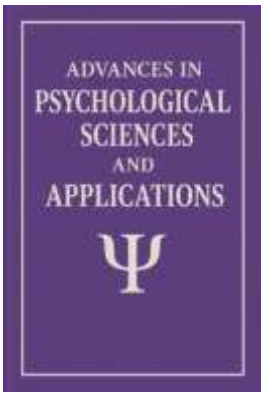
ADVANCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES AND APPLICATIONS

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The Role of Art and Music Interventions in Mediating Emotional Regulation and Reducing Academic Stress among University Students

A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress is a common issue experienced by university students and is closely associated with mental health conditions and a decline in academic performance. Emotion regulation plays a crucial role in stress management and has been proven to be an adaptive ability that enhances well-being. Interventions involving arts and music have increasingly been explored as effective approaches to improving emotion regulation skills among university students. This paper aims to systematically review existing studies related to Arts and music-based interventions in enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students, as well as to identify the intervention methods implemented. The method used in this paper is a systematic review of experimental studies, meta-analyses, and qualitative research focusing on arts and music interventions among university students. The analysis of results is based on measurements of academic stress, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being. The main findings indicate that Arts and music-based interventions consistently reduce academic stress levels and help improve students' emotion regulation skills. In conclusion, Arts and music-based interventions are effective in enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students. Such approaches can be integrated into mental health support programs, including counseling and group guidance services, for students at the university level.

Keywords
Academic Stress
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Introduction

Psychological well-being (PWB) is a core concept in positive psychology that emphasizes individuals' optimal functioning rather than merely the absence of mental disorders [1],[2]. Unlike the hedonistic approach, which focuses only on momentary happiness or affective satisfaction, psychological well-being is grounded in a eudaimonic perspective that highlights meaning in life, self-actualization, and the pursuit of deeper personal goals. The model of psychological well-being developed by Ryff incorporates six key dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth [1]-[3].

The urgency to strengthen psychological well-being is increasingly evident among university students who are undergoing a crucial transitional period from adolescence to adulthood. During this stage, students face heightened academic demands, social pressures, increased independence, and preparation for future careers [4]. Numerous studies show that students with higher psychological well-being tend to have lower risks of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as better academic performance, adaptive coping abilities, healthy social skills, and stronger resilience in overcoming challenges [5]-[7]. Conversely, low psychological well-being increases vulnerability to psychological disorders, burnout, and maladaptive academic and social adjustment [4],[8].

One of the main factors influencing students' well-being is academic stress, which arises from academic demands such as coursework load, performance evaluations, time constraints, and interpersonal challenges within the campus environment [9], [10]. Global data indicate that more than 80% of university students worldwide have experienced academic stress at varying levels, and around 20% report that such stress significantly affects their physical and mental health [4], [11]. Academic stress may manifest through cognitive, psychological, physiological, and behavioral symptoms that negatively impact concentration, emotional stability, physical health, and social interactions [12]-[15]. If left unmanaged, academic stress not only hinders academic achievement but also increases the risk of serious mental health issues, including suicidal ideation among some students [16].

On the other hand, emotion regulation ability represents a crucial psychological resource that can buffer the negative effects of academic stress. Emotion regulation is defined as individuals' ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional responses to achieve desired goals [12], [14]. Students with good emotion regulation tend to manage emotions adaptively, utilize flexible cognitive and behavioral strategies, and maintain psychological balance [13], [14]. Empirical evidence shows that emotion regulation skills are associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, better academic efficacy, and higher resilience [15], [16]. Conversely,

deficits in emotion regulation are linked to increased risks of psychopathology and poorer decision-making quality [11], [13].

Aligned with the growth of interdisciplinary approaches, arts and music-based interventions have increasingly gained attention as effective strategies to support emotion regulation and promote psychological well-being in academic settings. A range of experimental and meta-analytic studies reveal that engagement in arts and music activities can facilitate adaptive emotion regulation strategies, reduce physiological and psychological stress responses, and improve mood as well as learning motivation [17]-[19]. However, the current literature remains fragmented, with many studies examining only one aspect of stress, emotion regulation, or arts/music intervention without providing a comprehensive understanding of how these components interact within the university context.

Therefore, a systematic synthesis is needed to more deeply understand how arts and music-based interventions contribute to enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students. Such integrated insights are vital in guiding the development of evidence-based interventions that are relevant to students' needs amid the increasing complexity of academic challenges today.

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to identify, synthesize, and critically analyze empirical evidence regarding the role of arts and music-based interventions in facilitating emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students across global contexts. This review seeks to answer the following research questions to provide meaningful insights:

1. What theories have been applied in research related to arts and music interventions in enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress?
2. What strategies of emotion regulation are utilized within arts and music-based interventions?
3. What are the perceived risk dimensions, their antecedents, consequences, and risk reducing strategies associated with arts and music-based interventions aimed at improving emotion regulation and lowering academic stress?
4. What are the research gaps and recommendations for future directions in research and practical intervention?

Overall, this review provides a comprehensive synthesis of the mechanisms through which arts and music-based interventions influence emotion regulation and the management of academic stress domains that have previously been examined separately in the literature. It strengthens and expands the understanding of psychological well-being and emotion regulation models among university students by integrating perspectives from creative arts and music-based interventions. Furthermore, it offers an evidence-based foundation for the development,

implementation, and evaluation of arts and music-based intervention programs in higher education settings to enhance student mental health. This review also provides policy recommendations for universities, educators, counselors, and higher education policymakers to address academic stress and improve students' psychological well-being in more innovative and effective ways.

Material and Methods

The development of this article was conducted through two main stages, namely a comprehensive literature review and subsequent analysis and discussion of the findings [20],[21]. This study adopts the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework [22]. PRISMA was selected because it is widely recognized as a rigorous and standardized protocol for systematic literature reviews and is frequently applied across various research disciplines. The methodological quality and reporting standards of studies that employ the PRISMA framework are also considered to be higher than those that do not. The widespread adoption and acceptance of PRISMA guidelines ensures a greater likelihood of publication feasibility and enhances the credibility of systematic screening procedures in literature-based research (see Figure 1).

The primary data source used for this systematic literature review is Scopus. Scopus is a comprehensive bibliographic database providing access to peer-reviewed scientific literature and is recognized as a reliable platform for literature search due to its stringent selection process for indexed journals. Scopus was chosen because it offers extensive coverage of social sciences and humanities research [23], and provides detailed bibliometric analyses that consider not only citation counts but also broader evaluative indicators. This comprehensive approach allows for a more holistic assessment of research contributions.

The literature search was conducted between August 2015 and September 2025. The keyword "Arts and Music for Emotion Regulation" was applied specifically to the "article title, abstract, and keywords" fields in Scopus to ensure comprehensive retrieval of studies relevant to the research topic [24]. Accordingly, the systematic literature review conducted using the PRISMA model is described as follows:

1. Identifying relevant keywords, criteria, and search boundaries.
2. Screening articles based on their relevance.
3. Tracing sources from selected studies and considering potential exclusions.
4. Reviewing the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the selected articles.
5. Documenting each eligible article into the extraction process.
6. Conducting classification analysis, network analysis, network hypothesis development, and visualization.

A total of 900 documents were initially identified before applying any screening procedures. To narrow the scope of the reviewed literature, the following criteria were applied:

1. Only articles published and indexed in Scopus.
2. Articles published between 2015–2025.
3. Scopus-indexed journals classified within Q1–Q4 quartiles.

One of the primary justifications for limiting the publication period is to ensure the relevance of the evidence base so that the review accurately reflects the latest knowledge landscape and incorporates the most contemporary research findings. Furthermore, this temporal restriction serves as an efficient strategy in updating previous SLRs, as it enables focused identification of newly emergent studies since earlier reviews were published, which are then integrated into the updated analytical synthesis. Methodologically, this approach reduces the risk of including outdated or less relevant studies by prioritizing more recent scholarly literature that is presumed to align more closely with current scientific practices and understanding.

Subsequently, the selected studies were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, followed by network hypothesis analysis after identifying relevant articles according to the PRISMA protocol. Thematic analysis was conducted based on the SPAR-4-SLR framework within the assessing component [25]. A concept matrix was then utilized to categorize and map the collected data. This method is beneficial in facilitating information organization and the analytical process. A network hypothesis analysis was also employed to identify correlations among variables within the reviewed topic. This step aimed to identify new potential research models, particularly related to inter-variable relationships and mediating mechanisms.

In addition, the concept matrix was used to analyze research gaps within the reviewed literature. This framework is primarily designed to highlight areas with significant potential for further scientific exploration but which have remained underexamined, thereby effectively filling the existing knowledge gaps. It is important to note that Miles [26] refers to a model developed by Müller-Bloch and Kranz [27], which is an extension of the foundational framework introduced by Robinson et al. [28]. Alongside the research gap identification, Cooper's [29] Taxonomy of Literature Reviews was also adopted to synthesize knowledge in a neutral manner, avoid critique bias, and ensure that the organized findings are contextualized within the historical development of the field.

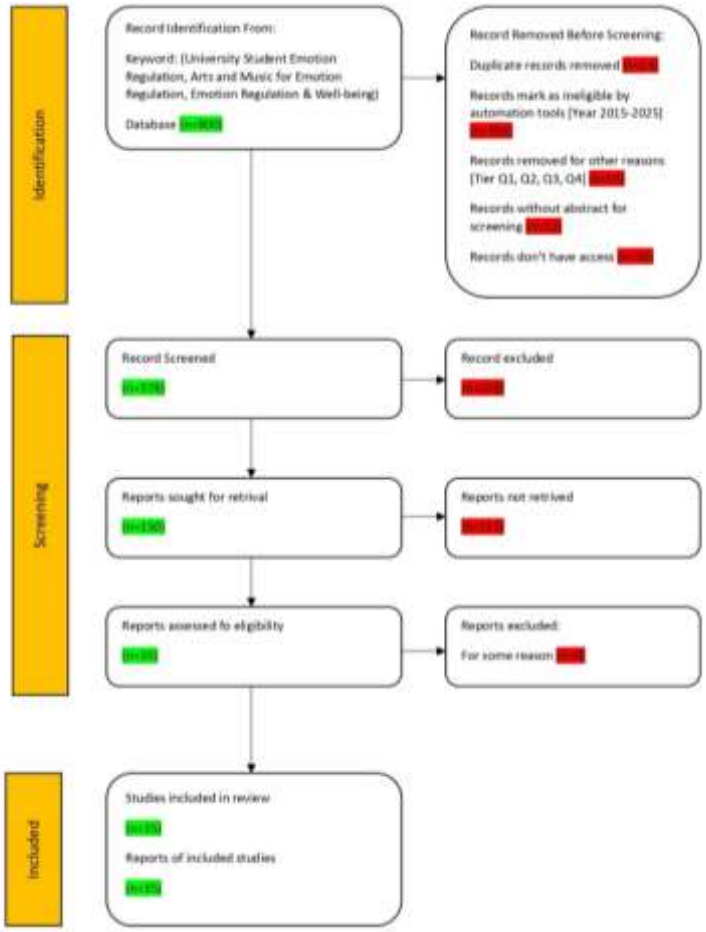


Fig. 1. PRISMA Model

Results

The findings of this study were obtained through a screening process that initially identified 900 articles based on the selected research topic. These articles then underwent a justification process to ensure accuracy and relevance. Following the initial justification, articles that were irrelevant or lacked abstracts and full-text access were excluded, resulting in 378 remaining articles. A subsequent screening was carried out to remove studies that did not align semantically with the research focus, leaving 150 articles deemed eligible. The final screening stage prioritized articles with strong methodological quality by ranking them according to the journal quartile index, yielding a final selection of 35 articles for synthesis and analysis.

In the final dataset obtained, the studies included in this review were published between 2017 and 2025. The analysis of publication trends (see Fig. 2) shows that 71% of the articles were published within the last three years. The highest number of studies (12) was published in 2025, while the lowest number (1 each) appeared in 2017 and 2019. No eligible studies relevant to the research focus were identified for the year 2020.

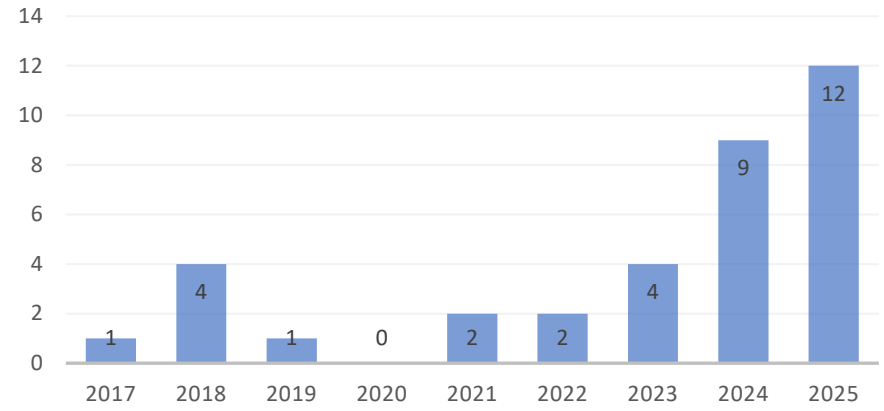


Fig 2. All Included Studies were Categorized Based on their Publication Year

In addition to publication year, the studies were also analyzed based on the country in which the research was conducted. The reviewed studies were carried out across multiple continents, including Asia, Europe, and Australia, and several were conducted across multiple countries simultaneously. Some intervention studies did not explicitly specify the country in which the research took place.

Among the studies that did specify a country of origin, China contributed the highest number of publications (n = 7). Beyond single-country studies, those conducted across multiple countries collectively represented the largest proportion, accounting for a total of 10 studies (see Fig. 3).

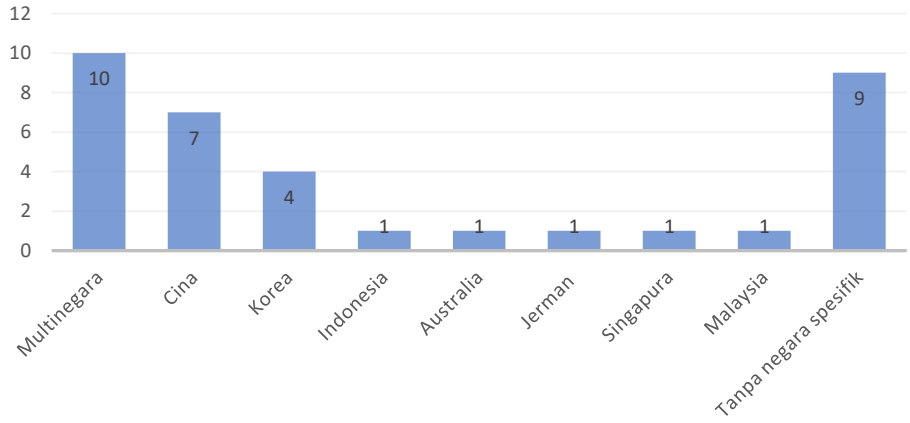


Fig. 3. All Included Studies were Categorized Based on the Country in which the Research was Conducted

Regarding the methodological approaches, literature review studies represented the highest proportion at 37%. Observational studies accounted for 34%, while the remaining studies employed experimental or mixed-method designs. In addition, the most commonly used data analysis techniques included modeling analyses (SEM, regression, ANOVA, network analysis,

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fuzzy AHP/TOPSIS, and first-/second-/third-order synthesis). The second most frequent analytical approach was narrative synthesis followed by thematic analysis.

This review provides insight into the theoretical foundations frequently associated with arts and music as interventions for emotion regulation. Our analysis indicates that the existing body of literature is predominantly supported by multidisciplinary frameworks that can be categorized into three major domains (see Fig. 4).

First, theories that focus on positive well-being concepts, primarily drawing from the PERMA Theory and Positive Psychology. In addition, the Self-Determination Theory is utilized to better understand motivational aspects in therapeutic engagement, which aligns with the concept of hardiness in building stress resilience.

Second, theories related to emotional and stress mechanisms explore how emotion regulation framework view arts and music as effective strategies, supported by the Mood Management Theory. Meanwhile, perceived intervention effects are explained through the Integrative Stress Theory and stress-biomarker models, which link improvements in emotion regulation to changes in affect and physiological responses. The Broaden and Build Theory further reinforces the notion that positive emotions can be enhanced as an outcome of interventions that strengthen long-term psychological resources.

Third, theories focusing on neurobiological and cognitive concepts address how Arts and music-based experiences influence the brain through neuroaesthetic models (e.g., Embodied Aesthetics, Leder's Model), emphasizing physical responses and reward system mechanisms, particularly in relation to Cognitive Load Theory which explains the role of arts and music in managing cognitive capacity to facilitate better emotion regulation.

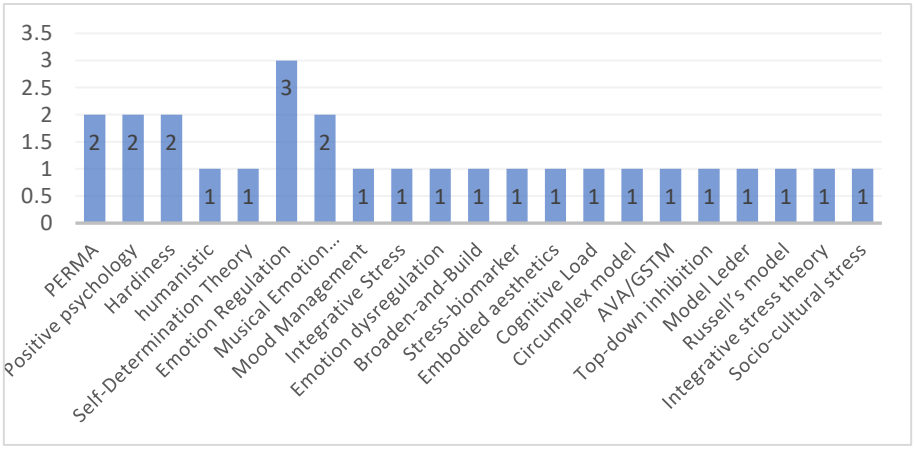


Fig 4. All Analyzed Studies were Categorized Based on the Frequency of Theoretical Frameworks Associated with Arts and Music-Based Interventions, Resulting in a Total of 21 Frequently Referenced Theories.

Discussion

A. Emotion Regulation Strategies Through Arts and Music

Emotion regulation through arts and music involves a variety of approaches that integrate self-awareness, mindfulness, and creative expression. Activities such as drawing, painting, and collage-making provide space for reflection, expression, and the reconstruction of emotional experiences. In the context of music, personal preference-based selection, intentional listening, guided imagery, improvisation, and songwriting have been shown to support emotional management, channel anger, and reduce anxiety through cathartic mechanisms that promote better self-regulation. Group-based approaches are also commonly employed, such as group improvisation, drumming, singing, and sharing sessions to strengthen social connectedness and communication, while simultaneously providing affective support to enhance resilience and emotional well-being. Integrating arts and music with relaxation techniques may further support adaptive coping among university students. Ultimately, arts and music-based approaches offer a solid foundation for strengthening emotion regulation, reducing academic stress, and enhancing well-being in student populations.

B. Synthesis of Risk-Related Factors

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms and effectiveness of Arts and music-based interventions in enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students, we systematically synthesized the key findings from the 35 included articles. Additionally, we identified methodological patterns and data-analysis approaches among these studies (Figure 5). Each article was analyzed across four core components risk factors, antecedents, consequences, and risk-reducing strategies to map relational patterns and determinants contributing to intervention success.

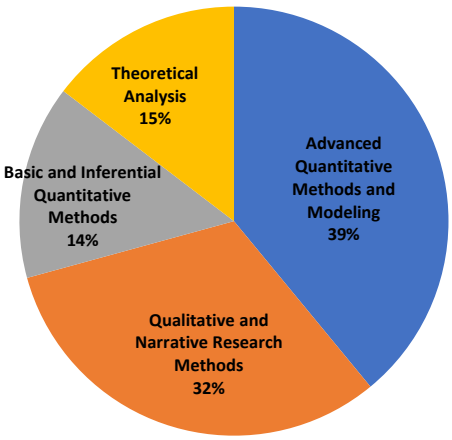


Fig. 5. Theoretical, Quantitative, and Qualitative Analyses were Used in this Review, with Advanced Quantitative Studies and Modeling Approaches being the most Commonly Applied

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C. Risk Factors

In the university student context, the primary risk factors identified include academic stress, anxiety, and emotion dysregulation. Cross-country studies ([30], [31], [32], [33]) highlight that academic pressure, assignment demands, and performance competition significantly contribute to elevated stress and anxiety levels among students. Moreover, vulnerability to psychological issues increases when emotion regulation abilities are poor, coupled with a tendency toward maladaptive strategies (e.g., rumination, avoidance) and a lack of adaptive coping.

Additional risks such as test anxiety [33], [49], impaired psychological well-being [34], [35] and reduced motivation and well-being [31], [61] were also identified. These findings are further supported by meta-analyses and systematic reviews [32], [52], which confirm a heightened relapse risk when effective emotion regulation strategies are absent.

D. Antecedents

First, individual factors such as emotional intelligence and resilience play a protective role, where higher EI, self-awareness, resilience, and hardiness are linked to better academic stress management [30], [40], [34], [60]. Second, personal habits and preferences in arts and music (e.g., genre choice, frequency, purpose of listening; engagement in visual arts, dance, drama, or songwriting) influence the effectiveness of these creative approaches as coping mechanisms [31], [37], [38]. Third, contextual and environmental factors such as the quality of interaction with arts and music, social support, and supportive academic environments serve as essential antecedents that facilitate adaptive emotion regulation [34], [53]. Fourth, intrinsic motivation and personal value systems also determine the level of intervention effectiveness, where interest in the arts and personal meaning are key drivers for emotional adaptation [46], [61].

E. Consequences

The primary consequences identified are, first, significant improvements in emotion regulation as demonstrated by increased ability to identify, express, and manage emotions adaptively following Arts and music-based interventions [30], [31], [33], [45]. Second, both active forms of engagement (e.g., drumming, improvisation, group music-making) and passive activities (e.g., listening, guided imagery) consistently reduce academic stress and anxiety [48]-[50]. Third, interventions demonstrate positive effects on well-being, learning motivation, life satisfaction, and academic performance, supported by longitudinal studies and RCT based evidence [34], [33], [59], [62]. Additional benefits include reductions in test anxiety, improved sleep and mood quality, enhanced self-efficacy, strengthened adaptive coping, and increased social connectedness [32], [53], [54].

F. Risk Reducers

This review also identified several risk-reducing strategies reported in the included studies. Arts and music-based programs such as art therapy, music therapy, group drumming,

improvisation, songwriting, guided imagery, and mindfulness-based activities demonstrated significant effectiveness in reducing stress and enhancing emotion regulation [32], [48], [52].

Furthermore, interventions that allow participants to self-select the type of art or music demonstrated greater stress reduction and emotion regulation benefits than those that are externally imposed, as self-selection increases engagement, emotional relevance, and personal meaning [38], [46]. Combining active (art-making or playing instruments) and passive (listening and relaxation) components broadens positive impact and accommodates student preferences [49], [51]. Participation in arts and music groups or communities also reinforces protective effects through mechanisms of social support and connectedness [34], [53].

Integrative approaches that combine arts and music with psychoeducation and mindfulness have been shown to improve emotion regulation further and reduce academic stress [34], [53]. To evaluate physiological outcomes, several studies have incorporated biomarker-based assessments as part of intervention evaluation [50], [48]. In addition, a random sampling was used to select one hundred and fifty pupils from the primary schools in Isolo Local Government Area. The questionnaire was the main instrument of research in the study. For the data analysis, simple percentages were used to describe the results and test the hypotheses.

Table 1. The Authors of Selected Papers

Code	Author(s)	Year	Code	Author(s)	Year
P1	Zhang [30]	2025	P19	Song et al. [33]	2024
P2	Julia et al. [31]	2025	P20	Ye et al. [35]	2025
P3	Martin et al. [32]	2018	P21	Finnerty et al. [48]	2023
P4	Park and Suh [40]	2023	P22	Khaira et al. [49]	2023
P5	Chong et al. [37]	2024	P23	Gruber and Oepen [51]	2018
P6	Aloufi et al. [36]	2021	P24	Abbing et al. [52]	2018
P7	Guo [34]	2025	P25	O'Donnell et al. [53]	2021
P8	Yang [61]	2024	P26	Ramaswamy et al. [54]	2024
P9	Park and Suh [40]	2023	P27	Cao et al. [55]	2025
P10	Kennet et al. [14]	2021	P28	Rodwin et al. [56]	2022
P11	Freitas et al. [47]	2022	P29	Saskovets et al. [57]	2025
P12	Tan et al. [45]	2024	P30	Ding et al. [58]	2025
P13	Vidas et al. [46]	2025	P31	Agres and Chen [59]	2025
P14	Lee et al. [38]	2025	P32	Feng and Wang [60]	2025
P15	Barnett and Vasiu [39]	2024	P33	He et al. [44]	2024
P16	Hou et al. [42]	2017	P34	Wang [62]	2025
P17	Mastandrea et al. [43]	2019	P35	Wong et al. [50]	2021
P18	Guo [41]	2024			

Table 2. The Exploration Results of the Selected Papers

No	Risk Factor	Antecedent	Consequence	Risk Reducer
P1	Perceived stress, emotional dysregulation	Emotional intelligence, arts engagement	↑ Well-being, ↑ EI, stress moderates	Self-awareness, mindfulness, art/music/dance/theater/literature activities
P2	Academic stress, poor emotion regulation	Music listening patterns, coping style	↑ Emotional well-being, mood management	Self-selected music, mood management strategies
P3	Academic stress	Stress level, lack of coping	↓ Stress (81% studies), ↑ emotion regulation	Art/music intervention, guided imagery, mindfulness
P4	Perceived stress, negative emotion	Hardiness, music for emotion regulation	↑ Life satisfaction, better emotion regulation	Music for anger/anxiety, hardiness training
P5	Emotional dysregulation	Music habits, intention, self-selection	↑ Coping, distraction, venting, self-soothing	Listening, singing, playing music (mostly self-selected)
P6	Academic stress	Modality engagement, stress level	↓ Stress (81% studies)	Multimodal arts: music, art, dance, drama
P7	Poor resilience, well-being	Positive psychology, music training	↑ Resilience, well-being, academic performance	Music education (practical, composition), social skills training
P8	Cognitive, emotional dysregulation	Structured music program	↑ Memory, motivation, emotion regulation	Structured music activities
P9	Perceived stress	Hardiness, music usage	↑ Life satisfaction	Music for anger/anxiety regulation
P10	Emotion dysregulation	Music listening habits	↑ Coping, distraction, catharsis, venting	Listening, singing, playing music
P11	Depression, anxiety (adolescents)	Music therapy exposure	↑ Self-esteem, ↓ depression/anxiety	Improvisation, songwriting, verbal reflection
P12	Depression, anxiety, alexithymia	Healthy/unhealthy music use	Healthy: ↑ emotion regulation; Unhealthy: ↑ depression/anxiety	Healthy: reappraisal; Unhealthy: rumination; personalized music
P13	Poor emotion regulation	Motivated music listening	↑ Emotion regulation, positive affect	Motivated listening, lyric analysis, imagery, self-chosen music
P14	Emotional dysregulation	Intentional music listening	↑ Emotion control, interoceptive listening	Daily music, GIM, improvisation
P15	Emotional dysregulation, stress	Art/music/dance engagement	mPFC/amygdala activation, adaptive ER	Reappraisal, creative expression, improvisation
P16	Emotion dysregulation, neural imbalance	Music exposure	↑ Inhibition, reward system, limbic-cortical	Listening, improvisation, discharge
P17	Stress, low well-being	Aesthetic experience, art/music	↓ Stress, improved mood, empathy	Reappraisal, aesthetic distance, empathy

No	Risk Factor	Antecedent	Consequence	Risk Reducer
P18	Poor psychological capital, low EI	Arts education, self-efficacy, EI	↑ Self-efficacy, psychological capital, well-being	Artistic engagement, expressive art/music
P19	Test anxiety, poor emotion regulation	Group improvisational music therapy (GIMT)	↓ Test anxiety, ↑ emotion regulation, ↑ GPA	Group music making, improvisation, reflection
P20	Psychological needs deficit, low well-being	Aesthetic education, SDT	↑ Well-being via psychological needs	Self-expression, creative dev, social engagement (music, art, dance, lit)
P21	Stress, anxiety (students)	Online group music therapy	↓ Stress, ↓ anxiety, stable hair cortisol	Songwriting, singing, lyric analysis, group listening
P22	Test anxiety (nursing students)	Various non-pharma interventions	↓ Test anxiety	Music relaxation/distraction, guided imagery, EFT, aromatherapy
P23	Mood/affect imbalance	Art-making (directive/free)	Mood repair, ↑ positive affect	Drawing, clay, collage, mandala, music distraction
P24	Anxiety (adults)	Art therapy	↓ Pre-exam/prisoner anxiety	Relaxation, exposure, self-expression (mandala, drawing, clay)
P25	Emotional dysregulation, low well-being	Participatory arts, gender factors	↑ Connectedness, emotion regulation, empowerment	Drumming, singing, drama, painting, mixed arts
P26	Mood disorders, neuro dysfunction	Music therapy	↑ Plasticity, mood, cognition	Distraction, emotional resonance, synchrony, improvisation
P27	Mood symptoms, loneliness	Music psychoeducation (Tuned In)	↓ Mood symptoms, ↓ loneliness, ↑ emotion regulation	Self-selected music, psychoeducation, group sharing
P28	Social-emotional/internalizing issues	Music-based intervention	↑ Social engagement, emotion regulation	Improvisation, songwriting, lyric analysis, group music
P29	Stress response (adults)	Sound/music/nature intervention	↓ HRV, BP, cortisol, ↓ self-report stress	Relaxation music, nature sound, live music, distraction
P30	Mental fatigue, cognitive stress	Music intervention (genre/tempo)	↓ Fatigue, ↑ cognitive performance	Relaxing/exciting/preferred music, attention regulation
P31	Stress, low mental health/social connection	Arts-based (music/dance) program	↑ Mental health, QoL, creativity, ↓ stress	Group drumming, dancing, improvisation
P32	Low resilience, well-being, employability	Music therapy, demographics	↑ ER, ↑ well-being, ↑ employability	Music listening, creation, online discussion
P33	Anxiety, depression (students)	Music education intervention	'Music appreciation and self-care' most effective	Music appreciation, self-care, group music, digital platforms
P34	Low subjective well-being, academic stress	Mindfulness, music engagement	↑ Academic performance, affective support	Music listening/playing (various genres), mindfulness
P35	Stress (clinical/non-clinical)	Music intervention (RCTs)	↓ Biomarker stress (cortisol/α-amylase), ↓ psych stress	Listening, relaxation music, group/individual, percussion

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G. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Arts and musicbased interventions in enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students, several methodological limitations remain. The majority of the reviewed studies were dominated by cross-sectional designs, relied heavily on self-reported measures, and utilized demographically homogeneous samples. Moreover, standardized intervention protocols were rarely applied, limiting the replication and comparability of findings. Another limitation lies in the lack of longitudinal investigations and insufficient exploration of different forms of artistic modalities and music genres.

To address these gaps, future research should adopt longitudinal and experimental designs to evaluate the sustainability of intervention effects. Expanding the diversity of participant samples including students from varied cultural backgrounds, gender groups, and larger populations will enhance the generalizability of findings, especially in non-Western contexts. Further investigations are also needed to examine different types of arts and music genres and to assess the efficacy of digital and technology-based intervention formats. Additionally, future studies should integrate objective measures and explore underlying mechanisms among clinical populations to deepen the scientific understanding of how arts and music interventions operate.

Finally, findings from this systematic literature review confirm that, over the past eight years, research on Arts and music-based interventions targeting emotion regulation and academic stress among university students has grown substantially particularly within the last three years. The analyzed studies originate from a diverse range of countries and continents, with major contributions from multi-country investigations and research conducted in China. While diverse methods were employed including literature reviews, observational studies, and experimental approaches cross-sectional designs remained predominant. Theoretical frameworks applied were highly multidisciplinary, encompassing positive psychology, integrative stress perspectives, neuroaesthetic and cognitive models, each complementing one another in explaining the psychological impact of arts and music on student mental health.

The primary findings highlight that academic stress, anxiety, and emotion dysregulation are the most prominent risk factors among university students. Individual abilities (emotional intelligence, resilience, hardiness), engagement with arts and music activities, social support, and intrinsic motivation are significant antecedents that influence intervention effectiveness. Arts and music interventions consistently demonstrated reductions in academic stress and anxiety, alongside improvements in well-being, emotional management, life satisfaction, learning motivation, and academic performance. Their effectiveness is further strengthened when

interventions involve active participation, personal preference, and group-based engagement that fosters social connectedness.

Emotion regulation strategies facilitated by arts and music are diverse ranging from creative expression (drawing, painting), improvisation, intentional listening, and songwriting to guided imagery and mindfulness. The combination of active and passive engagement, integration with psychoeducation and relaxation exercises, and community participation broadens the scope of outcomes and enhances long-term benefits. However, this review also emphasizes the need to optimize and sustain intervention advantages by identifying the most effective and contextually relevant approaches.

Conclusion

Ultimately, while Arts and music-based interventions have been proven effective in enhancing emotion regulation and reducing academic stress among university students, several research gaps must be addressed. Existing studies are predominantly cross-sectional, utilize subjective measures, and involve limited sample diversity. Standardized intervention protocols and long-term evaluations are needed, as well as further exploration across diverse art forms and music genres. Future research should incorporate robust longitudinal and experimental designs with diverse and balanced populations, particularly considering multicultural and gender representation. The integration of objective measurements and digital-based intervention formats is also necessary in response to current technological advancement. More in-depth investigation into intervention mechanisms within clinical populations and the development of digital Arts and music-based interventions are highly recommended to strengthen the existing evidence and support the sustainable contribution of arts and music to student mental health.

Limitation and Suggestions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the review was limited to articles published in English, which may have led to the exclusion of relevant studies published in other languages. Second, the selection of databases was restricted to [list databases, e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed], potentially overlooking pertinent literature indexed elsewhere. Third, despite the application of rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria, there remains the possibility of selection bias and the omission of grey literature, such as unpublished studies or reports. Furthermore, the review relied on the accuracy and completeness of the data reported in the primary studies, which may introduce reporting bias.

For future research, it is suggested to broaden the scope by including articles in multiple languages and searching additional databases to capture a more comprehensive set of relevant studies. Researchers are also encouraged to incorporate grey literature and consider alternative

review methodologies, such as meta-analysis or mixed-methods synthesis, to enhance the robustness of findings. Finally, regular updates of systematic reviews are recommended to reflect the most recent advancements in the field.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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