

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Effects of dance education on emotional repair and identity reconstruction in women

DOI: 10.29063/ajrh2026/v30i11.9

Yalin Cui

Jichuan East Road, Hailing District, Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, Taizhou University, China

For Correspondence: Email: cuiyalin0222@163.com

Abstract

This study examines the effects of dance education on emotional repair and identity reconstruction among women, with particular attention to the roles of embodiment, bodily governance, and negotiated agency. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to women participating in formal and semi-formal dance education settings in selected Chinese cities. The study measured six latent constructs: Dance Education Engagement, Embodiment, Emotional Repair, Identity Reconstruction, Bodily Governance, and Negotiated Agency. Structural equation modeling was employed to test the relationships among these variables. The findings show that dance education significantly enhances embodiment, which in turn positively contributes to emotional repair and identity reconstruction. The results further indicate that although dance spaces may reproduce forms of bodily governance through discipline and normative expectations, women actively negotiate these structures through agency and self-expression. Overall, the study highlights dance education as both an embodied pedagogical practice and a psychosocial resource that supports women's emotional wellbeing and self-redefinition. These findings contribute to growing scholarship on movement-based interventions and suggest that dance education may offer meaningful benefits for women's mental health, empowerment, and holistic wellbeing. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2026; 30 [11]: 98-110).

Keywords: Dance education; Embodiment; Emotional repair; Identity reconstruction; Bodily governance

Résumé

Dans le contexte des systèmes de gouvernance corporelle, cette étude explore l'éducation à la danse comme pratique incarnée pour la reconstruction identitaire et la guérison émotionnelle des femmes. Un modèle quantitatif utilisant la modélisation par équations structurelles a analysé des données d'enquête auprès de femmes inscrites dans des programmes de danse formels et semi-formels, en s'appuyant sur les théories de l'incarnation, du traumatisme et de la gouvernance féministe. Les résultats démontrent que l'éducation à la danse améliore significativement l'incarnation, ce qui facilite ensuite la réparation émotionnelle et soutient la reconstruction identitaire. Une identité reconstruite avec succès prédit fortement l'agencéité négociée—la capacité à réinterpréter et à défier les normes gouvernantes—tandis que la gouvernance corporelle restreint négativement la reconstruction identitaire. Les résultats présentent l'éducation à la danse comme un site de gouvernance incarnée où guérison et négociation du pouvoir convergent, ainsi que comme une intervention psychosociale. Cette étude ajoute des données empiriques aux discussions interdisciplinaires sur le genre, la santé mentale et l'éducation. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2026; 30 [11]: 98-110).

Mots-clés: Éducation à la danse, Incarnation, Réparation émotionnelle, Reconstruction identitaire, Gouvernance corporelle

Introduction

Women's psychological distress and identity fragmentation are increasingly recognized as embodied experiences rather than purely cognitive or emotional phenomena. Conventional psychological interventions have traditionally focused on verbal articulation, cognitive restructuring, and clinical symptom reduction, often overlooking the role of the body in emotional regulation, trauma processing, and identity

formation.¹ Emerging interdisciplinary scholarship in psychology, education, and performance studies suggests that emotional repair and identity reconstruction are deeply rooted in embodied practices, positioning the body as a critical site of healing and self-making.^{2,3} Dance education and dance-movement-based interventions have gained prominence as embodied modalities that integrate physical movement, emotional expression, and social meaning-making. Research across clinical, educational, and community settings demonstrates

that dance facilitates emotional regulation, improves self-awareness, and supports psychological well-being, particularly among women experiencing trauma, depression, body image disturbance, or social marginalization.⁴ Unlike conventional therapeutic approaches, dance engages proprioceptive, kinesthetic, and affective systems simultaneously, allowing participants to process emotions through movement rather than verbal narration alone.⁵

Beyond therapeutic outcomes, dance education also functions as a mechanism of identity reconstruction, enabling women to renegotiate self-perception, agency, and bodily ownership. Studies have shown that participation in structured dance practices contributes to improved self-concept, emotional competence, and body image, particularly in contexts where women's bodies have been subject to medicalization, violence, or social discipline.⁶ Through repetition, rhythm, and collective movement, dance enables participants to reclaim bodily autonomy and reconfigure fragmented identities disrupted by trauma or social exclusion.

At the same time, feminist and sociological scholarship highlights that dance education operates within broader systems of bodily governance, where norms of discipline, aesthetics, and control shape women's embodied experiences. Dance training can both reproduce and resist dominant power structures, making it a complex site where emotional repair intersects with social regulation. Understanding dance education solely as a psychological intervention risks obscuring its role in shaping subjectivity, agency, and gendered embodiment.⁷

Recent empirical evidence further supports the effectiveness of dance-based interventions in addressing trauma, depression, and psychosocial distress among women across diverse contexts, including survivors of violence, refugees, and individuals coping with illness.⁸ However, despite this growing body of work, there remains limited integrative analysis that situates dance education at the intersection of psychological healing, embodied identity reconstruction, and bodily governance. This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing dance education as a transformative mechanism that

extends beyond therapeutic intervention to function as a form of embodied governance and identity work. By synthesizing interdisciplinary evidence, the paper advances an integrated framework that reconceptualizes dance education as a powerful site of emotional repair, bodily agency, and gendered self-reconstruction in women's lives.

Literature review

Embodiment and the body as a site of knowledge and healing

Embodiment theory challenges Cartesian separations of mind and body by emphasizing the body as a primary site of knowledge, experience, and meaning-making. Within psychology and feminist scholarship, embodiment is understood not merely as physical presence but as the lived, affective, and socially mediated experience of being in a body.⁹ Emotional states, identity formation, and self-perception are increasingly conceptualized as embodied processes shaped through movement, sensation, and interaction with social norms.

Dance and movement practices occupy a central position within embodiment theory, as they activate proprioceptive awareness, kinesthetic intelligence, and affective expression simultaneously. Empirical studies demonstrate that embodied movement enhances emotional competence, self-awareness, and psychological integration, particularly among women whose bodily experiences are often shaped by trauma, surveillance, and normative regulation.¹⁰ Unlike verbal therapeutic approaches, dance enables pre-reflective emotional processing, allowing individuals to access and regulate affective states that may be inaccessible through language alone.

Within dance education, embodiment facilitates the reconstruction of bodily agency by reorienting individuals toward their own sensory experiences rather than external evaluative frameworks. Research shows that sustained engagement in dance can improve body image, self-concept, and emotional resilience, reinforcing the idea that embodiment functions as a foundational mechanism for psychological well-being and identity formation.¹¹

Trauma, emotional repair, and dance-based interventions

Trauma is increasingly understood as an embodied phenomenon, with psychological distress manifesting through somatic symptoms, dissociation, and disrupted bodily awareness. Traditional trauma interventions have been critiqued for privileging cognitive and narrative processing while insufficiently addressing the bodily dimensions of traumatic experience.¹² As a result, somatic and movement-based therapies have gained prominence as complementary or alternative approaches to trauma recovery.

Dance movement therapy (DMT) has been empirically shown to reduce symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress, and emotional dysregulation across diverse populations of women, including survivors of violence, refugees, and individuals coping with chronic illness.¹³ Meta-analyses and randomized controlled trials indicate that dance-based interventions support emotional repair by facilitating affect regulation, grounding, and reconnection with bodily sensations.¹⁴

Crucially, emotional repair through dance is not limited to symptom reduction. Qualitative studies highlight that movement-based practices enable participants to renegotiate fragmented identities, restore a sense of bodily ownership, and re-establish trust in their own physical presence¹². These findings suggest that dance functions as both a therapeutic and identity-oriented practice, allowing women to reconstruct meaning and agency through embodied engagement.

Identity reconstruction through dance education

Identity reconstruction refers to the process through which individuals reconfigure self-understanding following experiences of disruption, marginalization, or trauma. Within feminist and educational theory, identity is seen as fluid, relational, and embodied rather than fixed or purely cognitive¹³. Dance education provides a unique context for identity reconstruction by integrating bodily discipline, creative expression, and social interaction. Studies demonstrate that participation in dance education contributes to improved self-esteem, emotional integration, and redefinition of

personal identity, particularly among women negotiating body image dissatisfaction, illness, or social exclusion¹⁵. Through choreographic practice and embodied learning, participants engage in iterative processes of self-reflection and re-authorship, where movement becomes a medium for expressing and reshaping identity narratives.

Importantly, identity reconstruction through dance is shaped by pedagogical contexts. Feminist approaches to dance education emphasize reflexivity, agency, and inclusivity, enabling participants to resist restrictive norms and reclaim bodily autonomy. These pedagogical dimensions distinguish dance education from purely clinical interventions, positioning it as a broader social and cultural practice with transformative potential.

Bodily governance, power, and gendered regulation

While dance education can enable emotional repair and identity reconstruction, it also operates within systems of bodily governance. Drawing on Foucauldian and feminist theory, bodily governance refers to the ways institutions, pedagogies, and cultural norms regulate bodies through discipline, surveillance, and normalization. Dance training, particularly in formal or elite settings, has historically reinforced gendered ideals of discipline, aesthetic conformity, and bodily control.¹⁶

Empirical research highlights how dance education can simultaneously function as a site of empowerment and regulation. On one hand, structured movement practices cultivate bodily awareness and agency; on the other, they may reproduce normative expectations related to femininity, body size, and performance standards¹⁷. This duality underscores the importance of critically examining dance education not only as a therapeutic tool but also as a governance mechanism shaping women's embodied subjectivities.

Recent scholarship calls for reframing dance education as a space of negotiated governance, where emotional repair and identity reconstruction occur within—and sometimes against existing power structures¹⁸. Such an approach recognizes women as active agents who

navigate, resist, and reinterpret bodily norms through embodied practice.

Synthesis and research gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that dance education operates at the intersection of embodiment, trauma recovery, identity reconstruction, and bodily governance. While substantial evidence supports the psychological and emotional benefits of dance-based interventions, existing studies often treat therapy, education, and governance as separate domains. There remains a lack of integrative frameworks that theorize dance education simultaneously as a mechanism of emotional repair and a form of bodily governance shaping women's identities.

This study addresses this gap by advancing a theory-driven perspective that situates dance education within embodied trauma recovery while critically engaging with its governance dimensions. By doing so, it contributes to interdisciplinary debates in psychology, education, gender studies, and performance research.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework positions dance education as an embodied pedagogical practice that initiates emotional repair and identity reconstruction in women through structured movement and choreographic engagement. Dance education activates embodiment processes—such as kinesthetic awareness, proprioception, and affective expression—which enable individuals to experience and regulate emotions at a bodily level. These embodied processes facilitate emotional repair by supporting trauma processing, psychological integration, and affect regulation, particularly in contexts where distress is somatically encoded. Through sustained embodied engagement, emotional repair becomes a foundation for identity reconstruction, allowing women to rebuild bodily agency, reconfigure self-concept, and renegotiate disrupted identity narratives. Figure 1 shows the framework.

Simultaneously, the framework situates dance education within systems of bodily governance,

where norms of discipline, aesthetic regulation, and gendered expectation's structure both pedagogical practice and embodied outcomes. While bodily governance shapes how movement is taught and experienced, identity reconstruction through dance can generate negotiated agency, enabling women to critically engage with, resist, or reconfigure dominant bodily norms. This reciprocal relationship highlights dance education as neither purely emancipatory nor purely disciplinary, but as a dynamic site where emotional repair, identity work, and power relations intersect. Together, the framework conceptualizes dance education as a mechanism through which women navigate trauma, reclaim bodily autonomy, and transform embodied subjectivity within governed social contexts.

Methods

Study design

This study employed a quantitative, explanatory, cross-sectional design to examine how participation in dance education contributes to emotional repair and identity reconstruction among women, while also assessing the role of bodily governance and negotiated agency. A quantitative design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to test hypothesized relationships among multiple latent constructs through structural equation modeling (SEM). The design allowed the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of women's dance experiences and to empirically evaluate the pathways linking dance education, embodiment, emotional repair, identity reconstruction, bodily governance, and negotiated agency.

Study setting

The study was conducted in selected urban centers in China, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, where formal and semi-formal dance education programs are more widely available. These cities were selected because they host a greater concentration of dance academies, university-affiliated dance programs, community arts centers, and women-oriented wellness and movement initiatives. Such settings provided

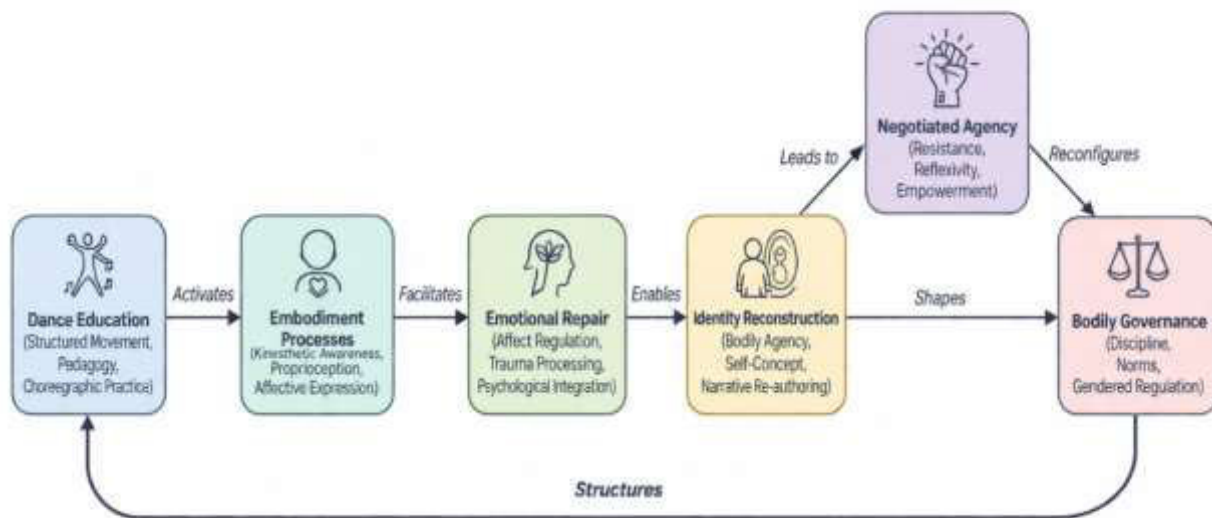


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of study

access to women with sustained engagement in structured dance learning, which was necessary for examining the relationships among dance education, embodiment, emotional repair, identity reconstruction, bodily governance, and negotiated agency.

Study population

The target population comprised adult women aged 18 years and above who had participated in dance education programs for a minimum period sufficient to meaningfully experience structured movement practice. The study focused on women because the conceptual framework specifically addressed emotional repair, identity reconstruction, and bodily governance in relation to women's embodied experiences. Participants were eligible if they were currently enrolled in, or had recently completed, a formal or semi-formal dance education program and were able to understand and respond to the questionnaire independently. Women who had no regular dance education experience, were below 18 years of age, or were unable to complete the survey were excluded from the study.

Sampling technique and sample size

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants from relevant dance education settings, because the study required respondents with direct experience of structured dance learning. This was supplemented by snowball recruitment; whereby eligible participants were invited to share the survey with other women in similar dance education communities. This combined approach was appropriate because there is no single accessible sampling frame for women participating in diverse dance education programs across institutions and community settings.

The study aimed to achieve a sample size adequate for SEM analysis. Since the model included multiple latent constructs and indicators, a minimum sample of approximately 300 respondents was targeted to ensure sufficient statistical power, stable path estimation, and reliable assessment of the measurement model. A total of 385 questionnaires were initially distributed. Following the exclusion of incomplete responses (42), outliers (18), and invalid cases (25), the final dataset comprised 300 valid responses. This sample size aligns with the recommended

thresholds for conducting structural equation modeling analysis.

Questionnaire development

Data were collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire developed from the study's conceptual framework and informed by prior literature on embodiment, dance-based psychosocial healing, identity formation, feminist pedagogy, and women's agency. The questionnaire was designed to measure six latent constructs: dance education engagement, embodiment, emotional repair, identity reconstruction, bodily governance, and negotiated agency. Item development was guided by scholarship emphasizing embodiment as a lived and meaning-making process, the therapeutic and psychological effects of dance and dance movement interventions, the role of movement in self-concept and body image restoration, and the influence of gendered pedagogical norms on women's agency and bodily experience^{1,2,4,6,8}. The questionnaire consisted of demographic items and construct-based statements rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The wording of the items was refined to suit women participating in formal and semi-formal dance education settings in selected Chinese cities.

Measurement of variables

The study measured six latent constructs: dance education engagement (DE), embodiment (EMB), emotional repair (ER), identity reconstruction (IR), bodily governance (BG), and negotiated agency (NA). All constructs were assessed using multiple questionnaire items rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The items were developed from the study's conceptual framework and informed by prior literature on embodiment, dance-based psychosocial healing, identity formation, feminist pedagogy, and women's agency. Higher scores on each scale indicated a stronger presence of the relevant construct.

Embodiment (EMB) referred to the participant's bodily awareness, sensory presence, kinesthetic responsiveness, and felt connection to

her body during and after dance participation. This construct assessed whether dance education enhanced bodily consciousness and integrative self-awareness.

Emotional Repair (ER) referred to the extent to which dance participation supported emotional release, regulation, healing, and recovery from distress. Items under this construct measured perceived improvements in emotional balance, self-soothing capacity, and restoration of inner stability.

Identity Reconstruction (IR) captured the extent to which dance education enabled women to rebuild self-understanding, restore self-worth, and develop a renewed sense of personal identity. This construct reflected the idea that embodied learning can support deeper processes of self-redefinition.

Bodily Governance (BG) measured participants' perceptions of discipline, regulation, aesthetic expectations, and normative pressures operating within dance education environments. This construct was included to capture the critical dimension of power and control within embodied pedagogical spaces.

Negotiated Agency (NA) referred to women's perceived capacity to respond actively and reflexively to these governing structures by asserting choice, interpretation, and self-direction within their embodied experiences. It represented the outcome of identity reconstruction in relation to broader social and pedagogical constraints.

Data collection procedure

Data were collected through questionnaire administration in dance education settings and, where appropriate, through an online survey link shared with eligible participants. Potential respondents were first informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Only women who agreed to participate proceeded to complete the questionnaire. To reduce missing data and response errors, participants were encouraged to answer all items, and incomplete or invalid responses were removed before final analysis.

Data analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS for preliminary statistical analysis and

AMOS/SmartPLS for structural equation modeling. First, descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participant characteristics and general response patterns. Second, the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Third, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion to confirm that the constructs were empirically distinct.

After establishing the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among the latent variables. Path coefficients were estimated to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationships between dance education, embodiment, emotional repair, identity reconstruction, bodily governance, and negotiated agency. Model fit was assessed using standard SEM fit indices, including the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also examined to assess the explanatory power of the model for endogenous constructs.

Ethical approval

The study adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and was granted ethical approval by the Institutional Review Board of Taizhou University (Approval Code: TZU-IRB-2025-089). Prior to participation, all individuals were fully briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Written informed consent was obtained to ensure understanding and agreement.

Participation was entirely voluntary, with responses anonymized and securely stored to protect confidentiality. Recognizing the sensitive nature of topics such as emotional distress and identity, the questionnaire items were thoughtfully designed to minimize any potential discomfort. Additionally, participants were provided with contact details for mental health support services. Throughout the study, the well-being of participants remained a top priority.

Results

Measurement model assessment

The measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of the latent constructs included in the study: Dance Education Engagement, Embodiment, Emotional Repair, Identity Reconstruction, Bodily Governance, and Negotiated Agency. Internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined prior to testing the structural model.

All constructs exceed the recommended thresholds for Cronbach's alpha (>0.70), composite reliability (>0.70), and average variance extracted (>0.50), indicating strong internal consistency and convergent validity. These findings support the conceptualization of embodiment, emotional repair, and identity reconstruction as coherent latent constructs, consistent with prior empirical work in dance movement therapy and embodiment research.^{4,11,19} The satisfactory reliability of Bodily Governance confirms its viability as a measurable construct capturing perceived discipline and normative regulation, as theorized in feminist and Foucauldian scholarship.^{20,21}

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion to ensure that each construct was empirically distinct.

The square root of AVE for each construct (diagonal values) exceeds its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity. This distinction is theoretically important, as it demonstrates that emotional repair and identity reconstruction—while related—are empirically separable processes, supporting feminist and trauma-based critiques that identity recovery extends beyond symptom reduction.^{9, 16, 17}

Structural model results

The hypothesized structural relationships were tested using SEM. Model fit indices indicated a good fit to the data (Comparative Fit Index = 0.94,

Table 1: Reliability and convergent validity of the study constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted AVE
Dance Education Engagement	0.86	0.89	0.62
Embodiment	0.88	0.91	0.65
Emotional Repair	0.90	0.92	0.68
Identity Reconstruction	0.87	0.90	0.64
Bodily Governance	0.82	0.85	0.59
Negotiated Agency	0.89	0.91	0.67

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables

Construct	Dance Education	Embodiment	Emotional Repair (ER)	Emotional Repair (ER)	Emotional Repair (ER)	Emotional Repair (ER)
Dance Education (DE)	0.79					
Embodiment (EMB)	0.61	0.81				
Emotional Repair ER)	0.58	0.69	0.82			
Identity Reconstruction (IR)	0.55	0.66	0.71	0.80		
Bodily Governance (BG)	0.42	0.46	0.44	0.51	0.77	
Negotiated Agency (NA)	0.49	0.63	0.67	0.72	0.54	0.82

Table 3: Structural model path coefficients and hypothesis testing results

Path	β	t-value	p-value
Dance Education → Embodiment	0.67	10.12	<0.001
Embodiment → Emotional Repair	0.63	9.21	<0.001
Emotional Repair → Identity Reconstruction	0.61	8.74	<0.001
Bodily Governance → Identity Reconstruction	-0.28	4.09	<0.001
Identity Reconstruction → Negotiated Agency	0.69	10.55	<0.001

Table 4: Explained variance (R²) of endogenous constructs

	Coefficient of Determination (R ²)
Embodiment	0.45
Emotional Repair	0.40
Identity Reconstruction	0.52
Negotiated Agency	0.48

Tucker–Lewis Index = 0.93, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = 0.045, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual = 0.041), meeting established SEM thresholds. Dance education shows a strong positive effect on embodiment, confirming theoretical claims that structured movement activates kinesthetic awareness and bodily presence.^{3,6} Embodiment significantly

predicts emotional repair, supporting trauma literature that frames healing as a somatic and affective process rather than a purely cognitive one.^{9,10} Emotional repair, in turn, strongly predicts identity reconstruction, aligning with qualitative findings that emotional integration precedes re-authorship of self and bodily agency.²²

Bodily governance exhibits a significant negative effect on identity reconstruction, indicating that rigid norms and disciplinary practices can constrain identity recovery. This finding empirically supports feminist critiques of dance pedagogy as a site of both empowerment and regulation^{13, 15}. However, identity reconstruction strongly predicts negotiated agency, suggesting that women actively reinterpret and resist governing norms through embodied self-reconstruction.

Explained variance of endogenous constructs

The model explains substantial variance across all endogenous constructs, particularly identity reconstruction ($R^2 = 0.52$). This indicates that embodiment and emotional repair together provide strong explanatory power for identity-related outcomes, consistent with integrative embodiment–trauma frameworks.^{4,14} The explained variance in negotiated agency further supports the argument that dance education enables women not only to heal emotionally but also to actively renegotiate bodily norms and power relations.

Discussion

This study sought to empirically examine dance education as a mechanism for emotional repair and identity reconstruction in women, situating these processes within broader structures of bodily governance. The structural equation modeling results provide strong support for the proposed theoretical framework, demonstrating that dance education operates through embodied processes to facilitate emotional healing, while identity reconstruction mediates women's capacity to negotiate and reconfigure governing norms. The discussion below interprets each structural path in relation to embodiment, trauma, and governance theories.

Dance education and embodiment

The strong positive relationship between dance education and embodiment confirms theoretical claims that structured movement and pedagogical engagement activate bodily awareness, proprioception, and kinesthetic intelligence. Embodiment theory emphasizes that the body is not merely a vessel for cognition but a primary site of knowing and experiencing the world. The findings empirically validate this perspective by demonstrating that participation in dance education significantly enhances embodied awareness.^{1,2} This supports prior scholarship arguing that dance enables participants to reconnect with sensory and affective dimensions of the self, particularly in contexts where bodily awareness has been disrupted by trauma or social regulation.

From an educational standpoint, this result reinforces the idea that dance education functions as embodied pedagogy, where learning occurs through movement, sensation, and affect rather than abstract cognition alone. This aligns with feminist critiques of disembodied learning models and supports calls for recognizing bodily engagement as central to women's psychological and educational development.

Embodiment and emotional repair

The significant path from embodiment to emotional repair provides empirical support for trauma theories that conceptualize psychological distress as somatically encoded. Trauma literature consistently argues that emotional dysregulation, dissociation, and distress are stored and expressed through the body, making purely verbal or cognitive interventions insufficient.^{16, 17} The results demonstrate that heightened embodied awareness significantly predicts emotional repair, suggesting that reconnecting with bodily sensation and movement facilitates affect regulation and psychological integration.

This finding strengthens the argument that dance-based practices offer unique therapeutic value by enabling pre-verbal and non-discursive processing of emotional experiences. By engaging the body directly, dance allows women to regulate emotions, process trauma, and restore a sense of bodily safety, corroborating trauma-informed and somatic healing frameworks.

Emotional repair and identity reconstruction

The strong positive relationship between emotional repair and identity reconstruction highlights that emotional healing is a necessary precondition for reconstituting identity. Identity theory, particularly within feminist and psychosocial traditions, emphasizes that identity is embodied, relational, and shaped through lived experience¹⁸. The findings suggest that once emotional distress is regulated and integrated, women are better positioned to reconstruct disrupted identity narratives, reclaim bodily agency, and develop a coherent sense of self. This path empirically supports qualitative research showing that dance-based interventions enable women to move beyond

symptom reduction toward deeper processes of self-authorship and meaning-making. Identity reconstruction, in this sense, emerges not as an abstract cognitive shift but as an embodied reorientation toward the self.

Bodily governance and identity reconstruction

The negative association between bodily governance and identity reconstruction confirms critical feminist and Foucauldian perspectives on discipline and regulation. Bodily governance theory posits that institutions and pedagogies regulate bodies through norms, surveillance, and expectations, particularly in gendered contexts such as dance education^{23, 24}. The findings indicate that rigid disciplinary norms and aesthetic regulation constrain women's capacity to reconstruct identity, reinforcing the argument that governance structures can limit agency even within spaces intended for empowerment.

This result complicates idealized narratives of dance as inherently liberatory, demonstrating instead that dance education operates within power-laden systems that shape embodied subjectivity. It underscores the importance of pedagogical reflexivity and inclusive practice in mitigating the constraining effects of governance on identity formation.

Identity reconstruction and negotiated agency

The strong positive relationship between identity reconstruction and negotiated agency illustrates how women actively respond to governing structures rather than passively internalizing them. Negotiated agency reflects women's capacity to reinterpret, resist, and reshape bodily norms through reflexivity and empowerment.²⁵ The findings suggest that identity reconstruction enables women to engage critically with governance, transforming discipline into a site of agency rather than submission.

This path aligns with feminist theories of agency that emphasize negotiation rather than outright resistance, recognizing that empowerment often occurs within, not outside, existing structures. Dance education thus emerges as a dynamic site where emotional repair and identity work enable

women to renegotiate power relations and reclaim bodily autonomy.

Integrative theoretical contribution

Taken together, the findings bridge embodiment theory, trauma theory, and bodily governance by demonstrating how dance education simultaneously functions as a psychological intervention and a socio-political practice. Embodiment enables emotional repair; emotional repair supports identity reconstruction; and identity reconstruction mediates women's engagement with governing norms.^{6,7,9} This integrative pathway advances existing literature by empirically demonstrating that emotional healing and identity work are inseparable from questions of power, discipline, and agency.

The results reposition dance education beyond a therapeutic or artistic activity, framing it instead as an embodied governance mechanism with transformative potential. By mapping each structural path to theory, the study contributes a nuanced understanding of how women navigate trauma, embodiment, and regulation through dance.

Study strengths and limitations

This study has several strengths. It offers a theory-driven examination of dance education by linking embodiment, emotional repair, identity reconstruction, bodily governance, and negotiated agency within a single analytical model. The study also contributes empirically to an area that is often discussed conceptually by applying structural equation modeling to women's experiences in formal and semi-formal dance education settings. In addition, the focus on women's embodied experience provides useful insight into how dance may function not only as an artistic or educational practice but also as a psychosocial resource for emotional healing and self-reconstruction.

However, the study also has limitations. First, its cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables. Second, the use of purposive and snowball sampling may reduce the generalizability of the findings beyond the selected dance education settings and cities. Third, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data creates the possibility of social desirability and response bias. Finally, the

study was conducted in selected urban settings in China, so the findings may not fully represent women participating in dance education in rural areas or different cultural contexts. Future studies may address these limitations by using longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, and more diverse samples.

Policy and practice implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for both educational policy and mental health practice, particularly in relation to gender-responsive, trauma-informed interventions. The empirical evidence demonstrates that dance education functions not only as a psychosocial intervention but also as a structured pedagogical space where embodiment, emotional repair, and identity reconstruction intersect. As such, policy frameworks should move beyond viewing dance solely as an extracurricular or therapeutic activity and recognize it as a legitimate embodied learning and mental health resource.

From an educational policy perspective, institutions at the school, university, and community levels should integrate dance education within broader wellbeing and psychosocial support strategies. The strong link between dance education, embodiment, and emotional repair suggests that embodied pedagogies can play a preventative and restorative role in addressing emotional distress among women. Curriculum designers and policymakers should therefore support inclusive, reflexive dance pedagogies that prioritize bodily awareness, emotional expression, and agency rather than rigid performance standards. Such an approach can mitigate the constraining effects of bodily governance identified in the findings, ensuring that dance education does not reproduce harmful norms related to discipline, body aesthetics, or gendered conformity.

In mental health practice, the results support the integration of dance-based and movement-oriented interventions within trauma-informed care models. Mental health practitioners, particularly those working with women affected by trauma, depression, or identity disruption, can leverage dance education as a complementary intervention that addresses the somatic dimensions of psychological distress. The demonstrated pathway

from embodiment to emotional repair underscores the importance of bodily engagement in emotional regulation, supporting calls to move beyond exclusively verbal or cognitive therapeutic modalities. Practitioners should, however, remain attentive to power dynamics and governance structures within therapeutic and educational settings, ensuring that interventions promote negotiated agency rather than reinforcing disciplinary control.

At a broader level, the findings call for cross-sector collaboration between education systems, mental health services, and community arts organizations. Policies that support interdisciplinary partnerships can facilitate access to embodied interventions for women who may be underserved by conventional mental health services, while also fostering environments where emotional healing and identity reconstruction are supported through culturally and socially sensitive practices.

Conclusion

This study advances a theory-driven understanding of dance education as a mechanism for emotional repair and identity reconstruction in women, situated within broader structures of bodily governance. Drawing on embodiment theory, trauma theory, and feminist governance perspectives, the findings empirically demonstrate that dance education activates embodied processes that facilitate emotional repair, which in turn enables identity reconstruction and negotiated agency. At the same time, the study highlights the constraining role of bodily governance, underscoring the need to critically examine power and regulation within educational and therapeutic contexts.

By mapping each structural pathway to theory, the study contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship that challenges mind-body dualism and repositions the body as central to psychological healing and identity formation. Dance education emerges not merely as an expressive or therapeutic tool, but as a dynamic site where emotional, pedagogical, and political processes converge. Women's engagement with dance enables both vulnerability and resistance,

allowing them to navigate trauma, reclaim bodily agency, and renegotiate governing norms.

While the study is based on cross-sectional quantitative analysis, it provides a robust empirical foundation for future longitudinal and mixed-methods research. Further investigation is needed to explore how different pedagogical approaches, cultural contexts, and institutional settings shape the balance between emotional repair and bodily governance. Overall, the findings underscore the transformative potential of embodied education and call for its greater integration into gender-responsive educational and mental health frameworks.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank all participants who took part in this study and shared their experiences. The authors also acknowledge the support of the dance education institutions and community programs that facilitated access to the study population. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations relating to participant information. The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests or conflict of interest in relation to this study.

References

- Gao H, Li R, Shen J, Yang H. Children's gender and parents' long-term care arrangements: evidence from China. *Applied Economics*. 2025;57(13):1510-1525.
- Ma Y, Bennett D, Chen S. Perceived organisational support and university students' career exploration: the mediation role of career adaptability. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 2023;42(4):903-919.
- Hong Q, Jiao X, Qiu X, Xu A. Investigating the impact of time allocation on family well-being in China. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*. 2024;25(5):981-1005.
- Ou J, Li N, He H, He J, Zhang L, Jiang N. Detecting muscle fatigue among community-dwelling senior adults with shape features of the probability density function of sEMG. *Journal of Neuro Engineering and Rehabilitation*. 2024;21(1):196.
- Lin C, Zhang Y. Combined effects of stress, depression, and emotion on thermal comfort: A case study in Shenzhen. *Journal of Building Engineering*. 2025; 103:112158.
- Zhang Y, Dong S, Niu R, Chu Y, Pan Y, Xu J. Neuroergonomics evaluation of teamwork in a fast-paced communication and shared decision-making task. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*. 2026; 112:103892.
- Jiang R, Dong W, Bai L, Qu A, Dong Y. Which built environment factors promote urban residents' climate change adaptive behaviors? Multi-group application of an exploratory framework via adaptive motivations' mediation. *Sustainable Cities and Society*. 2026; 139:107214.
- Csordas TJ. Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology. In: *Body/Meaning/Healing*. Palgrave Macmillan US; 2002:58-87.
- Koch S, Kunz T, Lykou S, Cruz R. Effects of dance movement therapy and dance on health-related psychological outcomes: a meta-analysis. *Arts Psychother*. 2014;41(1):46-64.
- Koch SC, Riege RF, Tisborn K, Biondo J, Martin L, Beelmann A. Effects of dance movement therapy and dance on health-related psychological outcomes: a meta-analysis update. *Front Psychol*. 2019; 10:1806.
- Bojner Horwitz E, Lennartsson AK, Theorell TP, Ullén F. Engagement in dance is associated with emotional competence in interplay with others. *Front Psychol*. 2015; 6:1096.
- Hyvönen K, Pylvänäinen P, Muotka J, Lappalainen R. The effects of dance movement therapy in the treatment of depression: a multicenter, randomized controlled trial in Finland. *Front Psychol*. 2020; 11:1687.
- Jeong YJ, Hong SC, Lee MS, Park MC, Kim YK and Suh CM. Dance movement therapy improves emotional responses and modulates neurohormones in adolescents with mild depression. *Int J Neurosci*. 2005;115(12):1711-1720.
- Schwender TM, Spengler S, Oedl C and Mess F. Effects of dance interventions on aspects of the participants' self: a systematic review. *Front Psychol*. 2018; 9:1130.
- Sandel SL, Judge JO, Landry N, Faria L, Ouellette R and Majczak M. Dance and movement program improves quality-of-life measures in breast cancer survivors. *Cancer Nurs*. 2005;28(4):301-309.
- van der Kolk B. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Viking; 2014.

17. Dieterich-Hartwell R. Dance/movement therapy in the treatment of post traumatic stress: a reference model. *Arts Psychother.* 2017; 54:38-46.
18. Bradt J, Shim M and Goodill SW. Dance/movement therapy for improving psychological and physical outcomes in cancer patients. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2015;(1):CD007103.
19. Pylvänäinen P and Lappalainen R. Change in body image among depressed adult outpatients after a dance movement therapy group treatment. *Arts Psychother.* 2018; 59:34-45.
20. Sheppard A and Broughton MC. Promoting wellbeing and health through active participation in music and dance: a systematic review. *Int J Qual Stud Health Well-being.* 2020;15(1):1732526.
21. Karcou V, Dudley-Swarbrick I, Starkey J, Parsons AS, Aithal S, Omylinska-Thurston J and Parisi A. Dancing with health: quality of life and physical improvements from an. *Oncology.* 2005; 85:365-376.
22. Harrington H. Female self-empowerment through dance. *J Dance Educ.* 2020;20(1):35-43.
23. Fatkulina N, Hendrixson V, Rauckiene-Michealsson A, Kievisiene J, Razbadauskas A and Agostinis-Sobrinho C. Dance/movement therapy as an intervention in breast cancer patients: a systematic review. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.* 2021; 2021:4989282.
24. Pylvänäinen PM, Muotka JS and Lappalainen R. A dance movement therapy group for depressed adult patients in a psychiatric outpatient clinic: effects of the treatment. *Front Psychol.* 2015; 6:980.
25. Henderson B. Intertextuality and dance: an approach to understanding embodied performance of gender in dance discourses. *J Dance Educ.* 2019;19(1):1-9.