SHAPING THE WHOLE HUMAN BEING: DANCE AS AN EDUCATIONAL VEHICLE

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ABSTRACT

Education is fundamentally oriented toward the holistic development of learners' potential, encompassing not only knowledge but also personality, values, skills, and the capacity to interact meaningfully with the surrounding environment. Within this framework, dance can be positioned as an educational "vehicle" because the experience of dancing integrates the body, mind, emotion, creativity, social interaction, and cultural values in a unified process. However, dance is still commonly treated merely as an artistic skill to be mastered rather than as a comprehensive educational experience, leaving its contribution to holistic human formation insufficiently articulated. This article aims to examine the position of dance as an educational vehicle in the formation of the whole human being. A literature review was conducted using a descriptive-interpretative approach, drawing on national and international academic sources concerning dance education, character education, creativity, learner development, and cultural integration. The findings show that dance learning has the potential to develop physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and characterological dimensions simultaneously, while the repeated practice inherent in dance cultivates discipline, responsibility, cooperation, independence, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Traditional dance further opens a space for internalizing values and local wisdom through movement, music, narrative, symbol, and cultural context. The study concludes that dance should not be positioned merely as an artistic competency, but as an educational experience that connects reason, feeling, body, values, and action in the process of shaping a whole human being, offering both theoretical grounding and pedagogical direction for arts and character education in schools.

Keywords: *dance education; whole human development; character education; creativity; embodied learning; cultural identity; local wisdom*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially a process designed to help learners develop their full potential. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere in which learners actively develop their potential, including spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2003). The national education goals likewise position the development of individuals who are faithful, ethical, competent, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible as a central aim of the educational process.

This formulation indicates that education cannot be understood merely as a process of knowledge transfer. Education encompasses the formation of human beings capable of thinking, managing themselves, building social relationships, developing skills, and internalizing values. Within this perspective, arts education occupies a strategic space because it offers learning experiences that are expressive, creative, affective, social, and psychomotor in nature.

Dance is one form of arts education that directly engages the body as its primary medium. Dancing is not only concerned with mastering a repertoire of movement, but also demands attention, appreciation, coordination, creativity, discipline, and the capacity to interact with others. Internationally, dance education has increasingly been framed through the lens of embodiment, in which learning is understood to occur through the whole person rather than through cognition alone (Anttila, 2018; Markula & Frantsi, 2024). From this standpoint, dance learning can become an educational experience that brings together physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions.

A growing body of research supports the association between dance learning and character formation. Fitriana et al. (2018), for instance, show that dance learning can contribute to the development of religious, honest, disciplined, creative, independent, and responsible character. In extracurricular settings, dance can also become a space for cultivating a friendly character through interaction, cooperation, and mutual assistance among learners (Wulan et al., 2019). Beyond character, dance also carries measurable developmental benefits: a systematic review by Tao et al. (2022) demonstrates that dance produces physiological and psychological benefits for children and adolescents, while an experimental study by Kotaman et al. (2024) shows that a structured dancing program significantly improves young children's social skills. On another dimension, traditional dance contains cultural values that can become a source of education. Andari and Sayoga (2023) show that dance can be used to teach moral and ethical values through the relationship between movement, narrative, and cultural philosophy. Edinon (2022) similarly demonstrates that traditional dance contains religious, moral, social, and cultural values that can be implemented in school-based dance instruction, while a global systematic comparison by Liu et al. (2024) confirms that indigenous and cultural dance education consistently functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission and identity formation across diverse national contexts.

Despite this expanding evidence base, most studies examine the physical, character-related, or cultural contributions of dance in isolation, and international scholarship rarely engages with the Indonesian discourse on "insan utuh" (the whole human being) that underlies national education policy. Consequently, dance continues to be treated predominantly as an artistic subject matter rather than as an integrative educational vehicle. Building on this gap, the present article discusses dance not merely as instructional content within arts education, but as a "vehicle" of education—an experiential space through which the educational process can unfold in an integrated manner. The discussion is directed toward the relationship between dance and character

formation, holistic development, creativity, cultural identity, and the development of the whole human being, synthesizing national and international literature to offer a conceptual contribution relevant to global dance-education discourse. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines the method of the literature review; Section 3 presents the results and discussion across seven thematic dimensions; and Section 4 offers the conclusion and implications.

METHOD

This article employs a literature review method with a descriptive-interpretative approach. The sources examined include journal articles, education policy documents, and relevant academic sources concerning dance education, learner development, character education, creativity, and local culture, drawn from both national (Indonesian) and international publications indexed in databases such as Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. The review proceeded through four stages: (1) identification of sources relevant to the theme of dance education; (2) selection of information related to physical, cognitive, emotional, social, characterological, creative, and cultural development; (3) thematic categorization of findings; and (4) interpretation to construct a conceptual synthesis regarding the position of dance as an educational "vehicle" in the formation of the whole human being. This review is not intended as a systematic review with meta-analytic procedures, but as a conceptual synthesis clarifying the position of dance education within the broader project of holistic human development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dance as an Educational “Vehicle”

The term “vehicle” is used in this article to affirm that dance is not merely an object of study, but also a space in which educational experience takes place. When learners study dance, they do not simply learn to execute movement; they also learn to observe, remember, feel, interpret, practice, interact, create, and reflect. In the National Core Arts Standards in Dance, the process of dance learning is articulated through four artistic processes: creating, performing, responding, and connecting. Together, these processes demonstrate that the experience of learning dance encompasses creation, performance, response or reflection, and the connection of dance experience to broader contexts and knowledge (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014).

This perspective affirms that dance is an active learning experience. Learners can solve movement problems, express ideas through movement, think critically about their artistic experience, and connect that experience to other experiences, contexts, and meanings. A single dance activity can therefore encompass multiple learning processes at once (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014).

In dance education, embodied experience becomes a central part of the learning process. The body functions as a medium for understanding movement, space, time, energy, rhythm, and expression. This experience does not stand alone but is connected to thinking, social experience, and reflection. Anttila (2018) argues that embodied learning entails that learning takes place within the whole human being and between human beings, situated within social and physical reality—positioning embodiment, rather than cognition alone, as the foundation of learning. Markula and Frantsi (2024) similarly show that dance education grounded in embodied experience can bring together bodily analysis, social theory, and the lived experience of dancing, producing a more embodied and holistic learning process. Dance learning, therefore, should not be understood merely as the acquisition of movement technique. Edinon (2022) shows that dance learning in

schools encompasses not only the psychomotor domain but also the cognitive and affective domains, meaning that dance activity can become a learning experience that involves bodily skill together with thought, feeling, value, and meaning.

The position of dance as an educational "vehicle" becomes increasingly clear when learning is designed to connect movement experience with learners' lives. Learners can learn through movement problem-solving, expressing ideas through movement, engaging in reflection, and connecting dance experience to the context of everyday life. Dance experience can therefore simultaneously become an artistic, cognitive, affective, social, and cultural experience (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014; Markula & Frantsi, 2024; Anttila, 2018). From this perspective, dance is positioned not merely as an artwork or a skill to be mastered, but as an educational vehicle that brings together body, mind, feeling, experience, creativity, and value. It is here that dance occupies a strategic position in the process of forming the whole human being.

Dance and Character Formation

Character formation in dance learning occurs primarily through process and habituation. Repeated practice requires learners to attend regularly, follow rules, heed instruction, exercise self-control, and take responsibility for assigned tasks. Fitriana et al. (2018) show that dance learning can contribute to religious, honest, disciplined, creative, independent, and responsible character. This finding indicates that character is not always taught through verbal advice, but can be developed through concrete learning experience. In group activities, dance learning also demands the capacity to adjust to others: learners must attend to the tempo, space, position, and movement of fellow group members so that a performance can proceed harmoniously. Cooperation and the capacity to appreciate others therefore become inherent parts of the learning process. Wulan et al. (2019) demonstrate that extracurricular dance activity can build a friendly character through interaction among students, providing opportunities for learners to help one another, get to know their peers, and build social relationships. These findings are consistent with broader international evidence: a review of dance's contribution to social-emotional competence indicates that dance promotes such competence by providing opportunities for self-attunement, nonverbal expression, and interpersonal synchrony, mechanisms that similarly underlie the social gains reported by Kotaman et al. (2024) among young children participating in a structured dance program.

Dance can thus become a space for the habituation of character through concrete experience. Values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, independence, and appreciation of others are not merely discussed, but experienced and practiced.

Physical, Emotional, Social, and Cognitive Development

The formation of the whole human being requires the integration of multiple developmental dimensions. Dance education offers the opportunity to develop several of these dimensions simultaneously.

Physical Development

Dance uses the body as its principal medium. Learners learn to coordinate the movement of the head, hands, torso, and feet; to regulate balance; to develop flexibility; and to understand the relationship among space, time, and energy. Wahyudi and Gunawan (2020) show that creative dance learning in early childhood provides space for both motor development and creativity. A systematic review by Tao et al. (2022) further confirms, across a substantial body of international evidence, that dance produces measurable physiological and psychological benefits for children and adolescents, including improvements in motor competence, cardiorespiratory fitness, and

mood. Taken together, these findings indicate that the experience of dancing can support the development of movement ability alongside children's confidence in exploration.

Emotional Development

Dance also becomes a space for emotional expression. Movement allows learners to express mood, character, and ideas without always relying on verbal language. This process can help learners develop expressive capacity and understand emotional experience. Kotaman et al. (2024) note that dance functions as a medium for transferring emotional and social information among group members, and that the synchronization of movement among dancers facilitates prosocial behavior such as helping and sharing.

Social Development

Group dance requires learners to build coordination and interaction. They learn to share space, maintain harmony, attend to a partner or group, and accept differences in ability. Such experience gives dance learning a strong social dimension: dance does not only develop the individual as a dancer, but also the individual as part of a group. Kotaman et al. (2024) provide experimental evidence that a structured dancing program significantly improves young children's social skills relative to a comparison group, reinforcing the conceptual link between group dance practice and social competence documented in the Indonesian extracurricular context by Wulan et al. (2019).

Cognitive Development

Learning dance also involves remembering, analyzing, understanding patterns, solving movement problems, and developing ideas. Learners are not limited to imitation; they can be guided to explore, modify, combine, and create movement. Suwarjiya and Sulistyawati (2022) show that learning newly created dance forms gives students room to modify and create movement variations, making the learning activity more active and creative. Taken together, dance offers a learning experience in which physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects can develop simultaneously.

Dance as a Space for Creativity and Self-Expression

Creativity is one of the essential elements of dance education. Learners need opportunities to explore movement, develop ideas, improvise, and organize movement into a meaningful form. Suwarjiya and Sulistyawati (2022) show that learning newly created dance can expand students' creative space because students are not only observing and imitating, but are also encouraged to modify and create movement.

Wahyudi and Gunawan (2020) similarly show that creative dance can be used in early childhood learning through imaginative and play-based activity, giving children the opportunity to generate movement responses based on their own ideas and experiences. Creativity in dance education, in the end, is not solely concerned with producing new movement. Creativity is also related to the courage to try, the capacity to make decisions, problem-solving, flexibility of thought, and the ability to attribute meaning to experience. Dance learning should therefore not stop at imitating the teacher's movement, but should develop toward observing, exploring, improvising, creating, performing, and reflecting.

Dance as a Medium for Cultural Internalization and Local Wisdom

Traditional dance has a close relationship with the social and cultural environment in which it grows. Within it can be found symbols, values, norms, narratives, worldviews, and community identity.

Andari and Sayoga (2023) show that dance can become a medium of character education through the relationship among movement, narrative, moral values, ethics, and cultural philosophy. Edinon (2022) likewise shows that traditional dance contains religious, moral, social, and cultural values that can be implemented in school-based learning. Yeni and Supriyanto (2024) show that the values embedded in traditional dance can be taught through movement and meaning. A global systematic comparison of intercultural and indigenous dance education by Liu et al. (2024), covering studies conducted across 2010–2024, further confirms that cultural dance education consistently functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission and identity formation across diverse national settings, from ethnic dance traditions in Europe to indigenous dance practices in the Americas and Asia—underscoring that the pattern observed in Indonesian traditional dance is part of a broader, cross-cultural phenomenon rather than a context-specific anomaly. Dance learning, therefore, does not merely transmit a form of movement from one generation to the next, but can also revive the meaning embedded within that movement.

In this context, local wisdom becomes a source of learning. Learners can study how a community understands the relationship between humans and God, between humans and one another, and between humans and their environment. This process helps learners understand that culture is not merely a relic of the past, but a source of value that can be reinterpreted in present-day life. Traditional dance thus performs two interrelated educational functions: developing the learner as an individual and strengthening cultural awareness as part of collective life.

Dance, Cultural Identity, and the Formation of the Whole Human Being

The formation of the whole human being is not only related to individual competence, but also to a person's capacity to understand who they are, where they come from, and how they relate to their social and cultural environment. Learning traditional dance opens a space for learners to encounter cultural identity through direct experience. Learners do not merely view dance as a spectacle; they experience movement, music, floor patterns, symbols, costume, narrative, and the context of performance. This experience can strengthen learners' connection to their culture. As the cross-national synthesis by Liu et al. (2024) suggests, cultural dance education fosters social cohesion and cultural identity precisely because it conveys cultural values and social meaning through embodied participation rather than passive observation. Dance thus becomes a means of recognizing cultural values and identity while simultaneously developing the capacity to reinterpret that experience within the context of present-day life.

Dance Education as an Integration of Mind, Heart, and Skill

Based on the discussion above, dance education can be understood as an integrative process. The mind develops as learners observe, remember, understand, analyze, solve problems, and create. The heart develops as learners appreciate, feel, respect, exercise self-control, build empathy, and internalize values. The body develops as learners train coordination, balance, precision, flexibility, expression, and technical mastery.

Social and cultural skills develop as learners cooperate, understand cultural identity, appreciate difference, and connect dance experience to life. Dance education should therefore not be confined to the psychomotor domain alone; it can become a multidimensional learning experience that integrates cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, and cultural aspects. This integrative character is echoed in recent international work on embodied reflective practice, in which dance-based reflection is shown to support the development of self-perception, reflexivity,

and professional growth by uniting bodily experience with cognitive and emotional processing (Schwender et al., 2025).

It is at this point that the term "vehicle" becomes relevant. Dance becomes a "vehicle" because, through the experience of dancing, the educational process unfolds concretely and comprehensively. Learners learn through the body, but that bodily experience is enriched by thought, feeling, value, social interaction, and cultural context.

CONCLUSION

Dance can be positioned as an educational "vehicle" because its learning process enables learners to develop through experiences that involve body, mind, heart, creativity, social interaction, and culture. Dance is not only concerned with the mastery of movement skill; it can also become a space for character formation, creativity development, emotional management, cooperation, responsibility, and the reinforcement of cultural identity.

Dance learning shows that the educational process can unfold through experience that is simultaneously aesthetic and ethical. Discipline is built through practice, responsibility through tasks, cooperation through group dance, and creativity through exploration and creation, while cultural values are internalized through movement, music, narrative, symbol, and the context of tradition—patterns that, as the international literature reviewed in this article demonstrates, recur across diverse cultural and national settings rather than being unique to any single tradition.

The formation of the whole human being through dance education can thus be understood as a process that integrates mind, heart, body, values, skill, and social-cultural life. Dance becomes an educational "vehicle" when learning does not stop at the ability to perform movement, but brings learners toward the capacity to understand, appreciate, create, interact, and derive meaning from experience as part of the formation of the self. For practice, these findings suggest that dance curricula should be designed to deliberately connect technical training with reflective, social, and cultural components rather than treating movement mastery as an end in itself. Future research is encouraged to examine, through comparative or longitudinal empirical designs, how these integrative benefits of dance education manifest across different cultural and institutional contexts.

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