



Exploring the Influence of College Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Ambidextrous Leadership on Creativity: The Mediating Role of Aesthetic Experience

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Ambidextrous leadership in education domain is reflected in teachers' ability to provide aesthetic experience to students by stimulating their creativity. This study proposes and validates a mediation model to investigate the mediating role of aesthetic experience in the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity. **Methodology:** A questionnaire survey was administered, which addressed transformational leadership, transactional leadership, aesthetic experience, and creativity as variables of a conceptual model. A sample size of 670 college students from Chinese colleges participated. The data was tested using PROCESS and

Bootstrapping methods. **Findings:** The research findings indicate that college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership have a significantly positive impact on both creativity and aesthetic experience; and college students' aesthetic experience also has a significantly positive impact on creativity. Furthermore, mediation model demonstrate that aesthetic experience fully mediates the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and students' creativity. **Implications for Research and Practice:** The study findings would offer useful insights for school leaders and teachers to foster student creativity and cultivate teachers' proficiency in ambidextrous leadership. Teachers should promote aesthetic-oriented activities like organizing art exhibitions, facilitating artistic creation projects, and integrating interdisciplinary art education into the curriculum.

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Introduction

Creativity serves as a catalyst for scientific and social advancement and stands as a cornerstone of a nation's competitiveness (Meng & Zhao, 2018; Zhao et al., 2024). Numerous universities worldwide run programmes to foster teachers' creativity to transform them as good leaders and students' creativity to attain learning objectives

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(Huang, Lee, & Dong, 2019). It has also been pointed out that aesthetic experience can be considered an important individual factor in the generation of creativity (Savoie, 2017). Conscious engagement of both teachers and students in aesthetic experiences can serve as an effective way to enhance creativity (Mahgoub, 2016). In other words, it is often premised that college students can enhance their creativity under the leadership of teachers with ambidextrous leadership characteristics.

In recent years, the concept of ambidextrous leadership has gained traction in leadership scholarship (Haider et al., 2023; Tuan Luu, 2017). Ambidextrous leadership is defined as a leadership scenario in organizational management practices where managers often face conflicting tensions or contradictions. In such a context, leaders need to possess the ability to integrate and coordinate two mutually contradictory yet complementary leadership behaviors and be able to flexibly transition between the two forms of leadership (Oluwafemi, Mitchelmore, & Nikolopoulos, 2020; Schreuders & Legesse, 2012). Compared to singular leadership behaviors, ambidextrous leadership features characteristics that are more practical and balanced in addressing conflicts effectively (Cunha et al., 2019).

Researchers have explored ambidextrous leadership from different perspectives, such as open and closed leadership, empowering leadership and directive leadership, transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Kassotaki, 2019; Li et al., 2023; Lorinkova, Pearsall, & Sims Jr, 2013). Among them, transformational leadership and transactional leadership have been widely applied in educational research (Abadama, 2020; Asmawi et al., 2023; Pachler, Kuonath, & Frey, 2019). Transformational leadership, by motivating and inspiring students' intrinsic motivation, can promote students' self-development and growth, while transactional leadership can incentivize students to achieve goals and tasks through reward mechanisms (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020).

In addition to its direct impact on creativity, ambidextrous leadership in such combinations can also exert influence through a few theoretical underpinnings and influencing factors. For instance, by utilizing social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), one can define individuals' intentions and behaviors in social interactions. This theory primary rests on two key factors: environmental factors (e.g., behavior and environmental characteristics) and individual factors (e.g., personality traits, cognitive structure, and emotions). Previous research has utilized social cognitive theory to establish a theoretical foundation for exploring the mechanisms linking ambidextrous leadership and creativity (Shao, Wang, & Li, 2019). Arici and Uysal (2022) highlighted the close relationship between leadership, as a significant environmental factor, and individual creativity.

Since it is known that individual, environmental, and behavioral factors mutually influence each other (Bandura, 1986), as per the social cognitive theory, it is essential to simultaneously consider the influence of environmental factors (teachers' ambidextrous leadership) and individual factors (aesthetic experience) on creativity. Educational research suggests that while principals' ambidextrous leadership positively influences the creativity of elementary school teachers (Da'as, 2023), aesthetic experience often proves an important individual factor in the generation of creativity (Savoie, 2017). It is also suggested that teachers can broaden students' aesthetic experiences through various teaching methods, fostering an appreciation for the beauty of life (Shih, 2020). Additionally, findings from Yeh, Hsu and Yastrubinskiy (2021) indicate that college students' aesthetic experiences can stimulate creativity.

Aesthetic experience is defined as the process by which individuals absorb, internalize, and transform aesthetic perceptions into their own thoughts and feedback experiences through contemplation when appreciating artistic and beautiful objects, thereby becoming individuals' perception of beauty (Chang, 2017). This suggests that a conscious engagement in aesthetic experiences can serve as an effective way to enhance creativity (Mahgoub, 2016). Therefore, this study proposes that aesthetic experience may mediate the association between college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity.

While existing research has extensively examined the influence of various leadership styles on creativity, ranging from transformational and transactional to empowering and servant leadership (Chow, 2018; Luu, 2019; Ma & Jiang, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2024), treating leadership behaviors as singular constructs, very little research has been conducted to examine the impact of environmental factors (teachers' ambidextrous leadership) and individual factors (aesthetic experience) on creativity within the educational context. Past empirical studies have found that students' perceptions of teacher transformational leadership and transactional leadership can both enhance students' creativity (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020; Mao et al., 2020; Pachler et al., 2019). Given that background and rationale, this study examines how ambidextrous leadership can be utilized to combine transformational leadership and transactional leadership.

Based on these empirical observations, this study established a mediation model to examine the contribution of emergent literature on aesthetic experience on psychological processes. This model links college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership with creativity through the mediating role of aesthetic experience. The objective is to investigate the mediating role of aesthetic experience in the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity.

Literature Review

College Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Ambidextrous Leadership and Creativity

Research has found that leadership behaviors can help leaders establish a consistent relationship with followers and influence their innovative activities (Rosing, Frese, & Bausch, 2011). To transact their leadership behavior and impact the creativity of their followers, transactional behaviorism requires leaders to build a stable mental state and equilibrium to achieve their objectives. In such cases, though structured and conventional transactional leadership is appropriate, however, modern day organizations need to develop dynamism enough to ensure adaptability and progress, despite changing situations. This requires transformational leadership (Luo et al., 2018). Some studies suggest that leaders should follow a flexible leadership style, or an ambidextrous leadership, which will prepare leaders to actively seek new ideas and solutions, foster their initiative, innovativeness, and adventurous spirit (Martínez-Climent, Rodríguez-García, & Zeng, 2019; Tuan Luu, 2017). Such ambidextrous leadership, which aligns with the principles of dialectics, balance, and mutual transformation, help leaders to achieve resource balance and execution through resource integration and reconstruction, enabling them to explore new ways to address complex issues (Li et al., 2023; O'Reilly Iii & Tushman, 2008).

Empirical studies in organizational research have found a significantly positive impact of ambidextrous leadership on employees' creative behavior (Cheng, 2024; Jiang et al., 2023;

Wang et al., 2021). Similar findings exist in studies within an educational context, where teachers provide students with diverse guidance to exercise creative thinking, thereby promoting students' creativity (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; Piirto, 2010). Additionally, a study on university teachers showed that ambidextrous leadership significantly influences teachers' innovative behavior (Kebede, Terefe, & Ijigu, 2024). Furthermore, empirical research by Da'as (2023) found that the ambidextrous leadership of principals influences the creativity of elementary school teachers through organizational support for creativity. From the above inferences, it can be concluded that college students may enhance their creativity under the leadership of teachers with ambidextrous leadership characteristics. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: College students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership has a significant and positive effect on creativity.

College Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Ambidextrous Leadership and Aesthetic Experience

Ambidextrous leadership demonstrates the capacity to flexibly transition between various individual behaviors, fostering individuals' exploration and developmental capabilities, and encouraging active engagement in life experiences (Rosing et al., 2011). Previous studies have substantiated the positive influence of leaders on employees' aesthetic experiences through motivation and inspiration (Bathurst, 2007). Choi (2019) affirmed that supervisors facilitate higher levels of aesthetic experience among employees by articulating a compelling vision. Educational literature similarly highlights teachers' role in guiding students to engage with the beauty of art, nature, society, and science, enabling them to cultivate an appreciation for life's aesthetic intricacies and continually recognize and cherish beauty (Yang, 2013). Chang (2017) contends that teachers establish autonomous and inclusive learning environments, facilitating students' acquisition of aesthetic experience through interaction and provision of aesthetic practice opportunities. Based on these insights, it is plausible to infer that college students under the tutelage of teachers exemplifying ambidextrous leadership characteristics may enhance their aesthetic experience. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: College students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership has a significant and positive effect on aesthetic experience

Aesthetic Experience of college students and creativity

Students' creativity is influenced by psychological activities and processes (Mao et al., 2020). Lussier (2010) elucidated that aesthetic experience serves as a form of meditation, absorbing and integrating individual thoughts and feedback experiences. When combined with consciousness and subconsciousness, these experiences have the potential to stimulate creativity and may contribute to subsequent creative endeavors (Richards, 2007). Research indicates a significant positive correlation between individuals' creative expression in activities and aesthetic experience (Savoie, 2017). Aesthetic experience can foster individuals' motivation and confidence, augment imaginative capacity in daily life, and catalyze the occurrence of creative behavior (Davies et al., 2009). Empirical research supports the view that aesthetic experience is positively correlated with creativity. For instance, students receptive to aesthetic experiences exhibit heightened inspiration and performance in creative tasks (An & Youn, 2018). Yeh et al. (2021) suggest that students

engaging in aesthetic experience practices integrating fictional narratives with life experiences demonstrate enhanced creativity. Moreover, students' aesthetic experience is significantly and positively correlated with their innovative behavior (Chang & Jaisook, 2021). It is reasonable to infer that college students' aesthetic experience may foster creativity. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: *The aesthetic experience of college students has a significant and positive effect on creativity*

The Mediating Role of Aesthetic Experience

Drawing upon social cognitive theory, individual behavior and intention are influenced by both environmental and individual factors (Bandura, 1977). Currently, social cognitive theory is widely utilized in studying creativity, with literature exploring the combined impact of contextual factors (e.g., entrepreneurship education, human resource management, leadership) and individual factors (e.g., entrepreneurial inspiration, self-efficacy, personal ability) on creativity (Farooq et al., 2022; Gu, Liang, & Cooke, 2022; Wang, Mundorf, & Salzarulo-McGuigan, 2022). In alignment with this perspective, this study views college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership as a contextual factor and aesthetic experience as an individual factor. We posit that college students' creativity may be influenced not only by their perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership as an environmental factor but also by aesthetic experience as an individual factor. For instance, Choi (2019) confirmed the mediator of aesthetic experience in the association between intellectual inspiration, personal care dimensions, and innovation in transformational leadership. This indirect evidence sheds light on the potential relationship between ambidextrous leadership, aesthetic experience, and creativity. Leaders, by attending to individual emotions and sharing their vision of aesthetics, can evoke aesthetic sentiments among followers, thereby fostering creativity (Polat & Öztoprak-Kavak, 2011; Samier, Bates, & Stanley, 2006; Savaş, Verwijmeren, & van Lier, 2021). Analogously, in educational literature, teachers' flexible leadership styles enable students to explore the beauty of their surroundings, stimulating curiosity and an exploratory spirit (Shih, 2020). In summary, college students perceive that teachers' ambidextrous leadership may facilitate the development of aesthetic experience, subsequently exerting a positive impact on creativity through the mediating effect of aesthetic experience. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: *Aesthetic experience acts as a mediating role in perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and creativity among college students.*

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of this study.

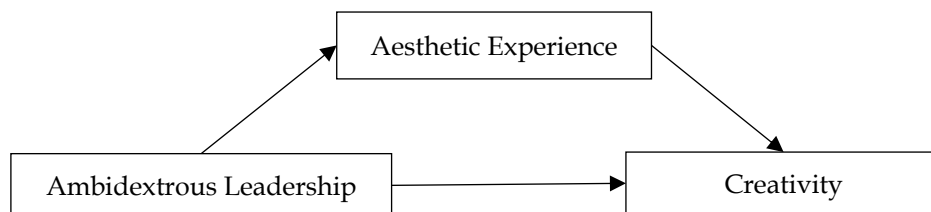


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework.*

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed survey methods and quantitative approaches to gather large-scale data for induction and summarization. For this purpose, the secretaries of research management deanships at selected universities in Shandong Province, China were explained study's purpose and procedures. With their assistance, online questionnaires were administered to those college students who volunteered to participate. These colleges were recognized as innovative education reform demonstration institutions by the Ministry of Education of China, and their students exhibited exceptional creativity.

Sampling and Population

The population of this study comprised students pursuing art and design courses from two public colleges in Shandong Province, China. This population was selected for this study because demonstration colleges exhibit homogeneity in terms of local government guidance, supervision, and financial subsidies. Convenience sampling, a non-probabilistic method based on participant willingness and local convenience, was utilized to select the sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The sample size of this study was determined by the criterion proposed by Ghiselli, Campbell and Zedeck (1981): when a study involves the use of scales, the minimum sample size should be ten times the total number of items on the scale. In this study, the total number of items in four scales was 58, therefore, when 670 valid responses were received out of 700 distributed, yielding an effective response rate of 84.8%, this number was utilized as final sample size. This sample comprised 188 male participants (28%) and 482 female participants (72%). Regarding participants' local institution, 198 students (29.6%) were born in urban areas, while 472 students (70.4%) hailed from rural regions. The characteristics of the sample of college students in this study, such as gender and local institution, were generally similar to the national college student population, with more females and fewer males, and more rural areas and less urban areas (Huang et al., 2021).

Research Tools and Data Collection

Data collection involved the use of four scales, which respectively addressed transformational leadership, transactional leadership, aesthetic experience, and creativity. Data collection commenced ten weeks after the semester began, facilitated through the anonymous online questionnaire platform (www.wjx.cn). Specifically, participants were asked to evaluate instructors teaching sketching courses in art and design. A Likert 5-point scale was used to measure all variables. Brislin's (1970) translation method was applied to translate the questionnaire from English to Chinese, ensuring translation accuracy. During the back-translation process, the English questionnaire was first translated into Chinese, then the Chinese version was translated back into English. After comparing the differences, we made modifications and adjustments to some items to maintain the accuracy of this study. As the Transformational Leadership Scale, Transactional Leadership Scale, and Creativity Scale originally measured employees' perceptions, we made minimal textual modifications and adjustments to some items to adapt to the context of higher education.

Data Analysis

This study used SPSS to conduct reliability testing, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and Common Method Variance (CMV) Test. The AMOS was employed to assess the validity and fit of the data. Specifically, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for each measurement tool in this study, reporting model fit (SRMR, IFI, NFI, CFI, TLI), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Finally, the PROCESS plugin in SPSS was utilized to test the research hypotheses, with ambidextrous leadership as the independent variable, creativity as the dependent variable, and aesthetic experience as the mediating variable. Model 4 was selected to test the mediating effect of aesthetic experience. Additionally, the Percentile Bootstrap Method with a bias-corrected confidence interval of 95% and using 5000 samples was employed to further test whether each path was significant, and whether the confidence interval of each path coefficient included 0, indicating whether the hypothesis was supported (Hayes, 2013).

Findings and Analysis

Right at the outset, this study calculated the validity and reliability of the instruments and scales used. Since these scales measured college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership by using the interaction product term of two types of teachers' leadership behaviors, namely, the interaction product term of transformational leadership and transactional leadership to measure ambidextrous leadership, it was essential to ensure the construct validity and reliability. Transformational leadership was assessed using the transformational scale from the MLQ-5X-Short questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Comprising 16 items across four dimensions, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, with responses on a Likert scale from "1 = never" to "5 = always," this instrument demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = 0.981$) and satisfactory construct validity (SRMR = 0.017, IFI = 0.978, GFI = 0.922, CFI = 0.978, TLI = 0.973, CR = 0.982, AVE = 0.834).

Likewise, transactional leadership was assessed using the transactional scale from the MLQ-5X-Short questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Encompassed two dimensions of contingency rewards and management by exception, and eight items, and responses similarly scored on a Likert scale, displayed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.935$) and construct validity (SRMR = 0.040, IFI = 0.967, GFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.967, TLI = 0.952, CR = 0.960, AVE = 0.753). Erdel and Takkaç (2020) tested the effectiveness of college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership (transformational leadership scale and transactional leadership scale) within a college student population, finding it suitable for use in higher education contexts.

Aesthetic experience among college students was assessed using the Aesthetic Experience Scale developed by Chang (2017), comprising 21 items distributed across four dimensions: pleasure experienced in beauty, aesthetic attitude, understanding of beauty, and complete experience. Responses were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from "1 = completely disagree" to "5 = completely agree". This scale, previously utilized in higher education contexts, demonstrated robust reliability and validity (Chang & Jaisook, 2021). In this study, the Aesthetic Experience Scale exhibited high reliability ($\alpha = 0.985$) and satisfactory construct validity, as evidenced by confirmatory factor analysis results indicating good fit to the data (SRMR = 0.017, IFI = 0.970, GFI = 0.894, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.965).

The creativity of college students was evaluated using the Creative Scale developed by Zhou and George (2001), comprising 13 items within a single dimension. Responses were collected using a Likert scale ranging from "1 = completely disagree" to "5 = completely agree". Previous research by Gu, Zhang and Liu (2014) demonstrated the scale's reliability and validity in educational contexts. In this study, the Creative Scale exhibited strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.952$) and satisfactory construct validity, as confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis results indicating good fit to the data (SRMR = 0.041, IFI = 0.919, NFI = 0.910, CFI = 0.919, TLI = 0.903, CR = 0.953, AVE = 0.610).

Given the reliance on self-report data collection for all variables in the survey, the potential for common method bias was assessed. The comparison between the fit of the multi-factor model CFA and the single-factor model CFA was conducted to evaluate the presence of common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Results indicated that the chi-square value for the multi-factor model ($\chi^2 = 4527.379$) was significantly lower than that for the single-factor model ($\chi^2 = 19769.876$). The comparison yielded a substantial difference in fit between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15242.589$, $\Delta df = 55$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting a significant improvement in fit for the multi-factor model. These findings suggest that the common method bias in this study is not severe (Verhagen & Van Dolen, 2011). Table 1 summarizes these results.

Table 1

Comparison of The Multi-factor Model and The Single-factor Model

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p
Single factor model	19769.876	1595	12.395	15242.589	55	000
Multifactor model	4527.287	1540	2.940			

Note: χ^2 is Chi-Square, df is degrees of freedom.

Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients among variables pertaining to college students' perception of teacher's ambidextrous leadership, aesthetic experience, and creativity. The correlations between these variables reached statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). College students' perception of teacher's ambidextrous leadership exhibited a significant positive correlation with creativity ($r = 0.394$, $p < 0.01$) and with aesthetic experience ($r = 0.782$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, aesthetic experience showed a significant positive correlation with creativity ($r = 0.450$, $p < 0.001$). Discriminant validity was assessed using the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), which exceeded the correlation coefficients between any two variables, satisfying the criterion for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2

Variable Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Variable	M	SD	Ambidextrous Leadership	Aesthetic Experience	Creativity
Ambidextrous Leadership	17.245	5.865	0.823		
Aesthetic Experience	4.287	0.685	0.782***	0.787	
Creativity	3.781	0.617	0.394***	0.450***	0.781

Notes : Values along the diagonal (bold font) refer to the square root of each AVE indicator. : *** $p < 0.001$.

These findings underscore the interconnectedness among the variables. Previous research has often linked transformational and transactional leadership with individual cognitive and emotional outcomes (Bryman, 1992; Harrison, 2011; Van der Vyver, Kok, & Conley, 2020). Similarly, aesthetic experience encompasses psychological processes integrating cognition and emotion (Leder et al., 2004), highlighting the close association between ambidextrous leadership and aesthetic experience with individual cognition and emotions, thereby rationalizing their strong correlation.

The mediating model of aesthetic experience was tested using the Hayes Process program model 4. As depicted in Table 3, in Model 1, college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership exhibited a significant positive impact on creativity ($B = 0.041, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Similarly, in Model 2, college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership significantly and positively influenced aesthetic experience ($B = 0.091, p < 0.001$), thus supporting H2. Upon incorporating aesthetic experience as a mediating variable in Model 3, aesthetic experience demonstrated a significant and positive effect on creativity ($B = 0.386, p < 0.001$), while the direct impact of college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership on creativity became no significant ($B = 0.011, p > 0.05$). This suggests that aesthetic experience fully mediates the relationship between college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity, thereby supporting H3 and H4. Furthermore, employing the nonparametric percentile Bootstrap method with bias correction confirmed the mediating effect of aesthetic experience, yielding an indirect effect value of 0.030 with a 95% confidence interval of [0.019, 0.041], excluding zero. This further corroborates the significant mediating role of aesthetic experience in shaping college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity.

Table 3

Testing The Mediation Model of Aesthetic Experience

Variable	Model 1 Creativity B	Model 2 Aesthetic Experience B	Model 3 Creativity B
Constant	3.068***	2.713***	2.176***
Ambidextrous Leadership	0.041***	0.091***	0.011
Aesthetic Experience			0.386***
R ²	0.115	0.612	0.329
F	122.418***	1054.456***	6.953***

Note : *** $p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the growing interest in ambidextrous leadership, research on its influence on college students' creativity remains limited. This study aims to delve into the association between college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity, along with the underlying psychological mechanisms. The results of the study validated the proposed theoretical model. Therefore, the objectives of this study have been significantly achieved, and the hypotheses tested in this research have empirical support.

Firstly, the research findings indicate that college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership have a significant positive impact on their creativity, H1 is supported. This finding aligns with the literature on ambidextrous leadership by Yasmeen

and Ajmal (2023), which suggests that leaders need to employ ambidextrous leadership to enhance individuals' levels of creativity. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that teachers with ambidextrous leadership characteristics appear to be more effective instructors, as students are more satisfied with their flexible leadership styles and are willing to exert more effort in learning and exploring knowledge (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020). Furthermore, when students perceive that teachers understand their psychology, they consider the teachers as role models, thereby establishing a direction for progress, ultimately prompting the generation and implementation of novel ideas (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2023).

Secondly, the research results indicate that college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership have a significant positive impact on aesthetic experience. The findings of this hypothesis H2 are compared with those of existing studies. According to Choi (2019), leaders can enhance individuals' aesthetic experience by portraying a vision and guiding them to demonstrate higher levels of aesthetic experience. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that teachers, through creating a self-directed and open learning atmosphere, actively engaging with students, and providing opportunities for aesthetic practice, can help students gain aesthetic experiences (Chang, 2017). Additionally, Yang (2013) suggests that teachers using diverse guidance approaches can enable students to learn to appreciate the beauty in everyday life. Therefore, the results of the study suggest that the findings are widely recognized.

Furthermore, the research results indicate that college students' aesthetic experience has a significant positive impact on creativity, confirming H3. This finding aligns with the study by Chang and Jaisook (2021), which suggests that students' aesthetic experience can inspire their innovative behavior. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that aesthetic experience can broaden students' perspectives, inspiring them to seek new sources of inspiration and creativity, thereby promoting more creative and unique performances (Yeh et al., 2021). Additionally, An and Youn (2018) emphasize that individuals who maintain an open attitude in daily life are more likely to be inspired by aesthetic experiences, thus performing better in creative tasks. Therefore, the results of the study suggest that these findings are widely recognized.

Lastly, the research results demonstrate that aesthetic experience fully mediates the relationship between college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and their creativity, with support for H4. Previous organizational behavior research has also confirmed a significant positive impact of ambidextrous leadership on aesthetic experience (Bathurst, 2007; Choi, 2019; Rosing et al., 2011). There is also evidence that aesthetic experience has a significant positive impact on creativity (Choi, 2019; Davies et al., 2009; Kong & Chang, 2019). Similarly, Shih (2020) also argued that teachers' diverse guidance approaches would encourage students to explore beauty with keen perception, thereby stimulating curiosity and a spirit of exploration. Therefore, the results of the study suggest that these findings are widely accepted.

The outcomes of this study substantiate the principles proposed by social cognitive theory, highlighting the intricate interplay among individual, environmental, and behavioral factors (Bandura, 1986). Specifically, the influence of aesthetic experience (individual factors) on college students' creativity (behavioral factors) is mediated through their perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership (environmental factors). Prior

investigations into the impact of ambidextrous leadership on creativity have often overlooked mediating variables (Herrmann & Felfe, 2013). The findings contribute significantly to our understanding by elucidating the pivotal mediating role of aesthetic experience in shaping college students' perception of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and its impact on their creativity. This underscores the nuanced dynamics within educational settings and underscores the importance of considering multifaceted influences on student outcomes.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study enriches the literature in two significant ways. Firstly, by empirically examining college students' perceptions of teachers' ambidextrous leadership and its impact on creativity, this research fills a notable gap in the literature. The findings provide empirical evidence that college students perceive teachers' ambidextrous leadership as a key determinant of their creativity, thus extending existing literature (Kung, Uen, & Lin, 2020; Tung, 2016; Yasmeen & Ajmal, 2023). Notably, while transactional leadership focuses on external rewards and transformational leadership fosters internal rewards, it is argued that the optimal leadership style integrates both aspects (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Hood et al., 2009). Erdel and Takkaç (2020) advocate for a blend of transformational and transactional leadership in educational settings, aligning with the findings of this study. Secondly, this research sheds light on the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and college students' creativity. The identification of aesthetic experience as a mediating factor underscores the importance of ambidextrous perceptions and experiences in shaping creative outcomes. Thirdly, the study's alignment with social cognitive theory reinforces the notion that behavior and intention are influenced by a combination of contextual and individual factors (Bandura, 1977). By conceptualizing college students' perception of ambidextrous leadership as a contextual factor and aesthetic experience as an individual factor, this research extends the application of social cognitive theory to the realm of college students' creativity.

The present study offers actionable insights for school leaders and teachers to foster student creativity. Firstly, school leaders are encouraged to organize lectures and training sessions on ambidextrous leadership, equipping teachers with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to implement ambidextrous leadership strategies effectively. By cultivating teachers' proficiency in ambidextrous leadership, schools can amplify its positive impact on student creativity. Secondly, teachers can actively promote aesthetic-oriented activities within the classroom, such as organizing art exhibitions, facilitating artistic creation projects, and integrating interdisciplinary art education into the curriculum. These initiatives provide students with diverse opportunities to engage in aesthetic experiences, thereby stimulating their creativity and fostering a more vibrant learning environment.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this research sheds light on college students' perceptions of teacher's ambidextrous leadership, aesthetic experience, and creativity, there are several limitations that warrant consideration in future research. Firstly, all variables were self-reported by college students, raising the possibility of common method bias despite statistical tests indicating otherwise. Future studies could mitigate this concern by employing data

collection methods across multiple time points. Secondly, this study adopts a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Future research could benefit from longitudinal and experimental designs to provide more robust evidence. Lastly, while aesthetic experience was found to fully mediate the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and creativity in our model, it's plausible that other moderating factors play a role. Future investigations could explore additional regulatory mechanisms such as individual personality traits and organizational culture to deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics.

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