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Community Arts Participation, Youth Empowerment, and Social Development

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the association between community-based arts participation, youth empowerment, and social development using a quantitative secondary-data design based on 925 complete youth observations. We construct an Arts Participation Index from ten visual and performing arts items and a Youth Empowerment Index from psychosocial and prosocial indicators, then use heteroscedasticity-robust OLS regression and tertile comparisons. Results show a positive, statistically significant association between arts participation and youth empowerment ($\beta = 0.250, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.080$) that remains significant after adjusting for age, gender, and education. Respondents in the highest arts-participation tertile reported markedly higher empowerment scores ($+0.264$) compared to those in the lowest tertile (-0.248). Furthermore, active and public-facing activities—specifically dancing ($r = 0.263$), art exhibitions ($r = 0.171$), and theatre ($r = 0.133$)—showed the strongest component-level correlations with empowerment outcomes. While establishing that arts engagement is meaningfully connected to confidence, social connection, and prosocial behavior, the paper emphasizes that cross-sectional secondary evidence reflects statistical association rather than direct causal impact. Crucially, these empirical insights show how creative involvement actively supports youth development rather than serving as mere leisure, providing actionable evidence for policymakers, educators, and community organizations. By fostering structured artistic opportunities, institutions can effectively cultivate civic agency, peer collaboration, resilience, and inclusive social participation among young people.

Keywords: community arts; youth empowerment; social development; arts participation; cultural engagement; youth well-being.

I. INTRODUCTION

Community-based arts participation holds an important place in contemporary debates on youth development because it links cultural expression to agency, belonging, social visibility, and community participation. Visual arts workshops, music groups, theatre activities, dance practices, creative writing spaces, and community exhibitions create environments in which young people can communicate identity, collaborate with peers, and participate in shared cultural life. These activities are not only artistic experiences. When organized as inclusive, participatory spaces, they can also give young people opportunities to build confidence, express emotions, cooperate with peers, develop leadership readiness, and take responsibility toward others.

Youth empowerment is a multidimensional developmental process, not a single psychological trait. It includes confidence, voice, decision-making capacity, social trust, prosocial orientation, and readiness to participate in collective life. Community arts settings matter to this process because they let young people express themselves in visible, embodied, and relational ways. A young person who performs, contributes to

a group artwork, joins a music activity, participates in dance, or presents creative work to an audience is not merely producing a cultural output. Such participation also involves negotiation, self-presentation, cooperation, feedback, and recognition.

The social-development value of community arts is therefore located in the interaction between creativity and participation. Arts activities can foster belonging by bringing young people into shared spaces where imagination, skill, and cooperation are valued. They can strengthen agency because participants make choices, solve creative problems, and communicate ideas. They can also support inclusion because artistic activity may provide alternative modes of expression for young people who do not always feel represented in formal institutions. For this reason, community arts should be examined as a mechanism for youth development rather than as recreational programming alone.

This focus matters because empowerment developed during adolescence and early adulthood can shape later participation in education, work, culture, and community life. Creative spaces may help young people develop social capacities that conventional academic indicators alone cannot capture. Confidence in communication, willingness to cooperate, comfort with public expression, and openness to community responsibility all matter for social development, yet narrow evaluations of cultural initiatives often overlook them. A stronger evaluation approach therefore needs to examine how arts engagement connects to both individual and social dimensions of empowerment.

Despite this topic's strong conceptual appeal, the evidence base remains uneven. Many discussions describe the transformative potential of community arts, but fewer studies operationalize arts participation and youth empowerment through measurable indicators. This creates a gap between the language used in cultural policy and the requirements of empirical research. To treat community-based arts participation as a social-development resource, researchers should examine its relationship with empowerment using transparent methods that link participation to observable outcomes. This paper addresses this need by constructing empirical indices of arts participation and youth empowerment and testing their statistical association.

The study intentionally frames its analysis cautiously. The available evidence does not measure enrollment in one named community arts intervention, nor does it follow participants before and after a specific program. Instead, the analysis uses youth-level survey evidence to examine arts participation as an empirical proxy for engagement with community-relevant arts practices. This distinction is important because it protects the paper from making causal claims that the data cannot support. The purpose is not to prove that arts programs alone produce empowerment, but to test whether stronger arts engagement is associated with empowerment-related characteristics after demographic differences are considered.

The empirical model is built around two composite measures. The Arts Participation Index captures engagement with visual and performing arts components, including music, dance, theatre, exhibitions, instruments, and writing. The Youth Empowerment Index represents empowerment-related dimensions such as assertiveness, decision-making, achievement orientation, happiness, energy, socializing, friendship networks, empathy, giving, charity, and public-speaking confidence. This design translates a broad community arts topic into a measurable research model while preserving the multidimensional nature of youth empowerment.

The empirical value of this approach is that it treats community arts participation as an assessable social practice. Rather than assuming that participation is beneficial, the study tests whether higher arts engagement is associated with stronger empowerment scores. This matters for policy and practice because arts organizations often need evidence they can communicate to funders, educators, local authorities, and community partners. A measurable model also helps distinguish general cultural preference from participation most closely linked to social confidence, prosocial behavior, and community-oriented development.

The remainder of the paper follows a journal-style empirical structure. The literature review synthesizes studies on arts participation, well-being, youth development, empowerment, inclusion, and social connection. The research framework presents the study problem, aim, questions, hypotheses, and conceptual contribution. The methodology explains the dataset screening process, sample, variables, index construction,

statistical equations, data-quality procedures, and ethical treatment of secondary evidence. The results section reports descriptive, reliability, correlation, group-comparison, regression, and sensitivity findings. The discussion interprets the results for social development, followed by implications, limitations, future research directions, and conclusion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature shows a clear movement toward treating arts participation as a measurable social and developmental experience. Music-based work demonstrates that structured participation can support connection, belonging, and positive youth development, while longitudinal evidence links arts and cultural engagement with broader social-development pathways among adolescents [1], [2]. Arts-based body-mapping research further shows that creative methods can help young people represent embodied health and emotional experience through visible forms of expression [3].

Population-based and review evidence also supports the connection between arts engagement and well-being. Large-scale public-health research has linked recreational arts participation to mental well-being, while participatory arts have been linked to bonding, bridging, belonging, and social capital [4], [5]. Participatory action research using arts-based methods adds an empowerment dimension by allowing young people to become co-producers of knowledge rather than passive research subjects [6].

Intervention and youth-centered studies suggest that arts participation can support resilience, identity, and psychosocial well-being. School-based Arts on Prescription work indicates that structured arts workshops can improve mental health and resilience among adolescents [7]. Digital storytelling with Indigenous youth demonstrates how arts-inspired inquiry can support voice, identity, and cultural understanding [8]. Narrative research on youth arts participation also shows that creative activity can contribute to enjoyment, connection, self-expression, and well-being [9].

Non-formal arts education is especially relevant to community-based empowerment because it often provides flexible spaces for experimentation, peer learning, and self-confidence [10]. Longitudinal research on arts and cultural engagement in adolescence and early adulthood builds on this discussion by linking arts participation to behavioral trajectories and developmental outcomes [11]. Related evidence on arts interventions for mental-health stigma suggests that creative programs can shape young people's social attitudes, strengthening the social-developmental relevance of arts practice [12].

Research on active arts engagement emphasizes that meaningful participation in creative activity can generate personal, social, and health-related benefits for young people [13]. Drama and theatre studies show that performance can strengthen socio-motivational outcomes by giving marginalized young people embodied opportunities for visibility, recognition, and inclusion [14]. Arts education theory further argues that different artistic activities should be connected to specific socioemotional outcomes rather than treated as a single undifferentiated intervention [15].

Creative youth-development research connects artistic practice with discipline, motivation, responsibility, identity, and public voice. Music education studies frame repeated artistic engagement as a pathway to positive youth development when mentoring and structured opportunities for achievement support it [16]. Hip-hop and culturally sustaining arts pedagogy extend the argument by linking youth creativity with civic engagement, cultural identity, and community change [17]. Youth-led arts-based participatory action research also demonstrates that creative projects can strengthen meaningful participation and psychosocial well-being in contexts of migration and adversity [18].

Research on visual arts and self-concept further supports the empowerment pathway. Group visual arts activities have been associated with resilience among young people experiencing mental health complexities or learning difficulties [19]. Arts engagement has also been linked to higher self-esteem in children,

suggesting a confidence-related pathway relevant to youth empowerment [20]. Songwriting research adds another expressive mechanism, allowing young people to explore identity, self-concept, and personal meaning through creative production [21].

Field-level and intervention reviews show that program design is central to the developmental value of arts participation. Creative youth-development programs connect artistic skill-building with identity, voice, agency, and life skills [22]. Arts-based interventions in natural or outdoor spaces add evidence on well-being and connection to place [23]. Ethical analyses of participatory arts with young people also show that empowerment depends on safe facilitation, careful attention to power relations, and respectful participation structures [24].

Social-connection studies are directly relevant to the present paper because youth empowerment includes both individual confidence and relational participation. Adult survey evidence shows that arts engagement supports social connectedness through multiple pathways [25]. Dance intervention research indicates that movement-based participation can influence migrant pupils' sense of belonging in school [26]. Participatory arts in social work practice also show the value of creative activity for youth mental health, recognition, and community-oriented practice [27].

Broader evidence on arts, culture, and subjective well-being supports treating arts participation as a measurable social-development variable rather than a purely leisure-based activity [28]. Rapid review evidence on arts activities for children and young people further connects creative participation with resilience, mental well-being, self-esteem, and belonging [29]. These findings justify the present study's focus on arts participation, youth empowerment, and social development.

Across the reviewed studies, arts participation is most strongly associated with empowerment when young people are given meaningful roles, regular participation opportunities, peer interaction, creative choice, and public-facing forms of recognition. This pattern supports an empirical framework that examines arts participation not only as cultural preference but also as a social practice linked to confidence, belonging, agency, and prosocial engagement.

At the same time, the literature warns against treating arts participation as automatically transformative. Outcomes depend on program quality, access, inclusion, cultural relevance, continuity, facilitation, and opportunities for youth decision-making. The present study therefore uses cautious statistical testing and interprets the evidence as association-based rather than causal.

Table 1. Thematic Comparison of Empirical and Theoretical Studies on Arts Participation, Youth Empowerment, and Social Development.

No.	Author(s) and year	Design / context	Key finding	Use in this paper
1	Barrett & Bond (2015)	Study of a music program and positive youth development	Music participation fostered connection and developmental growth.	Supports musical participation.
2	Bone et al. (2022)	Two-cohort longitudinal adolescent study	Arts and cultural engagement related to fewer antisocial/criminalized behaviors through mediating pathways.	Supports social-development pathway.

3	Boydell et al. (2018)	Body mapping research with youth experiencing psychosis	Visual arts-based methods helped represent embodied physical and mental health experiences.	Supports expressive methods.
4	Davies et al. (2016)	Population study of recreational arts engagement	Recreational arts engagement was positively related to mental well-being.	Supports index-based arts analysis.
5	Daykin et al. (2021)	Qualitative systematic review of social capital in participatory arts	Participatory arts fostered bonding, bridging, belonging, and social capital.	Supports mediating processes.
6	Doucet et al. (2022)	PAR and arts-based methods with young people	Used photovoice and arts-based approaches to support advocacy and transformative social change.	Supports empowerment methods.
7	Efstathopoulou & Bungay (2021)	Arts on Prescription in a school setting	Ten weekly workshops improved mental well-being and resilience among adolescents.	Supports program-level outcomes.
8	Eglinton et al. (2017)	Digital storytelling with Indigenous youth	Arts-inspired storytelling supported youth voice, identity, and cultural understanding.	Supports voice and identity.
9	Ennis & Tonkin (2018)	Narrative study of youth arts activity and well-being	Youth arts participation supported identity, enjoyment, connection, and self-expression.	Explains psychosocial mechanisms.
10	Ferrer-Fons et al. (2022)	Case study of a non-formal arts education center	Arts education reduced barriers and supported empowerment and self-confidence.	Directly supports empowerment framing.
11	Fluharty et al. (2022)	Latent growth analysis using Add Health	Arts and cultural engagement was examined in relation to adolescent and early-adult substance-use trajectories.	Supports youth behavior analysis.
12	Gaiha et al. (2021)	Systematic review and meta-analysis of arts stigma interventions	Arts interventions showed potential to reduce mental-health stigma among youth.	Links arts with social attitudes.

13	Groot et al. (2021)	Review of active arts engagement and health/well-being	Active arts engagement was linked to personal, social, and health-related benefits.	Supports active participation.
14	Hanrahan & Banerjee (2017)	Drama and theatre with marginalized young people	Theatre participation supported socio-motivational outcomes and feelings of being alive and included.	Supports theatre pathway.
15	Holochwost et al. (2021)	Theoretical and program-focused analysis of arts education	Link specific arts activities to specific socioemotional outcomes.	Supports clear operationalization.
16	Hospital & Morris (2018)	El Sistema-inspired music program study	Music education was framed as a path to positive youth development.	Supports music and PYD links.
17	Kuttner (2016)	Hip-hop citizenship and arts-based civic pedagogy	Culturally sustaining arts practices were framed as civic engagement and community change.	Supports civic empowerment.
18	Lee et al. (2020)	Youth-led arts-based PAR with youth in adversity	Creative projects strengthened meaningful participation and psychosocial well-being.	Supports participation and agency.
19	MacPherson et al. (2016)	Scoping study of group visual arts activities	Visual arts groups supported resilience among young people with mental health complexities or learning difficulties.	Supports visual arts/resilience.
20	Mak & Fancourt (2019)	Propensity score study of arts engagement and self-esteem	Arts engagement was associated with higher self-esteem in children.	Supports confidence component.
21	Miao & Stewart (2022)	Songwriting and youth self-concept	Songwriting offered a creative structure for young people to explore identity and self-concept.	Supports self-expression.
22	Montgomery (2020)	Creative youth development field review	Creative youth development connected artistic skill-building with identity, voice, and life skills.	Supports CYD framing.

23	Moula et al. (2022)	Systematic review of arts-in-nature interventions	Arts-based interventions in outdoor settings supported well-being and connection to nature.	Adds intervention evidence.
24	Pavarini et al. (2021)	Ethical analysis of participatory arts with young people	Participatory arts methods can support safe engagement when ethical power relations are managed.	Supports ethical program design.
25	Perkins et al. (2021)	HEartS survey on arts engagement and social connection	Arts engagement supported social connectedness through multiple pathways.	Supports social connection.
26	Ritchie & Gaulter (2020)	Dance intervention with migrant pupils	Dance activities influenced migrant pupils' sense of belonging in school.	Supports belonging mediator.
27	Walls et al. (2016)	Participatory arts in youth social work practice	Participatory arts were identified as valuable for youth mental health and well-being practice.	Supports community practice.
28	Wheatley & Bickerton (2017)	Study of arts, culture, sport, and subjective well-being	Engagement in arts and culture was associated with subjective well-being.	Supports well-being outcomes.
29	Zarobe & Bungay (2017)	Rapid review of arts activities for children and young people	Arts activities linked with resilience, mental well-being, self-esteem, and belonging.	Supports resilience and well-being indicators.

III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK, AIM, QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESES

Community-based arts participation is frequently presented as an important pathway for youth expression, inclusion, and social growth, but its developmental value is often discussed in broad descriptive terms. This study frames the problem as a measurement issue: before making strong claims about its social-development relevance, arts participation must be linked to observable empowerment indicators. The research therefore examines whether a measurable arts-participation index is positively associated with a multidimensional youth-empowerment index.

1. AIM

This study aims to examine whether youth arts participation, treated as an empirical proxy for engagement with community-relevant arts practices, is positively associated with empowerment indicators relevant to social development and community participation.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can arts participation and youth empowerment be operationalized using measurable survey indicators?

- Is there a statistically significant relationship between arts participation and youth empowerment?
- Do young people with higher arts participation report higher empowerment scores than those with lower arts participation?
- Does the relationship between arts participation and youth empowerment remain significant after controlling for age, gender, and education?

3. HYPOTHESES

- H1: Arts participation is positively associated with youth empowerment.
- H2: Youth in the high arts participation group report higher empowerment scores than youth in the low arts participation group.
- H3: The positive relationship between arts participation and youth empowerment remains significant after controlling for age, gender, and education.

4. STUDY CONTRIBUTION.

The paper makes three main contributions.

- First, it offers a structured empirical model that links arts participation with youth empowerment rather than treating the relationship as self-evident.
- Second, it applies statistical testing to examine whether the association remains meaningful after accounting for demographic controls.
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- Third, it interprets the findings in relation to social development by showing how arts participation may connect individual confidence with broader dimensions of belonging, cooperation, and community responsibility.

These contributions are relevant to cultural institutions, youth centers, local development agencies, and community arts organizations seeking evidence-informed program evaluation.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDY CONTRIBUTION

The conceptual framework positions community-based arts participation as a social and cultural pathway through which young people may develop confidence, belonging, expression, and peer interaction. The framework does not assume a direct causal mechanism; instead, it provides a theoretically grounded structure to test whether higher arts engagement is associated with stronger youth-empowerment indicators and broader social-development implications.

The study's main contribution is a measurable, cautious framework for evaluating community arts participation and youth empowerment. The paper contributes by linking arts engagement to youth-development theory, making the index structure transparent, applying robust statistical testing, and translating the results into practical implications for community arts organizations, cultural institutions, youth centers, and local development programs. It also contributes methodologically by distinguishing between association-based evidence and stronger causal claims that require field-based intervention designs.

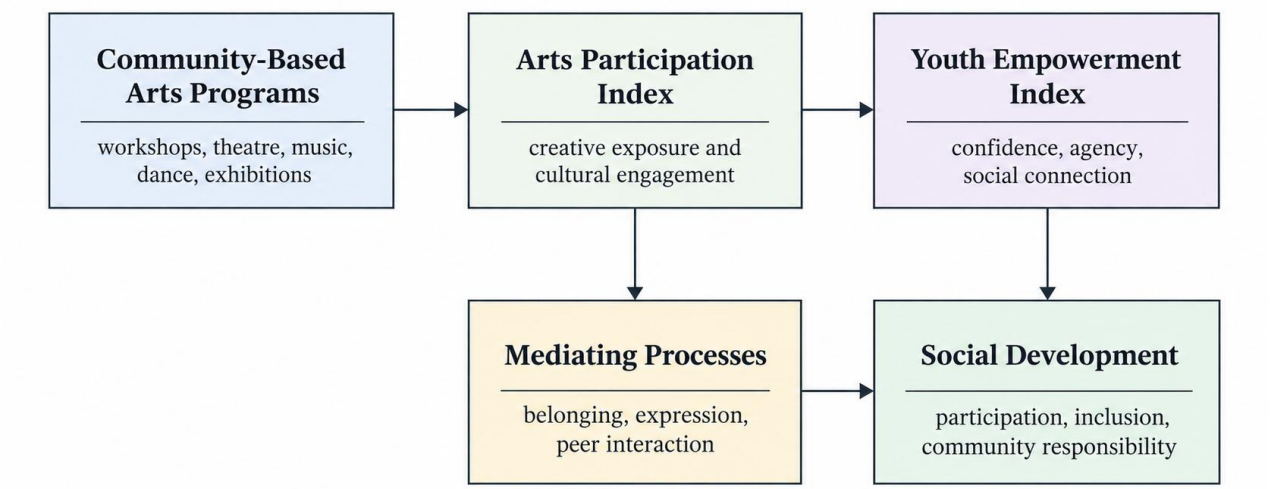


FIGURE 1. Conceptual framework of community arts participation, empowerment, and social development.

V. METHODOLOGY

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional secondary-data design. This design was appropriate because the selected data contain individual youth responses measured at one point in time and include both arts-related variables and psychosocial indicators. The analysis followed a reproducible statistical workflow involving data cleaning, index construction, descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, Pearson correlation, group comparison, analysis of variance, non-parametric sensitivity testing, and heteroscedasticity-robust ordinary least squares regression. The design supports association-based inference and does not claim causal effects.

2. DATASET SCREENING AND SELECTION

We screened seven publicly available secondary files for empirical suitability. We selected the youth survey response file because it included both arts-related indicators and psychosocial variables we could operationalize as empowerment-related outcomes. The screening process prioritized individual-level observations, arts variables, youth or young-adult respondents, demographic controls, and usable empowerment proxies. We retained other files only as background sources because they lacked youth-level outcomes, arts participation indicators, or individual empowerment measures.

Table 2. Screening of secondary files and empirical dataset selection.

File reviewed	Empirical content	Relevance to the paper	Decision
Youth survey responses	1,010 responses; 150 variables	Arts interests, social traits, confidence proxies, demographics	Selected for main empirical model
Youth art metadata	1,753 observations; 13 variables	Art experience, emotion, well-being, stress, creativity	Useful supplementary source but weaker for social-development modeling

Student-life survey	2,958 responses; 19 variables	Volunteering, participation, satisfaction, stress	Community engagement source but no direct arts indicators
Cultural engagement records	8,737 records; 16 variables	Event type, cultural engagement, social interaction	Event-level source but no youth empowerment outcome
Volunteer opportunities	Opportunity listings	Community volunteering information	Not individual youth outcome data
WDI indicators	Country-level development indicators	Education, health, employment variables	Macro background only
Uncleaned string file	Small text-manipulation file	No usable arts or youth empowerment variables	Not selected

The screening process prioritized individual-level youth data with both arts variables and empowerment-related psychosocial indicators.

3. SAMPLE

The selected youth survey included 1,010 initial records. After listwise deletion for variables required in the empirical model, the final analysis sample consisted of 925 complete observations. Participants ranged from 15 to 30 years old, with a mean age of 20.37 years (SD = 2.78). The complete sample included 554 female participants (59.9%) and 371 male participants (40.1%).

Table 3. Sample profile of the selected youth survey.

Characteristic	Category / statistic	Value
Sample size	Complete observations	925
Age	Mean ± SD	20.37 ± 2.78
Age	Range	15-30 years
Gender	Female	554 (59.9%)
Gender	Male	371 (40.1%)
Education	secondary school	577 (62.4%)
Education	college/bachelor degree	194 (21.0%)
Education	primary school	72 (7.8%)
Education	masters degree	67 (7.2%)
Education	currently a primary school pupil	10 (1.1%)
Education	doctorate degree	5 (0.5%)

The sample profile confirms that the empirical analysis is based on youth and young adult respondents with sufficient demographic information for controlled regression analysis.

4. VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT

The independent variable was the Arts Participation Index (AEI), constructed from ten visual and performing arts items: music, dance, folk music, classical music, musical performance, art exhibitions, dancing, musical instruments, writing, and theatre. The dependent variable was the Youth Empowerment Index (YEI), constructed from assertiveness, decision-making, achievement orientation, happiness, energy, socializing, number of friends, empathy, giving, charity, and public-speaking confidence. We created public-speaking confidence by reversing the public-speaking fear item. All items were standardized before aggregation to avoid scale dominance. Because empowerment is multidimensional, we treat the YEI as a formative proxy index rather than a narrow reflective scale.

Table 4. Operationalization of the main variables.

Construct	Role in model	Indicators	Operational definition
Arts Participation Index	Independent variable	Music, dance, folk, classical music, musical, art exhibitions, dancing, musical instruments, writing, theatre	Mean of standardized arts participation indicators
Youth Empowerment Index	Dependent variable	Assertiveness, decision-making, achievement, happiness, energy, socializing, friendship, empathy, giving, charity, public-speaking confidence	Mean of standardized empowerment and prosocial indicators
Age	Control	Age in years	Continuous control variable
Gender	Control	Female / male	Categorical control variable
Education	Control	Educational level	Categorical control variable

The indices translate broad concepts into measurable statistical variables while preserving transparency in indicator selection.

5. STATISTICAL EQUATIONS

The Arts Participation Index was calculated as the average standardized score across the selected arts indicators:

(1) $AEI = mean\{z(Music), z(Dance), \ldots, z(Theatre)\}$

where AEI refers to the Arts Participation Index and each component is first standardized before aggregation.

The Youth Empowerment Index was calculated as the average standardized score across empowerment indicators:

(2) $YEI = mean\{z(Assertiveness), z(Decision-making), \ldots, z(PSC)\}$

where YEI refers to the Youth Empowerment Index, and PSC refers to public-speaking confidence.

The main regression model was specified as follows:

(3) $YEI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1\, AEI_i + \beta_2\, Age_i + \beta_3\, Gender_i + \beta_4\, Education_i + \varepsilon_i$

The coefficient beta 1 tests whether arts participation is positively associated with youth empowerment after adjusting for demographic controls. We used heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors to improve the robustness of inference, and we interpret all coefficients as evidence of association rather than causation.

6. DATA QUALITY, SENSITIVITY STRATEGY, AND ETHICAL TREATMENT

We addressed data quality through complete-case selection for the variables required in the model, standardized scoring before index aggregation, and demographic controls in the regression specification. The analysis also treated the empowerment measure as a multidimensional formative proxy, which is appropriate when the construct combines confidence, social connection, well-being, and prosocial orientation rather than measuring one narrow psychological trait. We state this decision explicitly to prevent overinterpretation of internal-consistency statistics.

We examined sensitivity through complementary checks, including rank-based correlation, non-parametric group comparison, and an alternative empowerment specification focused on confidence, agency, social interaction, and public-expression indicators. These checks assessed whether the main positive association depended on a single model form. The study analyzed the dataset as anonymized secondary evidence; it reports only aggregate statistical patterns and makes no direct contact with participants.

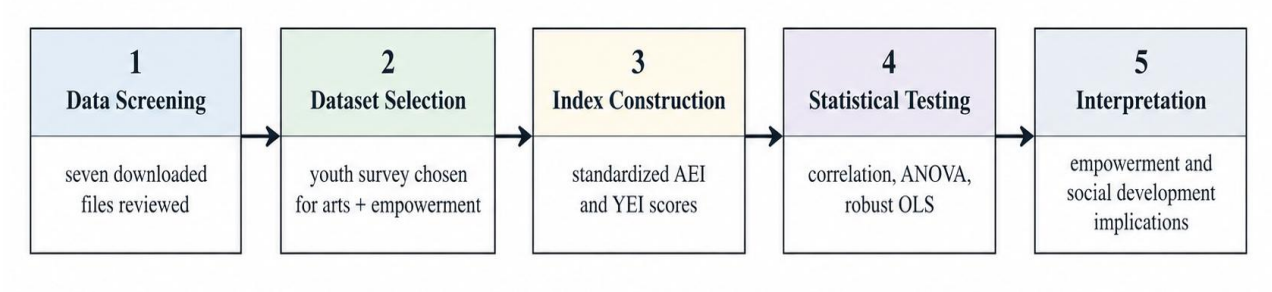


FIGURE 2. Statistical workflow used to transform the selected data into empirical findings.

The workflow documents how we screened the secondary files, processed the selected youth survey, and produced the statistical evidence.

VI. RESULTS

1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The descriptive statistics show that music was the most strongly endorsed arts indicator, followed by dance, theatre, classical music, and musical performance. Art exhibitions, dancing, musical instruments, folk arts, and writing showed more variation, helping distinguish lower and higher levels of arts participation. The variation across the arts indicators supports constructing an Arts Participation Index rather than relying on a single item.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for arts participation indicators.

Arts indicator	Mean	Standard deviation	Correlation with YEI
Music	4.75	0.63	0.104
Dance	3.09	1.17	0.195
Theatre	3.02	1.32	0.133
Classical music	2.97	1.25	0.032
Musical	2.77	1.27	0.132
Art exhibitions	2.61	1.33	0.171
Dancing	2.44	1.44	0.263
Musical instruments	2.34	1.52	0.117
Folk	2.29	1.13	0.138
Writing	1.89	1.28	0.056

The component-level correlations show that active forms of arts engagement such as dancing, dance, art exhibitions, and theatre have the clearest positive associations with youth empowerment.

2. RELIABILITY AND CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The Arts Participation Index showed acceptable internal consistency for an exploratory composite (Cronbach's alpha = 0.698). The Youth Empowerment Index showed lower internal consistency (alpha = 0.484), which is consistent with its treatment as a formative proxy rather than a purely reflective scale. The index intentionally combines confidence, social connection, well-being, and prosocial orientation rather than measuring a single narrow trait. The Pearson correlation between the Arts Participation Index and the Youth Empowerment Index was positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.263$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6. Reliability and correlation summary.

Statistic	Arts Participation Index	Youth Empowerment Index	Interpretation
Cronbach alpha	0.698	0.484	Arts index acceptable; empowerment index treated as formative
Pearson r between AEI and YEI	0.263	$p < 0.001$	Positive significant relationship
Complete observations	925	925	Same complete sample used for main model

The positive correlation initially supports the hypothesis that arts participation is associated with youth empowerment.

3. GROUP COMPARISON BY ARTS PARTICIPATION LEVEL

Participants were divided into low, medium, and high arts participation groups using tertiles of the Arts Participation Index. The mean Youth Empowerment Index increased across the three groups. ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference among the groups ($F = 21.15$, $p < 0.001$), with an eta-squared effect size of 0.044. This indicates a modest but meaningful group difference and supports the hypothesis that higher arts participation is associated with higher empowerment scores.

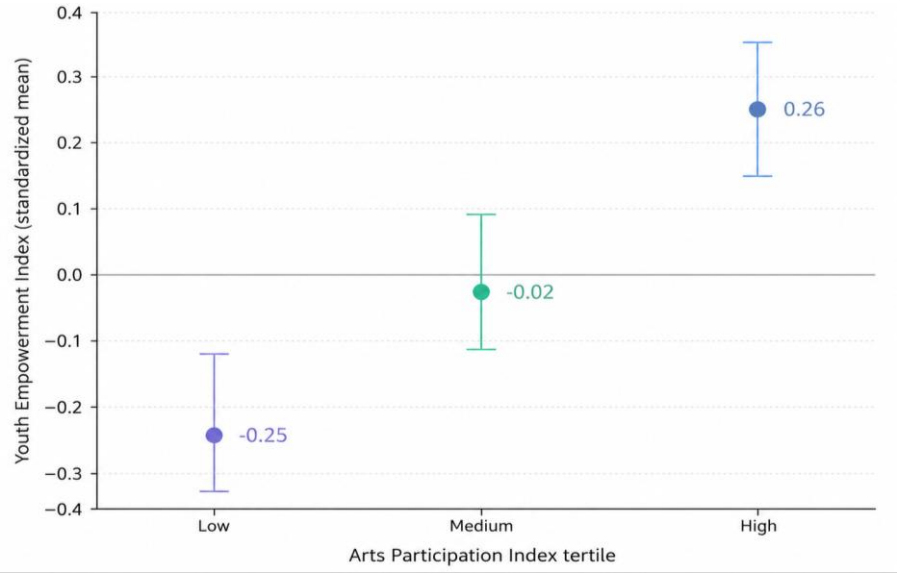


FIGURE 3. Youth Empowerment Index by Arts Participation Index tertile.

The figure shows a clear upward pattern from low to high arts participation, supporting a positive association between arts engagement and empowerment indicators.

Table 7. Youth empowerment indicators by arts participation tertile.

Arts group	YEI mean	Socializing mean	Number of friends mean	Charity mean
Low	-0.248	3.02	3.21	1.78
Medium	-0.016	3.12	3.32	2.06
High	0.264	3.30	3.50	2.39

The high arts participation group records higher mean values for socializing, friendship networks, and charity, indicating a social-development dimension beyond individual enjoyment.

4. REGRESSION RESULTS

The robust OLS model confirmed the positive association between arts participation and youth empowerment. The standardized coefficient for the Arts Participation Index was beta = 0.250, SE = 0.033, 95% CI [0.185, 0.315], $p < 0.001$. This means a one-standard-deviation increase in arts participation was associated with an estimated 0.250-standard-deviation increase in youth empowerment after controlling for demographics. The model explained 8.0% of the variance in youth empowerment, and arts participation increased explained variance by 5.6 percentage points beyond demographic controls.

Table 8. Heteroscedasticity-robust OLS regression predicting youth empowerment.

Predictor	Coefficient	Robust SE	z	p-value	95% CI
Arts Participation Index (standardized)	0.250	0.033	7.52	<0.001	[0.185, 0.315]
Age	0.013	0.015	0.91	0.361	[-0.015, 0.042]
Gender: male	-0.036	0.068	-0.53	0.596	[-0.169, 0.097]
Education: secondary school	-0.188	0.086	-2.19	0.028	[-0.356, -0.020]
Model N	925				
R-squared	0.080				
Adjusted R-squared	0.072				

The positive coefficient for arts participation remains statistically significant after controlling for age, gender, and education, supporting the main association-based hypothesis while indicating that arts participation is a partial rather than complete explanation of empowerment differences.

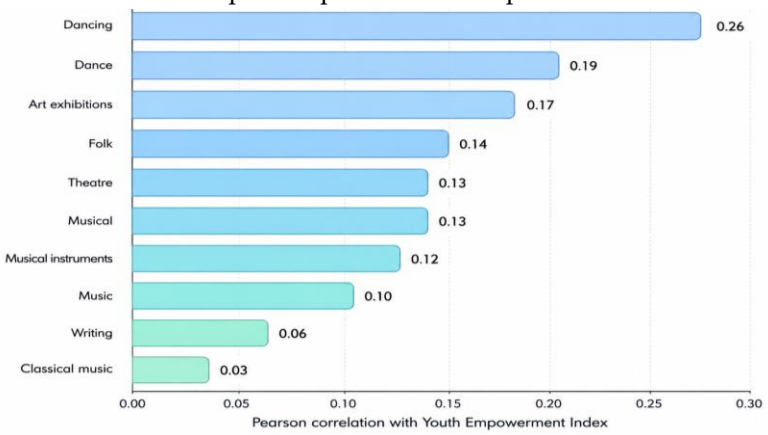


FIGURE 4. Correlations between specific arts indicators and the Youth Empowerment Index.

The figure suggests that active, participatory arts dimensions are more strongly associated with youth empowerment than passive preference items.

5. ROBUSTNESS AND SENSITIVITY CHECKS

Additional checks strengthened the credibility of the results without changing the main tables or figures. The rank-based association between the Arts Participation Index and the Youth Empowerment Index remained positive and statistically significant (Spearman rho = 0.256, $p < 0.001$), indicating the finding is not limited to the Pearson correlation assumption. A non-parametric group comparison also confirmed differences across arts-participation tertiles (Kruskal-Wallis H = 43.23, $p < 0.001$).

A narrower empowerment specification focused on confidence, agency, social interaction, friendship, achievement orientation, and public-speaking confidence also produced a positive controlled association with arts participation (beta = 0.183, $p < 0.001$). The main arts predictor showed no problematic collinearity with demographic controls (VIF = 1.11). These checks support the robustness of the central finding while reinforcing the need to interpret the results as association-based evidence rather than causal proof.

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings provide empirical support for a positive association between arts participation and youth empowerment indicators. The effect is moderate rather than large, but it is meaningful because the model uses broad psychosocial indicators and adjusts for demographic differences. The positive coefficient suggests that young people who report stronger engagement with arts and cultural activities also tend to report stronger empowerment-related characteristics, including socializing, confidence, achievement orientation, prosocial giving, and friendship networks. This pattern supports the argument that arts participation is connected with social-development dimensions beyond artistic enjoyment alone.

The results align with positive youth development and empowerment perspectives. Arts participation can create repeated opportunities for self-expression, peer interaction, decision-making, rehearsal, public presentation, feedback, and recognition. These processes may help young people develop confidence and social agency because participation requires them to act, communicate, listen, negotiate, and respond to others. The stronger component-level associations for dancing, dance, art exhibitions, theatre, and musical instruments suggest that embodied, collaborative, and public-facing arts activities may be especially relevant because they involve visibility, interaction, performance, and expressive risk-taking.

The interpretation must remain cautious. The study uses cross-sectional secondary evidence and does not directly measure enrollment in a named community arts program. Therefore, the findings cannot show that a specific program increased empowerment. The results best support the conclusion that youth arts engagement is meaningfully associated with empowerment indicators and that this association is strong enough to justify further program-level research. Future studies should test the same framework using field-based data, baseline and follow-up measurements, comparison groups, interviews, observations, and direct measures of belonging, leadership, civic responsibility, and community participation.

The practical implication is that community-based arts programs should be designed intentionally rather than treated as occasional cultural events. Programs are more likely to support social development when they include youth voice, collaborative production, mentoring, inclusive access, public presentation, and opportunities for young people to take responsibility. The results suggest that active, participatory arts experiences deserve particular attention because they are most closely linked to empowerment-related outcomes. Community arts organizations can use this evidence to design evaluation systems that track confidence, social connection, prosocial orientation, and expressive participation alongside artistic outputs. Future research should collect primary data from youth enrolled in community-based arts programs and include pre- and post-test measures, interviews, observations, facilitator records, and direct program attendance data.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study examined the association between community-based arts participation, youth empowerment, and social development using an empirical model grounded in youth-level survey evidence. By constructing an Arts Participation Index and a Youth Empowerment Index, the paper translated a broad cultural-development topic into measurable variables that could be tested through descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, correlation, group comparison, analysis of variance, robust regression, and sensitivity checks. The findings indicate that arts participation is positively and significantly associated with youth empowerment indicators, and that this relationship remains significant after accounting for age, gender, and education.

The results are meaningful because they show that arts participation is linked not only to cultural preference but also to confidence, social connection, achievement orientation, prosocial behavior, and public-expression indicators. Respondents in the highest arts-participation group recorded stronger empowerment scores than those in the lowest group, while component-level evidence suggests that embodied, participatory, and public-facing arts activities are especially relevant. These findings support viewing community arts as part of a broader framework for youth development and social participation.

The study also strengthens the methodological basis of community arts research by presenting a transparent index-based model and by applying robustness checks without overstating the evidence. The results should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects because the design is cross-sectional and does not follow participants before and after a named program. The Youth Empowerment Index is also formative, capturing several related dimensions of empowerment rather than a single, narrow psychological construct. These limitations define the next stage of research rather than eliminating the value of the findings.

Overall, the paper provides a stronger empirical foundation for examining arts participation as a youth-centered social-development construct. It shows that measurable arts engagement is meaningfully connected to empowerment indicators and offers a framework that cultural institutions, youth centers, and community arts organizations can extend. Future field studies should build on this model by using program-level samples, pre-test and post-test designs, comparison groups, interviews, observation, and direct measures of belonging, leadership, civic responsibility, and community participation.

Author Contributions

The author conducted the conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, investigation, writing, review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

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Data Availability

The dataset will be available from the author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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