ISSN 2522-6398 Vol. 8, Issue 5: 34-38, DOI: 10.25236/FER.2025.080505

Research on the integration of intangible cultural heritage skills into the practice of labor and beauty education in higher vocational art majors—Take the design and production course of English stone as an example

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Abstract: *The environmental art design program at higher vocational colleges faces issues such as the separation of labor education and aesthetic education, and insufficient inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage skills. To address these issues, this paper takes the "Ying Stone Design and Production Course" as an example to explore the integration of intangible cultural heritage skills into vocational education to achieve coordinated development in both labor and aesthetics. At the same time, it analyzes the practical characteristics of labor practices and the aesthetic educational value of intangible cultural heritage skills through theoretical construction, proposing a course design framework of "cultural cognition—skill training—innovation transformation." Furthermore, it relies on school-enterprise collaborative teaching and process evaluation mechanisms to optimize the practical path. Research shows that this model can effectively integrate labor skill training with traditional aesthetic education, providing theoretical support and practical references for the integration of five aspects of education in higher vocational environmental art programs.*

Keywords: *intangible cultural heritage skills; higher vocational environmental art; labor and beauty education; curriculum design*

1. Introduction

As the national "Intangible Cultural Heritage in Schools" policy continues to advance and the concept of "integration of five educations" in vocational education deepens, the combination of intangible cultural heritage skills with vocational education has become a key focus for promoting cultural confidence. Currently, in the environment art design program at higher vocational colleges, there is a common issue of overemphasizing technical operations while neglecting cultural connotations in labor education. Aesthetic education often remains at the theoretical level, lacking deep integration with real-world craft scenarios. This disconnection makes it difficult for students to grasp the essence of traditional aesthetics during skill training and also hinders the dynamic inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage skills. As a core element of traditional Chinese garden art, Ying Shi possesses both practical labor and aesthetic creativity, providing a natural medium to resolve these contradictions. This paper takes the Ying Shi course as its research object, using a progressive framework of theoretical analysis, curriculum design, and practical reflection to explore feasible approaches for achieving a synergistic effect of labor and aesthetic education in vocational schools. It aims to provide a practical example for deepening industry-education integration and solidifying cultural foundations in higher vocational education.

2. The synergistic logic of intangible cultural heritage skills and labor and beauty education

2.1. The dual educational attribute of intangible cultural heritage skills

Intangible cultural heritage skills, as a living form of Chinas excellent traditional culture, have always been closely intertwined with labor practices and aesthetic creation. From the perspective of labor education, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage skills is achieved through specific craft operations. Take the creation of artificial rock landscapes, for example; selecting stones, cleaning them,

ISSN 2522-6398 Vol. 8, Issue 5: 34-38, DOI: 10.25236/FER.2025.080505

and bonding them all require strict technical standards. As students repeatedly refine the stones, they not only master the craft skills but also develop a meticulous and dedicated spirit of craftsmanship[1]. This practical characteristic aligns well with the "unity of knowledge and action" philosophy advocated in labor education, making intangible cultural heritage skills a natural vehicle for vocational colleges to deepen labor education. Research has shown that standardized operations of intangible cultural heritage skills can effectively strengthen students sense of professional responsibility and teamwork, which is precisely the key path for labor education to elevate from "skill training" to "cultural immersion."

In the aspect of aesthetic education, intangible cultural heritage skills embody unique aesthetic values and cultural connotations. The "slender, wrinkled, porous, and translucent" characteristics of Ying stone are a refinement of natural beauty, while also carrying the philosophical wisdom of traditional garden art in "a small space as vast as a mountain forest." By interpreting the cultural symbols of Ying stone, students can transcend mere formal aesthetics and delve deeper into the spiritual core of Chinese traditional aesthetics, which is "harmony between heaven and humanity."[2]This aesthetic education does not merely remain at the level of theoretical instruction; it also transforms into students innovative capabilities through real design practices. For instance, in the creation of micro-landscapes, students need to combine the natural texture of English stones with modern design language, which encourages them to actively explore contemporary expressions of traditional aesthetics. Research indicates that aesthetic education in intangible cultural heritage skills can effectively enhance students cultural identity, laying the foundation for their creative transformation in professional fields.

2.2. The interactive relationship between labor and beauty education

The synergistic logic of labor and aesthetics education presents a dialectical unity between "cultivating beauty through labor" and "promoting labor through beauty." Labor practice is precisely the foundation for the formation of aesthetic perception. As students polish the English stone, they gradually understand the relationship between material texture and spatial composition through tactile and visual experiences. This embodied cognition transforms abstract aesthetic principles into practical creative guidelines. Aesthetic needs, in turn, drive labor innovation. When students attempt to incorporate English stone elements into modern landscape design, the limitations of traditional techniques prompt them to explore new tools and methods, such as using digital modeling technology to optimize the assembly structure of English stones. This approach preserves all the artistic connotations of traditional landscaping while improving construction efficiency. This two-way interaction breaks down the isolation between labor and aesthetic education in traditional teaching, establishing a virtuous cycle of "technique inheritance—aesthetic appreciation—innovative practice."

2.3. Applicability of environmental art major in higher vocational colleges

The discipline attribute of all "craft + design" in the environmental art design major of higher vocational colleges creates natural conditions for the integration of intangible cultural heritage skills[3]. In environmental art education, students are required to master practical skills such as material techniques and construction methods on one hand, and on the other hand, to cultivate their spatial aesthetic literacy and innovative design thinking. This goal of cultivating versatile talents aligns perfectly with the characteristic of intangible cultural heritage skills, which is "inheriting without being bound by tradition." For instance, in the English stone course, students must skillfully use traditional tools to complete basic landscaping work while integrating modern design concepts for cultural innovation. From the perspective of cultural ecology, environmental art majors emphasize the interactive relationship between humans and the environment, which deeply resonates with the ecological wisdom of "harmony between heaven and humanity" in intangible cultural heritage skills. The physical involvement of students in English stone craftsmanship, such as perceiving the texture of stones through touch and observing spatial composition through vision, transforms abstract cultural symbols into concrete cognitive experiences. This "body—craft—environment" interactive process provides theoretical support at the cognitive science level for the integration of labor and aesthetics education. This teaching practice has confirmed that intangible cultural heritage skills have dual value in vocational colleges; they serve not only as media for cultural inheritance but also as resources for professional innovation.

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3. The construction of English stone course with dual orientation of labor and beauty

3.1. Two-way integration of course objectives

The design of the Ying Shi course, which integrates labor and aesthetic education, aims to transcend the limitations of traditional professional courses that emphasize skills over culture. By setting goals, restructuring content, and innovating evaluation methods, it seeks to achieve an organic integration of labor education and aesthetic education. In terms of course objectives, labor education focuses on material process practices and the cultivation of teamwork skills. In school-enterprise cooperation projects, students are assigned tasks such as selecting materials for Ying Shi, constructing structures, and maintaining finished products. This reinforces the standardization of tool usage and process procedures, allowing students to understand the essence of craftsmanship through simulated real-world work scenarios. Aesthetic education, on the other hand, emphasizes the creative transformation of traditional aesthetic principles. In micro-landscape design, students should combine the Chinese painting concept of "the interplay between reality and abstraction" with the natural form of Ying Shi, adhering to traditional aesthetic rules while also reflecting modern design thinking. This dual-objective approach breaks down the disconnect between labor and aesthetic education, promoting the simultaneous advancement of skill training and cultural heritage.

3.2. Modular design of teaching content

In terms of course content design, the course adopts a modular structure: "Cultural Awareness—Skill Training—Innovative Transformation." The Cultural Awareness module uses theoretical lectures and oral history sharing from intangible cultural heritage bearers to systematically explore the historical origins and cultural value of Ying stone, such as analyzing the spatial philosophy of "seeing the big picture in small details" in Ying stone landscaping through classic examples from Lingnan gardens, guiding students to understand the cultural logic behind the skills. The Skill Training module relies on the school-enterprise co-built training base, breaking down traditional crafts into actionable practice units. Taking the Ying stone washing technique as an example, the joint development of a training manual by the school and enterprise clarifies technical standards such as water quality control and tool selection. Through repeated practice, students can not only master core skills but also appreciate how the details of the craft influence aesthetic presentation. The Innovative Transformation module uses real projects as a vehicle to promote the modern application of intangible cultural heritage skills. For instance, under the backdrop of rural revitalization, student teams designed public landscapes for an ancient village by combining Ying stone techniques with ecological paving technology, preserving the traditional scenic atmosphere while meeting the functional requirements of modern public spaces. This practice demonstrates the vitality of intangible cultural heritage skills in contemporary design.

3.3. Teaching methods and evaluation system

In terms of teaching methods, the "dual-teacher collaboration" model is employed, where intangible cultural heritage (ICH) bearers and professional teachers jointly undertake teaching tasks. ICH bearers focus more on skill demonstration and experience sharing, such as demonstrating the "jointing" technique in on-site English stone bonding to vividly showcase the subtleties of traditional craftsmanship. Professional teachers, on the other hand, approach from the perspective of design theory and cultural interpretation, guiding students to explore the aesthetic principles behind the skills. Both parties collaborate through joint lesson planning to ensure coherence in teaching content. For example, in the topic of "English Stone Fusion with Modern Materials," the ICH bearer explains traditional assembly techniques, while the teacher introduces parametric design tools to help students explore digital expression pathways for traditional skills. In terms of evaluation systems, a diversified assessment mechanism dominated by process-oriented evaluations is established. The exhibition phase invites experts from schools and enterprises to evaluate works based on two dimensions: skill completion and aesthetic innovation. The project participation assessment focuses on students contributions to teamwork and problem-solving abilities. The cultural reflection report requires students to combine practical experiences to articulate the impact of ICH skills on their professional competence and aesthetic awareness[4]. For example, in a course exhibition, the students "dry landscape" themed works were highly evaluated by both the university and the enterprise because they skillfully integrated the texture of English stone with minimalism style, and at the same time met the requirements of technological specifications and aesthetic innovation.

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4. The implementation effect and challenges of the dual education of labor and art in English stone courses

4.1. Implementation effect

The pilot practice of the Ying Stone course has provided empirical support for integrating intangible cultural heritage skills into the labor and aesthetics dual education in higher vocational environmental art programs. However, it has also exposed some pressing practical issues that need to be addressed. In terms of implementation outcomes, students labor literacy and aesthetic awareness have shown a trend of coordinated improvement. Through systematic technical training, students gradually mastered the operational standards of core processes such as selecting Ying Stone materials, washing stones, and bonding them. For example, in a school-enterprise joint project, when designing an artificial hill with Ying Stone for a community park, the student team could reasonably plan the assembly scheme based on the differences in stone texture and density, and their work was recognized by corporate mentors. This improvement in standardization is not only reflected in technical operations but also in a shift in professional attitude. As students continuously adjusted the angles of the stones, they gradually understood that the spirit of "striving for excellence" is not an abstract concept but a meticulous attention to detail in specific practices[5]In terms of aesthetic education, the curriculum has effectively promoted the deep integration of traditional aesthetics and modern design. Students creations have begun to break away from mere imitation of traditional forms, attempting to transform British stone elements into contemporary design language that aligns with current aesthetics. For instance, a group of students designed an urban cultural and creative space using British stone as the base material paired with acrylic, creating a visual effect of "dialogue between tradition and the future" through the contrast of reality and abstraction. This innovative practice demonstrates that teaching intangible cultural heritage skills can inspire students cultural awareness, encouraging them to actively explore contemporary expressions of local aesthetics while inheriting traditions. Additionally, real-world design tasks in school-enterprise cooperation projects also prompt students to deeply consider the social value of skill application. For example, when designing a British stone signage system for a rural cultural tourism project, students need to balance the recognizability of cultural symbols with modern aesthetic demands, which strengthens their design ethics and problem-solving abilities.

4.2. Existing problems

However, the implementation of the course still faces challenges in both resources and mechanisms. In terms of resource limitations, the scarcity and high cost of natural stone materials constrain the large-scale promotion of teaching. Some institutions, due to limited funding, have attempted to use artificial stones as substitutes for natural ones. However, the material differences make it difficult for students to experience the authentic texture and surface variations of traditional craftsmanship. Moreover, insufficient practical training equipment leads to some practical sessions being superficial, such as the lack of specialized cutting tools, which forces students to rely on simulation exercises to master stone processing techniques, leaving their practical skills underdeveloped. In terms of faculty collaboration, there are differences in teaching philosophies between intangible cultural heritage bearers and university teachers, which hinders the deepening of the course. Bearers focus more on the authentic transmission of skills, often adhering strictly to traditional procedures, while university teachers emphasize design innovation and interdisciplinary integration, advocating for the introduction of modern technology tools into teaching. For example, in the "Digital Modeling of Natural Stone" topic, bearers believe that virtual design can diminish students perception of physical materials, whereas teachers argue that digitalization is essential for improving design efficiency. If this ideological conflict is not effectively resolved, it may lead to fragmented teaching content, thereby weakening the laborThe synergistic effect of American and Chinese education.

4.3. Optimization suggestions

To address the aforementioned issues, optimizing the path requires tackling resource integration and mechanism innovation from two aspects. Deepening cooperation between schools and enterprises is key to solving resource challenges. For instance, a vocational college has established an "Intangible Cultural Heritage Skills Industry-Education Integration Base" with an English stone company. The enterprise provides materials and equipment support for practical training, while the school supplies technical talents with creative abilities to the enterprise, thus forming a virtuous cycle of resource sharing. Additionally, it is necessary to explore lightweight and low-cost alternative materials, such as

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using 3D printing technology to replicate the texture of English stones in composite materials. This approach can reduce teaching costs while preserving the aesthetic characteristics of traditional craftsmanship. To overcome obstacles in faculty collaboration, a systematic training mechanism is needed. Regular workshops on "Intangible Cultural Heritage Skills and Design Innovation" should be held, inviting inheritors and teachers to participate in course development. Case studies can be used to facilitate the integration of ideas between both parties. For example, during a joint lesson preparation session, an inheritor demonstrates traditional English stone landscape techniques, while teachers combine modern landscape design cases to analyze the potential application of traditional skills in public art, thereby formulating a teaching plan that balances skill inheritance and innovation. This collaborative model respects the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage while also adapting it to contemporary needs. Responding to the needs, it provides a feasible way for the deep integration of labor and beauty education.

5. Conclusions

Intangible cultural heritage skills integrated with the labor and aesthetic education of higher vocational environmental art majors have provided a new path for vocational education reform, one that is rich in cultural depth and practical value. This study uses the English stone course as an example to demonstrate the dual effectiveness of intangible cultural heritage skills in the synergy between labor education and aesthetic education: on one hand, skill practice enhances students craftsmanship spirit and professional identity through embodied labor experiences; on the other hand, the creative transformation of traditional aesthetics also stimulates students cultural awareness and design thinking. This integrated model responds to the policy requirement of "integration of five educations," and through methods such as school-enterprise collaboration and curriculum restructuring, it builds a bridge for the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and innovation in professional education. Future research can broaden the scope of intangible cultural heritage skills, incorporating regionally distinctive traditional crafts like pottery and wood carving into the curriculum system, thus forming an interdisciplinary, multi-level "intangible cultural heritage + labor and aesthetic education" teaching matrix. At the same time, it is necessary to deepen the school-enterprise cooperation mechanism, promoting long-term cooperation such as joint construction of practical training bases and collaborative faculty development, and leveraging digital technology to develop virtual simulation training resources to address resource limitations in traditional craft teaching. This will promote the coordinated development of vocational education and intangible cultural heritage protection, providing systematic support for the cultivation of cultural confidence and high-quality technical and skilled talents.

Acknowledgement

Guangdong Provincial General University Youth Innovation Talent Project (Philosophy and Social Sciences) Research on the Integrated Development of Labor Education and Aesthetic Education in Higher Vocational Colleges —— Taking the teaching of "Intangible Cultural Heritage" course in art design major in higher vocational colleges as an example (2022WQNCX179)

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