

An Initial Exploration of Innovative Practice Approaches for Dance Education Courses in Higher Education Institutions from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education

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Abstract: Dance education programs in higher education institutions bear the dual responsibilities of fostering aesthetic awareness and cultivating artistic literacy, embodying diverse educational functions and value orientations. While acquiring dance techniques through systematic and standardized curriculum learning, students must also comprehend the inherent aesthetic significance of dance art, thereby achieving spiritual enrichment and developing both aesthetic perception and creative competence. Therefore, to innovate and enhance dance education programs, institutions must first thoroughly understand the essential connection between aesthetic education and dance pedagogy, and excel in both aesthetic cultivation and technical training. Aesthetic education forms the foundational value of dance education, while technical training represents its practical manifestation. Through diligent study, students continuously improve their overall competence, enhance their aesthetic sensitivity, and apply these skills in practice, ultimately gaining a genuine appreciation for the artistic beauty and profound cultural heritage of dance.

Keywords: Aesthetic education; Higher education institutions; Dance education; Innovative practice

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1. Introduction

Aesthetic cultivation in dance education serves as the primary driving force behind its continuous evolution. Dance courses in higher education institutions constitute an indispensable component of the aesthetic education system, characterized by distinct contemporary features and disciplinary specificity. Through learning dance via body language, students develop profound aesthetic experiences. Innovative curriculum designs with multiple layers effectively foster the emergence of students' intrinsic aesthetic awareness. To fully express their aesthetic insights in class, students require not only adherence to established teaching methodologies but also integration of innovation to enhance the educational impact of dance education programs^[1].

2. Current status and development trends of dance education courses in higher education institutions

Dance education courses in higher education institutions have a long history. In ancient times, this tradition gradually evolved into systematic teaching through master-apprentice transmission, serving as a means to preserve dance skills. Various historical documents document the diverse forms of dance culture, including music-dance education and court dances. For instance, pre-Qin texts not only record “music education” but also include illustrations depicting how dance was used to educate the public and cultivate moral character. Subsequently, educators and cultural scholars interpreted these practices as activities aimed at fostering social etiquette norms among the populace. This demonstrates that China’s dance education originated from societal educational needs. Rooted in folk traditions, dance education has undergone significant evolution throughout history, reflecting contemporary societal perspectives on cultural inheritance and aesthetic cultivation, offering valuable insights for studying ancient educational philosophies. However, with societal changes, dance education courses in universities face severe content homogenization; emerging artistic forms proliferate rapidly, while students lose interest in traditional dance programs and resist monotonous skill training. Many institution-specific courses have been discontinued due to faculty attrition, leaving dance education at risk of marginalization. To revitalize this declining field, national education authorities have implemented targeted reform policies and issued relevant guidelines, ensuring the continuity and development of dance education ^[2].

3. The relationship between aesthetic education concepts and dance education curricula

In daily life, humans convey aesthetic perceptions and express personal taste to others through visual perception, auditory experience, and physical expression. Since dance education courses are practice-oriented, their implementation primarily focuses on physical training and aesthetic experience. Human perception can swiftly and accurately reflect learners’ evolving aesthetic sensibilities; students can integrate various elements, including sight, hearing, intuition, thought, and emotion, to flexibly and precisely embody the aesthetic essence of dance education. In dance education courses, students must first gain a thorough understanding of the course’s specific aesthetic objectives to transform their inner feelings into motivation for full engagement in learning. Secondly, they need to comprehend the disciplinary characteristics and cultural nuances of dance education to appreciate the distinct aesthetic expressions inherent in different dance programs ^[3].

4. The relationship between aesthetic education concepts and practical teaching

Dance education enables deeper exploration of students’ potential through structured training, providing essential physical preparation for artistic performance. Within dance curriculum frameworks, various practical activities transform diverse aesthetic emotions into tangible expressions. Only by thoroughly understanding the essence of dance education can learners fully showcase its distinctive artistic and aesthetic qualities. Dance education plays a pivotal role in aesthetic education implementation; its curriculum design, instructional planning, and content organization collectively reveal the aesthetic vision it aims to convey. When verbal expression proves inadequate for conveying aesthetic concepts, dance serves as an effective medium—where textual descriptions cannot sustain long-term impact, dance art becomes indispensable. By translating complex aesthetic ideas into concrete movements, dance education effectively communicates profound meanings through visual and kinetic language, achieving a powerful effect where silence speaks louder than words.

5. Innovative approaches to dance education curriculum from the perspective of aesthetic education

5.1. Innovation management in different course formats

In dance instruction, students' emotions evolve alongside course content and teaching adjustments. These aesthetic fluctuations resonate deeply within learners, fostering a shared artistic experience. During curriculum development, educators often draw inspiration from historical narratives or figures to highlight their remarkable achievements and spiritual essence; they may also recreate specific aesthetic events to showcase contemporary human lifestyles. Regardless of approach, these methods connect students' dance movements with historical contexts, enhancing their aesthetic engagement. For instance, courses featuring national heroes can use the "Feitian" dance as a model, allowing students to appreciate Chinese cultural charm through its graceful movements; those centered on literati figures may incorporate ritual music and dance segments from Confucian ceremonies to convey profound ritual aesthetics. Teaching props serve as vital expressive tools: red silk ribbons in folk dances radiate festive vitality, while water spray effects in Dai ethnic performances, though flexible in design, must embody cultural significance. Traditional musical instruments from each ethnic group are equally essential, complementing dances to showcase distinctive cultural characteristics. For example, the horsehead fiddle in Mongolian dance courses produces a mellow bass tone with a melodious and lingering quality, evoking images of boundless grasslands and cattle grazing under the setting sun—precisely mirroring the grandeur of galloping horses depicted in the piece "Gallop." The hand drum in Xinjiang dance courses features crisp and pleasant sounds that evoke sweet fruits and adorable girls from Xinjiang, complementing the lively and cheerful steps in the work "Picking Grapes." Dance courses in the Jiangnan region predominantly employ instruments such as the guzheng, guqin, and pipa, whose timbres exude ancient charm, transporting listeners to the prosperous and picturesque landscapes of ancient Jiangnan, much like the poetic and ethereal atmosphere created by the piece "Spring River Moonlit Night."

5.2. Innovative management of teaching tempo

The teaching rhythm in dance education courses is not only deeply intertwined with aesthetic principles but also inseparable from music; their integration enables more profound emotional expression and artistic atmosphere creation. Music imparts rhythm to dance movements, while rhythm refers to the cohesive sequence of actions formed through variations in pitch ratios, tempo, and dynamic intensity over time. However, changes in aesthetic intensity within this rhythmic framework cannot be conveyed through a single standardized movement pattern alone—it requires meticulous perception and interpretation of rhythm. Only through deep understanding and resonance can dancers identify and master the most crucial elements across various melodic aesthetics in dance education. Rhythmic interpretation should transcend mere beat-counting; it must adapt to specific contexts, as identical movements may yield different effects in diverse rhythmic environments. For instance, performing rapid, forceful movements to a gentle melody would compromise the dance's overall beauty and significantly diminish audience appreciation, whereas slow, drawn-out motions under an energetic composition fail to convey the intended emotional intensity. Therefore, dancers must cultivate acute rhythmic sensitivity during instruction, integrating internal aesthetic sensibility with external rhythmic patterns so that each movement naturally evolves from the rhythm rather than mechanically following beats. Only through this approach can true integration of aesthetics and rhythm be achieved in dance education ^[4,5].

5.3. Innovation management within the course rhythm

The core of dance education lies in rhythm – a dynamic flow of energy created through the transition between movements and shifting centers of gravity during posture changes. Both dynamic and static dance poses generate rhythmic variations: alternating between fast and slow tempos, gentle and powerful motions. Through continuous rhythmic shifts, these evolve into distinctive movement patterns. As musical melodies rise and fall, aesthetic sensibility and breath control permeate every posture and limb movement, integrating students' artistic expression with classroom practice for greater natural

elegance. Rhythm bridges learners' understanding of dance aesthetics with their ability to portray character traits vividly. In teaching practice, mastering rhythm requires not only precise execution of movements but also comprehension of breath flow between actions, ensuring each weight shift serves an aesthetic purpose. Taking classical body rhythm training as an example: through repeated practice of fundamental elements like "lifting, sinking, thrusting, leaning, contracting, expanding, and shifting," students gradually develop a coordinated mechanism where internal energy flows harmoniously with external movements. This transforms dance into a cohesive aesthetic chain rather than mere repetition of motions. If learners focus solely on mimicking physical forms while neglecting rhythmic breath control and emotional expression, their performances will lack vitality and fail to resonate with audiences. From an aesthetic education perspective, teachers should guide students to first focus on breathing and perceive the actual flow of rhythm within the body, allowing movement to serve as a natural manifestation of aesthetic awareness. Only in this way can dance education courses achieve the profound transformation from skill acquisition to the enhancement of humanistic literacy.

6. Innovative practical approaches to dance education curriculum in higher education institutions

6.1. Key aspects of innovative practice techniques

The primary manifestation of innovative practical techniques in dance education courses lies in teaching methodologies, which enable students to shine brilliantly during class delivery and infuse dance education with vibrant vitality and artistic impact. Within limited spaces, students execute complex, challenging movements by precisely utilizing their skeletal structure, ligaments, and muscles, expressing the profound aesthetics inherent in the curriculum while advancing the narrative progression of instruction. These innovative techniques are achieved through coordinated coordination of various body parts, including flexible movements of the head, neck, fingers, wrists, shoulders, and elbows, creating rhythmic, visually captivating performances that fully express students' inner creativity. Through years of practice and training, students develop unique dance skills that demonstrate distinctive aesthetic qualities, presenting the thematic essence of dance education and showcasing its multifaceted appeal. While teaching techniques share commonalities across different dance programs, they collectively reflect humanity's shared pursuit of dance artistry. The educational environment and cultural context of dance education provide fertile ground for innovative teaching approaches, allowing the distinctive character of these courses to gradually emerge through refined pedagogical practices ^[6].

6.2. Adapt practical skills according to the characteristics of each discipline

Dance education curricula are influenced by multiple factors, with a notable characteristic being the distinct styles exhibited across institutions. Key influencing elements include historical and cultural contexts, living environments, and disciplinary characteristics. Comprehensive universities and art-focused institutions adopt different curriculum approaches: comprehensive institutions emphasize interdisciplinary integration between dance and other disciplines, while art-focused institutions prioritize in-depth development of specialized skills. Due to their distinctive features, dance education programs effectively engage students actively. Taking the dance courses at Beijing Dance Academy and Minzu University of China as examples: the former leverages its robust classical dance and ballet curriculum, requiring students to master precise body alignment and technical standards during practice meticulously; the latter is deeply rooted in the dance cultures of China's 56 ethnic groups, demanding mastery of region-specific techniques such as Tibetan "Xianzi" knee tremors and Mongolian shoulder shaking. These contrasting disciplinary characteristics have shaped unique instructional methodologies. To refine their skills, students must delve into the historical origins, developmental trajectories, and cultural nuances of each discipline. Only by integrating institutional characteristics with practical techniques can students develop distinctive personal expressions while mastering universal dance language, ultimately achieving a transition from imitation to creativity in dance education.

6.3. Approaches and specific forms for applying practical skills

Students should flexibly apply practical techniques from dance education courses during learning, adapting them to musical rhythms and movements without mechanical application, as rigid adherence may reduce instructional quality due to overly formalized physical movements. For instance, in vocal artistry, merely performing songs according to musical scores and singing techniques while neglecting their creative context and emotional expression significantly diminishes a piece's artistic value. The principles of vocal artistry mirror those of dance: when students perform fixed movements without considering aesthetic elements or thematic depth, they fail to convey the course's essence, and forced movements directly compromise teaching effectiveness. Taking the classic work "Thousand-Armed Guanyin" as an example, dancers who mechanically execute uniform arm motions while ignoring its Buddhist cultural significance and celebration of life cannot convey its profound aesthetic impact, regardless of precision. Students should integrate dance techniques flexibly throughout learning, adapting to different teaching scenarios, coordinating with surrounding participants, sensing rhythm, and applying techniques appropriately. Excessive use may disrupt overall instruction; practical applications must adapt to context to help students appreciate the artistic beauty of dance education and enhance teaching quality^[7].

7. Conclusion

In today's era of intense global cultural convergence, conducting in-depth research on the current state and development trends of dance education curricula in higher education institutions helps these programs maintain their core identity and consistently preserve the disciplinary cultural characteristics and aesthetic values. The effective preservation of cultural development in dance education requires not only individual commitment but also collective support from governments and other social organizations. Investigating innovative practices in dance education from an aesthetic education perspective bridges the gap between students and aesthetic appreciation. By integrating musical instruments with dance while incorporating aesthetic experience and the fundamental purpose of dance education, students must achieve a harmonious blend of external physical expression techniques and internal aesthetic sensibility. Analyzing training methods for innovative practices in dance education expands its conceptual horizons and further elevates the pursuit of beauty.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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