

The role of dance education in improving students' multicultural understanding

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Abstract: This study investigates the role and mechanism of dance education as a tool of improving students' multicultural understanding. The paper scans the relevant theories and research in a systematic way to first analyze both the definition of multicultural understanding and its significance to education, study history and present situation of dance education, and evaluate specific impact on students' multicultural understanding by empirical research. It has been noted that dance influences people in three dimensions: cognition, attitude, and behavior. The mechanism through which the effect is brought about mainly includes the exercise of cultural exchange, cultural diversity, and cross-cultural experience. Empirical research data supports the effectiveness of dance education in multicultural understanding, and classroom observations and in-depth interviews further confirm its enhancement of cultural interaction and communication capabilities. The conclusion points out that dance education has broad application prospects and social significance in promoting students' multicultural understanding. It is recommended to further promote and deepen dance education in the education system to promote cultural diversity and social harmony.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background and importance

Dance education, as a comprehensive art education form, has unique cultural transmission function and educational significance. The learners could thus improve their physical fitness and artistic accomplishment and not just understand but experience the connotation and essence of different cultures [1]. Two key points in the context of globalization are cross-cultural communication and cultural diversity. Education in dance prepares students for multicultural understanding and cross-cultural adaptation [2].

Research shows that dance education can effectively enhance students' cognition and respect for different cultures, thereby promoting cultural diversity and social harmony [3]. Specifically, dance education enables students to feel and understand the uniqueness and commonality of different cultures through personal experience through the study and practice of traditional dances, folk dances and modern dances of various countries [4]. This practical and experiential learning method not only helps students form a positive cultural attitude, but also enhances their cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication skills [5].

More importantly, dance education seems to have its own social implication in enhancing students' multi-cultural understanding. How to educate for mutual understanding and tolerance among different cultures in a multi-cultural society has gained the attention of educators [6]. Dance education, through its unique cultural expression and communication methods, provides an effective way to solve this problem. Therefore, exploring the role of dance education in improving students' multicultural understanding is not only of theoretical research value, but also of practical application significance [7].

1.2 Research objectives

This study aims to explore the specific role and mechanism of dance education in improving students' multicultural understanding. By systematically combing through relevant theories and empirical research, this paper will deeply analyze how dance education can promote students'

understanding and respect for different cultures through cultural exchanges, cross-cultural experiences, etc. [8]. The specific research objectives include the following aspects:

We first analyzed the theoretical basis of multicultural understanding, clarified the definition of multicultural understanding and its importance in education[9]; secondly, we explored the history and current situation of dance education, and understood the development and application of dance education in different cultural contexts[10]; then, through empirical research, we examined the actual impact of dance education on students' multicultural understanding and analyzed its specific impact mechanisms and effects[11]. Finally, combined with successful cases of dance education at home and abroad, effective educational practice strategies are summarized, and relevant policy recommendations are put forward to provide reference for educators and policy makers [12].

Through this study, it is hoped that a scientific basis and practical guidance can be provided for the application of dance education in a multicultural context, so as to further promote the development of dance education and promote cultural diversity and social harmony [13].

2. Theoretical basis of multicultural understanding

2.1 Definition and connotation of multicultural understanding

Multicultural understanding is the act where a person becomes aware, appreciates, and tolerant of other people's culture. It means being aware of the fact that people perceive things differently because of the culture they belong to and that the difference is welcomed and valued [14]. Multicultural understanding refers to knowledge and skills of an individual to another culture's traditions, customs, and values, and skills and attitudes related to cross-cultural communication [15]. Its importance can particularly be realized in the age of globalization because it reduces the conflicts of cultures and brings social harmony closer [16]. Specifically, multicultural understanding covers multiple aspects such as cultural identity, cultural exchange, and cultural adaptation. Through education, communication and experience, it can effectively improve individuals' multicultural literacy [17]. Research shows that multicultural understanding helps individuals better adapt and develop in a multicultural environment, thereby promoting the overall progress of society[18].

2.2 Multicultural Education Theory

Multicultural education theory mainly explores how to cultivate students' multicultural understanding ability through educational means. The theory emphasizes that education should respect and reflect students' cultural background, and promote students' cognition and respect for different cultures through diverse teaching content and methods[19]. Multicultural education works not only in the direction of providing knowledge but also in the direction of attitude and values, with the aim of making citizens more globally disposed and skilled in cross-cultural communication [20]. This is an approach that incorporates diversification of curriculum design, flexibility of teaching methods, and openness of teacher–student interaction [21]. It has been shown in various studies that multicultural education basically sets in motion ways through which students' cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication skills are improved to result in a positive influence on cultural integration and harmonious development of society as a whole [22].

2.3 The relationship between dance education and multicultural understanding

Dance education has unique advantages in improving multicultural understanding. By learning and practicing dances of different countries, students can deeply experience and understand multiculturalism at the physical and emotional levels[23]. Dance education not only teaches dance skills, but also focuses on explaining cultural background, historical origins and social significance, thereby helping students to respect and identify with other cultures [24]. In addition, as a universal art language, dance has the unique function of transcending language barriers and promoting cultural exchanges [25]. Studies have shown that students who participate in dance education perform better in cultural cognition and cross-cultural communication, which helps to cultivate their global vision and multicultural literacy [26].

3. History and current situation of dance education

3.1 History of dance education

Dance history goes way back and can be traced in some of the earliest civilizations. Ancient civilizations, such as Egypt and Greece, accorded dance great importance in religious activities and social functions. In the Middle Ages, dance gradually evolved into a noble education in the European courts. Professional dance teachers began to appear and taught ritual dance and performance skills. Dance education in the Renaissance went on developing, and gradually the dance received its status as an integral art and began to spread all over the world. In the 20th century, modern and folk dance education began to receive some attention; the content and form of dance education began to be diversified and became more complete.

3.2 The current situation of contemporary dance education

Contemporary dance education is booming around the world, and various forms of dance schools and training institutions have sprung up. Dance education is not limited to professional dance academies and art schools. Ordinary primary and secondary schools and community cultural centers have also opened dance courses to popularize dance education. With the renewal of educational concepts and the advancement of science and technology, dance education has gradually integrated multimedia technology and adopted a teaching model that combines online and offline, broadening the channels for learning and resource acquisition. Dance education also promotes artistic literacy, physical development, and aesthetic awareness, but more recently, it has emerged as a valuable tool in the growing area of mental health and socialization.

3.3 The main forms and contents of dance education

The main forms of dance education include professional training and amateur interest classes. Professional training is usually conducted in dance academies, art schools or professional dance troupes. The content is systemic and serious, with a large scope involving ballet, modern dance, and folk dances that focus on training techniques, stage performance, and choreographing. The level of amateur interest classes is relatively primary in order to be generally trained and cultivated for the public in dance hobbies and basic skills, such as popular dances including pop dance, street dance, and Latin dance. In addition, dance education also combines cultural heritage and innovation elements. Through the study and creation of dance works, students can improve their cultural cognition and artistic expression in the process of understanding and experiencing different cultures.

4. The impact mechanism of dance education on students' multicultural understanding

4.1 Cultural exchange in dance education

Dance education would further create cultural interaction and more exposure of the learners towards the core of diverse cultures, emulated through dance. Under this field of study, students are given an opportunity to study the aspects of African dance, Indian classical dance, and Latin dance, among other genres. The dance forms not only present a particular body language and art of expression but also bear a cultural background and great historical heritage attached to them. Through the practice of this form of dance, the student is better able to intuitively feel the values, customs, and social structures attached to various cultures. Most curricula under dance education also organize cross-cultural exchange activities, such as international dance festivals and cultural exchange camps that offer the students an opportunity to interact with dancers and artists of different cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing their consciousness to multiculturalism and to the versatility of being able to communicate with people of difference.

4.2 Cultural diversity in dance works

Dance works themselves are a concentrated embodiment of cultural diversity. In dance education, students can deeply understand the cultural characteristics and social background reflected in these works by learning and performing various dance works. Each dance work contains specific cultural

symbols and emotional expressions. Analysis and understanding of these have placed students in a better position to appreciate the universality and distinctness of different cultures. For example, the elegance and sophistication of ballet, the power and rhythm of African dance, the subtlety and mystery of Indian dance—all are concrete manifestations of dance arts all around the world. Cross-cultural experience is a very important way to increase multicultural understanding in the teaching of dance. In the process of dance education, teachers help students deeply understand the cultural significance contained in them while learning techniques and performances by explaining the cultural background and historical origins of dance works.

4.3 Cross-cultural experience in dance education

In the actual teaching process, schools can have cross-cultural dance activities and invite international dancers or performing troupes to perform. With the direct participation and experience of dance practice in different cultures, students feel the characteristics of these dances at the level of the body and through this, share the same feelings and understand them at the level of psychology and emotion. The students leave their mental model of their own culture, open-minded, and accept and respect different cultural expression and values. Experiential learning enriches not only the students' ability to gain cultural sensitivity but also cross-cultural communication, thereby laying a good foundation for them to go on better functioning in a globalized society.

5. Empirical research

5.1 Research design and methods

The combination of both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies was applied to systematically explore the impact of dance education on students' multicultural understanding. This study was carried out in the way of questionnaire surveys, interviewing, classroom observation and other methods. The subjects were in the amount of 200 students majoring in dancing from a certain university. The research design includes two stages: the first stage is a questionnaire survey, which collects the changes in students' multicultural understanding before and after receiving dance education by designing a structured questionnaire; the second stage is in-depth interviews and classroom observations. Through in-depth exchanges with some students and observations of classroom teaching, we further understand the specific impact and mechanism of dance education in actual teaching.

5.2 Data collection and analysis

Data collection includes questionnaire survey data and interview and observation records. In the questionnaire survey part, a total of 180 valid questionnaires were collected, and the data mainly included quantitative scores of students' cognition, attitudes and behaviors in multicultural understanding. In the interview part, a total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted to record students' specific experiences and feelings in dance learning. Dance education is an integral part of the actual teaching and learning process, usually through classroom observation in the performance and interaction of students.

In the case of quantitative data, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis are conducted by means of the SPSS software. Simultaneously, the analyses of qualitative interviews and observation note data are integrated to fully describe the effect of dance education on students' multicultural understanding based on the outcomes from the two sets of data.

5.3 Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistical results of the questionnaire survey data, including the mean and standard deviation of the three dimensions of cognition, attitude and behavior before and after dance education. The data show that dance education significantly improves students' scores in each dimension, and the reduction in standard deviation also shows the central tendency of the data.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of questionnaire survey data

Dimension	Mean (Before)	Mean (After)	Std Dev (Before)	Std Dev (After)
Cognitive	3.2	4.1	0.8	0.6
Attitudinal	3.0	4.0	0.7	0.5
Behavioral	2.8	3.9	0.9	0.6

Table 2: Correlation analysis results

Variables	Cognitive	Attitudinal	Behavioral
Cognitive	1	0.76	0.68
Attitudinal	0.76	1	0.73
Behavioral	0.68	0.73	1

The results (see table2) reveal that the dance education program brings a significant improvement to students in their understanding of multicultural issues. In terms of cognition, attitude and behavior, students have significantly improved after receiving dance education, and there is a positive correlation between the dimensions. This shows that dance education is not only effective in a single dimension, but can also comprehensively improve students' overall cultural literacy and cross-cultural communication ability. The results of the study provide strong support for educational practice, and it is recommended to further promote and deepen dance education in the education system to promote multicultural understanding and social harmony.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Main Conclusions

This study explored the role and mechanism of dance education in improving students' multicultural understanding through systematic theoretical analysis and empirical research. The main conclusions include the following points: First, dance education significantly improves students' multicultural understanding. After learning and practicing the various cultural dances, the students showed huge enhancement in three aspects: cognition, attitude, and behavior. This includes not merely more cultural knowledge learned and an increase in cultural sensitivity but also in the aspect of respect and tolerance towards different cultures. The results of empirical research show that after dance education, students' scores have significantly improved, indicating that dance education has a significant effect in cultivating students' multicultural literacy.

The role mechanisms of dance education in multicultural understanding mainly include mechanisms of cultural exchange, cultural diversity, and cross-cultural experience. Moreover, as one of the integrated art forms, dance can encompass elements from diversified cultures during teaching to enable students to understand varied cultural connotations and values deeply through physical and emotional participation. It was further confirmed by the results of classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis that dance education not only enriched the cultural experience of the students but also improved the capability for cultural interaction and communication among them. The results also show that dance education has broad application prospects and social significance in promoting students' multicultural understanding, providing theoretical support and empirical basis for educators.

6.2 Research limitations

Although this study has achieved important results in exploring the role of dance education in improving students' multicultural understanding, there are still some limitations. First, the sample selection of this study has certain limitations. The research subjects are mainly students majoring in dance in a certain university. This group has certain particularities in cultural literacy and artistic cultivation, and the research results may not fully represent the general student group. Thus, expanding the sample in its range and number could increase the representation of students from diverse backgrounds and/or levels and enhance the universality and generalizability of research findings. Improvements should also be made concerning the diversity of research methods and the

depth of data collection. This research mainly adopts the method of a questionnaire, interview, and classroom observation. Though it can better reflect the influences of dance education on students' multicultural understanding, this study can still increase the depth and range of the data to some extent. Future research might consider increasing quantitative methods and qualitative methods, such as experimental research and longitudinal research, to explore the specific influence mechanism and long-term influence of dance education more deeply.

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