

# Research on Art Teaching in International High School

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**Abstract:** Adapting to the comprehensive promotion of quality-oriented education today, advocating art education has been widely concerned by people in recent years. In China's traditional educational environment, art education in China's international high schools will face challenges. This paper outlines several typical problems that art education faces in developing international high schools in China and provides relatively operable and effective solutions based on practical teaching research.

**Keywords:** Art Education; International High School; Quality-oriented Education

Art education can improve the artistic and cultural quality of the whole people and build rich spiritual and material civilization. The primary education in today's schools is quality-oriented, and art education is an organic part of it (Zhou, 1995). The art education in the schools is purposeful and systematic teaching activity, cultivates the educatee, enhances their aesthetic ability and the art creation ability. In a prosperous society currently, the traditional art education at the present stage, as one way of presenting the aesthetic education section in China's quality-oriented education, has experienced more than ten years of development. However, due to many objective reasons, the development potential of art education is relatively marginalized. In such an atmosphere, the orientation of art courses in international high schools, which are trying to connect with overseas education under the premise of relying on the Chinese education system, is quite awkward.

## 1. The current situation of art education

### 1.1 The inadequate education system

Although Chinese art education has entered the era of quality-oriented education, it has not yet formed a complete and scientific education system. Art is a comprehensive disciplinary concept that includes many more specific categories: painting, crafts, architecture, calligraphy, photography, etc. These subjects are relatively independent within the scope of art, but the target is just for cultivating the learning ability in art education. As a city in central China, Wuhan has attracted many educational resources because of its geographical location and economic development. There are now 16 international high schools and four international classes in public high schools in Wuhan. But only two of these schools offer specific art courses that allow students to take part in college entrance exams. After research, most international high schools in Wuhan city still set art as an optional subject and take the art curriculum established by the Ministry of Education of China as a reference. In the course setting, to balance the basic needs of each student, the principal point of art teaching is to focus on painting and art appreciation merely.

Meanwhile, as art is one of the elective courses in the Chinese education system, the school will also limit the teaching time in the course planning. It is a "perennial and universal lament among artists, artist-teachers, and teachers alike that there is not enough time to plan arts encounters for students" written by Uptis (2005). The international high schools in Wuhan, for example, offer students commonly no more than 2 class hours per week for the art course. In this case, in China's high schools, students are required to take 2 to 3 class hours of self-study every weekday in the classroom to deal with their course work. Since many students need to take competitions in other subjects, they have no time to attend the art class. Or even when it comes to exam week, the school will arrange to change the art class into a self-study so that teachers of other subjects can provide students with pre-exam guidance. Therefore, this number of hours may be far from enough for art teachers to guide students to create the complete artwork.

### 1.2 The deeply rooted selecting mode

Since the foundation of New China, the primary way of selecting talents has been the "test" system (Yue, 2009). In 2020, 10.71 million Chinese people took the National College Entrance Examination, among which 1.17 million took a joint fine-art examination held from over 20 provinces and cities. In this context, in Chinese universities, the vast majority of students majoring in art and design are picked out based on this joint fine-art examination on the unified framework of the content and scoring criteria. Therefore, these students have to go to specialized painting institutions to learn how to create works in a prescribed painting style for passing the exam, which means over one million students rote the methods from teachers' drawings, and it will continue year by year.

Nowadays, China's art examination is a pure exam-oriented talent selection mode, which has great limitations on exploring artistic talents. Such a selection system also significantly affects art education in international schools. In the applying process of the undergraduate course, students are facing to submit a personal portfolio. The Graphic Design bachelor program at the University

of the Arts London, for instance, clearly states on its website that it needs to include a portfolio that reflects students' participation in creative practice, critical thinking, and technical skills, rather than just a painting. Jolley and Zhang (2012) note that it is vital to avoid over-direction that overuse of templates in art. However, since the educational goal in China is still result-oriented, even in art education, students cannot immediately jump out of this constraint when faced with these requirements.

### **1.3 Tiny teaching space and weak teaching facilities**

As Susi (1986) notes, the setting where art activities occur must be capable of supporting a variety of distinctive instructional functions. The requirements of art courses on teaching facilities and space are stricter because there are many forms in art courses. In some art courses, students need to display their artwork through hands-on practice. Many international high schools should not just stay in the stage of providing painting studios but also more professional space to students, such as a multimedia classroom, to sufficiently display their artworks.

The weakness of the teaching facilities directly affects the creation of students. Many students who plan to apply to art and design programs suffer from the lack of relevant professional occasions, like 3D printers, so they cannot complete their artworks directly, thus affecting their application. For such students, the only quickest solution at the moment is to rely passively on off-campus portfolio institutions for their portfolios. The main reason for this situation is that the public's cognition of art education is still superficial, which leads to the low degree of attention paid to art education. However, as art education focuses on combining theory and practice and emphasizes practical operation ability, students have to spend more energy on artistic creation when some students are relatively weak in technical skills without guidance conditions.

### **1.4 Simple teaching mode**

With the continuous advancement of basic quality-oriented education in China, art teaching becomes more and more prominent in high schools. This paper summarizes the following typical teaching problems after personally experiencing teaching practice and watching demo classes from relevant international schools.

One is utilitarian teaching just for students who are required to pass the entrance examinations for undergraduate programs. This kind of teaching mode is familiar in China no matter what educational stage. Under the pressure of academics, many high schools offer courses centered on exam-oriented education. Art education, as a non-compulsory course, is highly passive. One of the occasions usually happens is the teacher lecturing on the platform while students are busy writing coursework of other subjects at their desks. Even when the exam work is approaching, art class will be adjusted to self-study class forcibly to meet the needs of students for examination preparation, especially for grades 12.

The second situation is the teacher-led output teaching. Under this teaching mode, teachers play a dominant role in class and ignore students' positions so that teaching activity is always in the curriculum framework in advance. The teacher becomes the exporter of information while the student becomes the forced importer of information. As Richmond (1993) reflects, understanding is the principal aim of teaching. Nevertheless, in the art classes of some international high schools, teachers have a much higher understanding of the major than students, and when they use too many professional vocabularies subconsciously, students always unable to understand the course content. Or some teachers have insufficient understanding of art, like not being able to distinguish the difference between Baroque and Rococo, and may respond vaguely to students' questions in class. There is no doubt that educators cannot answer learners' questions in such a teaching model, and learners will regulate their experience in the joy of class participation. Students' subjective initiative is unheeded, and they will lose interest in art thus it is out of the question for the cultivation of innovation ability.

## **2. The countermeasures**

The fine arts curriculum is the leading way for the school to carry on aesthetic education, and it has an irreplaceable function in the quality-oriented education process (Yin, 2002). Educators need to cultivate students to form a basic art literacy and stimulate students' interest in art learning. At the same time, leading students to learn art in a rich cultural context is an essential condition.

### **2.1 Situational teaching**

The teaching process is crucial in art education because it involves making the teaching content more accessible for students to understand. It can also make the development of a class atmosphere conducive to open experimental learning. It is good teaching that imaginative teaching in the artistic setting, or any educational setting for that matter (Richmond, 1993). Establish a situational teaching environment atmosphere, with real examples as a breakthrough point, guide students to use their imagination to connect the knowledge points to understand the teaching content more thoroughly. The teacher demands to inspire the student's expression and understanding in art class besides confers necessary artistic knowledge and skills. Tang (2021) notes that Art practice pays attention to on-the-spot observation and personal experience. In art teaching, teachers can arrange art practice appropriately, deepen the interaction between students and teachers in class, and cultivate students' thinking ability and expression ability.

### **2.2 Diverse teaching space and hardware**

In this digital age, the inclusion of digital technologies and web-based media is increasingly commonplace in the classroom (Winfield, 2011). In the art course, besides the simple painting homework, teachers can show some multimedia films to students to understand the teaching content more clearly, instead of just explaining to the textbook. Under such a premise, the studio needs to be more diverse. In addition to multimedia classrooms, schools can also provide students with a computer classroom for art learning. Introducing technology to schools helps prepare students better for their future when they need so-called 21st-century skills (Fulton, 1998). Many of China's schools have computer classrooms, but the computers only install with some office software. Regardless of whether they will study art and design in the future, students should have the resources to use formal design software to create their works freely.

Moreover, the basic painting studio needs to expand a specific space to give students more freedom to create and display their

works. As we all know, in addition to painting, students will also try to use various materials to create large-scale handmade works in artistic creation. Under such circumstances, a small art studio with only a few easels may not be open enough for the entire school.

### 2.3 Interdisciplinary teaching models

One enforceable solution to optimize the limited teaching time of arts education is to the overall planning of arts subjects. It should carry out appropriate art workshops and break professional barriers to construct interdisciplinary learning and broaden students' artistic horizons to cultivate inter-disciplinary creative talents. It depends on building a multi-disciplinary thinking system to integrate the new knowledge (Zhang & Lv, 2021). The art education method should change from the traditional copy drawing and tedious explanations to integrating theory and creation as one. For example, interdisciplinary teaching models have been widely adopted in schools across the United States (Drake, 1998). Students can learn and appreciate fine arts from the perspective of artists, historians, scientists, etc. In interdisciplinary teaching, the diversified knowledge system guides the students to create a dynamic learning atmosphere.

Arts education should consider an interdisciplinary arts approach and the interests and diverse learning styles of the pupils (Nompula, 2013). For example, in the course of "tie-dye" technology, I once invited the history teacher and the chemistry teacher to give a joint explanation. The history teacher explains the historical development of the tie-dye process first. After that, the chemistry teacher explains the tie-dye process's principle, and the art teacher leads the students to experience the tie-dye process and create their T-shirts. At the end of the course, the feedback from the students was that they were very engaged and experienced the fun of comprehensive subjects that they can learn knowledge of different subjects in one class.

## 3. Conclusion

As a part of quality education, art education has vital practical significance. High school art education has a significant influence on the development of aesthetic education and the comprehensive growth of students in many aspects. Based on the current development of Chinese high school art education, this paper analyzes the representative problems, combined with the experience of specific teaching practice, and puts forward operable improvement countermeasures. In the art education stage of senior high school, Teachers should improve the teaching policy according to the actual situation to guide students to learn art in a targeted way.

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