

The integration strategy and effect evaluation of art teaching and mental health counseling in preschool education

Fanlun He^{1,2}

¹ Anshan Normal University, Anshan, Liaoning 114001, China

² Philippine Women's University, Malate, Manila 1004, Philippine

ABSTRACT

As the foundation period of primary education, preschool education is an indispensable part of the national education system, which plays a significant role in the physical, psychological, and physiological aspects of individuals. As an essential introductory course of preschool education, art education not only bears the responsibility of aesthetic education but also plays an essential role in the development of mental health because of its disciplinary characteristics. In this paper, the control group will receive traditional art education and mental health counseling separately, while the experimental group will be provided with a holistic art education program and integrated counseling for mental well-being. The experimental results will have specific practical significance for improving children's art education and promoting children's mental health development.

KEYWORDS

Preschool education; Art teaching; Mental health counseling; Integrated strategies; Effectiveness evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Art is the natural expression of children's innocent hearts, and it is children's cognition of the things around them. Painting is an activity for children to understand society and participate in life, and it has attracted more and more attention. Art education is a cultural activity of great significance in the history of human development, and it is an important way for children to develop good values and abilities in all aspects at an early age. Many scientific studies have shown that children's painting plays an important auxiliary role in cultivating observation, imagination, and operation ability and is of great significance for shaping good character and developing intelligence.

Kindergarten children are in a stage of rapid growth and development, and their physical, mental, cognitive, emotional, and social abilities are constantly improving. The most urgent task now is to put the mental health of these young children first and ensure that they receive comprehensive care and support in a good environment.

The integration of preschool art education and mental health education is a blended teaching model to achieve children's aesthetic education and mental development. In the pursuit of high-quality early childhood education, many front-line kindergarten workers tend to choose an intermingled preschool education method. This approach focuses on knowledge transfer and skill development and is committed to developing a healthy mind and holistic development, while also emphasizing teacher-child interaction and home-school cooperation and encouraging children's autonomy and creative thinking. By taking appropriate measures, we can effectively promote their overall happiness and healthy growth. By combining art education with psychology education, children are able to express

their emotions in a variety of creative ways and reveal the depth of their inner world. This process promotes a more comprehensive self-knowledge and personal emotional experience. At the same time, the blended teaching mode also provides another important way to detect and meet children's emotional needs through art activities, which has a significant positive effect on promoting children's aesthetic education and mental health development.

Many scholars have deeply discussed children's preschool art education from multiple levels and perspectives and have accumulated rich experience in educational theory and practice. Xu (2016) elaborated that early childhood art education needs to deeply study children's psychological characteristics and cognitive styles and correctly guide them to realize self-expression in the field of painting to promote the healthy growth of children. Ding (2019) discussed the necessity of integrating mental health education into art teaching activities in preschool education and proposed feasible strategies. Xu (2022) discussed the factors that affected children's painting psychology and the nature of their game psychology, then proposed that preschool art education should integrate creation into daily life, guide children to exert their creativity independently and focus on stimulating children's talent in painting. Chen (2021) believes that preschool art education can be integrated with mental health education through the way of scientific evaluation of children's art creation and improvement of children's art creation environment, combined with the model of multi-media joint action, to achieve healthy development of children's minds. Bao (2019) emphasized the importance of early childhood mental health education and proposed corresponding strategies to promote the integration of teaching between the two by exploring the intrinsic relationship between early childhood mental health education and art education. These studies explored the psychology of children's painting, psychoeducation in preschool education, and the integration methods of art education, but there was a lack of research on the practical effects of related strategies.

The application of psychology is indispensable in education, and the focus of different sub-disciplines related to preschool children's art education, such as preschool child psychology and art psychology, is different, and the application of mental health education in art teaching hopes to combine the diversified psychological knowledge and practice into early childhood art education, so as to promote the development of children's physical and mental health more comprehensively. This paper first takes the aesthetic and psychological structure of preschool children as the starting point and then makes an in-depth analysis of children's art teaching. Finally, the integration strategy and effect of art teaching and mental health counseling in preschool education were explored.

2. EXPLORATION METHODS OF ART TEACHING AND MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

2.1. Children's Painting Psychology

Rooij & Weeda (2020) believes that children's drawings reflect children's perceptions of the world and their minds. The psychology of children's painting is to analyze the psychology of the painter from many aspects, such as lines and sizes, according to the pictures drawn by the painter. Since children's language skills are limited, it is a good way to express their thoughts with pictures, and when children feel the outside world, they will have a strong desire to "speak" anything they see.

Art teaching is a window into children's hearts (He & Sun, 2021), we need to look at children's painting. The content of children's paintings is exaggerated, colorful, and profound, and the content can reflect his daily life and young mind, different inner preferences will have an impact on the theme of the work, some children like to paint animals, some children like to paint plants, and some children like the warm pictures of the family. Children from the same family create much the same content, and children's painting is a process of translating one's ideas into a visual language, as well as a catharsis of inner emotions. Children's language expression ability is very limited, only by drawing

can it be reflected; if the teachers have an understanding of children's painting psychology, they can detect children's psychological changes in time so as to make appropriate adjustments.

2.2. Guidance on children's aesthetic and psychological structure in art teaching

So far, researchers and teachers have accumulated a variety of teaching methods, and the teaching of children's painting should be selected according to the psychological characteristics of children and the laws of children's cognition of things. Through the recognition of the characteristics of the psychological structure of preschool children, we can easily see that children have an independent way of looking at the world, moreover, they also have their own way of thinking and expression, which is not bound by adults. Therefore, in children's art education, it is necessary to give appropriate guidance to children according to their aesthetic and psychological structural characteristics (Lan, 2020).

(1) Let children have beautiful eyes

The so-called "eye of beauty" is to first observe and discover the beauty of children. Children's painting has vitality; it is by no means to lock children in the classroom, instill knowledge, and cultivate skills. Instead, it is necessary to combine the reality of life and the mainstream concept of society, guide children to correctly understand beautiful things, give full play to their imagination, form personality and characteristics, and positive aesthetics, so as to create vivid artworks.

(2) Stimulate aesthetic imagination and cultivate children's desire to create

In the process of children's painting creation, teachers should not teach children how to do it but should guide and motivate children to perceive beautiful things, guide children to discover beautiful things and unique creative points independently, arouse their aesthetic imagination, and let them create by themselves. Children often think and feel much more than adults imagine, and when they actually enter a certain scene, their emotions will be satisfied, their imagination will be stimulated, and they will experience this fun, so that they will become more active to create a lifelike work.

(3) Respect children's emotions and protect children's innocence

Children's emotional world is very different from that of adults, and they often integrate their own emotional experiences into their own works to achieve a state that adults cannot understand. Adults should protect the pure hearts of children and avoid over-evaluating or even blindly banning their creativity. From the perspective of mental health in preschool education, whether it is art creation or other growth and development activities, the strong intervention of adults will have a negative psychological impact on children, and such effects will accompany them for the rest of their lives. In mental health guidance education with art education as the activity carrier, it is necessary to protect children's purest creative expression to enhance children's creativity and self-confidence and promote the good development of children's minds.

(4) Optimize traditional assessment methods and promote children's self-assessment

According to Simamora (2020) and Inwood & Kennedy (2020), instructional assessment is also a very important step in the process of teaching children's art. When the children have finished a picture, the teachers should not rush to judge by their own standards but let the children share their work with others, patiently listening to and feeling the children's thoughts and emotions. When children share and interpret their work, it can enhance their interest in drawing, let them learn to appreciate each other, develop their character, and also help them improve their language skills. At the same time, teachers should also be aware that when children express objects, they cannot objectively reproduce the characteristics of objects in the same way that adults do. What they describe is what they observe, and they choose the objective existence and integrate their own feelings into their own minds through processing, transformation, and aesthetic perception. It is a kind of spiritual image formed by the fusion of children's subjective emotions and objective things. A child's drawing is not a representation

of an object, nor is it what adults see. Therefore, there is no difference between good and bad art teaching for children, and only by perceiving and understanding children's creativity from the perspective of children can children have a broader creative space (Denmead, 2021).

(5) Cultivate children's ability to correctly judge the orientation of aesthetic values

In this process, teachers need to constantly prompt and guide children to correctly judge beauty and non-beauty in combination with cases and learn to grasp which are the diversified aesthetics that should be tolerated, and which are the poorly oriented art content packaged as diverse aesthetics. Although children cannot fully judge right and wrong like adults, it is still necessary to grasp the enlightenment period of children's growth to lay a good foundation for their future development, cultivate their awareness of dialectical aesthetics, and with continuous practice, future knowledge reserves and life experience enriched, their ability to discriminate will continue to improve. This is an art education based on the correct three views, and it is also an important embodiment of art education to achieve mental health guidance.

3. MENTAL HEALTH ART AND ART TEACHING FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

3.1. Children's mental health and psychological adjustment ability have been improved

Art teaching can enable children to use a reasonable and effective method to meet their psychological needs and be able to independently adjust and solve various psychological problems caused by frustration, conflict, pressure, anxiety, etc., so as to avoid some mental diseases. Menzies et al. (2020) argue that the combination of art and mental health counseling can help overcome interpersonal barriers and create a safe and harmonious psychological atmosphere, so that people can release their long-standing negative emotions, free them from their inner difficulties, and find their own way forward. Based on Cohen et al (2022) and Moh & Sperandio (2022), a rich and colorful integrated practice of fine arts, multi-level, selective art assignments, and mental health counseling can enable children to develop a positive emotional attitude, soothe and relieve mental tension and exhaustion, and obtain a kind of spiritual purification. In addition, painting and other forms of art creation are also very common assessment methods and programs in early childhood psychological counseling.

3.2. Evoke children's aesthetic experiences

If a person can often find and feel beauty in life, his mood will become optimistic and positive; on the contrary, if a person has not experienced and felt beauty, there will be more negative emotions in his or her study and life. When children in preschool education experience combined art and mental health counseling, they are in the process of self-shaping accompanied by beauty, and through aesthetic education, their aesthetic feelings can be stimulated, and their long-standing depression can be released (Arcuri Sanders et al.,2019). The combination of fine arts and mental health education is a form of experience, which includes neurorelaxation, life experience, memory awakening, etc. The combination education mode is an important way for children to carry out aesthetic education, which can transform "beauty" into inner literacy and, at the same time, help children express their inner emotions or release their inner emotions. Preschool teachers should make full use of art education to enlighten children's minds, guide them to perceive the world with beautiful eyes, and let them feel and enjoy beauty in a rich aesthetic situation.

3.3. Promote kindergarten and preschool teachers and parents to change the concept of art education

The relationship between art teaching and mental health counseling is becoming closer and closer, and the mutual penetration of the two is an important result of the deepening reform of preschool education. Pre-school institutions and teachers have the dual responsibility of teaching and educating people and should pay attention to children's mental health and be good psychological counselors for children, so that they can always maintain a good attitude in a harmonious classroom atmosphere.

In the art teaching process of preschool education, if too much effort is put into the pursuit of technical difficulty, but the cultivation of children's positive personality and healthy development is neglected, which is contrary to the art education goal of preschool education children, and the cultivation of sound thinking and personality is the basic goal of preschool education children, otherwise the meaning of nurturing life is lost.

Teaching units and teachers should explore teaching effect evaluation schemes that are more in line with the laws of children's development, avoid focusing solely on visual and quantifiable painting results. More attention should be paid to what non-technical learning results children have obtained in art teaching activities that can contribute to children's physical and mental health development. First of all, it is necessary for teaching units to avoid using simple and crude ways to evaluate teachers, which can easily lead some teachers to pursue teaching methods that are not suitable for the current stage of development of children in order to complete the assessment. Although art teaching is based on art majors, in order to realize the integration of art education and psychological education, teachers need to have a deeper understanding of children's all-round development needs in the preschool education stage and explore what forms of mental health art activities can promote in which aspects.

In addition, although parents rarely appear in the actual operation process of early childhood art course teaching, in many cases, parents' expectations and requirements for the results achieved in the process of children's growth will also affect the actual trend of art teaching, especially for some private kindergartens, art courses need to pay extra fee, if the children cannot achieve technical improvement within a certain period of time, parents may think that the quality of the course does not meet expectations and will choose to give up and continue to let their children have related courses. Therefore, kindergarten and preschool teachers should also do a good job in communicating with parents, and coordinate and balance the expectations of different groups on the teaching effect in the teaching integration practice of children's aesthetic education and mental health all-round development.

In the process of changing concepts, the expansion of thinking is indispensable, and educators must first broaden their horizons and embrace diversity so that they can know how to appreciate and respect children's art creations, only then can they respond to the combination of art and psychological education with respect as the starting point in the previous discussion.

3.4. Effectively infiltrate mental health education in preschool art education

(1) Further strengthen the emphasis and attention on mental health education

With the improvement and development of the teaching content of preschool art education, it is an inevitable direction to effectively integrate mental health education into preschool art education. The combination of art education and psychological education can provide children with aesthetic education and mental health guidance in a more acceptable form, and the integration of the two disciplines can promote each other and improve the quality of teaching results. In this process, the organizations and teachers of preschool art education should also pay more attention to their mental health education, effectively improve their intellectual development and health security, have a comprehensive understanding of their psychological conditions, and pay attention to their psychological development.

Art teachers need to improve their mental health knowledge so that they can better pay attention to children's psychological conditions through teaching practice, and if they encounter situations that require psychological counseling, teachers can detect them as early as possible. In addition, a cooperation model between art teachers and psychological teachers or counselors can be established to analyze children's psychological conditions, so that when art teachers cannot accurately judge whether children need help, they can seek guidance and help from professionals to better improve the accuracy of children's psychological judgment. At the same time, in the process of integrating psychological education with other educational disciplines, teachers and teaching institutions should also do a good job of protecting children's privacy to avoid unnecessary harm to children's learning and life caused by the leakage of mental health counseling information.

(2) Effectively implement children's mental health education

First, children's mental health education should not only stay in theory but also be grounded in practical action. It is necessary to take the initiative to promote the mental health education of preschool art education majors. First of all, kindergarten mental health education is an important part of the development of preschool art education, and doing a good job in the planning and guidance of macro policies is the inevitable trend of preschool art education. Second, for preschool art education institutions, it is necessary to develop a diversified curriculum of art and psychological activities, combine mental health education with art teaching, improve children's understanding of society and basic social skills, and enable children to obtain effective mental health guidance in art creation. Third, kindergartens should also take the initiative to conduct mental health assessments for preschool art education professionals to improve their professionalism.

(3) Strengthen the training of preschool teachers

In order to better improve the quality of preschool art education, it is necessary to strengthen the training of preschool art education teachers. First of all, it is necessary to cultivate a high-quality preschool teaching team. Secondly, kindergartens should take the initiative to train their preschool teachers. Develop appropriate training plans to help teachers improve their teaching capabilities.

(4) Pay attention to improving teaching methods

While carrying out children's mental health education, it is also necessary to improve effective methods. First of all, it is necessary to give full consideration to the physical and mental differences of children, and effectively adopt differentiated educational strategies to provide targeted mental health guidance according to children's cognitive level, emotion, personality and other factors. Secondly, in daily learning and life, teachers and parents should also pay enough attention to children's possible mental health problems and solve them in a timely manner.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

4.1. Experiment 1: Quality and quantity of creative task expression and free creation

Preschool children were divided into two groups using a method of randomization. The control group carried out traditional art teaching and mental health counseling separately, and the experimental group adopted two teaching methods: comprehensive art education and mental health guidance. At the same time, this paper also compares the performance of creative tasks, the quality of freelance works, and the number of freelance works of the research subjects to evaluate their progress in innovation and imagination.

Table 1. Comparison of the quality and quantity of creative task performance and freelance creation

Evaluation indicators	Evaluation methods	Average score of control group (out of 100)	Average score of experimental group (out of 100)	Improvement degree (%)
Creative task performance	Creative problem solving test	75	85	13.3
The quality of freely created works	Expert review (creativity, originality)	70	80	14.3
The number of freely created works	Counting the number of creative works (pieces)	10	13	30.0

Table 1 shows the qualitative and quantitative comparison between the performance of creative tasks and the freedom to create works. In terms of creative task performance, the average score of the control group was 75 points, and the average score of the experimental group was 85 points.

4.2. Experiment 2: Assessment of improvement in emotional ability

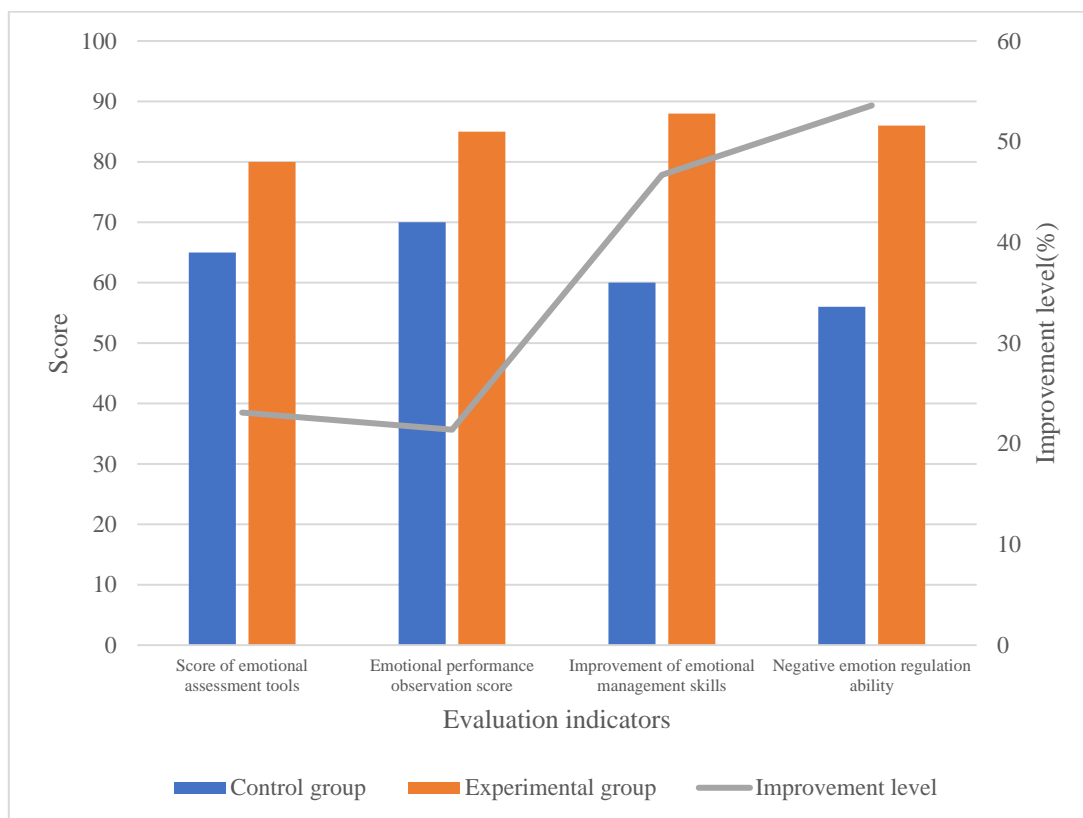


Figure 1. Comparison of scores between the control group and the experimental group

In this experiment, preschool children were taken as the research object, and a questionnaire survey was conducted on preschool children. The control group carried out traditional art education and mental health guidance separately, and the experimental group will have comprehensive art education and mental health guidance. Using emotion assessment tools, children's emotion assessment tool scores, emotional performance observation scores, emotion management skills improvement, and negative emotion regulation ability were observed.

Among the scores of the emotion assessment tool, 65 points were scored in the control group and 80 points in the experimental group. The improvement in emotional capacity in the different groups is shown in Figure 1.

4.3. Experiment 3: Comparison of scores between the control group and the experimental group

Art teaching for preschool children. The control group adopted traditional art education and mental health counseling, and the experimental group adopted comprehensive art education and mental health counseling teaching methods. By improving children's ability to understand, evaluate and appreciate art works, the cognitive level of art and beauty is evaluated in the way of painting evaluation.

The scores of the control group and the experimental group are shown in Figure 2. The score of the control group was 71.75 points, and the score of the experimental group was 88.875 points.

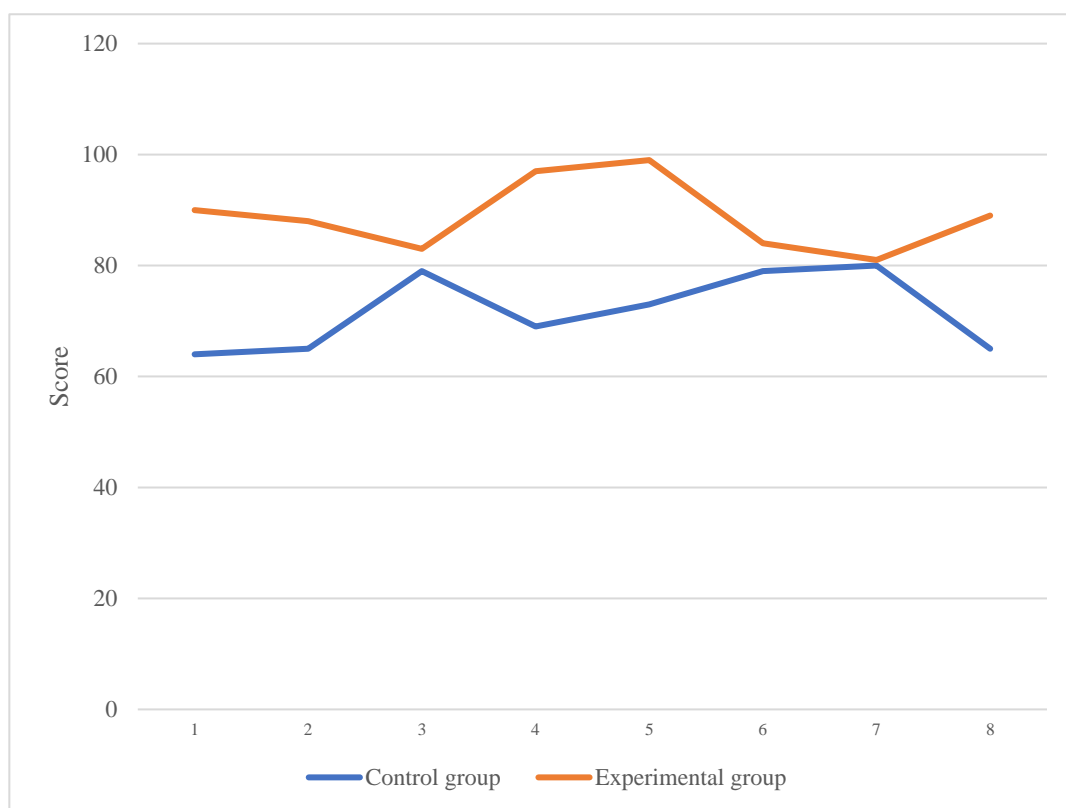


Figure 2. Comparison of scores between the control group and the experimental group

4.4. Summary

Combined with the results of three experiments, it can be seen that the score of subjects who received comprehensive art education and mental health education were more ideal, and the combination of art and psychology is a teaching time strategy in line with the law of children's physical and mental development, and the combination of the two has a positive effect on improving children's aesthetic education and mental health development.

Preschool children are in the primary stage of growth and development, children's ability to combine the two teaching contents independently is limited, if the art education and psychological education are separated, it is difficult for them to associate knowledge from another discipline and apply it. If the content of mental health guidance can be directly integrated into art activities, children can better

receive the art creation knowledge that has been well combined and conducive to the healthy development of physical and mental health.

Besides, the development of art teaching activities based on the guidance of mental health education is, to a certain extent, a kind of counseling for children's mental health and the shaping of healthy psychology, which can also explain why the experimental group also has good scores in the emotional control evaluation experiment.

Furthermore, the incorporation of psychology sub-disciplines with different focuses in art teaching can more comprehensively explore the art teaching mode that is more acceptable to children and more in line with their physical and mental development, so that they can better absorb art knowledge and improve their aesthetic ability in art teaching activities, so as to improve the cognitive level of art and beauty.

4.5. Limitations

Due to objective factors such as time, geography and cost, the experiment could not conduct long-term observation and evaluation of preschool children. In addition, due to the young age of preschool children, there may be a lack of understanding in some of the assessment content that requires their participation. At the same time, due to the limitation of the number of participants, the random allocation of the experimental selection in the distribution of the control group and the experimental group can control the painting foundation of the two groups if the conditions allow in the future, and try to select the participants with the same level of painting technology and theoretical knowledge reserves, so as to avoid the deviation of the experimental results caused by the difference in individual ability.

5. CONCLUSION

The introduction of mental health education into preschool art education in this paper is not only a useful exploration of the reform of preschool education in the new era, but also a useful exploration of the scientific development trend of art education. Art is inextricably linked with human psychology, and mental health education is introduced into the field of preschool art education to meet the needs of modern society for comprehensive quality training, pay attention to the principle of identity respect, diversity, and tolerance of each child, and promote their individual growth with the support of professional guidance. In this way, we can lay a solid foundation for the younger generation to broaden their horizons, improve their emotional intelligence, and maximize their potential.

REFERENCES

- [1] Arcuri Sanders, N. M., Vincenzes, K. A., & Forziat-Pytel, K. (2019). What does self-care look like for online graduate Mental Health Counseling Students? *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 15(1), 104–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2019.1639236>
- [2] Bao, J. (2019). Infiltrating Mental Health Education in Kindergarten Art Activities. *Computer campus*, 2019(9):3341-3342.
- [3] Chen, X. (2021). Research on the Integration Strategy of Mental Health Education and Kindergarten Art Teaching. *Exam Weekly*, 2021(84):163-165.
- [4] Cohen, K. A., Graham, A. K., & Lattie, E. G. (2020). Aligning students and counseling centers on student mental health needs and treatment resources. *Journal of American College Health*, 70(3), 724–732. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1762611>
- [5] Denmead, T. (2021). Time After Whiteness: Performative Pedagogy and Temporal Subjectivities in Art Education. *Studies in Art Education*, 62(2), 130–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.1896252>
- [6] Ding, Y. (2019). Mental health education infiltrates the art teaching in kindergarten classes. *New Education Era e-Magazine (Student Edition)*, (26), 1.

- [7] He, C., & Sun, B. (2021). Application of Artificial Intelligence Technology in Computer Aided Art Teaching. *Computer-Aided Design and Applications*, 18(S4):118-129.
- [8] Inwood, H., & Kennedy, A. (2020). Conceptualising Art Education as Environmental Activism in Preservice Teacher Education. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 39(3), 585–599. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12308>
- [9] Lan, H. Z. (2020). Classroom teaching evaluation of Chinese painting as a form of fine arts in rural junior high schools. *Agricultural Research in Asia: English*, 012(012), P.69-72.
- [10] Menzies, A., Kepley, L., Crockett, S. A., Erford, B. T., Byrd, R., & Aier, B. (2020). A Meta-Study of the Journal of Mental Health Counseling: An Analysis of Publication Characteristics, 2000–2019. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 42(3), 206–219. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.42.3.02>
- [11] Moh, Y. S., & Sperandio, K. R. (2022). The Need to Consider Requiring Trauma Training in Entry-Level Academic Training Programs in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 44(1), 18–31. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.44.1.03>
- [12] Rooij, M. and Weeda, W. (2020). ‘Cross-Validation: A Method Every Psychologist Should Know’, *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, 3(2), pp. 248–263. doi:10.1177/2515245919898466.
- [13] Simamora, R. M. (2020). The Challenges of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Essay Analysis of Performing Arts Education Students. *Studies in Learning and Teaching*, 1(2), 86–103. <https://doi.org/10.46627/silet.v1i2.38>
- [14] Xu, C. (2016). A Psychological Study on Children's Painting in Kindergarten Art Education. *Extracurricular Education in China (Late Edition)*, 2016(1):159. DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1004-8502.2016.01.151.
- [15] Xu, Q. (2022). A Psychological Exploration of Children's Painting in Kindergarten Art Education. *Educational Arts*, 2022(6):65. DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1002-2821.2022.06.051.