



FOSTERING PHYSICAL COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GLOBALIZED DANCE AND MUSIC PRACTICES IN PRESCHOOL

Yang Fan,¹ Nopadon Poonsawat²

Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University¹⁻²
China¹, Thailand²

Email: pingnaping@gmail.com¹, nopadon.poo@bkkthon.ac.th²

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Abstract

This study explores the multifaceted role of dance and music integration in preschool education as a globally relevant and culturally enriched pedagogical approach. Drawing upon interdisciplinary research and diverse international practices, the article examines how movement-based learning fosters physical, cognitive, and emotional development in early childhood. Through structured and creative dance activities synchronized with music, children enhance gross motor skills, rhythmic coordination, and spatial awareness while simultaneously engaging critical cognitive functions such as memory, sequencing, and pattern recognition. Emotionally, dance provides a safe outlet for self-expression, promoting confidence, empathy, and social interaction. The integration of culturally diverse dance and music forms introduces young learners to global traditions, nurturing openness and appreciation for cultural diversity from an early age. Supported by case studies and established educational frameworks—including Orff Schulwerk, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and the Kodály Method—the research emphasizes that preschool dance and music education is not merely

artistic enrichment, but a powerful tool for holistic growth. The findings highlight that a globalized and culturally responsive approach to dance and music integration fosters inclusive, immersive learning environments that support lifelong skills, cultural literacy, and well-rounded development in young children.

Keywords: Physical Cognitive; Emotional Development; Globalized Dance; Music Practices; Preschool

Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, early childhood education must evolve to support not only academic readiness but also the holistic development of young learners. Among the most dynamic and integrative approaches to early education is the combination of dance and music, which offers a powerful means to cultivate physical, cognitive, and emotional growth in preschool-aged children. When informed by global and culturally diverse practices, this interdisciplinary approach becomes even more impactful—promoting inclusivity, cultural literacy, and a deeper appreciation of artistic traditions across societies.

Dance and music are universal languages that transcend linguistic barriers and engage multiple senses simultaneously. Their integration in preschool settings enhances motor coordination, supports brain development, and nurtures emotional intelligence and self-expression. Research shows that movement-based, multisensory learning not only strengthens memory and executive function but also creates a joyful and meaningful educational experience. Moreover, embedding global dance and music traditions into curricula exposes children to the richness of world cultures, fostering empathy, respect, and a broader worldview from an early age. This article explores the significance of dance and music integration in preschool education, with particular attention to their combined impact on physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Drawing on current research, international pedagogical models, and culturally responsive practices, the study advocates for a globally informed approach to early childhood

arts education—one that prepares young learners to thrive both personally and collectively in a globalized era.

Significance of Preschool Dance Education

Preschool dance education serves as a crucial foundation for fostering the holistic development of children, blending physical movement, artistic expression, and educational goals into a unified and impactful learning experience. Its uniqueness lies in its multidimensional approach, which not only supports physical, cognitive, and emotional growth but also nurtures creativity, self-expression, and social skills. Research emphasizes that dance activities engage multiple senses, making learning more meaningful and effective (Lorenzo et al., 2007) highlight that "dance as a multisensory learning tool, enables children to process information through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences, facilitating deeper engagement and skill acquisition." Similarly, the Standards for Dance in Early Childhood by the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO, 2005). emphasize that integrating dance into early education helps children develop motor skills and physical literacy while also promoting cognitive connections through rhythm and pattern recognition.

Structured and creative movement activities promote motor skill development, spatial awareness, and rhythmic coordination, which are critical components of early childhood development. Lorenzo-Lasa et al. (2007) note that "the integration of music and dance choreography fosters cognitive development by requiring children to sequence movements, synchronize with rhythm, and anticipate patterns." These findings are further supported by Holland (2013), who explains that "music and dance together provide a natural environment for children to explore timing, sequencing, and spatial relationships, all of which are critical for early learning." On an emotional level, dance provides a safe and expressive platform for children to explore their emotions and build confidence. As the study observes, "creative dance allows children to express feelings that may be difficult to articulate verbally, contributing to their emotional resilience and self-awareness" (Lorenzo-Lasa et al., 2007). Çetin and Erdem Çevikbaş (2020) add that "using creative dance in preschool settings not only facilitates

emotional expression but also supports social-emotional learning by encouraging teamwork, empathy, and shared joy."

Through group interactions, children develop collaboration and empathy, as they learn to work together, share ideas, and appreciate the contributions of others. The NDEO (2005) guidelines underline the importance of collaborative dance activities, noting that "participation in group choreography builds communication skills and fosters mutual respect among young learners." This dynamic and integrative form of education ensures that children develop foundational skills that are vital for their overall growth and future learning experiences. The study concludes that "dance education not only enhances individual competencies but also fosters a sense of community and shared purpose, making it an invaluable component of early childhood education" (Lorenzo-Lasa et al., 2007).

Physical Development

Preschool dance education emphasizes gamified physical activities that play a critical role in enhancing children's coordination, balance, and motor skills. Structured and age-appropriate dance activities are particularly effective in developing control over large muscle groups, improving physical fitness, and fostering overall body awareness. As Lorenzo-Lasa, Ideishi, and Ideishi (2007) state, "dance activities integrated with movement patterns help children develop gross motor skills and improve spatial awareness through playful yet structured interactions." For instance, simple jumping movements strengthen lower body muscles, while spinning movements enhance balance and spatial orientation. These exercises not only build physical strength but also improve flexibility and dynamic control, as highlighted in the National Dance Education Organization's (NDEO) "Standards for Dance in Early Childhood" (2005): "Preschool dance supports fundamental motor development, ensuring children gain proficiency in basic movement patterns necessary for later physical and academic success." Furthermore, dance sharpens children's sensitivity to rhythm and movement relationships, helping them build an essential foundation for coordinated physical performance.

Cognitive Development

Dance education extends beyond physical movement to actively engage cognitive functions, providing a dynamic and immersive platform for intellectual growth. Preschool-aged children experience rapid brain development, and dance, with its inherently multisensory approach, plays a critical role in supporting this process. Dance activities integrate visual, auditory, and kinesthetic inputs, offering a holistic learning experience that stimulates multiple areas of the brain simultaneously. "Multisensory dance practices provide children with opportunities to enhance cognitive skills through coordinated movement and rhythmic engagement." One of the most significant cognitive benefits of dance education is its impact on memory and sequencing skills. Remembering and performing dance routines require children to engage in logical thinking, problem-solving, and pattern recognition. By recalling choreography, arranging movements in order, and synchronizing their actions with music, children strengthen their ability to process and organize information efficiently. "Music Fundamentals for Dance", "dance linked with music fosters higher-order thinking by requiring simultaneous processing of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic information." This integration enhances reaction times and attention spans, particularly as children learn to coordinate their movements with musical rhythms.

Moreover, dance activities activate both hemispheres of the brain, fostering neural connections that are essential for future learning. The left hemisphere, associated with logical processing, helps children analyze rhythm and structure, while the right hemisphere, responsible for creativity and spatial awareness, enables them to interpret and express musical emotions through movement. Research suggests that this bilateral brain activation strengthens executive functions such as focus, impulse control, and cognitive flexibility—skills that are crucial for academic success in later years.



Additionally, dance supports linguistic and mathematical development. Movement-based learning encourages children to associate rhythm and tempo with numerical patterns, reinforcing early math concepts. Dance routines that incorporate counting beats, step sequences, and spatial positioning enhance a child's ability to grasp mathematical relationships in a physical and experiential manner. Similarly, verbal cues and rhythmic speech patterns used in dance instruction can support language development, improving phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and verbal expression. In essence, dance education offers young children an enriching cognitive experience that blends artistic expression with essential cognitive skills, preparing them for more advanced learning experiences in both academic and creative fields.

Emotional and Social Development

Dance serves as a powerful and safe medium for preschool children to explore, express, and regulate their emotions. Through movement, children can communicate feelings they may not yet be able to articulate verbally, fostering emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Creative and improvisational dance, provides opportunities for children to "express inner feelings and emotions that they may not yet have the words to articulate." The act of translating emotions into movement helps children process and release stress, develop coping mechanisms, and build resilience. This contributes to greater confidence, a stronger sense of identity, and an improved ability to navigate complex emotional experiences.

Group dance activities also play a crucial role in developing social skills and cooperation. Collaborative movement exercises require children to work in sync with their peers, fostering teamwork, communication, and empathy. The National Dance Education Organization emphasizes the role of group activities in "cultivating shared goals, mutual respect, and problem-solving skills essential for community building." By learning to dance in a group, children practice turn-taking, active listening, and nonverbal communication, strengthening their ability to interact positively with others.



Furthermore, dance enhances a child's sense of belonging and cultural awareness. Participating in culturally diverse dance styles exposes children to different traditions, rhythms, and expressions, promoting openness and appreciation of diversity from an early age. Through shared dance experiences, children build emotional connections with their peers, fostering social bonding and reducing feelings of isolation.

Additionally, the expressive nature of dance fosters a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Successfully learning a new movement sequence or performing in front of an audience reinforces positive self-esteem and perseverance. Encouraging children to engage in movement-based storytelling or expressive improvisation helps them develop a sense of agency, where they learn that their emotions and ideas have value. This confidence-building aspect of dance education carries over into other areas of life, influencing children's willingness to take risks, express themselves, and engage with the world around them in a meaningful way (Brown & Chen, 2018).

In summary, dance education provides a multifaceted platform for emotional and social growth, helping children develop empathy, communication skills, emotional regulation, and cultural awareness—key attributes that will serve them throughout their lives.

Supporting Research

A growing body of research underscores the multidimensional benefits of dance education for preschool children, demonstrating its positive effects on physical development, cognitive abilities, and emotional well-being. Numerous studies have shown that children who participate in dance-based learning environments outperform their peers in key developmental areas. Regular engagement in structured dance activities has been linked to enhanced motor coordination, increased cognitive flexibility, and stronger emotional resilience.

For instance, research on child motor development indicates that consistent dance practice improves children's control over their bodies, while also fostering psychological resilience and teamwork skills. This reinforces the idea that preschool dance education is not merely an artistic activity but a comprehensive educational tool that lays the foundation for holistic child development. "Regular engagement in dance activities leads to improved gross motor control, enhanced cognitive flexibility, and strengthened emotional resilience." Similarly, Preschool dance education prepares children for future academic and social challenges by instilling foundational physical and interpersonal skills.

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that dance-integrated learning environments promote greater engagement and information retention. Dance provides a dynamic and multisensory approach to learning that enhances children's ability to process and remember complex concepts. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of movement-based learning strengthens neural pathways associated with memory and executive function, helping children develop focus, adaptability, and problem-solving skills.

Additionally, dance plays a critical role in supporting emotional expression and peer collaboration. The use of creative dance in preschool settings allows children to explore emotions in a nonverbal way, providing a therapeutic outlet for self-expression. Structured group dance activities encourage children to build trust and cooperate with others, setting the stage for positive lifelong social interactions. Taken together, these research findings highlight the profound impact of dance education in early childhood learning. By integrating movement-based instruction into preschool curricula, educators can create a more engaging, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive learning environment that nurtures children's cognitive, physical, and emotional growth.

Cultural and Historical Perspectives on Preschool Dance Education

The development of preschool dance education is deeply influenced by cultural backgrounds and historical evolution. Different countries and regions have unique approaches to integrating dance into early childhood education. For example, in China, traditional folk dances such as fan dance, yangge, and elements of Peking opera movements are often incorporated to enhance children's artistic literacy. In contrast, Western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom focus more on music-based movement education, utilizing methods such as Orff Schulwerk and Dalcroze Eurhythmics. These cultural differences shape curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and educational objectives in preschool dance education.

Historically, the integration of dance and music has deep roots. During the European Renaissance, court dances and music were inseparable, while in African cultures, traditional dances were often accompanied by complex rhythms and percussion instruments. Examining these historical contexts can help modern educators gain deeper insights into the educational value of various dance styles and integrate cross-cultural elements into preschool curricula. This approach fosters children's appreciation of different artistic traditions from an early age. Understanding the cultural and historical dimensions of preschool dance education provides valuable insights into how dance and music have been intertwined across different societies, shaping their integration in early childhood learning. By analyzing the evolution of dance education, educators can develop more inclusive and culturally responsive curricula that incorporate diverse artistic traditions. This not only enhances children's exposure to different dance forms but also fosters global awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity from an early age (Yang & Pattananon, 2024).

In conclusion, preschool dance education transcends being a mere artistic activity. Instead, it serves as an integrated educational tool, nurturing the physical, cognitive, and emotional development of young children while laying a robust foundation for their future growth and learning experiences.

Integration of Preschool Dance and Music Education

The integration of preschool dance and music education represents an interdisciplinary approach that combines two essential artistic disciplines to foster children's artistic perception and expression. By blending movement and music, this approach enhances the development of both artistic appreciation and practical skill acquisition in a balanced manner. This fusion not only strengthens physical coordination but also nurtures emotional, cognitive, and creative growth, providing a well-rounded learning experience for children.

Research has demonstrated that combining dance and music can create a highly effective and engaging educational environment, where children actively participate through multisensory experiences that connect auditory, visual, and kinesthetic stimuli. This integration enhances children's ability to perceive and respond to rhythms, melodies, and movements in a holistic way, promoting an increased awareness of both body and sound. Through these interactions, children develop not only motor skills and musicality but also an enhanced ability to communicate and express their emotions creatively.

The shared rhythmic foundations of both dance and music serve as a strong link, enabling children to grasp abstract concepts such as tempo, dynamics, and structure in a tangible and fun manner. When dance movements are synchronized with music, children experience the concepts of time and space more effectively, helping them to develop spatial awareness, body control, and rhythmical coordination. Furthermore, this synergy supports cognitive development by encouraging pattern recognition, memory retention, and problem-solving abilities as children learn to associate physical movements with musical cues. This dual engagement of the auditory and kinesthetic senses further

deepens the understanding of rhythm and improves attention span, fostering both cognitive and motor development (Honyian & Sondhiratna, 2024).

Additionally, dance and music integration fosters creativity and self-expression, offering children a platform to explore their emotions through both movement and sound. As they engage with both art forms, children gain confidence in their abilities to express their thoughts, feelings, and imaginations, facilitating not only their artistic growth but also their emotional and social development. The shared experiences of creating music and dance together further enhance social interactions, teaching children the value of collaboration, cooperation, and collective creativity.

In essence, the integration of preschool dance and music education not only provides children with a rich and immersive learning environment but also lays the foundation for lifelong skills in both the arts and personal development, helping them build a well-rounded foundation for future academic and social success.

Commonalities Between Dance and Music

Both dance and music share the core principle of rhythm, which allows for a natural connection between the two. This rhythm-centered nature of both forms allows for their integration to create a stronger teaching effect. Dance movements synchronized with musical rhythms can help children develop a deeper understanding of concepts such as time, space, and rhythm. For example, coordinating body movements with melodies and rhythms helps children understand not only the structure of music but also its emotional impact. For preschoolers, melodies and rhythms in music provide a natural guide for body movements, while dance visually represents the music. This interaction between dance and music allows children to internalize musical elements through kinesthetic experiences, facilitating the understanding of musical elements such as melody, rhythm, and tempo (Liao, 2009).

Educational Advantages of Interdisciplinary Integration

Integrating dance and music in preschool education offers a dynamic, multisensory learning experience that stimulates both cognitive and physical development. Unlike traditional instruction that isolates auditory and motor learning, interdisciplinary integration allows children to experience music in a tangible way, strengthening their understanding of rhythm, melody, and movement coordination. This dual engagement activates both the auditory and motor systems, enhancing neural connectivity and fostering a more holistic approach to learning. Research has shown that such interdisciplinary approaches not only improve musical literacy but also enhance motor coordination, spatial awareness, and body control. "Incorporating dance into music lessons provides a multifaceted learning experience that develops both auditory and motor coordination, enhancing children's musical abilities through active participation."

One of the key advantages of integrating dance with music is its impact on memory and retention. Movement-based learning provides children with a kinesthetic reinforcement of musical concepts, allowing them to internalize rhythm and melody more effectively. For example, integrating simple songs into structured dance movements helps children memorize melodies while simultaneously deepening their understanding of lyrics and musical phrasing. The physical embodiment of musical patterns reinforces cognitive processing, making learning more intuitive and engaging. Additionally, this approach encourages a deeper emotional connection to music, as children express feelings through movement, improving their interpretative and expressive abilities.

Interdisciplinary learning also plays a crucial role in developing creativity and problem-solving skills. The improvisational aspect of dance allows children to explore music beyond structured activities, encouraging them to experiment with movement, rhythm, and tempo. It was found that "the integration of dance and music creates a more enriching environment for creative expression and problem-solving skills development." When children are encouraged to create their own movement sequences to match musical compositions, they develop a stronger sense of artistic agency, fostering imagination and originality (Lee &

Park, 2020). Furthermore, integrating dance and music helps build essential foundational skills such as active listening, attention control, and memory recall. By linking movement with auditory cues, children engage multiple sensory pathways, strengthening their ability to process and retain musical information. This multisensory engagement enhances executive functioning skills, such as impulse control and sustained attention, which are crucial for academic success. Additionally, the physical engagement required in movement-based music education promotes emotional regulation, helping children manage stress and improve focus.

Beyond individual cognitive and physical benefits, interdisciplinary instruction fosters collaboration and social interaction. Group-based dance and music activities require children to coordinate with their peers, improving teamwork, nonverbal communication, and cooperative problem-solving skills. Learning to synchronize movements with a shared rhythm encourages children to listen actively and respond to group dynamics, reinforcing both musical and interpersonal skills. Ultimately, integrating dance and music in preschool education enhances engagement, strengthens cognitive and motor skills, and cultivates creativity and social collaboration. By moving beyond passive learning, interdisciplinary instruction offers children an immersive, interactive, and developmentally appropriate educational experience that nurtures both their artistic and academic growth.

New Knowledges

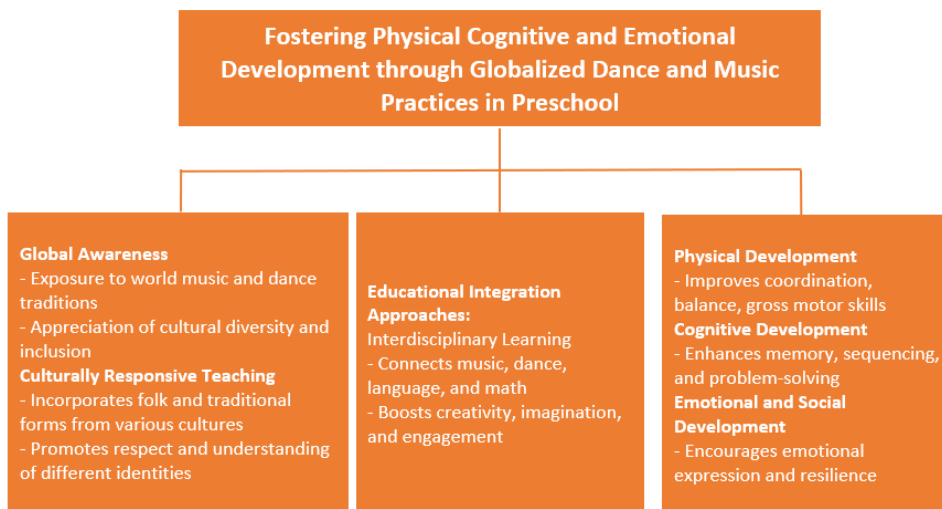


Figure 1. New Knowledges Diagram of Fostering Physical Cognitive and Emotional Development through Globalized Dance and Music Practices in Preschool.

Conclusions

Preschool dance and music education, when approached through a global and culturally responsive lens, serves as a transformative platform for nurturing children's holistic development. By integrating physical movement with musical expression, young learners gain critical foundational skills in coordination, cognitive flexibility, and emotional intelligence. This interdisciplinary practice supports not only motor and intellectual growth but also fosters creativity, cultural appreciation, and social collaboration. The inclusion of diverse musical and dance traditions enriches children's understanding of the world, promoting respect for global cultures and encouraging inclusive learning from an early age. As demonstrated through educational methodologies and international case studies, dance and music integration provides a developmentally appropriate, engaging, and impactful approach to early childhood education. Moving forward, educators are encouraged to adopt globally informed and culturally sensitive curricula that

blend movement and sound, thereby empowering children to thrive academically, artistically, and socially in an increasingly interconnected world.

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