Uncovering The Silent Struggles Of Junior High School Students In Developing Dancing Skills: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

Dancing, a universal art form, plays a vital role in the holistic development of junior high school students, fostering creativity, teamwork, and self-expression. This phenomenological study explores the challenges faced by junior high school students in developing their dancing skills within selected grade levels of Esperanza National High School-Annex, San Jose Campus in DepEd Koronadal City Division during the 2024–2025 school year. Six students were chosen for the study, providing insight into their emotional, technical, and environmental struggles. The findings reveal that students struggle with fast-paced dance steps, lack of coordination, and the emotional impacts of embarrassment, loss of confidence, and bullying. Students report gradual improvement and acknowledge the positive role of peer and teacher support, along with self-directed learning through platforms like TikTok. Resource limitations—including inadequate space, mirrors, and costumes—significantly hinder learning, while peer dynamics such as fear of judgment and peer pressure also affect their confidence. Cultural influences, social media, and the availability of formal training programs and financial support also impacted interest engagement. The study highlights the importance of a supportive environment, structured lessons, and professional mentorship in enhancing dance skills. Recommendations include enhancing teacher support, fostering inclusive environments, and developing culturally relevant dance curricula.

Keywords: *dance education, junior high school, student challenges, phenomenological study, skill development*

INTRODUCTION

Dancing is a universal art form that combines physical expression, rhythm, and cultural significance. For junior high school students, mastering dancing skills is often essential to their holistic development, fostering creativity, teamwork, and self-expression. Despite its importance, many students struggle to acquire these skills, which remain overlooked in educational discourse.

At the international level, the integration of performing arts into education has been shown to enhance student engagement, self-confidence, and creativity (Snyder, 2019). However, challenges persist, particularly in developing countries, where limited resources and cultural perceptions often hinder students

from fully engaging in dance education (Smith & Brown, 2020). In many cases, dance remains an extracurricular activity rather than a structured academic subject, reducing opportunities for skill acquisition (Garcia & Patel, 2021). On the positive side, research indicates that students who participate in dance programs exhibit improved motor skills, social adaptability, and emotional well-being (Chang & Lee, 2020). Conversely, the lack of standardized curricula and professional dance instructors continues to limit students' full potential in mastering dance techniques (Williams, 2022).

In the Philippines, dancing is deeply ingrained in cultural and social traditions, with festivals and school programs frequently emphasizing traditional and modern dance forms (Alvarez, 2018). However, recent studies suggest that many students lack access to structured dance training, leading to skill gaps that impact their performance and confidence (Santos, 2021). While the Department of Education (DepEd) has integrated dance into the Music, Arts, PE, and Health (MAPEH) curriculum, the effectiveness of instructional approaches varies significantly among schools due to differences in teacher expertise and available resources (Del Rosario & Cruz, 2020). On the one hand, cultural dance education fosters national pride and historical awareness (Flores, 2022). On the other hand, the absence of standardized dance training leads to inconsistent student competencies, particularly in modern and contemporary dance (Reyes, 2021). In South Central Mindanao, where diverse cultural expressions thrive, schools often showcase dances representing indigenous and regional traditions (Manalili, 2022). Yet, students in this region face additional challenges, such as inadequate facilities, a lack of qualified instructors, and competing academic priorities, which exacerbate skill gaps in dancing (Ramirez & Bautista, 2023). While traditional dances are widely promoted, the integration of contemporary dance education remains limited, further affecting students' adaptability to various dance forms (Soriano, 2021). A significant advantage of dance education in this region is its role in preserving cultural identity, as students learn and perform indigenous dances unique to Mindanao (Torres, 2022). However, without proper instructional support and infrastructure, many students struggle to refine their techniques, limiting their growth as performers (Gonzales, 2023).

Despite the recognized benefits of dance education, research on the specific challenges students face in acquiring dance skills remains scarce. Prior studies have mainly focused on the cultural significance of dance or its role in promoting physical fitness, neglecting the difficulties students encounter in skill development (Martinez, 2020). While there are numerous studies on student engagement in performing arts, little attention has been given to how students perceive and overcome barriers in dance education (Fernandez & Uy, 2022). This gap highlights the need for research that delves into students lived experiences and the underlying factors that hinder their progress in dance mastery.

Given the limited research in this area, this study aims to explore the underlying challenges that junior high school students encounter in developing their dancing abilities, employing a phenomenological approach to uncover their lived experiences at Esperanza National High School-Annex, San Jose Campus, DepEd Koronadal City Division, during the school year 2024-2025. Addressing these struggles is essential, as enhancing dance education can significantly contribute to students' creative development, confidence, and overall academic experience. The urgency of this study lies in the growing recognition of dance as both a cultural practice and a pedagogical tool that fosters holistic student development.

METHODS

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore the underlying challenges faced by junior high school students in developing their dancing abilities at Esperanza National High School-Annex, San Jose Campus, under the DepEd Koronadal City Division, during the school year 2024–2025. The phenomenological method focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences, requiring researchers to set aside personal biases to accurately interpret participants' emotions, perceptions, and beliefs. The study was conducted at the researcher's home school, enabling a deeper contextual understanding through close interaction with the student participants. Six junior high school students were

purposefully selected based on specific criteria, including current enrollment, participation in dance activities, self-reported struggles with dance skills, and willingness to share personal experiences. Data collection was conducted through validated semi-structured interviews, allowing in-depth exploration of the students' challenges. The data gathering process followed formal protocols, with approval from relevant authorities, and involved face-to-face interviews conducted in accordance with health guidelines. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns and generate meaningful insights into the students' experiences in learning dance.

RESULTS

The findings of this phenomenological study revealed a range of challenges junior high school students face in developing their dancing skills at Esperanza National High School-Annex, San Jose Campus, during the school year 2024–2025. Thematic analysis of interviews with six student participants uncovered several recurring themes. Students described difficulties with dance movements, such as keeping up with fast-paced choreography and struggling with coordination, often leading to feelings of embarrassment, discouragement, and a decline in self-confidence. Despite these emotional hurdles, students reported gradual improvement, motivated by positive experiences such as enjoyment and encouragement from peers. Time management also emerged as a challenge, as students balanced academic responsibilities with limited time for dance practice. Instructional and environmental factors significantly affected learning, with students valuing clear, step-by-step teaching methods but expressing concerns over limited resources such as mirrors, costumes, and practice space. Peer influence played both supportive and discouraging roles, with encouragement helping build confidence while fear of judgment and bullying hindered participation. Teacher support was seen as vital, particularly through constructive feedback and motivation. Cultural, social, and environmental influences further shaped students' dance experiences; family heritage inspired cultural dance interests, while social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube served as informal learning tools. Limited access to formal training and economic barriers also constrained students' development. To cope with these challenges, students adopted various strategies, including self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and drawing support from family and mentors. Many expressed a desire for more structured opportunities, such as dance workshops and professional coaching. Preferences for dance genres varied, with hip-hop and cultural dances being popular yet challenging for some. Overall, the results underscore the complex interplay of emotional, instructional, social, cultural, and environmental factors in shaping students' dance learning journeys.

DISCUSSION

Emerging Themes on Personal Experiences of Junior High School Students Regarding Their Challenges in Acquiring and Improving Dancing Skills
. Through in-depth analysis, seven emerging themes were identified that encapsulate the personal challenges junior high school students face in acquiring and improving their dancing skills. These include struggles with learning dance due to the complexity and speed of choreography, leading to frustration and reduced motivation. Emotional concerns such as embarrassment, low self-esteem, and social anxiety also surfaced, particularly when students performed in front of peers or faced criticism. Despite these difficulties, many students perceived gradual improvement through persistence and practice, which helped build confidence. Balancing dance with academic responsibilities emerged as a common challenge, often limiting time for practice. Nonetheless, motivation and enjoyment—especially from peer support and social connections—encouraged students to continue participating. Physical and technical challenges, including mastering coordination and specific dance styles like hip-hop and folk dances, further complicated their

learning. Lastly, peer influence and social pressure played a dual role, where support boosted confidence but fear of judgment discouraged engagement. Together, these themes highlight the intricate interplay of emotional, technical, social, and academic factors shaping students' experiences in learning dance.

Emerging Themes on Students' Perceived Factors Contributing to Their Struggles in Learning Dance, Such as Instructional Methods, Resources, or Peer Dynamics

An in-depth analysis of students' experiences revealed eight key themes that explain the factors contributing to their struggles in learning dance. These include instructional methods, where students emphasized the importance of clear, step-by-step guidance to reduce confusion and facilitate skill acquisition. Resource availability emerged as another major factor; lack of space, mirrors, costumes, and props often hindered students' practice and confidence. Peer influence played a dual role, with supportive classmates boosting motivation while negative peer judgment led to anxiety and disengagement. The theme of comfort level and confidence underscored how social anxiety and fear of performing in front of others limited participation.

Teacher support was found to be vital, with students valuing instructors who provided both technical corrections and emotional encouragement. Similarly, the quality of feedback was crucial; constructive and specific feedback helped students improve, while vague or harsh comments discouraged them. Support networks—including family, friends, and mentors—greatly impacted students' motivation to persist, especially during challenging times. Lastly, students suggested improvements such as professional dance training, better facilities, and more opportunities for practice and performance to enhance their learning environment and overall experience.

Together, these themes highlight how instructional quality, emotional climate, physical resources, and social support all interact to shape students' success and struggles in dance education.

Emerging Themes on How Cultural, Social, and Environmental Contexts Influence Student's Ability to Develop Their Dancing Skills

An in-depth analysis of junior high school students' experiences uncovered six major themes that illustrate how cultural, social, and environmental contexts shape their ability to develop dancing skills. These include cultural influence, where students' ethnic backgrounds and traditions either foster engagement with dance or create barriers due to lack of familiarity. Social norms and peer judgment strongly affect students' confidence, with societal expectations either motivating or discouraging participation depending on the student's self-perception.

Social media influence emerged as a significant theme, with platforms like TikTok and YouTube serving as powerful and accessible tools for learning new styles and boosting creativity. The availability of dance training and qualified instructors was also critical—students with access to structured programs demonstrated greater skill progression, confidence, and enthusiasm. Environmental factors, including access to suitable practice spaces and facilities, were found to greatly affect comfort, safety, and freedom of movement, all of which contribute to learning outcomes.

Lastly, economic factors such as the affordability of costumes, training programs, and other dance-related expenses heavily influenced participation. Students from lower-income families faced more obstacles but highlighted the importance of financial aid in continuing their dance education.

Emerging Themes on How do students cope with and address their development of dancing skills, and what support do they believe could help overcome these struggles

These themes emphasize the need for culturally responsive instruction, inclusive learning spaces, and equitable access to resources to ensure that all students have the opportunity to grow and succeed in dance. The analysis of junior high school students' experiences in developing dance skills revealed key themes shaped by cultural, social, and environmental contexts, as well as students' coping mechanisms and support needs. Six themes highlight external influences: Cultural Influence emphasizes how students' heritage and community traditions affect their interest and engagement in dance, either as a source of inspiration or a challenge when unfamiliar styles are introduced. Social Norms and Judgment show that societal expectations and peer evaluations can both motivate and hinder students' confidence. Social Media Influence presents platforms like TikTok and YouTube as popular tools for learning, offering accessible instruction and creative expression. Dance Training Availability points to the vital role of formal instruction and structured programs in enhancing technical skills and motivation. Environmental Factors, such as practice space and facilities, affect students' comfort and ability to practice effectively. Economic Factors reveal how limited financial resources constrain access to costumes, training, and performance opportunities.

In terms of coping strategies and desired support, eight additional themes emerged. Peer and Teacher Support is essential for motivation and learning, though often limited by students' shyness. Self-Directed Learning through online platforms enables students to learn at their own pace, promoting autonomy. Family and Environmental Support provides emotional encouragement, helping students persist through challenges. Learning from Experience and Mentorship reflects students' appreciation for guidance from experienced dancers and structured workshops. Constructive Feedback, particularly positive reinforcement, boosts confidence and fosters a safe learning environment. Dance Skill Development Opportunities underscore the need for institutional support through more workshops and formal classes. Barriers to Practice and Learning, such as emotional discomfort, time constraints, and feelings of exclusion, continue to restrict participation. Lastly, Dance Style Preferences reveal that students are more engaged when allowed to explore genres aligned with their interests and identities, highlighting the need for diverse offerings in dance education. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of dance skill development and the importance of holistic, culturally sensitive support systems in schools.

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