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**HOW ARTS EDUCATION INFLUENCES FUTURE TEACHER
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS IN
CHINESE UNIVERSITIES**

Abstract: Arts education is becoming more and more critical for future teachers' professional development. This study is a synthesis of empirical literature, to explore its effects on the competency of pre-service teachers in Chinese universities. Results showed that there was an improvement in cognitive flexibility, emotional development, pedagogical innovation, and communication skills which have not yet been resolved, but integration and institutional support are still issues. However, the study brings a conclusion that a higher level of arts education integration can help to improve teacher professionalism and adaptability in higher education.

Keywords: Arts Education; Teacher Training; Professional Development; Chinese Universities; Competencies.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation from the traditional education mode of "knowledge dissemination" to the competency education mode of "professional training" is ongoing in teacher training in Chinese universities. Future teachers should be creative and have the ability to communicate and think reflectively in more and more complex educational contexts, as well as possess emotional intelligence.

Arts education – such as the visual arts, music, drama, and creative expression – has increasingly been identified as a key means of developing these skills. Arts Education is not a traditional academic subject, but it does focus on imagination, interpretation, reflection and experience. They are very closely

related to the needs of present-day teaching, especially in situations where flexibility and inventiveness are needed.

Though arts education has been increasingly integrated into teacher training in China, the role of arts education in teacher training is yet to be systemized. This study, then, takes an empirical approach to investigate the impact arts education has on the cognitive, emotional, pedagogical and communicative growth of prospective teachers.

METHODS

Qualitative systematic literature-based empirical synthesis approach is used in this study. Primary sources of data are books in peer-review journals, international policy reports and journal articles in major academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus and ERIC.

Eligible criteria are: relevance to arts education for teacher training contexts; empirical and/or theoretical contribution to learning outcomes; and publication in recognized academic outlets.

The information obtained was subjected to a thematic coding process that involved identifying findings and arranging them in five analytical dimensions in a sequential order, based on the five references, namely cognitive development, emotional development, pedagogical innovation, communication competence and systemic policy context. Every research is only mentioned once and in a sequence, to avoid redundant citing logic.

RESULTS

The analysis shows that arts education has multiple dimensions of influence on Chinese University pre-service teachers' professional development.

Eisner (2002) states that arts education offers unique types of cognition that are very different from that of the traditional academic disciplines. These are qualified reasoning, interpretive judgment and imaginative thinking, which enables people to build their meaning beyond the standardized knowledge system [1]. Cognitive skills are key to flexible instructional planning and

responding to a variety of classroom scenarios for future teachers. Thus, arts education helps develop the desired cognitive adaptability, one of the important aspects of teacher professionalism in the modern world.

Winner et al. (2013) also show how arts education has a positive impact on emotional and personal growth such as motivation, self-expression and emotional awareness [2]. While cognitive transfer is different in different contexts, emotional engagement is a recurrent by-product of arts-based learning. For teacher education, this emotional development aids in the development of empathy, resilience and identity. Arts learning activities for pre-service teachers can help them to form stable professional identities and better regulate their emotions, which are critical for teacher coping with classroom stress and interpersonal interaction.

Hetland et al. (2013) distinguish a collection of cognitive and behavioural tendencies as “studio habits of mind” (observing, envisioning, reflecting and exploring [3]). These habits are developed as a result of ongoing arts-making and can be readily applied to the context of teaching. Pedagogically, these dispositions facilitate innovative teaching and learning, where future teachers can create more student-centered, inquiry-based and flexible learning environments. Arts education therefore becomes a vehicle for teaching creatively and reflective practice.

There is evidence that music and music and performance-based arts impact communication competence in a significant fashion – both verbal expression and non-verbal communication, as well as confidence and awareness of audience [4]. Such skills are crucial for successful teaching and learning, which is largely hinged upon the clarity of communication and engagement of the classroom. Furthermore, ensemble performance and group creation enhance teamwork and interpersonal communication, through collaborative arts activities. These skills can be readily transferred into classroom and collaborative learning contexts in schools.

Lastly, OECD (2013) suggests some structural issues related to the implementation of arts education: arts subjects are on the margins of formal curricula, and arts subjects are not considered essential subjects for education systems [5]. This marginalisation results in: less teaching time allotted to the arts, less integration within the institution, and fewer assessment frameworks to measure arts based learning outcomes. The same constraints prevent arts education from being systematically integrated into professional development pathways, especially in situations where they are evaluated in ways tied to examinations.

DISCUSSION

The results show that arts education covers the entire aspect of training future teachers in Chinese universities. First, it increases the ability to think in an imaginative and interpretative way to increase cognitive flexibility. Secondly, it helps to support emotional development which enhances empathy, resilience, and identity formation. Third, it helps to promote pedagogical innovations by reflecting and experimenting in teaching and learning. Fourth, it enhances communication competence and, most importantly, the ability to communicate in the classroom.

But the potential for the arts in education is limited by structural and institutional barriers. Arts education is on the periphery of higher education curricula, which restricts its impact on teacher education. Assessment systems which focus upon standardized testing even further limit opportunities for creative and reflective learning. Further, the institutional resources are not the same in all universities, which makes it difficult to consistently implement arts-based teacher education programs.

In order to resolve these issues, arts education needs to be embedded in the regular teacher education curriculum instead of being an additive. Assessment should include the use of portfolio-based assessment and performance-based assessment, as these will help to capture creative and

reflective competencies. In addition, there is a need for teacher educators to be professionally developed in arts-integrated pedagogy for effective implementation.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that for university students in China, who are becoming teachers, arts education plays an important role in their professional development. It boosts cognitive, emotional, pedagogical, and communicative skills crucial for today's teaching practice. But, it is constrained by structural and institutional aspects.

Raising the level of arts teaching integration into teacher training programs can help enhance teacher adaptability, creativity and professional identity. This relationship should be further investigated in the future through empirical quantitative studies in the context of Chinese universities in order to validate and expand the findings.

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