

Building Laban Dance Creation Curriculum to Develop Body Language Comprehension and Dance Creativity of College Students in China

Li Ma^{1,2} & Peng-Fei Chen^{1,*}

¹Chinese International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand

²School of Music, Xi'an Yang Normal University, Shaanxi, China

*Correspondence: Chinese International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand. E-mail: blissfulalice@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of a Labanotation dance creation curriculum on cultivating body language comprehension and dance creativity among Chinese dance majors. Based on experimental design, the research analyzes how a specialized pedagogical approach enhances students' understanding of physical expression and creative choreographic capabilities. The curriculum framework integrates four core movement elements, namely, "Body, Shape, Space, and Effort" with Labanotation principles. The results demonstrate that this pedagogical model effectively improves students' cognitive understanding of physical language and facilitates more innovative dance expressions. The findings provide novel insights for designing dance composition curricula and significantly impact dance education practices.

Keywords: labanotation, dance creation teaching, dance creativity, college students majoring in dance, body creativity

1. Introduction

Creativity plays a pivotal role in artistic domains, particularly in the field of dance (Pradana et al., 2025). In China's higher dance education, there is a greater emphasis on cultivating high-standard technical abilities and emphasizing physical performance, which is still lacking in other aspects of dance, especially creativity (Jin & Martin, 2019). In higher education in China, creativity is increasingly becoming indispensable in teaching and learning (Kleiman, 2008). Heyes (2011) proposed that students consciously or unconsciously imitate the movements teachers teach (Heyes, 2011), which is common, especially in dance learning. Students lack self-understanding and creativity, which is also seen as a problem that dance education researchers need to address (Foley, 2016; Giguere, 2011; Purgstaller, 2021). Therefore, when developing new teaching methods for dance creation, it is necessary to strengthen students' understanding of body language and movements to express the emotions conveyed by dance.

Teaching dance creation in the 21st century is not limited to teaching dance body movements and completing work creation (Bakirova et al., 2021). Instead, in dance creation, students use body language to solve problems through understanding and demonstrate creativity through thinking through body language (Krish, 2011). Exploring creativity necessitates embodied engagement, wherein the comprehension of physical language serves to activate and harness individuals' intrinsic creative capacities, thereby excavating innate artistic potential (Goldberg, 2024). Dance creativity manifests as both the process of employing bodily articulation in novel ways to achieve choreographic objectives and the ability to cohesively integrate movement phrases into a developed kinetic sequence (Kirsh, 2011; Stevens et al., 2001). Laban dance notation is a way of understanding the movement itself, perceiving the dance movements, and experiencing how they connect and change in time and space in a way that is being read. Ultimately, it achieves the performance of dance movements while consciously training dancers to develop their own dance language and logical thinking, which is beneficial for dance creation (Liu Dan, 2022). Therefore, the input of body language comprehension into the output of creativity can be addressed through Labanotation in dance creation. Labanotation is the most widely used dance movement symbol system (Ørbæk, 2021).

This study, therefore, aims to apply Labanotation to dance creation curriculum and to improve the gap in Chinese dance

students' understanding of body language and creativity in dance. By integrating Labanotation into dance creation curriculum, the research aims to improve students' understanding of body language and their ability to create dance, break through the limitations of traditional teaching methods, and build a broader understanding of the body and a continuous creative learning approach.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this study, we explore and emphasize the importance of Labanotation, which records all body parts' movements. Using Labanotation in dance creation curriculum allows for recording movements and enables the understanding and analyzing of body movements (Elyagutu, 2017). The advantage of Labanotation is that it can accurately record movements. Second, it can establish systematic action thinking. This study uses Labanotation to construct dance creation teaching, allowing students and dancers to analyze and understand the basic logic of their movement sequences (Mccaw, 2023). In the study of Dimarucot (2022), it is proposed that with the innovation of education in the 21st century, traditional dance teaching methods may no longer be effective for contemporary students. Dance teaching must be comprehensive, and its curriculum must be aligned with students' learning needs. Therefore, the focus is not only on output but also on the process of input and learning.

The four categories of the Laban movement analyze body, effort (movement quality), space, and shape, providing a seemingly simple framework for understanding and research. All categories are interrelated, and analyzing these interrelated categories can summarize the understanding of human movement (Bradley, 2008). The four categories commonly used in Labanotation are Body, Effort, Shape, and Space (Cai Peishan, 2023).

Laban dance creates creative possibilities by expressing phrases of body elements and movements and proposes body movements on different spatial levels (Bonfatti, 2022). The exploration of movement is not only the process of physical movement but also the understanding of the body during the movement process (Bradley, 2008). With the help of this system in dance creation teaching, the use of Labanotation's body usage, movement texture, body shape, and space can not only record the trajectory of body movements during creation but also allow students to learn to analyze and understand body movements (Elyagutu, 2017). In his research, Cruz (2013) mentioned that incorporating Labanotation into the curriculum through curriculum and teaching can make students more creative, observant, and expressive and provide a better understanding of the expression of body movements. Labanotation movement analysis can effectively and creatively help teachers and students combine dance creativity with teaching content. Based on the above discussion, the theoretical framework of this study applies Laban dance notation to dance creation curriculum to address issues of body language understanding and dance creativity. The classification Framework of Labanotation includes “Body, Shape, Space, and Effort”, as shown in Figure 1. The Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework of this study.

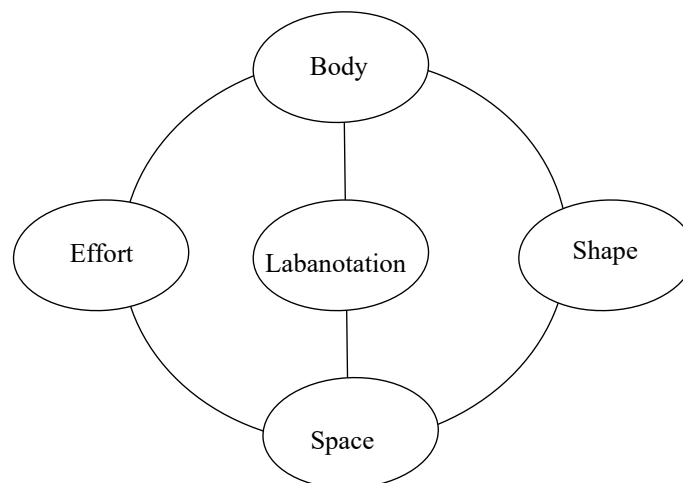


Figure 1. Classification Framework of Labanotation

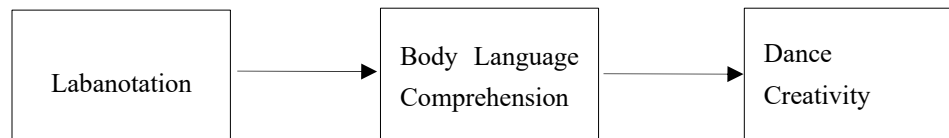


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

To improve Chinese college students' body language comprehension and creativity by implementing Laban dance creation curriculum. The research is conducted in two stages. In the first stage, we will study Labanotation's theoretical framework, related application literature, and effective classroom strategies and methods to identify methods that can significantly improve college students' understanding of body language and dance creativity. Based on this, develop curriculum and lesson plans. Subsequently, the research invited five dance experts to evaluate the proposed curriculum and teaching structure and adjusted the curriculum and teaching plan based on their suggestions. The framework of Labanotation dance creation curriculum development is shown in Figure 3.

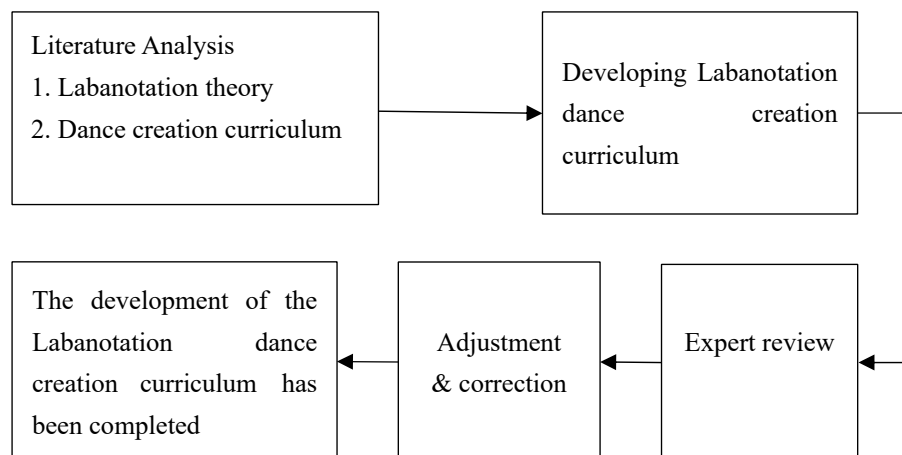


Figure 3. Research Framework

Labanotation dance creation curriculum development

3.1 Expert Review

The index for understanding body language in the Labanotation dance creation curriculum is based on movement expressions from the Delsarte System and Laban Movement Analysis. Meanwhile, the index for dance creativity is derived from the creativity dimensions proposed by Braun and Victoria (2006). Using the framework of the Laban dance composition curriculum, an initial draft of the curriculum was developed.

Five dance experts were invited to assess the validity of the content, resulting in the formulation of competency indicators and a Labanotation-based dance creation curriculum. These experts evaluated the content validity of the Labanotation dance creation theory curriculum. They were selected based on their expertise in related fields, holding at least a master's degree in dance, an intermediate or higher professional title, and more than 15 years of teaching experience. The details of the experts are presented in Table 1, and the final competency indicators are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Experts' Background Information

Expert	Gender	Education	Profession Title	Profession Title	Teaching age	Work unit
1	Female	Ph.D.	Dance education	Associate Professor	20	Music Academy
2	Male	Ph.D.	Choreography direction	Professor	25	Normal University
3	Female	Master	Choreography direction	Associate Professor	13	Normal University
4	Female	Ed.D.	Dance education	Associate Professor	22	Music Academy
5	Female	Ph.D.	Dance education	Professor	19	Normal University

The expert reviewed the design of the Labanotation dance creation curriculum and the teaching design and plan of the four teaching units. Regarding the teaching content of the syllabus, five experts provided suggestions for modifying the ability indicator dance creativity B3 as shown in Table 2, removing the repetition of the word "understand" and modifying it to "understand the novel practical application or usefulness of creativity in dance works."

Experts review the overall design of the Labanotation dance creation curriculum and the teaching design and Content of the 8 teaching units. For the first lesson of Unit 1, which focuses on facial expressions such as happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise, experts 2 and 3 suggest adding training on the commonly used expressions of longing and helplessness in the works. In the 9th lesson of Unit 3, regarding the change in action time, experts 1, 3, and 4 suggested adding exercises for acceleration and deceleration. In the 11th lesson, experts 1 and 2 suggested adding freedom and restraint of mobility exercises.

4. Results

4.1 The Objectives of the Labanotation Dance Creation Curriculum Based on Laban Dance Notation

This study divides the objectives into two core competencies (body language comprehension and dance creativity), and based on the six dimensions of these two core competencies, the detailed objectives of the Labanotation dance creation curriculum are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Learning Objectives of Labanotation Dance Curriculum

Core Competencies		Capacity Indicators
A. Body language comprehension		A1. Able to understand and express facial emotions through body Language
		A2. Able to understand and execute dynamic spatial variations of the limbs and torso
		A3. Able to understand and demonstrate rhythmic flow of body movements
B. Dance creativity		B1. Able to understand and regulate the expression of a highly responsive body
		B2. Able to understand and apply expansive thinking in dance
		B3. Able to understand and apply creativity and innovation in dance practice

4.2 Labanotation is Applied in Each Unit of the Dance Creation Curriculum

The application of Labanotation in dance creation classes is divided into four different units, with each ability indicator reasonably integrated into the curriculum design. Through the study of four units, the research aims to cultivate students' understanding of body language and their creativity in dance. For detailed information, please refer to Table 3

4.2.1 Unit Content

Unit 1, physical elements. In essence, dance is an art of body movement. Generally speaking, people express their feelings through organized and regular body movements (Jin & Martin, 2019). Creating elements through body movements is also considered possible space exploration, creating a dynamic and continuous connection between human inner and outer experiences (Hatipoğlu et al., 2024).

Unit 2, Action Space Variation. Space and body have certain structures, forms, and scales. Space becomes the object, and the body becomes the subject. The relationship between the object and the subject forms a dynamic system: the relationship between the body and its movement in space (Hasgöl & Gümüstas, 2016). Created through the multi-dimensional spatial movement context of body movements, Labanotation describes a complex geometric system

that includes solid and crystalline forms as well as the structure of the human body, as well as spatial patterns and paths (Hasgöl & Gümüstas, 2016).

Unit 3, change in movement rhythm. The rhythm of the body is something that a person can master. By changing the body's rhythm through movement, one can vary the speed, duration, emphasis, and rhythm of the movements during action creation and performance (Hanna, 2001). The diversity of body movement rhythms is generated through Labanotation's action texture space, gravity, time, and flow dynamics (Tasi, 2023).

Unit 4, Creation of Dance Works. The dance creation curriculum focuses on students' understanding and application of developmental work creation in the creative process (Butterworth, 2004). Exploring spatial patterns through body understanding in dance composition (Milovanovic, 2023), Not only the expression of the body but also the understanding of the body movements can produce creative works (Clements et al., 2018). The Labanotation dance creation curriculum comprehensively examines the understanding of body language and dance creativity through various units, training students to enhance their dance creativity from the input of body understanding to the output of dance creativity.

Table 3. Labanotation Dance Creation Curriculum

Units	Teaching objectives	Class time (hours)	Content	Evaluation
U1 Physical elements	A1	8	Lesson 1: Elemental Body Modeling Lesson 2: Element paragraph input connection Lesson 3: Outputting connections for element paragraphs Lesson 4: Paragraph revision	Student performance Teacher feedback
U2 Change in action space	A2 B2	8	Lesson 5: Three-dimensional changes Lesson 6: Modifying Spatial Paragraphs Lesson 7: Laban Icosahedron Space Application Lesson 8: Modifying the entire paragraph	Student performance Teacher feedback
U3 Change in movement rhythm	A3 B1	8	Lesson 9: Variation in Movement Timing Lesson 10: Changes in physical strength Lesson 11: Spatial Variations in Limb Strength Lesson 12: Revision of the entire paragraph	Student performance Teacher feedback
U4 Dance creation works	A1 A2 A3 B1 B2 B3	8	Lesson 13: Integration of Comprehensive Elements in Labanotation Lesson 14: Integration of creative elements Lesson 15: Works and Music Lecture 16: Performance of Labanotation Works	Student performance Teacher feedback

4.2.2 Instructional Methods

Labanotation has evolved from recording body parts to making all body movements. Using Labanotation in dance creation curriculum allows for recording movements and enables the understanding and analyzing of body movements (Elyagutu, 2017). Therefore, this study conducts experimental teaching based on the theory of Labanotation dance creation, guiding students to inspire themselves through physical movements and implementing the process of dance creation through creative movement and understanding of body language. In the creation process, students are guided to explore element-based discovery teaching methods or more physical exercises (Lobel, 2020). Figure 3 demonstrates the pedagogical implementation of Labanotation in dance creation. A1 exemplifies students' engagement with spatial configuration through static poses; A2 illustrates dynamic spatial transformation through transitional sequences; A3 captures rhythmic articulation of spatial dynamics within choreographic phrasing. Details on Laban Movement-based Creation are shown in Figure 4.

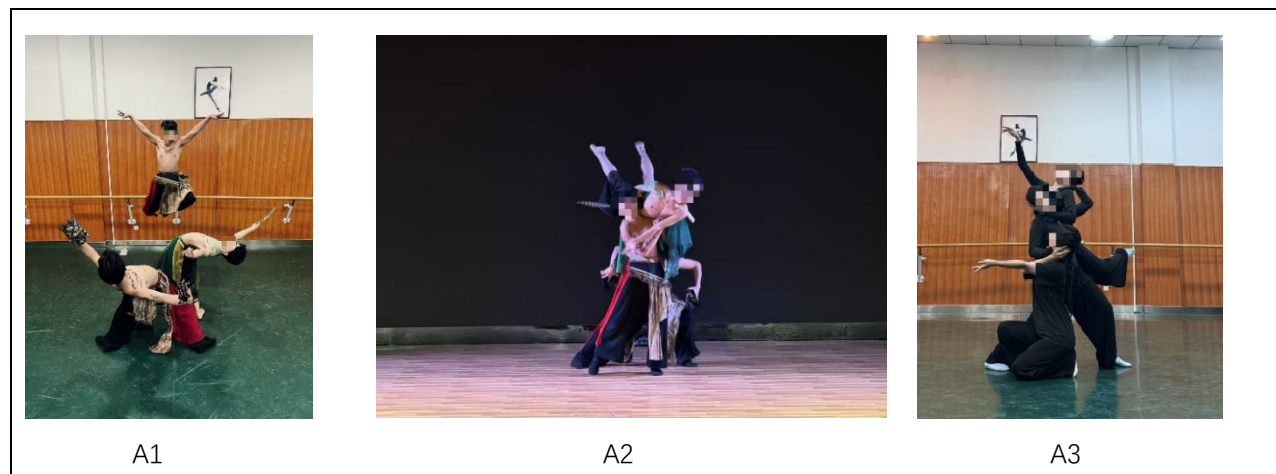


Figure 4. The Pedagogical Implementation of Labanotation in Dance Creation

4.2.3 Assessments

The evaluation method of this study is to conduct Labanotation dance creation teaching based on student performances and teacher feedback. Combining curriculum competency indicators and classroom teaching objectives, teachers and students establish Labanotation dance works based on Labanotation body elements, movement space changes, movement rhythm changes, and dance creation works, using a unified "Dance Works Rating Form" to conduct Labanotation dance works creation student performances, teacher evaluation feedback, and creation works rating.

5. Discussion

This study's Labanotation dance creation curriculum is based on the Labanotation classification framework. The curriculum design focuses on the teaching content of body, movement texture, space, and shape. It designs teaching units and evaluation methods based on six indicators of body language comprehension (facial expressions of body language, movement routes of limbs and torso, movement rhythm, movement sensitivity, thinking breadth, and novel applications). The learning effectiveness of students has significantly improved in all of these dimensions. Mccaw's (2023) research shows that using Labanotation to construct dance creation teaching allows students to analyze and understand the basic logic of their action sequences.

This study establishes the concept and methodology of the curriculum and echoes previous research. Curriculum reform can improve students' ability to analyze physical movements and promote a coherent process from understanding movements to logical thinking and creative expression (Zeitner, 2023). The purpose of this study is to build a curriculum that can improve the understanding of body language and dance creativity in dance creation curriculum based on similar perspectives to previous studies, where the integration of Labanotation into the curriculum teaching has resulted in stronger creativity, observation, and physical expression abilities among students, as well as a better understanding of movements and expressions (Cruz, 2013). Frazier's (2021) study found that Labanotation not only records movements but also promotes students' understanding of movement sequences and the formation of logical thinking while stimulating creative thinking. Laban dance notation is important in developing Chinese university dance majors' body language comprehension and creativity, but its popularity has not yet increased (Jin, 2021).

In the process of dance creation, students need to contribute creative ideas for body movements, learn how to explore different ways of physical movement possibilities, and create different movement concepts to promote dance creation (Lavender, 2006; Lavender & Predock-Linnell, 2001). The characteristics of this curriculum, namely Labanotation, are of great value, as it provides new ways of understanding the language of movement (Guest, 2005). Teachers should cultivate students' ability to record the trajectory of body movements and learn to analyze and understand them in dance creation curriculum (Elyagutu, 2017). Although traditional teaching can directly achieve the teaching goal, it ignores students' thinking, understanding, and creativity in the learning process (Huang et al., 2019). Therefore, this study is based on Labanotation, restructuring the basic elements of dance creation teaching, drawing on previous research on body language or creativity teaching models (Tovey, 2022), highlighting the unique characteristics of the curriculum from body language comprehension input to dance creativity output (Zeitner, 2023), and using

Labanotation to construct a dance creation curriculum to enhance the body language comprehension and dance creativity of Chinese dance students. The idea and Content of this curriculum also conform to the "14th Five-Year Plan for Artistic Creation" of the China Art Department in 2021, which focuses on the development layout of national artistic creation in the next five years, including dance education and aims to cultivate high-level creative talents.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Laban dance creation curriculum significantly enhances body language comprehension and choreographic creativity among Chinese dance majors. Through systematic instructional design, this pedagogical approach facilitates students' deeper understanding of physical expression. It promotes the development of dance expressivity and creative thinking. As an innovative teaching paradigm, it establishes novel pedagogical pathways for dance education while providing theoretical underpinnings and practical guidelines for optimizing dance composition curricula. Regarding pedagogical implementation, the Labanotation framework enables students to conduct precise analysis and application of corporeal language, thereby improving their expressive capabilities in choreography and improvisational practices. Instructors may employ Labanotation methodologies to guide students in exploring diverse spatial relationships, movement qualities, and dynamic fluidity, consequently advancing their compositional proficiency and artistic interpretation. Furthermore, this curriculum enriches dance pedagogy by introducing structured training mechanisms adaptable to various dance genres, equipping students with transferable skills for broader artistic applications.

From a longitudinal perspective, the curriculum's impact extends beyond classroom instruction, significantly impacting systemic innovation in dance education. It establishes a scientifically grounded analytical approach to movement creation. It empowers students to employ corporeal language with heightened creativity in professional practice. Concurrently, it offers practical references for emerging fields such as interdisciplinary artistic collaboration and digital choreography. Nevertheless these contributions, the study acknowledges inherent limitations. The current curriculum structure, encompassing four units over 16 instructional sessions, presents opportunities for expanding content depth and breadth. Future research should refine the curricular structure through modules addressing diverse dance styles, emotional articulation, and improvisational techniques to strengthen students' corporeal literacy holistically. Additionally, investigations into Labanotation's multidimensional applications, particularly in interdisciplinary integration, digital media arts, and performative pedagogy, could yield enriched theoretical frameworks and innovative praxis, catalyzing transformative developments in dance education.

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