Research on Aesthetic Awakening in English Teaching for Art Students in Universities

Shao Qian

School of International Culture and Communication, Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute, Jingdezhen, 333403, China

Abstract: Art students in higher education, with visual thinking and professional specificity, face dual challenges of weak English foundations and inadequate teaching adaptability. Characterized by vocabulary gaps (30% lower active vocabulary than non-art majors) and weak grammar, they struggle with traditional methods—like context-divorced vocabulary cramming and grammar drills—that mismatch their visual-thinking traits. The "aesthetic awakening" philosophy proposed here, rooted in aesthetic and constructivist theories, reconstructs teaching through three dimensions: exploring English rhythmic beauty (e.g., Shakespearean sonnet cadence) and lexical cultural metaphors (e.g., art terminology etymology) at the content level; constructing cross-cultural art dialogue scenarios (e.g., bilingual analysis of Impressionist and Chinese ink paintings) methodologically; and establishing professional creation-integrated dynamic portfolios for evaluation. This approach breaks free from the "language-as-tool" paradigm, transforming English learning into an artistic thinking extension through aesthetic experience. Beyond basic skills, it aims to achieve three-dimensional unity in linguistic knowledge, cross-cultural aesthetics, and professional practice.

1. Introduction

With the deepening of cultural globalization, English, as a key language in international communication, remains vital in university education. However, art students often encounter significant difficulties in English learning. Prioritizing professional skill development, they tend to undervalue English and suffer from weak foundational skills, leading to poor learning outcomes. The concept of "aesthetic awakening" offers a new perspective for English teaching to art students in universities. It emphasizes that English instruction should not only impart language knowledge but also guide students to discover the aesthetic appeal of the English language, the charm of its culture, and opportunities for self-improvement through learning.

2. Analysis of the Current Status of English Learning Among University Art Students

2.1. Weak English Foundations

Art students generally enter university with lower English scores than students in other majors, demonstrating significant gaps in basic skills such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, many students master fewer than 3,000 English words, insufficient for daily reading and writing; their weak understanding and application of complex sentence structures lead to chaotic sentence patterns and inaccurate expressions. These challenges undermine their confidence and make English learning daunting.

2.2. Low Learning Interest

Art students tend to favor visual and creative thinking, while traditional English teaching often focuses on linguistic knowledge transmission with dull content and little relevance to art majors. This makes it difficult for students to connect English learning with their professional interests, lacking intrinsic motivation. Additionally, some students perceive limited value in English for their professional development, leading to apathy.

2.3. Lack of Cultural Awareness

English is not just a language tool but also a carrier of Western culture. Art students often focus solely on linguistic forms while neglecting underlying cultural connotations, lacking knowledge of Western art, history, and society. This hinders their ability to accurately understand and express themselves in cross-cultural exchanges. For instance, without relevant cultural background knowledge, they struggle to grasp the deeper meanings and values of Western artworks.

2.4. Structural Deficits in Learning Strategies

Art students generally lack systematic cognitive strategies in English learning, with a methodological gap between their visual-thinking-dominated cognitive habits and the logical analysis and pattern-summarizing required for language learning. For example, most students still use rote repetition to memorize professional terms instead of associating vocabulary with corresponding artworks or creative concepts; in listening practice, they lack predictive strategies for professional concepts, resulting in low information capture efficiency. This strategy deficit essentially reflects insufficient metacognitive abilities—nearly half of students use inefficient "word-by-word translation" strategies in all-English art seminar scenarios, severely impacting the coherence of information processing.

2.5. Inadequate Professional Adaptability of Practice Scenarios

Current English teaching practice links poorly with the real-world application scenarios of art majors. Traditional classroom simulations of daily communication have minimal relevance to art students' professional needs (e.g., international curatorial negotiations, English interpretation of artworks). When required to describe artwork materials and creative concepts at international art exhibitions, students often struggle due to a lack of professional expression training. This disconnection between practice scenarios leaves students trapped in a split between "classroom English" and "professional application"—surveys show only a small number of students believe classroom exercises effectively transfer to real international art exchange contexts.

3. The Connotation and Significance of Aesthetic Awakening in English Teaching for University Art Students

3.1. Connotation

The core of "aesthetic awakening" lies in breaking free from the fetters of linguistic instrumental rationality, transforming English teaching into a cognitive process where artistic thinking and aesthetic experience coexist. Specifically, it takes the visual thinking characteristics of art students as a starting point, embedding an aesthetic dimension within the linguistic sign system: by analyzing the metrical rhythm of Shakespearean sonnets, phonetics learning resonates with the rhythmic perception of music majors; through the etymological narrative of "perspective" (the spatial metaphor of the Latin roots "per" and "specere"), vocabulary memorization is transformed into a training of painting composition thinking; by means of the logical stratification of complex sentences in art critiques (such as the contrastive structure introduced by "while"), grammar learning aligns with the scheme interpretation logic of design majors. This teaching reconstruction is not a simple overlay of artistic elements but an establishment of cognitive isomorphism between linguistic forms (phonetics, vocabulary, syntax) and artistic thinking (spatial imagination, symbolic metaphor, structural expression), making every language knowledge point a trigger to activate aesthetic perception—when students use English to analyze how the "thick impasto" of Van Gogh's Sunflowers conveys texture, language learning has quietly transformed into a cross-media art interpretation practice.

3.2. Significance

At the essential level of education, aesthetic awakening subverts the fragmented state between "linguistic knowledge" and "artistic literacy" in traditional teaching, constructing a spiral ascending pathway of "aesthetic experience-cultural cognition-professional application". For students, this transformation signifies an identity reconstruction from "word-by-word translation executors" to "cross-cultural art interpreters": when they study the "neo-classical motifs" of Wedgwood ceramics through English documents and transform them into inspiration for the "modern translation of traditional patterns" in local ceramic art creation, the language is no longer an auxiliary skill external to their profession but a thinking tool intervening in artistic creation. This integrative effect manifests as a double breakthrough in practice: on the one hand, students' resistance to English is dispelled by aesthetic pleasure, as they take the initiative to imitate linking skills through The Phantom of the Opera arias or expand their vocabulary independently to interpret English critiques of Yayoi Kusama's works; on the other hand, cross-cultural aesthetic cognition enables them to accurately interpret the material language and creative concepts of artworks in English at international art exhibitions, translating classroom knowledge into real capabilities for global artistic dialogue. More profoundly, aesthetic awakening essentially cultivates "artistic bilinguals" in a globalized context—individuals who can construct modern narratives of local aesthetics in their mother tongue while decoding the spiritual core of Western art through English, ultimately forming a critical and creative artistic expression system in the interstices of cultural dialogue.[1]

4. Strategies for Achieving Aesthetic Awakening in English Teaching for University Art Students

4.1. Optimizing Teaching Content to Unearth the Beauty of English Language and Culture

Selecting Teaching Materials Relevant to Art Majors: In choosing English textbooks and

designing teaching content, full consideration should be given to art students' professional needs and interests. Materials related to art history, art theory, art creation, and art appreciation—such as English articles, videos, and music—can be selected. For example, introducing the lives and works of Western famous painters like Da Vinci, Van Gogh, and Picasso, and analyzing their artistic styles and creative concepts; playing classic English musicals and films like The Phantom of the Opera and The Sound of Music allows students to learn English while appreciating art. Such professional-related content helps students feel the close connection between English and art, stimulating their interest in English learning.

Emphasizing the Aesthetic Teaching of Language Knowledge: When explaining language knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics, students should be guided to discover its aesthetic qualities. For example, English vocabulary abounds with vivid metaphors, beautiful idioms, and proverbs like "as brave as a lion" and "a piece of cake," which are not only rich in meaning but also full of linguistic charm. In grammar teaching, students can appreciate the rigor and logical beauty of English grammar by analyzing sentence structures and logical relationships. In phonetics teaching, students can feel the rhythmic beauty of English intonation, linking, and stress, and improve their pronunciation and language sense through imitation and recitation.[2]

4.2. Innovating Teaching Methods to Create a Pleasant Learning Atmosphere

Situational Teaching Method: Create English scenarios related to art, allowing students to apply their knowledge in simulated real-life contexts for communication and interaction. For example, organize students to host an English art exhibition opening ceremony where they role-play as artists,curators, or audience members, using English to introduce their own works and critique others' creations; or simulate an international art symposium where students deliver speeches and engage in discussions in English. Through immersive scenario-based teaching, students can experience the practicality and fun of English in practice, enhancing their confidence and sense of achievement in learning.

Task-Driven Teaching Method: Design English learning tasks related to art majors, enabling students to acquire English knowledge and skills while completing tasks. For example, asking students to write English introductions to their art portfolios, translate an art critique, or create and present an English PPT on Western art genres. Task-driven learning clarifies goals, encourages students to actively explore problem-solving methods, and cultivates their autonomous learning ability and teamwork spirit.

Multimedia Teaching Method: Utilize multimedia technologies such as images, videos, audio, and animations to enrich teaching content and forms, creating a vivid teaching atmosphere. For example, when teaching Western artworks, playing high-definition images and related documentaries allows students to intuitively appreciate the beauty of the works and their cultural backgrounds; when learning English songs, playing music videos helps students learn lyrics and pronunciation while enjoying the music. Multimedia teaching stimulates students' multiple senses, improving their attention and learning outcomes.

4.3. Establishing a Diversified Teaching Evaluation System to Focus on the Learning Process and Progress

Combining Formative and Summative Evaluation: In traditional English teaching evaluation systems, summative evaluation (e.g., exam scores) has often been overly emphasized as the core or sole criterion for measuring teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes, while dynamic elements such as students' learning attitudes, participation, and progress trajectories during the learning process have not received sufficient attention. This evaluation orientation can lead to

teaching deviating from the essence of "focusing on individual growth" and neglecting that learning is a process involving continuous accumulation and diverse development. To achieve aesthetic awakening, a diversified teaching evaluation system should be established, combining formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluation includes classroom performance, learning attitude, homework completion, and group collaboration skills. By recording students' incremental progress, providing timely affirmation and encouragement, students feel their efforts are recognized, enhancing their motivation and confidence.[3]

Combining Self-Evaluation and Peer Evaluation: Advocate the organic integration of self-evaluation and peer evaluation, striving to transform students from passive objects of evaluation to active subjects. Through self-evaluation, students can dynamically examine their learning processes and outcomes, accurately identify strengths and weaknesses, and formulate targeted improvement plans; peer evaluation allows students to understand their learning from different perspectives, learn from others' strengths, and help each other progress. For example, after completing group tasks, students can evaluate their own and group members' performances and provide constructive feedback.

4.4. Interdisciplinary Competency Development for Faculty: Building a Dual-Track Teaching Team of Art and Language

The key to achieving aesthetic awakening lies in whether teachers can organically integrate artistic aesthetics with language teaching, requiring a break from the single-language professional background of traditional English teachers to form interdisciplinary teaching communities. Teaching teams comprising English teachers, art professionals, and cross-cultural studies scholars can be established to develop teaching content that balances linguistic norms with artistic aesthetics through collaborative lesson planning and joint teaching. For example, in a unit on "Abstract Expressionism," English teachers handle text analysis and language training, art history teachers analyze the creative concepts of Pollock's drip paintings from a professional perspective, and cross-cultural scholars further interpret the aesthetic connections between this genre and Eastern calligraphy, forming multi-dimensional knowledge construction.

Faculty professional development should focus on enhancing artistic literacy and cross-cultural competence. "Immersion art workshop training" can enable English teachers to participate in art practices like sculpture mold-making and oil painting sketching, deepening their perceptual understanding of professional terminology; "cross-cultural art criticism seminars" can systematically teach the English expression system of Western art theory and the English interpretation methods of Chinese art spirit. Practices at an art college show that teachers with interdisciplinary training demonstrate significantly improved professional adaptability and aesthetic guidance when designing "bilingual art creation interpretation" tasks, with student engagement nearly doubling compared to traditional classrooms. This faculty development model breaks down disciplinary barriers between language teaching and art education, enabling the aesthetic awakening teaching philosophy to be implemented through teachers' interdisciplinary practices.[4]

5. Conclusion

In English teaching for art majors in higher education, the aesthetic education philosophy transcends instrumental rationality by integrating aesthetic cultivation with cross-cultural cognition, transforming language learning into a synergistic development of artistic sensibility and cultural communication capabilities. Theoretically, it focuses on establishing isomorphic relationships between the formal aesthetics of English (phonetic rhythm, lexical metaphors, syntactic logic) and artistic thinking patterns, while fostering two-way dialogue in cross-cultural cognition through

decoding Western art and cultural paradigms.

Practically, a tripartite framework is constructed: content integration bridges art history, creative practice, and cross-cultural criticism to deepen the interplay between language acquisition and aesthetic comprehension; methodology leverages scenario-based pedagogy to build immersive linguistic environments that translate discipline-specific terminology into communicative competence; evaluation innovates by embedding cultural translation and aesthetic interpretation into dynamic assessment systems, surpassing conventional metrics.

Educationally, this model cultivates globally-minded art professionals with dual perspectives. Students use English to reconstruct dialogues between local and Western artistic traditions, elevating language proficiency into a tool for shaping global art discourse. Through aesthetic empowerment, it revitalizes cultural confidence and pioneers a new paradigm in foreign language education that harmonizes humanistic depth with professional rigor, ultimately redefining the intrinsic motivation for cross-cultural artistic engagement.

References

[1] Ma Dan, Yu Zhihua. Practical Exploration of 'Integrating Ideological and Political Education with Aesthetic Education' in College English Teaching [J]. Foreign Language Teaching, 2023(5): 102-106.
[2] Wang Gang. Research on the Reform of Practical Teaching Management Systems in Art Colleges [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan Education Press, 2022.
[3] Eko ç A. Teaching Speaking with Works of Art in a Preparatory Class [J]. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 2020, 15(5): 415-427.
[4] Liu Min. Construction of a Cloud-Based Assessment Model for Formative Evaluation in English Teaching [J]. Foreign Language Teaching, 2020(5): 89-93.