

## The Pathway of Developing Assessment Tools for Primary School Art Education

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### Abstract

**Educational Measurement and Evaluation, as one of the three major research topics in Educational Scientific Research, play an important role in promoting the development of educational quality. However, effective measurement and evaluation tools for primary school art education in China are still lacking. Starting from the current status of primary school art education in China, this paper focuses on the measurement and evaluation of primary school art education in China, emphasizing the need to pay attention to the validity of teacher and student behaviors to enhance their thinking in art education assessment. This, in turn, will contribute to the establishment of scientifically effective measurement and evaluation tools for primary school art education.**

### Keywords

**Primary school art education; Educational measurement and evaluation; Primary school art teachers.**

### 1. Introduction

The main contradiction that this research focuses on and addresses lies between the practical needs of teachers and students in the context of primary school art education measurement and evaluation tools and the objective absence thereof. This study not only seeks to establish, from an epistemological perspective, the scientific and timely significance of art education assessment in guiding and making informed judgments in art classroom teaching and learning, but it also aims, methodologically, to delineate relevant core issues and propose targeted problem-solving directions and fundamental approaches.

Educational measurement and evaluation have evolved into one of the three major research topics in Educational Scientific Research, alongside educational foundation theory and educational development. They play a significant role in meeting and promoting the developmental needs of primary school art education assessment in China. When researching issues related to primary school art education assessment, it is crucial to grasp the following five main aspects: Firstly, the practical research and theoretical construction of primary school art education assessment in China currently face the practical problem of "a lack of integration between measurement and evaluation." Secondly, there exists a contradiction between the real needs of art teachers in terms of theoretical knowledge, methods, and tools for effective assessment in art teaching and the objective absence of such resources. Thirdly, the introduction of relevant policies and government-led large-scale education quality monitoring initiatives has drawn attention from art education managers, implementers, and participants, highlighting the social significance of art education assessment. Fourthly, most primary school art teachers in China currently lack comprehensive, scientific, and in-depth understanding of

the value of art education assessment in relation to art teaching and student learning. Meanwhile, they also lack corresponding practical skills. Finally, there is a deficiency in a culture of scientifically effective assessment in primary school art education, making it challenging to conduct scientifically standardized and effective assessments in art teachers' teaching work, as well as in students' art curriculum learning and art literacy development. This paper will proceed to discuss these real-world issues in more detail.

Without scientifically standardized tools for art education measurement and evaluation, both learners and educators may encounter objective issues, such as unclear self-positioning, inaccurate developmental goals, and insufficiently highlighted problem areas when they lack an understanding of their stage-specific growth and development. Conversely, if art teachers and students can mutually establish clear overall and stage-specific objectives in their growth process, along with basic performance descriptions and optimal performance descriptions for corresponding objectives, they can timely identify and address recent developmental issues. This can be achieved through self-reflection and analysis, facilitating effective corrections and improvements through comparison and differential analysis. Therefore, how to better realize this concept will be a subject of reflection and research for art teachers and a focal point of discussion in this paper.

## 2. Current Challenges in Chinese Primary School Art Education

Chinese primary school art education is currently in its most favorable development period since the founding of the People's Republic of China. However, this does not mean that there are no issues or that the development of primary school art education is without problems or challenges. The trends of informatization, digitization, and intelligence in society provide new historical opportunities and pathways for the development of art education, but they also introduce new development issues. The examination and reflection on both old and new problems are fundamental to the study of the development of primary school art education and are crucial for discussing the current state and development direction of art education assessment. Guided by the concept of "dynamic quality art education assessment," this paper conducts investigations through methods such as social surveys, educational observations, and literature research. It finds that there are numerous issues in the current development of Chinese primary school art education, affecting both teachers and students. The research primarily takes the form of surveys, using questionnaires to understand the factors influencing students' art literacy development from three main dimensions: the family, the school, and the community.

In general, the prominent issues in current Chinese primary school art education can be summarized in the following five aspects.

First, the internal and external environment of primary school art education is in a "suboptimal" state. Analyzing the overall state of current primary school art education from the perspective of educational ecology, it is evident that it exhibits "unhealthy" educational phenomena in terms of social and educational environments. On one hand, at the societal level, art curriculum has been marginalized among numerous subjects and considered a negligible "subsidiary subject," a situation that remains unchanged. Consequently, art curriculum lacks the respect and status it deserves, and art teachers lack the social respect and professional dignity they deserve. Furthermore, under the influence of the exam-oriented education system in China, where the curriculum is tailored to what is tested, the concept of "teach what is tested" and "learn what is tested" has become a general consensus, exacerbating peculiar educational phenomena such as the absence of primary school art courses, arbitrary suspension of art classes, and prioritizing exam preparation over art education. On the other hand, from the perspective of the art education environment, there are issues related to uneven distribution of educational

resources, educational inequality, inadequate educational management, and an imperfect educational culture in art education. Additionally, with limited class hours, primary school art teachers are burdened with heavy responsibilities. They are also tasked with campus visual culture development and art activity planning and organization, resulting in substantial workloads. However, many schools consider the workload of art classes to be equivalent to only about 60% of subjects like language and mathematics in terms of evaluation for benefits, professional recognition, promotions, and housing arrangements. This highlights that art teachers receive lower salaries and benefits, their energy is dispersed across multiple responsibilities, making it challenging for them to dedicate time and enthusiasm to delve into art education.

Second, the professional development of art teachers lacks continuity and depth. Firstly, art teachers have long been deprived of high-quality professional development and training opportunities, leading to a lack of comprehensive, targeted, and effective training. There is significant overlap among available training programs, making it difficult for teachers to grow effectively. Secondly, art teachers do not have a strong enough awareness of lifelong learning. This is evident in their limited attention to academic research in the field of art, developments in educational policies, and related outcomes. For example, many teachers have not made substantial transitions from the "two basics" stage to the "three dimensions" stage, and they do not have a high level of understanding or focus on the core competencies of art subjects. Thirdly, art teachers lack sufficient awareness and capacity for educational research. Their participation in activities such as publishing papers, conducting research projects, and school-based development needs improvement. For instance, some education researchers have indicated that "few teachers of art and music subjects have the opportunity to participate in research projects, and they have never considered conducting subject-related research themselves." Lastly, teachers often have an inadequate understanding of the essence of art education and hold various misconceptions. This is particularly evident in their failure to recognize that art education is a pluralistic discipline. They tend to emphasize the intrinsic value of artistic techniques and knowledge while downplaying or neglecting the educational significance and value of art education. This imbalance in the development of "art" and "education" as two pillars is a significant concern.

Third, the development and implementation of art courses lack a concept of disciplinary culture. The specific manifestation is that the situation of art courses in primary schools is far from ideal. Many schools either do not offer art classes, fail to allocate sufficient class hours for art, or offer art courses that have never been taught by art teachers. Some schools even face the dilemma of art courses being sidelined by other subjects and sacrificing art education for the sake of exam preparation and academic achievement. This reflects a lack of understanding and emphasis on the art discipline by both teachers and students. The construction and implementation of art courses lack standards and order, resulting in a limited variety of content and a low rate of course offerings. On one hand, previous research has shown that under the context of the new curriculum standards, art teachers often tend to choose and design teaching content that avoids complexity, leans towards easy topics, and emphasizes skills over theory. For example, some teachers have reported that they have attended over 30 art classes in various locations like Beijing, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou. Among these, nearly half were appreciation classes, and the others were "modeling and expression" or design classes, with no mention of "comprehensive exploration" classes. This is not an isolated case but a prevalent phenomenon in primary school art education after the curriculum reform. When faced with the four learning domains of "modeling and expression," "appreciation and evaluation," "design and application," and "comprehensive exploration," art teachers tend to choose activities related to "modeling and expression" and "appreciation and evaluation." These activities are closer to the traditional "two basics" style of art education, which focuses on teaching and learning basic knowledge and

skills. They also have lower difficulty and complexity levels, making them easier to design, control, and evaluate.

Fourth, there is a lack of a systematic and effective Chinese-style art education assessment method and culture. Currently, the construction and development of the assessment system and culture in Chinese primary school art education are in their early stages, shaping the direction and development of art education assessment in China. Research indicates that primary school art teachers and education researchers in China, as a whole, lack an understanding of art education assessment and quality monitoring. This is especially true when it comes to assessment thinking and assessment culture in art curriculum teaching. The reasons for this are primarily as follows. Firstly, there is a lack of awareness. Many teachers have not fully recognized the importance of art education assessment and are not clear about its integral role in art education. Secondly, there is a lack of capability. Most art teachers with backgrounds in the humanities do not possess the literacy and skills for mathematical and statistical research. They may not have received formal education in subjects such as statistics, educational statistics, and educational and psychological measurement. Therefore, they lack confidence in conducting research and practice in art education assessment, and also lack effective assessment methods and tools. Assessments often exhibit characteristics such as exaggerated language, standardization, artificiality, and ineffectiveness. Encouraging only positive evaluations and excessive rewards make art education appear filled with "flattery" and "bribery," deviating from the essence of art education. Thirdly, there is a strong utilitarian mindset. Art teachers are often reluctant to invest too much time in art education assessment, especially when it is seen as challenging and complex. Fourthly, the predominant method of results-based evaluation, centered on student assignments and artworks, still prevails. From the perspective of educational significance, students' learning processes, both within and outside the art curriculum, should hold more exploratory and meaningful value than the outcomes. However, most art teachers focus more on results in their teaching design, content, and evaluation criteria, neglecting the process performance and effort of students in and out of art courses. Only by incorporating the entire process of students' learning in art classes into the perspective of evaluation can evaluation have a truly meaningful reform; otherwise, it is fundamentally no different from the previous 'grading homework' assessment approach."

Fifth, students' awareness of and engagement in art courses need improvement. Firstly, students often lack a positive attitude and mindset towards learning art, leading to tendencies of not wanting to learn or not enjoying the subject. Secondly, as primary school art is not a subject assessed in standardized tests, students often do not perceive the importance of art education in the broader context of exam-oriented education. They may consider it less significant or even dispensable. Despite insights from experts in cognitive psychology and neuroscience highlighting the importance of art education for individual development, the phenomenon of underestimating art education persists. Thirdly, there are limited opportunities and platforms provided by schools or society for students to engage in related art activities. On the one hand, the development of campus art culture in schools may be lacking in richness and substance, making it challenging for students to appreciate the cultural and aesthetic value that art brings to their lives and surroundings. On the other hand, schools in rural and remote areas often struggle to provide adequate educational resources, resulting in significant urban-rural disparities. For instance, students from local schools in such areas have fewer opportunities to participate in online or offline museum-based art education activities compared to students in first-tier cities or provincial capitals. Fourthly, there is a lack of synergy and relevance between home-based art education, community-based art education, and school-based art education. This fragmented approach to art learning results in a lack of continuity and comprehensiveness in students' art education. Therefore, creating a conducive environment

and culture for home-based art education is also an important dimension of researching primary school art education.

In summary, optimizing art education assessment methods and thinking can help art teachers gain a comprehensive understanding of the internal and external environment and the current state of Chinese primary school art education. It can also help identify directions and key areas for adjustment and improvement.

### **3. Focus on behavioral validity to optimize art education assessment thinking.**

Monitoring and tracking the overall development level and status of Chinese primary school art education is beneficial for art teachers to grasp the direction of educational reform. It is also the fundamental value of large-scale national-level basic education quality monitoring work. However, for teachers and students actively involved in art teaching activities at the forefront, this alone is not sufficient. Teachers and students need to understand each other's developmental status and level of teaching and learning through individual stage assessments and comparisons, thus achieving gradual growth. Furthermore, for art teachers, understanding and learning about art education policies and curriculum standards, analyzing core artistic competencies, critically interpreting textbooks, selecting course content, setting course objectives, judging teaching effectiveness, and defining teaching difficulties and boundaries are all essential aspects of cognition and understanding. Students should also be aware of their mastery of fundamental art knowledge and skills, the internalization and transfer of artistic learning values, and the formation of artistic learning competencies. These are the kinds of information that parents are most interested in and need to know.

Behavioral validity, as understood and defined from the perspective of measurement, refers to the degree to which teachers and students perceive the value of their respective participation in art education activities, i.e., the consistency with established teaching objectives, learning goals, teaching content, and learning content, among other elements. Teachers and students immersed in the primary school art education environment should pay attention to and reflect on the effectiveness of their art education and learning behaviors. It is crucial for art teachers and students to always be clear about the purpose, nature, significance, and effectiveness of the activities they engage in, rather than blindly going through the motions. This is where art education assessment thinking plays a significant role. A strong assessment mindset helps teachers and students understand that participation does not necessarily equate to effectiveness, and growth may not necessarily mean reaching the desired level. Therefore, teachers and students need to contemplate which behaviors they should focus on and reflect upon. Within the scope of this research, teachers can improve behavioral validity through several avenues.

First, pay attention to teachers' attitudes towards art education. This involves critically examining and reflecting on one's own career choices and professional attitudes. Currently, there are often reports of conflicts and retaliation between teachers and students. A significant reason for this is that some teachers may not be well-suited for the teaching profession or may lack a proper understanding and respect for it, leading to states of apathy, radicalism, and other abnormal teaching attitudes and mindsets. Understanding the disciplinary nature and fundamental characteristics of primary school art education to a certain extent influences a teacher's teaching effectiveness.

Second, focus on teachers' art teaching design and development. Art education design is an integral part of art teaching activities, and successful art teaching design is a necessary condition for effective art education. Therefore, art teachers should pay effective attention to and improve their goal setting, content selection, teaching method establishment, activity

arrangement, and assessment method selection in art teaching. By using pre-assessment techniques, they can understand students' readiness to engage with new curriculum content and effectively implement differentiated and tiered teaching, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to enhance their artistic literacy through art education. For example, under the core literacy concept, how primary school art teachers effectively integrate and demonstrate core artistic literacy within the framework of a "three-dimensional objective" in art education is a critical consideration. Although the 2011 version of the art curriculum standard is still used in compulsory education, the "literacy era" in primary and secondary art education will officially arrive with the introduction of the new high school art curriculum standard that places core artistic literacy at its core. Additionally, when art teachers face minority students, international school students, or rural school students, it is essential to effectively and balance the emphasis on folk art, traditional culture, international artists, and artworks. These are all critical considerations in teaching design and development.

Third, pay attention to teachers' implementation of art education. Implementing art education is the concrete practice of art teaching and is a critical phase in carrying out art teaching activities. It involves whether teachers can effectively grasp the articulation of art teaching objectives in the curriculum standards, translate them into their own art classroom teaching, and understand the extent to which they comprehend and implement the curriculum objectives in a timely manner. For instance, during a review of numerous art lesson plans and classroom observations, some art educators have found that many teachers have inaccurate understandings of teaching objectives. This includes issues such as incomplete objectives, unclear objectives, or objectives that are unrelated to the subject matter. Moreover, it's important to assess whether art teachers can convey to students the special value and significance of the current lesson in their personal and historical context and how it differs from their regular curriculum. They should address questions like why this activity is happening and who the audience is. Failing to do so could diminish the overall value of the teaching activity. Therefore, it's crucial to pay attention to and evaluate the effectiveness of art teachers' implementation process and outcomes.

Fourth, focus on teachers' art teaching evaluations. Art teaching evaluations also need to be measured and assessed. Art teachers should evaluate and improve their own teaching evaluation behaviors, including their choice of language, methods, and effectiveness in evaluating art teaching. For example, teachers should avoid or minimize the use of inappropriate and valueless evaluation language such as "you're great," "well done," "very smart," "beautiful colors," "doesn't look like it," "you're not very smart," and so on. Furthermore, teachers should focus on and evaluate students' learning process performance, especially aspects like individual thinking changes, attitudes, emotions, cooperation skills, leadership skills, and more, in addition to assessing their learning outcomes and reviewing their assignments and artworks.

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