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Improving Malay Traditional *Joget* Dance Technique Through Vygotsky Framework Among Female Secondary School Dancers in Ampang, Selangor: The Participatory Action Research

Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim^{1,*}, Leong Ngan Ping¹, Nor Liyana Izdihar Nor Azman¹, Farah Shazleen
Shaharudin¹

¹ Arts and Cultural Club, Pandan Mewah Secondary School, Ampang, Selangor Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Over the years, we have been teaching and learning performing arts that significantly support human development, especially among young school learners. According to studies, performing arts, particularly dance, have assisted young learners in developing a sense of awareness - physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. Hence, establishing a cultural club in Malaysian schools is pertinent to unearthing young learners' potential. However, we discovered that our young learners have significant issues related to their left and right coordination, which is the foundation of physical activities, especially dancing. To address this issue, we tailored our teaching strategies to conditional behaviour learning. Our study aims to help these learners improve their *joget* dancing technique. To collect and reflect meaningful data, we have recruited 15 participants among our school pupils. They are all girls aged between 13 and 17 years old. We spent almost two months making sense of all relevant information and data for this research via observation, reflection, planning, and action. Our reflection indicates that most young learners experience left-right coordination problems and cannot perform the instruction accordingly. Hence, the intervention has helped them improve their technique. Using both the Vygotsky and Learning Progression frameworks to teach dance has had a significant impact on students' performances and could be applied to other subjects and platforms.

Keywords:

Vygotsky, dancing, reflection,
participatory action research, left-right
coordination

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1. Introduction

Our research site is located in Ampang and is under the Hulu Langat District Office. In line with the government's and the world's initiative for quality education (SGD No. 4), out-of-school programmes should be recognised as a mechanism to attract students to school. Overall, student participation in extracurricular programmes, especially in the performing arts (dancing), is significant because it promotes physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development as outlined in the National Philosophy of Education:

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: baidruel@gmail.com

Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large. [1]

Our research is therefore essential to support student engagement in performing arts programmes, especially to help students execute proper technique during activities. For young learners participating in dance activities, left-right coordination is essential [2].

The task of choreography, especially in the performing arts such as dance or theater, requires creativity, physical readiness, and good right- left coordination [3]–[6]. In dancing, learners must perform the movements instructed by the choreographers. Not all learners have similar motor skills [7], as some of them even have difficulty performing left and right body movements in a coordinated manner. Studies have shown that people tend to confuse left and right, and that women suffer from this problem in the majority [8].

Based on our observations and reflections to determine their level of competence, we found that most of the young learners were experiencing the Joget dance for the first time. Therefore, few were familiar with the appropriate skills when they entered the programme in elementary school. Table 1 shows our observation of the young learners' competencies in performing the activities.

Table 1

Observation of Young Learners' Competencies in *Joget* Dance

Analysis of Young Learners' Competencies		
3 Pupils executed the routine perfectly (Having no left-right coordination issues)	7 Pupils had minor left-right coordination issues	5 Pupils have major issues in left-right coordination

Dancing is a team activity where synchronisation is crucial. Therefore, we assume that all our dancers will have a similar level before the final performance. However, the audience, especially the examiners, demand a higher level of synchronisation and correct execution of technique.

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky was interested in the social influences on human development. According to his theory, the sociocultural aspect of consciousness is fundamental in both time and reality, while the personal aspect of consciousness is derivative and accidental [9]. Consequently, the concept suggests that a person's mental functioning is not just the product of social engagement; rather, the specific structures and processes that people exhibit may be related to their relationships with others, which we used in our action research. We have found that the Vygotsky framework for learning is much more appropriate and contextual [10]–[12]. We report some reviews relevant to the idea of left-right confusion and the sociocultural aspects of cognitive and learning development.

1.1 Socio-cultural aspects of Cognitive Learning

As we conducted our research based on Vygotsky's theoretical framework, the concept includes sociocultural experiences that an individual learns through contact with social and cultural systems [10]. Vygotsky describes an important concept to explain his theory: the zone of proximal development. While addressing the idea of the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky also addresses the concept of scaffolding. Students learn about and adapt to their community through interactions with their classmates, teachers, and other members of the community during the learning process [10]. Students' ability to learn in the classroom is influenced by their prior knowledge and experiences, such as their behaviours practised at home. Therefore, Vygotsky presented three basic principles to understand how the mind works: (i) learning occurs within a person's social position, (ii) language is the foundation of culture, and (iii) cultural norms have a significant impact on an individual's education and growth [12]. The shared norms, values, and beliefs of a community constitute its culture, which is reflected in its institutionalised rules and normative practises. Language facilitates the transmission of behavioural norms. Culture emerges from specific events whose meanings are communicated to members [11]. Culture has a lasting effect on children's brains by shaping their predictable behaviour. Therefore, people should recognise how culture and human growth are interconnected. In a cyclical loop, culture shapes the individual, and the individual shapes the culture. In the context of our study, those who suffer from confusion in left-right coordination can continuously learn from their caregivers until their confusion disappears. In learning new movements and routines, the young learners learned contextually from their caregivers, especially from their dance peers who have similar social rank and status. They learned through both verbal and body language communication by imitating the movements demonstrated by their peers or coaches, which eventually reflected the learning position that was mostly based on shared values and norms [12]. Obviously, language is the key point in this learning process.

1.2 The Left-Right Coordination and Confusion

This research came about because the left and right sides (of the brain) work together. It explains some ideas about physiology and science in detail using literature, especially in the fields of medicine, physiology, sports science and performance, and neurology [8]. Some brief ideas would help teachers like me understand how hard it is for our young students. Locomotion is the process of coordinating left and right movement [2], [7]. This process has its own rhythm that occurs simultaneously in order to move around more easily. For example, in our study, the young learners have to coordinate their hands with the right way of standing so that their movements are synchronised. During the learning of an observed motor action, errors and confusion occur. From a neurologist's point of view, this is called mental rotation and mental rotation ability [8]. In our study, when the young dancers had to coordinate their left hand and right foot, they rotated an image of their two hands and feet in their mind. When they do the same thing differently, it leads to confusion.

1.3 Learning Progression

The learning progression framework is important in three areas of education: how to teach and learn, how to test, and how to design curriculum. Adapting the way people learn better connects the knowledge and skills they acquire throughout their education [13], [14]. Learning progression discourse is a widely used method in education [15], [16]. The learning progression framework can be viewed in four ways: (i) domain-specific content-learning *joget* dance requires learners to master a

specific domain content, namely the specific movement [17]; (ii) integration of knowledge and practise-instructor and learner; and (iii) integration of knowledge and practise-to integrate the acquired knowledge and put it into practise [18]; (iii) sequential and progressive - trainers teach them based on learners' level of ability and progress; and (iv) research-based - trainers apply these principles based on existing research [19]. Thus, learning progression is like the first step in learning to dance. To dance well, each step depends on the previous one. So we develop a step-by-step process that makes sense.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follow:

- i) To identify drawbacks of young learners while performing a routine in *joget* dance; and
- ii) To design an appropriate approach to overcome left-right coordination issues in *joget* dance.

1.3 Research Questions

In this study, our main research questions are twofold:

- i) What are the drawbacks of young learners while doing *joget* dance?
- ii) What are the solutions to overcome the left-right confusion in *joget* dancing among young dancers?

2. Methodology

This participatory action research is qualitative in nature as it follows the following systematic steps, namely: observation (issue), reflection, planning, action, re-observation and re-reflection [20]. This model allows us to repeat the cycle of observation and reflection so that the learners achieve the primary objective of one's learning [20]. The target group consists of 15 young learners in dancing. Since the research was conducted internally, we were only obtained direct permission from the school principal to collect meaningful data from the participants. We recruited our participants using purposive sampling and they were the non-Malay pupils from form 1 to form 4 with multiple social and educational backgrounds. The meaningful data for this research was collected via observation, informal conversation and interviews. Consent forms for both, training and researching purposes, were distributed to all participants involved in this study. This study involves the following sequence of steps:

2.1 Identifying Issues

The issue among young learners is related to the level of left-right coordination, which happens at various degree of seriousness. As a result, some have problems with hand and foot coordination while performing the *joget* routine. It harms the performance and execution of correct techniques.

2.2 Observation

As a result of the left-right coordination and confusion, our young learners face several problems in terms of synchronisation, execution and consistency while performing *joget* dance. Based on our observation, three pupils have no issues as they learned the correct basic since primary school. However, seven face minor difficulty and five face major confusion between left-right movement while performing basic *joget*.

2.3 Reflection

Based on observation, self-inquiry reflection has been made to understand the issue being studied and plan a solution. Reflection is conducted to examine one's teaching practices and subsequently make changes to improve those practices. Among the observed is the execution of correct left-right movement, synchronisation and consistency while performing basic *joget* dance. The reflexive diary is written out as an intervention that is appropriate to the issue being studied.

2.4 Planning

As a result of the reflection, we have set up a plan to deal with this problem. We designed the learning progression as an intervention to give a step-by-step progression to the young learners. The intervention includes (i) expert demonstration, (ii) peer/teacher step-by-step assistance, (iii) music assistance, (iv) peer/teacher step-by-step assistance (with music), and (v) prop assistance. All these were executed through learning progressions. Assessment of performance through assignments or homework found that students achieve encouraging progression. We found that the young learners were able to execute the basic *joget* routine perfectly after the intervention. Nevertheless, our young learners require peer assistance. We found that almost all who had left-right (hand-foot coordination issue) were able to execute the basic *joget* steps with the assistance of their peer dancers.

2.5 Actions/Measures

The implementation of the action and intervention is executed as planned and is carried out online (pre-test) for almost three months. A total of five activities were carried out throughout the implementation period adapting Vygotsky and the Learning Progression framework, as indicated briefly in planning section. First, the activities related to expert demonstration where we invited dancing coach to showcase or demonstrate the correct routine of *joget* step-by-step. Second, teacher and peers who were already mastered the routines assisted their team members to improve their movement and routines. Third, we integrate the use of music in their *joget* movement. Fourth, teachers and peers used music to assist team members. Final process is related to the use of related props.

The use of both frameworks helps our young learners to build their locomotor ability and left-right coordination, spur their self-confidence and sense of emotional security, and be able to mingle around with their peers and trainers. We encourage all learners to self-regulate the routine whenever and wherever they are free either at school or at home. We ask our young learners to join our Google Classroom to review the recording of their earlier training practices that further detail the mistakes in their movement as well as to view the recording of the routine execution performed by the instructor. As a result of these interventions, we were able to choreograph and execute the final performance for the Festival Gala Seni organised by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The socio-cultural interventions as proposed by Vygotsky [10] and learning progression [15], [19] do wonders and improve the locomotor ability of all young dancers.

2.6 Observation (Second Cycle)

Based on observation, it was found that the intervention went smoothly. Young learners can follow to dance with the other learners. When we found that they were confident with their move and execution, we started to choreograph the movement, using *joget* song of *Serampang Dua Belas*. However, throughout the training, some learners have struggled with consistency in their execution. Therefore, teacher/peer step-by-step assistance was applied to spur the young learners' awareness of the routine that they were required to do.

2.7 Reflection (Second Cycle)

We reflect again on the actions that have been carried out to make improvement in their execution. Although the majority of our learners experienced an improvement in their performance, one of them dropped out of the class due to their physical inability to cope with the correct execution and had a minor injury. We encouraged her to join the team when she has recovered from her injury later.

To make it short, our participatory action research is based on Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's Framework that require observation, reflection, planning and action, as indicated in Figure 1.

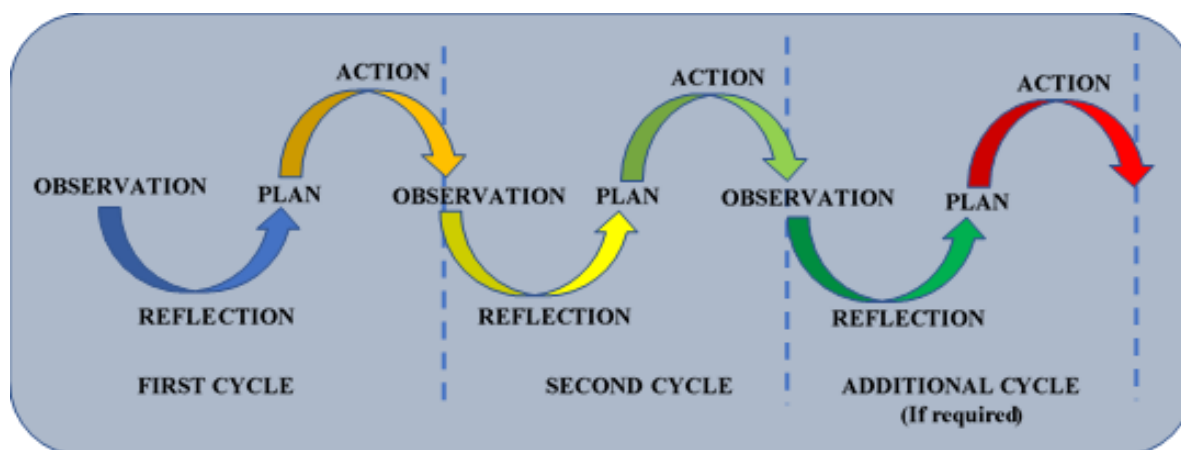


Fig. 1. Participatory Action Research Framework (Adopted from Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon [20])

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Expert demonstration and peer/teacher step-by-step assistance

Reflection is the best way to understand the extent of the learning outcome [21], [22]. This is indeed true when it comes to our role as teachers in charge of the dancing team. We reflect on our reflexive diary (as indicated in Photo 1) [20] that we made indicating our experience in handling our young learners.



Photo 1. Teacher assists young learners (Source: Dr. Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim)

Reflexive Diary

June 14, 2022

Music Room, Ampang

We were the teachers in charge of the dance team. One of us comes from a music education background, and I had several years of experience as a National Arts Coach for performing arts, including language, theatre, and dance. The other two were newcomers to dancing activities. In terms of personal experiences, both of us have had national and international exposure and are interested in performing arts activities. We showed them how the *joget* should be done step-by-step, counting from 1 to 8. After the demonstration, we asked them to execute the movement. Some of them did brilliantly. We discovered that many of them required special attention. We then separated them into three groups and performed the activities differently. For those who could carry out the dance steps accurately, we let them assist their friends in training like peer coaching.

The reflexive diary addresses our experience in managing these learners. We found them very enthusiastic about learning *joget*, as most of them were non-Malay. We found some learners were good as they had an initial tutorial before joining the team:

Teacher, I used to join my dancing club when I was in Ong Pong Primary School. Sadly, we have had no chance since joining the secondary due to academic commitment and COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Thank you for inviting us.

(Chaha, 16 years old)

We also discovered that our young dancers are struggling to cope with the technique that we impose on them. Laiyi, 17 years old told us that:

Difficult! That is what I would say when it comes to this routine. I was struggling with my body and my movement too. *Cikgu* made the learning experience very meaningful by showing it step-by-step. I hope I could maintain my interest in the team. Look easy but sorry, it is difficult!

(Laiyi, 17 years)

3.2 Peer/teacher step-by-step assistance (with music)

In our approach to ensuring young learners master their skills, we used music, so that they can easily embrace themselves with the move according to the rhythm and tempo of the music played. In this regard, counting from 1 to 8 is pertinent as indicated in the following reflexive diary:



Photo 2. Training with music (Source: Dr. Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim)

Reflexive Diary

July 10, 2022

Anjung Siaga, Ampang

We came early today to school. I arrived around 6.25 am and our dancers arrived 5 minutes later. We gathered at the Anjung Siaga for the early morning training before the daily assembly. We instructed all learners to recall what they have learned. Today, we are going to use music, yes, the music that they are going to perform for video recording. Using learning progression, step-by-step, they look confident! Later, when we use Music, everything returned to the beginning learning! *Hadoiiii...* we went back to basic. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8..... Then, we let them hear the tempo of the *joget* song. I demonstrated – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.... Then, I ask them to do it! Yes, they made it! Though it was not that good, at least I can visualise the outcome of the *joget* later!

The use of music is substantial. It will be used later on and definitely, we want them to perform using the song. As we chose *Joget Serampang Dua Belas*, we found that the song is a fast-tempo *joget*. Young learners (as portrayed in Photo 2) complained that the *joget* was too fast and they requested to change the song to something else. We explained that the song was the traditional song as required

in competition and fulfilled the level of difficulty expected. When I told them that they are confused with their left-right hand and feet coordination, one of them replied:

Sorry *cikgu*, we messed up! My mind was confused to do multiple tasks, counting from 1 to 8, and listening to music. It was terrible but enjoyable at the same time. Give us some time la *cikgu*, later on, I will execute better, I promise!

(Harby, 14 years)

Young performers have also addressed concerns about their peers' performance. They told their worries:

Cikgu, kiki did mistakes repeatedly. Can you do something about her? We are so worried that she would not be able to execute her routines before the big day! We have helped her but it seems, she was at 'another' level.



(Hanchiang, 14 years)

3.3 Prop assistance

In an attempt to ensure young learners master the movement, we found that prop is useful in minimising error/confusion and at the same time brings a synographic impact on performance visualisation. After a discussion with a senior coach of dancing, he suggested we use a prop for that purpose. We came out with the idea to use *Songket* Cloth.

Photo 3. Young performers use *Songket* Cloth as a prop (Source: Dr. Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim)

Reflexive Diary

July 21, 2022

School Hall, Ampang

Oh my... a very packed day for all of us. After negotiating with school administrators, they allowed us to train. Our justification, we brought a senior coach for dance from the *Jabatan Kesenian dan Kebudayaan Negara* (JKKN). Abid

has been in the industry for more than 40 years and grew up witnessing the dancing festival in palaces. It was great advice and he helped us in many ways. We told him that we would use the *Songket* Cloth. Yes, it was indeed a good idea. So, we watched Abid assist the learners to use *Songket* as a prop. *Songket* did wonder. They looked magnificent while executing *joget* routine with minimal error. Thank you, God!

We were amazed by the level portrayed by our young dancers. They looked good and fabulous with the *Songket* prop (as portrayed in Photo 3). They executed their routine with so much confidence compared to the last time when we trained. We hoped they could sustain their spirit and enthusiasm to give the best in their final performance. The use of *songket* has further enhanced their confidence:

We look good and beautiful with *Songket* props. Let us hope that our beauty will further expose when we do the full dress rehearsal. I wish all of us are in high spirits and I would like to thank to Abid for helping us.

(Xixi, 16 years)

In addition, the use of *songket* has enriched their and understanding of the Malay culture:

I never touch the *songket* material before *Cikgu*! It's really beautiful. I hope I could ask my mom to buy the material for me. Hopefully, I will get one in the future.

(Kiki, 15 years)

3.4 Discussion

The following is a discussion of the research findings based on the research objectives.

i) Research Objective 1: to identify drawbacks of young learners while performing a routine in *joget* dance

While the majority of the participants were the first timer, we thought that it was an uphill task of forming a decent dancing team. However, when we gathered and asked them to do the routines, we witnessed some silver linings, that came from the framework of Vygotsky and Learning Progression. The major drawback for the young learners was related to the left-right coordination (between hands and feet). It showed that they needed intensive training. However, when we went through the socio-cultural learning approach by Vygotsky, we knew that peer and teacher assistance were the primal factor. We discovered when they faced difficulties such as left-right confusion, they went to the basic...1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Significant others such as peers and teachers are contributed to the success of *joget* dance routine. The early identification has made them more structural and confident during the performance.

ii) Research Objective 2: to design an appropriate approach to overcome LR coordination issues in *joget* dance

After we have detected the drawback of our young learners, we designed the intervention and reflection based on the framework of Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon [20]. We divided the intervention and reflection into 3 major stages, for this participatory action research. The intervention included (i) expert demonstration and peer/teacher step-by-step assistance, (ii) peer/teacher step-by-step assistance (with music), and (iii) prop assistance. All these were executed through learning progressions. These three phases were in line with the learning progression framework, where everything went back to the basics once the learners faced confusion difficulties. Using the counting from 1 to 8, the teachers would go back and see if the routines were performed according to the standard practices. The music element, which is pertinent in dancing was added as they progressed. Though the young learners faced difficulties while listening to music and doing their routines, with the help of learning progression, they improved. Props have certainly enhanced their confidence and added flavour to their performance.

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that the main drawback of young dancers is related to left-right coordination where they tend to confuse the direction. Despite the neurological factor behind the drawback, we chose the socio-cultural determinant of significant others and learning progression to overcome the problem. The observation, reflection (reflexive diary) and plan were well executed and benefited the young learners.

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