



The Influence of Arts Participation on Subjective Well-Being, Emotional Regulation as a Mediator

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Abstract: This study examined whether arts participation (AP) predicts subjective well-being (SWB) among Chinese undergraduates and whether emotional regulation (ER) mediates this relationship. A cross-sectional survey of 215 students in Shandong showed that AP significantly predicted SWB both directly and indirectly through ER, confirming partial mediation. Findings suggest that arts engagement enhances well-being partly by improving emotional regulation, highlighting the value of integrating arts modules, creative labs, and emotion-regulation workshops into university programs. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, self-report data, single-province sample, and potential self-selection bias. Future research should use longitudinal or experimental designs, broader samples, and explore additional mediators and moderators.

Keywords: arts participation, subjective well-being, emotional regulation

1. Introduction

Arts participation involves engaging in artistic activities for enjoyment or creative expression [1]. While research on college students' well-being is growing, few studies have examined how arts participation affects subjective well-being among young adults in China. Previous research on older adults shows mixed results, with some reporting positive effects on happiness and life satisfaction [2] and others finding benefits only from sustained participation [3]. The mediating role of emotional regulation in this context remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how emotional regulation mediates the relationship between arts participation and subjective well-being among Chinese undergraduates in Shandong Province.

2. Literature Review

Arts participation contributes to subjective well-being by supporting self-expression, emotional regulation, and social connection, enhancing life satisfaction. Such creative experiences can also promote flow, strengthen resilience, and improve perceived life quality [4]. Overall, higher levels of arts participation are expected to be positively associated with greater subjective well-being.

Emotional regulation refers to how individuals manage their emotions and influences their psychological well-being by helping them handle negative feelings, sustain positive affect, and remain resilient [5]. In arts participation, emotional regulation can boost well-being, as artistic activities provide opportunities for emotional expression and management [6]. People with stronger emotional regulation may gain deeper emotional benefits from the arts, while those with weaker skills may experience less impact on their well-being. Based on the above rationale, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H1: Arts participation positively predicts subjective well-being.

H2: Emotional regulation partially mediates the relationship between arts participation and subjective well-being.

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative cross-sectional design with a self-administered online questionnaire to examine arts participation, emotional regulation, social connections, and subjective well-being among university students in Shandong Province. Purposive sampling was applied to target students who had engaged in arts activities within the past 12 months. A total of 215 valid responses were collected through Wenjuanxing (86% response rate). G*Power analysis ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.95) indicated a minimum sample of 129, confirming that the final sample of 215 provided sufficient statistical power.

This study used a 19-item questionnaire, including 6 items on arts participation, 6 on emotional regulation, and 7 on subjective well-being, all measured on a 5-point Likert scale. All scales were pre-tested for linguistic and cultural fit, and a pilot study with 40 students in Shandong confirmed good reliability, with Cronbach's α values of .859 (AP), .867 (ER), and .840 (SWB), indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 1. Reliability of Variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	interpretation
AP	0.859	good reliability
ER	0.867	good reliability
SWB	0.840	good reliability

4. Data Analysis

The regression analysis in Table 2 showed that arts participation significantly and positively predicts subjective well-being ($B = .90$, $\beta = .884$, $t = 27.58$, $p < .001$). The model explains 78.1% of the variance in subjective well-being (adjusted $R^2 = .78$), indicating a strong relationship. The variance inflation factor (VIF = 1.000) suggests no multicollinearity issue, confirming the model's stability. These results support the hypothesis that greater engagement in arts activities is associated with higher subjective well-being among college students.

Table 2. Regression Analysis of AP & SWB

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	p	Adjusted R ²	F	VIF
Constant	.31	.105	-	2.965	.003		0.78	
AP	.9	.033	.884	27.581	<.001		760.699	1.000

Note. dependent variable: subjective well-being, Predictors: arts participation

Table 3. The Mediating Effect of ER on AP & SWB

Effect Type	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
AP → ER	.805	.033	24.355	<.001	0.74	.87
ER → SWB	.447	.061	7.395	<.001	0.328	.566
AP → SWB (Direct effect)	.54	.057	9.52	<.001	0.428	.652
AP → SWB (Indirect effect via ER)	.36	.053	—	—	0.255	.46

Table 3 shows that arts participation (AP) significantly predicted emotional regulation (ER), $\beta = .805$, $SE = .033$, $t(213) = 24.355$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.74, .87]. In turn, ER significantly predicted subjective well-being (SWB), $\beta = .45$, $SE = .06$, $t(213) = 7.40$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.33, .57]. The direct effect of AP on SWB remained significant, $\beta = .54$, $SE = .06$, $t(213) = 9.52$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.43, .65]. The indirect effect via ER was also significant, $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = .36$, $SE = .05$, 95% BCa CI [.26, .46], indicating that emotional regulation partially mediates the relationship between arts participation and subjective well-being.

5. Discussion

The findings show that arts participation enhances college students' subjective well-being both directly and indirectly through emotional regulation, which partially mediates this relationship [7]. This study provides new evidence from Chinese undergraduates, highlighting the value of arts in promoting enjoyment, emotional resilience, and mental health. Theoretically, it demonstrates emotional regulation as a key mechanism in an underrepresented cultural context. Practically, the results support incorporating arts-based programs into university curricula and wellness initiatives to foster emotional competence and well-being. Future research should examine other mediators, such as social support or self-efficacy, and explore structured arts interventions for sustainable mental health.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how arts participation affects college students' subjective well-being, with emotional regulation as a mediator. Results show that arts participation enhances well-being both directly and indirectly by improving emotional regulation. Practically, universities can support student well-being through arts modules, workshops, labs, and accessible exhibitions or performances. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, self-report data, and a single-province sample.

Future research should use longitudinal or experimental designs, broader samples, and examine additional mediators (e.g., self-efficacy, social support) and moderators (e.g., gender, engagement intensity, online vs. offline participation).

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Author Bio

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