

## **Exploring the Essential Competencies of Dance Teachers in the Era of Aesthetic Education Reform**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the essential competencies required of dance teachers in the context of China's recent aesthetic education reform. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, the research identifies the shifting roles of dance educators from technical instructors to facilitators of aesthetic experience and cultural understanding. The findings reveal six core competencies: Dance and Pedagogical Competency, Aesthetic Perception and Facilitation Competency, Socio-emotional Teaching Competency, Differentiated and Student-centered Competency, Cultural Literacy and Transdisciplinary Creativity Competency, Reflective and Developmental Competency. These competencies highlight the increasing demand for teachers to integrate emotional engagement, cultural awareness, and creative exploration into classroom practice, moving beyond exam-oriented instruction. By constructing a practice grounded competency framework, this study contributes to bridging the gap between policy expectations and teachers lived realities. It also provides insights for improving teacher preparation and professional development, offering practical implications for supporting the sustainable implementation of aesthetic education in China.

*Keywords:* Aesthetic education reform, dance teachers, teacher competencies, professional development

### **Introduction**

In recent years, aesthetic education has gained renewed prominence in educational reform agendas worldwide, particularly in response to concerns that exam-oriented schooling neglects students' emotional, creative, and embodied development. In China, this shift has been formalized through a series of national policies culminating in the Comprehensive Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative issued by the Ministry of Education in 2023 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). These reforms reposition aesthetic experience, cultural understanding, and creative expression as central goals of schooling rather than peripheral enrichment activities.

Within this reform context, dance education has undergone a significant redefinition. Once marginalised as an extracurricular or performance-oriented subject, dance has been formally incorporated into the compulsory education curriculum and recognised as a key vehicle for aesthetic education. As an embodied and expressive art form, dance offers unique possibilities for cultivating students' aesthetic perception, emotional awareness, and holistic development. However, this policy elevation also places new and complex

demands on dance teachers, whose professional roles can no longer be confined to technical instruction or performance preparation alone.

Existing practices in dance education, particularly in examination oriented systems, have traditionally prioritised technical mastery and measurable outcomes. While such approaches may support performance proficiency, they often leave limited space for aesthetic experience, emotional engagement, and individual meaning-making. The current aesthetic education reform therefore raises a fundamental educational question: What kinds of professional competencies are required of dance teachers when teaching is no longer centred solely on technique, but on facilitating aesthetic experience and embodied understanding?

Although policy documents increasingly emphasise teacher responsibility in implementing aesthetic education, there remains a lack of clarity regarding how these expectations translate into teachers' everyday practices and professional competencies. International scholarship on dance pedagogy and arts education has highlighted the importance of embodied learning, affective engagement, and teacher identity. In addition, few studies have systematically examined how dance teachers reconstruct their competencies within strong, policy driven reform contexts, particularly in non Western educational systems.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores the core competencies required of dance teachers under China's aesthetic education reform through qualitative inquiry. By examining teachers' lived experiences across different educational settings, this study seeks to move beyond policy interpretation to develop a practice grounded competency framework that contributes to broader discussions in dance education, aesthetic pedagogy, and teacher professional development.

The reform of aesthetic education in China has undergone a gradual but significant transformation over the past few decades. Although, the concept of holistic education was proposed as early as the beginning of the 20th century by Cai Yuanpei, the first Minister of Education. He advocated the comprehensive development of Moral, Intellectual, Physical, Aesthetic and Labor (L. Zhang, 2000). However, for a long period of time, aesthetic education has always been on the margins of educational theory and practice. It was not until the late 1990s that aesthetic education began to re-emerge as an integral component of national education policy.

A critical turning point occurred in 1999 when the Ministry of Education emphasized the need to promote quality-oriented education, formally incorporating aesthetic development into the goals of compulsory schooling (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2000). This marked a shift from an exam driven, knowledge centered system toward a more balanced framework that acknowledged creativity, emotional development, and cultural literacy as essential educational outcomes.

In the following years, aesthetic education was gradually and systematically addressed at the policy level. Policies such as the 2015 Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2015) and the 2019 Guidelines for Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Higher Education Institutions clarified the role of aesthetic education in school curricula (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). These documents emphasized the need for diverse and high quality art courses and began to call attention to the role of teachers. They are not only as technical instructors but also as facilitators of aesthetic growth.

In 2020, the document "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Work of Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era" puts forward higher requirements at the policy level (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020). The document clearly states that all teachers, regardless of subject, should be equipped with an aesthetic awareness and incorporate aesthetic values in their teaching. For arts teachers, especially dance teachers, this means that their responsibilities and social expectations are rising.

Most recently, the 2023 Notice on the Comprehensive Implementation of the Aesthetic Education Immersion Action (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023) introduced a more targeted and actionable approach. The policy promotes the idea of aesthetic education for all students, in all schools, through all teachers. It shifts the focus from merely offering courses to creating a school wide aesthetic environment, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration and the full integration of aesthetic values into school culture. Crucially, it also prioritizes the professional development of aesthetic education teachers and calls for improvements in teacher preparation, evaluation, and support systems.

These policy developments reflect a consistent and growing recognition of aesthetic education as a core of China's modern educational. More importantly, they establish a clear link between educational policy and

teacher responsibility. The shift toward holistic education and aesthetic development is no longer a theoretical ideal, it is a mandate that directly affects what teachers are expected to do and how they are prepared.

For dance education, this policy evolution has practical implications. As dance becomes a formally recognized subject in compulsory education, and as its role in aesthetic education is emphasized, dance teachers are now expected to guide students in experiencing, interpreting, and expressing aesthetically. As well as to foster cultural understanding and to support emotional and personal growth through artistic practice. These expanded expectations require dance teachers to possess a broader and more integrated set of professional competencies. From an international perspective, aesthetic education has similarly been framed as a response to the limitations of instrumental and exam-oriented schooling. Scholars have argued that aesthetic learning supports students' emotional engagement, perceptual sensitivity, and meaning making capacities, positioning art education as a core rather than supplementary component of holistic education (Dewey, 1980; Greene, 2001). Viewed in this light, China's recent aesthetic education reform reflects a globally shared concern with re-balancing cognition, emotion, and experience within formal schooling, while also raising specific questions regarding teacher preparation and professional competence.

The 2022 revision of China's National Curriculum Standards for compulsory education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022) introduced a notable and encouraging change. For the first time, dance was officially listed as an independent subject within the arts curriculum at the primary and secondary levels. This policy changes not only reflected growing governmental attention to aesthetic education but also signaled a wider recognition of the educational value of dance in supporting students' holistic development.

Unlike many traditional academic subjects that primarily engage cognitive or linguistic skills, dance operates through the body, emotion, and imagination. This embodied mode of learning aligns with international research in dance education, which conceptualizes dance as a form of embodied cognition through which learners construct meaning, emotion, and identity via movement (Schonmann, 2015). This aligns closely with the core principles of aesthetic education, which emphasize perception, experience, and emotional engagement rather than rote memorization or logical reasoning. Through dance, students are invited to feel, interpret, and express themselves that foster empathy, emotional awareness, and a deeper connection to themselves and others.

Moreover, dance contributes uniquely to aesthetic education by offering a non-verbal language for meaning making. In an increasingly exam-oriented environment, students are often evaluated by their ability in standardized formats. Dance offers a different pathway one where aesthetic, emotion, and narrative are communicated through movement, rhythm, and choreograph. It cultivates sensitivity to form, flow, and embodiment, engaging students in ways that purely verbal or visual arts may not.

Given these characteristics, it is clear that dance plays a vital and irreplaceable role in realizing the goals of aesthetic education. However, these same characteristics also mean that teaching dance in the context of aesthetic education is not a straightforward task. It requires much more than technical proficiency or classroom management. Dance teachers are now expected to design experiences that foster aesthetic perception, support emotional expression, and cultivate creative interpretation. This requires a combination of aesthetic awareness, pedagogy, and reflective practice skills.

In short, the inclusion of dance in compulsory education reflects more than a curriculum adjustment. It signals a change in how education values embodied knowledge, emotional intelligence, and creative experience. For teachers, this shift translates into expanded responsibilities and evolving expectations. Understanding the unique educational functions of dance is therefore essential to defining what competencies are needed to teach it effectively under the aesthetic education reform.

In response to the increasing complexity of teaching, many countries and educational institutions have adopted competency-based approaches to teacher preparation. Rather than focusing solely on knowledge acquisition or credentials, this model emphasizes what teachers are actually able to do in practice. Competency-based frameworks aim to define, develop, and assess the specific skills, knowledge, and dispositions that teachers need to be effective in diverse classroom environments (Mulder, 2014).

The competency-based approach emphasizes not what teachers "know" but what they "can do". It stresses that teachers should not only master professional knowledge but also have the ability to effectively translate knowledge into teaching behaviors. This includes multiple dimensions such as curriculum design,

classroom interaction, student assessment, and reflection on teaching. In arts education contexts, teacher competency has increasingly been understood not merely as technical proficiency, but as a dynamic integration of pedagogical knowledge, aesthetic judgment, emotional responsiveness, and professional identity. Studies in dance and arts education (Beijaard et al., 2004) suggest that teachers' embodied experiences, reflective capacities, and relational awareness play a critical role in shaping meaningful learning environments.

In the context of the current reform of aesthetic education in China, the concept of competency-based teacher training is particularly crucial. As dance education has shifted from skills training to aesthetic experience and individual development, teachers need to demonstrate emotional insight, cultural understanding, and teaching creativity in addition to professional technical expertise. As emphasized in the relevant policy documents (Du, 2024), teachers are the "last mile" to implement the goals of aesthetic education. Only by continuously improving the aesthetic quality of professional teachers, strengthening the comprehensiveness of curriculum implementation and innovating teaching methods can the goals of aesthetic education be truly realized in the real classes.

In addition, competency-based teacher preparation frameworks typically categorize teacher competencies into multiple dimensions: including subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, emotional and relational competencies, and a sense of continuous learning. This categorization is highly aligned with the core goals of aesthetic education. Aesthetic education emphasizes emotional development, critical thinking, and creative exploration. In brief, teachers' comprehensive teaching ability is the key guarantee for the effective implementation of aesthetic education. However, despite the growing importance of the competency-based concept in the field of teacher education globally, its practical implementation in arts education, especially in dance teacher preparation, is still insufficient. For example, in the field of vocational education, pedagogical training is still centered on technical skills, with less attention paid to the cultivation of cultural literacy and emotional competence (Zhao et al., 2025). Similarly, arts programs in higher education often focus on disciplinary training and lack a systematic framework of aesthetic competencies. Such structural deficiencies make it difficult for teachers to respond to the aesthetic education goals advocated in the policy and reflect the conceptual and pedagogical misalignment of the current teacher education system.

Despite appearing as multiple structural challenges, the difficulties faced by dance teachers under aesthetic education reform largely stem from an unresolved question regarding how professional competency should be understood within an aesthetic teaching paradigm. Since the publication of the Comprehensive Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative in 2023, the Ministry of Education has set higher requirements for the competency structure and professionalism of dance teachers at the policy level. However, as a reform that has just been initiated, its practice path at multiple levels, including the system, curriculum, concepts, and teacher preparation, is still unclear. The current dance teacher training system faces both practical challenges and many uncertainties that need to be clarified.

At the levels of system and management, the professional status and development opportunities of dance teachers are more limited. In terms of teacher appointment and title evaluation, aesthetic teachers are generally in a disadvantaged position, which can easily lead to a lack of professional identity and thus increase the phenomenon of burnout. Some teachers report that there is limited room for job promotion, which poses a certain barrier to professional growth. Secondly, the distribution of aesthetic education teachers between regions is seriously unbalanced, and some of the aesthetic education teachers employed in some regions have not even received systematic professional training. In addition, some schools, due to the face-saving project mentality, regard aesthetic education as a tool for showing achievement and seeking honors, leading to the teaching and evaluation of aesthetic education being incorrectly oriented towards a selective, utilitarian path, and weakening the essence of its educational nature (Wang et al., 2025). These conditions indirectly shape teachers' professional roles and limit the development of aesthetic-oriented competencies.

At the level of curriculum system, the current training path for dance teachers is still single. Most colleges and universities still focus on skills training and traditional teaching methods and lack systematic aesthetic literacy courses and cross-disciplinary integration content. Some vocational colleges tend to adopt an indoctrination and skill-oriented teaching mode, which ignores the cultivation of students' ability to perceive, understand and create aesthetics. This orientation not only restricts the development of teachers' awareness of aesthetic education, but also makes it difficult for them to effectively guide students to carry out aesthetic

experiences in actual teaching, which is a clear deviation from the core goals of aesthetic education advocated by the policy (Zhang, 2024).

At the level of the evaluation system, the assessment mechanism of dance education is still lagging behind in the context of the current aesthetic education policy. Many schools still rely mainly on paper-and-pencil tests or performance demonstrations, making it difficult to comprehensively capture the development of students' aesthetic awareness, emotional expression, and creative exploration. At the same time, the performance-based assessment conducted by professional teachers takes a one-dimensional perspective, and the evaluation criteria are highly subjective, making it difficult to reflect the multi-dimensional goals of aesthetic education. In addition, process and developmental assessments are generally absent in actual teaching, which weaken teachers' ability to recognize and respond to students' individual differences (Yao et al., 2024).

Lastly, at the level of teacher training, a number of policy documents have clearly emphasized its fundamental role in the construction of an aesthetic education system. Teachers training universities are not only responsible for the training of aesthetic education teachers but are also crucial fields for the implementation of the concept of aesthetic education and the implementation of educational reforms. As future educators, their aesthetic awareness, values, and teaching behaviors will directly affect the cognitive development and personality shaping of the next generation of students (Zhang, 2024).

Collectively, these challenges reveal a scholarly gap beyond implementation concerns. Existing studies rarely theorize how dance teachers reconstruct professional competencies when aesthetic experience becomes a central educational goal, particularly within policy driven reform contexts. To truly serve the goal of aesthetic education, dance education cannot be separated from the reexamination and reconstruction of the competence structure. Unfortunately, current research is still insufficient in exploring this topic. This study is based on this realistic situation and tries to clarify the core competence requirements of dance teachers in the educational transformation of the new era.

Since the release of the Comprehensive Implementation of Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative in Schools, aesthetic education has been officially included in the core agenda of national education, and dance education has been formally incorporated into the compulsory education curriculum. The document clearly points out to strengthen the construction of aesthetic education teachers, improve teachers' aesthetic education teaching ability, and promote teachers to become the first person responsible for aesthetic education. In the field of dance education, however, there is currently a lack of systematic research and practical guidance on how to understand and respond to these demands.

On the one hand, the policy emphasizes the need to “implement the demands of aesthetic education into all aspects of teachers' qualification admission, pre-vocational training, post-vocational training, and evaluation and assessment,” but in the practice of teacher training, aesthetic competence has often been equated with art techniques or teaching experience, and its core elements of aesthetic guidance, cultural understanding, and affective education have been neglected. Dance teachers, in particular, have long been selected and trained on the basis of technical talents, lacking the structural standards of competence that correspond to the concept of aesthetic education.

On the other hand, although the policy proposes that teacher training institutions should make aesthetic education an important part of teacher education, most of the dance teacher training systems in China have not yet constructed a systematic competence cultivation framework for aesthetic education in terms of curricula, teaching concepts, and practice paths. This has led to a gap between policy advocacy and the realities, and has also made it difficult to effectively realize the requirement that “teachers are the ‘last mile’ in implementing the goals of aesthetic education”.

This study focuses on identifying what kind of teaching skills and professional competencies dance teachers should possess in the context of the transformation of aesthetic education. Based on interviews with teachers at three different educational levels and classroom observations, this study aims to fill the practical gaps in current research on the structure of aesthetic education competencies of dance teachers in response to the goal demands put forward by the policy of aesthetic education.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach to explore the competencies required of dance teachers under the current aesthetic education reform in China. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The participants included three dance teachers from different educational contexts: a teacher-training university, a public elementary school, and an after-school private dance academy. With informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and identifying information was anonymized; participants are referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C. Classroom observations were conducted to complement interview data and capture enacted teaching practices. All qualitative data were organized and analyzed using ATLAS.ti, following a thematic analysis process. Throughout the analysis, reflexive attention was given to how the researcher's academic background might shape interpretation. Although the sample size was small, participants were purposefully selected to enable analytical comparison across contexts rather than statistical generalization. Consistent with qualitative research principles (Moustakas, 2011), the study prioritizes depth and analytic transferability to generate context-sensitive insights into dance teacher competencies.

### Findings

In this chapter, the essential competencies of dance teachers in the context of aesthetic education reform are explored through three interrelated dimensions: the real-world teaching context, institutional and policy-driven transformations, and the internal shift in teacher identity and understanding. Each theme reflects how dance teachers are navigating and reconstructing their roles amid shifting educational demands.

#### Teaching Realities: The Context Dance Teachers Encounter

The development of teacher competencies does not occur in isolation but is shaped by classroom realities. Most participants described teaching environments characterized by student diversity, limited foundational skills, and varying emotional receptivity to dance. Students in non-professional tracks often lacked technical proficiency but could engage in emotional or aesthetic expression when guided appropriately.

*"I think it's more important to stimulate the child's imagination. His capture of information about daily life plus his own thinking and aesthetics, he will make the movements. Maybe the quality of the movements he makes in the process is not good, but actually in the process, his aesthetics has been formed." (Teacher B)*

Teachers face a range of student-related challenges—from gendered attitudes toward dance, to emotional resistance, and aesthetic indifference—that require adaptive teaching approaches. Despite this, many continue to rely on traditional teaching models, shaped by performance or examination demands, limiting space for aesthetic exploration. Furthermore, external pressures such as heavy course loads, institution-driven competition tasks, and limited teaching time often leave little room for innovation. The gap between policy ideals and the on-the-ground learning environment constrains the implementation of aesthetic-centered pedagogy.

*"Time is so tight, in fact, there are only a total of ten to fifteen classes in a semester for a course, and sometimes you can't even teach the basic skills. It takes time for the students to accept it, and there are so many competitions and performance tasks. It is not realistic to achieve a depth of aesthetic literacy when there is not enough time." (Teacher C)*

Therefore, the ability of the teacher goes beyond the teaching technique itself, and lies in how to mobilize the aesthetic potential of the students within the limitations of reality, and to find educational possibilities between techniques and expressions. Between the pressure of reality and the ideal of teaching, to create a space for students' active expression and aesthetic development.

#### Institutional Shifts and Competency Transformation

While aesthetic education reform is emphasized at the policy level, its implementation varies widely across regions and institutions. Many participants noted that policies were unclear, unevenly enforced, or had minimal effect on third-tier cities or non-public sectors.

*“In recent years, aesthetic education has been promoted very vigorously, but it seems that we have not really tried to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific contents of the policy.” (Teacher A)*

The top-down nature of policy introduction often failed to reach or resonate with front-line teachers. In addition, limited professional development, inadequate training resources, and administrative burdens were frequently cited as obstacles to improving aesthetic teaching capacity. However, most felt underprepared to teach beyond their technical expertise, lacking theoretical or methodological support. In terms of interdisciplinary integration, some teachers actively tried to introduce culture, history, science and technology to expand the boundaries of aesthetic education, but some of them confessed that they were “unable to do so” in these aspects.

*“In professional colleges and universities, dance is always about movement, but they may not have thought deeply about the meaning behind the movement or the cultural implication of the movement. Therefore, many of the teachers who are trained to teach in the real teaching process just teach the same things to the children that they have learned. There is no way to inform the students of the cultural implications behind the movements.” (Teacher B)*

This gap between policy and competence indicates that dance teachers must move from being mere “technical implementer” to “educator” with cultural understanding, integrative thinking and aesthetic literacy, which is a new requirement for teachers' core competencies under the reformed system.

### **Shifting Identities: From Coach to Aesthetic Educators**

The most significant transformation lies in how they reconsider their role. Many participants showed signs of transitioning from performance-oriented instructors to facilitators of aesthetic experience. Teachers began to recognize that emotional engagement, aesthetic perception, and individual expression are central to students' artistic development. Several expressed that they are now paying more attention to student emotions, imaginative narratives, and non-technical outcomes.

*“In fact, many children suffer from depression due to various kinds of stress. But I think dance is like a kind of therapy, this kind of atmosphere will relax the mood instantly. Some children even have some inherent defects, so I don't think we can stop them from learning dance and expressing themselves through dance, we can't stop them. ... child can do it without so difficult technical skills, I think it's more about his expression.” (Teacher A)*

However, this transformation has also revealed deficiencies in teacher training. Many teachers lack aesthetic literacy, are unfamiliar with creative instructional design, and are unclear about how to assess the growth of aesthetic.

*“Many teachers actually don't know much about what aesthetic education really is on their own, even though many policies are now advocating this thing. Some of the current curricula are supposedly oriented towards aesthetic education, but in reality most of them are still traditional teaching styles. However, this may also have something to do with the overall perception of the teaching team itself, for the newly promoted things we also need to go to the training, the teacher's concept also needs to update.” (Teacher C)*

Despite these challenges, some teachers showed emerging reflective practices and a willingness to revise their teaching philosophy. They reported experimenting with more open-ended class structures, emotion-driven prompts, and student-created material, marking a shift from instruction to co-creation.

### Core Competency Model for Dance Teacher

In the context of the reform of aesthetic education, dance teachers are faced not only with the adjustment of teaching content, but also with the all-round transformation of their identities and abilities. The previous section gradually reveals the internal logic of the evolution of teachers' competence through an in-depth discussion of the teaching reality, the demand for competence transformation driven by institutional change, and the transformation of teachers' concepts and the reconstruction of their identities. Before constructing a model of core aesthetic education competencies for dance teachers, it is necessary to present its analytical foundation. Based on open, axial, and selective coding of interview and classroom observation data, the study identified seven interrelated coding groups that influence the development of dance teachers' competencies. These groups include policy and institutional environments, teaching challenges and external constraints, teacher competency development, teaching content and strategies, transdisciplinary integration and external support, student characteristics and learning status, as well as aesthetic concepts and expression. Each group contains several core codes that frequently appear in the analysis and play a critical role in competency formation.

*Table 1. Seven coding groups and core codes supporting the competency model*

	Coding Group	Core Codes	Relationship
1	Policy and Institutional Environment	Difficulty in policy implementation; Regional differences in policy impact; Ambiguous understanding of policies; Curriculum mismatch	Influences teaching challenges and constraints
2	Teaching Challenges and External Constraints	Insufficient teaching time; Outcome-resource mismatch; Lack of systematic concepts; Cultural connotation deficiency	Limits teacher competency development
3	Teacher Competency Development	Additional task interference; Skills not translating into outcomes; Shortage of training resources; Low aesthetic literacy	Shapes teaching content and strategies
4	Teaching Content and Strategies	Lack of teaching material; Need for interdisciplinary integration; Exam-oriented teaching; Skill-oriented teaching; Weak aesthetic guidance	Affects transdisciplinary integration and support
5	Transdisciplinary Integration and External Support	External resources; School and external collaboration; Cross-disciplinary content; Local culture in class	Enhances student characteristics and learning
6	Student Characteristics and Learning Situation	Diverse backgrounds; Individual aesthetic construction; Active participation; Expression differences; Progress and emotional growth	Shapes aesthetic concepts and expressions
7	Aesthetic Concepts and Expressions	On-site triggers of perception; Expression and creativity training; Teacher aesthetic awareness; Updated teaching methods	Final outcome of the model

As shown in Table 1, this table not only reveals the internal structure and core elements of the seven groups, but also reflects their characteristics of interaction in real teaching situations. The core codes in the

diagram are directly derived from the experience summaries and problem responses of front-line dance teachers in their daily teaching, policy adaptation, and professional development processes, laying a solid empirical foundation for the formulation of the competency model.

Based on this, and combining the previous analysis of the teaching reality, the need for competence transformation driven by institutional change, and the transformation of teachers' concepts and identity reconstruction, this paper further integrates and refines the competence requirements involved in these groups, ultimately constructing a model of six core aesthetic education competences for dance teachers in the new educational era. It includes dance and pedagogical competency, aesthetic perception and facilitation competency, socio-emotional teaching competency, differentiated and student-centered competency, cultural literacy and transdisciplinary creativity competency, and reflective and developmental competency.

*Table 2. Six Core Competencies of Dance Educators in the Aesthetic Education Reform*

Core Competency for Dance Teacher	
1	Dance and Pedagogical Competency
2	Aesthetic Perception and Facilitation Competency
3	Socio-emotional Teaching Competency
4	Differentiated and Student-centered Competency
5	Cultural Literacy and Transdisciplinary Creativity Competency
6	Reflective and Developmental Competency

This competency model does not stem from abstract theorization but is grounded in the lived experiences of front-line dance educators. It reflects their practical responses to everyday teaching challenges, institutional pressures, and evolving student needs, as well as their gradual process of professional awareness and transformation. Each competency emerged from continuous adjustment and exploration within real educational contexts. For aesthetic education reform to take root meaningfully in the future, the key lies in how we support teachers' sustained growth across these six dimensions, and whether we can establish a coherent, long-term system of development pathways and professional support.

Overall, the findings indicate that the identified competencies should not be seen as isolated teaching skills or simple responses to policy demands. Instead, they reflect how dance teachers continually negotiate tensions between technique and aesthetic experience, institutional expectations and classroom realities. These competencies emerge through everyday teaching practice and teacher-student interaction, rather than being directly prescribed by policy. In this sense, dance teacher competency is best understood as a dynamic, practice-based construct shaped by the aesthetic education reform.

### Discussion

This study interviewed three highly experienced dance teachers from distinct institutional settings—after school private dance academy, public elementary school, and teacher training university. Their diverse perspectives reveal how national aesthetic education reform is interpreted, adapted, or challenged in different teaching contexts. One after school private dance academy teacher emphasized how dance has become a source of healing and emotional release for students coping with academic and psychological stress. Even students with physical disabilities seek expression and inclusion through dance. This underscores dance education as a deeply human-centered practice is an insight often missing in policy discourse. These observations can be further situated within aesthetic education theory, highlighting how emotional and embodied experiences shape pedagogical actions.

In third-tier city, the public school teacher reported that despite new national curriculum standards promoting aesthetic education, traditional and local culture, many schools lack access to updated teaching materials. Teachers often have to create content on their own, leading to increased pressure on curriculum design and cultural integration. Moreover, unlike selective programs, public elementary school dance classes are universal and inclusive. Teachers must manage significant differences among students in motivation, ability, and engagement, which adds complexity to their pedagogical responsibilities. This complexity reflects the embodied and context-sensitive nature of teaching, suggesting that teacher professional identity is continuously

negotiated in response to diverse student needs. Linking these findings to literature on teacher professional identity and embodied learning highlights the theoretical implications of cultivating competencies that extend beyond technical proficiency.

The teacher training university teacher reflected on the outdated nature of current teacher education cultivation system, which often focus narrowly on dance techniques first while neglecting training in student psychology, curriculum design, in-depth internship, or aesthetic facilitation. Both new and experienced teachers are in urgent need of targeted professional development opportunities. This suggests that policy reforms must be accompanied by systemic support mechanisms that enable teachers to grow beyond traditional roles and embrace the multidimensional demands of aesthetic education.

This study brings a grounded, practice-oriented perspective that reflects how real teachers navigate evolving expectations on the ground. It surfaces under-explored topics such as the therapeutic role of dance, accessibility for students with physical limitations, and teaching material scarcity in two or third-tier city schools. The six-competency framework proposed is not top-down but inductively derived from the lived realities of teachers, offering context-sensitive insights into professional transformation. In this sense, the framework both operationalizes aesthetic education principles and provides a lens for examining the interplay between policy, pedagogy, and teacher identity.

Despite the limited sample size, this study provides valuable insights from frontline practitioners. Teachers' situated experiences and feedback serve as a vital bridge between educational policy and student development, and their voices should be recognized as essential foundations for future research and reform. Subsequent studies could expand in scope, educational stage coverage, and methodological diversity to further enrich a systematic understanding of dance teachers' professional development. Such future research could also deepen theoretical engagement, examining how embodied and aesthetic dimensions of teaching inform broader discourses in international dance education.

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