

Integrating Aesthetic Education to Enhance Innovation and Entrepreneurial Employment among Applied Undergraduate Students in China

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Abstract

With the increase in number of college graduates and the rapidly developing job market, the mismatch between educational attainment and employability skills (such as the ability of innovation and entrepreneur) has become a serious issue. This research explores the strategic function of aesthetic education in addressing this gap among applied undergraduate students, with an emphasis on the ways in which creative learning experiences can help to develop students' innovation competencies and entrepreneurial preparation. Based on Human Capital Theory, Experiential Learning Theory and AMABILE's Creativity and Innovation Theory, the empirical study investigates how specialized courses, student competitions and Social practice are working as part of aesthetic education. (O) Method: The quantitative research was completed in Shandong Youth Politics College on the Radio and Television major which in-volved 385 students. Pearson correlation results also provided strong evidence for relationship across aesthetic educational factors and entrepreneurship and innovation ability. Remarkably, the association between innovation capability and the output of entrepreneurial employment was strongest ($r = .832$, $p < 0.01$) supporting the interrelatedness of creative ability and the success of entrepreneurship. The study finds that aesthetic education as a systematically implemented approach in applied curricula, plays an important role in improving students' problem-solving, critical thinking and cooperative spirit, which are imperative for China's changing labor market. It advocates for greater institutional commitment to interdisciplinary aesthetic programming and proposes educational reform that places aesthetic education at the core, rather than the periphery, of undergraduate development. This study further adds to national education how it works empirically, and provides policy and curriculum reference to cultivate innovation-oriented talents in China.

Keywords: Aesthetic Education, Innovation Ability, Entrepreneurial Employment, Applied Undergraduate Students, China

Introduction

In recent decades, China's higher education system has undergone a rapid expansion, with the gross enrollment rate rising from 12.5% in 2000 to 57.8% in 2021 (Chen, 2023). This

massification has significantly increased the number of college graduates entering the labor market each year. However, despite academic qualifications, many graduates still face challenges in securing meaningful employment that demands innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurial skills (Li et al., 2022; Wang, 2022). The growing mismatch between what students learn in universities and the skills required by a dynamic job market underscores the urgency to re-evaluate current educational practices, particularly in applied universities that are tasked with producing industry-ready talent (Dong, 2021; Liu & Yang, 2022).

Aesthetic education, traditionally seen as peripheral to core academic subjects, is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach to bridging this gap. By integrating creative learning experiences such as art, music, literature, and design into formal curricula, aesthetic education cultivates critical thinking, emotional resilience, and collaborative problem-solving skills—essential competencies for entrepreneurial success and innovation (Zhao et al., 2022; Wu & Guo, 2023). These creative attributes not only support personal development but also contribute to students' capacity for adaptability, self-directed learning, and initiating value-driven projects, whether in employment or self-employment settings (Chen, 2023; Xue & Meng, 2024).

The importance of this topic lies in its potential to reshape talent development strategies in China. With policy momentum from the Ministry of Education encouraging interdisciplinary learning and character formation through aesthetics (Gao, 2024; Peng, 2024), aesthetic education is no longer an optional component but a mandated aspect of holistic education. Recent policies, such as the "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era" (Liu, 2020), have outlined concrete measures to embed aesthetics into both classroom teaching and extracurricular programs.

Despite these efforts, empirical studies on the effectiveness of aesthetic education in enhancing innovation and entrepreneurial employment outcomes remain limited. Particularly in applied universities, where educational outcomes are closely tied to employability, there is a need to understand how aesthetic education supports or strengthens students' innovation abilities and entrepreneurial intentions. The significance of this study therefore lies not only in contributing to academic discourse but also in offering concrete insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, educators, and employers seeking to prepare graduates for China's evolving labor market.

This study specifically investigates the relationship between aesthetic education and students' innovation and entrepreneurial capabilities by focusing on key components such as specialized courses, disciplinary competitions, student innovation contests, and social practice activities. Conducted in the context of Shandong Youth Politics College, the research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that support the integration of aesthetic education into applied undergraduate programs. By doing so, it addresses critical gaps in employability preparation and contributes to national strategies for cultivating creativity-driven, entrepreneurial graduates who can thrive in uncertain and competitive professional environments (Pei, 2024; Zhang, 2022; Luo & Chen, 2023). The specific aims for the study are:

1. To assess the extent to which aesthetic education is integrated into Chinese applied undergraduate programs through Specialized Discipline Competitions, Student Innovation Competitions, the Integration of Specialized Courses, and Social Practice Activities.
2. To examine the impact of the components of aesthetic education—such as specialized courses, disciplinary competitions, innovation contests, and social practice activities—on the entrepreneurial employment outcomes of students in Chinese applied undergraduate institutions.
3. To investigate the impact of aesthetic education, through its various components—such as specialized courses, disciplinary competitions, innovation contests, and social practice activities—on the innovation capabilities of Chinese applied undergraduate students.

Literature Review

Importance should be attached to the concept of the combination of the information acquisition and competence development if the theory of the modern humanistic thought for education is to be successfully integrated with the theoretical system of the innovation education. For the two kinds of education are such that their integration is necessary. The concept of “knowledge” is appropriate encompassing all different kinds of knowledge including ontological knowledge (also called Subject matter knowledge), conditional knowledge (also called Inter-related knowledge), operational knowledge (also called Instructional knowledge) and cultural knowledge (also called humanistic knowledge). On the contrary, “competence” has been defined as over a vast range of concepts like literacy, comprehension, reasoning, ability to adapt imaginative thinking in a few circumstances, experimental manipulation and invention (Zhang, 2021).

"Aesthetic education" is a concept that has been widely used in Chinese colleges in the past 10 years. Due to the Party's national policy texts, the orientation of these universities has been successively transformed from “art education” to “aesthetic education.” The demands of aesthetic education have also changed from “strengthening” to “all-around-strengthening and all-around improving”, this indicates that the status quo is weak, still an item with shortage, the contents, forms all need to be “improved”; the purpose of aesthetic education is “points out improving the aesthetic”. Sound aesthetic education must first be clear about the purpose of aesthetic education is "rich aesthetic and humanistic literacy" and "develop personality, emotion, and mind," but also the goal of aesthetic education to cultivate ability creativity; methods and content of aesthetic education is first aesthetic education function to play, to the moral, intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic, labor six "education" (education). "The word "aesthetic education" means the specific content, as well as methods, used in such education. To achieve the goals of fully educating and integrated educating and highlighting the overall, practical characteristic of aesthetic education courses and cultivating innovation ability, the focus is being shifted, but in order to achieve these goals (Cao, 2021). The predominant mode of instruction, and the primary content area of instruction continue to be art courses. For example, as Figure 2.4 shows, frequency of terms associated with aesthetic education in higher education institutes has increased markedly from 2014 onwards.

This trend began in 2014. In 2019, the Opinions on Aesthetic Education of Colleges and Universities of the Ministry of Education, on the one hand, put forward a fixed requirement:

adding public art courses and art practice to the school-level talent training plan and adding the public art courses to the credit system management, so that students are required to complete the public art credits in the course before graduation, and, on the other hand, encouraging colleges and universities to experiment with combining their own professional advantages and interdisciplinary characteristics "building a public art curriculum system with aesthetic education and humanistic quality as the core, creative ability as the focus, and the development of outstanding art "treasures as the deployment space".

Under the background of national education policy promoting student holistic development, aesthetic education in colleges and universities has developed vigorously across the country in recent years. This is because it is implemented. This is largely because of these rules being introduced. The Chinese government also recognizes the legitimacy and power of aesthetic education as the effective path in promoting these virtues, emotions and creativity to form a strong moral character. For example, this is consistent with the overall goal of building a socialist society with distinct Chinese features (Zhao, 2021). The Ministry of Education has also put down a series of guide lines, emphasizing to set up the arts, music and culture courses in the higher education institute. These recommendations were released to promote its practice. It does so to assist in achieving this purpose.

According to the policy document entitled *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era* (published in 2020), aesthetic education is an important part of the ideological and political work of universities. The reason given in support of this assertion was that aesthetic education is included in the school curriculum. Consequently, aesthetics should be integrated into all teaching activities, programs provided for students at all levels in schools (Liu, 2020). This duty arises as aesthetics are one element of art. The policy seems to imply that there will be a change from classes that are considered elective to subjects that are core and are grounded in the arts. This reform, if it's followed, will enable aesthetic literacy to ultimately become a shared responsibility throughout all disciplines.

There have also been some changes in the regulations which govern institutional support systems of aesthetic education. Those changes have already been implemented. Hence universities should establish or improve departments for the performing arts, musing and fuming arts needed to be certain that there are sufficient faculty, space and resources for aesthetics education (Wang & Chen 2021). This duty extended to creation of departments charged with the arts. These institutional changes have been crucial in democratizing aesthetic education as well as in raising the quality of such education - especially in second-tier colleges whose art departments did not formerly excel. Nowhere is that truer than in what have historically been classified as under-performing schools. For example, one of the contributions that has made has facilitated the spread of aesthetic education.

It is highly recommended that aesthetic education is combined with technology, innovation and entrepreneurship education in class as this is also in line with the 2021 Five-year Education Plan that seeks to foster cross-disciplinary approaches. The plan aims to be implemented by 2021. Based on the planning background of these subjects, and according to the educational theory that "Innovation is the soul of the talent program" (Sun, 2021), the integration was conducted to help students think innovatively and train their imagination, so

that they can contribute to the programs for talent development at the national level. Given this, it is clear that aesthetic education is not regarded as anymore as accessory to all round student capabilities, but rather as a necessary part of these.

Educational curriculum reform has been one of the major policies induced by the popularisation of aesthetic education. This is a major plank of policy that has been emerging. To get away from passive appreciation of art work, the Ministry of Education has issued a new regulation that aesthetic education courses have to be given credit and been scored by performance and reflective evaluation (Ma & Zhang, 2022). The move is part of an attempt to change how appreciation is traditionally shown. As part of an attempt to move beyond the old approach, this is part of the process. Through thus changed, AE comes closer to traditional intellectuality and skills. That's a big step in the right direction.

Some other significant references include the "The Second Guidelines of Art Education: Art Education in College Education" (Issued in 2022). The recommendations came out in 2022. 2022 was when these instructions came to the light of day. Consistent with these suggestions, I think schools should be doing as much possible as they can to tailor creative instruction to the cultural contexts found in some neighbourhoods. Employing local traditions in the realms of calligraphy, opera, and folk dance as an inspiration, educational institutions is empowered to develop cultural confidence and heterogeneity among the student population (Chen, 2022). Under this strategy, aesthetic education is strongly localized and cultural sustainability promoted.

In recent years, the popularity of digital technologies has also impacted aesthetic education policy. The Ministry of Education's support for the production of online art appreciation platforms, virtual museums and AI-facilitated creative tools also allows universities to expand aesthetic education beyond the traditional classroom (Li 2023). It happens because universities are free to extend the range of an aesthetic education outside the classroom. Thanks to this help, schools can push the limits of aesthetic learning outside of conventional classroom settings. More important than before in the post-Covid world of online learning. Online learning is more popular.

Current policies are paying attention to the role of aesthetic education in the mental health of college students. This is a newer phenomenon. According to Zhou and Fang (2023), students' psychological resilience is strengthened through their participation in aesthetic activities such as music, painting and drama, fostering a genuine sense of participation among them. This therapy aims to produce healthful effects in the patient. Educational institutions are advised to include such programs in the student support service with the aim of enhancing the academic achievability of their students and ultimately the wellness of their students.

And further, with recent recommended documents, the role of a teacher has been focused by the expanding of aesthetic education. All of these suggestions have been put forward in recent years. Teachers need to be involved in training to have better aesthetic literacy and efficacy in teaching (Huang, 2023). This is because current policies have made such a move necessary for educators. Projects like these are conceived as one way to try to move from the theoretical policy goals to actual implementation in classrooms.

To judge whether aesthetic education works, there are assessment methods already existing. To this end, the above procedures have been implemented. As Gao (2024) reported, the Ministry of Education has recently integrated into the quality evaluation systems of institutions, aesthetic education performance indicators. Gao provided that information. Each institution has to produce an annual report and review feedback from students to show that it is meeting the standards. And as a result of the functioning of this system of accountability, there shall be no doubt that the methods of aesthetic instruction shall continue to enjoy the benefits of development and enlightenment.

Also, to further develop aesthetic education, public-private partnerships are part of the policy scene. All of this is aimed to improve aesthetic education. Zhang and Lin (2023) recommend that schools and teachers be motivated to work with culture groups, art academies, and local artists to develop learning opportunities for experiential learning which cultivate artistic intimate relationship. This however, would be with a view to stimulating artistic participation. This would allow for an opportunity for the artistic community to participate. The aesthetic sector of education is regarded as relevant to the real world because relationships have been developed. Its because of the actuality of the real world.

We also need to consider implementing aesthetic education that targets all citizens in the process of policy reform. Ren (2023) notes that the current policies that are implemented within China advocate for a broader access to art for children from families of low-income as well as for students with disabilities. This decision is proof that China is committed to increasing access to education for all children and that it has followed that through. Several factors can facilitate or hinder inclusive practices. Two of these attributes are adaptive technologies and teacher expertise.

And additionally, the laws of an aesthetic education have been affected by globalization. Relationships Policy To promote collaboration with international art institutions and participation in overseas art competitions and exchanges, the policy is drafted for fostering such relationships. Due to this, the students in China are more inclined toward knowing and respecting multi-world cultures and this consequently raises the international status of aesthetic education in China (Fang, 2023).

As a final point of interest since their inception, aesthetic education laws have always been fitted to environmental and ecological ends. To add devices or use it according to Xu (2023), students are encouraged towards environmental awareness and creative thinking, when ecological arts and nature-based curriculum is applied. This is in accordance with the recommendations of the guidelines. This is example of a broader drive in the educational paradigm towards the ecological civilization that can be found in education.

Further more and more in then ideological and political and education sector system, more efforts have been designed to the aesthetic education. Via policies (Wu, 2023), students are being encouraged to engage in aesthetic practices of avant-garde art, film, and patriotic songs. It's basically to inculcate in the students a greater sense of national identity, and to support the development of their character. This approach involves a fusion of an aesthetic sense with moral education.

The Whether or not aesthetic education policy can be effectively conformed to the intelligent education system is ultimately It's hard to say. Due to the introduction of LA in China, it is now possible to personalize aesthetic learning, and this is believed to guarantee better engagement and delivery of customized knowledge to the learner (Jin & Yang, 2024). There is growing prevalence of artificial intelligence and big data in China as educational technology is brought to new heights in the country. Aesthetic education is now at the head of that ordered revolution which at this period of virtual technology is occurring in education. This is in part because of the way those resources are used.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory

The research is based on the Human Capital Theory developed by Gary Becker in the 1960s and it establishes a fundamental framework for human capital, in which education and training influences the economic out of individual. This theory was originally posited by Gary Becker. The Human Capital Theory is largely premised on the substantial stock of human capital which adds heavily to the productivity and earning power of individuals. Conscious on the other hand, assumes that investments in human capital, such as education, training and other skills, add significantly to human capital accumulation. The concept rests on this very principle (Che & Zhou, 2010). The resulting theory of rational agents assumes, in effect, that the persons are rational and the decisions concerning investment in themselves or not are made dependent on the return on investment which can be anticipated once this decision has been reached.

Experiential Learning Theory

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), developed by Kolb David, highlights the importance of learning from experience, observation, abstract conceptualization and experimentation. In this reflect-and-act model, learning occurs through students experiencing, constructing their knowledge on the basis of these experiences, observing or reflecting on these observations, and then acting or exploring. Especially when one is either applying at higher education facilities which are focussed on a practical qualification (like applied universities). As part of this research, aesthetic education whereby arts-based activities, design tasks, cultural projects and innovation challenges aimed at students' artistic skill development, self-expression, and problem-solving are introduced to students operates as an experiential learning platform to help students improve their creative skills.

Creativity and Innovation Theory (Amabile, 1996)

Teresa Amabile's Creativity and Innovation Theory (1996) offers a comprehensive model for considering how aesthetic education can foster innovation and entrepreneurial abilities in applied undergraduate learners. The theory appears in this 1996 publication. It is not the product of domain-relevant skills, however, it is a combination of domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes (ie: risk-taking and divergent thinking) and intrinsic motivation that creates creativity, according to Amabile. This relationship produces logic and creativity. These are critical ingredients for coming up with novel and useful solutions in any domain, but they are even more so in learning environments meant to cultivate the next generation of business leaders and problem-solvers.

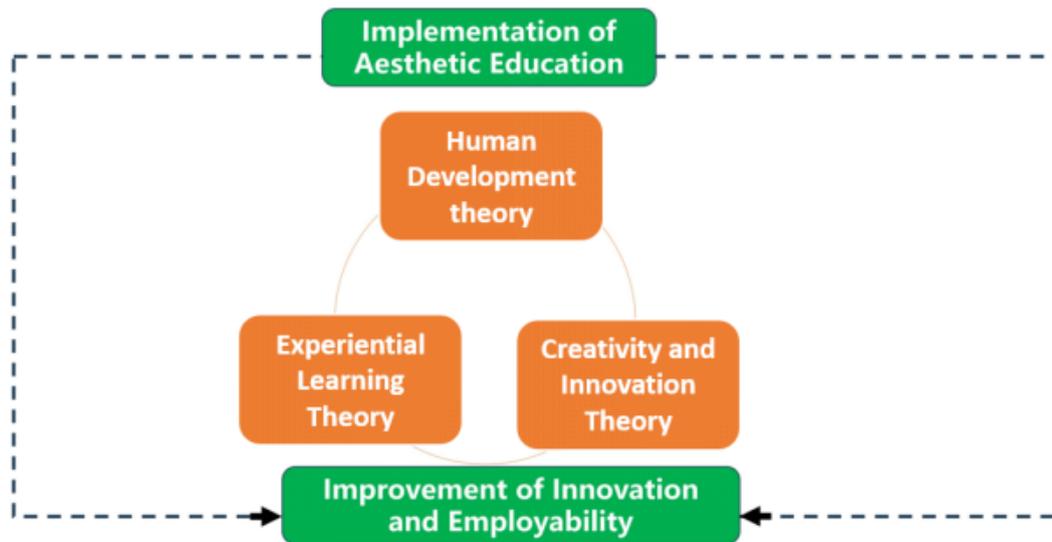


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework

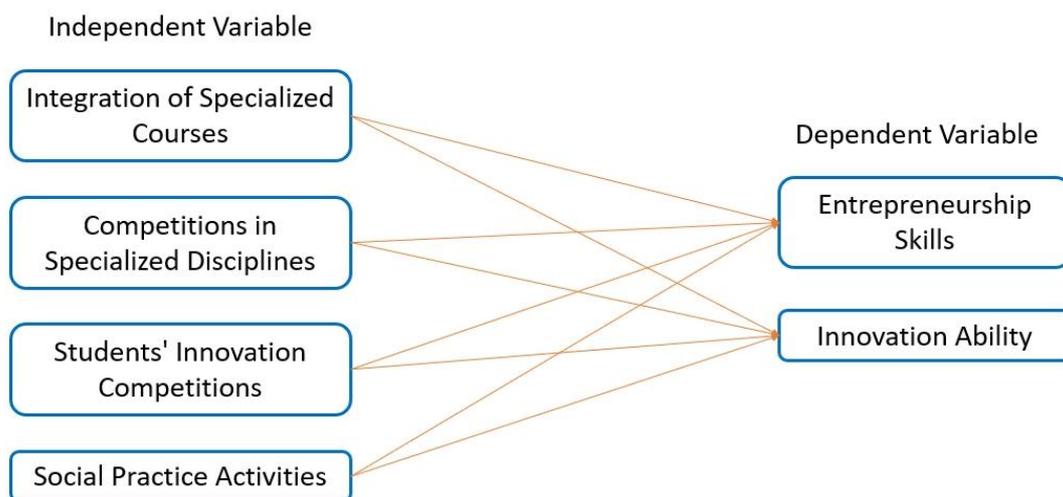


Figure 2: Conceptual framework

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design to effectively examine aesthetic education influencing employed entrepreneurial and innovative (EIN) people in applied undergraduate program. This method was chosen for the capability it offers to obtain large-scale, structured, and fordable data from the target students, and is especially useful for examining patterns, correlations, and differences by group across the constructs of creativity, entrepreneurial intention and aesthetic educational engagement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2012). The use of the same questionnaire to collect the data in the study contributes to reliability, validity, and generalization of the findings in more similar educational settings.

This research targets the junior students from shantytown youth political college with Radio and Television Studies (Bachelor of artachelor of Arts degree) as the major in Shandong. Based on sample size determination table which has been developed by Krejcie & Morgan

(1970), it is suggested that for a population of 380 students, the number of samples required is 181 students. This is suggested with the confidence of 95%. On the contrary, the present study includes a sample size of 385 to strengthen the statistical power and robustness of the result. Actually, this sample size can be considered a near-census of all the junior students in the selected major. This strategy ensures a very representative sample that minimizes sampling errors and allows the potential for more rigorous data analysis and generalization during the confines of a study.

Table 1
Population and Sample

College Name	Target Population	Sample Size
Shandong Youth Politics College	480	385

The source, collection processes of data of the exploration and practice on aesthetic education of Innovation and Entrepreneurial Employment of Chinese applied undergraduates started with being granted ethical approval from involved IRB or the ethics committee. An approval letter including study purpose, methods of data collection, and how the data will be confidential and protected was also prepared. The approval letter is the official document that allows the able to attend to the ethical rules and regulations (Li,2022). Descriptive data analysis will be used to check the implementation status of aesthetic education. For every item in the questionnaire concerning these aims, frequencies and percentages will be calculated for a true impression whether the participants answered delight, neutral or infelicitous (Zhao, 2022).

Results

Table 2

Results

Pearson Correlation		Integration of Specialized Courses	Competitions in Specialized Disciplines	Students' Innovation Competitions	Social Practice Activities	Entrepreneurship	Innovation Ability
Integration of Specialized Courses	Pearson Correlation	1	.772**	.760**	.742**	.580**	.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385
Competitions in Specialized Disciplines	Pearson Correlation	.772**	1	.858**	.797**	.580**	.687**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385
Students' Innovation Competitions	Pearson Correlation	.760**	.858**	1	.862**	.637**	.751**

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385
Social Practice Activities	Pearson Correlation	.742**	.797**	.862**	1	.616**	.757**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385
Entrepreneurship	Pearson Correlation	.580**	.580**	.637**	.616**	1	.832**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385
Innovation Ability	Pearson Correlation	.678**	.687**	.751**	.757**	.832**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	385	385	385	385	385	385

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis indicates a strong positive correlation between several of academic and extracurricular activities suggesting a positive influence of these activities on the development of Innovation and Entrepreneurial Employment among the students. Incorporation of specialty courses reveals that there is a significant positive relationship with specialty competition ($r = 0.772$, $p < 0.01$); Innovation $r = 0.678$ ($p < 0.01$); entrepreneurship $r = 0.580$ ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that the particular courses are connecting the theoretical and applied aspects of the topics at hand, by giving the students what they need to formulate and apply entrepreneurial thinking and creative problem solving.

Specialized competitions are significantly correlated with the innovation competition ($r = 0.858$, $p < 0.01$) and social practice ($r = 0.797$, $p < 0.01$) of the students. These findings reveal that these contests are cooperative competitive and are certain to promote students' staff entrepreneurial motivation ($r = 0.580$, $p < 0.01$) and innovation ability ($r = 0.687$, $p < 0.01$). Social practice and innovation competitions demonstrate the highest correlation ($r = 0.862$, $p < 0.01$), because the two provide perspectives to each other and are complementary to real-world problem-solving logics and creative learning opportunities. They are also both significantly correlated with entrepreneurship ($r = 0.616$ and $r = 0.637$, respectively, $p < 0.01$) and innovation capacity ($r = 0.757$ and $r = 0.751$, respectively, $p < 0.01$). The strongest correlation is found between entrepreneurship and innovation ability ($r = 0.832$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a close connection between innovative practicability ability and entrepreneurial self-confidence. In general, these results show the compounding effect of academic and extracurricular activities on the readiness for nascent, managing and serial entrepreneurs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that aesthetic education is crucial to enhancing the innovative and entrepreneurial abilities of Chinese applied undergraduate students' employment. Creative, content-based courses, contests, and hands-on social practice activities, etc., are the integration of aesthetic education that can lead students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and flexible perspective acquisition. These are skills that are crucial to thrive in today's competitive work environment. Such challenges may affect the program's success, even though its efficacy has been demonstrated in scientific studies, as an example, variable curriculum implementation, changes in institutional support, and external socio-economic influences. In future research, more emphasis will be placed on the expansion of the subjects of the research, the comparison of different educational environments, the practice of longitudinal research, the strategy of the multidisciplinary approach of the aesthetic education, etc. By considering these aspects, schools, policy-makers, and teachers can continue to fine-tune the aesthetic education strategies employed to that they are maximally impactful on the child. Finally, the research raises the priority of implementing aesthetic education; in order to obtain a generation of students with not only academic abilities, but also innovatives, enterprisers and able to face the challenges of a continuous changing labour market.

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