

Studying university students' views on ethnic culture and its comprehension through art and design

ZHANG YAN¹, E.E. KOSHMAN²

The article presents the results of an empirical study of students' perceptions of ethnic culture, assessment of the importance and attitude to its expression by means of art and design. It was found that the majority of respondents have an average level of ethno-cultural awareness, have a positive attitude to the comprehension of ethnic culture through art and design, better understand the ethno-cultural heritage of their country than the culture of other countries and regions, join it through Internet resources, participate in events, observe traditions.

Keywords: ethnic culture, cultural heritage, means of understanding and familiarization with ethnic culture, art, design, university students, ethno-cultural education, intercultural communication.

В статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования представлений студентов об этнической культуре, оценка важности и отношение к ее выражению средствами искусства и дизайна. Установлено, что большинство респондентов обладают средним уровнем этнокультурной осведомленности, положительно относятся к постижению этнической культуры через искусство и дизайн, лучше понимают этнокультурное наследие своей страны, чем культуру других стран и регионов, приобщаются к ней через интернет-ресурсы, участие в мероприятиях, соблюдение традиций.

Ключевые слова: этническая культура, культурное наследие, средства познания и приобщения к этнической культуре, искусство, дизайн, студенты вузов, этнокультурное образование, межкультурная коммуникация.

Introduction. Advocating cultural equality, allowing diverse symbiosis, and realising diverse co-existence will provide new development opportunities for human culture. American anthropologist Melville Jean Herskovits puts forward: «Each culture has unique connotations and aesthetic values, and cultures should respect each other» [1]. China is a multi-ethnic country where ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism coexist. In an era when the wave of globalisation is washing over every corner of the world, and when diverse cultures are blossoming with colourful charms, the protection and inheritance of national cultures is not only an inevitable requirement for the development of national cultures, but also an inevitable requirement for the creation of a harmonious, rich and colourful society. However, it should be noted that the «pluralism» we emphasise is not unlimited «pluralism» leading to the division of the country, and when advocating «pluralism», we also need to pay attention to the «oneness». When advocating «pluralism», it is also necessary to pay attention to «oneness». Education plays an important role in the inheritance and preservation of culture, and university education, as an important part of the national education system, is also of great significance to the inheritance of culture. This study explores the theory and practice of integrating national culture into art and design courses, which responds to the current multicultural context of respecting cultural diversity and promoting cultural equity.

Ethno-cultural education of students plays a pivotal role in fostering a strong sense of ethno-identity, which is central to individual and collective well-being. Ethno-identity refers to a person's identification with and sense of belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group. It encompasses a deep connection to one's cultural heritage and traditions and contributes to a broader understanding of diverse societies. James A. Banks, an educator and scholar known for his work on multicultural education, emphasizes the importance of ethno-cultural education in promoting cultural awareness and fostering a positive sense of identity among students. J.A. Banks argues that education should incorporate the cultural experiences and perspectives of diverse ethnic groups to help students develop a more inclusive and informed worldview [2]. Geneva Gay's research on culturally responsive teaching, as detailed in «Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice» [3], emphasizes the role of educators in validating and affirming students' cultural backgrounds. She argues that ethno-cultural education should create spaces where students can celebrate their identities, fostering a strong sense of ethno-identity. Incorporating insights from these scholars and their respective works, it becomes evident that ethno-cultural education is essential for students. It not only

promotes cultural awareness and understanding but also empowers individuals to embrace and take pride in their cultural heritage. Moreover, it fosters inclusivity, empathy, and intercultural competence, contributing to a more harmonious and diverse society.

The means of familiarization with the ethnic culture of one's country are diverse and have been studied by various scholars. Participation in cultural festivals, celebrations, and events provides direct exposure to a culture's traditions, rituals, and customs. Clifford Geertz emphasized the importance of «detailed description», which involves detailed observation and participation in cultural practices in order to understand their meaning [4]. Attending events like Diwali in India, Chinese New Year celebrations, or Native American powwows immerses individuals in the richness of ethnic culture. Cultural institutions and museums serve as repositories of a nation's heritage. Museums curate exhibitions that showcase art, artifacts, and historical narratives, offering an educational and immersive experience. They provide a tangible link to a culture's past and present.

Researchers were attracted by the problem of the influence of mass media and literature on cultural understanding (V. Benjamin, M. McLuhan, etc.). Books, films, television, and online content can offer diverse perspectives on a culture. They provide narratives, stories, and visual representations that enable individuals to grasp the complexities of ethnic culture. Cultural exchange programs promote cross-cultural interaction and understanding.

Milton Bennett developed a theory about intercultural sensitivity, emphasizing the role of direct contact with other cultures [5]. In the digital age, online resources have become increasingly important for cultural familiarization. Websites, social media, and virtual tours provide access to a wealth of cultural information.

While these means are valuable for familiarizing oneself with ethnic culture, their effectiveness may vary depending on individual preferences and contexts. Some individuals may find cultural festivals and events to be the most immersive experience, while others may prefer engaging with cultural institutions or exploring online resources. Effective familiarization often involves a combination of these means, tailored to individual interests and objectives.

Art and design play a crucial role in understanding and familiarizing individuals with ethnic culture. Clifford Geertz, a prominent figure in cultural anthropology, emphasized the importance of interpreting culture as a system of symbolic meanings. He argued that artistic expressions, including visual arts, rituals, and performances, are symbolic forms that carry cultural significance [4]. Geertz's approach, known as «thick description», encourages the in-depth study of cultural symbols and their role in conveying meaning. Art and design are vital components of this interpretive framework, as they provide rich sources of cultural symbolism and expression. Edward Said, in his influential work «Orientalism» explored how art, literature, and other forms of cultural representation have been used to construct and perpetuate stereotypes about non-Western cultures. This highlights the powerful role of art and design in shaping perceptions of ethnic cultures. Art can either reinforce existing stereotypes or challenge them, making it a crucial tool for promoting accurate and respectful cultural understanding [6].

Art and design constitute a universal visual language that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers. They provide a direct, sensory experience of cultural expressions, allowing individuals to connect with the essence of ethnic cultures on an emotional and intellectual level. Artifacts, paintings, sculptures, textiles, and other forms of artistic expression often carry deep-rooted cultural narratives that can span generations. They serve as windows into the collective memory of a community. Artists from ethnic backgrounds use their creative expressions to assert their identities and cultural pride. They challenge stereotypes, celebrate diversity, and convey a sense of belonging. Art and design, in this context, become tools for self-expression and empowerment. Art and design can also serve as a mirror that reflects and critiques society's perceptions of ethnic cultures. Artists often engage in a dialogue with prevailing stereotypes, biases, and misconceptions, inviting viewers to question and reconsider their preconceived notions. Art and design have the capacity to bridge cultural gaps and foster cross-cultural understanding. When individuals from different cultural backgrounds engage with art, they can find common ground and establish connections that transcend cultural boundaries. Art and design can be instrumental in educational settings, where they serve as dynamic tools for teaching and promoting cultural awareness.

In essence, art and design transcend mere aesthetics; they are dynamic conduits for cultural exploration and dialogue. They offer a profound and immersive way of connecting with ethnic cultures, enriching our understanding of the diverse tapestry of human heritage and identity.

This study aims to uncover university students' views on ethnic cultural art and design. Investigating their knowledge, learning approaches, interest, importance, and attitudes, it aims to provide a holistic view of art's impact on ethnic cultural appreciation. The significance lies in enhancing educational practices, fostering unity in diverse student groups, and refining curricula to promote cross-cultural understanding.

This research aligns with cultural education, art pedagogy, and intercultural communication objectives. It can guide effective education methods for today's students and policies that integrate ethnic cultural expressions into curricula, nurturing a more inclusive and culturally aware society.

Research methods and methodology. This study focuses specifically on students at Anhui Vocational College of City Management. This survey comprises 16 questions categorized into five main areas, aimed at systematically exploring university students' perspectives on Ethnic Cultural Art and Design. These categories include: Understanding of Ethno-Cultural Heritage (questions 5 and 6), Approaches to Learning about Ethno-Cultural Heritage (questions 8 and 9), Interest in Understanding Ethno-Cultural Heritage through Art and Design (questions 10 and 11), Importance of Ethno-Cultural Art and Design (questions 12 and 13), and Attitudes towards Ethno-Cultural Art and Design (questions 14, 15, and 16).

Research Materials:

Comprising 16 carefully constructed questions, the questionnaire collected essential data on respondents' demographic characteristics, understanding of ethno-cultural heritage, learning approaches, interest, perceived importance, and attitudes towards ethnic cultural art and design. A total of 159 valid questionnaires were received covering the disciplines of Landscape Technology, Advertising Design, Fashion Design, Pre-school Education and Interior Design.

The data collection period for this study was from 14th May 2023 to 14th June 2023. Unlike traditional field surveys, this study used an innovative method of questionnaire distribution. The questionnaires were distributed through contemporary digital media channels, particularly utilising platforms such as WeChat and QQ groups, and using hyperlinks to facilitate participation. A total of 159 valid responses were collected.

Stringent measures were adopted to maintain the anonymity of participants, protect their privacy, and minimize any potential response bias during data collection. By meticulously adhering to these research methods, materials, and methodological principles, this study aimed to uncover, analyze, and contribute valuable insights to the intricate landscape of university students' perspectives on ethnic cultural art and design.

Research results and their discussion.

1. Understanding of Ethno-Cultural Heritage. Knowledge of the ethnocultural heritage. The majority (72,33 %) exhibited a moderate understanding, while a notable 19,49 % admitted limited knowledge. The data indicate that there is a significant variation in the level of awareness among participants regarding their understanding of ethno-cultural heritage. A majority of respondents exhibited a basic level of cultural awareness. However, a notable proportion confessed to having limited knowledge in this area.

When asked about their knowledge of the national cultural heritage of their country, a significant proportion (71,07 %) indicated that they were moderately aware of it, with 14,47 % saying they were «very aware». This indicates a strong cultural connection among a significant segment of respondents. Conversely, there were participants who indicated limited understanding of their own culture. These findings provide insights into potential issues related to cultural self-confidence. Those who said they were «not very well informed» or «hardly informed» indicated that their awareness could be improved.

The survey showed that although a significant number of students (83,02 %) showed interest in the national cultural heritage of other countries or regions, 16,98 % showed limited participation. The data reveal disparities in participants' interest in the ethno-cultural heritage of other countries or regions. These disparities may be influenced by personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and educational exposures.

2. Approaches to Learning about Ethno-Cultural Heritage. The data show that the main ways for college students to learn about ethnic cultural heritage include Internet resources (89,94 %), books (55,35 %), and folk traditions and activities (57,23 %). The use of Internet resources is quite high among students, probably because they provide a wide range of information and diverse perspectives. About 50,94 % of the respondents learnt about ethnocultural heritage through classroom teaching, showing that traditional classroom education still plays an important role. About 3,77 % of the respondents mentioned other avenues such as social media (Twitter), Internet and travelling. This shows that some respondents learnt about national culture through social media platforms and personal practice.

In response to the question on the most effective learning approach, about 44,03 % of the respondents considered the Internet resources as the most effective way to understand ethnocultural heritage. This further validates the importance of the Internet as a source of information access and diversity perspectives. Effectiveness of folk traditions and activities: About 32,7 % of the respondents believe that participation in folk traditions and activities is also effective in understanding ethnic cultural heritage. This suggests that through actual participation in cultural activities, students can gain a deeper understanding of culture. Some 6,29 % of respondents believed that classroom teaching was an effective way, while 8,81 % believed that museums were also effective. This shows that traditional education and cultural institutions still play a role in learning.

3. Interest in Ethnic Cultural Understanding through Art and Design .The data show that the interest of university students in understanding ethnic cultural heritage through art and design is quite high. About 24,53 % of the respondents expressed great interest and 69,18 % expressed some interest, which indicates that most of the respondents expressed a positive attitude towards comprehending ethnic culture through art and design. Although there are still 5,03 % of respondents who expressed little interest in learning about national culture through art and design, while 1,26 % of respondents said they were not interested at all. Nonetheless, this relatively low percentage shows that most people have a positive attitude towards this approach.

When asked if they have participated in art and design activities related to national cultural heritage, about 55,35 % of the respondents said yes. This indicates that a portion of the respondents have already been actively involved in the field of art and design related to national culture, which may have further deepened their interest in the field. On the other hand, about 44,65 % of the respondents indicated that they have not yet participated in these activities. This may be due to their lesser knowledge of this approach or lack of opportunity to participate.

4. The Importance of Ethnic Cultural Art and Design. The data show that about 66,67 % of the respondents think that ethnic culture art and design are very important in preserving and maintaining cultural heritage, while 32,08 % of the respondents think that they are important. This finding reflects the concern of university students about preserving traditional culture. Ethnocultural arts and designs play an important role in passing on culture by conveying history, stories and traditions.

The data show that 66,67 % of the respondents consider ethnic cultural art and design very important in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural exchange, while 30,82 % of the respondents consider them important. This finding emphasises the role of art and design in promoting global cultural interaction and understanding. Through artwork and design, people can learn about and appreciate the uniqueness of different cultures, thus reducing barriers between cultures.

5. Attitudes towards Ethnic Cultural Art and Design. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents have a positive attitude to ethnic cultural art and design. About 66,04 % of the respondents expressed strong support and 28,3 % expressed moderate support. This reflects the respondents' recognition and appreciation of this field, implying that they believe that ethnic cultural arts and design play an important role in cultural heritage and expression.

Almost all respondents (96,86 %) believe that ethnic cultural arts and design should be given more attention and support in university education. This finding indicates that respondents generally believe that university education should focus more on cultivating students' knowledge and understanding of ethnic culture art and design.

Identifying barriers or challenges in promoting ethno-cultural art and design appreciation. Respondents mentioned many perspectives related to ethnic cultural art and design in their statements. Some interviewees believed that it contributes to the transmission of national culture, promotes cultural confidence and enriches the educational life of the university. The others emphasised the importance of culture in ethnocultural art and design and the importance of cultural heritage for the future. Some of them mentioned the relationship between national culture and art and design, and how to integrate national culture in design.

Some respondents emphasised the diversity of university education and believed that university life should be colourful. They believed that the combination of ethnic culture and art and design could make artworks more distinctive and at the same time promote the spirit of traditional Chinese ethnic culture. This suggests that they expect university education to provide a diverse cultural environment that promotes students' overall understanding of national culture.

Many respondents emphasised the importance of national culture and artistic design in preserving and passing on national culture. They believe that national culture is a symbol of their own identity and should be protected and inherited in an innovative way. At the same time, some interviewees also mentioned the role of national culture, art and design in promoting cultural diversity, conveying national characteristics and enhancing national cohesion.

Conclusion. In conclusion, this comprehensive study has provided valuable insights into university students' perceptions of ethnic cultural art and design, offering both academic and practical significance. The key findings are as follows:

1. **Ethnic Cultural Awareness:** The survey indicates that a majority of respondents possess a moderate level of understanding of ethno-cultural heritage. Compared with other countries or regions, Chinese college students show a stronger understanding of their national cultural heritage, which indicates that it has a solid connection with national identity.

2. **Learning Approaches:** A notable shift in learning preferences is evident, with digital resources, especially the internet, emerging as the preferred channel for gaining knowledge about ethnic cultural heritage. This underscores the importance of integrating digital learning platforms into educational strategies to cater to evolving students' needs.

3. **Importance of Art and Design:** The survey underscores the deep-seated significance of ethnic cultural art and design in cultural preservation and diversity promotion. Respondents acknowledge its potential to foster cultural pride, unity, and intercultural exchange.

4. **Attitudes:** The overwhelmingly positive attitudes expressed by participants toward ethno-cultural art and design highlight its pivotal role in cultural expression and identity formation. The unanimous call for increased attention and support for such endeavors in university education underscores the need for educational reform.

These findings carry practical implications for educational institutions and policymakers:

1. **Holistic Curriculum Development:** Educational institutions can consider the development of comprehensive curricula that incorporate online resources and creative methodologies, aligning with students' preferences and needs.

2. **Policy and Program Enhancement:** Policymakers can explore policies that facilitate the integration of ethnic cultural art and design into core curricula. Collaborative efforts with cultural organizations can amplify the impact of such programs, providing students with a well-rounded cultural education.

In summary, this study's insights provide a strong foundation for informed action. By aligning with the outcomes of this survey, educational institutions and policymakers can drive cultural preservation, enrich academic experiences, and elevate cross-cultural understanding. Achieving a culturally-aware educational landscape hinges on recognizing the pivotal role of ethnic cultural art and design. This study serves as a guiding beacon for institutions and policymakers on their journey toward holistic cultural integration in education.

References

1. Bandura, A. Social cognitive theory in cultural context / A. Bandura // *Applied Psychology*. – 2002. – № 51 (2). – P. 260–290.
2. Banks, J. A. Cultural diversity and education : Foundations, curriculum, and teaching / J. A. Banks. – Boston : Allyn and Bacon, 2001. – 366 p.
3. Gay's, G. Culturally responsive teaching : Theory, research, and practice / G. Gay's. – N. Y., 2000. – 251 p.
4. Geertz, K. Interpretation of cultures / K. Geertz. – M. : ROSSPEN, 2014. – 557 p.
5. Bennett, M. J. Basic concepts of intercultural communication : Paradigms, principles, and practices / M. J. Bennett. – Boston : Hachette UK, 2013. – 352 p.
6. Said, E. W. Orientalism / E. W. Said. – N.Y. : Vintage Books, 1979. – 368 p.

¹Мозырский государственный педагогический университет имени И.П. Шамякина

²Гомельский государственный университет имени Франциска Скорины