

Strategies for Enhancing Subjective Well-Being in Art and Design Students: Evidence from Three Higher Vocational Colleges in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China

Wu Yun Dong ^{1*}, Kong Wei Jian ², Lv Ting Ting ³

¹ Dongshin University, South Korea

² Keimyung University, South Korea

³ Quanzhou Ocean Institute, China

*Corresponding Email: ethanwu0525@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined factors influencing subjective well-being among 306 art and design students from three higher vocational colleges in Quanzhou, China, using hierarchical regression analysis. Results indicated that social support and psychological resilience were the strongest positive predictors, jointly explaining 46% of the variance in well-being. In contrast, academic stress showed a significant negative effect, with over 60% of students reporting moderate to high stress related to creative workload and career uncertainty. Professional satisfaction displayed a differentiated pattern: although students reported relatively high satisfaction with social recognition of their majors, lower self-assessed competency weakened career identity and indirectly reduced well-being. Guided by Self-Determination Theory, this study conceptualizes how autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are differentially satisfied or frustrated through social support, resilience, stress, and professional satisfaction, thereby shaping subjective well-being. Findings underscore the importance of creative interpersonal networks, particularly faculty mentorship and peer collaboration, in art education. The study further highlights the negative impact of mismatches between initial major selection motivations and subsequent career identity development, suggesting the need for targeted career counseling, resilience training, and practice-oriented transition programs.

Keywords: Art and design education; subjective well-being; psychological resilience; academic stressors; major-career identity alignment

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1.0 Introduction

Happiness, transcending temporal boundaries and cultural differences, has emerged as a globally prominent concern. Within psychology, happiness is defined as subjective well-being an individual's subjective evaluation of their life circumstances based on personal standards, acting as the ultimate arbiter of their own existence (Diener, 1984). This concept underscores the profoundly personal nature of happiness.

As academic research on happiness deepens, early studies primarily focused on the impact of external factors such as age, gender, income level, and residential density on happiness. However, given that happiness is fundamentally an individual's subjective experience of life, these sociodemographic variables prove insufficient for comprehensively explaining personal well-being. Consequently, research on the internal psychological factors influencing happiness has gained increasing prominence in recent years, becoming a major research focus (Yang & Yu, 2024). Moreover, happiness does not exist in isolation but is closely intertwined with major life events experienced during different developmental stages. Consequently, examining the events encountered by individuals at various life phases holds particular significance (Lucas, 2007). College students, navigating the transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, face numerous adaptation challenges (Wu & Kong, 2024).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that human well-being and optimal functioning depend on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Tang et al., 2020). According to SDT, environments that support these needs enhance intrinsic motivation and well-being, whereas environments that frustrate these needs increase stress and maladjustment.

Within the context of art and design education, social support reflects the fulfillment of relatedness needs through faculty mentorship, peer collaboration, and professional networks; psychological resilience reflects competence by enabling students to cope with creative challenges and evaluative pressures; and professional satisfaction particularly alignment between personal interest and field of study reflects autonomy. Conversely, excessive academic stress and career uncertainty may frustrate these needs, thereby undermining subjective well-being.

Based on SDT, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework in which social support, psychological resilience, academic stress, and professional satisfaction jointly influence subjective well-being through the satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs.

This framework This study aims to fill these gaps by investigating the causal effect of low-carbon moves beyond descriptive associations and provides an analytical structure for interpreting well-being mechanisms among art and design students.

Art and design students often select their majors under the combined influence of employment prospects, social reputation of the discipline, parental expectations, and institutional guidance, rather than purely intrinsic interest (Sudhana et al., 2020). During their academic training, these students face intensive creative workloads, portfolio evaluations, exhibition requirements, and internships, alongside pressure related to subjective assessment standards and uncertain career trajectories (Li et al., 2024). These stressors may reduce professional satisfaction and negatively affect subjective well-being, potentially impairing long-term social adaptation and professional identity development (Toubassi et al., 2023).

If stress is viewed as an internal factor negatively impacting the subjective well-being of art and design students, then social support can be regarded as an external positive resource that promotes well-being. Furthermore, individuals' ability to recognize their strengths and fully realize their potential in daily life also contributes to positive experiences of well-being (Carruthers & Hood, 2004). A key psychological trait closely related to this potential is psychological resilience. Psychological resilience refers to an individual's capacity to actively cope with adversity, overcome challenges, and achieve effective adaptation through self-regulation and cognitive restructuring in high-pressure environments or situations with significant change (Mumtazah, 2024).

Although prior studies have examined college students' well-being in relation to stress, personality traits, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and academic satisfaction (Song et al., 2021; Wilcox & Nordstokke, 2019; Cui et al., 2024), research focusing specifically on art and design students remains limited, despite the distinctive creative, evaluative, and emotional characteristics of this population (Spendlove, 2007).

1.2 Research Gap and Uniqueness of Art and Design Students

Art and design students represent a unique and distinct subgroup within higher education, characterized by the inherently creative, subjective, and evaluative nature of their academic training. Unlike students in more standardized disciplines, they are required to continuously express personal creativity while simultaneously meeting rigorous academic, aesthetic, and industry-based standards. This dual demand often results in heightened performance anxiety, identity tension, and emotional labor, as they navigate the pressures of originality and excellence (Sawyer, 2018).

The creative process itself functions as a double-edged sword for these students. On one hand, it fosters self-expression, emotional fulfilment, and a sense of accomplishment; on the other, it intensifies self-doubt, peer comparison, and stress related to subjective evaluation. The transition from student to professional designer further complicates this landscape, as it demands early career identity formation and practical competency demonstration. Consequently, professional satisfaction and perceived competence emerge as particularly salient factors influencing their well-being.

Given these discipline-specific stressors and well-being mechanisms, treating art and design students as a homogeneous subset of general university students risks overlooking critical nuances. Their unique academic environment marked by subjective evaluation, creative blocks, and career uncertainty necessitates a dedicated theoretical and empirical framework for investigating subjective well-being.

Based on these objectives, the specific aims are as follows:

1. To understand the levels of social support, psychological resilience, stress, professional satisfaction, and subjective well-being among art and design majors.
2. To examine how general characteristics of art and design majors contribute to variations in their subjective well-being.
3. To examine the relationships among social support, psychological resilience, stress, professional satisfaction, and subjective well-being among art and design majors.
4. To examine the influence of social support, psychological resilience, stress, professional satisfaction, and subjective well-being on family subjective well-being among art and design majors.

By adopting this approach, the study provides context-sensitive empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the well-being of art and design students. It underscores the importance of targeted interventions, such as faculty-student mentoring, resilience training for creative blocks, and career alignment counseling, to address their unique challenges. Ultimately, this research advocates for a discipline-specific understanding of well-being to foster healthier, more fulfilled creative professionals.

2.0 Research Methods

2.1 Research Participants

This study employed a descriptive research design. Participants comprised 306 art and design students from three higher vocational colleges in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China, all of whom had completed at least one internship and voluntarily participated in the study. Participants were drawn from four major

fields within art and design programs (e.g., visual communication design, environmental design, digital media design, and product design), reflecting the typical disciplinary structure of vocational art education in China. The inclusion criteria were: (1) enrollment in an art or design major, (2) completion of at least one internship, and (3) voluntary consent to participate. Students without internship experience or with incomplete questionnaire responses were excluded.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality assurances, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The study adhered to established ethical standards for social science research.

2.2 Research Tools

2.2.1 General Characteristics

General characteristics were measured using a self-administered questionnaire consisting of seven items, including five demographic variables (gender, grade, interpersonal relationship quality, perceived health status, and academic achievement level) and two major-related variables (motivation for choosing the major and internship experience). These variables were included as control factors based on prior well-being research among university students.

2.2.2 Social Support

The social support measurement tool used in this study was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) to assess social support among university students. This tool comprises 12 items: 4 items on family support, 4 items on friend support, and 4 items on support from significant others or meaningful people. Each item uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater perceived social support. The MSPSS has been widely validated across cultural contexts, supporting its suitability for assessing social support among Chinese college students. In this study, Cronbach's α was .92.

2.2.3 Psychological Resilience

The psychological resilience measurement tool used in this study is a modified and refined version of the Resilience Scale developed by Oshio et al. (2002) for university students. This tool comprises 16 items: 5 items assessing positive future orientation, 6 items for emotional regulation, and 5 items for interest and interest diversity. Negative items are reverse-scored. Each item uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater psychological resilience. This

scale captures both emotional and cognitive-adaptive aspects of resilience, aligning with the competence dimension of Self-Determination Theory. Cronbach's α in this study was .80.

2.2.4 Stress

Academic stress was measured using the Chinese Perceived Stress Scale (CPSS) developed by Yang et al. (2003). The CPSS consists of 14 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress levels. This instrument has been widely applied in stress research among Chinese university populations and demonstrates stable psychometric properties. In the present study, Cronbach's α was .89.

2.2.5 Professional Satisfaction

Professional satisfaction was measured using the scale developed by Kim (2000), consisting of 13 items divided into two dimensions: personal-level satisfaction (6 items) and social-level satisfaction (7 items). Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), with higher scores indicating higher levels of satisfaction. In this study, Cronbach's α was .89.

2.2.6 Subjective Well-Being

The subjective well-being measurement tool employed in this study utilizes the Subjective Well-Being Scale developed by Suh et al. (2011). This instrument comprises 9 items: 3 items assessing life satisfaction, 3 items measuring positive emotions, and 3 items evaluating negative emotions. Scores are calculated by reverse-scoring negative statements. Each item uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high), with higher scores indicating greater subjective well-being. This multidimensional structure allows for a comprehensive assessment of both cognitive and affective components of well-being. Cronbach's α for this study was .82.

2.3 Data Collection and Procedures

To ensure methodological rigor and ethical compliance, data collection followed standardized procedures. Prior to survey administration, the research plan was reported to and approved by the relevant administrative departments of the participating institutions. Participants were informed of the study objectives, data usage, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature of participation.

Data were collected from December 5 to December 12, 2025, targeting third- and fourth-year art and design majors from the three selected vocational

colleges. A total of 329 questionnaires were distributed during scheduled after-class sessions using structured classroom administration. To protect participant privacy and minimize response bias, completed questionnaires were immediately sealed in individual envelopes upon submission. All participants received small tokens of appreciation as compensation for their time.

After excluding 23 incomplete or invalid questionnaires, 306 valid responses were retained for final analysis, yielding an effective response rate of 92.7%.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 18.0. First, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to summarize participants' general characteristics and the levels of social support, psychological resilience, academic stress, professional satisfaction, and subjective well-being. Means and standard deviations were calculated to examine overall distribution patterns.

Second, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were performed to identify differences in subjective well-being across demographic and academic characteristics. Pearson correlation analysis was then used to examine relationships among the main study variables.

Finally, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify key predictors of subjective well-being among art and design students. Control variables were entered in the first step, followed sequentially by stress, professional satisfaction, social support, and psychological resilience, consistent with the proposed theoretical framework.

3.0 Research Findings

3.1 Differences in Subjective Well-Being Levels Based on General Characteristics

The sample consisted of 306 art and design students, including 185 third-year students (60.5%) and 121 fourth-year students (39.5%). Among the participants, 187 students (61.1%) reported good interpersonal relationships, while 119 students (38.9%) reported fair or poor interpersonal relationships. Regarding perceived health status, 212 students (69.3%) reported good health, and 94 students (30.7%) reported average health.

Motivations for choosing an art and design major were categorized as follows: personal interest (107 students, 35.0%), job opportunities (102 students, 33.3%), parental advice (60 students, 19.6%), and college entrance examination scores (37 students, 12.1%). Academic achievement levels were distributed as excellent (67 students, 21.9%), moderate (190 students, 62.1%), and low (49 students, 16.0%).

Statistical analyses revealed significant differences in subjective well-being

across several general characteristics, including interpersonal relationships, perceived health status, and major selection motivation. Specifically, students reporting good interpersonal relationships demonstrated significantly higher subjective well-being scores than those reporting fair or poor relationships ($t=6.10$, $p<.001$). Similarly, students with good perceived health reported higher well-being than those with average health ($t=2.75$, $p=.007$).

Regarding motivation for major selection, a significant difference was observed among groups ($F=2.90$, $p=.024$). Students who chose their major based on personal interest exhibited higher subjective well-being than those influenced primarily by external factors such as employment prospects or parental advice. No statistically significant differences were found with respect to gender, grade level, or academic achievement.

These findings suggest that interpersonal relationships and intrinsic motivation for major choice play a critical role in shaping subjective well-being among art and design students. Detailed analysis of these relationships is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of Subjective Well-Being by General Characteristics

	Category	n (%)	M±SD	t or F	p
Gender	Male	19 (6.2%)	46.0±10.0	.36	.72
	Female	287 (93.8%)	44.0±7.0		
Grade	Grade 3	185 (60.5%)	44.2±7.1	-1.99	0.055
	Grade 4	121 (39.5%)	45.4±6.9		
Interpersonal Relationships	Good	187 (61.1%)	46.5±6.1	6.1	<.001
	Fair or poor	119 (38.9%)	41.7±7.0		
Health Status	Good	212 (69.3%)	45.8±7.1	2.75	.007
	Average	94 (30.7%)	42.4±6.6		
Motivations for Choosing to Study Art and Design	Interest	107 (35.0%)	46.0±6.5	2.9	.024
	College Entrance Examination Score	37 (12.1%)	45.7±6.1		
	Job Opportunities	102 (33.3%)	42.9±7.3		
	Parental Advice	60 (19.6%)	44.7±7.4		
Academic Achievement Level	Excellent	67 (21.9%)	46.2±6.7	1.8	.16
	Moderate	190 (62.1%)	44.5±6.9		
	Low	49 (16.0%)	42.5±7.5		

3.2 Participants' Social Support, Psychological Resilience, Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Well-Being Levels

Descriptive statistics for the main study variables are presented in Table 2. The mean score for social support was 5.99 ± 0.90 on a 7-point scale, indicating a relatively high level of perceived social support among participants. Among the subdimensions, support from significant others ($M=6.01 \pm 0.75$) was the highest, followed by family support ($M=5.89 \pm 1.05$) and friend support ($M=5.82 \pm 0.87$).

The mean score for psychological resilience was 3.82 ± 0.62 on a 5-point scale, reflecting a moderate-to-high level of resilience. Among its subdimensions, positive future orientation scored the highest ($M=4.10 \pm 0.64$), followed by interest diversity ($M=3.92 \pm 0.61$), while emotional regulation scored relatively lower ($M=3.05 \pm 0.65$).

The mean stress score was 3.56 ± 0.59 on a 5-point scale, indicating a moderately

high level of perceived academic stress among art and design students. Professional satisfaction averaged 4.19 ± 0.52 on a 5-point scale. Notably, social-level satisfaction ($M=4.36 \pm 0.59$) was higher than personal-level satisfaction ($M=3.87 \pm 0.67$), suggesting a discrepancy between external recognition and self-perceived competence.

The mean subjective well-being score was 4.88 ± 0.72 on a 7-point scale, indicating an above-average level of well-being. Taken together, these descriptive results illustrate a pattern in which relatively strong social support coexists with elevated stress and uneven perceptions of professional competence.

Table 2: Levels of Social Support, Psychological Resilience, Stress, Professional Satisfaction, and Subjective Well-Being

Variable	Possible Range	Range	M±SD	Item Mean
Social Support	12–84	39–82	71.8±9.45	5.99±0.90
Family Support	4–28	12–28	23.5±4.25	5.89±1.05
Friend Support	4–28	10–28	23.4±3.55	5.82±0.87
Other Support	4–28	13–28	24.1±3.15	6.01±0.75
Psychological Resilience	16–80	32–75	58.1±7.15	3.82±0.62
Positive Future Orientation	5–25	13–25	20.6±3.25	4.21±0.72
Emotional Control	6–30	5–20	13.3±2.70	3.17±0.73
Interest Diversity	5–25	12–25	19.7±3.05	3.89±0.76
Stress	14–70	39–70	46.9±6.75	3.56±0.61
Professional Satisfaction	13–65	34–65	53.6±7.25	4.19±0.52
Personal Level Satisfaction	6–30	16–30	23.3±4.05	3.92±0.71
Social Level Satisfaction	7–35	15–35	30.6±4.15	4.42±0.63
Subjective Well-Being	9–63	28–58	45.0±7.15	4.88±0.72
Life Satisfaction	3–21	10–21	16.7±2.95	5.53±0.95
Positive Emotions	3–21	9–21	5.7±1.10	5.50±1.05
Negative Emotions	3–21	7–20	11.7±3.55	3.87±1.16

3.3 Correlations Among Social Support, Psychological Resilience, Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Subjective Well-Being in the Sample

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among the main study variables, and the results are presented in Table 3. Subjective well-being was positively correlated with social support ($r=.54$, $p<.001$), psychological resilience ($r=.56$, $p<.001$), and professional satisfaction ($r=.44$, across three batches provides the temporal variation required for a robust multi- $p<.001$). In contrast, subjective well-being was negatively correlated with stress ($r=-.40$, $p<.001$).

Among the independent variables, social support showed a moderate positive correlation with psychological resilience ($r=.38$, $p<.001$) and professional satisfaction ($r=.41$, $p<.001$), while stress was negatively correlated with psychological resilience ($r=-.50$, $p<.001$) and professional satisfaction ($r=-.15$, $p<.005$).

These results indicate that psychological resilience and social support are the variables most strongly associated with subjective well-being, whereas stress functions as a significant risk factor. The observed correlation pattern provides

empirical support for the hypothesized relationships derived from the Self-Determination Theory framework.

Table 3: Correlations Among Variables

Variable	Category	Social Support	Psychological Resilience	Stress	Professional Satisfaction	Subjective Well-Being
		r (p)	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)	r (p)
External Factors	Social Support	1				
Internal Factors	Psychological Resilience	.38 (p<.001)	1			
	Stress	-.20 (p<.005)	-.50 (p<.001)	1		
	Professional Satisfaction	.41 (p<.001)	.43 (p<.001)	-.15 (p<.005)	1	
	Subjective Well-Being	.54 (p<.001)	.56 (p<.001)	-.40 (p<.001)	.44 (p<.001)	1

3.4 Factors Influencing Subjective Well-Being

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify key predictors of subjective well-being among art and design students. The results are summarized in Table 4. Interpersonal relationships and perceived health status were entered as control variables in Model 1. Interpersonal relationships significantly predicted subjective well-being ($\beta=.43, p<.001$), whereas health status was not a significant predictor ($\beta=.02, p=.710$). Model 1 explained 19% of the variance in subjective well-being ($F= 47.50, p<.001$).

In Model 2, stress was added and showed a significant negative effect on subjective well-being ($\beta=-.28, p<.001$), increasing the explained variance to 27%. Professional satisfaction was introduced in Model 3 and demonstrated a significant positive effect ($\beta=.29, p<.001$), with the explained variance rising to 36%.

In Model 4, social support was added and emerged as a significant positive predictor ($\beta=.28, p<.001$), increasing the explained variance to 43%. Finally, psychological resilience was entered in Model 5 and remained a significant predictor ($\beta=.23, p<.001$). The final model explained 46% of the total variance in subjective well-being, indicating substantial explanatory power.

Diagnostic tests confirmed the absence of multicollinearity and autocorrelation, supporting the robustness of the regression model. Overall, the findings

indicate that interpersonal relationships, social support, psychological resilience, professional satisfaction, and stress jointly shape subjective well-being, with social support and psychological resilience exerting the strongest positive effects.

Table 4: Stratified Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)	Model 4 (β)	Model 5 (β)
Interpersonal Relationships	.42 ($p < .001$)	.36 ($p < .001$)	.32 ($p < .001$)	.24 ($p < .001$)	.21 ($p < .001$)
Health Status	.03 (.705)	.02 (.855)	.13 (.805)	.04 (.635)	.05 (.305)
Pressure	-	-.27 ($p < .001$)	-.24 ($p < .001$)	-.21 ($p < .001$)	-.11 (.035)
Professional Satisfaction	-	-	-.29 ($p < .001$)	.21 ($p < .001$)	.13 (.035)
Social Support	-	-	-	.28 ($p < .001$)	.26 ($p < .001$)
Psychological Resilience	-	-	-	-	.23 ($p < .001$)
F(p)	47.40 ($p < .001$)	43.90 ($p < .001$)	38.40 ($p < .001$)	38.30 ($p < .001$)	35.50 ($p < .001$)
R ²	0.17	0.25	0.35	0.42	0.45
Adjusted R ²	0.17	0.25	0.34	0.4	0.44

4.0 Discussion

This study examined the mechanisms influencing subjective well-being among art and design majors by integrating social support, psychological resilience, academic stress, and professional satisfaction within a Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework. The findings extend existing well-being research by highlighting the unique psychological dynamics experienced by students engaged in creative and practice-oriented disciplines.

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on student well-being. First, it extends Self-Determination Theory by contextualizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs within vocational art and design education. While prior SDT-based studies have largely focused on general university populations, this research demonstrates that the satisfaction and frustration of basic psychological needs manifest in discipline-specific ways among art and design students.

Social support emerged as the most influential predictor of subjective

well-being. Within the SDT framework, this finding underscores the centrality of relatedness need satisfaction. Art and design students frequently engage in collaborative learning, studio-based projects, and mentorship-driven instruction. Faculty guidance, peer critique, and senior-junior collaboration constitute essential relational resources that support emotional validation and creative confidence. When such relational support is strong, students are more likely to experience enhanced well-being.

Psychological resilience also exerted a significant positive effect on subjective well-being, supporting the role of competence satisfaction in SDT. Resilience enables students to reinterpret failure, manage evaluative stress, and persist through creative uncertainty key challenges inherent in artistic learning contexts. This finding aligns with international research indicating that resilience buffers the negative effects of stress and enhances adaptive functioning among university students.

In contrast, academic stress negatively predicted subjective well-being, reflecting need frustration. Art and design students often face ambiguous assessment criteria, time-intensive creative production, and pressure to translate abstract ideas into tangible outcomes. Such stressors may undermine students' perceived competence and autonomy, leading to reduced well-being when coping resources are insufficient.

Professional satisfaction demonstrated a differentiated influence on well-being. While students reported relatively high satisfaction with the social recognition of their major, personal-level satisfaction related to perceived professional competence was comparatively lower. This discrepancy between external validation and internal self-evaluation represents a distinctive psychological tension in art and design education, where societal appreciation does not always translate into personal confidence. This imbalance may weaken career identity formation and indirectly diminish subjective well-being.

4.2 Uniqueness of Art and Design Students in Well-Being Research

The findings reinforce the argument that art and design students constitute a psychologically distinct group within higher education. Unlike students in more structured disciplines, art and design majors operate in learning environments characterized by subjectivity, creativity, and evaluative ambiguity. Success is often defined through aesthetic judgment rather than standardized criteria, increasing emotional exposure and vulnerability.

Furthermore, art and design students are required to develop professional identities early, often during their undergraduate or vocational training. The pressure to establish a coherent career identity while still refining technical and creative competencies intensifies stress and heightens sensitivity to feedback. These characteristics help explain why social support and resilience play

particularly critical roles in shaping well-being within this population.

4.3 Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest several targeted intervention strategies. First, universities should prioritize the development of structured social support systems tailored to art and design students. Faculty mentorship programs, peer critique workshops, and collaborative studio activities can strengthen relational networks and enhance students' sense of belonging.

Second, resilience-building interventions should be incorporated into art and design curricula. Workshops focusing on emotional regulation, adaptive coping, and reframing creative failure can help students strengthen competence-related resources and mitigate stress. Given the inevitability of evaluative pressure in creative disciplines, resilience training represents a sustainable strategy for well-being promotion.

Third, the discrepancy observed between social-level and personal-level professional satisfaction highlights the need for competency-based career counseling. Programs that help students objectively assess and develop their professional skills such as portfolio coaching, industry-aligned projects, and structured internships may reduce self-doubt and support career identity development.

Finally, to address stress associated with the transition from education to employment, institutions should establish industry transition programs. University–industry collaboration, alumni mentoring, and realistic career expectation guidance may reduce uncertainty and facilitate smoother professional adjustment.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how well-being trajectories evolve across different stages of art and design education. Second, the sample was drawn from three higher vocational colleges in a single region of China, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should expand the sample to include universities in different regions and educational systems, as well as conduct cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews or portfolio-based reflections could provide deeper insight into the lived experiences underlying quantitative well-being indicators. Finally, future studies may explore mediating or moderating mechanisms such as career identity or intrinsic motivation to further refine the SDT-based explanatory model.

5.0 Conclusion

This study explored the effects of social support, psychological resilience, academic stress, and professional satisfaction on the subjective well-being of art and design majors enrolled in higher vocational colleges in Quanzhou, China. The findings demonstrate that social support and psychological resilience are the most influential positive predictors of subjective well-being, while academic stress exerts a significant negative effect. Interpersonal relationships and professional satisfaction further contribute to variations in well-being, and the integrated model explains 46% of the total variance.

By adopting Self-Determination Theory as an analytical framework, this study advances understanding of how autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are differentially satisfied or frustrated within creative and practice-oriented educational contexts. The results highlight that, for art and design students, well-being is shaped not only by general academic stressors but also by discipline-specific factors such as subjective evaluation, creative uncertainty, and early career identity formation.

This research contributes to the literature by empirically demonstrating that art and design students constitute a distinct population whose well-being mechanisms differ from those of general university students. In particular, the discrepancy between high social-level professional satisfaction and relatively lower personal-level competence satisfaction reveals a unique psychological tension that may undermine career confidence and subjective well-being if left unaddressed.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that enhancing the well-being of art and design students requires targeted and context-sensitive interventions. Universities should prioritize strengthening social support networks, fostering psychological resilience through curriculum-based interventions, and providing competency-oriented career guidance. Programs designed to bridge the gap between academic training and professional practice may be especially effective in reducing stress and supporting sustainable well-being.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations related to its cross-sectional design and regional sample. Future research should employ longitudinal and cross-cultural designs to validate and extend the findings. Nonetheless, the present study provides a theoretically grounded and empirically supported foundation for developing well-being promotion strategies tailored to art and design students in vocational higher education.

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