

A Mixed-methods Study on Early Childhood Educators' Aesthetic Literacy and Aesthetic Teaching Practices

Yu-Ting Chen¹⁾

University of Taipei

Abstract

As aesthetic education has become an important component of school curricula in Taiwan, aesthetic education for children is valued in early schooling. This study explores early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in north Taiwan. The researcher conducted a mixed-methods study, including a survey and interviews, with 490 early childhood educators participating in the survey, 10 of whom participated in the interviews. The findings indicate that: (1) the early childhood educators' mean score for aesthetic teaching practices was better than that for aesthetic literacy. (2) The high achievers in aesthetic literacy had better aesthetic teaching practices than the moderate achievers and low achievers. (3) There was a significantly positive correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices. (4) The 10 interviewed early childhood educators believed that their aesthetic teaching practices were influenced by their aesthetic literacy. They played important roles as aesthetic guides and providers to help the children explore the environment, as well as exploring, creating, and appreciating the arts. This study provides a lens for examining aesthetic education in early schooling in Taiwan, as well as valuable information about early childhood aesthetic education and teacher education in an Asian context.

Keywords : aesthetic literacy, aesthetic teaching practices, arts, early childhood educators

Corresponding author, ¹⁾ ytchen@utapei.edu.tw

Introduction

As aesthetic education has become an important component of school curricula worldwide (Amadio et al., 2006), aesthetic development for young children is also valued in some western and Asian countries (Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, 2013; Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). Aesthetic education can be defined as a way of providing learning opportunities and environments for students to explore, perceive, feel, and get to know aesthetic subjects, and to put aesthetics into practice in their life (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2018). It can enable students to express their perceptions, feelings, and ideas through various modes of art. Aesthetic education has also been valued in early schooling in Taiwan. The *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* integrates the aesthetic domain into the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2012, 2016). This domain emphasizes helping young children to develop their aesthetic ability and to find enjoyment through various art media. Moreover, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan has implemented the *Mid to Long Term Plan of Aesthetic Education* from early schooling to lifelong learning (MOE, 2013, 2018). Early childhood educators are thus encouraged to implement aesthetic education in preschools in Taiwan.

Aesthetic literacy can refer to the ability and skills required to perceive aesthetic objects (Chen & Lin, 2004). Some researchers contend that educators' aesthetic literacy has a direct bearing on their implementation of aesthetic education (Lee, 2012). Some researchers have also found that elementary school teachers' aesthetic cultivation or participation in aesthetic activities is positively correlated with their aesthetic teaching (Chen, 1996; Wang, 1999). Chen (1996) further revealed that high achieving teachers participating in aesthetic activities had better aesthetic teaching practices than the moderate and low achievers. However, there is no research that reveals the relationship between early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and their aesthetic teaching practices in Taiwan. Since aesthetic education has been promoted in preschools in Taiwan, it is important for us to understand the current situation and relationship of Taiwanese early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices.

In order to gain a broad picture of early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and

aesthetic teaching practices, as well as a deeper understanding of individual early childhood educators' perspectives, mixed methods, including a survey and interviews, were employed to explore early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in Taiwan. While aesthetic literacy refers to educators' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of interacting with the arts¹, aesthetic teaching practices implies their actual practices of aesthetic education. This study can provide us with a lens for examining aesthetic education in early schooling in Taiwan, as well as valuable information about early childhood aesthetic education and teacher education in the Asian context. Based on the aim of the research as stated above, the research questions were as follows.

- (1) What is the current situation of early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in Taiwan?
- (2) Are there significant differences in aesthetic teaching practices depending on different levels of aesthetic literacy?
- (3) Is there a correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices?
- (4) What are the interviewed early childhood educators' perspectives on their aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices?

Literature Review

Aesthetic Literacy

Aesthetic literacy is the knowledge, experience, and skills required to interact with aesthetic objects². With a variety of aesthetic objects, researchers discuss the content of aesthetic literacy in different forms, such as the arts, nature, and life (Chen, 2017; Fong, 2013). This study focuses on aesthetic literacy in the arts, and therefore a discussion of aesthetic literacy in the arts is presented as follows.

¹ The arts in this study are the media of visual arts, music, and drama, which are included in the aesthetic domain in the curriculum framework in Taiwan (MOE, 2012, 2016).

² Aesthetic objects refer to the products of aesthetic appeal, such as the products of various art forms, living environment, nature, and so on.

According to Clinard and Foster (1998), aesthetic literacy is the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and habits of mind to participate in, discriminate, and reflect on one's experiences of the arts. Aesthetic literacy in the arts depends upon reading—to experience, interpret, and respond to the various forms of art, as well as writing—to communicate using verbal, musical, kinaesthetic, or visual language.

Chen and Lin (2004) pointed out that aesthetic literacy consists of four elements: knowledge of the arts, skills of arts performance and appreciation, attitudes toward the arts, and habits of participating in arts activities. In this context, the arts refer to visual arts, music, and performing arts (dance, drama, and films). Knowledge of the arts includes knowledge of art history, as well as the concepts, principles, media, and expression of the arts. Skills of arts performance imply the action of applying the expressive art media, while the skills of arts appreciation refer to the ability to appreciate works of art in various forms. Attitudes towards the arts include beliefs or feelings about the arts, and intention to participate in the arts. Habits of participating in arts activities refer to the frequency of participation in arts activities.

With the advocacy of aesthetic education in modern society and school reforms, some researchers have conducted mixed-methods research to explore the impact of aesthetic literacy programs on teachers, students, and administrators in schools (Clinard, 1999). Based on Chen and Lin's idea of aesthetic literacy, some researchers have conducted survey research to investigate aesthetic literacy of the educators, citizens, or students at elementary school level and above (Chen, 2014a; Chen & Lin 2004; Wu, 2017). In the study of preschool educators' aesthetic literacy, Chen (2014a) found that most educators maintained positive attitudes toward the arts and had the habit of engaging in arts activities. As for knowledge of the arts, they were good at understanding the features of painting. Their average skills of arts performance and arts appreciation were moderate; their visual arts skills were better than their music and performing arts (dance and drama) skills.

In addition to the studies above, there have also been studies related to teachers' aesthetic cultivation. Wang (1999) applied a survey and interviews to study elementary school teachers' aesthetic cultivation, aesthetic teaching beliefs and aesthetic teaching practices. Aesthetic cultivation refers to one's cultivation of a wide range of arts, including architecture, craft, music, dance, literature, drama, and film. Wang's findings revealed that teachers' aesthetic

cultivation was moderate, and that it was positively correlated with their aesthetic teaching beliefs and aesthetic teaching practices. In another study, Chen (1996) conducted survey research to study elementary school teachers' participation in aesthetic activities, aesthetic experiences, and aesthetic teaching. Aesthetic activities refer to the activities of literature, visual arts, music, and performing arts. The results indicated that teachers' participation in aesthetic activities was positively correlated with their aesthetic teaching. The high achievers in participating in aesthetic activities had better aesthetic teaching practices than the moderate and low achievers.

As shown above, some researchers have investigated teachers' aesthetic literacy, aesthetic cultivation, or participation in aesthetic activities in different forms of the arts (Chen, 1996; Chen, 2014a; Wang, 1999). Chen and Lin's idea of aesthetic literacy in the arts (Chen & Lin, 2004) provides us with a clear framework of aesthetic literacy—knowledge of the arts, skills of arts performance and arts appreciation, attitudes toward the arts, and habits of participating in arts activities. Since the media of visual arts, music, and drama are included in the aesthetic domain of preschool curricula, this study focuses on early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy in the visual arts, music, and drama.

Aesthetic Education in Early Childhood

Aesthetic education should begin in the early childhood period (Denac, 2014; Lim, 2004; Lin, 2015). It is helpful to develop young children's imagination and creativity, especially through the arts (Curriculum Development Council 2006; Ho, 2017). Most young children participate in various forms of art activities in their everyday life. They can enrich their learning experiences through exploring the arts and the aesthetic world. The aesthetic domain is incorporated into the early childhood curriculum in Taiwan. It emphasizes helping young children to perceive the environment, evoke their rich imagination and creation, and develop their aesthetic preferences and aesthetic literacy. It also aims to develop young children's aesthetic abilities to explore and perceive, perform and create, and respond to and appreciate the arts (MOE, 2012, 2016).

Earlier studies have explored aesthetic education in early childhood settings. Some

researchers have studied the features of aesthetic education in certain early childhood programs, such as the Bank Street, Reggio Emilia, or Waldorf school programs (Lim, 2000, 2004; Liu & Pai 2010; Yu, 2021). These studies showed that arts and aesthetics were valued at schools and were supported by the teachers. In aesthetic teaching practices, Lim (2005) found that early childhood teachers, working with 4- and 5-year-old children, provided appropriate and various arts materials for the children, valued the process of art making, and created a safe atmosphere by asking stimulating questions to help the children transform their aesthetic experiences into expressive art forms.

Since aesthetic education has been promoted in early childhood in Taiwan, studies on aesthetic education have increased. Some preschool educators conducted action research to improve their professional teaching in aesthetic education by implementing aesthetic curricula using different art media, such as visual arts, music, and drama (e.g. Cheng, 2016; Fu, 2019; Lo & Lin, 2010). Some researchers conducted research to explore preschool educators' aesthetic teaching practices. While Yang (2014) employed survey research to investigate preschool educators' teaching practices in the aesthetic domain in preschools, Chen (2014b) conducted a mixed methods study to explore preschool educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and aesthetic teaching practices. These studies revealed that the educators' background led to significant differences in their aesthetic teaching. The preschool educators agreed with the importance of aesthetic education; however, one of their difficulties was their insufficient knowledge of aesthetic education or arts appreciation.

In summary, aesthetic education for young children can be implemented through the arts. Teachers play important roles in guiding young children to explore, create, and appreciate the arts in aesthetic education. Some studies have revealed early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching practices. Although some studies have shown that elementary school teachers' aesthetic cultivation is positively correlated with their aesthetic teaching (Chen, 1996; Wang, 1999), there is no research showing the correlation between early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices. Hence, this study aimed to explore early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in Taiwan.

Method

In order to capture a general picture of early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices, as well as a deeper understanding of individual early childhood educators' perspectives, mixed methods, comprising a survey and interviews, were employed to explore early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in Taiwan. It applied the ideas of a sequential explanatory design of a mixed method approach (Hanson et al., 2005; Sung & Pan, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) and used the advantage of quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices. The quantitative data were collected by using the aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices questionnaire, followed by the qualitative data which were collected by interviewing early childhood educators. The purpose of the questionnaire was to capture a general picture of the educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in response to the first three research questions. The purpose of the individual interviews of a small group of educators was also used to explain and complement the quantitative findings, in response to the fourth research question. The research design is described as follows.

Participants

The participants were early childhood educators at public and private preschools, providing education and care for children aged 2-6, in Taipei City and New Taipei City in north Taiwan. Using cluster sampling, 541 questionnaires were distributed to the educators in the two areas. A total of 490 questionnaires were completed, equaling a retrieval rate of 90.6%. The age of the participants in this study ranged from 20 to more than 50 years old, of whom 53% had teaching experience of one to ten years, and 47% had teaching experience of 11 to 20+ years. As for their education background, 83% of the teachers had a Bachelor's degree, 11% had a Master's degree, and 6% had a high school level certificate.

Measures

The aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices scale was a self-reported questionnaire, with possible responses on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate a stronger degree of aesthetic literacy or aesthetic teaching practices. Aesthetic literacy refers to educators' knowledge, experience, and skills of interacting with aesthetic objects. The aesthetic objects in this study are the media of visual arts, music, and drama, which are included in the aesthetic domain in the curriculum framework in Taiwan (MOE, 2012). The items for the aesthetic literacy scale were based on the questionnaires of Chen and Lin (2004) and Chen (2014a). The statements could be related to the aspects of participating in arts activities, attitudes towards the arts, knowledge of the arts, and skills of arts performance and arts appreciation. Aesthetic teaching practices refers to educators' actual practices of aesthetic education. The items for the aesthetic teaching practices scale were based on the questionnaire of Chen (2014b) and the curriculum framework in Taiwan (MOE, 2012). The statements could be related to the aspects of exploring and perceiving, performing and creating, and responding and appreciating. As for content validity, five professors who specialize in early childhood education, music education, visual arts, and drama examined the questionnaire and provided feedback. A pre-test was carried out with two experienced preschool teachers. Some wordiness and unclear sentences were modified.

The internal consistency reliability for the total survey, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .95. The main questionnaire consisted of two parts, with the first part including 25 statements relating to aesthetic literacy. The Cronbach's alpha was .93 for the aesthetic literacy scale. The new categories were verified through a factor analysis. Four factors were produced, accounting for 64% of the total variance and demonstrating adequate reliability. These were habits of participating in arts appreciation activities (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$), attitudes towards the arts (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), knowledge of the arts (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$), and skills of arts performance and arts appreciation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Some item samples of visual arts are shown in Table 1.

The second part consisted of 13 statements on aesthetic teaching practices. The Cronbach's alpha is .94 for the aesthetic teaching practices scale. The new categories were verified through a factor analysis. Two factors were produced, accounting for 74% of the total

Table 1. *Samples of Items for the Aesthetic Literacy Scale*

Aspects	Items
Habits	I usually appreciate visual arts in arts exhibitions (e.g. art galleries, museums, culture centers, or any exhibitions).
Attitudes	The arts are important to me in life. Attending arts activities is important to me.
Knowledge	I understand the features of the expression of visual arts (e.g. fine art, craft, and plastic arts, etc.)
Skills	I can use at least one medium of visual arts (e.g. watercolor, clay, etc.) and its techniques. I can talk about the features of artworks with the related terms of the visual arts.

Table 2. *Samples of Items for the Aesthetic Teaching Practices Scale*

Aspects	Items
Explore the environment & create works of the arts	I provide an aesthetic environment for young children in exploration and creation.
Appreciate the arts	I guide young children to appreciate artworks with the terms of the visual arts.

variance and demonstrating adequate reliability. These were habits of guiding young children to explore the environment and create works of the arts (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), and guiding young children to appreciate the arts (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). Sample items are shown in Table 2.

Interviews

A total of 10 early childhood educators from the three groups (high/moderate/low achievers in aesthetic literacy average scores)³ in the survey volunteered to be interviewed. They were trained either in early childhood education or early childhood and care programs.

³ The participants were divided into three groups of high, moderate, and low achievers according to their average scores on the aesthetic literacy scale in the survey results-the top 27% as the high-achievers, the middle 46% as the moderate-achievers, and the remaining 27% as the low-achievers.

Their background information is presented in Table 3. The semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone, at the convenience of the participants. Each educator participated in one interview, each lasting 30–80 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 3. *Interviewees' Background Information*

Interviewees	Age	Education background	Years of teaching	Aesthetic literacy score group
Ms. Lee	40s	Master	20+	High
Ms. Lin	30s	BA	10+	High
Ms. Wen	30s	Master	10+	Moderate
Ms. Hu	30s	BA	10+	High
Ms. Chou	20s	Master	20+	Low
Ms. Wu	50s	BA	20+	Moderate
Ms. Fang	20s	BA	4	High
Ms. Cheng	40s	BA	20+	High
Ms. Wang	30s	BA	10+	Moderate
Ms. Lo	20s	BA	3	Low

The interviews were intended to obtain information regarding the early childhood educators' views on their aesthetic literacy, attitudes toward aesthetic education, ways to develop young children's aesthetic abilities, roles of teachers in aesthetic teaching, and their views on the aesthetic curriculum. Examples of the interview questions are as follows. What do you think of your aesthetic literacy? What are your attitudes toward the arts? Does your aesthetic literacy influence your aesthetic teaching? In what ways? What do you think of aesthetic education for young children? How do you help young children to develop their aesthetic abilities through the arts? What are your difficulties in aesthetic teaching?

Data Analysis

The research was conducted from October 2015 through August 2016. Ethics approval was obtained from the university Institutional Research Board in Taiwan, and therefore, this study was volunteer-based and did not intrude upon the participants in any way.

The quantitative questionnaire data were analyzed with the SPSS 18.0 program. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the educators' general situation regarding their aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices. In order to understand the differences in educators' aesthetic teaching practices in terms of different achievers⁴ in aesthetic literacy, independent-samples *t* test, one-way ANOVA, and Scheffé's method were employed. Furthermore, Pearson correlation was used to analyze the correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices.

The qualitative interview data were to explain and complement the quantitative findings. The qualitative data were analyzed using coding and categorizing (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Examples of codes include aesthetic feelings, aesthetic experience, aesthetic ability, beauty in nature, arts materials, exploring, sharing, and appreciating. Examples of categories are children's aesthetic abilities, aesthetic teaching methods, ways of arts appreciation, roles of teachers, and aesthetic teaching difficulties. Furthermore, the researcher compared the categories among the 10 participants and identified similar categories for reporting purposes. The data were triangulated by theory triangulation (literature review on aesthetic education). The participants were invited to do member checking. All the participants' names are pseudonyms.

Results

According to the research questions, the results of the early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices are presented as follows.

Current Situation of Aesthetic Literacy and Aesthetic Teaching Practices

Table 4 shows that the mean score for overall aesthetic literacy is 3.80 (*SD*=.46). The mean score for the aspect of habits of participating in arts appreciation activities is 3.51 (*SD*=.64); for attitudes towards the arts it is 4.23 (*SD*=.53); for knowledge of the arts it is 3.69 (*SD*=.61);

⁴ The participants were divided into three groups of high/moderate/low achievers according to their average aesthetic literacy scores, as mentioned earlier on page 33.

and for skills of arts performance and arts appreciation it is 3.75 ($SD=.59$). The results show that the early childhood educators scored higher on the dimension of attitudes towards the arts, and lower on the dimension of habits of participating in arts appreciation activities, and knowledge of the arts.

Table 4. *Means and Standard Deviations of the Aesthetic Literacy Scales (N=490)*

Aspect	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1) Participation	3.51	.64
(2) Attitudes	4.23	.53
(3) Knowledge	3.69	.61
(4) Skills	3.75	.59
Total	3.80	.46

Table 5 shows that the mean score for overall aesthetic teaching practices is 3.92 ($SD=.56$). The mean score for the aspect of guiding young children to explore the environment and create works of the arts is 4.02 ($SD=.56$), and for guiding young children to appreciate the arts it is 3.82 ($SD=.63$). The result indicates that the early childhood educators scored higher on the dimension of guiding young children to explore the environment and create works of the arts, and lower on the dimension of guiding them to appreciate the arts.

Table 5. *Means and Standard Deviations of the Aesthetic Teaching Practices Scales (N=490)*

Aspect	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1) Explore the environment & create works of the arts	4.02	.56
(2) Appreciate the arts	3.82	.63
Total	3.92	.56

In summary, the mean scores of the early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices were moderate. The *t*-test analysis shows that the mean scores for aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices are statistically different ($t=-6.07$, $p < .001$). This result seems to suggest that the early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy ($M=3.80$, $SD=.46$) was not as strong as their aesthetic teaching practices ($M=3.92$, $SD=.58$).

Differences in Aesthetic Teaching Practices in terms of Different Achievers in Aesthetic Literacy

Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference in aesthetic teaching practices in terms of different achievers in aesthetic literacy ($F=96.51$; $p < .001$). In a multiple comparison, the Scheffé's method shows that the high achievers ($M=4.36$; $SD=.45$) performed better than the moderate achievers ($M=3.88$; $SD=.46$) and low achievers ($M=3.56$; $SD=.51$), while the moderate achievers performed better than the low achievers. In sum, the early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy seems to lead to differences in their aesthetic teaching practices.

Table 6. *Analysis of Variance of Aesthetic Teaching Practices (N=490)*

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	Scheffé's
(1) High achievers	132	4.36	.45	96.51***	(1)>(2)
(2) Moderate achievers	227	3.88	.46		(1)>(3)
(3) Low achievers	131	3.56	.51		(2)>(3)

*** $p < .001$

Correlation between Aesthetic Literacy and Aesthetic Teaching Practices

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis reveal the significantly positive correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices ($r=.60$; $p < .01$). This indicates that the early childhood educators who performed better in aesthetic literacy tended to have better performance in aesthetic teaching practices.

Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on their Aesthetic Literacy and Aesthetic Teaching Practices

The interviewed early childhood educators believed that their aesthetic teaching practices were influenced by their aesthetic literacy. The educators who performed better in aesthetic literacy provided more information about their aesthetic teaching practices. Their perspectives on their roles as teachers in aesthetic teaching practices and the difficulties they faced in aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices are presented as follows.

Teachers as aesthetic guides to explore and perceive the beauty in life

The interviewed educators believed that teachers play an important role in guiding young children to explore and perceive the beauty in life. They shared how they guided the children to explore and perceive nature and the living environment.

For instance, Ms. Hu (high achiever in aesthetic literacy) emphasized everyday aesthetics for young children. She believed that it was important for them to explore and perceive the beauty in nature and in the environment in their everyday lives. She guided them to observe the sunset from the school bus on their way home. She further guided them to describe the changing colors of the sunset. As she explained:

The children and I sit on the school bus on the way home. We usually pass by Diving Bay... The children say, "The sun is on the sea." And then, some children say, "It is so yellow." The older child says, "It is the sunset." Some children say, "It is beautiful." Then I ask them, "Why do you feel that the sunset on the sea is beautiful?" And... I guide them to describe the sunset using different adjectives. The children use yellow, orange, blue, and white to describe the changing colors of the sunset... Whenever the school bus passes by Diving Bay, the children see the sunset and appreciate the sunset... (Interview 4, 03/02/2016).

Teachers as aesthetic environment providers to explore and create the arts

The interviewed educators believed that it was important for teachers to provide an aesthetic and beautiful environment in their classrooms, as well as various materials for young children to explore and create visual arts, music, and drama. They shared how they served as aesthetic providers as follows.

Regarding the aesthetic and beautiful environment in the classroom, the interviewed educators paid attention to the arrangement and cleanliness of the classroom environment. Some of them invited the children to decorate the environment. For example, they brought flowers from the field to decorate the classroom and arranged their tables using kitchen utensils and tablemats at lunchtime. Below are excerpts from the interviews.

Ms. Cheng (high achiever in aesthetic literacy): The children saw the little flowers and grass outside the classroom. They brought them in to make the flower arrangement in the classroom... It looked beautiful! They were in a good mood and felt happy... They enjoyed collecting the little flowers and grass (Interview 8, 18/03/2016).

Ms. Hu (high achiever in aesthetic literacy): The children can arrange the kitchen utensils and

tablemats. They ask if they are going to eat rice or noodles. They ask if they need spoons, forks, or chopsticks... They choose the plates... It gives them a good sense of life aesthetics (Interview 4, 03/02/2016).

The interviewed educators also provided various materials for the children to explore and create artworks in visual arts, music, and drama. For example, Ms. Wen (moderate achiever in aesthetic literacy) shared how she provided the children with natural and various materials to create art works, musical instruments, and props.

We used leaves... or stones, and even clam shells to make art works... As for music, we once used beans to make shakers... And I guided the children to think about what could be put in the shakers... They put in rice... and paperclips. They experienced different sounds with different shakers. As for drama, we once used gloves, cloth, and paper to make the props (Interview 3, 01/02/2016).

Teachers as aesthetic guides to respond to and appreciate the arts

The interviewed educators shared how they guided the children to respond to and appreciate the visual arts, music, and drama. In visual arts appreciation, the educators tended to guide the children to appreciate their artworks. Some educators raised open-ended questions and applied simple art elements to guide the children to talk about their artworks. For example, Ms. Lee (high achiever in aesthetic literacy) invited the children to share their artworks. She asked them open questions such as "What colors did you use? Why did you make it? How did you decide to do it? How did you make it?" (Interview 1, 28/01/2016).

In music appreciation, the interviewed educators usually invited the children to share their feelings about the music. Some educators guided the children to talk about the tempo (fast/slow) or dynamics (loudness/softness) of the music. They even guided the children to move their body to feel the tempo or dynamics of the music. As Ms. Hu (high achiever in aesthetic literacy) explained, "When you hear the fast music, you can run and jump. When you hear some patterns of rhythm, you can walk..." (Interview 4, 03/02/2016).

In drama appreciation, the young children watched drama performances in different forms, such as their peers' role plays, teachers' role plays, animated cartoons, children's drama performances, or professional children's theatres. The interviewed educators often guided the children to discuss the story, roles, or something interesting in the drama. As Ms. Lin (high achiever in aesthetic literacy) mentioned, "We invited the children to talk about the roles.

Who plays the role? And the story and something interesting in the drama” (Interview 2, 28/01/2016).

As shown above, the interviewed educators guided the children to appreciate the various art forms. They applied simple artistic elements to guide the children to describe their art works, and to share their ideas of the music they listened to and the drama performances they watched. Ms. Cheng explained that “early childhood teachers don’t know that much about artistic terminology” and she suggested that teachers “improve the aesthetic literacy in this matter” (Interview 8, 18/03/2016). This could be one of the reasons why the interviewed educators tended to apply simple artistic elements to guide the children’s arts appreciation.

In addition, some educators mentioned that they did not have enough time to participate in arts appreciation activities themselves because they sometimes had to do administrative tasks on weekends or spend time taking care of their own children. For example, Ms. Wu (moderate achiever in aesthetic literacy) explained, “We sometimes work on administration tasks on weekends. So I don’t have time to attend arts performances” (Interview 6, 04/03/2016). Ms. Wang (moderate achiever in aesthetic literacy) also explained, “It depends on the available time. I have two kids to take care of, so it’s a little bit difficult for me to attend arts performances outside of school” (Interview 9, 18/03/2016).

Discussion

This study explored early childhood educators’ aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in north Taiwan. The survey results showed that the mean scores of these early childhood educators’ aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices were moderate. However, the mean score for aesthetic teaching practices was higher than that for aesthetic literacy. This result is similar to Wang’s finding (Wang, 1999) that elementary school teachers had higher scores for aesthetic teaching practices than for aesthetic cultivation in Taiwan. Since aesthetic education has been promoted in the recent curriculum reform on early childhood education in Taiwan (MOE, 2012), most early childhood educators value their aesthetic teaching practices. However, they can make more effort to improve their aesthetic literacy in the arts, such as attending teachers’ workshops on the arts and aesthetic

education, creating the arts in daily life, and attending arts performances on and off campus more often.

In aesthetic literacy, the survey results showed that the early childhood educators scored higher on the dimension of attitudes towards the arts. This indicates that they maintained positive attitudes towards the arts, which is the same as Chen (2014a) found in her study. Nevertheless, they scored lower regarding their habits of participating in arts appreciation activities, and knowledge of the arts. According to the interview, some educators explained that they did not have enough time to attend arts performances because they were also busy with administrative tasks or family affairs. One interviewee considered that early childhood educators had to improve their aesthetic literacy since their knowledge was insufficient. Earlier studies also showed that early childhood educators' difficulty was a result of insufficient knowledge of aesthetic education or arts appreciation (Chen, 2014b; Yang, 2014). This may be because they had not received sufficient arts related courses in their previous preservice teacher training programs. Most universities place less emphasis on the arts and aesthetic education in their early childhood teacher education programs. Since aesthetic education has been promoted in early schooling, it is suggested that early childhood teacher education programs may provide more courses related to the arts and aesthetic education for preservice teachers, and may organize workshops on teaching practices in aesthetic education and arts appreciation for in-service teachers. Local governments can also provide workshops on the arts and aesthetic education for early childhood educators, and encourage them to attend art exhibitions and performances.

In aesthetic teaching practices, the survey results showed that the early childhood educators scored higher for guiding young children to explore the environment and create works of the arts. The interview data showed that the educators guided the children to explore and perceive the beauty in nature and in the living environment, such as observing and describing the changing colors of the sunset. They also provided an aesthetic and beautiful environment in their classrooms, along with natural and various materials for the children to explore and create visual arts, music, and drama. Similarly, Chen (2014b) found that some early childhood teachers guided students in discovering the change of nature in the environment. It could correspond with the traditional Chinese aesthetic attitude, such as observing flowers and nature in daily life (Kong, 1998). On the other hand, the early

childhood educators scored lower for guiding young children to respond to and appreciate the arts. According to the interviews, the educators provided opportunities for the children to appreciate various art forms, but they only applied some simple artistic elements to guide the children in arts appreciation. One educator explained that they did not know much about artistic terminology. To improve their teaching profession, the teachers are encouraged to attend teachers' workshops on teaching practices in arts appreciation and aesthetic education. They can also participate in the Teacher Professional Learning Community in Aesthetic Education in their local area.

The survey results showed that the high achievers in aesthetic literacy had better aesthetic teaching practices than the moderate and low achievers. The interviewed early childhood educators also believed that their aesthetic teaching practices were influenced by their aesthetic literacy. The educators who performed better in aesthetic literacy shared more information about their aesthetic teaching practices. Both the quantitative and qualitative data showed that those early childhood educators with high aesthetic literacy had better aesthetic teaching practices. Chen (1996) also found that Taiwanese elementary school teachers who were high achievers in engaging in aesthetic activities performed better aesthetic teaching practices than those who were moderate achievers and low achievers. Therefore, it is important for early childhood educators to have better aesthetic literacy so that they will have better aesthetic teaching practices. Moreover, they can learn about aesthetic teaching practices from the high achieving teachers in aesthetic literacy.

There is a significantly positive correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices. Similarly, previous studies showed the positive correlation between elementary school teachers' participation in aesthetic activities and aesthetic teaching practices (Chen, 1996; Wang, 1999). Since there is a positive correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices, early childhood educators are encouraged to value their aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices. They can pay more attention to their aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices through the arts together with the young children in their daily life.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Using mixed methods, this study explored early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in north Taiwan. In conclusion, this study showed that the mean scores of early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices were moderate. However, their aesthetic teaching practices were better than their aesthetic literacy. There were significant differences in their aesthetic teaching practices in terms of different achievers in aesthetic literacy. The high achievers in aesthetic literacy had better aesthetic teaching practices than the moderate achievers and low achievers. There was a significantly positive correlation between aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices.

The interviewed early childhood educators believed that their aesthetic teaching practices were influenced by aesthetic literacy. The educators who performed better in aesthetic literacy provided more information about their aesthetic teaching practices. They played important roles as aesthetic guides and aesthetic providers to help the young children explore the environment, as well as exploring, creating, and appreciating the arts through visual arts, music, and drama. However, their difficulties included insufficient knowledge of the arts, and insufficient time to participate in arts appreciation activities themselves.

There are several recommendations for early childhood teacher education and aesthetic education. First, it is recommended that local governments provide workshops on the arts and arts appreciation for in-service teacher training, and encourage them to attend art exhibitions and arts performances in their daily life. To provide more opportunities to engage in arts appreciation activities, preschools can cooperate with local arts museums and arts performing centers, encourage their educators to visit them with the children on field trips, and invite performing artists to perform at school. In addition, early childhood educators are encouraged to pay more attention to the arts and beauty in their living environment, share their aesthetic feelings, and create works of the arts and an aesthetic living environment. Second, it is suggested that early childhood teacher education programs provide courses in aesthetic education and workshops of teaching strategies in arts appreciation, and encourage pre-service and in-service early childhood educators to participate in them. Furthermore, university professors can collaborate with early childhood educators to conduct action research to help them improve their professional development in aesthetic teaching practices.

Third, as this study is limited to early childhood educators' aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in the arts, it is suggested that future researchers explore aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in life, humanities, or other fields.

This study will encourage Taiwanese early childhood educators to value their aesthetic literacy and aesthetic teaching practices in everyday life. It provides us with a lens for examining aesthetic education in early schooling in Taiwan. It also provides valuable information about early childhood aesthetic education and teacher education in the Asian context.

References

- Amadio, M., Truong, N., & Tschurennev, J. (2006). *Instructional time and the place of aesthetic education in school curricula at the beginning of the twenty-first century*. UNESCO International Bureau of Education.
- Chen, C. (2017). Mei gan su yang dao xiang jiao syueh jhih li lun yu shih jian [The teaching aesthetic literacy of theory and practice]. *Journal of Education Research*, 275, 18-33. <https://doi.org/10.3966/168063602017030275002>
- Chen, C., & Lin, S. (2004). *Tai wan min zhong mei gan su yang fa jhan yu yi shu jiao yu gai jin jhih yan jiu* [A study on the development of Taiwanese people's aesthetic literacy and the improvement of arts education]. National Taiwan Arts Education Center.
- Chen, M. (1996). Mei gan jing yan yu mei gan huo dong duei guo xiao jiao shih mei yu jiao syueh jhih ying xiang yan jiu [The effect on aesthetic experience and aesthetic activities in aesthetic teaching of Taiwan elementary school's teachers]. *Journal of Research on Elementary Education*, 2, 177-209.
- Chen, Y. (2014a). Tai wan you er jiao bao ren yuan mei gan su yang jhih yan jiu [A study on preschool educators' aesthetic literacy in Taiwan]. *Bulletin of Educational Resources and Research*, 61, 1-32.
- Chen, Y. (2014b). A study on early childhood educators' aesthetic teaching beliefs and practices in Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 8(3), 21-39.

- Cheng, S. (2016). *Shih jyueh yi shu rong ru you er yuan mei gan ling yu jhih ke cheng yan jiou—yi zong he mei tsai wei li* [Integrating arts into the aesthetic domain of the preschool curriculum—Study of mixed media] [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Tainan University.
- Clinard, J. (1999). *The impact of school reform: A follow-up study of the framework for aesthetic literacy* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Montana.
- Clinard, J., & Foster, L. (1998). Putting art standards into practice with aesthetic literacy. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 82(597), 18-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/019263659808259704>
- Curriculum Development Council. (2006). *Guide to the pre-primary curriculum*. HKSAR.
https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/preprimary/pre-primaryguide-net_en.pdf
- Denac, O. (2014). The significance and role of aesthetic education in schooling. *Creative Education*, 5(19), 1714-1719. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2014.519190>
- Fong, T. (2013). Han guang tong chen yu tian di you: Lun dang dai mei gan su yang [Free improvisation and play: On the contemporary aesthetic literacy]. *Journal of Education Research*, 236, 29-43. <https://doi.org/10.3966/168063602013120236003>
- Fu, P. (2019). *You jiao jiao shih mei gan ke cheng sing dong yan jiou—yi you er tu pu cheng sian jhih yin yueh lyu dong wei li* [Young children's eurhythmics learning through drawing notation: An action research on the aesthetics curriculum by a kindergarten teacher] [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Tsing Hua University.
- Graue, M. E., & Walsh, D. J. (1998). *Studying children in context: Theories, methods, and ethics*. Sage Publications.
- Hanson, W. E., Creswell, J. W., Clark, V. L. P., Petska, K. S., & Creswell, J. D. (2005). Mixed methods research designs in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 224-235. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.224>
- Ho, K. L. (2017). In search of an aesthetic pathway: Young children's encounters with drama. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(1), 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1148694>
- Kong, P. (1998). *Mei syueh zai tai wan de fa jhan* [The development of aesthetics in Taiwan]. Nanhua University.
- Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (2013). *KICCE policy brief issue 2. Nuri*

curriculum: The first step toward the integration of the split systems of early childhood education and care in Korea.

<https://repo.kicce.re.kr/bitstream/2019.oak/4086/2/PE0002.pdf>

- Lee, H. S. (2012). Jiao yu ren yuan han yu mei gan su yang jhih tan syun [A research on the aesthetic temperament of education staff]. *Journal of Cardinal Tien College of Healthcare & Management*, 10, 74-84. <https://doi.org/10.29855/JCTCN.201210.0006>
- Lim, B. (2000). *Aesthetic education for young children in three early childhood settings: Bank Street, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Lim, B. (2004). Aesthetic discourses in early childhood settings: Dewey, Steiner, and Vygotsky. *Early Child Development and Care*, 174(5), 473-486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443032000153633>
- Lim, B. (2005). Aesthetic experience in a dynamic cycle: Implications for early childhood teachers and teacher educators. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 25(4), 363-373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1090102050250411>
- Lin, M. (2015). *You er yuan mei gan jiao yu* [Aesthetic education in preschools]. Psychological Publishing.
- Liu, J., & Pai, H. (2010). Ge de shih mei syueh zai hua de fu you er yuan de cheng sian—yi tai jhong shih mou tuo er suo wei li [The presentation of Goethe's aesthetic in a Waldorf kindergarten—An example in a kindergarten in Taichung City]. *The Journal of Educational Science*, 9(1), 51-70. <https://doi.org/10.6388/JES.201006.0051>
- Lo, H., & Lin, M. (2010). You Er De Si Jyu Shang Si Ke Cheng Yan Jiou [An action research on young children's drama/theater appreciation curriculum]. *Drama Education and Applied Theater*, 1, 141-175.
- Ministry of Education. (2012). *You er yuan jiao bao huo dong ke cheng jhan sing da gang* [Early childhood education and care curriculum framework (temporary edition)]. <https://www.ece.moe.edu.tw/ch/filelist/galleries/filelist-files/1011005.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2013). *Jiao yu bu mei gan jiao yu jhong chang cheng ji hua di yi chi wu nian ji hua* [The mid to long term plan of aesthetic education—The first phase five-year plan (2014-2018)]. <https://ws.moe.edu.tw/001/Upload/8/relfile/0/2073/e221c236-b969-470f-9cc2->

ecb30bc9fb47.pdf

Ministry of Education. (2016). *You er yuan jiao bao huo dong ke cheng da gang* [Early childhood education and care curriculum framework].

<https://www.ece.moe.edu.tw/ch/preschool/.galleries/preschool-files/NEW1.pdf>

Ministry of Education. (2018). *Jiao yu bu mei gan jiao yu jhong chang cheng ji hua di er chi wu nian ji hua* [The mid to long term plan of aesthetic education—The second phase five-year plan (2019-2023)].

<https://ws.moe.edu.tw/001/Upload/8/refile/7844/61296/e0a9702c-1f05-44ec-9207-f9abf1504abc.pdf>

Ministry of Education and Research (2006). *Framework plan for the content and task of kindergartens*.

<https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/barnehager/engelsk/frameworkplanforthecontentandtasksofkindergartens.pdf>

Sung, Y., & Pan, P. (2010). Hun he yan jiou zai jiao yu yan jiou de ying yong [Applications of mixed methods research in educational studies]. *Journal of Research in Education Sciences*, 55(4), 97-130.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Sage Publications.

Wang, G. (1999). Guo min siao syueh jiao shih mei yu jiao syueh jhih yan jiou [A study on aesthetic teaching at elementary school teachers in Taiwan]. *Symposium at Compulsory Education in Hsin-Ju Teachers College*, 4, 21-43.

Wu, K. (2017). Tai wan min zong mei gan su yang liang biao jhih jian gou yu diao cha [A study of scale construction and situation of aesthetic literacy]. *Psychological Testing*, 64(2), 131-154.

Yang, L. (2014). *Gao syong shih jiao bao fu wu ren yuan mei gan jiao syueh sian kuang jhih diao cha* [Survey research on current aesthetic instruction by Kaohsiung City preschool educators] [Unpublished master's thesis]. National Pingtung University.

Yu, G. (2021). Re(Searching) meaning: An aesthetic approach to teaching and learning outside of the box. *Visual Arts Research*, 47(2), 1-21.

<https://doi.org/10.5406/visuartsrese.47.2.0001>