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Aesthetic Integration in Children's Calligraphy:
Teachers' and experts' perspectives

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Abstract
This qualitative study explores how aesthetic education can be integrated into calligraphy instruction for elementary-aged children. Semi-structured interviews with two primary school calligraphy teachers and three calligraphy education experts examined the need for a new teaching module, current practices, classroom challenges, and ways to engage low-interest learners. Participants highlighted age-appropriate instruction, cultural themes, and interactive activities, while noting constraints such as limited class time, short attention spans, and insufficient resources. Findings suggest that effective integration of aesthetic principles requires innovative module design, cross-disciplinary approaches, and stronger teacher development, offering guidance for future curriculum planning.

Keywords: Calligraphy Education, Aesthetic Education, Cultural Appreciation, Elementary Education

1.0 Introduction
Chinese calligraphy has long been valued not only as a handwriting skill but as a cultural art form embodying profound historical and aesthetic meaning. In recent years, educational authorities in China have emphasized the importance of aesthetic education in schools (Yang, Zhang et al., 2025), reflecting a global trend to cultivate students' creativity and cultural awareness. Calligraphy, as a unique traditional art, offers rich material for such aesthetic instruction (Liu, 2024). However, existing calligraphy classes often focus on technical drills and lack cohesive curricula, leaving little room for aesthetic engagement (Wei, Talib et al., 2025). For example, Liu (2024) observes that university-level calligraphy courses typically have scattered content and insufficient emphasis on artistic appreciation. In contrast, policy documents call for strengthening aesthetic literacy through cultural subjects. There is thus a pressing need to explore how elementary calligraphy instruction can integrate aesthetic education. This study addresses that gap by conducting semi-structured interviews with both practicing calligraphy teachers and academic experts. The goal is to identify opportunities and challenges in cultivating children's aesthetic appreciation through calligraphy, and to suggest pedagogical strategies for effective integration. It further seeks to determine the key opportunities and challenges perceived by both teachers and experts. Finally, the study aims to establish pedagogical strategies that can enhance children's aesthetic development through calligraphy.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Differences in Calligraphy Education at Home and Abroad

Chinese calligraphy uses Chinese characters, which are visually complex and culturally embedded. Unlike alphabetic writing systems, Chinese characters are composed of intricate strokes and radicals, reflecting thousands of years of history (Wei, Talib et al., 2025). Accordingly, calligraphy education in China and other East Asian countries (e.g., Japan, Korea) traditionally combines handwriting instruction with cultural heritage (for example, learning character history and classical texts) (Wei, Talib et al., 2025). In these contexts, calligraphy is often part of national curricula or cultural courses, aiming to instill aesthetic sensibility and cultural identity in students. In contrast, in many Western educational settings, Chinese calligraphy is not a required subject but is taught primarily through language or art electives, often with a greater focus on cultural appreciation than on skill mastery. The literature notes that while Chinese calligraphy education emphasizes cultural and aesthetic values, it also faces modern challenges. For instance, Liu and Champadaeng (2024) report that in contemporary society traditional calligraphy faces marginalization due to technology and changing interests. Calligraphy's decline in daily use has made its classroom integration more difficult (Cao & Champadaeng, 2024). Overall, the pedagogical approaches differ: Chinese teachers may integrate calligraphy with moral and historical education, whereas overseas programs may treat it as a creative art activity within Asian studies (Wei, Talib et al., 2025). This study examines specifically the Chinese primary education context, where bridging tradition and modern aesthetic education is a current concern.

2.2 Current Status and Challenges of Aesthetic Education in Children's Calligraphy

Educational authorities in China have called for strengthening aesthetic education across subjects. Recent policy documents (e.g., the 2020 Ministry of Education guidelines) explicitly encourage integrating artistic and cultural elements into the curriculum (Yang, Zhang et al., 2025). In practice, scholars note that art education in schools often lacks a systematic structure (Liu, 2024), and calligraphy classes specifically tend to focus on technique over appreciation. For example, Liu (2024) describes calligraphy courses where theoretical knowledge and practice are taught, but there is insufficient content for fostering genuine aesthetic appreciation (Liu, 2024). In the teacher education literature, some studies have explored how calligraphy can serve aesthetic pedagogy: Yang et al. (2025) note that integrating calligraphy with aesthetic education can improve pre-service teachers' judgment of beauty (Yang, Zhang et al., 2025). However, most research focuses on adult learners or general art education, with few investigations targeting primary school settings. Challenges reported include insufficient class hours for calligraphy, a shortage of qualified instructors, and outdated teaching materials. Furthermore, students often perceive repetitive practice as boring, undermining motivation. Online and digital tools remain underused: although some innovative programs exist, overall adoption of technology in calligraphy teaching is limited (Liu, 2024). Thus, while policy and theory support aesthetic goals, the reality in children's calligraphy education is that curricula and pedagogy have yet to fully realize those aspirations.

2.3 Literature Review Summary

Overall, the literature underscores calligraphy's value for developing cultural literacy and aesthetic sensitivity (Liu, 2024), but highlights a gap between educational ideals and classroom practice. Scholars agree that innovative approaches (e.g., cross-disciplinary projects, multimedia integration) are needed to make calligraphy teaching more engaging and meaningful(Yang, Zhang et al., 2025). Existing studies also point to the benefits of calligraphy practice for students' concentration, creativity, and perseverance(Cao & Champadaeng, 2024). Yet in elementary education, empirical research is sparse. This review thus establishes the context: calligraphy has recognized educational potential, and aesthetic education is a national priority, but implementing these together in children's schooling is complex and requires investigation. The present study fills this gap by gathering qualitative data from practitioners to reveal how aesthetic education might be effectively infused into children's calligraphy instruction and what obstacles must be overcome.

3.0 Methodology

A qualitative interview study was conducted. We recruited two groups of participants by purposive sampling: (1) Primary school calligraphy teachers (n=2): both were female teachers with master's degrees in calligraphy and over five years of teaching experience. They were responsible for designing calligraphy lesson plans and curricula in their schools. (2) Calligraphy education experts (n=3): all held Ph.D. degrees in calligraphy education, had researched the field for over five years, and worked in Chinese universities. These experts focus on cultivating calligraphic and aesthetic competence in teacher education and on methods for teaching calligraphy (including aesthetics) at earlier school stages.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant. The interview guide covered questions and topics for teachers and experts, including:

Questions & Topics（Teachers)	
A	Is it necessary to design and develop a new calligraphy teaching module?
B	Challenges when teaching calligraphy to children aged 9-12.
C	Experiences as a calligraphy teacher and the methods you use to teach aesthetics in your classroom.
D	Strategies for engaging students who are uninterested in calligraphy or art.
E	View the role of calligraphy in cultivating children's cultural appreciation.

Questions & Topics（Experts）
A   Is it necessary to design and develop a new calligraphy teaching module?
B   Challenges educators face when implementing calligraphy education at the primary school level (children aged 9-12).
C   Suggestions and opinions on integrating aesthetic education principles into the new calligraphy teaching module.
D   Perspective on the potential of calligraphy in fostering children's cultural heritage awareness and appreciation.
E   Recommendations and insights for future research or development related to calligraphy education.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A thematic content analysis was performed: interview transcripts were coded according to the question topics and emergent themes. Key ideas were identified and categorized (e.g., curriculum design, student engagement, teaching obstacles). Trustworthiness was supported by using the same interviewer (for consistency) and by comparing responses across participants. The resulting themes form the basis of the findings reported below.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Experts' Perspectives (E1–E3)
Experts consistently emphasized that a new Calligraphy Teaching Module (CTM) is necessary to shift the focus from mechanical skill training to a balance of technique and aesthetic cultivation. For instance, E1 stressed the "overemphasis on skills" in current practice, calling for a redesigned module to address this gap.

Table 1. Experts – Necessity of a New Module

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Excerpts (English/Chinese bilingual)
Necessity of a New Module	Experts emphasized the need for a new CTM to balance technique with aesthetic cultivation.	E1: "A new module is essential because current calligraphy teaching focuses too much on skills and neglects aesthetics." E1: "新的教学模块是必要的，因为目前的书法教学过于强调技能，忽视了审美。"

A key challenge identified was the lack of systematic aesthetic training for primary school teachers, coupled with limited teaching time and insufficient resources. E2 specifically noted that many teachers lack aesthetic literacy, making integration difficult.

Table 2. Experts – Challenges in Implementation

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Excerpts (English/Chinese bilingual)
Challenges	Experts noted a lack of trained teachers, limited time in the curriculum, and insufficient resources.	E2: "Primary teachers often lack systematic training in aesthetics, which makes integration difficult." E2: "小学教师往往缺乏系统的审美训练，这使得融入审美变得困难。"

Experts advocated embedding aesthetic appreciation, cultural history, and creative expression into CTM. E3 emphasized guiding students beyond brush skills toward structural and compositional beauty.

Table 3. Experts – Integration of Aesthetic Principles

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Excerpts (English/Chinese bilingual)
Integration	Suggested connecting calligraphy with art appreciation, cultural history, and creativity.	E3: "We should not only teach brush skills but also guide students to feel beauty through structure and composition." E3: "我们不仅要教毛笔技巧，还要引导学生通过结构和章法去感受美。"

Experts consistently highlighted calligraphy as a form of living cultural heritage that helps children develop cultural identity and respect for tradition. E1 noted its role in connecting children with national heritage.

Table 4. Experts – Calligraphy and Cultural Heritage

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Excerpts (English/Chinese bilingual)
Heritage	Experts emphasized calligraphy as a living cultural heritage that builds identity and cultural pride.	E1: "Calligraphy connects children with Chinese heritage and fosters respect for tradition." E1: "书法将儿童与中华文化遗产联系起来，培养他们对传统的尊重。"

Experts pointed to the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, practice-based research, and stronger policy support. E2 suggested future studies should explicitly connect pedagogy with cultural heritage preservation.

Table 5. Experts – Future Directions

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Excerpts (English/Chinese bilingual)
Future	Experts called for interdisciplinary research, more practice-based resources, and policy support.	E2: "Future research should link pedagogy with cultural heritage preservation." E2: "未来的研究应将教学法与文化遗产保护相结合。"

4.2 Teachers' Perspectives (T1–T2)

Teachers also supported the development of a new CTM, particularly as a way to make calligraphy more engaging and enjoyable for students. T1 emphasized the importance of balancing skill development with enjoyment.

Table 6. Teachers – Necessity of a New Module

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Teachers(English/Chinese bilingual)
Necessity	Teachers believe a new CTM is needed to stimulate interest and integrate aesthetic goals.	T1: "Yes, children need a module that makes calligraphy both skillful and enjoyable." T1: "是的，孩子们需要一个既能学技能又能享受乐趣的模块。"

Teachers reported incorporating aesthetic methods such as posture correction, structural analysis, and the appreciation of classical works. T2 highlighted the practice of integrating posture training with appreciation activities.

Table 7. Teachers – Teaching Experience and Aesthetic Methods

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Teachers(English/Chinese bilingual)
Aesthetic Methods	Teachers integrate posture training, character structure, and art appreciation in daily lessons.	T2: "I often combine posture correction with appreciating famous calligraphy works." T2: "我经常把坐姿纠正与名家书法作品赏析结合起来。"

Teachers identified challenges such as limited class hours, lack of student focus, and insufficient parental support. T1 stressed that some parents undervalue calligraphy, which undermines its effectiveness.

Table 8. Teachers – Challenges in Classroom Practice

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Teachers(English/Chinese bilingual)
Challenges	Teachers face limited class hours, students' declining handwriting habits, and a lack of parental support.	T1: "Some children struggle to focus, and parents see calligraphy as unimportant." T1: "有些孩子很难集中注意力，家长也认为书法不重要。"

To motivate less interested students, teachers employed strategies such as festive calligraphy activities and competitions. T2 described how Spring Festival couplets fostered excitement even among reluctant learners.

Table 9. Teachers – Engaging Less Interested Students

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Teachers(English/Chinese bilingual)
Engagement	Teachers use competitions, festive activities, and creative practice to engage students.Declining handwriting habits and lack of parental support.	T2: "During the Spring Festival, writing couplets excites even less interested students." T2: "在春节期间写对联，即便是不太感兴趣的学生也会很兴奋。"

Teachers underscored the cultural role of calligraphy in helping students appreciate heritage and identity. T1 described calligraphy as both technique and culture.

Table 10. Teachers – Calligraphy and Cultural Appreciation

Theme	Core Insights	Selected Teachers(English/Chinese bilingual)
Cultural Appreciation	Teachers see calligraphy as a key to cultivating cultural respect and identity in children.	T1: "Through calligraphy, students understand that writing is part of culture, not only technique." T1: "通过书法，学生明白书写不仅是技能，更是文化的一部分。"

4.3 Summary of Findings

Both experts and teachers agreed on the necessity of a new CTM and the cultural significance of calligraphy. However, differences emerged in emphasis: experts stressed systemic reform and integration of aesthetics, while teachers focused more on practical classroom strategies and student engagement. These complementary perspectives highlight the importance of designing a CTM that is both pedagogically sound and practically adaptable.

5.0 Discussion

The findings reveal a convergence between practitioner insights and educational theory. Both teachers and experts underscored calligraphy's unique value in aesthetic and cultural education, echoing prior literature. For example, Liu (2024) highlights calligraphy's role in cultivating cultural self-confidence, a benefit our respondents also emphasized. The necessity of innovative teaching modules aligns with scholarly calls for curriculum diversification. Chen et al. (2025) specifically advocate place-based and techno-cultural approaches in calligraphy pedagogy to move beyond rote drills. Our participants' suggestions—to integrate technology, local culture, and participatory projects—resonate with these ideas: embedding calligraphy in community or festival contexts and using digital tools could enhance aesthetic sensitivity and engagement (Chen, Maaruf et al., 2025).

Many of the challenges identified (student motivation, limited class time, resource constraints) match those reported in general art education research (Malytska, Chabanenko et al., 2022). The teachers' frustration with repetitive drills is well-documented, and the experts' call for multimedia and storytelling echoes best practices in creative pedagogy. Our results support Wei et al. (2025), who found that calligraphy practice develops cognitive and affective skills (attention, creativity, patience) (Wei, Talib et al., 2025): respondents noted these benefits precisely as reasons to persist with calligraphy education. At the same time, the findings highlight a gap: although policy frameworks emphasize aesthetic education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023), implementation at the elementary level remains uneven. The experts' concern about a lack of evaluation mechanisms suggests that merely having standards is not enough; practical guidance and support are needed.

*5.1 Strategies for Effective Integration (*based on the data and literature)*:*

1）Differentiated module design: teaching module should be tiered by grade and skill level, with concrete aesthetic and cultural objectives at each stage (e.g. storytelling for younger children, artistic composition for older ones). This concept echoes the "place-based embodiment" idea of Chen et al. (2025), situating learning in students' cultural environment.

2）Cross-curricular integration: embedding calligraphy in Chinese language, history, or art lessons can provide a meaningful context. Teachers in this study successfully tied calligraphy to festivals and literature, which aligns with Wang et al.'s (2024) "three-fold integration" strategy of combining on- and off-campus cultural resources in aesthetic education.

3）Use of multimedia and technology: as both teachers and experts suggested, incorporating videos, animations, and digital calligraphy apps can stimulate interest. This is supported by recent research showing that integrating technology (e.g., smart devices, VR) can enhance aesthetic learning and student creativity.

4）Interactive and student-centered pedagogy: replacing pure lecturing with group activities, storytelling, and exhibitions helps sustain engagement. This practice is consistent with the broader calligraphy education literature, which recommends project-based and inquiry-driven methods.

5）Teacher development and resources: Implementing aesthetic integration requires well-trained teachers and adequate materials. Schools might offer professional development in art pedagogy and provide diverse calligraphy materials, as suggested by both the interviews and aesthetic education guidelines (Bu, 2021).

These strategies address the identified challenges: by diversifying activities and linking content to students' lives, teachers can mitigate boredom and maintain attention. By aligning with policy goals for holistic education, schools can justify allocating more time and resources to calligraphy. Importantly, the emphasis on cultural meaning (e.g., understanding the aesthetic spirit in each stroke) helps students see relevance, potentially boosting intrinsic motivation. In summary, our findings and the literature together suggest that effectively integrating aesthetic education into children's calligraphy requires a multifaceted approach involving curriculum design, pedagogy, technology, and support systems.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study explored opportunities and challenges in blending aesthetic education with children's calligraphy instruction. Through interviews, we found that both teachers and experts recognize calligraphy as a powerful tool for cultural and aesthetic education. They agree on the need for innovative curricula that incorporate traditional culture and modern methods. At the same time, they face practical constraints: limited class time, varied student engagement, and resource gaps. To capitalize on the opportunities, educators must design differentiated modules, use interactive and interdisciplinary teaching methods, and leverage digital tools (as advocated by Chen et al. 2025).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on a small sample of teachers and experts, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader educational contexts. Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported interview data rather than classroom observations or quantitative learning outcomes, which may introduce subjective bias. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than conclusive.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following actions for curriculum planners and teachers:

1）Develop tiered calligraphy curricula: Create multi-level modules that match students' age and skill, blending calligraphic technique with aesthetic goals at each stage.

2）Integrate culture and storytelling: Embed Chinese cultural content (legends, holiday themes, related art forms) into calligraphy lessons to give practice deeper meaning and context.

3）Use interactive activities: Incorporate hands-on projects, art competitions, and exhibitions to make learning engaging. Encourage student creation (e.g., designing banners or digital art) rather than passive copying.

4）Leverage technology: Employ multimedia resources (videos, animations), calligraphy apps, and possibly VR/AI tools to diversify instruction and accommodate different learning styles.

5）Train and support teachers: Provide professional development in calligraphy pedagogy and aesthetic education techniques. Equip classrooms with quality materials (various scripts, ink sets, digital devices) and access to cultural venues (museums, artist visits).

6）Policy and evaluation: School leaders and policymakers should ensure sufficient time and recognition for calligraphy/aesthetic lessons, and develop evaluation mechanisms to monitor quality (as recommended by experts).

By implementing these strategies, schools can better realize the synergy between calligraphy and aesthetic education. Future research could assess the effectiveness of specific curriculum designs and digital tools (as experts suggested), as well as the long-term impact of calligraphy practice on children's aesthetic sensibilities and academic development. In conclusion, the interviews indicate that with thoughtful curriculum innovation and support, calligraphy education can successfully cultivate children's cultural appreciation and artistic literacy – turning a traditional art form into a dynamic educational asset.

Acknowledgement

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study
This paper makes several contributions to calligraphy art education and teaching module design. First, it clarifies the necessity of integrating aesthetic education principles into traditional art courses, and connects skill training with aesthetic development through the proposal of a child-centered Calligraphy Teaching Module (CTM) for children aged 9–12. Second, it emphasizes the role of calligraphy in cultural heritage education, illustrating how it can foster children's cultural awareness and identity formation. Third, it provides teachers with practical strategies to address classroom challenges, which may support professional development in art education. Finally, by employing semi-structured interviews that combine the perspectives of experts and teachers, this study offers a methodological model for qualitative research in heritage-based art education.

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