

Research on the Teaching Practice of Improvisational Sports Dance in University Public Physical Education Courses and Its Value in Promoting Physical and Mental Health

Hu Jiayuan

School of Physical Education, Yan'an University, Yan'an, Shaanxi 716000, China.

Abstract: Universities are carrying out curriculum reforms to make public physical education more diversified and personalized. On this basis, this paper explores viable teaching schemes to integrate improvisational sports dance into university public PE courses. The discussion takes advantage of this dance genre's unique educational traits: it supports independent self-expression and helps learners achieve balanced physical and mental development. Literature review and observation are adopted as core research methods. The research findings show that improvisational sports dance can activate students' creative thinking and emotional expression. Continuous participation brings simultaneous improvements in physical functions and psychological literacy, which verifies its practical application value. This research provides a feasible direction for public physical education to advance college students' all-round development. It also puts forward suggestions to strengthen popularization work and optimize supporting systems for teaching.

Keywords: university public sports; improvisational dance; teaching practice; physical and mental health; value promotion

0. Introduction

Physical and mental health constitutes the foundation of people's all-round growth and lifelong quality of life. As society and economy keep advancing, students' living and growth conditions have changed greatly, and psychological troubles have become increasingly prominent. The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China highlighted the significance of attaching importance to mental health and psychological services. Boosting students' physical and mental wellbeing and supporting their holistic development has long drawn widespread attention from the public and society.

Nowadays, many college students rely heavily on takeout food, which leads to irregular eating habits and damages physical fitness. Staying up late scrolling mobile phones disturbs regular sleep. Long hours of sitting in classrooms and libraries also trigger physical discomfort such as lumbar strain. Besides physical sub-health, contemporary undergraduates face various psychological barriers including anxiety, depression, loneliness, social fear and academic burnout. Multiple factors lead to these problems: heavier academic tasks and fierce competition cause setbacks in study; severe employment pressure brings worries about future development; the transition from high school to university changes interpersonal connections, and some students fall into isolation.

College students are in a critical phase of self-exploration. They hold curiosity toward reality and future possibilities, yet may feel dissatisfied and confused about their career planning. Given such circumstances, the Ministry of Education together with 16 other departments jointly released the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Students' Mental Health in the New Era (2023-2025). The document clearly points out that comprehensive education should be promoted to improve students' mental health. Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the plan fully implements the Party's educational guidelines. It adheres to cultivating talents for the Party and the nation, fulfills the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education, sticks to the health-first educational concept, and elevates the priority of mental health work in schools.

1. Definition of Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

1.1 Public Physical Education Courses in Universities

University public physical education aims to facilitate college students' physical and mental all-round development. It helps learners improve sports literacy and motor skills, cultivates lasting interest and habits in physical exercise, strengthens teamwork awareness and competitive spirit, and ultimately raises students' overall physical fitness level.

1.2 Physical and Mental Health

Physical and mental health refers to comprehensive wellbeing covering physiology, psychology and social adaptation, covering three dimensions: physical wellness, mental health and social adaptability. In concrete terms, it describes a state where people maintain sound physical functions and positive, stable psychological conditions. People under such status can cope with environmental pressure and challenges effectively, and reach harmonious balance between body and mind.

1.3 Improvisational Sports Dance

Improvisational sports dance consists of spontaneous movements created by dancers without prearranged choreography. Movements are inspired by music, personal emotions or surrounding environment. Three core characteristics can be summarized as follows. First, creative improvisation: movements originate from instant inspiration instead of fixed dance routines. Second, emotion-oriented expression: dancers focus on natural emotional release rather than deliberate preset performance. Third, sensitivity to external stimuli: dance movements are generated from immediate responses to the surrounding environment.

2. Teaching Practice Design for Improvisational Sports Dance in University Public Physical Education Courses

2.1 Design of the Teaching Objectives System

2.1.1 Fundamental Objectives

During classroom teaching, teachers need to guide students to form good habits of pre-class warm-up and post-class relaxation. Sufficient physical activation before training can effectively prevent sports injuries. Dynamic warm-up activities and static stretching can both serve this purpose.

In skill learning, students first need to distinguish common dance rhythms such as 3/4 and 4/4 beats. After that, they master basic sports dance elements, including typical basic steps such as samba steps and rumba square steps, simple static poses and hand expressions. Standard body posture is the core training focus at this stage. Gradually, students build body awareness and stable core control. With diversified teaching strategies, learners improve physical coordination and rhythmic perception, so they can coordinate movements with musical beats accurately. Moreover, students need to understand the core idea of improvisational sports dance: free expression without self-criticism. They should build confidence and dare to complete impromptu dancing in front of others, and break away from the worry of "imperfect movements".

2.1.2 Development Goals

On the basis of basic skills, repeated practice helps students consolidate core techniques and quickly grasp elementary requirements. Teachers correct improper movements in a timely manner, helping learners form distinctive movement styles and smoother action transitions, alongside better coordination and improvisation ability.

Students learn to capture rhythm shifts within music. They can independently adjust movement

range, speed and rhythm according to different musical styles. Such training improves physical flexibility and reaction capacity, enabling seamless coordination between movements and music and more flexible technical application. Meanwhile, students begin converting inner feelings such as joy, relaxation and calmness into dance movements matching musical styles, which effectively relieves psychological pressure. Targeted training for difficult technical points of various dance types further improves overall performance quality.

2.1.3 Ultimate Goal

Dancers do not need to design movement frameworks beforehand. They can create matching action sequences freely for random music, or finish thematic group choreography. During performance, inner emotions can be conveyed accurately through body language. Learners gradually reach the realm of "movements following the heart" and fully interpret the emotional tone and artistic style of music. Reasonable space arrangement matters greatly in improvisation. By adjusting movement strength, speed and posture, learners can express layered, complex emotions from multiple dimensions. With calm self-confidence, personal emotions integrate naturally into dancing, enhancing expressive force and unique aesthetic charm. In addition, teachers can supplement dance cultural knowledge including historical backgrounds and stage etiquette. Expanding relevant knowledge helps satisfy learners' individualized growth demands and lift their overall artistic literacy.

2.2 Innovation in Teaching Organization Models

2.2.1 Classroom Teaching

Basic training needs to be maintained consistently during classroom learning. When teaching improvisational sports dance, teachers can adopt game-based activities and interactive teaching forms, paired with timely encouragement. Such methods lower learning difficulty, stimulate students' interest and strengthen their confidence. Besides, educators should actively guide students to integrate personal hobbies, popular cultural elements and moves from other dance styles into creation. Teachers can set clear themes and require groups to complete improvisational choreography within designated musical materials. Meanwhile, instructors need to build a positive and inclusive classroom atmosphere throughout the whole teaching process.

2.2.2 Extracurricular Activities

Apart from classroom teaching, schools can build online platforms for improvisational sports dance teaching. High-quality demonstration videos and creative inspiration materials can be uploaded, supporting online communication and idea sharing among students. Students are encouraged to take part in small-scale performances and exchange events to accumulate practical experience.

Schools can organize inter-university dance exchange activities to broaden learners' horizons, promote experience exchange, support diversified personal growth and boost interdisciplinary integration. Public welfare dance shows and community activities can also be arranged, helping students turn dance skills into practical social capabilities.

In-class and extracurricular activities complement each other. Classroom learning lays practical foundations, while after-class activities provide platforms for knowledge application. This mode forms a closed loop of "learning-practice-feedback-improvement" and realizes the original educational value of improvisational sports dance.

3. The value of improvisational sports dance in promoting physical and mental health within university public physical education curricula

3.1 Value in Promoting Physical Health

Improvisational sports dance differs from rigid repetitive training. When learners spontaneously complete rotations, jumps and stretching movements, muscle strength and joint flexibility get improved naturally. Dancers can adjust movement range, rhythm and exercise intensity following different music, which brings prominent benefits to physical functions. Compared with fixed-intensity long-distance running, it suits college students' physical training demands better. Regular participation strengthens myocardial contraction, improves cardiopulmonary capacity, and helps students get rid of sub-health conditions.

During improvisation, the brain continuously processes musical rhythm, spatial information and limb signals and makes instant feedback. Long-term practice strengthens neural connections between the cerebral cortex and motor nerves, improving overall body coordination and reaction speed.

3.2 Value of Mental Health Promotion

A growing number of studies in recent years confirm that improvisational sports dance can deliver positive effects in psychological intervention. As an artistic form, it improves mental wellbeing via body movements and emotional experience. When dancing, college students can express inner feelings through body language to achieve emotional release and psychological catharsis. This activity can also stimulate endocrine secretion and generate substances such as endorphins to ease stress and tension, improving physical and mental conditions for students bearing accumulated negative emotions.

Sports dance is a comprehensive art with high aesthetic and entertainment value, combining sports, dance and music and integrating physical exercise with artistic cultivation. It supports holistic education for college students and exerts positive influence on physical fitness, mental state, personality shaping, aesthetic ability, social communication and environmental adaptability^[1]. Furthermore, improvisational sports dance facilitates harmony between body and mind, helping students gain deeper understanding of their physical conditions and inner world.

3.3 Teaching Value of the Course

Traditional university public physical education mainly focuses on fitness promotion and motor skill training, taking physical test standards and competitive results as important evaluation indicators. The cramming teaching mode is rigid and formulaic. Its obvious defect lies in ignoring students' dominant position in learning. Students have limited opportunities to reflect, communicate and explore cooperatively. Single teaching methods cannot fully activate students' initiative and autonomous learning awareness, nor effectively cultivate creative thinking^[2]. Supporting psychological adjustment measures are also insufficient.

By contrast, modern sports intervention for college students not only targets physical improvement, but also pays more attention to easing psychological pressure and emotional regulation. Different from the unified group training mode in the past, it focuses on personalized guidance and flexible diversified intervention schemes. This approach can effectively reduce academic anxiety, ease physical and mental burden, relieve emotional troubles and improve students' willingness to participate in sports.

4. Discussion

4.1 Feasibility and Optimization Directions of Improvisational Sports Dance Teaching in University Public Physical Education Courses

4.1.1 Advantages of the Teaching Model

Sports dance enjoys great popularity among college students in university physical education. Learners achieve satisfying learning outcomes, and gain more opportunities to learn social

etiquette and cross-cultural communication. Elegant steps, smooth movements and confident demeanor of dancers bring aesthetic enjoyment to audiences^[3].

Improvisational sports dance matches the individualized development orientation of university physical education. Its value is not limited to fitness improvement; it also develops students' innovation capacity and teamwork awareness. Nevertheless, many university public PE courses still adopt traditional competitive sports frameworks and fail to keep pace with educational demands. Conventional teaching relies on fixed lesson plans to teach standard movements, unable to satisfy diverse student needs or motivate active participation. On the contrary, the innovative mode of improvisational sports dance develops students' creativity and exploratory thinking in personalized training. This teaching method facilitates all-round student development, strengthens teacher-student communication, helps educators understand students' demands, creates active classroom atmosphere and lifts overall teaching efficiency.

4.1.2 Existing Practical Problems

Some students face psychological obstacles when conducting dance improvisation, bringing difficulties to teaching activities and hindering personal progress. Such problems arise from complicated mental states. Various causes lead to this phenomenon: some students fear being laughed at after making mistakes, or care excessively about others' opinions. These thoughts trigger self-doubt and continuous anxiety in learning. Others suffer from social anxiety in public occasions, showing nervousness, trembling and blank minds. All these conditions increase the difficulty of teaching arrangement.

Therefore, teaching design needs to fully consider individual differences among students, putting forward high requirements for teachers' flexibility, observation ability and professional literacy. Guiding college students to break barriers of spontaneous expression solves their personal psychological obstacles, and pushes teachers to continuously adjust teaching methods for different learners. Education is more than knowledge transfer. It guides students to overcome psychological difficulties, supports personalized expression, helps them face challenges bravely and recognize individual uniqueness, so as to build self-confidence.

The core of improvisational sports dance lies in harmony between body and mind. Only when psychological resilience and motor ability improve simultaneously can every student fully release artistic potential and show unique charm.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

(1) Improvisational sports dance possesses high feasibility in university public physical education. It can effectively promote college students' physical and mental health. Compared with traditional sports dance courses, it has unique strengths in stimulating exercise enthusiasm and supporting personalized development.

(1) To verify the operability of improvisational sports dance teaching in public university PE, this study constructs an implementation framework of "learning-practice-feedback-improvement". It provides new ideas for curriculum reform of university public physical education.

5.2 Recommendations

Future research on improvisational sports dance can expand its research scope. Researchers can carry out comparative studies covering different regions, university types and majors, to improve the universality of this implementation model. Schools can organize teaching achievement exhibitions to expand the influence of this course. In addition, long-term tracking research lasting 1 to 3 years can be conducted to observe its sustained influence on college students' physical and

mental health according to individual conditions.

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