

Educational Equity from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education

Yuhan Luo^{1,a,*}

¹Beijing Normal University, Beijing, 100875, China

a. 207432357@qq.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: With the rapid development of society, people attach more and more importance to the all-round development of their moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor qualities. The status and role of aesthetic education in education has received increasing attention. In recent years, the state has issued a series of aesthetic education policies, aiming at strengthening the aesthetic education work in schools and improving students' aesthetic and humanistic qualities. These policies make it clear that aesthetic education is no longer an adjunct to education but an important part of cultivating well-rounded talents. However, despite these efforts, educational equity remains a significant challenge, especially in the context of the unequal development between urban and rural areas. This paper examines how aesthetic education can be used to enhance educational equity, especially in the area of urban and rural students. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relevant strategies of promoting educational equity from the perspective of aesthetic education.

Keywords: Aesthetic Education, Equity, Urban-rural Development Gap, Art Education

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, education and training programs are no longer limited to simple cultural lessons. The current educational pursuit focuses on the comprehensive cultivation of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor qualities. Aesthetic education, as an important part of the five-fold education system, penetrates into all aspects of comprehensive development. It plays a vital role in assisting moral and intelligent development, promoting physical fitness, and contributing to the realization of educational equity and the high-quality development of education. However, with the implementation of a series of aesthetic education policies, art education—being a high-cost field—has gradually been monopolized by children from families with better economic conditions. The unbalanced development of urban and rural areas has also led to limited opportunities for students in some rural areas to access relevant aesthetic education.

The realization of educational equity is an important mission of education, with the belief that "knowledge changes destiny" being a common societal expectation. The concept of educational equity usually includes equity in the starting point, process and outcomes of education. This paper seeks to find out whether educational equity is a reality in the area of aesthetic education and if so, how it can be realized especially for the rural and township learners. The study aims at finding out whether these students have adequate resources, whether they are well equipped and guided during the learning process and whether they have chances to perform and climb the social ladder through

art education. These issues are discussed in this paper with the view of providing recommendations for the enhancement of educational equity in the future development of aesthetic education.

2. Overview of Aesthetic Education and Educational Equity

The concept of aesthetic education first appeared in ancient Chinese thought, particularly in the teachings of Confucius on rites and music. His ideas of "poetry education" and "music education" emphasized the role of aesthetic education, encapsulated in the phrase "Xing in poetry, standing in ceremony, success in music." As one of the five essential educational components, aesthetic education plays an important role in personal development. The basic function of aesthetic education is to cultivate one's feelings, shape one's soul, and nurture one's sensibility. At the same time, receiving aesthetic education can guide people towards the overall comprehension of the form and meaning of aesthetic objects and cultivate people's imagination and understanding. In addition, aesthetic education also helps to cultivate moral consciousness, gradually forming a free and moral psychological structure. As Gorky noted, "Aesthetics is the ethics of the future," and Einstein acknowledged, "The greatest scientists are often artists," underscoring the importance of aesthetic education in the all-round development of individuals.

In September 2015, the General Office of the State Council issued *the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools*, marking the first official policy document specifically addressing aesthetic education. This document puts forward clear requirements for strengthening aesthetic education in schools, aligning with the need of the new era. Additional policy documents, such as *the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era* and *the Measures for the Administration of Part-time Teachers of Physical Education in Schools*, have provided important guidelines for reforming aesthetic education teaching, curriculum, teacher training, school-running conditions and organizational support.

Art education plays an important role in talent development. The government advocates for improving the aesthetic education mechanism in schools, narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas, and ensuring that all students have access to aesthetic education opportunities. This initiative aims to promote the development of aesthetic education across all levels and types of schools, strengthen targeted guidance, encourage the development of distinctive programs, and create a new educational landscape of "one school, one product" and "one school, multiple products" [1].

The Opinions also propose the comprehensive implementation of artistic quality assessments for primary and secondary school students, incorporating these results into the comprehensive quality evaluation of students in junior and senior high school. Furthermore, the policy explores the inclusion of art subjects in the pilot reform of the middle and high school entrance examinations, with the examination content aligned with curriculum standards. The use of modern technology to ensure objective and fair evaluation is also emphasized [1]. However, whether art exams should serve as the standard for talent selection remains questionable.

Art education is often perceived as a high-risk, high-investment, and low-return educational direction [1]. It is difficult for ordinary families to cultivate children in the arts, especially in the context of the prevailing exam-oriented education system. Most families prioritize cultural subjects, which leads to neglecting art education. The high costs and resource disparities discourage students in rural towns from pursuing the arts, potentially leading to the loss of artistic talents. The inequity in aesthetic education is mainly caused by the uneven development of urban and rural areas. Economic and cultural factors are the two key constraints that affect educational fairness in the context of aesthetic education.

These factors—economic limitations and cultural disparities—are central to understanding the inequities in aesthetic education. To explore these issues in greater depth, the next two sections will analyze how these issues manifest in the education system and their impact on the accessibility and quality of aesthetic education across different regions.

3. The Impact of Economic Factors on the Fairness of Aesthetic Education

The gap in economic capital is a fundamental factor that leads to the unfairness of education. In China's social environment, there is a serious imbalance between urban and rural development, with many families still struggling to meet basic needs such as food and clothing. Although the implementation of compulsory education has, to a large extent, promoted rural education, the popularization level of compulsory education is still closely related to the economic development of these regions. In fact, the expansion of compulsory education in China lags far behind the country's overall economic progress. From a global perspective, the level of compulsory education in China falls behind the world average. Vertically, despite the rapid improvements in compulsory education in various regions, rural education remains relatively underdeveloped in most provinces. This indicates that while basic cultural education has made progress, high-cost art education is still far out of reach for rural families [2].

Economic capital in this context mainly refers to the material investment of schools and families in art resources owned by students. The schools of rural and township families have too little economic investment in art education, which makes it relatively difficult for them to get started. It is found that the form of art courses offered by most schools in rural or suburban areas tends to be simple, mainly music and art classes, lacks diversity, has a low opening rate, and the number of weekly class hours fails to meet the national requirements. At the same time, teachers in rural schools are weak; the number of full-time teachers is small, nearly half of them are part-time teachers, and the teachers' art teaching experience is short, and their professional quality is low [3]. Lack of sufficient and diverse art education equipment and facilities, and urban schools are relatively backward compared with the professional equipment, the overall quality of artistic activities to carry out aesthetic education is poor, and there is a significant gap between urban schools [4]. Thus, it can be seen that it is difficult for students in remote areas to have the opportunity to obtain professional and systematic art-related aesthetic education.

In addition, rural families do not have enough economic means to support their students to participate in relevant art training or to afford art exams. For students from poor families, this lack of financial resources effectively eliminates opportunities for artistic development. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the per capita disposable income of urban residents in 2023 was 51,821 yuan, whereas that of rural residents was only 21,691 yuan, less than half of that of urban residents [5]. It is obvious that most rural families cannot afford the high cost of art training for their children. The cost of short-term art training may be the disposable income of rural families for several years, and the qualified high-income families can cultivate their children's artistic attainments from an early age, which provides a new way for the future entrance examination. It seems that art examination has always been a high-cost and high-risk way of education, and only a few students from high-income families can successfully study for a long time. The inevitable family background and financial capital should not be an obstacle to a student's all-round development.

4. The Impact of Cultural Capital on the Fairness of Aesthetic Education

While economic capital mentioned above is difficult to solve in the short term, there are other avenues for improving the fairness of education in aesthetic education. Aside from the objective

limitations of economic capital, there is still considerable room for improvement in the realm of subjective cultural capital. Culture inherently carries class characteristics, and through the infiltration of cultural capital, educational equity can be further achieved, promoting the reproduction of social class.

In terms of family cultural capital, children from rural families often lack the family environment conducive to aesthetic education. These families may not have enough conditions to carry out artistic edification on them. Moreover, in the traditional family education cognition, the knowledge that "knowledge changes destiny" does not include the knowledge brought by learning art. As a result, families with low cultural capital tend to put more emphasis on the importance of learning cultural courses, thus ignoring the art-related cultivation. The research finds that there is a significant difference between the educational backgrounds of parents of art students and ordinary students. The proportion of parents of art students with high educational background is 9.7% and 10.4%, higher than that of parents of ordinary students [6]. The family aesthetic education with high cultural capital can also expose children to different art forms and knowledge in the family environment and cultivate their aesthetic quality and humanistic quality. The ultimate goal of family aesthetic education is to shape children's aesthetic personality, enhance children's aesthetic ability, and cultivate children's aesthetic taste, so as to help children establish an aesthetic connection with life and grasp real life with the ideal of beauty. It can be predicted that the children of these families are more likely to stand out in art education and get better performance.

Regarding school cultural capital, the most significant problem arises in the pursuit of exam-oriented education, especially the "utilitarianism" of some rural schools. They blindly emphasize the importance of academic performance and neglect the cultivation of students' aesthetic education. The fundamental reason for the marginalization of the status of aesthetic education in rural schools lies in the utilitarian orientation of the concept of educational evaluation, that is, the result of judging the value of education by instrumental criteria. For a long time, in the rural field, farmers mostly distinguished the educational value of different disciplines according to the standard of whether they could solve the problems of life. They think that learning Chinese will enable them to read and read, and learning mathematics will enable them to calculate and keep accounts. Farmers think that such disciplines are clearly productive, so they think that they are useful. And art, music, and other disciplines, in the eyes of farmers, can only be used for entertainment and play; this knowledge cannot solve practical problems. In these disciplines, to increase investment is a waste of time and money; it is to delay learning. This kind of public consciousness leads to the long-term backwardness and stagnation of aesthetic education consciousness in rural schools [7]. More importantly, rural teachers have a shallow cognition of aesthetic education teaching methods, and most of them follow the traditional teaching paradigm in aesthetic education teaching, taking lecturing learning as the basic method of aesthetic education implementation, which results in the lack of experience, inspiration, and culture in aesthetic education teaching in rural schools.

5. Conclusion

From the findings in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the major barriers to attaining educational equity in aesthetic education are rooted in economic and cultural factors. Rural schools do not have a variety of art classes, and the teachers they have are usually untrained or work part-time. Also, the financial difficulties that are common to most rural families make it difficult for many students to attend art classes that are not offered at school. Therefore, rural students are in a very poor position to seek art education and be successful in this area. Cultural capital is another factor that affects the effectiveness of aesthetic education; it is another social factor that defines aesthetic education. Rural children do not have the family and cultural background that is necessary for the development of an artist. In these

households, the emphasis is, however, made on the core academic subjects, and arts education is considered to be less important. This cultural perception complements a shortage of art resources, making it hard to change the situation.

To solve these problems, the schools should enhance the role of offering various and quality art education. For rural areas, the following strategies are important: First, enhance financial inputs; second, involve local culture and arts in schools. Focusing on local culture and intangible cultural heritage, the rural students can be given more meaningful and easily available artistic experiences, as well as enhance their cultural awareness.

In conclusion, the changes in the education system and the focus on the enhancement of the equity distribution of resources present a better prospect for an inclusive and diverse aesthetic education system. The paper calls for further efforts on the part of both the state and society to guarantee that rural students have the same opportunity to study art as their urban counterparts in order to enhance their aesthetic and humanistic potential along with their academic accomplishments. Given that economic and cultural capital affect students' access to and experiences within arts education, further research should attempt to reduce these gaps so that all students may achieve their arts potential.

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