

# A Study on the Path of art Education Practices in Rural Primary and Secondary Schools from the Perspective of Educational Equity

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## **Abstract:**

In recent years, art education in rural primary and secondary schools has received widespread attention, but there is still a large gap with urban art education. This research analyzes the differences in urban and rural art education practices from the perspective of educational equity, and the improvement path of rural art education practices. The study found that rural art education practices face deficiencies in resources, cognition, and quality. To address these questions, there is an urgent need to develop local natural and cultural resources to enrich the content of art education and develop art education activities with local characteristics. Based on this, the study puts forward the following suggestions. Rural schools should pay attention to local art education in combination with regional characteristics, emphasize natural experience, and embrace cultural integration. In the process of education practices, teachers should pay attention to improving students' art judgment ability and encourage self-expression to foster a strong sense of cultural identity. These paths are essential to promote equitable development of art education practices between urban and rural areas.

**Keywords:** art education; educational equity; urban-rural differences; practical path

## **1. Introduction**

Art education is an essential part of quality education, playing an irreplaceable role in cultivating students' imagination and creativity and promoting all-round development. At the same time, however, art education is a weak link in Chinese rural education,

and it is a key point in the quality difference between rural and urban populations [1]. Although the basic operation of art education activities in rural primary and secondary schools has been guaranteed through poverty alleviation and educational policy support in recent years, the gap between urban and rural areas in terms of art education content and effectiveness is

still significant. This gap has become one of the important issues in the current issue of educational equity. In response, relevant policy documents have pointed out that one of the tasks of educational modernization is to achieve equalization of basic public education services, and the Ministry of Education has also prioritized the quality of art education as one of the key tasks of art education in rural schools. Achieving a balance in art education between urban and rural areas can help cultivate sound personalities of rural students, which provides more possibilities for their future development. As a result, the need to improve the quality of rural art education is becoming increasingly urgent.

The current challenges faced by art education in rural primary and secondary schools include deviations in the understanding of art education, a lack of art education resources and inappropriate use, and a shortage of qualified teachers, etc. [2-4]. Although policy support and cooperation with universities have alleviated these issues to a certain extent, it is difficult to achieve the long-term development of art education by relying solely on external resources [2]. Based on this, the study starts from the perspective of educational equity and explores how to tap into rural natural and cultural resources based on existing external resources. Transform these internal resources into art education resources, with the aim of exploring sustainable art education development paths.

## 2. The Particularity of Art Education Practices in Schools

Art education is also known as education about beauty. In a narrow sense, it focuses on artistic appreciation, to improve people's artistic sensitivity and operational abilities. In a broad sense, it encompasses various forms of art experiences in art, science, the environment, etc. Through these experiences, individuals can enhance their art perception, and gain richer emotions and broader understanding, ultimately achieving an elegant and harmonious state of life [5].

School-based art education practice is an important way to cultivate morality and build character and is also a key part of promoting students' all-round development. Through guiding students to perceive and create beauty, art education fosters their capabilities of observation, imagination, and creativity. The ultimate goal is to enhance their art literacy and shape a sound personality [6]. Therefore, art education holds an irreplaceable significance in the broader context of educational practices.

### 2.1 Comprehensiveness and Extensiveness

As a kind of education that educates people through beauty, art education shares common values with other forms of education in cultivating students' sound personalities, improving their overall quality, and developing innovation abilities. Its practice should also be comprehensive and extensive, similar to other forms of education, and should not be confined to a single subject or ignore the connection with other contents. Under the guidance of art education theory, school art education practices should establish an art-based integration, and broaden the boundaries and vision of art education to improve students' comprehensive quality and art abilities [5].

Art education includes art but is not limited to it. On the one hand, it includes the outcomes of art education, such as learning about artworks and practicing artistic skills. On the other hand, art education is a broad form of education that spans the entire process of human development [7]. However, in the current art education practices in schools, there is a phenomenon of narrowly defining the scope of art education with subject-based art courses such as fine arts and music, or a tendency to conduct art education simply to cultivate artistic expertise. Such practices neglect the integration of art education into non-art subjects, limiting its breadth. Schools should integrate art education practices into various environments, allowing them to subtly exert their educational function.

### 2.2 Non-Utilitarian Nature

The main purpose of art education is not to develop professional skills or train artists but to enrich students' spiritual world, broaden their horizons, and cultivate their thinking and creativity. This process has an implicit and delayed impact on people's cultivation, making it difficult to evaluate through simple standardized measurements.

Under the long-term influence of exam-oriented education, schools usually measure the value of subjects based on their ability to improve test scores, believing that subjects such as Chinese and mathematics that are included in standardized tests are more practical and therefore worth investing more resources and time in. Meanwhile, music and art, which have long been outside the utilitarian scope, have not received due attention, resulting in the marginalization of art education. Art education should go beyond the functions of relieving academic pressure and enriching campus life, and attach importance to its value in cultivating a sound personality.

### 2.3 Cultural Dimension

The development of culture strengthens the function of art education, which serves as both the foundation and di-

rection for art education practices. In turn, these practices promote the prosperity of culture. Through art education practice, schools can explore and carry forward the contemporary value of traditional culture, and absorb the world's outstanding cultural achievements. By responding to the needs of the times, create new cultural and artistic forms.

Art education should not be limited to the imparting of formal knowledge and skills. It is also necessary to encourage students to explore cultural depth and achieve educational goals through understanding and participation. By engaging in art activities, students become active participants in cultural development, rather than mere spectators. School art education practices should emphasize the process of exploring "why", and pay attention to the cultural significance behind the works. Such practices, as a form of education and self-education, not only cultivate students' ability to discover beauty, feel beauty, and create beauty but also shape a sound personality and promote the healthy development of social culture [8].

### **3. Analysis of the Differences in Urban and Rural School Art Education Practices**

Rural primary and secondary schools account for more than 74% of the total number of such schools in China. Although the implementation of art education in rural areas is currently progressing rapidly to catch up with urban regions, due to geographical and economic factors, the distribution of art education resources between urban and rural areas is still unbalanced.

#### **3.1 Differences in Starting Points: Cognition and Students' Art Literacy**

Due to the long-term absence of art education in rural schools, even though art education activities are now basically guaranteed, the understanding of art education remains vague and one-sided. In contrast, urban schools have benefited from years of systematic theoretical guidance and practice in art education, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of art education among schools, teachers, parents, and students.

In rural areas, the value of education is often measured by whether it can solve practical problems. Education with direct productive value, such as intellectual education and labor education, is valued. Art education, which does not show immediate results, is often regarded as dispensable and secondary to other forms of education. Teachers still follow the traditional "cramming" and "standardized" test-oriented education concepts, simply regarding art

education as courses such as art and music. They equate art education practice with specific technical training and ignore students' art experiences and creativity. As a result, students and parents also regard art education as a kind of entertainment, lacking a deep understanding and appreciation.

From the students' perspective, various factors such as socio-economic development, pressure to enter higher education, urban-rural cultural conflicts, family changes, and urbanization processes have a significant impact on the psychological cognition of rural students. Additionally, opportunities for art education in rural schools are limited, with insufficient artistic environments, resulting in a lack of exposure to artistic works, and thereby leading to a deficiency in basic art literacy. In contrast, families with better economic conditions or parents with higher education levels in cities will actively maximize their children's opportunities to receive art education, further widening the starting point gap of art education between urban and rural students [9].

#### **3.2 Process Differences: Content and Quality of Art Education Practices**

Overall, urban primary and secondary schools offer a wide variety of art education courses, including traditional courses such as art theory, art practice, and art appreciation, as well as additional courses and characteristic school-based courses such as calligraphy, dance, and opera. In terms of extracurricular activities, urban schools regularly organize cultural activities such as art festivals and museum visits, and they form clubs for activities like choir, dance, and drama under the guidance of professional teachers. Regarding campus atmosphere, urban schools build campus and corridor culture to create a strong artistic atmosphere on the campus. These diverse art education activities provide students with a broader learning platform and help improve their comprehensive literacy.

In contrast, the quality of art education in rural schools is generally lower than that in urban schools. Many art teachers have moved to cities due to limited development opportunities, resulting in instability in the teaching staff, which disrupts the continuity and stability of rural art education. Moreover, many art education practices are carried out by non-professional teachers who do not have relevant professional knowledge and abilities, resulting in a lack of systematic and structured continuity in art education [10]. In addition, teaching facilities and materials are often insufficient, and cultural classrooms are often temporarily converted, which fails to meet the needs of art education. Even if the teaching equipment has been improved due to external support, the actual dilemma is that teachers in

rural areas often struggle to understand or use these educational facilities effectively [4]. These resources are often underused and unable to achieve the intended impact on art education [3].

### 3.3 Difference in Outcomes: Knowledge, Skills, and Personality Development

Education in the new era advocates the principle of “educating morality through beauty, educating people through morality, and educating people into talents”, but art education in rural schools is often narrowly regarded as courses for developing artistic skills, which underestimates students’ psychological reactions when learning [11]. Most rural schools place too much emphasis on art competitions and the cultivation of students with specialties. They set art education goals with a professional skills orientation, and aim to broaden students’ future career choices and improve their survival ability by cultivating their artistic expertise. Even some traditional cultural art education courses are based on local cultural characteristics, such as opera or traditional instruments, and are primarily designed to learn a musical instrument or a singing technique to achieve success in competitions or enter a professional college. The orientation towards professional knowledge and skills has led to an irrational allocation of art education resources in rural areas, with low student participation in art education activities, and insufficient educational equity.

On the contrary, art education practices in most urban schools emphasize the comprehensive cultivation of personality and emotions, rather than focusing only on the learning of knowledge and skills. Urban schools encourage students to gain unique art experiences and emotional resonance through participation and practice, attach importance to combining art education with daily life, and pay attention to the cultivation of both students’ spiritual beauty and behavioral beauty. This approach expands the value of art education beyond mere artistic skills training, offering broader educational benefits in non-artistic contexts.

## 4. Practice Path for Promoting Equity in Art Education

At present, rural schools have achieved the goal of offering and sufficiently implementing art education courses. However, in the new stage of promoting high-quality basic education, the problem of how to offer well has increasingly become a central issue [2]. Therefore, constructing rural school art education activities with rich content and diverse forms has become a key task at this stage. It is

crucial to deeply understand the importance of rural art education, recognize the current challenges faced by rural schools, and improve its comprehensive quality to narrow the urban-rural art education gap, which is significant to building a high-quality and equitable compulsory education system in the new era [12].

### 4.1 Develop Local Art Education and Emphasize Natural Experiences

The starting point of rural art education in the new era lies in developing and improving the endogenous logic and motivation of local culture. The core is how to better develop and utilize local traditional art education resources and promote art education to become daily, diverse, and distinctive. In practice, art education should combine the local cultural ecology, and explore local cultural characteristics by integrating local history, culture, production life, and folk art into art education activities. For example, local cultural symbols such as patterns, colors, characters, and stories extracted from local chronicles and oral histories can be integrated into the curriculum and campus culture. By highlighting the beauty of the rural areas, students can be guided to observe and reflect on their local culture from art perspectives, thereby fostering their understanding of local traditions. By developing “local” art education resources, students can enhance their ability to discover and appreciate rural beauty, while increasing their awareness of protecting local culture.

In addition, rural art education should make full use of natural resources to enrich the venues for art education activities. Students should be encouraged to go into the fields and forests to experience the beauty of nature. This open practice can enhance the authenticity and freedom of art education, and encourage students to form richer and broader art perspectives and value systems. By stepping out of the classroom, participating, observing, and experiencing firsthand, students’ natural curiosity and interest can be stimulated, thus fostering imagination and creativity. In this way, art education plays a unique role in the work of moral development and personality building.

### 4.2 Embrace Cultural Integration and Improve Art Judgment

Although the gap in infrastructure between urban and rural areas has gradually narrowed, there is still a gap in the cultural and art aspects in rural regions. Western arts and urban paradigms have become the mainstream art tendency in rural areas, but such a tendency lacks a naturally generated cultural foundation, amounting to mere imitation. As rural areas in the new era absorb new information at an accelerated pace, the development of local culture

shows individualized and diversified art education needs, which often conflict with the traditional cultural context [13]. Art education in rural areas should thus be broad and interactive, integrating traditional art participation and modern civilizational experiences as a regular part of everyday life.

Since rural areas have been in poverty for a long time, humanities education has been relatively weak. Even if poverty alleviation has achieved progress, there is still insufficient attention to the art dilemma of rural students after economic improvement. Scientific art guidance can cultivate students' healthy thinking modes and judgment standards, preventing the negative influence of harmful art values. Rural primary and secondary schools should focus on developing advanced art culture and awareness, and enhance students' appreciation and understanding of art and culture. This would ensure students not be engulfed by various external art cultures and ideological trends in the context of the Internet and economic globalization. By embracing and integrating modern and traditional cultures, students can be guided to extend their art perspectives to worldview, outlook on life, and values. This approach can truly help rural areas achieve cultural and artistic "poverty alleviation". For example, schools can regularly host multicultural art festivals or develop integrated creative courses that guide students to combine local traditional cultural content with foreign modern art forms for creation. Additionally, local intangible cultural heritage inheritors and urban artists can be invited to conduct art workshops and dialogue activities, promote students' understanding of multiculturalism, and cultivate their art judgment and innovation ability.

### **4.3 Encourage Self-Expression and Strengthen Cultural Identity**

Art education not only includes education in art, but also art education in morality and life. The former aims to enhance people's cultural character and spiritual pursuits, while the latter focuses on people's social relationships and value judgments. Together, they build a complete personality [5]. In the context of globalization, rural areas may lose confidence in their local culture due to blind worship of modern culture, or face an identity crisis due to difficulties in digesting existing culture. Therefore, it is particularly important to change the educational mindset from professional-oriented art education to more universal art education, to help rural students establish identity recognition and cultural identity.

To achieve this, art education should focus on the construction of humanistic thought and emphasize students' subjectivity and self-expression ability. The current rural

art education practice is often designed and implemented from the perspective of urban experts in the countryside. Although it helps to improve the quality of rural art education, it fails to fully reflect the subjectivity of rural students. These "Outsiders" should prioritize creating platforms and guiding paths, while the actual creative process should allow students to exercise their wisdom. By encouraging self-creation and expression, students can enhance their art abilities and stimulate their inner artistic creativity. Rural students, in particular, possess a raw artistic creativity and an unconditioned imagination that are often lacking in urban children. Specifically, rural schools can carry out project-based learning of local culture, through participating in the research and recording of relevant historical culture, reinterpreting traditional stories, and conducting thematic creation, etc. Through this process of perceiving, understanding, and expressing local culture, students can gradually form a clear understanding of self-identity and cultural belonging in the process of perceiving, recognizing, and expressing local culture.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study explores the path of art education practices in rural primary and secondary schools from the perspective of educational equity, analyzing the differences between rural and urban art education and identifying areas for improvement. The study found that although the art education resources in rural schools have improved, there is still a significant gap with urban schools in terms of cognition, content, quality, and effect due to the lack of deep understanding and systematic implementation. Therefore, local natural and cultural resources should be developed and utilized to enrich the content of art education and foster art education practices with local characteristics to enhance students' art ability and cultural identity.

As art education enters a golden era of development in primary and secondary schools, it is essential to seize the opportunity to improve rural art education. Rural students should no longer enter universities and society with a lack of artistic and art experiences, burdened by feelings of inferiority. This study provides new ideas and methods for improving rural art education practices, emphasizing that art education should not only rely on external resources but should pay attention to the exploration and utilization of local resources. This study provides valuable reference points for education policymakers and practitioners, especially in designing more sustainable and local art education activities in combination with local cultural ecology and resource advantages. Moreover, this study also highlights the role of art education in cultivating students' art judgment, identity cognition, and cultural identity in the

contemporary cultural context, which has a certain guiding significance for changing the utilitarian and one-sided phenomenon in the current art education practices. Future research should further explore how to systematically integrate local cultural resources into art education practices and examine its long-term impact on students. Additionally, research should focus on enhancing teacher development and establishing robust evaluation systems for art education, to effectively promote the fair development of urban and rural art education practices and ensure that every student in rural schools has access to fair and high-quality art education.

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