leaders believe that aesthetic education usually includes art forms in local culture, such as traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting, paper-cutting, and Peking Opera facial masks. These cultural symbols not only have visual beauty, but also carry national history and cultural memory. Through aesthetic education, students can understand the cultural origin and spiritual connotation of their own nation, so as to enhance cultural identity and pride. Aesthetic education also includes world art history, culture and art comparison and so on. For example, by comparing Chinese ink painting with European oil paintings, African masks with Central American murals, students can understand the values and aesthetic standards of different cultures from diverse art forms. So aesthetic education helps students better understand and appreciate the beauty of local culture and other cultures. Aesthetic education enhances students' cultural confidence and identity, and also cultivates their cross-cultural understanding.

As for the impact of social and economic conditions on the art and aesthetic education of our students, school leaders mentioned that due to the lack of funds in the school, the limited funds are used to support the distribution of teaching equipment and teacher subsidies for major disciplines, and the school lacks professional art classrooms and painting tools and other infrastructure that can be used for practice. Parents of local students generally pay more attention to the core subjects of the college entrance examination (such as Chinese, math, English, etc.) and ignore the art curriculum, believing that aesthetic education is "useless". The local lack of museums, art galleries and other public cultural places, students have fewer opportunities to contact art works and cultural activities,

resulting in a single aesthetic education resources.

Some studies have shown that material resources are the basis of the implementation of aesthetic education curriculum. Insufficient funding limits the use of art materials and the effectiveness of curriculum implementation, which in turn affects teachers' professional performance and teaching effectiveness. At the same time, the professional capacity of teachers can alleviate some of the impact of funding shortage in the case of limited resources, but this capacity is often restricted by long-term insufficient funding, thus forming a mutual influence cycle<sup>[21]</sup>. In economically backward areas, parents generally pay more attention to the core subjects of college entrance examination (such as Chinese, math, English, etc.), ignore art courses, and consider aesthetic education "useless". Family economic difficulties lead to parents unable to support their children to participate in after-school art training or purchase art tools, which also weakens students' opportunities for aesthetic education development<sup>[22]</sup>.

According to the above survey, the researcher believes that the interviewed school leaders have a certain cognition of the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability, but due to the evaluation and practical orientation, the school leaders do not do too much resource tilt in art education. In short, the attitude of the school leaders towards art education is that they know the importance of art education in theory and the implementation problems of art education, but they do not care about the development of students' aesthetic ability in the actual teaching.

#### 4.2 Art teachers' cognition of the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability

Art teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' aesthetic abilities, especially in less developed regions where educational resources are often limited. Their perceptions and teaching practices directly influence how students experience and interpret art, develop creative thinking. Art teachers' views on art education reflect both its potential for personal development and the challenges of delivering high-quality art instruction in resource-constrained environments.

The researcher coded the art teachers of the interviewees in target school as AT1, AT2. The interview results of art teachers in target schools are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Art Teachers' answer for the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability

Emerging Theme	Code	Exemplar
Art Education	-AT1	- Students' aesthetic consciousness can be cultivated through art practice and art appreciation.
	-AT2	- Incorporate lessons on art history, emphasizing how aesthetic theories evolved in different cultures and time periods.
Aesthetics	- AT1	- Students demonstrate their level of understanding of aesthetic theory by analyzing aesthetic principles such as balance, harmony, and emotional expression in works of art.
	- AT2	- Students embody their understanding of aesthetics by creating works of art that explore specific aesthetic theories.
Society	- AT1	- Students may have few opportunities to visit art exhibitions, museums or be exposed to the diverse forms of contemporary art.
	- AT2	- Poor areas have low Internet penetration, and students have limited access to external cultural and artistic information.
	- AT1	- Parents are more inclined to students to learn skills that can bring economic benefits, rather than believing that art and aesthetic education is necessary.
	- AT2	- There are fewer opportunities to be influenced by outside culture, and students may have insufficient awareness of modern art and global art trends.

Regarding how art teachers integrate aesthetic theories into the art classroom, the interviewed

teachers mentioned introducing key aesthetic theories such as beauty, form and expression through practical art projects such as art creation and art appreciation activities. For example, students may create artwork inspired by various aesthetic philosophies, such as formalism, expressionism, or realism. Upon completion of their study project, critique activities are held that allow students to analyze how their work aligns with a particular theory or their own new findings. In conjunction with art history courses, emphasis is placed on the evolution of aesthetic theory across cultures and time periods. For example, teachers mentioned discussing Confucian aesthetics in Chinese art or the concept of the "sublime" in Western art. Use online video resources and documentaries to deepen your understanding. Some studies have shown that using video and multimedia can effectively improve students' understanding of aesthetic concepts<sup>[23]</sup>.

Studying fine arts allows students to apply abstract aesthetic theories, such as formalism, naturalism, or expressionism, in practical projects. This experiential learning solidifies their understanding of aesthetic concepts by translating theoretical principles into visual representations<sup>[24]</sup>. The Fine Arts course teaches students how to use aesthetic vocabulary to criticize and analyze works of art<sup>[25]</sup>. This practice deepens their ability to understand symbols, composition, and artistic intent, developing a more refined understanding of beauty and artistic expression.

Interviewed teachers mentioned that students can create abstract works that emphasize visual elements such as lines, shapes, colors, and textures. For example, they can design geometric compositions, inspired by artists like Mondrian, to explore aesthetic concepts of balance and harmony. Students can also produce detailed portraits or still life works with an emphasis on realism. This approach helps them explore how accurate representation evokes an appreciation of beauty in everyday life.

Studies have shown that when students create art, they directly apply aesthetic concepts such as balance, harmony, and contrast. Students explore composition and structure through abstract art projects. Using color and brushstrokes to express emotion, and linking aesthetic theory with art practice in art practice<sup>[26]</sup>.

Although the interviewed teachers mentioned some effective ways to influence students' aesthetic ability through art education, the actual implementation may not be as smooth as the interviewed teachers' answers due to the local social and economic conditions. Similar to the school leaders interviewed, art teachers specifically cited similar views, such as the relative lack of cultural, artistic and aesthetic resources that students are exposed to; Families are more inclined to let students spend more time on college entrance examination subjects, and do not believe that fine arts and aesthetic education is necessary.

According to the above survey, the researchers believe that the art teachers in this school have a certain understanding of the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability, and will take a measure to guide students to understand aesthetic theories through learning art history knowledge and completing some art practices in teaching practice. However, they are also limited by the local social and economic conditions. Students will be influenced when they receive aesthetic knowledge.

### **4.3 Students' cognition of the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability**

Students' perspectives on how art education influences their aesthetic ability reveal mixed experiences. While many students expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of art education, some recognized its positive effects on their artistic growth, emotional development, and cultural awareness.

The researcher coded the 10 students of the interviewees in target school as ST1,ST2,ST3 to ST10. The interview results of target school students are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Students' answer for the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability

Emerging Theme	Code	Exemplar
Art Education	- ST1 - ST3 - ST5 - ST8	- Introduce aesthetic concepts in the art class.
	- ST2 - ST6	- Introduce aesthetic concepts in art creation.
	- ST4 - ST9 - ST10	- Have no idea.
Aesthetics	- ST1 - ST3 - ST4	- Enhanced visual sensitivity. - Development of critical aesthetic thinking.
	- ST5 - ST8	- Broader cultural aesthetic awareness.
	- ST2 - ST6 - ST9	- Emotional and personal expression. - Recognition of symbolism and deeper meaning.
	- ST7 - ST10	- Have no idea.
Society	- ST1 - ST2	- There is little access to high quality works of art or advanced art tools.
	- ST1 - ST2 - ST3 - ST4 - ST5 - ST6 - ST7 - ST8	- There are no museums and galleries in my hometown.
	- ST1 - ST2 - ST3 - ST4 - ST5 - ST6 - ST7 - ST8	- The lack of innovation in local architectural design has had a negative impact on their aesthetic.
	- ST1 - ST2 - ST5 - ST6 - ST7 - ST9	- Parents refuse to give themselves more space for consumption aesthetically

In the question of integrating aesthetic concepts into art courses, some students mentioned that their art teachers introduced the concept of "cultural aesthetics", focusing on how traditional Chinese

art embodies the aesthetic values of cultural identity, symbolism, and harmony and balance. The teacher discussed with the students examples of local folk art, such as paper-cutting, New Year paintings and pottery. Some students mentioned that their art teacher taught them to design posters featuring local folk art, using concepts such as color harmony, symbolism, and pattern repetition to connect traditional aesthetics with modern design. Some students mentioned that since the school is located in a mountainous area and there is a river nearby, the art teacher took the surrounding mountains and rivers as inspiration and guided them to appreciate landscape paintings and natural landscapes in reality. Through the contrast between painting and reality, the art teacher guides the students to explore the aesthetic principles of balance and contrast, and focuses on the concepts of composition and spatial perspective.

Although some students gave examples of art teachers introducing some aesthetic concepts through art appreciation and art practice courses. However, in the survey, some students told the researchers that they did not know whether their teachers added aesthetic content to the curriculum.

Some students gave their own different views on how the concept of aesthetics evolves with the development of art education.

Some students mentioned that taking fine arts courses made them more sensitive to visual elements such as color, shape, line, texture, etc. They learn to observe and appreciate the beauty around them in greater detail, which they see as a reflection of their improved aesthetic abilities. Through discussion and analysis of art, students learn to look beyond personal preferences, such as whether a work of art is "beautiful" or "not." They began to use critical thinking to evaluate art based on composition, light and shadow, and thematic depth, and gained a deeper understanding of the aesthetic value of artworks. Before receiving art education, some students are only familiar with local or national art styles. Through art appreciation courses, they are exposed to works of art from different cultural and historical backgrounds. This expands their understanding of global artistic diversity and cultural richness, and they believe that the fine arts program enriches their aesthetic diversity. Some students believe that making art can help them express their emotions and manage stress. They describe making art as a creative outlet that allows them to explore personal emotions and improve their mental health, which makes them comfortable and thinks it will be aesthetic. Some students believe that they learn how to explore deeper meanings behind artworks by analyzing the artist's creative intent, social context, and cultural values reflected in the art. This analytical ability helps them better appreciate the social and cultural impact of art, which also gives them an understanding of what aesthetics is. As before, there were also some students who said they had no opinion on this question.

Many students mentioned that due to local socio-economic conditions, they have few opportunities to go to art galleries, exhibitions and professional art institutions. This lack of exposure reduces their opportunities to experience different art forms and expand their aesthetic understanding. The students felt that the old architectural design and the lack of innovative urban development in the area had a negative impact on their aesthetic. The singularity of urban planning and design limits their exposure to visually stimulating and creatively designed Spaces. Some students mentioned that many families prioritize meeting basic needs over purchasing decorative or artistic items, and students are rarely exposed to an aesthetically pleasing home environment. Some students shared that when they asked for decorative items, their parents rejected the idea because they thought it was an unnecessary expense. Despite some economic difficulties, local cultural traditions, handicrafts and natural landscapes remain a unique source of aesthetic inspiration. Traditional folk customs, regional costumes and local crafts have a positive effect on students' artistic development, forming an aesthetic rooted in daily life rather than material wealth.

Students' perception of fine arts education presents a complex combination of positive influence and unfulfilled potential. While art education has improved some students' aesthetic sensitivity,

cultural awareness, and emotional resilience, many students feel that limited resources, rigid curricula, and a lack of diverse art programs hinder their artistic development. Addressing these challenges could significantly improve the course experience for students and foster a deeper aesthetic understanding.

#### 4.4 The changes of students after art education

As part of the study, the researchers conducted three months of classroom observation in the target schools, during which time they communicated with the instructors, who continuously adjusted the classroom content using aesthetic concepts. Next, I will take the first and last lessons of the two art teachers I observed as examples to analyze the changes in students' cognition of aesthetic concepts after they initially accepted the art course and after they accepted the art course.

The researchers observed the Chinese landscape painting as the theme of the art class of two art teachers in the target high school. Both classes, the first art classes of the semester, follow a strict, textbook-based approach, with no deliberate mention of aesthetic theory or conceptual exploration related to art appreciation. In class, the teacher described the painting characteristics mentioned in the textbook, emphasizing technical aspects such as brushwork and ink texture, as well as landscape elements such as mountains, rivers and trees. However, the interpretation is limited to descriptive features and does not discuss the underlying artistic intent or aesthetic meaning. The students were not asked to interpret or respond emotionally to the paintings. There are no questions such as "What emotions does this painting evoke" or "How does the white space affect your perception of the landscape?" The researchers observed a lack of integration of aesthetic theory in the first art class, which may have limited students' ability to critically engage with art and develop aesthetic sensitivity. Instead of discussing topics such as aesthetics, emotional influences, or spiritual symbols of nature in Chinese art, students are left with a superficial understanding that focuses on historical facts and technical depictions of the painting.

Most students remained quiet and passive throughout the class. As the teaching method is based on lectures, there is no interactive discussion or creative activities, students mainly listen, and even more than half of the students do not pay attention to the content of the teacher's class. Students have little apparent enthusiasm or curiosity about the subject. Some students showed signs of boredom, such as staring out the window, resting their heads on their desks, or leaning over their desks themselves to write. The lack of hands-on activity or dynamic video assistance seemed to reduce their interest in and connection with the art under discussion.

In general, teacher-centered teaching methods and a lack of interactive or creative ways of teaching the curriculum have led to low student engagement. This kind of art class has limited effect on students' aesthetic ability.

In the following three months after the initial observation, the researchers conducted interviews with the target population of the target school, obtained the interview data, conducted additional communication with the art teachers, and continuously observed the presentation effect of the art classroom. After three months of follow-up, the researchers will use the last art class as an example to demonstrate the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability.

This is a class on contemporary Chinese art that begins with an important question: "How does contemporary art reflect the changing culture and values of contemporary China?" By connecting the arts to the social and cultural context, it immediately grabs the students' attention. The teacher then introduced the aesthetic theories of conceptual art, symbolism and cultural criticism, explaining how contemporary Chinese artists combine traditional and modern ideas. For example, the teacher interpreted Artist Xu Bing's *A book from the sky* as a critique of language and communication, prompting students to reflect on its meaning. Students take a virtual museum tour through a digital

platform showcasing contemporary Chinese art. They visited the exhibits of the National Art Museum of China and the International Gallery. This interactive feature adds visual depth and context to the presentation of real artwork. The teacher asked the students to use symbolism, abstraction and other aesthetic concepts to analyze the artwork. Students work in groups to interpret specific works and share their interpretations with the class. In this class, students actively participate in discussions and provide unique insights, rather than passively receiving information. The teacher clearly explains aesthetic terms and relates them to real examples of works of art. And using digital museums and digital galleries, these multimedia applications can help students visualize art beyond textbook images. Student collaborative group projects encourage original thinking and creative expression, reflecting students' mastery and application of aesthetic concepts.

This student-centered classroom presentation, combined with multimedia tools, aesthetic theory discussions, and creative group discussion tasks, enables students to be highly engaged, actively engaged, and meaningfully personal. This change of teaching method greatly enhances students' cognition of art learning and understanding of aesthetics related theories.

## 5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the current situation of art education in less developed areas of China, taking a high school in Hubei Province as an example to explore the impact of art education on students' aesthetic ability in an environment with limited resources. The main objective of this study is to reveal how art education shapes students' aesthetic consciousness and understanding, and then to put forward suggestions for optimizing art education.

Target school leader recognize the potential value of fine arts education to the development of students' aesthetic ability, but due to the restrictions of college entrance examination orientation and shortage of funds, fine arts courses are often marginalized, and resource allocation and teaching support are seriously insufficient. There is a clear gap between the implementation of the policy and the actual operation. Teachers generally try to integrate aesthetic theory and art history knowledge in teaching, but the curriculum design is restricted by the lack of class hours and teaching equipment. Although teachers have a full understanding of the potential of art education, the actual teaching effect is not fully reflected due to the limitations of resources and teaching environment. The improvement of students' aesthetic ability is manifested as the enhancement of art appreciation, creativity and cultural cognition, but the development of individual is quite different. Art courses stimulate some students' interest in art through artistic creation and appreciation of works. However, due to the influence of social and economic environment, some students' art participation and family support are obviously insufficient. Through three months of classroom observation, the study found that students' engagement was significantly improved when guided by multimedia content and aesthetic concepts. However, limited class hours and lack of systematic course design are still the main bottlenecks affecting the depth of teaching.

This study shows that although the implementation of fine arts education in schools in underdeveloped areas faces many challenges, it plays an important role in improving students' aesthetic ability. The research suggestions include: strengthening the implementation of education policy, optimizing the curriculum arrangement, and increasing the allowance for teachers in art classes. Schools should provide more professional equipment and textbooks, promote digital teaching tools, strengthen teachers' professional training, and improve the teaching quality and innovation of fine arts courses. The government should introduce policies to strengthen family and community support for art education and enrich students' extracurricular art experience. Through multi-party cooperation and continuous improvement, fine arts education is expected to play a greater educational and social cultural value in the resource-limited environment.

However, the study is limited to a single school case study, and the wide applicability of the data is limited. In addition, there may be subjective biases of participants in the interview and observation process, and future research can be extended to more schools and multidisciplinary backgrounds to carry out long-term follow-up studies to more comprehensively assess the long-term impact of fine arts education. Through systematic policy support and social resource input, art education in underdeveloped areas is expected to become an important driving force for students' allround development.

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