# Body, Tradition, and the Future: Reimagining Dance Education in a Changing World

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**Abstract**

This paper was prepared to reconsider the direction of dance education at a time when the dancer's body, the traditions it inherits, and the technologies surrounding it are changing at different speeds. Using a qualitative conceptual approach, the study conducted a thematic review of 57 Scopus-indexed publications issued between 2001 and 2026, covering studies of embodiment, pedagogies of traditional and cultural dance, and the use of digital technology in dance learning. The review shows that the dance education literature remains divided into strands that rarely meet, namely a strand that defends the body and tradition as sources of knowledge and a strand that measures the success of technology through movement accuracy, motivation, and learning engagement. From this reading, the Body–Tradition–Future framework is formulated on three principles: the body as a source of knowledge, tradition as a living pedagogy, and technology as an extension of bodily experience. The framework can serve as a basis for designing dance education curricula and assessments, particularly in teacher education institutions, so that prospective dance teachers can master movement, understand the cultural meanings it carries, and use technology without losing their bodily presence.

***Keywords:*** *embodiment; dance education; traditional dance; digital technology; pre-service dance teachers*

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## INTRODUCTION

Social change driven by globalization, digitalization, and the Covid-19 pandemic has shifted how people learn, communicate, and even experience their own bodies. Among the arts education fields, dance is one of the most affected by this shift, because its primary material is the body, present in a shared space and time. When practical dance classes were moved onto screens during the pandemic, dance educators were forced to ask again what is actually taught in the studio and what is lost when the teacher's body and the student's body no longer share the same floor (Saearani, 2024; Zeitner, 2023). That question has not been fully answered. After virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and social media entered the dance classroom, it has, in fact, become sharper (Guang & Xueliang, 2025; Warburton, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

The problems of dance education do not come only from outside. Formal dance education also carries a legacy of problems of its own. Many university dance curricula were built on Western conservatory models that place imitation of the teacher at the core of learning, so that the student's body is more often treated as an object to be shaped than as a knowing subject (Barr & Oliver, 2016; Dyer, 2009; Lakes, 2005). Such models also tend to marginalize dances that emerged from non-Western communities or to teach them using pedagogical principles foreign to their traditions of origin (Koff, 2021; Mabingo, 2015; McCarthy-Brown, 2009). In China, traditional dance curricula in higher education have been criticized for overemphasizing technical and performance skills, while the innovative capacity and cultural literacy of teacher trainees receive little attention (Chen & Peng-Fei, 2025). In the United States, postsecondary dance education, which grew out of women's physical education programs in the 1930s, still struggles with curricular equity, program development, and leadership in the field (Risner, 2007, 2010).

Indonesia faces problems that are not very different. Traditional dance is taught in schools and in arts education study programs. However, its teaching often stops at the mastery of movement vocabulary, while the values, history, and ways in which the owning community transmits the dance are rarely studied. At the same time, prospective dance teachers are growing up with smartphones, short videos, and applications that allow them to record and assess their own movement (Astuti et al., 2026). The coastal performing arts of Semarang offer an example close to the author's own experience. The dance that grew out of Gambang Semarang art was born of the encounter between Javanese and Chinese cultures in a port city, so that, from the outset, this tradition was flexible and open to new elements. This reminds us that tradition is never truly still, and that a dance education which seeks to safeguard tradition needs, above all, to understand how that tradition moves.

Several studies have been conducted to enrich knowledge about dance education from various angles, including embodiment and bodily knowledge (Ailamazyan & Shuvalova, 2010; Gehm et al., 2015; Ophir, 2016; Weber, 2019), pedagogies of cultural and traditional dance (Daryanti et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Lobo, 2026; Long & Mambetakunov, 2025), and the use of digital technology in dance learning and creation (Dania et al., 2011; Huddy, 2017; Li et al., 2018; Parrish, 2016). Nevertheless, these three groups of studies generally proceed separately. Recent technology studies mostly measure movement accuracy, motivation, and student engagement (Li, 2026; Wang, 2025; Xu et al., 2025), whereas studies of tradition rarely address how bodily knowledge in traditional dance can survive when screens and algorithms mediate its learning.

Meanwhile, studies of embodiment often take Western concert dance as their point of departure, so that the dance experiences of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, have contributed little to the formulation of their concepts.

The novelty of this paper lies in its attempt to bring these three strands of scholarship into a single conceptual framework that places the body at the center, tradition as a source of pedagogy, and technology as an extension, not a replacement, of bodily experience. The framework is also read from the standpoint of pre-service dance teacher education in Indonesia rather than from that of professional dancer training. Therefore, the question posed in this paper is: "How can dance education be reimagined so that it remains rooted in bodily knowledge and tradition, while remaining open to the technological and social changes faced by the current generation of prospective dance teachers?" This paper aims to map the tensions between body, tradition, and technology in the dance education literature published over the last two and a half decades, to formulate the Body–Tradition–Future conceptual framework, and to derive its implications for curriculum, assessment, and collaboration in higher dance education, particularly within teacher education institutions.

## METHODS

This paper is a conceptual study using a qualitative approach based on a thematic literature review. A conceptual approach was chosen because the aim of the paper is not to test hypotheses but to construct a framework of thought that can guide further research and practice in dance education. The data sources consist of 57 Scopus-indexed publications compiled by the author through searches of the Scopus database, comprising 45 journal articles, 6 book chapters, 4 conference papers, and 2 books, published between 2001 and 2026. These publications were selected because they address at least one of the three main concerns of this paper: the body and embodiment in dance education; traditional and cultural dance in formal education; and digital technology in dance learning and creation.

The review was carried out in four steps. First, the author read the title, abstract, and core findings of each publication. Second, each publication was assigned a thematic code according to the main issue it addresses. Third, these codes were grouped into three axes of study, as shown in Table 1. Fourth, the author examined the relationships and tensions between the axes in order to formulate the conceptual framework and its implications.

| Axis of study | Focus | Number | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| Body and embodiment | Bodily knowledge, somatic approaches, body image, and critiques of authoritarian pedagogy | 14 | Gehm et al. (2015); Weber (2019); Barr & Oliver (2016); Ophir (2016) |
| Tradition, culture, and institutions | Traditional and cultural dance in formal education, decolonizing pedagogy, curriculum, and policy | 16 | Mabingo (2015); Koff (2021); Liu et al. (2024); Risner (2010) |
| Technology and digital media | Virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, motion capture, online and blended learning, social media | 27 | Guang & Xueliang (2025); Dou (2024); Warburton (2024); Astuti et al. (2026) |
| **Total** | | 57 | |

**Table 1.** Distribution of the literature by axis of study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the reading, the author applied theoretical triangulation, comparing findings from different traditions of scholarship, such as anthropology, phenomenology, critical pedagogy, and educational technology, on the same issue. The results were then confronted with the author's own experience as an educator and researcher in the performing arts at a teacher education institution. This study is not intended as a systematic review following the PRISMA protocol. Its scope is limited to the literature compiled, so the resulting framework needs to be tested further through empirical research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Body as a Source of Knowledge, Not Merely a Demonstration Tool

The starting point of this framework is the recognition that the dancer's body holds knowledge. Gehm et al. (2015) position dance as both an archive and a medium of body knowledge, that is, knowledge produced, stored, and transmitted through movement, whose role is becoming increasingly important in a globalized society. Weber (2019) strengthens this view through somatic movement dance education. Dancing is understood as a practice of embodied meaning-making that couples sensing and moving being with its environment. According to Weber, somatic approaches deepen bodily attention and perception, individual autonomy, and intersubjective mutuality. Ailamazyan and Shuvalova (2010) reveal another side of the same process, showing that cultural practices of working on the body, including dance training, shape a person's physical and personality traits, along with the body image and the meanings of dancing that the person lives through.

Studies of the body in dance have also shifted from the study of movement towards the study of the body in its various dimensions. Alonso (2022) notes that dance and body expression have developed into a scientific discipline with a strong empirical base that also contributes to medicine, psychology, and pedagogy. Brozas Polo (2013) observes a similar expansion in the writing of Western contemporary dance, where the philosophy of the body, body-awareness techniques, and the dialogue of dance with other arts have changed the way choreography is composed.

If the body is a source of knowledge, the way it is taught becomes an ethical question and not merely a technical one. Lakes (2005) traces the authoritarian pedagogical legacy in Western concert dance technique training and rehearsals. Barr and Oliver (2016) show that technique classes that make imitation of the teacher primary are entangled with the myth of the perfect body, and they propose feminist pedagogy as an alternative. Dyer (2009) suggests merging traditional technique vocabularies with democratic teaching perspectives, and Ohlberg (2023) shows that a contemporary technique class that trains visual, oral, and movement literacy yields better technical and artistic development. Petsilas et al. (2019) add that reflection cultivated through creative and embodied methods helps dance students achieve professional self-sufficiency.

This view opens space for bodies that have long been regarded as less than ideal. Edward and Newall (2020) refute the myth that the aging body should no longer dance. Zurvas (2026)

reframes ballet pedagogy for adults living with illness, injury, or age-related limitations, while Prichard (2024) describes a journey from body oppression to body sovereignty through contact improvisation. For pre-service dance teacher education, these findings matter because school dance classes will be filled with highly diverse bodies, not with the bodies of professional dancers.

Through an ethnography of dance teachers in Israel, Ophir (2016) shows that the teaching body is an active social agent. Every teacher carries a "body signature" that embodies particular educational ideologies, and can maneuver within those ideologies while reshaping them. This finding needs to be read together with the critique of imitation above. In many dance traditions of the Indonesian archipelago, learning begins with imitating the teacher. However, imitation in tradition occurs within a long-standing relationship between teacher and student, accompanied by explanations of meaning, context, and performance etiquette. Long and Mambetakunov (2025) found a similar pattern in China, where the *shi-tu* (master–disciple) system, rituals, and the symbolism of traditional art remain alive in modern arts education. The problem, therefore, lies not in imitation itself but in imitation that is detached from meaning and from relationship. If associated with the concept of embodiment, the teacher's body is the first text that students read, and the way that body is present in the classroom also teaches values.

**Tradition as a Living Pedagogy**

The second axis departs from the awareness that tradition cannot simply be taught as repertoire. McCarthy-Brown (2009) reminds us that the "dance culture" of educational institutions is not always synonymous with culturally relevant teaching. Hierarchy in traditional Western dance training can make many students from other cultural backgrounds feel excluded, leading them to stop developing their potential. Mabingo (2015) notes that dances from African communities have begun to enter formal education in the United States, yet the methods used to teach them still rest on Western pedagogical canons. He therefore proposes applying the pedagogies of Ugandan traditional dances in formal dance education as a step towards decolonization. Koff (2021) goes further by redefining dance education from sociocultural and philosophical perspectives, no longer confined to privileged Western dance forms. These three studies agree on one point: tradition carries not only content but also method.

The benefits of traditional and cultural dance education have been documented in many contexts. Through a systematic review of studies from 2010 to 2024, Liu et al. (2024) conclude that cultural dance fosters social cohesion, emotional well-being, creative thinking, and cultural identity. However, comparative research on intercultural and indigenous cultural dance education remains limited. Daryanti et al. (2025) reviewed 18 articles and found that traditional dance education supports children's holistic cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Lobo (2026) studied 270 second-year students at a state university in the Philippines to examine the relationship between engagement in traditional dance and students' cultural competence, while Guo and Li (2025) surveyed 275 students to investigate how learning dance culture affects their cultural values. Olvera (2008) adds a health dimension, with evidence from seven articles supporting the use of cultural dance for physical and mental health.

Other studies show that tradition is always in motion. He et al. (2026) conducted fieldwork in Yi villages, universities, and professional performance venues in Yunnan Province with 21 informants, ranging from choreographers and educators to students and community participants.

Their study traces how Yi dance is preserved, adapted, and taught across different settings. Rowe et al. (2015) record a dialogue between the Beijing Dance Academy, founded in 1954 on Russian conservatory models, and the Dance Studies Program at the University of Auckland, which emphasizes community dance. That dialogue reveals that even the most established institutions are searching for new pedagogical strategies. In Ukraine, Bigus et al. (2022) demonstrate the role of arts education in preserving and disseminating culture amid globalization, while Cheesman (2021) records how New Zealand's national standards for numeracy and literacy from 2007 affected dance teaching and why building community among learners remains at the heart of dance education.

For dance education in Indonesia, the lesson from these studies is that tradition needs to be taught together with its modes of transmission. Prospective dance teachers need not only to master the movement vocabulary of coastal dances but also to learn directly from the artists and communities who own them, to understand the history of cultural encounter that gave rise to them, and to experience how these dances are performed in their social contexts. The planned collaboration between Universitas Negeri Semarang and the University of Malaya for pre-service teachers, which brings together the Gado-Gado Semarang dance and Malay Japin as a means of cultural diplomacy, is one such effort. If associated with enculturation theory, this kind of learning positions students not merely as recipients of a repertoire but as part of the process of cultural transmission itself.

**Technology as an Extension of the Body, Not a Replacement**

The The encounter between dance and digital technology is not new. Faver and Stein (2001) had already outlined a long-term research agenda for digital stage architecture. Birringer (2004) discussed interactive dance and telepresence through the production *Here I come again/Flying Birdman*, which involved collaborators in Europe and Brazil, while highlighting the collaborative cultural politics of online performance. Mandilian et al. (2008, 2010) documented *Information Overload* at Drexel University, in which dancers appeared with MP3 players, PDAs, and mobile phones, and employed infrared-based visual tracking and color histograms. The work required collaboration among programs in performing arts, digital media, electrical and computer engineering, and the music industry. However, a decade later, Dania et al. (2011) concluded that these advanced technologies had still not entered everyday classroom practice in movement and dance education.

Social media subsequently changed the situation. Parrish (2016) notes that telecommunications, video-sharing sites such as YouTube, and social media have multiplied the number of people interested in dance and dance education. Li et al. (2018) studied Generation Z students and their teachers in three public high school dance programs in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. They found that research on technology use at this level remained very scarce. Huddy (2017) observes that digital technology has struggled to enter the dance technique studio because technique training relies heavily on real-time experiential learning. Through action research,

Huddy shows that technology can expand student engagement when used for collaborative and co-creative experiences. In the domain of creation, Cisneros et al. (2019) developed virtual reality tools for choreography through the WhoLoDancE project, Babcock (2024) introduced interactive media in choreography for undergraduate students, and Zhang and Wu (2025) designed a curriculum that integrates software coding with dance education through three new courses.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced all of these practices to be tested within a short time. Saearani (2024) describes how a teaching and creative movement course at a university in Malaysia was delivered online through Google Meet and video, combining synchronous and asynchronous strategies. The study notes that resources, technological capability, and students' psychological condition strongly determined the success of learning. Zeitner (2023), through self-study research conducted in 2020 and 2021, shows that camerawork and interdisciplinary teaching and learning can help overcome physical boundaries in online dance improvisation teaching.

The most recent studies are moving towards artificial intelligence and immersive environments. Guang and Xueliang (2025) examined 491 students learning folk dance in an immersive virtual reality environment. Wang (2025) developed an augmented reality application that adapts to the progress and learning style of 150 participants. Li (2026) compared virtual-reality-based and conventional dance lessons for preschool children in terms of movement accuracy, rhythm synchronization, engagement, and motivation. Zhou et al. (2024) designed a system that generates dance sequences from music analysis and then presents a digital human as a tutor. Xu et al. (2025) tested a dance training tool combining mobile interaction, artificial intelligence, and timely feedback with 60 college students. Büyükgökoğlan and Uğuz (2025) developed a pose-estimation-based evaluation system for Turkish folk dance using skeletal data from one teacher and nine students performing five dance figures. Zhou and Sangsawang (2026) propose a data-driven blended learning framework for minority dance education, citing the limited number of expert instructors and geographic barriers. Other studies address AI-based risk analysis of dance technique (Lin, 2022), dance teaching systems based on digital media (Gong & Cao, 2024), the teaching quality of multimedia-based dance programs (He & Fang, 2025), and even the financial implications of dance teaching management information systems (Liu & Tian, 2023).

From the standpoint of embodiment, most of these studies read the body as data: skeletal coordinates, positional accuracy, and conformity to rhythmic counts. This reading is useful but incomplete. Javanese dance aesthetics recognizes three measures of dance quality: *wiraga* (mastery of movement), *wirama* (precision of rhythm), and *wirasa* (depth of feeling). Motion capture and artificial intelligence are already reasonably capable of measuring *wiraga* and *wirama*. However, wirasa can only be read by another body that is present and understands the dance's cultural context. Without this awareness, a figure of traditional dance may be judged "correct" by an algorithm while having lost the meaning that makes it a traditional dance.

Interestingly, the most convincing empirical evidence comes from models that combine technology with bodily presence. Dou (2024) compared three learning groups: face-to-face, fully online, and blended, and found that the blended group achieved the best results and was more encouraged to reflect and think critically. Astuti et al. (2026) show that combining the mirror, a tool long familiar in the dance studio, with self-recorded video improved the performance and creativity

of 46 dance students in Indonesia. Warburton (2024) adds a more critical note. When dance students become content creators on platforms such as TikTok, dance educators need to ask what their responsibility is in supporting students who wish to take part in the "creator economy." When associated with the concept of embodiment, technology is most meaningful when it extends the body's reach, memory, and awareness, not when it takes over the body's role as a source of knowledge.

## The Body–Tradition–Future Framework

Based on the three axes above, this paper formulates the Body–Tradition–Future framework. The framework does not treat body, tradition, and technology as three equal and separate elements. The body is placed at the center, while tradition and technology become two directions it can travel. Tradition gives the body memory, that is, knowledge transmitted by a community through movement, values, and relationships. Technology gives the body reach, that is, the capacity to record, reflect, share, and collaborate beyond the limits of physical space. The dance education of the future trains the body to remember and to imagine at the same time. The three principles of this framework and their forms in pre-service dance teacher education are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Principles of the Body–Tradition–Future framework and their forms in pre-service dance teacher education

| Principle | Pedagogical question | Form in learning |
|---|---|---|
| The body as a source of knowledge | What does the student's body know, and how does the student learn to read it? | Somatic practice and embodied reflection; rejection of the myth of the perfect body; awareness among pre-service teachers that their bodies serve as models in the classroom |
| Tradition as a living pedagogy | How does the owning community transmit movement, values, and meaning? | Learning directly from artists and communities; study of the history and social context of dance; imitation accompanied by explanation of meaning. |
| Technology as an extension of the body | When does technology extend bodily experience, and when does it replace it? | Self-recorded video and digital feedback for reflection; blended learning; cross-border online collaboration; critical literacy towards social media |

The three principles interlock. A body without tradition easily loses its roots, so that movement becomes mere skill. Tradition without a self-aware body easily turns into rote memorization and obedience. Technology without body and tradition risks reducing dance to data that can be measured but has lost its meaning. The framework, therefore, proposes one simple measure for every innovation in dance education: does the innovation make students more sensitive to their bodies, more understanding of their traditions, and better prepared to carry both into the future?

## Implications for Pre-service Dance Teacher Education

The first implication concerns the curriculum. Chen and Peng-Fei (2025) constructed competency indicators for dance education programs in China using a two-round modified Delphi method, in response to curricula that lean too heavily on technical skills. Risner (2010) likewise urges educators and administrators to re-envision postsecondary dance education to ensure its relevance in the twenty-first century. In Indonesia, the curriculum for prospective dance teachers

needs to give balanced space to movement mastery, cultural literacy, reflective capacity, and digital literacy. Courses in traditional dance can be designed around fieldwork with communities, following the approach of He et al. (2026), so that students experience tradition in its place of origin.

The second implication concerns assessment. The assessment of dance practice has tended to rely on movement accuracy and conformity with the teacher's model. Automated evaluation systems, such as the one developed by Büyükgökoğlan and Uğuz (2025), can help instructors monitor student progress more objectively. However, they should be treated as supporting tools rather than the sole judge. The measures of *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa* can serve as the basis of a rubric that combines technology-assisted assessment, assessment by instructors and artists, and students' written or oral reflection on their bodily experience.

The third implication concerns collaboration. What Birringer (2004) pioneered as telepresence in performance can now be realized as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), bringing together students from different dance traditions. Such collaboration is not intended to replace the bodily encounter but to prepare for and deepen it. Saearani's (2024) experience in Malaysia shows that resource readiness and students' psychological condition need to be considered from the outset.

The fourth implication concerns the diversity of bodies and learner well-being. Prospective dance teachers will teach in classrooms that do not select their students. Olvera's (2008) findings on the health benefits of cultural dance, Zurvas's (2026) inclusive pedagogy, and Cheesman's (2021) attention to community building show that the dance class can become a healthy and welcoming space, provided that teachers are equipped with ways of teaching that do not demand a single ideal body. Lastly, prospective dance teachers also need critical literacy towards social media so that they can accompany pupils who are growing up as both viewers and creators of dance content (Parrish, 2016; Warburton, 2024).

Finally, this review of 57 publications provides a complete picture of how dance education moves among three pulls: a body that demands recognition as a source of knowledge, a tradition that asks to be taught alongside its modes of transmission, and a technology that offers new reach while carrying the risk of reduction. The Body–Tradition–Future framework answers the question of this paper by affirming that reimagining dance education does not require a choice between safeguarding tradition and welcoming technology. What must be safeguarded is the body's position at the center of learning, so that every change ultimately leads to a body that is more aware, more rooted, and better prepared for a world that keeps changing.

## CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the future of dance education depends on its ability to place the body at the center of learning. The review of 57 Scopus-indexed publications shows that studies of embodiment, traditional dance, and technology in dance education have so far proceeded separately, with technological innovation tending to treat the body as data. In contrast, the preservation of tradition tends to stop at the teaching of repertoire. The Body–Tradition–Future framework brings the three together through three principles, namely the body as a source of knowledge, tradition as a living pedagogy, and technology as an extension of bodily experience. Within this framework, tradition gives the body memory, and technology gives the body reach.

It is therefore suggested that teacher education institutions review their dance education curricula by giving balanced space to movement mastery, cultural literacy, embodied reflection, and digital literacy. Dance instructors are encouraged to use technology as a tool for reflection and collaboration rather than as a substitute for the bodily encounter in the studio, and to develop assessment rubrics that include the dimensions of feeling and cultural meaning. For researchers, this conceptual framework needs to be tested through empirical studies, for example, action research or the development of technology-assisted traditional dance learning models in arts education programs, so that its principles can be measured and refined.

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