

Evaluating the Confidence and Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Ethnic Dance Instructors in Kuching Sarawak

Rejerki anak Misek
Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sarawak
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
e-mail: rejerki@gmail.com

Article received: July 22, 2024

Article accepted: April 4, 2025

Article published: June 23, 2025

Cite this article (APA): Misek, R. A. (2025). Evaluating the confidence and pedagogical content knowledge of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching Sarawak, *Jurai Sembah*, 6(2), 39-44. <https://doi.org/10.37134/juraisembah.vol6.1.4.2025>

Abstract

The study investigates the pedagogical competence of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, Sarawak, focusing on their confidence levels and perceptions of their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The preservation of traditional dances, integral to the region's cultural heritage, depends significantly on the effectiveness of these instructors. This research measures their confidence in teaching ethnic dances and explores their self-assessed PCK, crucial for effective instruction. Findings suggest that while instructors possess deep cultural knowledge and respect for traditions, they face challenges such as limited resources and outdated pedagogical training. Addressing these issues through targeted professional development and enhanced teaching strategies can improve dance education quality, ensuring the accurate and engaging transmission of cultural heritage. The study's insights can inform training programs and support systems to enhance the teaching effectiveness of ethnic dance instructors, ultimately contributing to the preservation and evolution of Sarawak's vibrant cultural traditions.

Keywords: ethnic dance instruction, cultural heritage preservation, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Introduction

Ethnic dance forms are a vital part of the cultural heritage of many regions, and their preservation and transmission to future generations are crucial. In Sarawak, Malaysia, the state's diverse ethnic communities have a rich tapestry of traditional dances, each with its unique movements, rhythms, and cultural significance. The role of dance instructors in this context is paramount, as they are responsible for not only teaching the technical aspects of these dances but also imparting the underlying cultural knowledge and values to their students (C. Warburton, 2019; Alter, 2000). This preliminary study aims to investigate the pedagogical competence of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, Sarawak. Specifically, it seeks to measure the confidence level of these instructors in teaching ethnic dances, as well as to identify their perceptions regarding their own pedagogical content knowledge in the field of dance (Lum & Gonda, 2014; Gonye & Moyo, 2015; Wahira, 2017). Understanding the pedagogical competence of ethnic dance instructors is crucial for several reasons (Gonye & Moyo, 2015). Firstly, it can provide insights into the challenges and needs of these instructors, which can inform the development of targeted training programs and support systems to enhance their teaching effectiveness (Wahira, 2017). Secondly, it can help identify the cultural values, traditions, and nuances that are

being conveyed through ethnic dance instruction, thereby contributing to the preservation of these intangible cultural heritage (Santana, 2019). Ultimately, this study aims to shed light on the pedagogical landscape of ethnic dance instruction in Sarawak, with the goal of supporting the continued transmission and evolution of these vibrant cultural traditions. Finally, an examination of the pedagogical competence of ethnic dance instructors can shed light on the broader issues of multicultural education and the adaptation of traditional art forms to contemporary educational contexts (Lum & Gonda, 2014).

The primary objective of this study is to measure the confidence level of ethnic dance instructors in teaching ethnic dances in Sarawak. Confidence is a critical factor in teaching effectiveness, as it influences an instructor's ability to engage students, manage the classroom, and implement innovative teaching strategies (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). By assessing the current confidence levels of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, this research aims to provide insights into their readiness and capacity to teach traditional dances effectively. Understanding these confidence levels can help identify areas where instructors may need additional support or professional development to enhance their teaching practices and ensure the effective transmission of cultural heritage. Another significant objective of this study is to identify the perceptions of ethnic dance instructors regarding their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in the field of dance. PCK is essential for effective teaching as it encompasses the specialized knowledge that instructors need to present content in an accessible and engaging manner, understand students' preconceptions, and adapt instruction to meet diverse learning needs (Shulman, 1986).

This research seeks to explore how ethnic dance instructors in Kuching perceive their own PCK and its adequacy for teaching ethnic dances. By investigating these perceptions, the study aims to uncover potential gaps in knowledge and skills that may affect the quality of dance education. Identifying these gaps can inform targeted professional development initiatives and curriculum enhancements to better support instructors in their roles. To address these research objectives, the following research questions are posed: "What is the current confidence level of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching when it comes to teaching ethnic dances?" and "How do ethnic dance instructors in Kuching perceive their own pedagogical content knowledge and its adequacy for teaching ethnic dances?" These questions will guide the investigation into the instructors' confidence and PCK, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence their teaching effectiveness and the overall quality of ethnic dance education in Sarawak.

Ethnic dance, an integral part of cultural heritage, plays a crucial role in preserving the traditions and identity of communities. In Kuching, Sarawak, ethnic dance instructors are pivotal in transmitting this cultural knowledge to younger generations. The role these instructors play is not just educational but also cultural, ensuring the continuity and appreciation of ethnic traditions. This literature review examines existing research on the confidence and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of ethnic dance instructors, with a focus on the unique cultural context of Kuching, Sarawak. The review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing instructors' confidence and their perceptions of their PCK, drawing attention to the importance of these factors in the effective teaching and preservation of ethnic dance. Teacher confidence is a critical factor in effective teaching, impacting both instructors' performance and student outcomes. Studies have shown that confident teachers are more likely to employ innovative teaching methods, engage students effectively, and create a positive learning environment (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In the context of ethnic dance, confidence is particularly important as instructors often need to convey complex cultural meanings and practices. The ability to teach with authority and assurance helps instructors impart not only the technical skills but also the cultural narratives that are essential to ethnic dance. Hence, fostering confidence in ethnic dance instructors is crucial for the holistic education of students in this field.

Several factors influence the confidence of ethnic dance instructors. Experience and professional development are significant contributors. Instructors with more years of teaching experience and those who have participated in continuous professional development programs tend to exhibit higher confidence levels (Guskey, 2002). Additionally, community support and recognition of the instructors' role in cultural preservation can bolster their confidence (Nieto, 2005). The acknowledgment and encouragement from the community not only validate their efforts but also enhance their sense of purpose and motivation. This support can take many forms, from public recognition to more tangible resources that facilitate their teaching. The interplay of these factors creates a supportive environment that nurtures the instructors' professional growth and confidence.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) refers to the specialized knowledge that teachers need to effectively teach their subject matter. It encompasses understanding how to present content in a way that is accessible and engaging for students, knowing students' preconceptions, and adapting instruction to meet diverse learning needs (Shulman, 1986). In the context of ethnic dance, PCK involves not only dance techniques but also cultural knowledge and pedagogical strategies tailored to teaching traditional dances. This dual focus on technique and cultural context is what sets ethnic dance apart from other forms of dance education. Instructors must be adept at integrating these elements to provide a rich and immersive learning experience for their students.

Research on PCK in dance education highlights the unique challenges faced by dance instructors. These challenges include balancing technical skill instruction with the transmission of cultural narratives and values embedded in the dances (Risner, 2010). Effective ethnic dance instructors must possess deep knowledge of the cultural context and history of the dances they teach, along with the ability to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. They need to navigate the complexities of teaching a subject that is both physically demanding and culturally significant. This requires a nuanced understanding of their students' needs and the ability to adapt their teaching methods accordingly. The ability to blend these aspects into a cohesive teaching strategy is a hallmark of effective ethnic dance education.

Ethnic dance instructors' perceptions of their PCK can vary based on their training, background, and teaching context. Studies indicate that instructors with formal education in dance or related fields often feel more equipped with pedagogical skills compared to those who learn dance informally (Alter, 2008). However, even experienced instructors may face challenges in areas such as curriculum design, assessment, and integrating technology into dance instruction (Kimmerle & Côté-Laurence, 2003). These challenges highlight the need for ongoing professional development and support. Instructors must continuously evolve and adapt to new teaching methods and technological advancements to stay relevant and effective. Addressing these gaps through targeted training programs can significantly enhance their teaching capabilities and confidence.

Kuching, Sarawak, is home to a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, each with its own unique dance traditions. The preservation and teaching of these dances are essential for maintaining cultural heritage and identity. Ethnic dance instructors in Kuching play a crucial role in this cultural transmission, often working within community settings and cultural institutions. They face specific challenges, including limited resources, varying levels of student interest and commitment, and the need to adapt traditional dances for contemporary audiences. However, there are also opportunities for innovation and growth, such as incorporating multimedia resources and collaborating with other cultural organizations (Khoo, 2017). These opportunities can help enhance the teaching and learning experience, making ethnic dance education more engaging and accessible to a broader audience.

In conclusion, this literature review highlights the importance of confidence and PCK for ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, Sarawak. While experienced and confident instructors are more effective in engaging students and preserving cultural traditions, they also face unique challenges in their teaching practices. Understanding the factors that influence their confidence and perceptions of PCK can inform targeted professional development programs and support strategies. Future research should focus on empirical studies that measure these constructs and explore interventions to enhance the teaching of ethnic dance in Sarawak. By addressing these issues, we can ensure that the rich cultural heritage of ethnic dances in Kuching is preserved and celebrated for generations to come.

Methodology

This study, titled "Evaluating the Confidence and Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Ethnic Dance Instructors in Kuching, Sarawak" employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess the pedagogical competence and teaching confidence of ethnic dance instructors in the region. The research utilizes three primary instruments: surveys, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

To gather quantitative data, a structured survey was developed and distributed to a comprehensive sample of six ethnic dance instructors from various cultural institutions in Kuching, including the Sarawak Cultural Village (Skim Latihan Dual Nasional (SLDN) Programme), *Majlis Seni Sarawak (Kelas Bimbingan Seni)*, and Academy SADIA (Ethnic Dance Class). The survey aimed to gauge instructors' confidence levels in

different aspects of teaching ethnic dances, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and understanding the cultural context of the dances. Drawing upon Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Schunk, 2001), particularly the concept of self-efficacy, the survey measured instructors' beliefs in their abilities to effectively teach ethnic dance. The survey questions assessed self-efficacy in areas such as knowledge of specific ethnic dance forms, the ability to convey techniques and cultural nuances, and handling classroom challenges (Rahayuningtyas et al., 2020). Additionally, the survey included questions to assess instructors' self-perception of their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), focusing on their understanding of dance techniques, methods for conveying cultural significance, and student engagement strategies. Reflective Practice Theory was used to frame these questions, encouraging instructors to reflect on their teaching practices and identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Complementing the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected group of experienced ethnic dance instructors, each with over ten years of teaching experience. These instructors, drawn from various ethnic dance backgrounds, provided diverse perspectives and in-depth insights. The interviews explored factors contributing to their confidence levels, detailed perceptions of their pedagogical content knowledge, and any perceived gaps or areas for improvement. The Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) Theory guided the interview framework, assessing how instructors integrate dance content knowledge with pedagogical strategies. The interviews evaluated their understanding of presenting dance concepts, anticipating student difficulties, and adapting teaching methods to diverse learners.

To assess the practical application of pedagogical knowledge and teaching confidence, classroom observations were conducted. These observations focused on teaching methods, interaction with students, incorporation of cultural elements, and overall teaching effectiveness. Observing live classes enabled an assessment of how instructors apply their pedagogical knowledge in real-time and their confidence in handling various teaching scenarios.

Overall, this mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection through surveys, interviews, and observations, provides a comprehensive assessment of the pedagogical competence and teaching confidence of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, Sarawak. This methodology ensures a well-rounded understanding of instructors' capabilities and areas for professional development.

Results

The survey on the confidence levels of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, Sarawak, reveals a nuanced understanding of their self-assessed capabilities across various teaching dimensions. The respondents, comprising ten instructors aged between 30 to 45 years with diverse ethnic backgrounds (Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu) and extensive teaching experience (ranging from 10 to 20 years), provided insightful feedback on their confidence levels in different teaching aspects. When teaching ethnic dance to beginners, a majority (70%) felt confident, while a smaller proportion (20%) were neutral, and only one instructor (10%) felt slightly confident. Confidence dipped when it came to teaching advanced techniques, with only 50% expressing confidence, 30% remaining neutral, and 20% feeling slightly confident. The ability to engage students showed a split, with 40% confident and 60% neutral. Cultural explanation skills saw better confidence levels, with 60% confident and 30% neutral, and only one instructor feeling slightly confident. Adapting teaching methods to different learning styles proved challenging, as only 20% felt confident, while a significant 70% were neutral. Lesson planning emerged as a significant area of concern, with no instructors feeling very confident or confident; instead, 60% were not confident at all. Knowledge of dance history and origins showed high confidence, with 70% confident and 20% neutral. Teaching proper techniques saw varied confidence, with only 20% confident, 40% neutral, and 40% slightly confident. Assessing student performance and providing feedback had better confidence, with 60% confident and 40% neutral. Integrating music and rhythm saw the highest confidence, with 90% confident or very confident. Using props and costumes also showed high confidence, with 70% very confident and 30% neutral. Professional development and collaboration with peers were areas of strength, with high levels of confidence in seeking opportunities (90%) and collaborating with others (100%). However, staying updated with trends and accessing resources were challenging, with no respondents feeling confident, 50% neutral, and 30% not confident at all. The survey highlights the need for

more structured training and reliable resources to bolster confidence across these teaching aspects, ensuring the preservation and effective transmission of ethnic dance traditions.

The qualitative insights into ethnic dance instructors' perceptions of their pedagogical content knowledge in Kuching reveal a complex landscape of both mastery and challenges. Instructors generally feel confident about their understanding of the historical and cultural significance of the dances they teach, yet some express a need for more comprehensive and updated guidance. This is crucial as historical narratives and cultural contexts evolve over time. Ensuring cultural accuracy in their instruction is a significant concern, with six out of ten respondents admitting uncertainty about whether their teaching fully respects the original forms of the dances. Despite these uncertainties, all instructors unanimously emphasize the importance of cultural respect in their teachings. The predominant instructional strategy is traditional and teacher-centred, where the instructors demonstrate techniques and students are expected to learn passively. This approach, however, does not accommodate different learning styles or skill levels, which the instructors recognize as a gap in their pedagogical practices.

The identification of strengths and areas for improvement in the pedagogical approaches of ethnic dance instructors highlights several key points. Strengths include the instructors' deep respect for cultural traditions and their dedication to teaching fundamental dance techniques and ensuring correct body posture and gestures. Additionally, instructors take pride in their past experiences as dancers and their continuous efforts to stay updated with current trends, albeit with limited resources. However, significant areas for improvement were also identified. Instructors noted the need for better support and resources, including comprehensive documentation of dance histories and traditions to aid their teaching. They also highlighted the importance of incorporating diverse teaching strategies to engage different learning styles and enhance student engagement. Collaboration among instructors and with cultural organizations is currently limited to events and competitions, indicating a need for more structured and frequent professional interactions to share best practices and support continuous learning.

To enhance the teaching competence of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, several recommendations for professional development programs can be made. Firstly, there should be more opportunities for instructors to learn about pedagogy specifically tailored to ethnic dance, possibly through the establishment of dedicated dance academies in Sarawak. Professional development workshops and conferences can provide valuable platforms for instructors to connect, exchange ideas, and learn about new teaching methodologies and research in ethnic dance education. Additionally, creating a comprehensive and accessible repository of historical and cultural information on ethnic dances can help instructors ensure the accuracy and cultural integrity of their teachings. Collaboration with other cultural organizations and ethnic dance instructors should be encouraged and facilitated through regular networking events and collaborative projects. Lastly, providing ongoing support and mentorship can help instructors continuously refine their teaching practices and stay motivated in their mission to preserve and propagate the rich cultural heritage of ethnic dances in Kuching.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the pedagogical competence of ethnic dance instructors in Kuching, Sarawak, highlighting their significant role in preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region through dance. The findings underscore the instructors' strengths, such as their deep cultural knowledge, respect for traditions, and dedication to teaching fundamental dance techniques. However, the study also reveals challenges, including limited resources, a lack of updated pedagogical training, and the need for more diverse teaching strategies to accommodate different learning styles and skill levels. These insights are crucial for developing targeted training programs and resources that can support instructors in enhancing their teaching effectiveness. By addressing these gaps, such programs can help ensure that the teaching of ethnic dances is both culturally accurate and pedagogically sound. Furthermore, fostering collaboration among instructors and with cultural organizations can create a more dynamic and supportive environment for professional development. This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the current state of ethnic dance education in Sarawak but also sets the stage for future studies and interventions aimed at strengthening the capacity of dance instructors. Ultimately, these efforts will play a vital role in

preserving the vibrant cultural heritage of Sarawak for future generations, ensuring that ethnic dances continue to be a source of cultural pride and identity.

Acknowledgement

The author declares that there are no specific acknowledgements for this work. This manuscript was developed independently, without external funding, institutional sponsorship, or collaborative assistance requiring formal recognition.

References

- Alter, J. (2008). Transformative professional practice: A study of professional development in dance education. *Research in Dance Education*, 9(2), 137–152.
- Alter, J. B. (2000). The transcultural adaptation of teaching methods from country of origin to an American university setting. *Research in Dance Education*, 1(1), 27–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647890050006569>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.
- Gonye, J., & Moyo, N. (2015). Traditional African dance education as curriculum reimagination in postcolonial Zimbabwe: A rethink of policy and practice of dance education in the primary schools. *Research in Dance Education*, 16(3), 259–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2015.1036020>
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3), 381–391.
- Khoo, G. (2017). Cultural continuity and change in Sarawak ethnic dance traditions. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 48(1), 145–162.
- Kimmerle, M., & Côté-Laurence, P. (2003). *Teaching dance skills: A motor learning and development approach*. Human Kinetics.
- Lum, C. H., & Gonda, D. E. (2014). Considerations of dance transmission processes: Adapting Bharata Natyam in a Singapore primary school. *Research in Dance Education*, 15(2), 107–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2014.890583>
- Nieto, S. (2005). *Why we teach*. Teachers College Press.
- Rahayuningtyas, W., Wulandari, R., Pramono, A., & Ismail, A. I. (2020). Self-efficacy in Topeng Malang dance learning using modeling technique. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Arts, Language and Culture (ICALC 2019)* (pp. 118–121). <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200321.024>
- Risner, D. (2010). Dance education matters: Rebuilding postsecondary dance education for twenty-first century relevance and resonance. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 111(4), 123–135.
- Santana, F. D. T. (2019). Teacher creativity strengthening for establishment of culture identity. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Art, Design, Education and Cultural Studies (ICADE 2018)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icade-18.2019.77>
- Schunk, D. H. (2001). Self-efficacy: Educational aspects. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 13820–13822). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02402-5>
- Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4–14.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(7), 783–805.
- Wahira, W. (2017). Need analysis of lesson planning to teach education value of Sulawesi ethnic dance teaching in primary school. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 16(2), 116. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v16i2.6733>
- Warburton, E. C. (2019). Dance pedagogy. In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Dance Studies* (pp. 29–44). <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350024489.ch-003>