



THE APPLICATION AND CHALLENGES OF CRITICAL THINKING IN DANCE EDUCATION IN INNER MONGOLIA UNIVERSITIES*

ກາຮປະຢຸກຕີໃໝ່ແລະຄວາມທ້າທາຍຂອງກາຮຄົດຍ່າງມີວິຈາຮຄູານ

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Abstract

This study aims to study the application and challenges of critical thinking in the teaching of dance majors at Inner Mongolian Universities, employing a multifaceted approach encompassing documentary, interviews, and observations, the study investigated the three most influential universities in Inner Mongolia that offered dance programs and conducted an in-depth analysis from the perspectives of educators and students.

The research findings that in the field of dance education in Inner Mongolia's universities, critical thinking is defined as a skill that enables students to go beyond mechanical dance performance. It encourages in-depth analysis, emotional understanding, questioning, and thoughtful consideration of dance works, fostering independent thinking and innovation. Methods for cultivating critical thinking include group discussions, literature research, reforming teaching approaches, and nurturing democratic teacher-student relationships. Designing tasks that promote thinking, such as cooperative learning and discussions, as well as building students' confidence and modifying the curriculum to include content related to critical thinking, are crucial. A SWOT analysis identifies strengths (cultural foundation), weaknesses (traditional models), opportunities (globalization), and

*Received September 22, 2023; Revised October 23, 2023; Accepted October 26, 2023



threats (resistance to change). In summary, critical thinking contributes to deepening the understanding of dance works, improving dance skills, enhancing creativity, and promoting students' cross-cultural understanding and international exchange. However, there are also challenges. Overall, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of critical thinking in dance education in Inner Mongolian universities and holds significant guiding implications for improving dance education.

Keywords: Critical Thinking; Dance Education; Inner Mongolian Universities; Application; Challenges

Abstract

การศึกษาครั้งนี้มุ่งศึกษาการประยุกต์ใช้และความท้าทายของการคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณในการสอนวิชาเอกนาฏศิลป์ที่มหาวิทยาลัยมองโกเลียใน โดยศึกษาจากเอกสาร การสัมภาษณ์ การสังเกตการณ์ การสำรวจ และการวิเคราะห์เชิงลึกจากมุมมองของนักการศึกษา และนักศึกษา

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณในสาขาวิชาศึกษาด้านนาฏศิลป์ ที่มหาวิทยาลัยมองโกเลียใน การคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณถูกกำหนดให้เป็นทักษะที่ช่วยให้เกิดการพัฒนาผู้เรียนการแสดง ส่งเสริมการวิเคราะห์เชิงลึก ความเข้าใจทางอารมณ์ การตั้งคำถาม และการพิจารณาผลงานการเต้นรำอย่างรอบคอบ การส่งเสริมการคิดอย่างอิสระและนวัตกรรม วิธีการปลูกฝังเชิงวิพากษ์ ได้แก่ การอภิปรายกลุ่ม การวิจัยวรรณกรรม การปฏิรูปแนวทาง การสอน และการรักษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างครูและนักเรียนในระบบประชาธิปไตย การออกแบบงานที่ส่งเสริมการคิด เช่น การเรียนรู้แบบร่วมมือและการอภิปราย ตลอดจนการสร้างความมั่นใจของนักเรียน และการปรับเปลี่ยนหลักสูตรให้รวมเนื้อหาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการคิด เชิงวิพากษ์ ถือเป็นสิ่งสำคัญ การวิเคราะห์ SWOT ระบุจุดแข็ง (รากฐานทางวัฒนธรรม) จุดอ่อน (แบบจำลองแบบดั้งเดิม) โอกาส (โลกาภิวัตน์) และภัยคุกคาม (การต่อต้านการเปลี่ยนแปลง) โดยสรุป การคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณมีส่วนช่วยให้เข้าใจงานเต้นรำอย่างลึกซึ้ง พัฒนาทักษะ การเต้น เพิ่มความคิดสร้างสรรค์ และส่งเสริมความเข้าใจขั้มวัฒนธรรมและการแลกเปลี่ยนระหว่างประเทศของนักเรียน อย่างไรก็ตาม ยังมีความท้าทายอยู่ โดยรวมแล้ว งานวิจัยนี้ให้ความเข้าใจที่ครอบคลุมเกี่ยวกับการคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณในการศึกษาด้านนาฏศิลป์ในมหาวิทยาลัยมองโกเลียใน และถือเป็นแนวทางที่สำคัญในการปรับปรุงการศึกษาด้านนาฏศิลป์

คำสำคัญ: การคิดอย่างมีวิจารณญาณ; การศึกษานาฏศิลป์; มหาวิทยาลัยมองโกเลียใน; การประยุกต์ใช้; ความท้าทาย



Introduction

In contemporary society, dance, as an art form that integrates creativity and expression, is continuously evolving and diversifying, presenting various facets. Driven by social change and cultural integration, dance has transcended its traditional stage boundaries and now plays a vital role in diverse educational settings. However, the objectives of traditional dance education have evolved beyond mere technical training, now emphasizing students' holistic development. In contemporary higher education, solely imparting technical skills and knowledge falls short of meeting students' comprehensive needs. In this context, critical thinking is gradually gaining prominence. It not only cultivates logical, problem-solving, and analytical abilities but also encourages deep reflection on the meaning of dance movements and delves into the social contexts, cultural implications, and aesthetic significance of dance works. Introducing critical thinking into dance classrooms serves not only as a tool for problem-solving and reasoning but also as an indispensable part of excellent teaching and learning (Ambrosio, 2015).

In Chinese dance education, critical thinking has been acknowledged. In the 2018 standards issued by the Ministry of Education, critical thinking and innovative abilities are incorporated into the training objectives of music and dance majors (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). However, actual dance instruction still faces challenges that hinder the realization of these objectives. This issue is particularly pronounced in Inner Mongolian universities' dance majors. Regionalized traditional teaching models may lead students to focus excessively on technical skills and performance forms, overlooking respect and understanding of diverse cultures. Inadequate cultivation of critical thinking in students results in blurred concepts of tradition and modernity, or a lack of autonomous thinking and innovative abilities, ultimately leading to a lack of subjective initiative. The disconnect between theory and practice restricts the cognitive thinking and practices of dance teachers. The philosophy of "emphasizing skills and devaluing intellectualism" may cause both teachers and students to neglect the ability to face problems outside the classroom (Jung, 2012).

The methods and abilities of critical thinking are particularly suited to addressing these key issues in dance education. Through appropriate tactics such as guided discussions and group collaborations, dance educators enhance students' understanding and learning levels (Ambrosio, 2015). Critical thinking also aids in creatively conceptualizing dance movements, enhancing expressiveness (Nabatov & Mankovska, 2021). These aspects are crucial in contemporary dance instruction.

Therefore, this study aims to delve into the practical application of critical thinking in the field of dance while focusing on how Inner Mongolian university dance instructors guide critical thinking in teaching and its effectiveness. Through comprehensive research from both student and teacher perspectives, this study will help uncover the current situation and future directions of dance education in Inner Mongolian universities, offering theoretical and practical support for educational reform and student development in higher education. (Xuefeng, 2022)

Research Objectives

To study the application and challenges of critical thinking in the teaching of dance majors at Inner Mongolian universities.

Methodology

This study aims to study the application and challenges of critical thinking in the teaching of dance majors at Inner Mongolian universities. Focusing on three universities with the highest enrollment, reputation, and program influence in the region: Inner Mongolia University of the Arts, Inner Mongolia Normal University, and Baotou Normal University. The selection of these universities ensures comprehensive representation and effective presentation of dance education in Inner Mongolia.

The research will employ various methods, including literature review, interviews, and observations. One senior faculty member with a rank of associate professor or higher, actively involved in teaching the dance program, will be selected from each chosen university for semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a random sample of dance students from these universities will be interviewed to enhance data completeness and diversity.



Through the literature review, relevant materials and theories on critical thinking, educational theory and critical thinking, and the intersection of dance and critical thinking will be collected. Through observational and interview methods, the study will investigate the practical application of critical thinking in dance education at Inner Mongolian universities and identify potential challenges. The research will adopt a qualitative research design to qualitatively analyze the collected data.

Results

1. Application of Critical Thinking in Dance Education at Inner Mongolian Universities

Extensive literature research has revealed that critical thinking is of paramount importance in dance education. In the field of dance education at Inner Mongolia universities, the significance of critical thinking is widely recognized among educators. This recognition extends beyond the notion that critical thinking plays a pivotal role in fostering students' understanding of dance and performance skills. However, it's worth noting that there is still a segment of educators with limited comprehension of the concept of critical thinking.

First and foremost, educators universally acknowledge that critical thinking is a powerful tool for enhancing students' understanding of dance. They believe that critical thinking can assist students in conducting in-depth analyses of dance works, going beyond superficial comprehension to grasp the subtle nuances and emotions within. This profound understanding helps students interpret dance works with greater expressiveness, enabling them to convey emotions and meaning to the audience, rather than mechanically replicating movements.

Secondly, educators emphasize the critical importance of critical thinking in nurturing students' interest in dance. By encouraging students to ask questions, contemplate why, how, and what else can be done, they are actively guided to explore dance knowledge. This proactivity ignites their passion for dance and fosters their willingness for self-directed learning. Educators recognize that cultivating students' interest is a crucial prerequisite for guiding them towards in-depth learning, and, in this regard, critical thinking plays a pivotal role.

Interestingly, educators also emphasize the importance of critical thinking in helping students understand dance works from different cultures and backgrounds, aligning with the international nature of dance as an art form. Critical thinking assists students in transcending cultural barriers, enabling them to better comprehend dance arts from various regions and ethnicities. This underscores that the role of critical thinking is not confined solely to the academic realm but also contributes to fostering cross-cultural understanding and communication. In the era of globalization, this ability is crucial for dance artists who may need to perform and collaborate in different countries and cultural contexts.

Through interviews and observations, it has been understood that existing educators have employed various strategies to cultivate students' critical thinking. These strategies include organizing group discussions, encouraging students to brainstorm, and requiring students to pose questions and engage in in-depth analyses. These methods not only stimulate students' analytical thinking but also enable them to comprehend the key aspects of dance learning more comprehensively.

For example, in ballet training classes when practicing floor movements, teachers can encourage students to analyze the effects and significance of these movements in subsequent standing positions (Figure 1). Through students' independent analysis and group discussions, a deeper understanding of these movements can be achieved. Additionally, supplementary literature research can also help students gain a profound and comprehensive understanding of the history, culture, and theory of dance, thereby enhancing both the depth and breadth of their critical thinking abilities.



Figure 1 Ballet Dance Classroom Ground Movement Training

Furthermore, educators have observed that critical thinking is more readily nurtured in courses related to dance choreography. Since dance choreography courses primarily involve students in creative processes, they inherently apply critical thinking when evaluating and analyzing their own creations (Figure 2). Students naturally develop the ability to assess the quality of their choreographed works, formulating critical analyses, and engaging in self-reflection. Dance choreography courses thus serve as an effective platform for nurturing students' critical thinking skills.



Figure 2 Student Group Creative Exercises in Dance Choreography Class

However, some educators emphasize the importance of shifting away from traditional educational models, embracing modern educational ideologies, and establishing democratic, equitable, and harmonious teacher-student relationships. In such an educational environment, students become primary participants in the learning process, while educators take on the roles of organizers, leaders, and mentors. This transformation fosters self-directed and collaborative learning, cultivating students' habits of independent thinking, teaching them how to sift through information, make reasonable conjectures, rectify errors, engage in effective comparisons, and make wise decisions. In this context, students are more actively encouraged to ask questions and express their thoughts and insights boldly. Educators should wholeheartedly respect students' questions and viewpoints to enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

2. Feedback on the Application of Critical Thinking in Dance Education at Inner Mongolian Universities Through student interviews and observations, we have found that students generally believe that the cultivation of critical thinking has had a positive impact on their dance learning and creative process. However, there are also some obstacles.

First and foremost, students unanimously agree that the cultivation of critical thinking enables them to delve deeper into the analysis of dance works, capturing details and emotions. This helps them interpret dance works more expressively and enhances their level of dance skill. Students express satisfaction with this aspect and consider critical thinking as a crucial tool in their dance learning.

Secondly, students emphasize that the development of critical thinking has had a positive impact on their creative process. They are better able to understand the ideas and artistic decisions behind dance creation, allowing them to choreograph and perform more innovatively. This suggests that critical thinking is beneficial not only on an academic level but also provides broader inspiration and support for dance creation and performance. When creating dance works, students can think more profoundly about themes, emotional expression, and the use of dance language, resulting in works that are more profound and original (Figure 3) (Figure 4).



Figure 3 Student Dance Composition Feedback 1



Figure 4 Student Dance Composition Feedback 2



However, some students find it challenging to ask questions in dance classes. This may be the result of influence from traditional teaching methods and years of exam-oriented education. Students may perceive the teacher as the primary authority in the classroom, leading them to believe that the teacher's word is final. Therefore, they are more inclined to ask questions outside of class.

3. Challenges Faced by Critical Thinking in Dance Education in Inner Mongolia

3.1 Traditional Thinking vs. New Perspectives One of the primary challenges facing dance education in Inner Mongolian universities is the conflict between traditional Chinese culture and the concept of critical thinking. In Western academic systems, challenging authority and theory is encouraged, even if it contradicts established facts. However, in the Chinese cultural context, questioning authority is considered a threat to social harmony (Dong, 2014). Therefore, promoting critical thinking in Inner Mongolian dance education may require a combination of social reform and cultural renewal. This could entail a comprehensive educational reform to instill in students the ability to ask questions, challenge the status quo, and pursue new perspectives.

Additionally, traditional Chinese culture tends to prioritize authority and issues of "face," potentially suppressing individual independent thinking and a spirit of inquiry. Educators should encourage students to actively pursue independent thinking and self-awareness. This may require building students' confidence and making them understand that engaging in critical thinking among different viewpoints is a positive behavior that contributes to personal and societal progress.

3.2 Traditional Teaching vs. New Models Dance education in Inner Mongolian universities also faces challenges regarding traditional teaching methods versus new teaching approaches. Traditional education models often place teachers as the primary transmitters of knowledge and authority, leading to passive information reception by students. Limited teacher awareness of critical thinking results in its limited practical application. Years of exam-oriented education further reinforce this pattern, with students prioritizing exam scores over deep learning. This model hampers the cultivation of independent thinking and critical thinking among students. To overcome this challenge, universities offering

dance programs in Inner Mongolia can consider adopting more modern educational models that emphasize democratic, equal, and harmonious teacher-student relationships. Students become the primary participants in educational activities, while teachers act as organizers, guides, and facilitators. This transformation can encourage students to actively engage in learning and foster their independence and critical thinking abilities.

3.3 Traditional Training vs. New Demands Traditional education systems often emphasize skill training, with education assessments focusing more on technical and performance aspects while neglecting the development of thinking and analytical skills. However, as societal and professional demands change, the new era requires individuals with critical thinking abilities, not just skill training. Therefore, dance courses in Inner Mongolian universities need to adjust their educational systems to better recognize and support the importance of critical thinking in student development. This may require a reassessment of the curriculum, including the incorporation of educational content that promotes critical and analytical thinking. Additionally, educational assessments should comprehensively evaluate students' holistic abilities rather than solely focusing on technical and performance levels.

In summary, dance education in Inner Mongolian universities faces multiple challenges stemming from traditional culture, educational models, and training systems. To nurture students' critical thinking abilities, a comprehensive approach is needed, encompassing educational reforms, innovative teaching methods, and a reevaluation of assessment techniques. These efforts will contribute to the development of well-rounded dance artists capable of meeting the demands of the modern era.

Discussion

This study reveals the significance of critical thinking in the teaching of dance majors at Inner Mongolia universities and the challenges it faces. Both teachers and students emphasize the multifaceted role of critical thinking in dance understanding, creation, and cultural cross-fertilization. However, China has been deeply influenced by Confucian traditional culture, which emphasizes principles of "harmony," "compliance," and "not delivering bad news" (Chen, 2018). These

traditional values are in conflict with critical thinking. In the Chinese cultural context, questioning authority is often viewed as disrespectful and inappropriate behavior, which can hinder the cultivation of critical thinking. Traditional Chinese culture and educational models pose challenges to nurturing critical thinking. Therefore, the study suggests the following measures for fully cultivating dance artists with critical thinking skills:

1. Educational Reform: It is essential to integrate education with societal change and cultural renewal to alter traditional educational notions, encourage students to actively raise questions, challenge the status quo, seek new perspectives, and promote independent thinking and self-awareness.

2 . Modern Educational Models: Establish democratic, equal, and harmonious teacher-student relationships, viewing students as primary participants in educational activities to foster independent and collaborative learning and create an environment conducive to nurturing creative thinking.

3. Innovative Teaching Methods: Design learning tasks that stimulate critical thinking, including cooperative learning and democratic discussions, to cultivate students' spirit of inquiry, analytical skills, and logical thinking.

4. Curriculum Adjustment: Review the curriculum and incorporate content that promotes critical and analytical thinking, allowing students to develop comprehensive abilities more holistically.

5 . Educational Assessment: Assess students' overall capabilities comprehensively, not only focusing on technical and performance levels, to better recognize and support the importance of critical thinking in student development. These measures will contribute to the development of dance artists with well-rounded skills who can adapt to the demands of the modern era within Inner Mongolia's university dance programs.

Body of knowledge

1. Conflict Between Traditional Culture and Critical Thinking: Understanding the characteristics of Chinese culture and seeking suitable methods for fostering critical thinking within the Chinese cultural context.



2. Reconsideration of Educational Assessment: Comprehensive assessment of students' overall abilities through various evaluation methods to holistically reflect students' critical thinking capabilities.

3. Cross-Cultural Understanding and International Exchange: Nurturing students' cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking to meet the demands of dance performance and collaboration in a globalized context.

Recommendations

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the practical application of critical thinking in dance education in universities in Inner Mongolia and the challenges it faces. The study highlights the importance of adapting educational approaches to balance traditional cultural values with modern critical thinking skills, ultimately benefiting the overall development of dance students.

Future Research Directions: This study has highlighted several potential research directions. Future research could delve deeper into the impact of different teaching methods on the development of critical thinking and how to better integrate critical thinking education into the curriculum of dance majors. Additionally, exploring the application of critical thinking in dance education in other regions or countries would allow for cross-cultural comparisons.

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