

# A Study of Folk Dance Learning by University Students

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**ABSTRACT**

In the folk dance traditions of every country in the world, there is a dance language and artistic expressions that express the characteristics of the nation. Dance is expressed through emotional movement using dance techniques. University dance teaching methods have a great impact on the quality and level of dance education. The article will present the results of an experimental study of a method of supporting students' folk dance learning. A total of 60 students studying dance at the Hulunbuir University of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, and the School of Dance Arts of the Mongolian State University of Music and Drama of the 1st and 2nd year of the dance teacher's class participated in our experiment. The performance of students in folk dance was evaluated within 5 criteria and the results were calculated, and the performance of students in folk dance improved by 1-2 levels. When the results of the pilot study were analysed using a T-test, the results of the evaluation of students' folk-dance performance showed that the students' knowledge of dance ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 28.926$ ), dance elements ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 24.523$ ), analysis and interpretation ( $p = 0.05$ ,  $t = 19.467$ ), understanding of dance ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 29.712$ ), and dance composition and improvisation ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 19.827$ ) were statistically significant.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In connection with the importance of preparing globally competitive citizens in the development of any country in the 21st century, the role and importance of arts education in the development of citizens, especially children and youth, has been given special attention (Erkhemtugs & Davaasuren, 2024, p.17). Therefore, UNESCO has studied and presented the best practices of developed countries in the world in line with its policies and activities on international trends in arts education. In this era of special attention to human development issues, countries have taken multifaceted measures for universal arts education and have begun to discuss the issue in a broad sense. UNESCO adopted the "Guidelines for Arts Education" at the First World Conference on Arts Education

held in Lisbon, Portugal in 2006 (UNESCO, 2006, p.76). UNESCO has distributed the guidelines to 193 member countries and has a common goal of providing stakeholders with an understanding of the importance, quality, role and goals of arts education in society. Countries recognize that arts education is a key factor in economic development and a way to stabilize and improve social relations (Erkhemtuvs & Davaasuren, 2024, p.17). The goals of arts education have been defined globally by the following four factors (UNESCO, 2006, p.186):

- Education, culture, access to and participation in education, and respect for human rights
- Development of individual capabilities
- Improving the quality of education
- Promoting cultural diversity.

The world is committed to people-centered development and to implementing goals aimed at developing the general learning capabilities of all citizens (UNESCO, 2023, p. 38). This process is equally relevant to arts education, and this document reflects the important role of arts education in shaping visionary, creative and professionally oriented individuals in the new century (UNESCO, 2006, p.19).

Arts are a means of communication for the dissemination of culture and a way to honor and glorify cultural knowledge. The culture of each nation has its own unique artistic expressions and traditions. Many cultural genres and works express the complex qualities of human kindness, cultural heritage, and beauty in many traditional and modern ways as a result of human creativity (Al-Zadjali, 2017, p.298).

The trend of arts in education prioritizes the use of arts to deepen understanding of the content taught in other subjects. This trend also aims to expand the overall learning outcomes of each student through arts education, based on the theory of “Multiple Intelligences” by Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University. There is also a tendency to express theory in practice through art disciplines, and the common trend of these subjects requires changes in teaching methodologies and teacher training (Erkhemtuvs & Davaasuren, 2024, p.9).

Mongolians are people with a unique tradition of teaching and learning. Informal education can be understood theoretically as a process of acquiring knowledge and skills to perform a specific task by using the tools given to each person by God, such as asking questions, observing, imitating, debating, consulting, teaching, and reflecting while living together with parents, siblings, friends, family, and other close people (Purevsuren, 2007, p.32).

In particular, teaching folk roots and traditional dances not only helps children develop a sense of community, but also helps them express their emotions through physical movement, acquire independent skills, and be healthy and resilient (Erdenekhorloo, 2020, p.24). Regional characteristics and geographical location in folk dances are important for the expression of the dance. For example, in the Bayad and Zakhchin folk dance, the Bayad ethnic group performs the horse dance by pressing the hips on both sides without shaking, and by touching the ground with both hands on both sides without moving below the waist. However, in Zakhchin, it is performed by sitting down and touching the ground with both hands forward. From this, it can be seen that the ethnic

groups of the Oirad group perform the same dance differently depending on the geographical location, the socio-historical situation experienced by those ethnic groups, and the unique characteristics of their livelihood.

In modern times, the organization of dance training in a way that combines tradition and innovation is illustrated in the work "Implementing Tao Xin Zhi's Life Education Theory in Teaching Practice" with a fable from the Song Dynasty. There was a farmer in the Song Dynasty. There was a stump in his field. One day, a rabbit ran to the stump and broke its neck and died. So the farmer put his farming tools near the stump and tried to get another rabbit. But the wild rabbit could not be caught. And he himself became the laughing stock of the Song people. If we want to lead today's people with the strategies of the past, it is the same mistake as waiting for a rabbit in the grass. If the dance teaching method of universities does not match the trends of the time, it will become a strange phenomenon like "waiting for a rabbit" (Naranhuar, 2019, p.198). Therefore, it is important to combine traditional methods and methods based on modern theoretical concepts of teaching and apply them to folk dance teaching.

Therefore, within the scope of our research, we aimed to study the basic movements of the folk dance of the lower ethnic groups based on the review of the theoretical methodology and research on teaching folk dance, create exercises that are appropriate for the age and mental characteristics of the students, and develop and study a methodological option to support their learning. The aim of the research work is to test, improve, evaluate, and assess the results of self-developed dance movements that express the customs of the Dagur ethnic group, supporting their learning, based on a version of this methodology.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Thorough historical source analysis, documentary analysis, interviews, questionnaires, experiments, and statistical methods have been used in this study. For historical and documentary analysis, the research work investigated the origin and development of the Dagur national folk dance of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, the characteristics of the dance style and movement, in relation to the geographical location, the customs and cultural heritage of the Dagur ethnic group based on cultural history documents (Bayanjargal, 2009. p. 21; Bayar, 2014, p.13; Chuluunbagana, 2000, p. 9; Ji & Qiu, 1998, p.138). Folk dance expresses the customs, dreams, and morals of the people and the Mongolian folk dance expresses the lifestyles, nature and customs of ethnic groups such as Western Mongolian, Khalkh, Buryat, Uzemchin, and Dagur, with their own unique characteristics. The research work investigated the origin and development of the Dagur national folk dance of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, the characteristics of the dance style and movement, in relation to the geographical location, the customs and cultural heritage of the Dagur ethnic group based on cultural history documents (Bayanjargal, 2009. p.21; Bayar, 2014, p.13; Chuluunbagana, 2000, p.9; Ji & Qiu, 1998, p.142). Folk dance expresses the customs, dreams, and morals of the people and the Mongolian folk dance expresses the lifestyles, nature and customs of ethnic groups such as Western Mongolian, Khalkh, Buryat, Uzemchin, and Dagur, with their own unique characteristics. For instance, the dances "Lurgel" and "Ahambai" and

“Lantutbe” not only reflect the history, culture, livelihood, customs, and lifestyle of the Dagur ethnic group, but also have inherited their unique characteristics, such as their connection with rituals and ceremonies, and depictions of hunting, and were registered as the first intangible cultural heritage of China in 2006 (He, 2014, p.2). Therefore, the movements of the “Lurgel” dance are multi-faceted and the strong “Devse alhaa” is the main one. The Lurgel dance is accompanied by a dialect word, while the “Akhanbai” and “Lantutbe” dances are less dynamic, the dance style is elegant, the hips are clearly thrown to the left and right, and there is a lot of “chiree alkhaa”.

Further, a total of 76 video lessons have been recorded for the students of the dance class to preserve these dance styles and developed training materials for their further use. When preparing the video materials, we paid attention to the following aspects:

- Analysing the content of the videos in advance.
- Planning the content to ensure appropriateness for the students' age and mental characteristics.
- Ensuring the quality of the video recordings.
- Making the videos accessible for pausing, playing, and controlling at specific moments.

When presenting the videos:

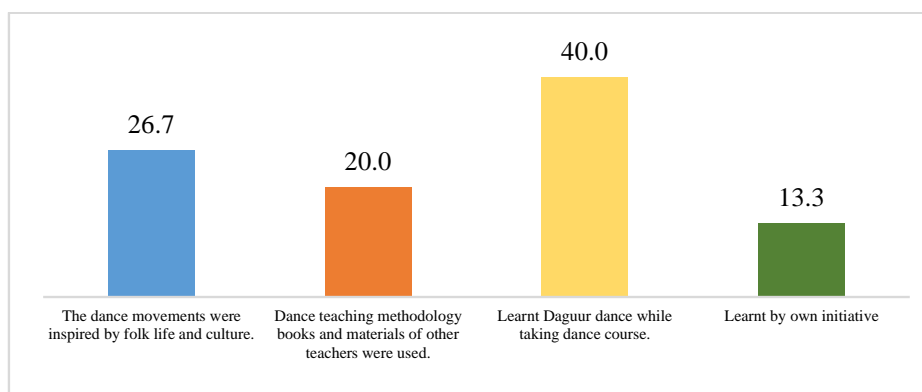
- Positioning the screen so that all students can see it.
- Prohibiting note-taking while the projector is running.
- Discussing the recordings after viewing.

The interviews and questionnaires were conducted with 15 Dagur dance teachers from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China. The focus group interviews involved 15 teachers and were guided by four open-ended questions. Additionally, a six-question questionnaire was administered, achieving a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.781. The 15 teachers who participated in the focus group interviews had 5-25 years of teaching experience, and the interviews lasted 90 minutes in total. The pilot study involved 60 students studying dance at the Hulunbuir University of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, and the School of Dance Arts of the Mongolian State University of Music and Drama in 2017-2019. The evaluation criteria developed for assessing folk dance performance, based on five criteria, demonstrated a confidence level of 0.849. The study's data were analyzed using the SPSS20 program.

### 3. RESULTS

As part of our study, we conducted individual interviews with 15 teachers who teach Dagur dance in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China and summarized the results. When asked about the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching folk dance, especially Dagur ethnic dance, 26.6% (4 teachers) of the teachers who participated in the study said that there is no curriculum for teaching dance, 53.3% said that there are few dance choreographies, textbooks, materials, and instructions, and 40% said that Dagur dance is rarely taught in dance schools and that there is a lack of knowledge about Dagur dance. However, when discussing the ways in which they overcame the above difficulties in teaching Dagur ethnic dance, 13.3% of the teachers responded that they

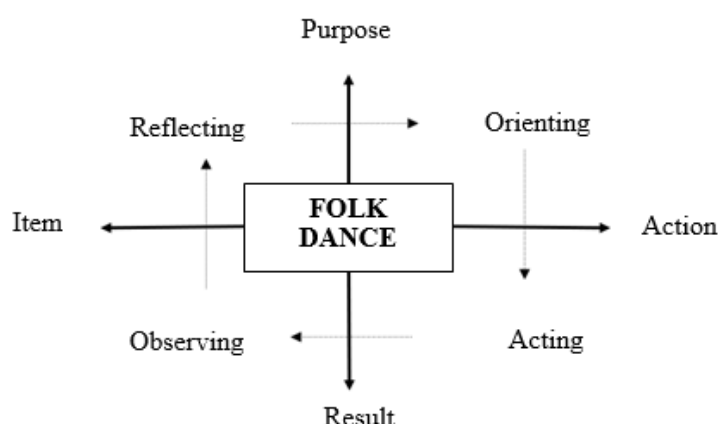
had choreographed Dagur dance exercises and Lurgel dances themselves, 46.7% used methods developed by other teachers, and 40% overcame the difficulties based on their own knowledge and experience. In addition, considering how they solved the difficulties in developing Dagur dance exercises and programs, we can see the following outcome (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Challenges in developing daguur dance routines and programs

When teachers evaluate the progress of Daguur dance students, they are given 100 points if they are active in class and express their dance movements correctly and effectively; if the students have 87% attendance, they are given 87 points based on the performance and style of the dance movements; if the children are able to express the characteristics and style of Daguur dance well according to the dance rhythm, they are given 80 points; if they are flexible and orderly, and the expression expressed through dance is 73.3%; and if they feel the beauty of dance, they are given 87 points based on how they feel it. By evaluating students, it is possible to make the dance profession more interesting, increase their interest in learning dance, and provide motivation, so that children understand dance better, learn to dance correctly according to the dance rhythm, and learn to express the characteristics and style of Daguur dance well. Including Daguur dance in dance classes is important for spreading and preserving our cultural heritage, making dance classes more interesting, and enriching the repertoire.

In the pilot study, we analyzed 76 video lessons developed according to a methodological option using methods such as observing, reflecting, orienting, and acting, and calculating the results using methods such as student folk dance performance, dance movement elements, changes in learning, and analysis of lesson notes (Figure 2). Based on a developed methodological version and a continuous assessment method that evaluates the American dance step-by-step learning process, the evaluation criteria for evaluating folk dance performance were developed and tested. The reliability of the evaluation criteria was analyzed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.849, which is "high", indicating that the evaluation rubric and its criteria are suitable.



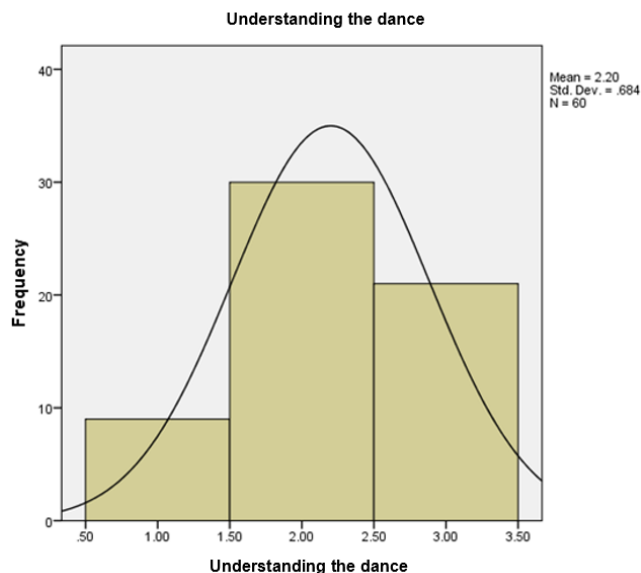
**Figure 2.** A methodological model of supporting the learning of folk dance

The evaluation criteria developed for assessing folk dance performance, based on five criteria, demonstrated a confidence level of 0.849. The students' folk dance performances were evaluated on a total of 25 points, with each skill being rated on a scale of 1-5, and the distribution of scores was studied.

**Table 1.** Performance assessment of daguur ethnic dance

Items		Number of students	Average value	Standard deviation	Standard mistakes	t (paired)	p
Before	Knowledge and understanding about dancing	60	1.4	0.35	0.02	28.926	0.000
After		60	3.7	0.42	0.04		
Before	Dancing elements	60	1.1	0.43	0.05	24.523	0.000
After		60	4.1	0.56	0.01		
Before	Analysis and report	60	2.3	0.57	0.03	19.467	0.000
After		60	3.7	0.41	0.02		
Before	Understanding the dance	60	2.2	0.65	0.04	29.712	0.000
After		60	4.2	0.48	0.05		
Before	Composing and dancing a dance	60	1.8	0.46	0.02	19.827	0.000
After		60	3.5	0.32	0.01		

According to the t-test, there is a statistically significant difference in knowledge of dance  $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 28.926$ , dance elements  $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 24.523$ , analysis and interpretation  $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 19.467$ , understanding dance  $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 29.712$ , and composing and dancing dance  $p = 0.001$ ,  $t = 19.827$ . Also, the normal distribution curve of the evaluation of the ability to understand folk dance is shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Normal distribution curve for folk dance comprehension assessment

Table 2 shows the correlation between the five abilities used to evaluate students' performance of Daguur ethnic folk dance.

**Table 2.** Correlation between the abilities to evaluate the performance of daguur ethnic folk dances

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Knowledge of dance	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig.(2-tailed)	NS				
	N	60				
(2) Dance elements	Pearson Correlation	0.647**	1			
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000				
	N	60	60			
(3) Analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.522**	0.597**	1		
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000			
	N	60	60	60		
(4) Understanding dance	Pearson Correlation	0.275*	0.586**	0.281*	1	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.033	0.000	0.030		
	N	60	60	60	60	
(5) Composing and dancing	Pearson Correlation	0.859**	0.584**	0.664**	0.254	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.050	

	N	60	60	60	60	60
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

From this relationship, the Pearson correlation coefficients are 0.859\*\*, 0.664\*\*, 0.584\*\*, 0.597\*\*, 0.522\*\*, and 0.647\*\*, which indicates the significance of the evaluation criteria for evaluating the performance of Dagur ethnic folk dance by students. From this, knowledge of dance is strongly correlated with the ability to compose and dance ( $r = 0.859$  and  $\text{sig} = 0.000$ ), and knowledge of dance and the ability to perform dance elements ( $r = 0.647$  and  $\text{sig} = 0.000$ ). However, the ability to understand dance was weakly correlated with the ability to compose and create dance ( $r = 0.242$  and  $\text{sig} = 0.000$ ). In the experimental study, we reached the following results:

- In this learning method, students have the opportunity to determine the dance movements themselves and learn independently, unlike traditional methods.
- There is an opportunity to discuss, draw conclusions, exchange ideas, and freely discuss the dance movements with the teacher and other students.
- The teacher does not teach directly, but rather encourages the student's activity, monitors the movements he has learned, and provides support to him, identifying changes in the dance movements, supporting the progressive aspects, and correcting the shortcomings, thereby improving the student's dancing skills.
- In this way, students can study the dance movements with their own intelligence, feelings, and skills, draw conclusions, and correct their mistakes with the teacher's guidance and advice, thereby improving the quality of dance learning.

In order to confirm the results of the pilot study, a group interview was conducted with 20 students who studied Daguur dance in Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, PRC. The results are summarized as follows. When the teachers who taught Daguur national dance were interviewed, they knew what Daguur dance is, how it is danced, and what style it is. They learned the movement patterns of Daguur national dance and gained a desire to learn more. Watching videos is a new and more effective way to learn. They felt the elegance of the dance, added to the dance style, felt the eloquence and beauty of this dance of ethnic minorities, and learned about the movements of everyday life.

According to the impressions during the study, the respondents learned Daguur dance through methods such as videos, the Internet, television, teachers, performances, and textbooks. Learning this dance using videos made it more interesting, increased motivation to learn, improved their learning methods because it was innovative. They thought it was better to learn by themselves than to be taught by a teacher, increased their ability to learn independently, helped them learn the dance moves correctly, and learned to do the basic dance moves by watching the videos.

The following difficulties and outcomes were observed in learning Daguur dance:

- Students learned the national style from the teacher's talk (85%);
- It was difficult to be taught by the teacher directly, but it was more interesting to learn by watching the video (90%);



- Watching the lesson video was innovative and increased learning method (80%);
- It was difficult to learn the dance and feel the national situation before, but watching the video seemed made it easier to learn, and watching the video increased the ability to learn by observation (85%);
- 95% of the participants answered that it was possible to watch the dance movements again and again, which is effective for better learning, indicating the effectiveness of the experimental study.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The research on the Dagur ethnic group, their traditional musical culture, the preservation of the ancient Dagur song and dance relics “Lurgel” and “Ahambai”, “Lantutbe” culture, and the preservation of Dagur ethnic traditions and culture have been studied by Zhang Shao Hong (2013, p.1), Wang Ming Chuan (2006, p.23), N. Chuluunbagana (2000, p.1), Zhang Tian Tun (2014, p.4), and He Feng Wen (2014, p.4). On the other hand, the methodological issues of dance teaching have been studied by scholars such as Guo Xu Xiang (1991, p.5), Wei Yang Yuan (1992, p.2), and Luo Lie Xi (2016, p.7). The works of these researchers include the study of early childhood dance education, the current situation of dance education for high school students, and the issues of dance curriculum and evaluation in universities. However, our research results are unique in that they examine the issue of learning folk dance, teaching students how to learn through folk dance, and developing them, such as the methodology of teaching the unity and flexibility between movements when dancing each folk dance movement one by one.

**Conclusion:** The results of the study show that teachers have many years of experience in teaching folk dance movements using traditional methods, such as requiring students to imitate and repeat them many times, but students still have difficulties in mastering this dance and learning the correct technique.

It is seen that preparing electronic materials in folk dance lessons and implementing them in combination with methods that are consistent with the stages of students' learning has the advantage of providing students with more opportunities to observe, reflect, plan, act, and repeat, and ensuring the development of independent learning.

The reliability of the assessment criteria for evaluating the performance of ethnic dances which were developed based on a methodological model to support students' learning of folk dances was 0.849, which indicates that the evaluation criteria are not only optimal, but also that the results are valid for the original population.

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