

# Dance Education in Early Childhood: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives from Kindergartens in Yogyakarta

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This study explores in depth the theories, concepts, and implementation of dance education in kindergarten institutions in Yogyakarta.

**Objectives:** The study was conducted in several kindergartens in Yogyakarta.

**Methods:** A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving data collection through observation, interviews, documentation, and pre- and post-learning kinesthetic tests. The sample comprised five kindergartens selected purposively.

**Results:** The implementation of image streaming and collaborative thematic approaches proved effective in significantly enhancing children's kinesthetic skills and creativity. The primary challenges identified were the limited competence of teachers and lack of supporting facilities.

**Conclusions:** Recommendations include strengthening teacher training, integrating dance into the curriculum, and providing adequate learning media to support the potential development of early childhood. The findings are expected to inform policy and educational practices in early childhood art education, particularly in Yogyakarta.

**Keywords:** dance education, kindergarten, creativity, early childhood development.

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is a crucial phase in shaping children's personality and intelligence. Art, particularly dance, plays a vital role in developing children's gross motor, social, emotional, and cognitive skills in an integrated manner. Dance is not merely a form of entertainment but a medium of expression that nurtures children's self-confidence and imagination from an early age (Ismail, 2021).

A study by Mayasarokh et al. (2023) at KB Rabbani Kuningan showed that structured dance education significantly improved children's gross motor skills, with pre-test to post-test scores increasing from 10.55 to 18.90 ( $p < 0.001$ ). This underscores dance as an effective educational medium for kinesthetic skill development.

Similarly, research by Viodita et al. (2022) at TK Khalifah Yogyakarta demonstrated that the image streaming method drastically increased children's creativity, from 15% to 90% of children exhibiting high creativity after two learning cycles.

However, Labib & Pamungkas (2024) found that many kindergartens in Yogyakarta still employed conventional methods in dance education, limited to movement demonstration without space for individual exploration or expression. Nugraha (2023) emphasized that the exploration-expression-appreciation learning model is essential in allowing children to create, respond to music freely, and appreciate others' work.

Yogyakarta, known as an educational city, has over 500 kindergartens with varied approaches and facilities. Nevertheless, Pamungkas (2023) reported that only 35% of kindergartens have an integrated dance program within their curriculum and ongoing evaluation.

This research thus aims to examine the effectiveness of dance education methods in Yogyakarta's kindergartens, identify challenges and opportunities, and provide recommendations for optimizing early childhood dance education.

## OBJECTIVES

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. A descriptive qualitative method was used to portray the learning process, while a quasi-experimental quantitative method was applied to measure changes in kinesthetic abilities and creativity through pretest and posttest assessments. The research was conducted in five kindergartens in Yogyakarta, selected through purposive sampling. The participants consisted of teachers, children aged 4–6 years, and school principals.

Data were collected through participatory observation, interviews, documentation, and kinesthetic ability tests. Qualitative data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, while quantitative data were processed using paired t-tests with the assistance of SPSS or Excel. Data validation was carried out through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking.

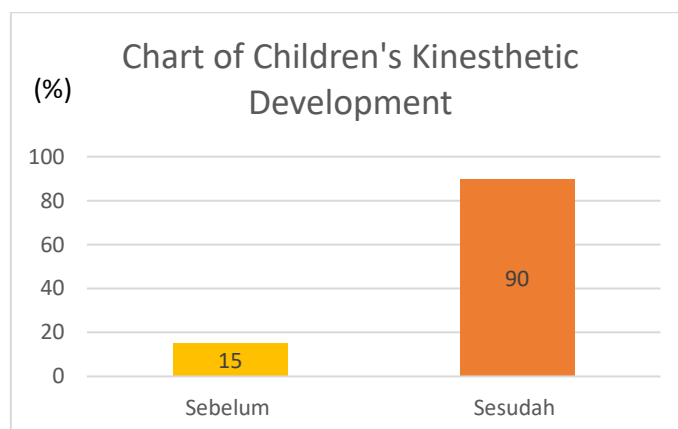
## RESULTS

### Implementation of Dance Learning

All five kindergartens implemented dance education with varying methods and frequency. TK Khalifah and UNY Laboratory Kindergarten applied the most structured models.

### Improvement in Kinesthetic Abilities

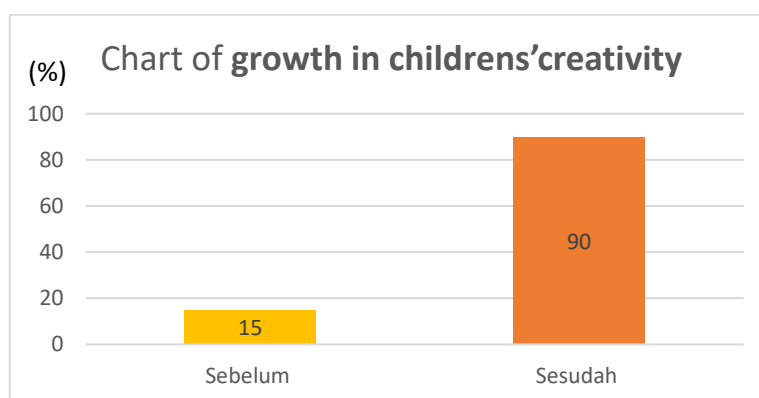
Pre-test and post-test scores showed a significant increase in children's kinesthetic skills across all kindergartens, ranging from 60% to 80%.



*Gambar 1. Chart of Children's Kinesthetic Development*

### Growth in Creativity

Children's creativity improved from 15% before the program to 90% afterward, particularly in kindergartens employing image streaming and collaborative approaches.



Gambar 2. Chart of growth in childrens'creativity

These findings reinforce that dance education not only supports artistic expression but also contributes substantially to motor and cognitive development.

### Challenges and Solutions

The primary challenges identified include limited teacher competence, inadequate physical space for movement, insufficient instructional aids, and the lack of integration of dance into the curriculum. Proposed solutions involve providing teacher training, optimizing available space, developing instructional media, and integrating dance activities into the daily lesson plans (RPPH).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the theory of dance education that emphasizes exploratory and expressive approaches. The effectiveness of the image streaming method is also confirmed. However, the challenges particularly those related to teacher competence and infrastructural limitations require serious attention in order to enhance the quality of dance education in kindergartens.

This research shows that the implementation of dance education in kindergartens across Yogyakarta varies in both methods and levels of success. These findings align with Labib and Pamungkas (2024), who highlighted disparities in the practice of dance education within early childhood institutions, where most schools still rely on conventional methods such as demonstration and movement imitation. While these approaches can be effective for developing basic motor skills, they offer limited opportunities for children to explore, create, and express themselves freely.

### The Advantages of the Exploration, Expression, and Appreciation (3E) Learning Model

The use of a learning model that emphasizes exploration, expression, and appreciation (3E) has been proven to significantly enhance children's creativity and kinesthetic abilities. The exploration phase allows children to experiment with various movements and develop their motor skills in an enjoyable and pressure-free environment. The expression phase provides opportunities for children to present the results of their exploration, which psychologically fosters self-confidence and non-verbal communication skills (Dils & Albright, 2001). Meanwhile, the appreciation phase helps children learn to respect themselves and others, cultivating empathy and a positive attitude toward the arts.

The image streaming method implemented in several kindergartens emerged as a key factor in the observed increase in creativity. By engaging children's imagination through musical and narrative stimuli, this method stimulates the integrated development of cognitive and sensorimotor functions. These findings are consistent with the study by Viodita et al. (2022), which reported a substantial increase in children's creativity following two cycles of image streaming-based instruction.

## **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors**

Although many kindergartens have made efforts to implement dance education, several significant challenges remain. One of the main barriers is the limited competence of teachers. Many early childhood educators have not received specialized training in dance, which hinders their ability to design innovative and engaging instructional methods. This finding aligns with Wulandari (2021), who emphasized the importance of professional development and training to support effective arts education.

Another major constraint lies in the lack of adequate facilities. Limited physical space for movement, as well as the scarcity of teaching aids such as audio-visual equipment and dance props, negatively affects the quality of instruction. This situation is consistent with Pamungkas (2023), who reported that only a small proportion of kindergartens in Yogyakarta possess adequate infrastructure to support arts learning. Furthermore, the insufficient integration of dance into the official curriculum results in dance often being treated as an extracurricular or optional activity, rather than an essential part of daily learning. Consequently, this leads to limited evaluation and underdeveloped instructional design in dance education.

## **Implications for the Development of Arts Education in Early Childhood**

The findings of this study suggest that optimizing dance education in kindergartens requires a holistic approach that encompasses teacher capacity building, the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure, and clear curriculum integration. Regular training for teachers on effective dance teaching techniques, along with the development of innovative learning media (such as interactive audio-visual tools), are crucial strategies that must be prioritized.

Furthermore, the explicit integration of dance into the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH) would encourage more serious and consistent implementation, while also facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of children's progress. This integration supports not only the development of gross motor skills, but also contributes to social-emotional, cognitive, and language development—aligning with the holistic principles of early childhood education as outlined in Ministerial Regulation No. 137 of 2014.

## **The Relevance of Local Culture and Indigenous Wisdom**

As a cultural city, Yogyakarta holds immense potential for developing dance education that is not only universal in nature but also enriched with local values. The use of traditional dance as a learning medium can instill in children a love for their cultural heritage while simultaneously contributing to the preservation of local traditions. This approach provides an added value that distinguishes kindergartens in Yogyakarta from those in other regions and helps to strengthen children's cultural identity from an early age.

## **Linkages with Child Development Theories**

From a theoretical standpoint, dance education supports the development of gross motor skills (Berger, 2017) and stimulates the right hemisphere of the brain, which is associated with creativity and emotional intelligence (Gardner, 1983). In addition, social-emotional development fostered through appreciation and collaboration in dance can help prepare children for positive interactions within their social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). This study thus reinforces the importance of integrating the arts as a vital and enjoyable component of holistic early childhood education.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of dance education in kindergartens across the Yogyakarta region is currently underway, yet it remains uneven and lacks systematic structure. Innovative instructional methods—such as image streaming and collaborative approaches—have been proven effective in enhancing young children's creativity and kinesthetic abilities. Nevertheless, many kindergarten teachers still require further training to competently manage dance instruction. Additionally, the availability of facilities and learning media for dance education remains limited, warranting greater attention and investment.

Given the vital role of dance in supporting the holistic development of children, the integration of dance content into the early childhood education (ECE) curriculum is an urgent priority. Therefore, it is recommended that the

Yogyakarta Education Office and early childhood education institutions organize regular dance education training for kindergarten teachers. The development of audio-visual learning media and supporting dance tools should also be prioritized. The kindergarten curriculum should explicitly incorporate dance education into its syllabus and assessment framework. Future research is encouraged to examine the long-term impact of dance education on various dimensions of child development in greater depth.

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