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Breaking Walls and Reconstructing: Practical Exploration of AIGC Empowering Non-Art Professional Aesthetic Education Courses

Chen Guangyu¹, Zahari Bin Ishak²

^{1,2}Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology,

Jalan Ikram-Uniten, 43000 Kajang, Selangor,

Malaysia

Abstract.

In the context of intelligent technology deeply embedded in the educational ecosystem, AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content) technology has brought profound transformation from concept to form in aesthetic education courses for non-art majors. This study approaches from the practical perspective of frontline university teachers, adopts qualitative research methods, and systematically examines the application of AIGC technology in aesthetic education courses for non-art majors through in-depth interviews with 12 instructors and participatory observation of four courses. The study found that the intervention of AIGC solved the long-standing structural dilemma of non-art students facing "strong aesthetic perception but weak creative expression" through "low-threshold creation," promoting the transformation of teaching from knowledge lecturing to practical generation. On this basis, this paper extracts three practical mechanisms: "pre-positioning aesthetic judgment," "process-based aesthetic dialogue," and "interdisciplinary aesthetic transfer," and proposes countermeasures to address risks such as the erosion of aesthetic subjectivity and narrowed aesthetic perception in technological applications, hoping to provide references for the practical transformation of aesthetic education in universities in the intelligent era.

Keywords:

AIGC technology; Non-art majors; Aesthetic education; Practical application

1. Introduction

Aesthetic education plays an irreplaceable role in the talent cultivation system of universities. In 2023, the Ministry of Education issued the "Notice on Fully Implementing the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action," clearly requiring that: Aesthetic education to immerse students, teachers with aesthetic education, and schools with aesthetic education (Zhao, 2025). Under this policy direction, aesthetic education courses offered to non-art students aim not only to impart aesthetic knowledge but also to cultivate students' aesthetic perception, judgment, and creativity. However, a practical challenge that has troubled frontline teachers for years remains unresolved: when courses target students from diverse backgrounds such as humanities, sciences, engineering, and medicine lacking professional art training, how can aesthetic education move from "discussing

beauty on paper" to "putting it into practice"? In nearly three years of teaching practice, I have deeply felt a "silent dilemma"—in class, students can make theoretically sound aesthetic analyses of classic artworks, but when asked to "create a work with aesthetic significance," most students find themselves at a loss, revealing the core contradiction in non-art major aesthetic education: there is a gap between aesthetic cognition and aesthetic creation, built by "technical barriers."

In recent years, the rapid iteration of generative AI technology has provided technical possibilities for bridging this gap. When students can generate images, music, and design works through natural language conversations with AI, the threshold for creation is lowered like never before. But the emergence of technological tools does not automatically solve educational problems -- how can AIGC tools be transformed into effective teaching resources? How can we leverage technological convenience while maintaining the humanistic quality of aesthetic education? Answering these questions requires returning to the front lines of teaching practice (Xiao et al., 2026). This study, based on this practical concern and from the practical perspective of frontline university teachers, examines the practical application of AIGC technology in aesthetic education courses for non-art majors, attempting to answer three progressive questions: How is AIGC used in aesthetic education classrooms? What changes have been brought about after its use? What do these changes mean for the essence of aesthetic education (Qi & Peh, 2026)?

2. Research Design and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm because AIGC-empowered aesthetic education is a dynamic practice process in the process of generation, with its effects and significance embedded in specific teaching contexts and difficult to fully capture through quantitative indicators. The core purpose of the research is to understand "meaning" rather than measure "effect."

2.1 Selection of Research Subjects

Based on the principle of "purposive sampling," the researchers selected research subjects with typicality and difference. The final inclusion included aesthetic education courses for non-art students from six universities: four regular undergraduate institutions and two higher vocational institutions. These courses covered various types such as "Art Perception and Aesthetic Experience," "AI-Assisted Art Creation," "Visual Culture and Digital Aesthetics," and "Design Thinking and Aesthetic Expression." A total of 12 instructors were interviewed in depth, including 3 with less than 5 years of teaching experience, 6 with 5–10 years, and 3 with over 10 years; Disciplinary backgrounds include art, design, education, computer science, and others. At the student level, data collection is mainly conducted through classroom observation and analysis of works.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection cycle covers a full academic year's teaching practice. Main collection methods include: semi-structured in-depth interviews (60–90 minutes each), classroom participatory observation (no fewer than 3 sessions per course), syllabus and lesson plan analysis, and collection of student works and learning reflection documents. Data analysis uses a thematic analysis method, following a six-step process of "familiarizing with the data -- generating initial code -- finding the theme -- reviewing the topic -- defining the theme -- writing the report." (Sandhiya & Bhuvaneswari, 2025) Through continuous coding comparison and theme refinement, three core themes and their interrelationships in AIGC aesthetic education practice were ultimately formed.

3. Practical Scenario: Multidimensional Application of AIGC in Aesthetic Education Classrooms

3.1 From "Verbal Description" to "Visual Generation": Visual Activation of Aesthetic Perception

In traditional non-art education classes, teachers often face an awkward situation: the effect of describing "what beauty is" in words is extremely limited -- you can describe the color relationships in Van Gogh's "Starry Night" in a thousand sentences, but it is not as good as letting students see a similar style firsthand. However, appreciating classic works ultimately means "seeing others' beauty," not "generating one's own beauty." The first thing AIGC does in is change the structure of this "viewing." In a university's course "Artistic Perception and Aesthetic Experience," the teacher designed a teaching segment called "Images in the Mind": students describe a scene in their memory with aesthetic significance in words, then use AIGC tools to convert the text into images, and finally compare the generated image with their own "inner vision" for reflection. A student from the economics and management program wrote: "I described the jujube trees and moonlight in my grandmother's yard when I was a child. The AI-generated images were beautiful, but not the courtyard I remembered." Later, I adjusted the description, adding details like 'rough bark' and 'a stone table missing a corner,' making the image much closer. It was only during this process that I realized that the truly beautiful things in my memory were not composition or color, but those specific touches and temperatures. " This case reveals a deep teaching mechanism: when students must describe "beauty" to AI in precise language, they actually undergo a process of "externalization" and "objectification" of aesthetic perception. Vague aesthetic perceptions must be transformed into clear verbal instructions, while AI-generated images become a "mirror"—students re-examine and refine their own aesthetic experiences by comparing "generated images" with "images in their minds." This is precisely the unique educational value of AIGC: it is not just about "helping students draw pictures," but also "helping students clearly see what they truly have in their hearts and what they want." (Han, 2026)

3.2 From "Copying Classics" to "Style Dialogue": Practical Exercises in Aesthetic Judgment

There has long been an inertia of "appreciation-style teaching" in non-art education -- students are required to analyze the "why classic works are beautiful," but are rarely asked to make their own aesthetic choices. This leads to students' aesthetic knowledge remaining at the level of "perception," making it difficult to translate into "judgment" skills. The emergence of AIGC tools has changed this situation. In a university's course "Visual Culture and Digital Aesthetics," the teacher set a "style spectrum" creation task: students used the same text description (such as "morning in the city") and asked AI to generate images in different styles such as minimalism, expressionism, ukiyo-e, cyberpunk, etc., then chose the version they thought was "most beautiful" and wrote the reason for their choice. Classroom observation records show that this seemingly simple task sparked a very lively aesthetic discussion. Students no longer repeated the textbook definition of style but had to make judgments based on their own feelings: "The minimalist version leaves too much blank space; I feel a bit empty. The expressionist version may have exaggerated colors, but that noisy feeling is like squeezing into the subway every morning." Another student disagreed: "It is precisely because it is empty that the 'morning' has a quiet strength."

In interviews, the teacher distilled this phenomenon: In the past, I taught style, students took notes, and during exams they dictated. Now, students switch back and forth, compare, and choose among several styles through AI. They are not learning about style, but practicing their aesthetic judgment. Every choice is a judgment exercise, and AI provides the conditions to make this practice possible

-- without AI, students cannot obtain different styles of the same content and compare them in a short time (Kanchon et al., 2024).

This finding has important educational significance: AIGC has transformed the "aesthetic judgment training" in aesthetic education classes from "theoretical talk" into "sand table simulation." Students are faced with a series of comparable aesthetic options, rather than isolated, unchangeable classics

3.3 From "Submission of Assignments" to "Process Performance": A Visible Presentation of Aesthetic Growth

The evaluation dilemma of traditional aesthetic education courses is that result-oriented works often fail to reflect the true aesthetic growth of non-art students. A student with zero art background may have basic skills created with AI assistance, but the aesthetic reflection and judgment they experience during creation may be profound and rich. If only "works" are evaluated, the most important educational achievements are missed. The application of AIGC provides a technical opportunity to solve this dilemma. In a university's "AI-Assisted Art Creation" course, teachers designed students' creative processes as "visual learning files": every interaction with AI (prompt design—generated results—modifications and adjustments—regeneration) is recorded, forming an "aesthetic decision chain." The final exam is not about submitting a work, but about presenting this "decision chain" and explaining the key choices within it. One student's end-of-term presentation was impressive. His final work was a city skyline between ink and abstraction, but the focus was not on the finished product but on five major adjustments during the process: the first time, the AI-generated style was realistic photography, which he felt was "too photolike, lacking imagination"; the second time, he switched to ink style, feeling it was "too traditional and lacked a sense of the times"; the third time, adding geometric elements, feeling "disjointed"; until the fifth time, when he layered semi-transparent glowing blocks on the ink wash foundation, he found the "dialogue between tradition and modernity" he wanted. The course instructor mentioned in an interview: "This student showed me what true aesthetic growth looks like." He wasn't learning how to use AI, but was exploring his own aesthetic taste through AI. Behind every adjustment was an aesthetic judgment—"This is wrong, why is it wrong?" "That is better, what is good about it?" This process of thinking is far more valuable than a perfect piece of work."

This practice demonstrates that the value of AIGC in aesthetic education evaluation lies in shifting the focus from the aesthetic quality of the work to the quality and growth of aesthetic decisions, shifting the process evaluation of aesthetic education from a concept to an operational one (Tao & Wang, 2026).

4. Mechanism Refinement: The triple logic of AIGC aesthetic education practice

Based on an in-depth analysis of the above practical landscape, this study attempts to extract the deeper mechanisms by which AIGC empowers aesthetic education in non-art majors.

4.1 Aesthetic Judgment Advanced: After technical barriers are eliminated, the focus of ability shifts

In traditional aesthetic education practice, "creation" comes after "appreciation," and there is a technical gap between the two. Students must first master certain artistic techniques before they can transform their aesthetic ideas into creative practice. This means that a large number of non-art students without opportunities for technique training are permanently excluded from the door of "aesthetic creation." The involvement of AIGC has broken this structure. Technique is no longer the prerequisite for creation; aesthetic judgment has instead become the core of creation (Cao, 2026) -- students don't need to know how to draw, but they need to be able to "judge what looks good"; They don't need to understand composition, but they need to "distinguish what sounds

good." The creative process has been reversed: aesthetic judgment has shifted from the "endpoint" of creation to the "starting point" and the "core that runs throughout."

This inversion does not lower the requirements for aesthetic education, but shifts its focus from "technical training" to "cultivating the mind"—this is precisely the direction non-art majors should focus on.

4.2 Human-Machine Collaborative Dialogue: Deepening Aesthetic Understanding Through Repeated Interaction

AIGC is not a "one-click generation" point-and-shoot camera; its educational value lies precisely in the process of using it. Every effective AI-assisted creation involves a cycle of "intention expression -- generating feedback -- perception and comparison -- adjusting intent." This cycle is essentially a process of deepening aesthetic cognition: When students first describe their ideas to AI, they often use vague, general language (such as "draw a beautiful picture"). The rough results generated by AI force students to reflect: "What exactly do I want?" To obtain more satisfactory results, students are forced to convert vague aesthetic preferences into more precise and distinctive descriptions. Under this "pressure," students' aesthetic perception becomes increasingly refined, and their judgments become clearer. Several interviewed teachers unanimously mentioned a phenomenon: after a semester of AIGC-assisted creative training, students' language expression skills -- especially their ability to accurately describe aesthetic feelings—have significantly improved. "They no longer say 'this is good,' but instead say, 'This version's color saturation is too high, weakening the sense of calmness in the theme.'" Refined aesthetic training ultimately externalizes into refined language, and in turn, refined language promotes further refinement of aesthetic perception (Hagman, 2025).

4.3 Interdisciplinary Aesthetic Transfer: Mutual Penetration of Professional Experience and Aesthetic Experience

A unique advantage of non-art students receiving aesthetic education is that their professional background can provide distinctive knowledge resources and perceptual perspectives for aesthetic experiences. The flexibility of AIGC makes this interdisciplinary aesthetic transfer possible.

The study observed: architecture students used AI to generate parametric installation art based on structural mechanics; biology students used AI to transform microscopic cellular structures into visual patterns with aesthetic value; computer science students tried to train their own style models, transforming concepts like "recursion" and "loop" from code logic into visual language.

These practices reveal an important trend: when "creation" is no longer limited by "techniques," every discipline can become fertile ground for aesthetic education, and every professional perspective can be transformed into a unique aesthetic viewpoint. AIGC plays a role here as a "translator", translating languages from different disciplines into perceptible aesthetic forms, thereby truly integrating aesthetic education into the fabric of professional education (Pan et al., 2026).

5. Reflection and Boundaries: Aesthetic Concerns in Technological Empowerment

5.1 Concerns about "Aesthetic Subjectivity."

During the interview, a warning voice repeatedly appeared. A teacher with over twenty years of teaching experience frankly said, "What worries me most is not students using AI, but that students are being used by AI." As AI-generated images become more exquisite and faster, will students gradually lose their own aesthetic judgments -- after all, AI will judge for them?"

This concern is not unfounded. Observations have found that a few students display a one-way "generate–receive" pattern when using AI: input a prompt, the AI-generated result is directly

adopted, without modification or reflection. In this model, students degrade from "creators" to "receivers," with aesthetic judgments outsourced to algorithms.

To address this risk, the key lies in deliberate intervention in instructional design—not letting students stop at "one generation and then finishing," but forcing multiple rounds of iteration, recording the reasons for each choice, and critically examining AI's "default aesthetics." The essence of aesthetic education is "making people human"; no matter how powerful technology is, it is still just a tool (*The Archive of Silence(s)*, n.d.).

5.2 Narrowing of "Aesthetic Diversity"

The training data of AIGC models determines that their generated content has an inherent "statistical preference"—it tends to produce the "most typical" and "most average-level" aesthetic styles. If overreliance on AI generation is used, students' aesthetic perspectives may be invisibly constricted to the "algorithmic average," and works that deviate from the mainstream, are not "attractive" enough, but have unique aesthetic value are excluded. In practice, many teachers have recognized this issue and adopted countermeasures: they have included a dedicated section on "aesthetic critiques of AI-generated content" in teaching, guiding students to analyze the "stylistic origins," "implicit biases," and "blind spots" of AI works, while introducing a large number of challenging non-algorithm-generated artworks as reference points.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the application of AIGC technology in aesthetic education courses for non-art majors from the practical perspective of frontline university teachers. The study finds that AIGC, through its unique approach of "low-threshold creation," effectively bridges the gap between aesthetic cognition and aesthetic creation among non-art students, promoting the transformation of aesthetic education classrooms from "knowing beauty" to "creating beauty" practice. Its deeper value lies not in providing convenient creative tools, but in reconstructing the competency structure of aesthetic education—making aesthetic judgment replace technical training at the core, and making processual aesthetic dialogue replace result-oriented work evaluation as the focus. Of course, this transformation is still ongoing. The true potential of AIGC to empower aesthetic education lies not in making every student an artist, but in helping each student become a "sensitive individual" more deeply—this is precisely the simplest and most fundamental mission of aesthetic education. In an era of accelerated technological iteration, staying true to this humanistic mission may be more important than any technological application strategy.

Statements and Declarations

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Author Contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. This project was conducted jointly by the authors. The authors reviewed and agreed to the final manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

About the Authors**Chen Guangyu**

Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, Malaysia

Zahari Bin Ishak

Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, Malaysia

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