Article

Research on the Practice of Music Theater Teaching in Secondary Schools and the Cultivation of Core Competencies from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education

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Abstract: This study explores the innovative pathways and educational value of music theater teaching within the framework of aesthetic education reform in secondary schools. It systematically examines the multidimensional aesthetic functions of music theater across four domains—aesthetic perception, artistic expression, cultural understanding, and creative practice—and constructs a tripartite model integrating "technology, culture, and education" alongside an aesthetic immersion framework centered on "artistic practice empowering cultural heritage". The research demonstrates that intelligent technologies and interdisciplinary integration significantly expand the boundaries of music theater education, transforming it from a mere artistic performance into a multidimensional educational platform encompassing cultural transmission, psychological healing, and social communication. Accordingly, a differentiated three-tier promotion system tailored to metropolitan, county-level, and rural schools is proposed, providing a replicable theoretical framework and practical paradigm for aesthetic education reform.

Keywords: aesthetic education; school music theater; music and drama; core competencies; interdisciplinary teaching

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The reform of aesthetic education in the new era has shifted secondary school music education from skill-based training to the cultivation of comprehensive artistic literacy. The *Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools* (2015) first elevated aesthetic education to a national strategic level. The *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era* (2020) established the core goal of "educating through aesthetics and cultural immersion", emphasizing the cultivation of aesthetic perception, cultural understanding, and creative practice through artistic activities [1]. Music theater, as a multidimensional art form integrating music, dance, drama, and literature, aligns closely with adolescents' aesthetic needs due to its comprehensive, interactive, and narrative characteristics, making it a key vehicle for aesthetic education reform.

The *Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards* (2022 edition) designated "Music and Drama" as a mandatory module, requiring interdisciplinary integration through project-based learning [2]. The Ministry of

Education's *Notice on Fully Implementing the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action* (2023) proposed building an "immersive aesthetic education ecosystem" to deepen the integration of artistic practice with campus culture and social resources [3]. Policy-driven practices, such as Shanghai's "Four Troupes and One Team" art club initiative [4], have provided institutional support and practical foundations for music theater teaching.

1.2. Research Significance

Theoretical Value: From the *Opinions on Aesthetic Education* (2015) to the *Aesthetic Education Immersion Action Notice* (2023), the policy focus has shifted from "ensuring adequate course offerings" to "cultivating core competencies". Grounded in Schiller's theory of "aesthetic education promoting human harmony" and Dewey's "art as experience", this study incorporates technological empowerment and interdisciplinary collaboration to construct a progressive theoretical pathway of "aesthetic experience – emotional resonance – value reshaping", injecting new variables into aesthetic education theory.

Music theater teaching aligns with the *Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards* principle of "education through aesthetics", facilitating the cultivation of core competencies such as cultural understanding, aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and creative practice. Its interdisciplinary nature breaks the monotony of traditional music education by integrating vocal music, dance, and drama, providing students with diverse artistic experiences while fostering innovation and practical skills. It serves as an effective pathway to achieve the goal of "fostering virtue through education".

2. Aesthetic Value System and Immersion Model of Music Theater

2.1. Four-Dimensional Cultivation Functions of Core Competencies

(1) **Comprehensive Construction of Aesthetic Perception**: Aesthetic perception forms the foundation of music-related core competencies. Music theater creates an immersive teaching environment through multisensory engagement (auditory, visual, kinesthetic). Students adjust their body language based on musical emotions and deconstruct cultural imagery through stage visuals, enhancing their sensitivity to rhythm, melody, color, and other elements. The *Aesthetic Education Immersion Action Notice* emphasizes improving aesthetic literacy through artistic practice, and music theater's multidimensional experiential model enables a leap from "listening" to "embodied perception". For example, when holographic technology presents historical scenes, students must capture the coordination between sound and visuals, experiencing how melody drives dramatic emotions, thereby deepening their aesthetic judgment—a value echoed in practices such as Beijing Normal University's *Ballad of the Past* [5].

(2) **Holistic Expression of Artistic Performance**: Artistic performance requires students to integrate musical language, performance skills, and aesthetic experience into creative practice. During music theater rehearsals, students convey spiritual themes such as "exploration, perseverance, and responsibility" through movements, expressions, and vocal techniques, transitioning from skill training to emotional communication. Character portrayal within specific cultural contexts encourages students to establish connections between historical narratives and contemporary values, achieving dual enhancement of artistic skills and cultural literacy.

(3) **Triple Decoding Pathways for Cultural Understanding**: Cultural understanding emphasizes decoding the symbols and value systems within artistic works. Music theater achieves deep understanding through three pathways:

· **Embodied Transformation of Historical Memory**: Technologies such as AI digital humans enable the "reappearance" of historical figures, transforming abstract culture into tangible collective memory. Students gain a sense of heritage mission through engaging with historical depth, progressing from cognitive to emotional identification.

· **Modern Interpretation of Cultural Symbols**: Symbols such as "exploration, perseverance, and responsibility" are dramatized through interwoven historical and contemporary narratives, creating a cultural tension between "change and heritage". Technological media (lighting, sound effects, projections) facilitate the transition of symbols from "replication" to "reproduction", aligning with the *Higher Education Public Arts Curriculum Guidelines* goal of "creative transformation".

· **Participatory Encoding of School-Based Culture**: Students engage in participatory creation through improvisation and script adaptation, "re-encoding" cultural spirit. Dramatized performances allow them to be both observers and interpreters of history, forming a "closed loop of immersive cultural education" that strengthens identity formation.

(4) **Interdisciplinary Generation of Creative Practice**: Music theater breaks disciplinary barriers by integrating music, drama, stage design, and technology. In line with the *Opinions on Aesthetic Education in the New Era* concept of "integrating five educations", interdisciplinary practices dissolve knowledge boundaries and activate innovative thinking [6]. Role rotation mechanisms (lead actors – backstage crew) further enhance cross-domain collaboration, laying a foundation for future multidisciplinary development.

2.2. Practical Dimensions of the Aesthetic Education Immersion Model

(1) **Triple Mechanisms of the Model:** The study constructs an aesthetic education immersion model centered on "artistic practice as the carrier, skill empowerment as the link, and cultural heritage as the goal", achieving educational value through three mechanisms:

· *Embodied Cognitive Field*: Transforms knowledge understanding into emotional identification.

· *Integrated Aesthetic Experience*: Uses technological media to strengthen empathy between history and reality, reconstructing the contemporary significance of national spirit.

· *Guided Educational Practice*: Focuses on cultural identity to promote psychological growth, social adaptation, and comprehensive competency development.

(2) **Artistic Realization of Emotional Education:**

· **Dramatized Expression of Intergenerational Communication**: Parent-child conflict scenarios encourage students to empathize with parental efforts. Role-playing cultivates empathy, and experiencing emotional fluctuations through characters helps students learn real-world communication skills, laying the groundwork for harmonious relationships.

· **Stage Interpretation of Scientific Spirit**: Stories of scientists are presented through song and dance, transforming abstract spirit into vivid imagery. Students internalize scientific qualities such as courage and dedication through role immersion, shaping their behavioral patterns and value judgments.

3. Curriculum Promotion and Three-Tier Implementation System

3.1. Institutional Support and Curriculum Design

Music theater courses focus on enhancing artistic literacy, aesthetic ability, and comprehensive expressiveness, fostering creativity, teamwork, and cultural understanding. A modular design is adopted: junior secondary emphasizes "experience + cognition" through appreciation and basic performance, while senior secondary emphasizes "creation + practice" with modules on playwriting, vocal music, and stage technology. Portfolio assessment records process-based outcomes such as script drafts and rehearsal videos, emphasizing learning trajectories over single outcomes. Funding is secured through special grants from the "Aesthetic Education Immersion Action Plan", collaborating with cultural and tourism departments to advance "arts in schools" programs and ensure course quality.

3.2. Technology Empowerment and Resource Integration

Partnerships with tech companies develop digital platforms for "creation–rehearsal–performance", integrating script libraries, accompaniment databases, and teaching cases. AI music software lowers technical barriers, while lightweight music production and choreography tools tailored for secondary schools cultivate students' technological literacy. VR/AR technologies create virtual rehearsal environments, supporting cloud-based collaboration and live streaming, significantly improving teaching efficiency.

3.3. Teacher Capacity Building

Interdisciplinary workshops on directing and stage technology are offered, guided by university experts and

industry professionals to enhance teachers' integrative teaching abilities. Regional music theater teaching communities are established for regular lesson study and experience sharing, forming collaborative teaching mechanisms.

3.4. Differentiated Three-Tier Promotion System

(1) **Metropolitan Cities: Pioneer Experimental Model**: Uses AI-generated content (AIGC) for interactive script platforms and virtual stage material libraries. Courses integrate "arts + technology + humanities" into a tripartite system, developing modular combinable course frameworks. Social linkages introduce industry resources for professional guidance, expanding reach through community art festivals and new media matrices.

(2) **County-Level Schools: Low-Cost Popularization Model**: Develops simplified music production tools to lower technical barriers. Implements "One County, One Story" plans to transform local histories into music theater materials, establishing regional shared resource libraries. Teacher empowerment through regional workshops, supported by community art groups and volunteers.

(3) **Rural Schools: Localized Regeneration Model**: Integrates local intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional opera and folk music, inviting inheritors to conduct school workshops. Digital dissemination builds a "rural aesthetic cloud stage", sharing works through short videos and forming a "school – village" linked aesthetic education ecosystem to enhance cultural identity.

4. Conclusions and Prospects

4.1. Conclusions

(1) **Artistic Form Innovation**: The integration of smart technologies (AI digital humans, holographic projection) and cross-media narratives breaks traditional stage limitations, constructing immersive experiential fields and advancing art education from unidimensional cognition to panoramic experience.

(2) **Core Competency Cultivation**: Multisensory interaction deepens artistic perception; role portrayal transforms skills into emotions; historical narratives promote cultural symbol re-encoding; improvisation stimulates critical thinking, constructing a learning progression from imitation to innovation.

(3) **Theoretical Framework Construction**: The progressive pathway of "aesthetic experience – emotional resonance – value reshaping" integrates Schiller's and Dewey's aesthetic theories, forming a tripartite framework of "philosophical speculation – educational practice – technological application", redefining music theater as a vehicle for cultural heritage, social communication, psychological healing, and interdisciplinary education.

4.2. Research Limitations

This study has three limitations:

(1) Limited representativeness of single cases—regional resource disparities necessitate differentiated configurations.

(2) Superficial technology application—focus on visual effects over a "technology – teaching – competency" linkage framework.

(3) Methodological singularity—reliance on qualitative research without quantitative data or long-term tracking of deep effects like cultural identity.

4.3. Future Directions

Smart technologies will deeply integrate with aesthetic education: AI-generated virtual roles, VR immersive rehearsals, and 3D-printed props will build personalized learning ecosystems. Educational ecosystems will evolve toward quadruple collaboration among schools, families, society, and digital platforms, deepening industry-education integration. Evaluation mechanisms will innovate to include three-dimensional models covering artistic literacy, cultural heritage, and innovation capability, providing scientific quality monitoring tools for music theater education and realizing the fundamental of "cultivating people through aesthetics and nurturing fundamentals with beauty".

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.
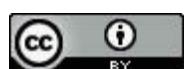
Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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