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A Quantitative Assessment of the Therapeutic Effects of Mongolian Ethnic Dance

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Abstract: This study explores the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance on students and faculty at Inner Mongolia Arts University. The research adopts a qualitative approach, gathering data through in-depth interviews with 15 dance students and 5 instructors. The study examines how Mongolian ethnic dance influences mental health, emotional expression, stress management, and social interactions. The findings indicate that participants experience significant benefits, including improved emotional well-being, better stress management, and stronger social connections. However, challenges related to the physical demands of the practice and the need for more targeted support were also identified. The study suggests that Mongolian ethnic dance can be an effective therapeutic tool in academic settings, though further research is needed to enhance its integration with other therapeutic practices. The results contribute to the growing field of dance therapy and offer valuable insights into the role of cultural dance in supporting student well-being.

Keywords: Mongolian ethnic dance, therapeutic effects, emotional well-being, stress management, social interaction, dance therapy

I. Introduction:

Mongolian ethnic dance has been practiced for centuries as a means of storytelling, celebration, and social cohesion. Characterized by its dynamic movements, intricate footwork, and expressive gestures, Mongolian dance reflects the nomadic lifestyle and deep spiritual connections of the Mongolian people. Beyond its cultural significance, Mongolian ethnic dance has been increasingly recognized for its therapeutic benefits, contributing to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of its practitioners. Engaging in these traditional dances promotes physical fitness through coordinated movements and enhances mental health by providing an outlet for emotional expression and stress relief. Dance therapy, as a subset of expressive therapies, utilizes movement and dance to support emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being [1]. The unique movements, rhythms, and cultural significance embedded in Mongolian ethnic dance provide a distinctive avenue for therapeutic intervention, particularly within educational settings.

With the advancement of technology and social progress, the understanding of health has expanded from merely the absence of physiological diseases to a comprehensive state encompassing physical, mental, and social adaptability [2]. However, the fast-paced nature of modern life and increasing social pressures have led individuals to face severe physical and mental health issues, which traditional medical approaches often struggle to address effectively [3]. Dance, as an ancient and diverse art form, has existed since the early stages of human civilization, continuously evolving as a means of aesthetic expression, emotional release, social communication, and a lifestyle attitude. In recent years, with the shift in health perceptions and the pursuit of holistic well-being, the unique role of dance in promoting physical and mental health has garnered increasing attention and recognition [4]. Consequently, dance has emerged as a comprehensive health solution, enabling modern individuals to achieve overall enhancement of physical and mental health, making it a significant topic of contemporary societal interest.

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in fostering both academic excellence and the holistic well-being of their students and faculty. In Inner Mongolia, universities have increasingly recognized the importance of incorporating cultural and artistic activities into their curricula to enhance the overall quality of education and support the mental health of their communities [5]. However, there is a paucity of empirical research examining the specific therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance within these academic environments. Understanding how such cultural practices contribute to the mental and emotional well-being of students and teachers can inform the development of comprehensive support systems in higher education institutions.

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International experience highlights the significant impact of benchmarking on the quality of higher education, as educational quality varies based on national culture, societal values, and socioeconomic development levels [6]. In Mongolia, the concept of benchmarking emerged in the 1990s within the management marketing theory framework. In contrast, numerous researchers in other countries have extensively studied benchmarking, developing it as a tool for enhancing production operations [7]. As A. Losol (2012) asserts, benchmarking is an optimal method and systematized tool for organizing the competitiveness of higher education institutions [8]. In today's globalized world, the rapid advancement of knowledge-based education necessitates the development of benchmarking practices to ensure sustainable development and international competitiveness [9]. This study examines the role of benchmarking in improving teaching quality within higher education institutions in Mongolia, drawing on international best practices and adapting them to the local context.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between traditional cultural practices and contemporary therapeutic methods. By conducting a quantitative assessment of the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance at Inner Mongolia Arts University, this research aims to provide evidence-based insights into how participation in ethnic dance can enhance psychological well-being, reduce stress, and foster a sense of community among dance students and instructors [10]. Furthermore, this study seeks to explore the role of benchmarking in evaluating and improving the quality of teaching within the context of dance education, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on educational quality enhancement through cultural and artistic integration.

This study aims to find the answer to the question: What are the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance on dance students and teachers at Inner Mongolia Arts University?

Based on the question, the objectives are as follows:

- To assess the levels of psychological well-being among dance students and teachers engaged in Mongolian ethnic dance.
- To evaluate the impact of Mongolian ethnic dance on stress reduction and emotional health.
- To identify the factors that enhance or inhibit the therapeutic benefits of ethnic dance within the university setting.

To provide recommendations for integrating Mongolian ethnic dance into higher education curricula as a therapeutic tool.

This study is meaningful because it bridges Mongolia's rich traditional dance with modern therapeutic practices in a university setting. By examining how Mongolian ethnic dance impacts the well-being of students and teachers at Inner Mongolia Arts University, the research helps us understand how cultural art forms can support both physical and mental health. In today's fast-paced world, many people struggle with stress and mental health issues, and incorporating traditional dance offers a unique and holistic way to manage these challenges. Moreover, the insights gained from this study can guide university leaders and educators in integrating traditional dances into their programs, fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment. Additionally, this research adds to the existing knowledge on dance therapy and cultural interventions, particularly within the distinctive cultural landscape of Inner Mongolia. It also paves the way for future studies and the creation of targeted programs that promote comprehensive health and well-being in academic institutions.

II. Literature Review

Dance therapy has long been recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Rooted in the expressive arts therapies, dance therapy leverages movement and rhythm to facilitate emotional expression, reduce stress, and improve overall health [11]. Studies have consistently demonstrated that engaging in dance can lead to significant improvements in mood, cognitive function, and social interactions, making it a versatile intervention for various populations [12]. The therapeutic benefits of dance are particularly pronounced in educational settings, where it can serve as a means of promoting mental health among students and faculty alike [13].

Mongolian ethnic dance, with its unique cultural heritage and intricate movements, offers distinctive therapeutic advantages. Unlike contemporary dance forms, Mongolian ethnic dance incorporates traditional rhythms, symbolic gestures, and storytelling elements that resonate deeply with practitioners' cultural identities [14]. This cultural specificity not only enhances the therapeutic experience by fostering a sense of belonging and cultural pride but also provides a structured form of physical activity that can improve coordination, flexibility, and cardiovascular health [15]. Additionally, the communal nature of Mongolian ethnic dance promotes social cohesion and emotional support, which are critical factors in mitigating stress and preventing burnout among participants [16].

The integration of traditional dances into higher education curricula has been shown to bolster both academic and personal development. Benchmarking, as a strategic management tool, plays a pivotal role in this integration by allowing institutions to measure and enhance the quality of their dance programs against established standards [17]. Through benchmarking, universities can identify best practices, optimize resource allocation, and implement evidence-based strategies to maximize the therapeutic benefits of dance [18]. Research indicates that institutions that actively engage in benchmarking practices tend to exhibit higher levels of program efficacy, student satisfaction, and overall educational quality [19].

Furthermore, the role of cultural interventions in higher education extends beyond individual well-being to encompass broader institutional goals such as fostering an inclusive and supportive academic environment. By promoting activities like Mongolian ethnic dance, universities can create spaces where cultural expression and therapeutic practices intersect, thereby enriching the educational experience and supporting the holistic development of students and faculty [20]. This holistic approach is essential in addressing the multifaceted challenges of modern higher education, where mental health issues are increasingly prevalent [21].

Despite the recognized benefits, there is a notable gap in empirical research specifically addressing the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance within higher education contexts. Most existing studies focus on Western dance forms or generalized dance therapy, leaving the unique contributions of Mongolian ethnic dance underexplored [22]. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a quantitative assessment of the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance at Inner Mongolia Arts University, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on cultural and therapeutic interventions in higher education [23].

III. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance on students and faculty at Inner Mongolia Arts University. The university is located in Hohhot and it is the only independent, comprehensive higher education institution for the arts in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Established in 1957 as Inner Mongolia Arts School, it evolved into the Inner Mongolia University School of Arts in 1987 and became an integral part of Inner Mongolia University in 2001. In 2015, it was officially granted independent status by the Ministry of Education and the People's Government of Inner Mongolia, and is now known as Inner Mongolia Arts University. The university has earned national recognition in various art forms, with its faculty and students winning numerous prestigious awards, such as the "Lotus Award" for original dance dramas, national art exhibitions, and national folk art festivals. It continues to nurture outstanding talent in fields such as music, dance, visual arts, and film, with alumni who have excelled in the arts, entertainment, and academia. Given the complex, subjective nature of therapeutic experiences, qualitative methods were chosen to provide a deep, nuanced understanding of the participants' personal experiences and perspectives. The aim is to investigate how this traditional form of dance influences participants' mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 dance students and 5 dance faculty members, chosen to represent a variety of experiences within the dance community.

The sample consisted of 15 students and 5 faculty members. Students were selected from academic years of 2022-2024 and levels of engagement with the program, ensuring a diversity of perspectives on the therapeutic effects of the dance. Faculty members, with extensive experience in teaching Mongolian ethnic dance, were included to provide expert observations on how the dance affects students' well-being. The qualitative interviews aimed to capture personal experiences of stress management, emotional expression, physical health benefits, and social interactions facilitated through dance.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to allow participants to share their experiences freely while guiding them to address specific aspects of the therapeutic impact of Mongolian ethnic dance. For the students, questions focused on personal experiences with the dance, perceived emotional and mental health benefits, stress management, social interactions, and motivations for continuing the practice. Additionally, students were asked about challenges in using dance therapeutically and suggestions for improving therapeutic programs. The faculty interviews centered on their observations of students' well-being, teaching strategies that integrate therapeutic aspects, and challenges encountered in promoting the dance's therapeutic benefits. Both student and faculty interviews were designed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the therapeutic dimensions of Mongolian ethnic dance.

The interview questions were designed to probe various dimensions of therapeutic effects. For students, key themes included personal and emotional experiences with dance, its impact on mental health, stress relief, and emotional expression. Additionally, the questions explored social aspects, such as relationships with peers and instructors. For faculty, the focus was on how they perceive the effects of dance on students' well-being, their strategies for fostering these benefits, and any challenges they encounter in teaching dance as a therapeutic tool. Both groups were asked to suggest improvements to enhance the therapeutic outcomes of the dance program. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies and interprets patterns or themes within the data. This approach was appropriate for extracting meaningful insights from the subjective accounts of students and faculty. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify commonalities and differences in the therapeutic effects of Mongolian ethnic dance, as reported by the participants. The findings are presented through key themes that emerge from the data, supported by direct quotes from the participants. This method ensures that the results reflect the authentic experiences and insights of those involved in the dance program, offering valuable contributions to the understanding of its therapeutic potential.

IV. Results and Findings

The analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed several key themes related to the emotional, mental, physical, and social benefits of dance. Both students and faculty members reported positive impacts on mental well-being, stress management, emotional expression, and social interactions, confirming the therapeutic potential of this traditional practice. The findings are organized around four main themes: mental and emotional well-being, stress management, emotional expression and social interaction, and challenges and support.

4.1. Mental and Emotional Well-Being

Both students and faculty identified Mongolian ethnic dance as a powerful tool for improving mental and emotional health. Many students reported feeling more emotionally stable and content after engaging in dance practices. Several participants noted that the rhythmic and physical nature of the dance helped them to release pent-up emotions and feel more connected to their inner selves.

Student Feedback:

- *"Whenever I feel overwhelmed with studies, dancing helps me clear my mind. It's like my emotions just flow with the rhythm, and I feel more relaxed afterward."* (Student 3)
- *"Mongolian dance helps me manage my emotions better. It's like a form of release. I can express anger or frustration through the movements."* (Student 9)

Faculty members also emphasized the emotional benefits they observed in students, particularly in terms of increased emotional resilience and enhanced focus.

Faculty Feedback:

- *"I've seen students come into the class looking stressed, but after a few minutes of dancing, they become calmer. There's a noticeable shift in their mood and energy."* (Teacher 2)
- *"For many students, the dance becomes a way to reset emotionally, to reconnect with themselves and their culture."* (Teacher 4)

4.2. Stress Management

Mongolian ethnic dance was widely acknowledged as a helpful tool for managing academic and personal stress. Students reported that dancing provided an effective escape from the pressures of academic life, helping them to relieve tension and recharge. Many participants shared specific examples of how they used dance to cope with stressful situations.

Student Feedback:

- *"I had an exam coming up, and I was feeling really stressed. I spent an hour practicing the dance, and I felt so much more focused afterward."* (Student 5)
- *"During exam week, I make sure to take time for dance practice. It helps me manage my stress and relax my mind, so I can perform better academically."* (Student 12)

Faculty also highlighted how dance was integrated into teaching strategies to help students manage stress. They reported that students who regularly participated in dance sessions showed better stress coping skills and emotional regulation.

Faculty Feedback:

- *"I encourage my students to use dance as a way to destress, especially during peak academic times. It's an important part of our curriculum because it helps students cope with stress in a healthy way."* (Teacher 3)
- *"Sometimes we use specific exercises in class designed to release tension. The students appreciate it, and they come back feeling refreshed and more centered."* (Teacher 1)

4.3. Emotional Expression and Social Interaction

Another key finding was the role of Mongolian ethnic dance in fostering emotional expression and building social connections. Many students described how the dance provided an outlet for emotional expression, particularly in a cultural context where such emotions might not always be openly discussed. Furthermore, both students and faculty emphasized the social aspects of dance, including enhanced interactions with peers and instructors.

Student Feedback:

- *"I feel like dance allows me to express emotions that I don't normally show. It's almost like a language of its own."* (Student 7)
- *"When I dance, I feel like I'm telling a story. It helps me connect with my emotions in a way words cannot."* (Student 11)

Faculty members observed that students often formed tight-knit groups within the dance program, and these bonds contributed to a sense of belonging and mutual support.

Faculty Feedback:

- *"The students often tell me how dance helps them connect emotionally not only to their own culture but to each other. It creates a strong sense of community."* (Teacher 4)
- *"The dance program fosters a sense of unity. The students support each other, and there's a shared understanding of what it means to use dance as a tool for personal growth."* (Teacher 1)

4.4. Challenges and Support

Despite the positive impacts of Mongolian ethnic dance, several challenges were identified by both students and faculty. Students mentioned the physical demands of dance, particularly the risk of injury and the discipline required to perform at a high level. Additionally, while the therapeutic aspects of dance were generally acknowledged, some students and faculty members suggested that more structured support systems could enhance the therapeutic benefits of dance.

Student Feedback:

- *"Sometimes I find the physical aspect of dance to be tough on my body. I think it would be helpful to have more stretching sessions before or after class to avoid injury."* (Student 10)
- *"While dance is great for my mental health, there are times when I wish I had more guidance on how to use it to cope with specific emotional issues."* (Student 14)

Faculty Feedback:

- *"One of the challenges is ensuring that students don't push themselves too hard, especially when they are stressed. We try to create a supportive environment, but it would be useful to have more workshops on how to integrate therapy into dance effectively."* (Teacher 5)
- *"There's a lot of potential here. With more resources and a clearer therapeutic framework, the program could have an even greater impact on students' overall well-being."* (Teacher 2)

4.5 Summary of Key Themes

Theme	Student Feedback	Faculty Feedback
Mental & Emotional Well-being	Dance helps with emotional release and boosts mood. "I feel more relaxed after dancing."	Students become calmer and more focused after dance. "A noticeable shift in their mood."
Stress Management	Dance relieves academic and personal stress. "It helps me focus better."	Dance is integrated into teaching to help students cope with stress. "It's an important part of the curriculum."
Emotional Expression & Social Interaction	Dance provides a unique outlet for emotions. "It helps me connect with my emotions."	Dance fosters emotional connection and builds strong student bonds. "It creates a strong sense of community."
Challenges & Support	Physical demands of dance and need for more emotional support. "More stretching would help."	Need for more structured support and resources. "More workshops on integrating therapy into dance."

V. Discussion

5.1 Mental and Emotional Well-Being

The results of this study indicate that Mongolian ethnic dance has a significant positive impact on the mental and emotional well-being of students. Participants reported feeling emotionally more balanced, less stressed, and more centered after engaging in dance. The rhythmic and expressive nature of Mongolian ethnic dance allows students to process emotions in a non-verbal way, leading to improved mental health. The cultural connection that students feel to the dance may also enhance this effect, as cultural practices often provide a sense of identity and grounding. However, while the positive emotional effects were broadly reported, some students noted the need for more targeted guidance on using dance as an emotional coping tool. This indicates that while dance is beneficial, students may require additional support in learning how to consciously use it for specific emotional needs. Future research could explore the development of structured therapeutic programs that integrate dance with emotional regulation techniques, providing a more comprehensive approach to mental well-being.

5.2 Stress Management

Both students and faculty highlighted the role of Mongolian ethnic dance in managing academic and personal stress. Students reported that dance provided an effective means to take a mental break from academic pressures, which improved their focus and performance in their studies. Faculty members also confirmed that dance was incorporated into their teaching as a way to help students manage stress, particularly during high-stakes periods like exam weeks. Interestingly, some students expressed that they felt better able to manage stress through regular dance practice, while others felt the need for more structured stress-relief strategies, such as pre- and post-class stretching. This suggests that while dance provides a general stress-relief benefit, the physical demands of the practice could sometimes lead to fatigue or strain, particularly when students are under heavy academic pressure. Therefore, integrating dance with other stress-management techniques, such as mindfulness or relaxation exercises, could enhance its effectiveness in managing stress.

5.3 Emotional Expression and Social Interaction

Another prominent theme that emerged from the findings was the role of Mongolian ethnic dance in emotional expression and social interaction. Both students and faculty emphasized that the dance allowed for a unique form of

emotional expression, helping students to communicate feelings they might not otherwise share. The communal aspects of dance also facilitated strong social bonds among students, which is particularly important in a university setting where feelings of isolation and stress can be prevalent. The social benefits of dance were also reported by faculty, who noted that students often formed close-knit groups within the dance program. The sense of community that emerged through dance appeared to offer emotional support, contributing to improved well-being. Future studies could further explore how group dynamics in dance influence both individual and collective emotional health, as well as how the sense of belonging created through dance can be leveraged to support students in their academic and personal lives.

5.4 Challenges and Support

Despite the positive outcomes, both students and faculty identified several challenges related to the therapeutic use of Mongolian ethnic dance. Students mentioned the physical demands of the dance, particularly the potential for injury or strain, which can interfere with their ability to fully benefit from the therapeutic aspects of dance. Faculty members also acknowledged the need for more structured resources and training to help students integrate the therapeutic aspects of dance more effectively. The need for more targeted support in dance programs was also highlighted, with students suggesting that additional workshops on using dance for emotional coping could enhance the therapeutic benefits. This indicates that while dance is perceived as beneficial, students may need more structured guidance to fully realize its therapeutic potential. It also underscores the importance of integrating dance therapy principles into the curriculum to ensure that both students and faculty can make the most of its emotional and mental health benefits.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

While the findings of this study are promising, there are several limitations that must be considered. First, the sample size was relatively small (15 students and 5 faculty members), which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research could expand the sample size to include a broader range of participants from different institutions or cultural backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the therapeutic effects of ethnic dance. Additionally, this study relied solely on self-reported data from interviews, which could be subject to bias. Future studies might incorporate observational data or longitudinal methods to capture the long-term effects of Mongolian ethnic dance on mental health and well-being. Further research could also explore how specific components of Mongolian ethnic dance (e.g., particular movements or rituals) contribute to its therapeutic effects. This would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how different aspects of the dance practice can be tailored to meet specific therapeutic goals. Additionally, integrating dance with other therapeutic practices, such as counseling or mindfulness, could enhance its effectiveness and provide a holistic approach to student well-being.

VI. Conclusion

Through qualitative interviews with both dance students and instructors, the research highlights how the practice of Mongolian ethnic dance positively impacts mental health, emotional well-being, and social interactions. Participants reported significant benefits in stress management, emotional expression, and social bonding, with many describing the dance as an effective tool for improving both their academic performance and personal well-being.

Despite the clear therapeutic advantages, some challenges were identified, such as the physical demands of dance and the need for more structured support to help students fully integrate dance as a tool for emotional and mental health. These findings suggest that while Mongolian ethnic dance can be a valuable component of therapeutic programs, further work is needed to enhance its effectiveness through better integration with other wellness strategies and additional resources for students and instructors alike.

The study also suggests the importance of expanding research into the specific components of Mongolian ethnic dance that contribute to its therapeutic benefits, as well as exploring ways to refine and enhance its application in educational settings. Overall, Mongolian ethnic dance holds substantial promise as a therapeutic practice, and further exploration can help optimize its potential in fostering well-being among students in academic environments.

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