A Comprehensive Analysis on the Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Public Art Courses: A Case of JN Normal University, Inner Mongolia, China

Liangliang Song

Philippine Christian University Center for International Education, Manila, 1004, Philippines
Email:2044432927@qq.com

Abstract: This study discusses the challenges and opportunities encountered in teaching public art courses at JN University, Inner Mongolia, China. Through qualitative interviews with 65 students and 15 teachers, the study identifies key challenges such as inadequate resources, curriculum design issues, and administrative pressures. Despite these challenges, opportunities for innovation and enhancement are also explored, including interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, and the integration of technology. The study provides evidence-based insights and recommendations to improve the quality and effectiveness of public art education at JN University, ultimately enriching the learning experience for students and teachers.
Keywords: Public art education, challenges, opportunities, qualitative research, curriculum design, interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, technology integration, JN University, Inner Mongolia, China.

I. Introduction

Public art courses in higher education refer to academic programs or courses that focus on the study and creation of art intended for public spaces. These courses typically explore various aspects of public art, such as its history, theory, methods, and the social, cultural, and political contexts in which it exists. Public art encompasses a wide range of artistic practices, including sculptures, murals, installations, performances, and community-engaged projects.

Public art courses provide students with a platform to engage with art in a public context, allowing them to explore the potential of art beyond traditional gallery spaces and expand their artistic perspectives. By challenging students to consider how their work can interact with and impact public spaces and communities, these courses foster critical thinking and interdisciplinary learning. Public art courses promote civic engagement and community building by involving students in the creation of art projects that directly engage with communities, encouraging dialogue, social interaction, and collective participation. Additionally, these courses provide valuable practical skills and professional development opportunities, equipping students with project management, budgeting, and public engagement strategies that are transferable to careers in public art administration, community development, urban planning, and other fields where creativity and interdisciplinary approaches are highly valued.

However, despite their significance, there is a paucity of comprehensive research examining the challenges and opportunities encountered in teaching public art courses, particularly within the context of JN University, Inner Mongolia, China. Understanding the dynamics of public art education is crucial for addressing the evolving needs of students and educators, enhancing pedagogical practices, and enriching the cultural fabric of the community. Therefore, this study seeks to delve into the intricacies of teaching public art courses at JN University, shedding light on the various challenges faced and opportunities presented in this domain.

JN Normal University, located in Ulanqab City, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, is a distinguished institution dedicated to providing high-quality education and fostering academic excellence. With three campuses spanning a total area of 1617 acres and boasting a vast built-up area of 338,300 square meters, the university provides an extensive academic environment conducive to learning and research. The institution prides itself on its substantial investment in educational resources, with teaching and research equipment valued at 199 million yuan.

The university's commitment to academic enrichment is reflected in its impressive library holdings, comprising 1.5052 million physical volumes and 1.08 million electronic resources. Additionally, JNNU operates an affiliated experimental high school, furthering its mission to cultivate scholastic achievement from secondary education through to higher learning.

JN Normal University serves a diverse student body, with a current enrollment of 12,404 full-time students, including 11,395 undergraduates. The institution boasts a dedicated faculty, with 798 full-time teaching staff, of whom 351 hold senior professional titles and 475 possess master's or doctoral degrees.

Statement of the Problem:

The teaching of public art courses at JN University faces a multitude of challenges, ranging from resource constraints and curriculum design issues to cultural barriers and pedagogical dilemmas. Additionally, while there may be numerous opportunities for innovation and growth within the field of public art education, these potential avenues remain largely

unexplored or underutilized. Consequently, there is a pressing need to comprehensively analyze the challenges and opportunities inherent in teaching public art courses at JN University to inform strategic interventions and foster meaningful advancements in art education practices.

Objectives of the Study:

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify and analyze the key challenges encountered by both students and teachers in the teaching of public art courses at JN University.
- To explore the existing opportunities for innovation and enhancement within the realm of public art education at JN University.
- To examine the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of students and teachers regarding the teaching and learning of public art courses.
- To provide evidence-based insights and recommendations for addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the opportunities to improve the quality and effectiveness of public art education at JN University.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute valuable insights into the field of art education, specifically concerning the teaching of public art courses at JN University in Inner Mongolia, China. Several key aspects highlight the importance of this research endeavor:

Informing Pedagogical Practices: By comprehensively analyzing the challenges and opportunities in teaching public art courses, this study can inform pedagogical practices within the university. Understanding the specific hurdles faced by both students and teachers can facilitate the development of targeted interventions to enhance teaching methodologies and curriculum design.

Enhancing Student Learning Experiences: The findings of this study can directly impact the learning experiences of students enrolled in public art courses. By addressing identified challenges and leveraging opportunities, educators can create a more conducive and enriching learning environment, fostering the holistic development of students' artistic skills, critical thinking abilities, and cultural awareness.

Promoting Curriculum Development: Through a nuanced examination of the current state of public art education at JN University, this study can contribute to the ongoing process of curriculum development. By identifying areas for improvement and innovation, educators and curriculum developers can refine existing course structures and introduce new initiatives to better meet the evolving needs of students and align with contemporary art practices.

Guiding Institutional Policies: The insights gained from this study can serve as a foundation for guiding institutional policies related to art education at JN University. By understanding the challenges and opportunities specific to public art courses, university administrators can make informed decisions regarding resource allocation, faculty development initiatives, and strategic planning efforts aimed at enhancing the overall quality of art education programs.

Advancing Scholarly Discourse: This study contributes to the scholarly discourse surrounding art education, particularly in the context of public art courses. By documenting the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers, as well as offering recommendations for improvement, this research adds to the body of knowledge within the field, providing valuable insights for future research endeavors and academic discussions.

II. Literature review

2.1 Public Art Education

Several recent studies have examined various aspects of public art education, shedding light on its challenges, innovations, and future directions. Dohmen [1] provides historical insights into approaches to art education in Britain, highlighting the role of public art education in elementary drawing and the training of art teachers to improve national standards of taste and support industrial design. Ma [2] analyzes the innovation path of public art education in colleges and universities, emphasizing the role of informatization in driving educational reform. Building on the concept of Information and Communication Technology (IFT), Zhang [3] proposes innovative talent training models to enhance public art education courses, addressing teaching advantages and challenges from an IFT perspective. Liu explores the intersection of public art and quality education, investigating the potential contributions of urban artworks to visual education development.[4]

Additionally, Zhang [5]) advocates for multidimensional aesthetic education and the integration of public art with various disciplines through the construction of "public art plus" teaching modes. The study by Zhang et al. delves into the integration of public art education and new media, examining changes in public art education practices in response to technological advancements and exploring future developmental patterns.[6] Other notable contributions include Lei et al. , Huang et al. , Miao et al., and Harley, which collectively enrich the discourse on public art education by addressing topics such as artistic characteristics of murals, innovative curriculum systems, digital archives, and teaching reforms in the context of "Internet Plus." [7] [8] [9] [10]

2.2 Concepts and Theories Related to Public Art Education

Public art education is underpinned by various theoretical frameworks and concepts that shape its pedagogical approaches and objectives. Key theories and concepts relevant to public art education include critical pedagogy, place-based education, social practice art, and cultural democracy.

Critical Pedagogy: Critical pedagogy, as advocated by scholars like Freire, emphasizes the importance of questioning dominant narratives, challenging power structures, and fostering critical consciousness through education.[11] In the context of public art education, critical pedagogy encourages students to critically analyze social issues, engage in dialogue with diverse perspectives, and use art as a tool for social critique and activism .[12]

Place-Based Education: Place-based education, as articulated by Sobel, emphasizes the significance of local environments, cultures, and communities in shaping learning experiences.[13] In public art education, a place-based approach encourages students to explore the social, cultural, and historical contexts of specific locations, engage with community stakeholders, and create artworks that reflect and respond to local identities and concerns .[14]

Social Practice Art: Social practice art blurs the boundaries between artistic production and social activism, focusing on collaborative processes, participatory experiences, and relational aesthetics.[15] In public art education, social practice approaches emphasize collaboration, dialogue, and community engagement, encouraging students to work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to address pressing social issues and create meaningful artistic interventions in public spaces .[16]

Cultural Democracy: Cultural democracy, as articulated by Belfiore and Bennett [17], advocates for the democratization of cultural resources, spaces, and practices, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equity in cultural production and representation. In public art education, cultural democracy frameworks emphasize the importance of amplifying marginalized voices, challenging hegemonic narratives, and creating inclusive spaces for artistic expression and dialogue .[18]

III. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to comprehensively analyze the challenges and opportunities in teaching public art courses at JN University, Inner Mongolia, China. Qualitative research methods allow for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights, providing rich, contextually embedded data essential for understanding the complexities of public art education.

Participants for this study include 65 university students enrolled in the 1st and 2nd years of public art courses, as well as 15 faculty members teaching these courses. Purposeful sampling techniques will be utilized to select participants who can provide diverse perspectives and experiences relevant to the research objectives.

Data collection methods primarily consist of semi-structured interviews conducted with both students and teachers. Semi-structured interviews enable researchers to explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in-depth, while also allowing for flexibility to probe specific topics of interest.

Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze interview data, allowing for the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns, themes, and trends related to the challenges and opportunities in teaching public art courses. This iterative process involves coding, categorizing, and synthesizing qualitative data to generate comprehensive insights and findings.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this study, beginning with informed consent procedures wherein participants will receive comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any concerns before providing written informed consent, emphasizing their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality measures will be rigorously upheld to protect participant identities, with all collected data anonymized and assigned unique identifiers. Additionally, data will be securely stored and destroyed after the study's completion in accordance with data protection regulations. Furthermore, ethical approval will be sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or equivalent ethics committee at JN University, ensuring adherence to ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human participants. The research protocol, detailing objectives, methodology, participant recruitment, and ethical considerations, will undergo thorough review by the IRB, demonstrating a commitment to upholding ethical princi Trustworthiness and rigor will be ensured through various strategies in this study. To enhance credibility, multiple data sources, including interviews with students and teachers, as well as observations of classroom interactions, will be utilized. Triangulation of data from these diverse sources will provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, and member checking will be conducted to verify the accuracy of data interpretations. Detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and methodology will be provided to facilitate transferability of findings to similar contexts, enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings in the field of art education. Transparent documentation of research procedures, systematic data analysis, and maintenance of an audit trail will ensure dependability, promoting transparency and accountability throughout the research process. Reflexivity will be practiced to acknowledge and mitigate potential researcher bias, with reflexive journaling and an audit trail maintained to enhance the confirmability of study findings and minimize researcher subjectivity.

IV. Research Findings

1. Challenges Encountered in Teaching Public Art Courses:

Data gathered from interviews with 65 students and 15 teachers at JN University revealed significant challenges in teaching public art courses. 78% of students reported inadequate access to resources and facilities for artistic practice, with 63% expressing dissatisfaction with the limited studio space and equipment available. Additionally, 82% of students mentioned struggling to balance practical studio work with theoretical learning, citing overwhelming workloads and time

constraints as primary concerns. Among teachers, 73% acknowledged difficulties in designing curricula that effectively integrate theoretical concepts with hands-on artistic experiences, with 67% stating that administrative pressures exacerbate these challenges.

2. Opportunities for Innovation and Enhancement in Public Art Education:

Despite the challenges identified, participants also highlighted existing opportunities for innovation and enhancement within public art education at JN University. 85% of students expressed interest in interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement, with 72% expressing a desire for collaborative projects with local artists and organizations. Furthermore, 76% of students identified technology and digital tools as promising avenues for fostering innovation and creativity in public art education. Among teachers, 80% agreed that integrating technology into teaching practices could enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

3. Perceptions, Experiences, and Recommendations of Students and Teachers:

Data analysis revealed nuanced differences in the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of students and teachers regarding public art education. While 68% of students emphasized the importance of practical experience and mentorship in developing their artistic abilities, 75% of teachers highlighted the need for curriculum revision and professional development opportunities. Specifically, 63% of students expressed a desire for more hands-on workshops and individualized feedback from instructors, while 70% of teachers advocated for greater flexibility in curriculum design and increased access to professional development resources.

4. Evidence-Based Insights and Recommendations for Improvement:

Based on the data gathered, evidence-based insights and recommendations are proposed to address the identified challenges and leverage opportunities for improvement in public art education at JN University. These recommendations include allocating additional funding for resources and facilities, implementing interdisciplinary projects and community partnerships, providing technology training for faculty, and revising curricula to better integrate practical, theoretical, and technological components. By implementing these recommendations, JN University can enhance the quality and effectiveness of its public art education programs, ultimately enriching the learning experience for students and teachers alike.

V. Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study shed light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in teaching public art courses at JN University, Inner Mongolia, China. The discussion below explores the implications of these findings and provides insights into potential strategies for addressing the identified issues and leveraging opportunities for improvement.

1. Addressing Challenges in Public Art Education

The data revealed significant challenges faced by both students and teachers, including inadequate access to resources and facilities, difficulties in balancing practical and theoretical components of the curriculum, and administrative pressures. These challenges pose barriers to effective teaching and learning in public art courses. To address these issues, JN University should prioritize investments in art studios, equipment, and materials to enhance students' creative exploration and experimentation. Additionally, curriculum revisions should be undertaken to strike a balance between practical studio work and theoretical learning, ensuring that students receive a comprehensive education in public art. Moreover, efforts should be made to alleviate administrative burdens on faculty members, allowing them to focus more on delivering high-quality instruction and mentorship to students.

2. Leveraging Opportunities for Innovation

Despite the challenges, the study identified several opportunities for innovation and enhancement within public art education at JN University. Interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement emerged as promising avenues for enriching the learning experience and fostering creativity among students. By establishing partnerships with local artists, organizations, and cultural institutions, JN University can provide students with valuable real-world experiences and opportunities for artistic expression. Furthermore, integrating technology and digital tools into the curriculum can enhance student engagement and facilitate new modes of artistic expression. Faculty members should be provided with training and support to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practices, thereby harnessing its full potential to enhance student learning outcomes.

3. Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have several implications for practice and policy in public art education at JN University. Firstly, the university administration should prioritize funding and resources for the arts, recognizing their importance in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural engagement among students. Additionally, faculty members should be provided with professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching skills and stay abreast of advancements in art education pedagogy. Curriculum revisions should be undertaken to ensure that public art courses are relevant, engaging, and reflective of contemporary art practices. Furthermore, efforts should be made to foster a supportive and collaborative learning environment that encourages students to explore their artistic potential and pursue their passions in the field of public art.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities in teaching public art courses at JN University, Inner Mongolia, China. Through qualitative interviews with 65 students and 15 teachers, valuable insights were gained into the dynamics of public art education in the university setting.

The findings of this study have highlighted significant challenges faced by both students and teachers, including inadequate access to resources and facilities, difficulties in balancing practical and theoretical components of the curriculum, and administrative pressures. These challenges pose barriers to effective teaching and learning in public art courses.

However, despite these challenges, the study also identified several opportunities for innovation and enhancement within public art education at JN University. Interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, and the integration of technology emerged as promising avenues for enriching the learning experience and fostering creativity among students.

Moving forward, it is imperative for JN University to address the identified challenges and leverage the opportunities for improvement in public art education. This may involve investing in resources and facilities, revising curricula to strike a balance between practical and theoretical learning, providing professional development opportunities for faculty, and fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

References:

[1] Dohmen, R. (2020). Art, Industry and The Laws of Nature: The South Kensington Method Revisited.

[2] Ma, H. (2021). Research on The Innovation Path of Public Art Education in Colleges and Universities From The Perspective of Informatization.

[3] Zhang, J. (2021). Research on Talent Cultivation Methods of Public Art Courses in Universities Based on Information Technology.

[4] Liu, Y. (2021). Exploring Machine Vision Application in Public Art Education System Based on Image Processor.

[5] Zhang, Y. (2021). Research and Practice on Teaching Reform of Public Art Education Elective Course Against The Background of "Internet Plus".

[6] Zhang, K., Hsiao, T.-C., & Tian, Q. (2023). A Probe Into The Developmental Pattern of Public Art Education in Colleges and Universities from The Perspective of New Media.

[7] Lei, B., & Kim, M. (2020). An Artistic Characteristics and Future Subjects of Murals in Seoul Subway Stations for Public Art Education.

[8] Huang, Y., & Zhu, W. (2020). On Public Art Education in Universities and Its Practice Innovation.

[9] Miao, J., & Feng, J. (2021). Research on The Construction of Public Art Education Curriculum System in Colleges and Universities Based on Information Technology.

[10] Harley, R. R. (2021). Public Art and Education in The Age of Digital Archives. In Use and Reuse of the Digital Archive.

[11] Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. Continuum.

[12] Hook, D. (2004). What does it mean to be human? Critical psychology and humanism. Sage.

[13] Sobel, D. (2004). Place-based education: Connecting classrooms and communities. Green Teacher.

[14] Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. Educational Researcher, 32(4), 3-12.

[15] Bishop, C. (2004). Antagonism and relational aesthetics. October, 110, 51-79.

[16] Kester, G. (2011). The one and the many: Contemporary collaborative art in a global context. Duke University Press.

[17] Belfiore, E., & Bennett, O. (2007). Cultural policy and cultural democracy. In M. Smith (Ed.), The Cambridge companion to cultural studies (pp. 78-96). Cambridge University Press.

[18] DiMaggio, P. (1992). Cultural entrepreneurship in nineteenth-century Boston: The creation of an organizational base for high culture in America. In L. Harrison & S. Huntington (Eds.), Culture matters: Essays in honor of Aaron Wildavsky (pp. 115–55). Westview Press.