

Research on the Embodied Cognition of Aesthetic Education Literacy Among University Faculty under Policy Guidance: The Case of Inner Mongolia

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Abstract: In China, particularly in ethnic minority regions such as Inner Mongolia, the policy context driving aesthetic education holds particular significance. This context emphasizes the importance of bodily cognition in dance pedagogy and explains why aesthetic literacy among university faculty is indispensable within the current national educational policy framework.

Keywords: Policy guidance; University faculty; Aesthetic literacy; Embodied cognition

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

Aesthetic education profoundly influences students' emotions and cognition through its unique approach to nurturing both mind and body^[1]. Within China's higher education system, particularly in ethnic minority regions like Inner Mongolia, the policy context for advancing aesthetic education is primarily reflected in the nation's high priority and policy support for this field. Through a series of policy documents, the state emphasizes the importance of aesthetic education in cultivating well-rounded talents and has incorporated it as a core component of the educational system^[2].

The significance of body awareness in dance instruction lies in its role as a vital vehicle for aesthetic education. Body awareness is not only central to dance teaching but also a key manifestation of the "embodiment" theory in aesthetic education, emphasizing the interplay between bodily experience and cognition.

As the primary educators in aesthetic education, teachers serve as the core practitioners of aesthetic education. However, their own aesthetic literacy is often overlooked, making it crucial to prioritize cultivating their aesthetic competence.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to explore how policy orientations influence the development of aesthetic education competencies among university dance instructors through an embodied cognition perspective. Core research questions include: How do policies shape teaching practices? How does embodied cognition promote the enhancement of educators' aesthetic competencies?

1.3 Overview of Scope and Methodology

Using Inner Mongolia as a case study, this research employs qualitative methods including interviews, classroom observations, and literature analysis to explore the interplay between policy implementation and teaching practices that integrate instruction with personal example in dance education.

2. Policy Framework and Aesthetic Education Development

2.1 National and Regional Education Policies

The advancement of aesthetic education in China's higher education has undergone a systematic development process, progressing from national top-level design to local implementation. The "Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools," aesthetic education is regarded as a vital pathway for enhancing students' aesthetic and humanistic literacy and achieving well-rounded development. The Opinions on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era, setting specific requirements for the higher education sector and emphasizing the vital role of aesthetic education in cultivating innovative talent and preserving Chinese cultural heritage. The "Notice on Comprehensively Implementing the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative," marking the entry of aesthetic education into a phase of comprehensive deepening.

The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has established a comprehensive system for implementing aesthetic education policies tailored to the characteristics of ethnic regions. The "Several Measures on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Labor Education, Physical Education, and Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era," establishing the strategic position of aesthetic education from a top-level design perspective.

2.2 Impact of Policies on Teacher Professional Development

Education in the new era has endowed aesthetic education with fresh connotations, gradually expanding it into a curriculum-based aesthetic education that aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals through comprehensive development across all disciplines and educational stages. National requirements for aesthetic literacy among higher education faculty have become increasingly specific and systematic.

The "Opinions on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era" proposes "improving the aesthetic education evaluation system in universities, incorporating aesthetic education efforts and outcomes into the talent cultivation assessment indicators for general higher education institutions." The incorporation of aesthetic education competencies into faculty promotion evaluations is becoming increasingly institutionalized.

3. Embodied Cognition in Dance Education

3.1 Theoretical Implications of Bodily Cognition

Traditional dance education models often prioritize technical skills over cognitive development, emphasize discipline over innovation, and rely on singular aesthetic standards—all of which hinder the cultivation of students' core competencies. From the perspective of embodied cognition theory, students' bodily experiences represent the integration of cognitive development, interactive innovation, and emotional engagement. Embodied Cognition Theory provides a core theoretical foundation for dance aesthetic education.

3.2 Policy Emphasis on Body Awareness

Multiple policies underscore the importance of this concept. The Notice on Comprehensively Implementing the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative explicitly states that dance constitutes a vital component of aesthetic education. The Ministry of Education's Opinions on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era mandates innovation in arts curriculum content, requiring dance courses to "focus on the coordinated development of mind and body and the cultivation of aesthetic abilities."

The Implementation Plan for the Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative in Schools of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region stipulates teaching requirements to "integrate calligraphy, dance, and other content into compulsory education and high school curricula."

4. Aesthetic Literacy of University Faculty

The aesthetic literacy dimension of university faculty emphasizes its structured, practical, and value-oriented nature. The development pathway guided by policy promotes the transformation of faculty from "skills-oriented" to "aesthetic-oriented" through policy direction, implementation strategies, and practical integration.

4.1 Dimensions of Aesthetic Literacy

Aesthetic literacy comprises elements such as aesthetic knowledge, aesthetic ability, and aesthetic awareness. Wei Du (2014) proposed that aesthetic literacy includes aesthetic knowledge (foundation), aesthetic ability (core), and aesthetic awareness (soul). Teachers must possess sound aesthetic values, integrating aesthetic education with moral and intellectual education to cultivate students' aesthetic character.

4.2 Development Pathways Guided by Policy

The “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era” calls for “building a strong aesthetic education faculty and comprehensively enhancing the teaching capabilities and quality of aesthetic education teachers.” For instance, the Ministry of Education’s “Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative” requires teachers to engage in aesthetic education practices.

5. Case Study: The Current State of Dance Education in Inner Mongolia

5.1 Educational Landscape and Cultural Specificity

The educational landscape and cultural specificity of dance education in Inner Mongolia are primarily reflected in its ethnic characteristics, educational models, and cultural heritage. Inner Mongolia integrates traditional Mongolian culture into dance education, emphasizing the aesthetic value and cultural transmission of ethnic dances. Inner Mongolia’s education system faces challenges including uneven distribution of educational resources and disparities in educational quality.

5.2 Teacher Experience and Physical Practice

Teachers’ experience and physical practice form the core of dance education. For instance, in ethnic dance instruction, teachers stimulate emotional resonance and aesthetic experiences by guiding students to imagine dance scenarios and engage in physical movement training.

5.3 How Teachers Can Embody Aesthetic Values and Meet Policy Requirements

To embody aesthetic values in teaching, educators must integrate aesthetic education throughout the entire teaching process. For instance, Inner Mongolia’s education policies emphasize the inheritance and innovation of ethnic dance culture. Teachers should integrate these policy requirements by combining ethnic dance with modern educational approaches to enhance teaching effectiveness.

5.4 Addressing Resource Constraints and Cultural Expression Challenges

Regarding resource constraints, issues like uneven distribution of educational resources and disparities in educational quality within Inner Mongolia require mitigation through policy optimization and teacher training.

6. Discussion

6.1 Integration of Policy Support and Cultural Heritage Preservation

The development of dance education in Inner Mongolia is driven by both policy support and cultural heritage preservation. Policy provides institutional safeguards for dance education, enabling the systematic and curricular development of traditional arts like Mongolian dance.

6.2 Teacher Training and Enhancement of Aesthetic Literacy

Governments at all levels in Inner Mongolia strengthen educators’ dance skills and cultural understanding through training programs for Mongolian dance creation, performance, and criticism.

6.3 Resource Constraints and Challenges in Cultural Expression

Despite progress in policy support and teacher training, dance education in Inner Mongolia still faces challenges such as uneven resource distribution and insufficient cultural expressiveness.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study systematically reviews core insights into how policy guidance enhances dance teachers’ aesthetic literacy through embodied cognitive processes within Inner Mongolia’s unique sociocultural context.

7.2 Future Research Directions

Further longitudinal studies and comparative analyses across other ethnic regions are called for to validate the role of the body in policy-driven aesthetic education reforms.

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