

# The Role of Art Education in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges

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## ABSTRACT

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) requires sustainable pathways of transmission, yet the educational role of art education in supporting ICH safeguarding in secondary technical and vocational colleges remains insufficiently clarified. This study aims to examine how students perceive the role of art education in safeguarding ICH within a vocational college context. A quantitative, descriptive, exploratory survey was conducted using a 30-item questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale, administered to 36 students from Guangdong Huali Technician College. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha. The overall mean score was 4.124 (SD = 0.767), with acceptable internal consistency for the overall instrument (alpha = 0.749), indicating generally positive student perceptions. At the dimension level, the highest mean score was observed for *Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty* (4.256), followed by *Role of Art Education* (4.214), while *ICH Status and Challenges* recorded the lowest, though still positive, mean (4.006). The highest item-level support concerned regularly inviting ICH inheritors for teaching and practice, whereas comparatively lower agreement was observed across several challenge- and integration-related items. Overall, the findings suggest that students perceive art education as a meaningful pathway for safeguarding ICH, particularly through curriculum integration, pedagogical support, and practice-based cultural engagement. However, the evidence should be interpreted as preliminary and perception-based, since the study draws on student responses from a single institutional setting rather than direct observation of educational practice or safeguarding outcomes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is not a static cultural residue, but a living body of practices, skills, meanings, and collective memory that depends on the continuity of transmission across generations. Its sustainability is therefore inseparable from the survival

of communities of practice, the preservation of embodied knowledge, and the capacity of social institutions to maintain cultural relevance amid change. Recent scholarship has shown that safeguarding ICH is increasingly challenged by weakening intergenerational continuity, changing social environments, and the need to adapt traditional cultural expressions to contemporary modes of transmission and participation [1-3].

Within this context, education has emerged as one of the most meaningful pathways for safeguarding ICH. Educational institutions can transform heritage from an object of passive preservation into an active field of learning, participation, literacy, and identity formation. This role becomes especially important when younger generations are increasingly distant from traditional cultural practices in their everyday lives. Studies on school-based heritage integration, educational networks for cultural preservation, and informal educational participation have demonstrated that safeguarding is more sustainable when linked to structured learning environments rather than left solely to informal continuity within shrinking cultural spaces [4-6].

In educational terms, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage should be understood not merely as preserving cultural forms in an abstract sense, but as enabling their continued transmission through structured learning, guided practice, interpretive engagement, and meaningful participation. Within school and vocational settings, safeguarding may therefore include curriculum integration, practice-based pedagogy, exposure to cultural bearers, and the creation of institutional spaces where heritage can be learned, enacted, and recontextualized. From this perspective, student perception is not simply a convenient source of data. Rather, it is an important analytical entry point, because students are the immediate recipients of educational processes through which heritage is made visible, valued, and pedagogically actionable.

Among the various educational pathways available, art education occupies a particularly important position. Many forms of ICH are embedded in craft, design, performance, visual symbolism, manual skill, and aesthetic interpretation. For that reason, art education offers more than factual exposure to heritage; it enables students to encounter cultural inheritance through making, seeing, performing, reflecting, and reinterpreting. Research on lacquerware preservation, ICH art education, and interdisciplinary course design in the digital age suggests that art education can function as a bridge between cultural continuity and contemporary pedagogy, allowing traditional forms to remain meaningful in changing educational contexts [7-9].

This issue is particularly relevant in the context of secondary technical and vocational colleges. Compared with more academically abstract educational environments, technical and vocational institutions are structurally closer to skill formation, applied pedagogy, workshop-based learning, and practice-oriented curriculum design. These institutional features make them especially suitable for linking art education with the safeguarding of ICH. Existing studies on art vocational curriculum systems, the integration of ethnic craft skills into fine arts pedagogy, and the development of ICH curricula based on experiential learning all suggest that vocationally oriented settings can provide fertile ground for connecting cultural inheritance with structured teaching and practical competence [10-12].

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Even so, the current literature remains fragmented. Some studies concentrate on digital preservation and virtual exhibition strategies, while others focus on specific heritage cases, local wisdom, school-community partnerships, or classroom-based cultural transmission. These contributions are valuable, but they do not yet provide a sufficiently integrated empirical understanding of how students themselves perceive the role of art education in safeguarding ICH, particularly in relation to heritage challenges, institutional integration issues, and strengthening pathways in technical-vocational settings [13-16].

A further issue is that the educational role of art in safeguarding ICH cannot be reduced to mere symbolic appreciation. It must also be understood through curriculum design, experiential learning, faculty readiness, institutional support, and the creation of practice environments in which heritage can be meaningfully enacted. Recent work on aesthetic curriculum innovation, cultural art literacy, social education through heritage, and analytical studies of batik-based ICH development indicates that safeguarding is more educationally effective when supported by coherent pedagogical pathways rather than isolated cultural events [17-20].

In response to these issues, the present study examines the role of art education in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in secondary technical and vocational colleges. The study approaches the issue through five analytical dimensions: ICH Status and Challenges, Role of Art Education, Current Integration Issues, Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty, and Pathways: Practice and Culture. Through this structure, the study does not merely ask whether art education matters, but how its safeguarding role is perceived and through which educational pathways it may be strengthened in institutional practice. The study's contribution is therefore descriptive and exploratory rather than causal: it offers an empirical account of student perceptions as a basis for understanding how art education may support more sustainable forms of ICH safeguarding in vocational educational settings.

To guide the analysis, the study is framed by the following main research question: How is the role of art education in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage perceived in secondary technical and vocational colleges? More specifically, the study addresses four sub-questions:

- a. How do students perceive the current state and challenges of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage?
- b. How do students perceive the role of art education in supporting the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage?
- c. What current integration issues are perceived in linking art education with intangible cultural heritage safeguarding? and
- d. Which educational pathways are perceived as most important for strengthening intangible cultural heritage safeguarding through art education, particularly in terms of curriculum, faculty, practice, and culture?

Through these questions, the study contributes an empirical basis for understanding how art education may support more sustainable forms of ICH safeguarding in vocational educational settings.

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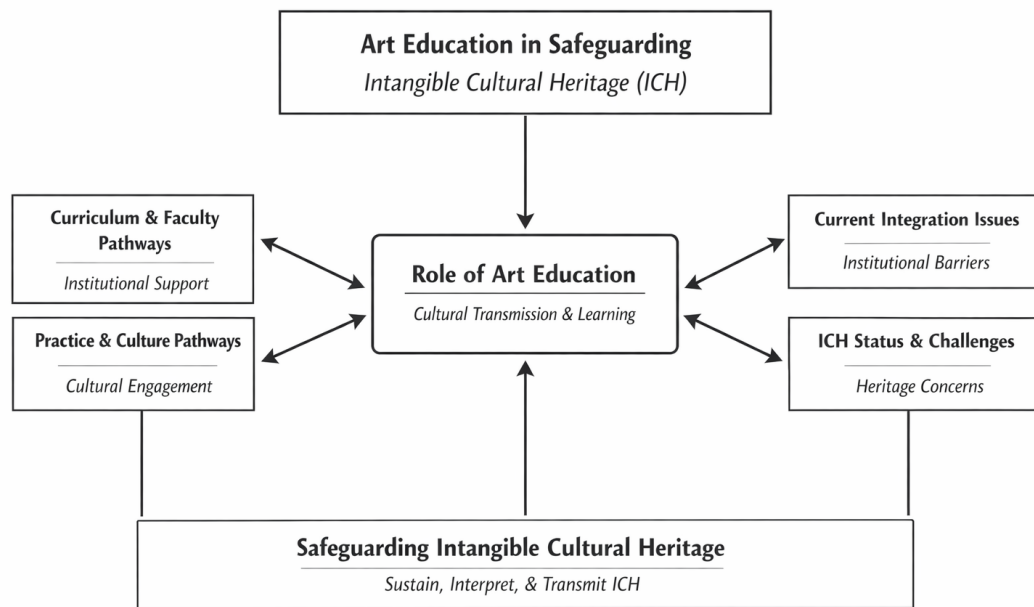


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Role of Art Education in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design with an exploratory orientation. The design was selected because the study does not seek to test causal relationships or evaluate intervention effects, but rather to describe how students perceive the role of art education in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in secondary technical and vocational colleges. In this sense, the study is positioned as a perception-based empirical inquiry that aims to identify the relative strength of support across the main dimensions of art education's safeguarding role.

This methodological choice is appropriate for two reasons. First, the topic of ICH safeguarding in educational settings involves cultural, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions that are often first revealed through attitude and perception data. Second, the available dataset is survey-based and therefore more suitable for descriptive and exploratory interpretation than for causal inference. Accordingly, the study focuses on mapping tendencies, priorities, and perceived strengthening pathways rather than making claims about direct educational effectiveness.

### 2.2 Conceptual and Analytical Framework

The study was guided by a conceptual framework that places art education as the central educational pathway through which the safeguarding of ICH may be strengthened in technical and vocational educational settings. Within this framework, art education is not treated merely as an aesthetic subject area, but as a pedagogical mechanism through which

students can encounter heritage through knowledge, practice, interpretation, creativity, and cultural participation.

To make this broad construct analytically manageable, the study organized the questionnaire into five dimensions: (1) ICH Status and Challenges, (2) Role of Art Education, (3) Current Integration Issues, (4) Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty, and (5) Pathways: Practice and Culture. The first dimension serves a diagnostic function by examining respondents' perceptions of the present condition of ICH and the challenges faced in its transmission. The second dimension focuses on the direct educational role of art education in heritage safeguarding. The third dimension identifies the current barriers that hinder effective integration between art education and ICH. The fourth dimension examines strengthening pathways related to curriculum structure and faculty development, while the fifth dimension addresses practical and cultural pathways such as workshops, school-based activities, community participation, and creative engagement.

### **2.3 Research Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted in Guangdong Huali Technician College, which served as the institutional setting for data collection. The respondents were 36 students, making the study a single-institution, perception-based survey.

Regarding gender composition, the sample included 26 female and 10 male students. The respondents were predominantly in late adolescence, with an average age of 16.83 years and an age range of 15 to 19 years. This profile indicates that the study primarily reflects the perceptions of students at an important stage of educational and cultural formation, where institutional exposure to heritage education may influence both awareness and participation.

Because all respondents came from the same institution, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. The study does not aim to generalize statistically to all secondary technical and vocational colleges. Rather, it provides a focused empirical reading of how students in one vocational educational context perceive the role of art education in safeguarding ICH.

### **2.4 Instrument Development and Measures**

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 30 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, with response categories coded as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The questionnaire was developed as a descriptive-exploratory instrument to capture student perceptions of the role of art education in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage across the five analytical dimensions derived from the study's conceptual framework and related literature. These dimensions were: (1) ICH Status and Challenges, (2) Role of Art Education, (3) Current Integration Issues, (4) Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty, and (5) Pathways: Practice and Culture. The instrument was intended to organize perception data in a structured way rather than to serve as a final psychometric scale for strong inferential modeling.

The item distribution was organized as follows: Q1-Q5 = ICH Status and Challenges; Q6-Q12 = Role of Art Education; Q13-Q18 = Current Integration Issues; Q19-Q23 =

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Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty; and Q24-Q30 = Pathways: Practice and Culture. The first dimension examined perceptions of the current condition of ICH and the challenges affecting its transmission. The second focused on the perceived educational role of art education in fostering awareness, appreciation, creativity, and the continuity of heritage. The third addressed current barriers in linking ICH with educational practice. The fourth examined institutional and pedagogical strengthening pathways related to curriculum and faculty, while the fifth addressed practice-based and cultural pathways such as workshops, exhibitions, school activities, and community engagement.

The questionnaire items were self-developed based on the study's conceptual framework and a review of relevant literature on ICH safeguarding, art education, and heritage transmission. The instrument was designed for descriptive-exploratory purposes rather than as a previously validated standardized scale. Because the study relied on a small single-institution dataset, no formal pilot test or advanced construct validation was conducted prior to the main analysis. This limitation is acknowledged and should be considered when interpreting the subscale-level findings.

## **2.5 Data Collection Procedure**

The study used questionnaire response data collected from students at Guangdong Huali Technician College. The responses were entered in a standardized format, checked for completeness, and cleaned before descriptive analysis. Each respondent's answers to Q1-Q30 were coded numerically according to the five-point Likert scale, allowing aggregation at both item and dimension levels.

Participation in the survey was voluntary. Respondents were informed that their answers would be used solely for academic purposes and that the data would be treated confidentially. No personally identifying information was included in the analytical reporting of the results.

## **2.6 Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and reliability analysis. The descriptive analysis was conducted at three levels. First, a respondent profile analysis was used to describe the sample by gender, age, and institutional background. Second, dimension-level descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the relative prominence of each of the five analytical dimensions. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to determine which dimensions elicited stronger or weaker agreement from respondents. Third, item-level analysis was conducted to identify the highest- and lowest-scoring questionnaire items.

In addition, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the instrument's internal consistency and its dimensions. The reliability analysis was included not to establish final psychometric validation in a strong inferential sense, but to ensure that the instrument had an acceptable level of coherence for descriptive and exploratory interpretation.

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### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 36 respondents participated in this study. All respondents came from Guangdong Huali Technician College, indicating that the present study reflects a single-institution educational context. Regarding gender, the sample comprised 26 female and 10 male students. The respondents were predominantly in late adolescence, with an average age of 16.83 years and an age range of 15 to 19 years. This profile suggests that the study captures the perceptions of students at a formative stage of educational, cultural, and vocational development, making their views particularly relevant for examining the educational role of art education in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

The respondent profile is analytically important for two reasons. First, because the participants are students in a technical and vocational educational setting, their responses directly reflect how ICH-related art education is perceived by the group most closely positioned to experience it in practice. Second, because all respondents come from the same institutional setting, the findings are best understood as descriptive and exploratory evidence rather than as a basis for broad statistical generalization across all secondary technical and vocational colleges.



Figure 2. Respondent collective data

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	26	72.2
	Male	10	27.8
Institution	Guangdong Huali Technician College	36	100.0
Age	15	2	5.6
	16	16	44.4
	17	6	16.7
	18	10	27.8
	19	2	5.6

### 3.2 Descriptive Results by Dimension

The instrument's overall mean score was 4.124, with an overall standard deviation of 0.767, indicating a generally positive pattern of agreement across the questionnaire. Within this sample, the highest mean score was observed for *Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty* ( $M = 4.256$ ,  $SD = 0.792$ ), followed by *Role of Art Education* ( $M = 4.214$ ,  $SD = 0.838$ ). The two next-ranked dimensions, *Pathways: Practice and Culture* ( $M = 4.071$ ,  $SD = 0.770$ ) and *Current Integration Issues* ( $M = 4.069$ ,  $SD = 0.702$ ), were very close in magnitude, while *ICH Status and Challenges* recorded the lowest mean at 4.006 ( $SD = 0.681$ ). Although these patterns are descriptively informative, they should be interpreted with caution, particularly because two of the dimensions later showed low internal consistency. Accordingly, the ranking pattern should be read as a sample-specific descriptive tendency rather than as definitive evidence of stronger or more stable subscale constructs.

This dimensional pattern remains descriptively informative, although it should not be interpreted too strongly given the uneven reliability profile across subscales. Within this sample, the relatively higher mean for *Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty* may indicate that respondents tended to associate ICH safeguarding with institutional and pedagogical support. However, because this dimension showed low internal consistency, the finding should be treated as an exploratory indication rather than as evidence of a stable construct.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Dimension

Rank	Dimension	Number of Items	Mean	SD
1	Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty	5	4.256	0.792
2	Role of Art Education	7	4.214	0.838
3	Pathways: Practice and Culture	7	4.071	0.770
4	Current Integration Issues	6	4.069	0.702
5	ICH Status and Challenges	5	4.006	0.681
	Overall Instrument	30	4.124	0.767

### 3.3 Item-Level and Reliability Results

At the item level, the highest mean score was recorded for Q21 ( $M = 4.500$ ,  $SD = 0.655$ ), followed by Q30 ( $M = 4.361$ ,  $SD = 0.723$ ), Q8 ( $M = 4.333$ ,  $SD = 0.828$ ), Q9 ( $M = 4.333$ ,  $SD = 0.828$ ), and Q10 ( $M = 4.306$ ,  $SD = 0.889$ ). These items show that respondents most strongly endorsed statements about regularly inviting ICH inheritors for teaching and practice, using new media to promote and disseminate ICH on campus, and recognizing art education as a means to improve aesthetic competence, facilitate the transmission of authentic artisanal skills, and cultivate the craftsman spirit.

At the lower end, the lowest mean score was found for Q1 ( $M = 3.861$ ,  $SD = 0.683$ ), followed by Q2 ( $M = 3.944$ ,  $SD = 0.630$ ), Q4 ( $M = 3.944$ ,  $SD = 0.674$ ), Q17 ( $M = 3.944$ ,

SD = 0.715), Q25 (M = 3.944, SD = 0.791), and Q27 (M = 3.944, SD = 0.715). Importantly, these lower scores do not indicate rejection. Rather, they indicate a more cautious level of agreement. This suggests that some aspects of ICH safeguarding may be perceived as more difficult, more conditional, or less immediate than others.

The instrument's overall reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.749. This level of internal consistency is acceptable for a descriptive and exploratory study and indicates that the questionnaire has a reasonable degree of overall coherence. At the same time, the reliability profile across dimensions should be interpreted carefully. The present study does not aim to establish a final psychometric model; rather, it aims to generate a structured, descriptive account of student perceptions.

While the overall alpha of 0.749 indicates acceptable internal consistency for the instrument as a whole, the subscale reliabilities were uneven. In particular, Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty (alpha = 0.287) and Pathways: Practice and Culture (alpha = 0.264) showed low internal consistency. These two dimensions are therefore retained as exploratory descriptive groupings, but their results should not be interpreted as psychometrically robust subscales. For this reason, dimension-level discussion involving these categories has been treated with added caution in the revised manuscript.

Table 3. Highest- and Lowest-Scoring Items

Category	Item	Mean	SD	Brief Content
Highest	Q21	4.500	0.655	Schools should regularly invite ICH inheritors for teaching and practice.
Highest	Q30	4.361	0.723	New media should be used to promote and disseminate ICH on campus.
Highest	Q8	4.333	0.828	Art education improves aesthetic competence and cultural confidence.
Highest	Q9	4.333	0.828	Art education facilitates the transmission of authentic artisanal skills.
Highest	Q10	4.306	0.889	Art education cultivates the craftsman spirit.
Lowest	Q1	3.861	0.683	Insufficient number of ICH inheritors/successors
Lowest	Q2	3.944	0.630	Urbanization compresses the living space and cultural context of ICH.
Lowest	Q4	3.944	0.674	Young people show cognitive gaps or low interest in ICH.
Lowest	Q17	3.944	0.715	Cooperation between schools and ICH enterprises is still formalistic.
Lowest	Q25	3.944	0.791	Authentic enterprise projects are needed for practice-based learning.
Lowest	Q27	3.944	0.715	Schools should partner with communities, museums, and inheritance bases.

Table 4. Reliability of the Instrument

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Overall instrument	30	0.749	Acceptable
ICH Status and Challenges	5	0.603	Moderate
Role of Art Education	7	0.666	Moderate
Current Integration Issues	6	0.751	Good
Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty	5	0.287	Low
Pathways: Practice and Culture	7	0.264	Low

### 3.4 Discussion

The findings indicate that students in this sample generally perceived art education as having a meaningful role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in a secondary technical and vocational college context. The overall positive mean pattern across the questionnaire supports this interpretation. At the same time, the evidence should be read within the limits of a perception-based, single-institution descriptive study rather than as a direct measure of educational effectiveness or safeguarding outcomes.

One noteworthy descriptive pattern is that the highest mean score in this sample was found in *Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty*, followed by *Role of Art Education*. Substantively, this suggests that respondents placed considerable value on institutional and pedagogical mechanisms, such as curriculum integration, teaching support, and structured educational design. However, this interpretation must be moderated by the fact that the *Pathways: Curriculum and Faculty* dimension showed low internal consistency. Accordingly, the finding is better understood as an exploratory indication of student support for these issues rather than as firm evidence of a stable underlying construct.

The comparatively strong mean score for Role of Art Education offers more consistent support for the view that students do not regard heritage as detached from formal learning. Rather, within this sample, art education was generally perceived as a relevant medium through which traditional culture can be encountered, interpreted, and transmitted in contemporary educational settings. This is broadly consistent with prior literature that positions art education as a bridge between aesthetic learning, cultural literacy, and heritage continuity [9], [21], [22].

The dimension Pathways: Practice and Culture also produced a positive mean score, suggesting that students viewed workshops, exhibitions, school-based cultural activities, and related forms of participation as potentially meaningful for ICH safeguarding. Nevertheless, this interpretation should also remain cautious, since the reliability of this dimension was low. The result, therefore, points not to a psychometrically strong subscale but to an exploratory, descriptive tendency that respondents may value practical and visible forms of engagement [15], [16], [23], [24].

The findings also suggest that respondents reacted somewhat more strongly to concrete school-based mechanisms than to broader diagnostic statements about cultural decline. A plausible interpretation is that students may find institutional actions—such as curriculum strengthening, exposure to practitioners, and cultural activities—more immediate, visible, and actionable than abstract statements about intergenerational decline or heritage endangerment. This does not mean that students deny the seriousness of heritage-related challenges. Rather, it suggests that educational possibility may be more cognitively and experientially salient than general cultural diagnosis within a school-based survey context.

It is also important to distinguish clearly between what the survey data directly show and what remains theoretically inferred. The questionnaire provides evidence of student agreement with a range of statements about art education, curricular support, practice opportunities, and selected integration issues. However, broader interpretations regarding institutional fragmentation, resource insufficiency, or the full structure of barriers to safeguarding should be treated as theoretical extensions rather than as claims conclusively demonstrated by this dataset alone.

Taken together, the study suggests that art education may be perceived by students as a potentially important educational pathway for safeguarding ICH, especially when linked to curriculum, pedagogy, and cultural participation. However, because the evidence is perception-based, sample-specific, and marked by uneven subscale reliability, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary descriptive evidence rather than as a definitive assessment of educational impact.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

This study provides descriptive-exploratory evidence that students at one secondary technical and vocational college generally perceive art education as a meaningful educational pathway for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The central contribution of the study lies not in demonstrating direct safeguarding outcomes, but in showing that students tend to associate art education with curriculum-based support, pedagogical engagement, and forms of cultural participation that may help make heritage more visible and educationally relevant.

The study also suggests that students may respond more strongly to concrete institutional and school-based pathways than to broader diagnostic statements about cultural decline. In practical terms, this implies that efforts to connect art education with ICH may become more educationally meaningful when heritage is linked to visible learning structures, guided practice, and participatory cultural opportunities.

At the same time, the findings must be interpreted within clear boundaries. The data are perception-based, drawn from a single institution, and supported by uneven subscale reliability, with two dimensions showing low internal consistency. For that reason, the study should be read as providing preliminary evidence rather than definitive or broadly generalizable conclusions.

Future research should expand the empirical basis of this topic by involving multiple institutions, larger samples, and, where possible, additional respondent groups such as teachers, cultural practitioners, and community actors. Further studies may also strengthen

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the measurement model through more rigorous instrument development and validation. Even with these limitations, the present study contributes an initial empirical basis for understanding how students in vocational educational settings perceive the relationship between art education and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage [25].

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the present findings, secondary technical and vocational colleges may consider strengthening the integration of ICH within art education curricula rather than treating heritage as an isolated extracurricular topic. Although the relevant dimension showed low internal consistency and should therefore be interpreted cautiously, the descriptive pattern suggests that respondents tended to value institutional and pedagogical support in heritage-oriented education.

Colleges should also expand practice-based and culture-based educational platforms. The findings indicate that students value pathways that connect art education to practice, cultural participation, and more visible engagement with heritage. Therefore, educational institutions should consider strengthening workshops, exhibitions, school cultural activities, and other participatory formats that allow students to encounter ICH through doing, making, performing, and presenting rather than solely through passive exposure.

In addition, greater attention should be given to current integration issues. Because students also recognized barriers to the current integration of art education and ICH, safeguarding cannot rely solely on good intentions or cultural enthusiasm. It requires institutional coherence, stronger links between course content and cultural practice, and clearer educational pathways for sustaining heritage in school settings.

Finally, future research should broaden the empirical base of this topic by involving multiple institutions and, where possible, including additional respondent groups such as teachers, practitioners, or community cultural actors. The present study provides a useful starting point, but its single-institution and student-perception basis means that broader validation remains necessary.

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