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# From Aesthetic Experience to Psychological Adjustment: A Theoretical Exploration of Aesthetic Education in Preventing Depressive States among University Students

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**Abstract:** Preventing depressive states among university students requires more than screening, referral, and professional intervention. It also requires sustained psychological support for all students, integrated into their everyday study and life. Although aesthetic education has been incorporated into the promotion of student mental health, how it contributes to the prevention of depressive states still lacks an integrated explanation. Using conceptual analysis and theoretical integration, this paper identifies risk factors across five aspects—emotion, cognition, meaning, relationships, and psychological resilience—and proposes an aesthetic experience–psychological adjustment framework. It focuses on how aesthetic experience may develop into students' everyday capacities for regulating emotions and coping with stress. This paper argues that non-instrumental engagement, emotional expression, and appropriate psychological distance help students accept negative emotions and revise unhelpful interpretations. Sustained aesthetic experience can enrich the sources of meaning and value in life, while shared appreciation and creation can strengthen emotional connection and mutual support between people. These processes are interrelated, and their long-term development through repeated experience may lay a solid foundation for students' psychological resilience. These effects are nevertheless shaped by autonomy in participation, the quality of aesthetic experience, the degree of emotional involvement, and individual differences. The analysis offers an approach to coordinating aesthetic education with mental health work in universities and a theoretical reference for further research.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic Education; Aesthetic Experience; Psychological Adjustment; Depressive States; University Students

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## 1. Introduction

The university years broadly coincide with emerging adulthood, when identity exploration, academic development, changing relationships, and career decisions often unfold together[1]. Persistent low mood, self-rejection, and withdrawal may intensify when these demands overlap and students lack sufficient psychological and social support. Providing earlier support and helping students develop coping resources through everyday education are therefore important concerns for university mental health provision. China's Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Student Mental Health Work in the New Era (2023–2025) provides a relevant policy basis. Issued by the Ministry of Education and 16 other departments, it advocates mental health promotion through five complementary areas of education. It also emphasizes the role of aesthetic education in supporting students' emotional well-being[2].

Screening, identification, referral, psychological counseling, and professional treatment are important components of psychological support in universities, enabling early risk detection and assistance for students experiencing greater distress. Everyday education also needs to address how students manage emotions, understand setbacks, and obtain support. Integrating such support into all students' learning and daily lives may reach those who have not actively sought help. It also extends prevention beyond responding to problems that have already become apparent.

Aesthetic education opens one avenue for this purpose. Its value lies not in becoming another form of psychological counseling, but in using aesthetic activities in art, nature, and everyday life to give students experiences that step temporarily outside an environment of grades, competition, and instrumental calculation. Schiller emphasized the cultivation of an integrated personality through aesthetic education; Cai held that aesthetic education nurtures disposition and feeling; and Zhu brought the aesthetic attitude into ordinary life[3-5]. Research on the arts and health likewise indicates associations between arts engagement and a range of health indicators and levels of well-being[6]. Taken together, these perspectives and findings suggest that aesthetic education is more than training in artistic literacy; it also shapes how students manage their emotions and experience life.

Potential psychological benefits from arts participation do not establish that university aesthetic education prevents depressive states. Two questions require explanation before this preventive role can be understood. First, how do arts courses, student activities, and campus environments give rise to genuine aesthetic experiences? Second, how might the emotional impact, pleasure, or relaxation experienced during an activity develop into more enduring psychological resources? Some existing evidence comes from therapeutic settings or specific populations and cannot be directly generalized to aesthetic education for all university students. Educational discussions often affirm its psychological value but provide less detail about the processes, conditions, and limits of its effects. This paper therefore examines where aesthetic education might contribute and why its benefits cannot be assumed to follow automatically from participation.

This paper uses conceptual analysis and theoretical integration to address a central question. How can aesthetic experiences develop into students' capacities to regulate emotions and cope with stress in everyday life? Aesthetic experience is treated as a key process through which aesthetic education may influence psychological states. The analysis considers emotion, cognition, meaning, relationships, and psychological resilience, before examining relevant conditions and practical implications. The account is open to testing and revision; it does not empirically establish the preventive effects of aesthetic education.

# 2. Conceptual Definitions and Theoretical Foundations

## 2.1 Aesthetic Education and Aesthetic Experience

Meiyu, the Chinese concept translated here as aesthetic education, overlaps with several related educational concepts. These include arts education, education of aesthetic sensibility, and other traditions of aesthetic education, although their meanings are not identical. Schiller viewed aesthetic education as reconciling sensibility and reason to develop an integrated personality; Cai emphasized its capacity to cultivate feelings. Zhu advocated understanding everyday life through an aesthetic attitude. Despite their different emphases, these perspectives extend aesthetic education beyond artistic knowledge and skills to human perception, emotion, and personality.

Here, aesthetic education refers to an educational process involving aesthetic objects encountered in art, nature, and everyday life. It develops students' capacities to perceive, understand, express, and create beauty, while nurturing their emotional and personal development. Aesthetic education includes arts education but is not equivalent to training in artistic skills. Its content may include arts courses, creative practice, appreciation of nature, and campus environments. Participation alone, however, does not establish that students have had an aesthetic experience or that their psychological states will improve.

Aesthetic experience is the integrated experience of perception, emotion, imagination, and understanding that develops through appreciation or creation. Four features are particularly relevant to the analysis presented in this paper. First, aesthetic activities temporarily set aside concerns about achievement, reward, and utility, directing attention to the experience itself. Second, students may become absorbed in a work or creative process, allowing self-evaluation and everyday worries to recede. This absorption shares some features with flow experiences[7]. Third, aesthetic experience can evoke pleasure, awe,

and the feeling of being moved. It can also allow sadness and loneliness to be felt and expressed at some psychological distance[8-9]. Fourth, engagement with artworks can offer students new ways of understanding themselves, others, and life. Not every activity has all four features, but aesthetic education can contribute to the psychological adjustment discussed below only when students engage emotionally and reflect on their experiences. Assessing possible psychological effects therefore requires attention to students' experiences, beyond the number of courses offered or activities attended.

## 2.2 Depressive States among University Students and Related Factors

This paper uses the term depressive states as a working concept. It describes a psychological state involving relatively persistent low mood, negative self-evaluation, diminished meaning, and interpersonal withdrawal. The term does not denote a depressive disorder diagnosed using clinical criteria. Nor does it classify disappointment after an examination, brief anxiety, or ordinary emotional fluctuations as depression. This concept locates the discussion within early prevention and psychological adjustment, where everyday university education may contribute. Students who meet clinical diagnostic criteria or experience marked functional impairment still require professional assessment and intervention.

To identify where aesthetic education might contribute, this paper draws on relevant theories to consider five groups of risk factors. First, negative emotions may remain dominant while sources of positive emotion are limited. The broaden-and-build theory proposes that positive emotions expand attention and possible actions, gradually building psychological resources[10]. Second, students may interpret themselves, the world, and the future negatively and repeatedly dwell on failure and distress. Beck's[11] cognitive triad and Nolen-Hoeksema's[12] research on rumination provide relevant theoretical foundations. Third, unclear life goals and values may make it difficult to recognize the meaning of present efforts. Frankl's[13] account offers one perspective for understanding this difficulty in finding meaning. Fourth, students may lack belonging, emotional connection, or perceived social support, which may otherwise buffer the adverse psychological effects of stress[14]. Fifth, students may lack accessible coping strategies and psychological resilience when facing stress. Stress appraisal and coping theory links psychological responses to how people interpret stress and the support and coping options available to them[15].

These five groups neither exhaust the causes of depressive states nor imply a fixed causal sequence. They may interact in ways that sustain or intensify students' difficulties. Persistent low mood, for example, may encourage negative interpretations, which may deepen withdrawal and weaken social support. Students who base self-worth heavily on grades, competitions, further study, or employment may interpret a specific setback as a failure of the whole self. This account does not identify competition itself as a direct cause of depressive states. Rather, narrow sources of self-worth and insufficient emotional support may make setbacks harder to process. Prevention therefore involves more than teaching a limited set of regulatory techniques. Students also need positive experiences, alternative ways of understanding events, a sense of value, and meaningful connections. These needs provide possible points of contribution for aesthetic education.

## 2.3 Psychological Adjustment

Psychological adjustment involves changes in emotions, thoughts, behavior, and interpersonal interactions in response to stress, setbacks, or emotional distress. Through these changes, individuals seek to restore psychological balance and gradually develop coping capacities. Adjustment can recur and accumulate, rather than constituting the final outcome of a single activity. This paper uses psychological adjustment instead of the broader concept of mental health to specify how aesthetic education might operate. An aesthetic experience may initially change how students feel about, understand, or address an immediate problem. Whether such changes contribute to a more stable psychological state depends on the duration of engagement, activity quality, and individual circumstances.

On this basis, the paper proposes an aesthetic experience–psychological adjustment framework. Aesthetic education provides opportunities for aesthetic experience through courses, activities, and environments, and students form specific experiences within them. These experiences may shape how students regulate emotions, cope with setbacks, seek meaning, and build interpersonal relationships in everyday life and, through continued application, may accumulate into a capacity for dealing with difficulties. Whether this transformation is achieved, and whether it helps guard against depressive states, requires further research to confirm.

Drawing on Caplan's[16] conception of prevention, this paper understands aesthetic education primarily as everyday

prevention directed at the whole student population. It can help ordinary students build psychological resources and can offer support to students experiencing early difficulties, but it cannot replace medical assessment and treatment. The discussion that follows therefore concerns the preventive role that aesthetic education may play under certain conditions, rather than its use as a principal method for treating depressive disorders.

# 3. Theoretical Mechanisms of Aesthetic Education in Preventing Depressive States

This section examines, across the five aspects of emotion, cognition, meaning, relationships, and psychological resilience, the pathways by which aesthetic experience may help students adjust their psychological states. These five aspects serve as theoretical threads for clarifying the preventive role of aesthetic education. Psychological resilience here refers to the capacity to maintain or restore psychological balance under stress.

## 3.1 Emotional Mechanism

Sadness and a sense of loss are part of ordinary life; what warrants attention is their becoming dominant over long periods and difficult to express and regulate, while positive emotions steadily decline. Aesthetic experience may build a relatively safe space to hold negative emotions. The distancing–embracing model holds that artistic form allows people to keep a suitable distance from the sadness and loneliness represented in a work, so that they can approach and understand these feelings without being wholly engulfed by them. A student who listens repeatedly to a sorrowful song is probably not sinking further into low mood but recognizing present feelings in the melody and the lyrics. Film, literature, and drama can likewise give a visible and intelligible form to the loneliness or confusion that individuals find hard to articulate. As long as aesthetic distance is not broken, such experiences may help students voice and accept their emotions rather than continually suppress or avoid them.

Aesthetic activities may also give rise to pleasure, being moved, awe, and wonder. Such experiences come largely from artworks, nature, and the process of creation, and do not depend entirely on achievement and external rewards. Even when an examination or competition has not gone well, students may still gain positive emotions from a song, an exhibition, or the campus landscape, which adds to their emotional lives a source not wholly governed by success or failure. According to broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions help widen the scope of attention and thought and gradually accumulate psychological resources for facing stress. Viewed through Gross's[17] model of emotion regulation, aesthetic absorption can briefly redirect excessive attention to negative events, the varied narratives offered by artworks help in reinterpreting difficulties, and artistic creation opens up nonverbal means of expression. These approaches are not transmitted to students directly as a set of psychological techniques; they are practiced through repeated appreciation and creation. Whether they can transfer further to everyday stressful situations is a key aspect of the empirical testing of this mechanism. Where appropriate aesthetic distance is maintained and participation is sustained, aesthetic education may draw on accepting negative emotions, adding positive experiences, and broadening regulation strategies to reduce the continual accumulation of low mood. The brief pleasure produced by a single activity does not establish that such an effect has taken hold.

## 3.2 Cognitive Mechanism

Negative cognitive schemas can lead people to interpret experiences rigidly and repeatedly seek information that confirms their existing judgments. The openness of aesthetic experience may loosen these habitual patterns. Artworks often permit more than one interpretation, requiring viewers to observe again, suspend judgment, and connect form, emotion, and personal experience. The model of aesthetic processing likewise presents appreciation as an active process involving perception, understanding, and affective evaluation, rather than passive reception[18]. Recognizing that a character, image, or plot admits different readings may help students see that real-life failures can also have multiple interpretations. Repeated practice in open-ended interpretation may make students less likely to equate a single setback with complete failure.

Aesthetic activities may also reduce excessive attention to the self. Artworks, other people's lives, and natural landscapes can direct attention outward. Experiences of awe may especially help people temporarily move beyond a narrow self-perspective and understand their circumstances in a broader context. This shift may ease the isolating feeling that "I am the only one failing." Immersive appreciation and creation may also redirect attention toward artworks and the activity itself. This shift may temporarily reduce rumination, understood here as repeatedly dwelling on negative feelings or experiences. Attention

restoration theory proposes that natural landscapes attract attention with little effort and help fatigued cognitive systems recover[19]. Suitable aesthetic experiences may therefore encourage flexible interpretation, redirect attention, and restore cognitive resources. These processes may reduce the role of rumination in sustaining depressive states. However, aesthetic activities may intensify rumination if an artwork closely mirrors personal suffering or appreciation becomes repeated immersion in negative content.

### 3.3 Meaning-Related Mechanism

Some university students habitually assess themselves through grades, competition results, further study, and employment outcomes. When these become the main sources of self-worth, a single setback may be interpreted as "I have failed as a person." The relatively non-instrumental character of aesthetic experience offers another way of experiencing life. Engaging with an artwork, experiencing nature, or completing a creative work can have value in itself, without being translated into rankings or rewards. Artistic expressions of life, love, freedom, and suffering also provide reference points through which students can reconsider their own experiences.

Creative activities give students a more active role in this process. Painting a picture, writing a poem, or staging a play requires them to select materials, organize form, and express experience. They therefore generate meaning of their own rather than simply receiving meanings already available to them. Dewey regarded art as a form of experience that achieves wholeness[20]. From this perspective, the expression, participation, and completion involved in creation may help students affirm their ability and worth through the concrete experience of "I created this." Even without external awards, the creative process may leave a sense of control and accomplishment. Sustained participation may also bring aesthetic sensitivity and creativity into students' self-understanding, so that academic or employment outcomes no longer define them alone. With multiple sources of self-worth, students may be less likely to reject themselves entirely after failure in one domain. They may also have more opportunities to regain support from other life experiences. By broadening sources of meaning and self-worth, aesthetic education may buffer the effects of performance setbacks on depressive states. This does not diminish the importance of academic and career goals.

### 3.4 Relational Mechanism

Many aesthetic education activities involve students participating together in shared experiences. Choirs, drama, dance, instrumental ensembles, film viewing, and arts clubs bring students together around shared works and creative goals. Emotional resonance during shared appreciation, together with coordination during collaborative creation, may strengthen feelings of being understood, accepted, and connected to others. When participation is voluntary and the group atmosphere is inclusive, interaction centered on artworks and shared interests may reduce pressure to discuss personal difficulties directly. It may also create space for feelings to be shared naturally.

The stress-buffering hypothesis proposes that social support may weaken the effects of stressful events on psychological distress. Shared aesthetic activities may provide an everyday source of belonging and emotional support if they offer stable, inclusive opportunities for interaction. For students who have begun avoiding social contact, a choir, drama group, or art club without high performance demands may offer an accessible route back into interaction. Through continued rehearsal, discussion, and creation, participants may become familiar with one another's feelings, and temporary cooperation may develop into more stable trust. Such connections may extend beyond completing tasks, giving students someone to confide in or turn to for help during stressful periods. For students who feel that "no one understands me," sharing an experience of an artwork may offer a starting point for expressing their circumstances and connecting with others. However, joint participation does not necessarily produce support, and excessive emphasis on selection, competition, and public evaluation may create new pressures. Groups that lack inclusiveness may also intensify feelings of exclusion. Whether aesthetic education works through relationships therefore depends on autonomy in participation, continuity of activities, and a welcoming group atmosphere.

### 3.5 Psychological Resilience Mechanism

Adjustments in emotion, cognition, meaning, and relationships may gradually develop into more stable coping capacities when repeatedly applied across different life situations. Zhu's idea of "making life an art" emphasizes that aesthetics can

become an attitude toward life, rather than remaining a temporary activity. From this perspective, the long-term value of aesthetic education extends beyond the improved mood produced by a particular activity. It also lies in students' possible development of more flexible ways of feeling and interpreting experience.

This aesthetic attitude can be understood through three main features. First, maintaining some psychological distance from suffering allows students to experience emotions without being wholly absorbed by them, leaving room for reflection and action. Second, accepting multiple meanings in artworks and uncertainty in life may help students avoid immediately treating unknown outcomes as the worst possible result. Third, finding positive experiences in nature, art, and everyday details allows emotional recovery to depend on more than major achievements. Although stressful events themselves may remain unchanged, students may gain additional resources for coping. These capacities are not equivalent to psychological resilience, but they may provide a foundation for withstanding stress and regaining balance. Whether students can apply these experiences to setbacks and pressures outside the activity is central to understanding the relationship between aesthetic education and psychological resilience. Sustained participation provides opportunities for these resources to accumulate, but whether it changes everyday coping capacities remains to be tested.

## 3.6 Translating Aesthetic Experience into Everyday Adjustment Capacities

The aesthetic experience–psychological adjustment framework examines whether experiences in courses, arts activities, or campus environments translate into everyday psychological capacities. These include regulating emotions, interpreting setbacks, and managing interpersonal relationships. Universities provide aesthetic opportunities through which students develop specific experiences. Their possible preventive value depends on whether students can reinterpret and use these experiences in everyday life. Neither the number of activities attended nor enjoyment during participation is therefore sufficient to establish a preventive effect. Students' responses to actual difficulties after leaving the activity also need to be examined. Table 1 summarizes potential forms of this transfer across the five dimensions.

*Table 1. Possible links between aesthetic experience and everyday psychological adjustment*

| Dimension | Related risks | Possible processes during aesthetic activities | Possible expressions in everyday adjustment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emotion | Persistent negative emotions and insufficient positive experiences | Recognizing and expressing emotions through artworks; experiencing pleasure and being moved | Accepting emotions under stress and choosing suitable regulation strategies |
| Cognition | Negative self-evaluation and repeatedly dwelling on setbacks | Considering multiple interpretations of artworks and redirecting excessive self-focused attention | Viewing setbacks from different perspectives and reducing entirely negative judgments of oneself |
| Meaning | A diminished sense of meaning in life and limited sources of self-worth | Expressing experience through appreciation and creation; discovering value beyond grades | Assessing oneself across several dimensions and remaining engaged with life |
| Relationships | Social withdrawal and insufficient social support | Sharing feelings and building trust through shared appreciation and collaborative creation | Maintaining connections beyond activities and seeking and providing support |
| Psychological resilience | Limited coping strategies and difficulty regaining psychological balance | Practicing emotion regulation and open-ended interpretation, and accumulating positive experiences through sustained participation | Coping flexibly with stress and regaining psychological balance after setbacks |

Note: These links are theoretical propositions that require separate examination of experiences during activities and their transfer to everyday life. They do not imply a fixed sequence in which the mechanisms operate.

These processes may support one another in several different ways. Positive emotions can encourage new interpretations, which may broaden meaning in life, while trust developed through shared participation may provide everyday support. The development of psychological resilience may be associated with repeated use of these forms of adjustment. Short-term

psychological changes differ from the long-term accumulation of capacities, but the five dimensions should not be treated as fixed, sequential stages. Further research should examine whether experiences persist beyond an activity, whether students use them in everyday life, and which conditions influence this transfer.

# 4. Conditions for Application

## 4.1 Scope and Professional Responsibilities

The aesthetic education discussed here primarily serves the general university student population, including students experiencing mild depressive states who need early support. Through everyday education, it offers opportunities for emotional expression, experiences of meaning, and social interaction, but does not provide diagnosis or treatment. Prevention here does not promise to eliminate temporary low mood. Rather, prevention aims to expand students' available strategies for psychological adjustment and reduce the possibility that accumulated stress develops into depressive states. Students who meet clinical diagnostic criteria, show substantial functional impairment, or face a crisis should still receive assessment and intervention from professional services. Aesthetic education can complement mental health education, physical education, and labor education. However, this paper does not claim that it is more effective than other approaches to prevention.

## 4.2 Genuine Aesthetic Experience and Activity Quality

Whether the proposed mechanisms operate depends on whether activities genuinely evoke aesthetic experience. Course numbers, participation counts, and the scale of exhibitions or performances document provision, but do not establish students' immersion, emotional involvement, or understanding of meaning. When art courses center on technical assessment and activities serve mainly competitions and public displays, aesthetic education may again become driven by performance targets. Its contribution to psychological adjustment may consequently be limited. Evaluation should therefore consider both participation coverage and how students feel, understand, and express themselves during activities. This also helps distinguish the provision of activities from the experiences students actually gain.

## 4.3 Autonomy in Participation and Moderate Emotional Involvement

Compulsory attendance, prescribed forms of expression, or excessive emphasis on assessment may turn aesthetic activities into another obligation. Courses and activities should allow students to choose content and forms of expression and to withdraw, without requiring them to disclose private emotions. Aesthetic experiences involving negative emotions also require appropriate psychological distance. Experiences may intensify rumination when a work closely mirrors personal adversity and emotional involvement exceeds the individual's capacity to cope. Activity design should therefore allow emotional engagement without assuming that the same content benefits every student.

## 4.4 Continuity and Individual Differences

A single activity may produce brief emotional or attentional changes, but these do not establish long-term preventive effects. Continued participation offers opportunities to revisit and apply aesthetic experiences. The development of everyday adjustment skills also depends on whether students can use these experiences to address actual difficulties. Aesthetic sensitivity, artistic experience, cultural background, personality, and current psychological state all influence this process; the same student's responses may also vary over time. Universities should offer appreciation and creative activities, with both group and individual participation. Students should be able to adjust their participation frequency according to their interests and capacity to cope.

# 5. Implications for University Practice

China's policies on school aesthetic education emphasize its educative role and its means of permeating everyday schooling[21-22]. In light of the framework presented here, practice should both improve the aesthetic experiences students actually have and give them opportunities to apply those experiences in everyday life.

## 5.1 Curriculum Design

Beyond imparting knowledge and training skills, aesthetic education courses can leave room for feeling, association, creation, and exchange. After appreciation or creation, students can be guided to reflect on how a work has affected their emotions and ideas and to consider whether such experiences help them address problems in their own lives, without undue disclosure of

private matters. Course assessment should give weight to participation in the process, understanding of works, and individual expression, and place less emphasis on technical grading, competition results, and standardized answers. Basic artistic training should still be retained, and should serve perception and expression.

### 5.2 Activity Organization

Choirs, theater, dance, instrumental ensembles, film screenings, and arts clubs can all provide platforms for interaction based on shared interests. Universities can reduce unnecessary selection and competition and open programs with low barriers for students without specialist training that can be attended on a continuing basis, while retaining individual pursuits such as reading, listening to music, and personal writing. In evaluating these activities, attention should extend beyond performances and awards to whether members participate consistently, whether the group atmosphere is open, and whether the exchanges formed during activities extend into everyday life.

### 5.3 Campus Environments

Natural landscapes, public art, and public spaces where people can linger can increase students' everyday opportunities to encounter beauty. Campus construction should not aim merely at a passing glance; staff and students should find such spaces easy to enter, to remain in, and to use. Walking paths through planted areas, small display spaces, and relatively quiet rest areas can all become everyday destinations that students can enjoy without registering in advance. Environments can serve to shift attention and provide brief respite, but their role should not be enlarged into directly alleviating depressive states.

### 5.4 Coordination with Professional Psychological Services

Aesthetic education units, arts departments, and counseling centers can jointly agree on forms of support during activities and on referral procedures. Where content involves intense emotional material, clear channels for seeking help can be prepared in advance; students who show marked distress should be referred promptly to professional services for assessment and treatment. Aesthetic educators should confine their work to aesthetic and educational activities. They should not carry out psychological testing or treatment, nor should all artistic activities be turned into psychological intervention programs.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Theoretical Contribution Of The Framework

This paper distinguishes activity participation, aesthetic experience, and everyday psychological adjustment to explain why similar art courses or activities may yield different psychological outcomes. Attending an activity does not necessarily mean engaging with it. Even pleasure or feeling moved does not necessarily translate into an ability to address everyday difficulties. Examining the connections among participation, aesthetic experience, and everyday adjustment makes discussion of aesthetic education's preventive value more specific. It asks both what students experience and whether those experiences change how they address actual problems.

Adjustment in emotion, cognition, meaning, and relationships may be mutually supportive and, through repeated use, provide a foundation for psychological resilience. Rather than listing five separate functions of aesthetic education, this account emphasizes their connections in everyday life. Subsequent research should examine both short-term psychological changes and the development of adjustment strategies that remain available over time. It can then assess whether these changes are associated with reductions in depressive states.

### 6.2 Explanatory Scope and Limitations

This paper uses conceptual analysis and theoretical integration; it presents no original empirical data and is not a systematic review of relevant research. The cited literature draws on aesthetic education, psychology, and arts and health. Some study populations and settings differ from those of everyday aesthetic education in universities. These sources therefore support theoretical reasoning about mechanisms, but do not establish consistent preventive effects on depressive states among university students. The five groups of factors identified here do not encompass all causes of depressive states.

Shared aesthetic activities combine artistic experience, cooperation, and social interaction, while creative activities also involve task completion and self-expression. If students' depressive states change after participation, further investigation must determine whether this reflects aesthetic experience, general participation, relationship support, or other factors. This paper cannot compare the relative effects of the five pathways or determine which activities, frequencies, and durations are

most appropriate.

### 6.3 Future Research

Future research could use repeated measurement or longitudinal follow-up to examine whether students have aesthetic experiences, apply them to everyday adjustment, and show corresponding changes in depressive states. The working concept of depressive states could be assessed using indicators such as depressive symptoms and negative self-evaluation. Studies should explain how each indicator relates to the concept rather than substitute a single scale score for the concept as a whole. Analyses of the five aspects should not assume a fixed sequence. Instead, they should test how these aspects influence one another and whether their contributions accumulate through continued participation. Different activity formats, participation intensities, and durations warrant comparison. Autonomy in participation, quality of experience, emotional involvement, and individual differences should also be examined. Alongside positive outcomes, research should document null findings and any rumination or burden associated with emotionally intense content, using these findings to refine the framework.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper proposes an aesthetic experience–psychological adjustment framework to explain how aesthetic education may contribute to preventing depressive states. It examines five aspects: emotion, cognition, meaning, relationships, and psychological resilience. The central question is whether aesthetic experiences can develop into students' everyday abilities to regulate emotions and cope with stress. Continued participation may enable different adjustment processes to support one another and gradually build coping resources. This process is influenced by autonomy in participation, quality of experience, emotional involvement, and individual differences. Universities can accordingly include aesthetic education within everyday psychological support, while subsequent empirical research examines its specific contributions and conditions for application.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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