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Towards Recruitment Strategies for College Male Students in Dance Sports

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Abstract: This study aimed to evaluate male students' levels of interest and participation in Standard and Latin dance sports, examine the relationship between these two variables, and propose evidence-based recruitment strategies to increase males' involvement in dance sports. The novelty of this study lies in its being the first to explore this research gap within the Chinese context. The study aimed to evaluate the levels of interest and participation in Standard and Latin dance sports among male students, examine the relationship between these two variables, and present evidence-based recruitment

strategies to increase male involvement in dance sports. The descriptive-correlational study took place at three selected universities in Anhui Province, China. In the study, an adequate sample size of 242 male student dancers was obtained by using a stratified random sampling method. Interest and participation in dance sports were assessed by means of a researcher-created questionnaire. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. Furthermore, Spearman's rho correlation was utilized to examine the relationships between variables. Findings revealed that male students have a high level of interest ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.14$) but a very low level of participation ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.12$) in dance sports for both Standard and Latin styles. In addition, a strong positive correlation ($\rho = 0.761$, $p < 0.01$) between the level of interest and participation in dance sports was found. Based on the findings, a recruitment strategy targeting male dance sports participants was proposed. The findings underscore the need for inclusive strategies and curricular integration to enhance dance sport participation and inform policies that promote engagement and gender equity.

Keywords: Dance sports, recruitment strategies, participation, interest, inclusivity

Introduction

Over the past few years, dance sports have gained attention as both a discipline and a competitive sport. Dance sports exist in an athletic form and have contributed numerous social, psychological, and physical benefits. However, the male student population in the dance sport discipline is relatively small compared to female students in formal studies, particularly at the student level, such as in schools. There are many layers to this dynamic. Male participants must contend with established gender norms and stereotypes, as well as other sociocultural notions that have historically associated dance with women. These gender stereotypes over the decades have caused male students to likely feel that they needed to be involved in more traditionally male sports, such as basketball or football, or risk looking "bad," "girly", or "unmanly" (Harding, 2022; Risner, 2023a) by participating in dance sports. This pressure could lead male students interested in dance forms to suppress their interest, or not participate at all, to avoid stigma or ridicule, or wait until they are situated themselves in a more supportive environment. Evidence suggests gender stereotype threats impact boys' learning, performance, and confidence in dance contexts (Bastos et al., 2023). The challenge with this information is coping with the consequences that prevent more male participation in dance sports. This situation is even more significant within educational settings where one would hope to see inclusivity, equity, and holistic development.

Dance sports, including Standard (e.g., Waltz, Tango, Quickstep) and Latin (e.g., Cha-Cha-Cha, Rumba, Samba) styles, are a combination of dance choreography, athletic fitness, technical movements, and expressive art. Dance sports are highly structured activities that require cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, balance, rhythm, and coordination (Mu et al., 2021). There is sufficient literature available to document the physiological, psychological, and educational benefits of dance sports and their implementation through the curriculum. Several studies (Christensen et al., 2021; Mu et al., 2021; Vasiutiak et al., 2021) promote dance sports as a vehicle for increasing student health and wellness. Christensen et al. (2021) state that dance sports provide benefits that positively contribute to psychophysiological health, including emotional coupling, depth of engagement, and stress relief. Bonavolontà et al. (2021) found changes in reaction time, motor control, and physical adaptability of dancers in middle age. Likewise, Marschin and Herbert (2021) found improved body image and positive psychological health for university students participating in dance sports compared to students participating in other sports activities. Dance sports offer opportunities for teamwork, discipline, confidence, and social communication for youth and student participants. As Vasiutiak et al. (2021) state, dance sports are highly engaging in maintaining motor activity leading to a healthy lifestyle, especially for university-age

students. The physical, social, and mental health benefits of dance sports make it a welcome addition to any school's physical education and extracurricular program.

Wang and Wang (2021) support the inclusion of dance sports in higher education for its role in the holistic development of students. As a result, a small number of colleges and universities are now offering dance sport as part of physical education classes, as an optional subject or as a way to pursue dance sport as a team member on a varsity or club level. While the process of institutionalizing dance sports is uneven, some post-secondary schools have made dance sports part of the school sports program. In contrast, others continue to marginalize dance as a non-competitive or recreational activity. When considering how to select participants for college dance teams, often the voluntary enrolment of members, or talent search methods for prospective candidates, inadvertently favour students who have received dance training previously. Koenigstorfer and Wemmer (2022) describe that successful sports clubs and programs find strength in inclusivity, and pro-active recruitment strategies; however, for many dance sport programs, the recruitment of male participants is challenging due, in part, to a lack of targeted recruitment methods and the presence of exclusionary stereotypes that attach to male involvement in dance.

Male students have the potential to enjoy dance sports; however, opportunities for this are often held in abeyance due to the stigma associated with the activity, a lack of representation, or limited opportunities resulting from inadequate exposure. Like Park (2020) suggests, it is crucial to understand how students are motivated in their choices to dance. Although many male students express genuine interest in dance sports, their enthusiasm is often overshadowed by fears of social ostracism and being perceived as less masculine. Zhang et al. (2021) suggest that male students' self-efficacy and positive body image significantly contributed to increased engagement and motivation in dance sports. In agreement with Wang et al. (2024), this suggests that with positive encouragement and a cultural shift, male students may be more likely to explore and sustain an interest in the activity. However, the interest must be cultivated through supportive environments, accessibility, and visible role models.

On the other hand, participation is a more concrete measure of student engagement, and it is precisely where the most significant discrepancy has been identified. Even in institutions that teach dance sports, there are persistently fewer males in any of the dance sport classes, clubs, and varsity teams compared to females. Social perceptions and structural constraints constantly prevent male students from recognising dance sports as a legitimate context of self-expression and athletic performance. Christofidou (2021) and Burt (2022) contend that male participation will continue to plateau until organisational culture adopts a more assured and explicit expression of gender identity in sport. Inclusive pedagogy, mentorship, and diversification strategies are all essential to bridge these gaps and transform our dance spaces into ones that are conducive to all.

Despite the growing recognition of dance sports as a recognised physical and artistic discipline with known physical, psychological, and social benefits, male participation remains low, particularly in an educational context. Societal norms and stereotypes contribute to male participation being lower, while norms reinforce dance as a feminine activity, deterring males' participation and creating stigma. Although there has been much documented on the interdisciplinary benefits of dance sports and its curriculum, little to no research has explored male students' interest and participation in dance sports, especially in an educational context, from a sociocultural perspective in China. Further research exploring how institutional recruitment practices, peer interactions, and curriculum relate to gendered notions influencing male students' participation in dance sport has been studied in a limited empirical context. This research is timely, as institutions increasingly reinforce more coherent and non-discriminatory physical education practices, and society at large continues to strive for the mainstream of gender equity in sports through solutions that challenge normative notions of gender.

Therefore, this study focuses specifically on the interest-participation gap among male college students in Standard and Latin dance sports within Chinese higher education contexts. It also aims to investigate the relationship between interest and participation, to develop an evidence-based method to recruit more males into dance sports. In addition, it seeks to extend the conversation about educational reform, focusing on the implications for addressing gender stereotypes, increasing equity in the educational system, and improving physical education.

Research Problem

In the context of higher education in China, dance sport has been increasingly becoming a more visible and institutionally supported part of campus life, including physical education classes and competitive extracurricular activities. This increase in visibility coincides with broader initiatives to enhance the diversity of physical activity programs and promote engaged development in students across physical, emotional, cultural, and social aspects. Yet, despite the well-documented institutional benefits of dance participation, including improved cardiovascular health, enhanced self-regulation, and strengthened social connectedness, male involvement remains notably limited (Leo et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). This is not surprising when we consider the gender-stereotyping perspective concerning Standard and Latin categories of dance sport, where cultural attitudes related to masculinity and expressive movements help to perpetuate this stigma. In educational settings, gender norms often frame dance, particularly partner dance, as a feminine pursuit, which fosters assumptions that male participation is unusual or even deviant. Deeply entrenched gender norms and sociocultural expectations are deterring male students from active participation, not only by telling them not to dance but also by generating fear of humiliation, disapproval from peers, and conflict with their identity.

Despite a small number of male students being genuinely interested in dance sports, such as Standard dances and Latin styles, these interests often do not result in continued participation due to complex structural and psycho-social factors. Currently, existing physical education programs and educational practices in China do not adequately consider the multifaceted motivational, cultural, and pedagogical factors that underlie male students' engagement in dance sports. Several factors, including the lack of gender-inclusive pedagogy, the scarcity of visible male dance role models, and limited opportunities for safe self-expression, contribute to a social context that restricts male participation in dance. Moreover, recruitment techniques and curricular content largely overlook the importance of aligning dance instruction with students' identities or interests in pursuing dance, which not only perpetuates exclusion but also hinders accessibility to the legitimacy of dance as a practice for both males and females. Therefore, without an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of male students' motivations, constraints, and social context, attempts to facilitate inclusion in dance sport are not well theorized or applied. Overall, this highlights the need for empirical research into the interest patterns and participation of male students in dance sport at Chinese universities, ultimately to inform empirically demonstrated ways to subvert gendered barriers to participation and inclusion.

Research Focus

This study examines the levels of interest and participation among male students in dance sports within Chinese higher education institutions, with a specific focus on the Standard and Latin categories. The first objective of this research is to measure the interest levels of male students in both Standard and Latin dance forms, identifying which styles they are most drawn to and how these preferences might reflect broader social or cultural influences. The second objective is to evaluate the actual participation levels in these styles, enabling a comparison between perceived interest and actual participation.

A third key area of focus is the relationship between interest and participation, specifically, whether male students who show higher levels of interest in dance sports are more likely to engage in them.

Understanding the relationship between interest and engagement will help clarify whether low participation is due to disinterest or obstructive barriers to engagement. To summarize, this research aims to develop evidence-based recruitment strategies that support the engagement agenda within this study program, taking into account the preferences, motivations, and perceived obstacles of male students. Therefore, the study will develop recruitment strategies tailored to support the participation of specific male students, while also contributing to the growing body of research on gender, motivation, and inclusive physical education practice within higher education in China.

Research Aim and Research Question

The primary aim of this study is to explore and assess the interest levels and participation of male students in dance sports in the context of higher education in China, focusing on both the Standard and Latin styles. This study will examine the extent of students' interest in these dance styles to establish the extent to which they participate in them, and whether their interest and participation are significantly related. Based on the findings, the study intends to propose practical, interest-driven recruitment strategies that can effectively encourage greater male involvement in dance sports programs, thereby contributing to more inclusive and gender-balanced physical education offerings in Chinese universities. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the interest level of male students in dance sports in terms of?
 - 1.1 Standard, and
 - 1.2 Latin?
2. What is the participation level of male students in dance sports in terms of:
 - 2.1 Standard, and
 - 2.2 Latin?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the interest and participation levels in dance sports of the respondents?
4. Based on the findings, what recruitment strategies may be proposed for male students' participation in dance sports?

Literature Review

Dance sport, also known as dancesport, is a codified form of competitive ballroom dancing that encompasses both Standard and Latin dance styles. Initially rooted in social dance traditions, it has undergone significant transformation into an internationally recognized athletic discipline governed by bodies such as the World DanceSport Federation (WDSF) and acknowledged by the International Olympic Committee. This dual identity, as both sport and cultural performance, positions dance sport as a unique domain within physical culture (Dyck & Archetti, 2020). Mu et al. (2021) emphasize the evolution of dance sport as a process of acquiring legitimacy and social capital, wherein recreational movements have been refined into strategic, high-performance artistic expressions that demand both technical mastery and disciplined training. Its growing presence in media and popular culture has further amplified its visibility and legitimacy, creating new opportunities for performance and pedagogy across formal and informal settings.

Academic research has documented dance sport as having multidimensional benefits in physical, psychological, and social dimensions. From a physiological standpoint, participation in dance sport has been shown to improve cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, muscular strength, and balance (Bonavolontà et al., 2021). For children and adolescents, especially, the physical benefits resulting from participation in dance sport are typically more pronounced due to their effects on motor development, postural control, and general fitness (Andrieieva et al., 2021; Grygus et al., 2020). While the physiological outcomes or physical benefits of dance sport have been reasonably well documented, the psycho-social

benefits of dance sport have received a great deal of attention in the literature as well. Participants in a dance-inspired fitness program reported improved body image and enhanced psychological well-being, while those who engaged in traditional team or individual sports did not report body image as a result (Marschin & Herbert, 2021). Christensen et al. (2021) essentially stated that regular participation in dance improves emotional regulation, promotes self-worth (i.e., self-esteem), and fosters psychophysiological integration, all of which align with therapeutic and mental health practices. Additionally, due to the inherently social nature of dance sport (partnership), students develop interpersonal skills that build social bonding and emotional intelligence (Park, 2020).

The integration of dance sport into educational contexts has emerged as a growing trend, particularly within collegiate physical education (PE) curricula. As traditional PE programs seek innovative approaches to promote physical activity, dance sport has been increasingly recognized for its capacity to engage students in dynamic, non-traditional ways (Vasiutiak, 2021). Wang and Wang (2021) argue that the inclusion of dance sport in university health and fitness courses enhances student participation and provides meaningful cultural and artistic experiences. Despite these advantages, barriers to implementation remain. Yin and Potimu (2024) identify logistical constraints, including facility limitations, scheduling difficulties, and a lack of trained personnel, as persistent challenges to integrating dance sport into mainstream educational frameworks. Nonetheless, the incorporation of dance sport aligns with broader educational objectives focused on inclusivity, physical literacy, and holistic development (Hanna, 2010; Sanderson & Gramann, 2023). Its emphasis on artistic creativity, cooperative learning, and embodied performance makes it a strong candidate for modern educational reform aimed at fostering wellness, creativity, and cultural responsiveness.

A critical area of concern in the literature is the gender disparity in dance sport participation, particularly the under-representation of male students. Although dance sport is formally open to all, sociocultural constructions of gender and masculinity often discourage boys and men from engaging in dance-related activities. Risner (2023b) attributes this trend to hegemonic masculinity and peer pressure, which are further reinforced by media portrayals that associate dance with femininity. Harding (2022) also found that, to avoid the risk of social exclusion, male students often felt the need to offset their involvement in dance against more traditionally 'masculine' activities, such as playing football. Bastos et al. (2023) showed empirically that gender stereotype threat negatively affects men's confident performance in dance contexts, establishing a psychological barrier to participation. Both studies echo the sentiments of Christofidou (2021), who critiques the limitations on gender expression in dance and how they reproduce narrow expectations, restricting the idea of non-normative performances and perpetuating gender binaries. However, there are calls for pedagogical practices that can address some of these barriers. For example, Burt (2022) asks that teachers affirm boys and their bodies as they are part of dance, and states that there are opportunities to create curricula that validate boys' participation. There has been limited structural change regarding male role models in dance, inclusive pedagogical practices, or the curriculum (Clegg & Butryn, 2012; Vertinsky, 2009).

The success and sustainability of dance sport in educational, community, or peer settings rely closely on recruitment and retention strategies. Koenigstorfer and Wemmer (2022) suggest setting up environments that are contributing, inclusive, reasonable, and welcoming; facilitating peers who are welcoming and responsive to the interests of participants; and fostering a positive attitude toward diversity, thereby validating as many interests and styles as possible. In outlining why people do dance sport, Park (2020) cites self-expression, physical health, and social engagement as primary motivations. Wang et al. (2024) determined that body image satisfaction and self-efficacy were common predictors of continued participation for university students. A drawback of more general recruitment strategies is the lack of expression of the gendered nature of participants in dance sport in terms of messaging. Specifically, messaging that utilizes traditional gender norms may directly deter male recruitment or

create barriers to engagement, further increasing existing disparities (Risner, 2023a; Sanderson & Gramann, 2023). Addressing this gap is possible by focusing on gendered messaging that relates to male reasons for engaging in dance sport, including strength, athleticism, and social/situational aspects relative to a specific culture or awareness. By addressing their messaging, dance sport can target members of their target population and even include some or all of the gender-specific motivations addressed in this chapter while more effectively targeting commitment to dance sport.

Dance sport research employs a variety of methods, with many being experimental or cross-sectional in design. There have also been qualitative and mixed methods approaches in dance sport research. Quantitative survey-based studies have been most prevalent, particularly for examining various motivational factors associated with demographic variables, participation trends, and mental and physical health outcomes (Park, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). These studies followed a pattern of conducting psychometric evaluations of various constructs, such as self-efficacy, body image, or stereotype threat. Qualitative research has been valuable in understanding the subtleties of interpersonal relationships and the effects of sociocultural issues associated with dance sport, particularly in relation to gender and identity (Burt, 2022; Risner, 2023b). Some dance sport research has used mixed methods designs to triangulate physical performance outcomes with psycho-social outcomes, or psycho-social theory to contextualize the dance sport experience (Bonavolontà et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2021). While the methods described above in existing research provide rich detail about statistically significant variables and the complicated sociocultural context of dance sport, a concern about much of the existing dance sport research is that it was cross-sectional. Longitudinal and policy-level analyses of dance sport are largely lacking, particularly in non-Western contexts. A key consideration for future dance sport research designs will be to adopt a more holistic and culturally situated approach.

Cross-cultural research illustrates substantial differences in how dance sport is conceptualized, provided, and institutionalized in very different global contexts. In Western nations, dance sport is broadly conceived through an individualistic lens of expression and performance, and is often viewed as an extracurricular activity (Hanna, 2010; Sanderson & Gramann, 2023). In contrast, in Eastern contexts (particularly in China, South Korea, and Ukraine), dance sport is viewed more regularly as a formal engagement through educational means and is constructed as a discipline, collective activity, and a health and developmental opportunity (Mu et al., 2021; Vasiutiak, 2021). In the case of China, structured educational policy influences the opportunities for children to participate in dance sport, while Confucian values instil discipline, respect, and collective coherence (Wang & Wang, 2021). However, importantly, gender differences in participation in dance sport persist across both cultural spheres. While the specific cultural factors governing involvement may appear varied (with Western stigma often defined through sexuality and Eastern stigma through filial obligations and conformity to social expectations), the result is a collective concern regarding the marginalization of male participants in dance sport. The issue of their exclusion as male dancers is a common one. Bastos et al. (2023) state that stereotype threat exists across cultures, but is shaped by culturally specific normative and contemporary contextual factors.

Three primary theoretical lenses framed this research. First, Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) provides an understanding of how societal norms, standards, and expectations influence the way people evaluate gender-appropriate behaviour, thereby informing male students' construction of dance sports as feminine and therefore not congruent with masculinity. Second, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) serves as a theoretical lens to analyse motivation in formal and informal education contexts, specifically highlighting autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which together are understood to cultivate an intrinsic motivation and commitment to engage in physical activity such as dance. Finally, Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) can also contribute value to the research by highlighting how students' expectations for success and subjective task value influence their motivation and willingness to engage in dance sports. While there is complexity in understanding how these

motivations interact with each other, these perspectives can provide a lens to explore how gendered beliefs, motivations, and perceived value, together, shape behaviour and engagement in dance sports.

The existing literature demonstrates that dance sport offers a rich site of inquiry and practice, characterized by its ability to foster physical fitness, psycho-social development, and cultural engagement. Its inclusion in educational settings aligns with contemporary goals of inclusive and holistic education. However, persistent challenges, including gender disparity, lack of systemic recruitment strategies, and limited research in specific cultural contexts, underscore the need for further investigation.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

A descriptive correlational research design was employed to investigate the levels of interest and participation in dance sport among first-year male college students, specifically in Standard and Latin style dance. Descriptive research enables researchers to provide meaningful descriptions of the individual characteristics, behaviors, and conditions of interest, thereby presenting a detailed image of student participation that serves to provide a more comprehensive understanding (Fischer et al., 2023). The correlational research design provided the ability to understand the relationship between students' self-reported interest and participation in dance sports of the Standard and Latin varieties without attempting to manipulate variables.

According to Mello (2020), descriptive correlational research is pragmatically applied when one wants to examine a perceivable relationship without establishing if one variable impacts another. This study is not pursued in an effort to find cause and effect; instead, it aims to provide conceptually meaningful foundational understanding of male students' interest levels and their participatory impacts (Siedlecki, 2020). The data was collected through a survey questionnaire tool developed by the researcher to measure the levels of interest and participation in Standard and Latin dance sport categories. The results provided valuable insight that helped develop recruitment strategies to increase participation levels of male students in dance sport programs.

Sample and Participants

The participants were selected from three universities in Anhui Province, China, that had a strong Physical Education program and were known to support dance sports in a physical activity context with the aim of student development. Due to the considerable number of students with a daily geographic context, selecting these universities established a relevant setting for investigating male students' engagement with dance sports (Unirank, 2024).

The participants were first-year male students enrolled in PE and recreation-related programs. A sample size of 242 students was calculated using the G* Power software to ensure statistical validity. To ensure a representative sample from across the three institutions and year level, stratified random sampling was used (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021; Kang, 2021). The context for this research was robust and relevant for exploring students' interest and participation in dance sports in higher education.

Instrument

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a researcher-developed questionnaire that measured the levels of interest and participation in Standard and Latin dance sport categories among first-year male students. The questionnaire was developed from a thorough review of the relevant literature and best practices related to questionnaire development, and in collaboration with the thesis

adviser (Taherdoost, 2022). The all-inclusive questionnaire included three sections: (1) Demographic Profile (sex, age group, and university affiliation); (2) Interest Level in Dance Sports Scale (his interest level); and (3) Participation Level in Dance Sports Scale (his participation level). The interest level portion contained 20 items—10 Standard dances and 10 Latin dances. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert-type scale, with response options rating interest from 1 – Strongly Disagree to 4 – Strongly Agree. The participation level consisted of 20 items, measuring the actual frequency of participating in dance sports using a frequency scale from 1 (Never) to 4 (Most of the Time).

To ensure strong content validity, the instrument underwent expert evaluation by a panel of three specialists in research and Physical Education from Jose Rizal University. Each expert performed an independent content assessment of the instrument about item clarity, relevance, and representativeness for the intended construct. A four-point scale (1-Disagree to 4-Strongly Agree) was used to denote relevance. The experts' appraisals were used to calculate the Content Validity Index (CVI) at a rate of 0.92, which exceeds 0.80, an accepted level of 0.80 for excellent content validity (Lee, 2021). The CVI is a high value, indicating an adequate level of expert agreement and the appropriateness of the content for the intended population and construct. The content was reviewed, and a pilot study was conducted with students from other universities, who are not part of the main study, to provide additional clarity and reliability information. An analysis of the pilot study data was conducted using Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency, yielding a reliability coefficient of .83, which falls within an acceptable range for instruments designed for social science research (Forero, 2024).

Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher ensured that all necessary ethical clearances and institutional approvals had been secured. These ethical clearances were necessary for the protection of the rights of the research participants, for the integrity of the research and the research process, and for being vigilant in eliminating all potential risks, either physical, emotional, or social. Furthermore, all participants were well aware of the study's nature, purpose, and procedures, as well as what was typically expected of them as participants. Moreover, participation was entirely voluntary, and before the research participants were included in the study, they were required to sign an informed consent form.

After receiving the ethical clearance and participant consent, the researcher administered the questionnaire. The respondents took an hour to complete the instrument, which was administered in a group setting. Answering the survey as a group on an agreed-upon schedule helped mitigate variability between samples, added consistency, and also improved quality by generating the same data across each sample. Finally, all collected data were securely stored in electronic format, with strict access controls to ensure confidentiality and data protection.

Data Analysis

In this study, several statistical methods were used to analyse the interest and participation levels of male college students in dance sports in Standard and Latin dance. Categorising the demographic characteristics of participants by noting frequencies and percentages provided an overview of the characteristics of participants who responded (Alabi & Bukola, 2023). The level of interest and participation in each category was determined using the mean as a measure of central tendency, and mean scores were interpreted using the following scale: 3.26-4.00 (Very High), 2.51-3.25 (High), 1.76-2.50 (Low), and 1.00-1.75 (Very Low). In addition, standard deviations were calculated to determine how similar or disparate participants were in their responses, with lower values indicating greater similarity in responses.

Before conducting inferential analyses, assumption testing was performed to ensure the appropriateness of the statistical procedures. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality, suitable for the sample size ($n = 242$), indicated that the distributions for both interest in dance sport ($D = 0.164$, $p < .001$) and participation levels ($D = 0.147$, $p < .001$) were significantly non-normal. As a result, Spearman's rho was employed as a non-parametric measure to assess the relationship between students' interest and their participation in Standard and Latin dance sport. Spearman's rho is appropriate for ordinal or non-normally distributed data and does not require the assumptions of linearity or homoscedasticity (Stapor & Stapor, 2020). Correlation values were interpreted using Cohen's (1988) effect size conventions, which suggested that values between 0.10 and 0.29 indicated a small effect, 0.30 to 0.49 a moderate effect, and 0.50 or higher a significant effect.

Results

1. Interest Level of Male Students in Dance Sports

The interest level of male students in dance sports was determined in terms of standard and Latin dance sports.

1.1 Standard Dance Sports

Table 1 presents the overall high interest level (HIL, $M = 2.97$) of male students in dance sports in terms of standard dance sports. This was supported by seven (7) out of the ten (10) indicators with computed means ranging from 3.05 to 3.11. The top four of these seven indicators were: Indicator 1, *I believe that learning standard ballroom dances is fun and can help me achieve my fitness goal* ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.59$, HIL, Rank 2.5); Indicator 7, *I am eager to understand the deeper cultural and technical aspects of Standard dances* ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.60$, HIL, Rank 2.5); Indicator 3, *I would consider joining Standard Dances because of its elegance, graceful movements* ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.56$, HIL, Rank 4.5); and Indicator 6, *I believe participating in Standard ballroom dancing could positively shape my personality* ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.60$, HIL, Rank 4.5).

Table 1

Interest Level of Male Students in Dance Sports in terms of Standard Sports

Indicator	M	SD	VI	Rank
1. I believe that learning standard ballroom dances is fun and can help me achieve my fitness goal	3.11	0.59	HIL	2.5
2. I am interested in exploring Standard Dances to help me enhance my character and discipline.	3.87	0.35	VHIL	1
3. I would consider joining Standard Dances because of its elegance, graceful movements.	3.10	0.56	HIL	4.5
4. I see Standard dance as a meaningful way to express myself through structured movement.	3.02	0.61	HIL	8
5. I am motivated to learn Standard ballroom dances even if it requires regular practice.	3.05	0.56	HIL	6.5
6. I believe participating in Standard ballroom dancing could positively shape my personality.	3.10	0.60	HIL	4.5
7. I am eager to understand the deeper cultural and technical aspects of Standard dances.	3.11	0.60	HIL	2.5
8. I see myself potentially excelling in Standard ballroom dance with proper training.	2.11	0.62	LIL	10

9. I consider joining a Standard dance group or club because of my strong interest in it.	2.19	0.67	LIL	9
10. I would recommend Standard ballroom dancing to others because I value its artistry and discipline.	3.05	0.62	HIL	6.5
Overall Result	2.97	0.19	HIL	

Note. 2.50 - 3.24 High Interest Level (HIL); 1.75 - 2.49 Low Interest Level (LIL); R = 1.10

However, Indicator 2, *I am interested in exploring Standard Dances to help me enhance my character and discipline*, was on a very high interest level (M = 3.87, SD = 0.35, VHIL, Rank 1) while Indicator 8, *I see myself potentially excelling in Standard ballroom dance with proper training*, (M = 2.11, SD = 0.62, LIL Rank 10); and Indicator 9, *I consider joining a Standard dance group or club because of my strong interest in it* (M = 2.19, SD = 0.67, LIL, Rank 9) were on a low interest level.

Moreover, the overall standard deviation (SD = 0.19) is significantly smaller than the range (R = 1.10), suggesting low variability. This means that the data points are clustered closely around the mean, indicating that the data set has less dispersion.

1.2 Latin Dance Sports

Table 2 exhibits the overall **high interest level (HIL, M = 2.68)** of male students in dance sports in terms of Latin dance sports. This was reinforced by six (6) out of the ten (10) indicators with computed means ranging from 3.04 to 3.12. The top three of these indicators were: Indicator 4, *I consider Latin dances a powerful means of building confidence and self-expression* (M = 3.12, SD = 0.55, HIL, Rank 1); Indicator 10, *I would recommend other people try Latin ballroom dance because I find it extremely captivating and engaging* (M = 3.09, SD = 0.60, HIL, Rank 2); Indicator 8, *I believe Latin ballroom dancing may play a role in my personal development* (M = 3.06, SD = 0.60, HIL, Rank 3).

Table 2

Interest Level of Male Students in Dance Sports in terms of Latin Sports

Indicator	M	SD	VI	Rank
1. I think anybody would find Latin ballroom dances an exhilarating and worthwhile activity for fitness and health.	3.05	0.61	HIL	4.5
2. I am truly excited about the passion and zeal of Latin ballroom dancing.	3.05	0.63	HIL	4.5
3. I am undoubtedly interested to join and learn Latin ballroom dances.	2.07	0.64	LIL	10
4. I consider Latin dances a powerful means of building confidence and self-expression.	3.12	0.55	HIL	1
5. I am inspired to participate in Latin ballroom dance activities because it resonates with my interests.	2.08	0.63	LIL	8.5
6. I am fascinated by the cultural narratives and meanings behind Latin dance styles.	2.14	0.63	LIL	7
7. I appreciate the analysis and learning of the technical aspects that make Latin dances dynamic.	2.08	0.66	LIL	8.5
8. I believe Latin ballroom dancing may play a role in my personal development.	3.06	0.60	HIL	3
9. I can see myself becoming more involved in Latin ballroom dancing very soon.	3.04	0.62	HIL	6

10. I would recommend other people try Latin ballroom dance because I find it extremely captivating and engaging.	3.09	0.60	HIL	2
Overall Result	2.68	0.21	HIL	

Note. 2.50 - 3.24 High Interest Level (HIL); 1.75 - 2.49 Low Interest Level (LIL); R = 1.20

Nevertheless, four indicators were categorized in the low interest level (LIL) with computed means ranging from 2.07 to 2.14. These were: Indicator 6, *I am fascinated by the cultural narratives and meanings behind Latin dance styles* (M = 2.14, SD = 0.63, LIL, Rank 7); Indicator 5, *I am inspired to participate in Latin ballroom dance activities because it resonates with my interests* (M = 2.08, SD = 0.63, LIL, Rank 8.5); Indicator 7, *I appreciate the analysis and learning of the technical aspects that make Latin dances dynamic* (M = 2.08, SD = 0.66, LIL, Rank 8.5), and Indicator 3, *I am undoubtedly interested to join and learn Latin ballroom dances* (M = 2.07, SD = 0.64, LIL, Rank 10).

Furthermore, the overall standard deviation (SD = 0.19) is meaningfully smaller than the range (R = 1.20), suggesting low variability. It connotes that the data points are clustered closely around the mean, and the dataset has less dispersion.

2. Participation Level of Male Students in Dance Sports

The participation level of male students in dance sports was determined in terms of standard and Latin dance sports.

2.1 Standard Dance Sports

Table 3 shows the very low participation level (VLPL, M = 1.45) of male students in standard dance sports. This was maintained by six (6) of the ten (10) indicators with computed means ranging from 1.07 to 1.10. To name three of these indicators were: Indicator 6, *I have tried private lessons in Standard ballroom dance* (M = 1.07, SD = 0.26, VLPL, Rank 10); Indicator 3, *I have participated in Standard Ballroom dance workshop to enhance my skills* (M = 1.08, SD = 0.28, VLPL, Rank 7.5); Indicator 8, *I am or have been a member of a group or team that performs Standard dances* (M = 1.08, SD = 0.27, VLPL, Rank 7.5); Indicator 9, *I have participated in a dance competition with Standard ballroom dance categories* (M = 1.08, SD = 0.28, VLPL, Rank 7.5), and Indicator 10, *I participate in Standard dance activities as a part of my regular extra-curricular activities* (M = 1.08, SD = 0.27, VLPL, Rank 7.5).

Table 3

Participation Level of Male Students in Dance Sports in terms of Standard Sports

Indicator	M	SD	VI	Rank
1. I have participated in a Standard ballroom dance class performance.	1.10	0.30	VLPL	5
2. I have performed Standard ballroom dance in a school or club setting.	1.99	0.35	LPL	4
3. I have participated in Standard Ballroom dance workshop to enhance my skills	1.08	0.28	VLPL	7.5
4. I have performed Standard dances in a school program.	2.01	0.39	LPL	2
5. I have completed a Standard dance routine in an informal event.	2.06	0.43	LPL	1
6. I have tried private lessons in Standard ballroom dance.	1.07	0.26	VLPL	10

7. I participated in rehearsals or practices for Standard dances in preparation for a performance.	2.00	0.44	LPL	3
8. I am or have been a member of a group or team that performs Standard dances.	1.08	0.27	VLPL	7.5
9. I have participated in a dance competition with Standard ballroom dance categories.	1.08	0.28	VLPL	7.5
10. I participate in Standard dance activities as a part of my regular extra-curricular activities.	1.08	0.27	VLPL	7.5
Overall Result	1.45	0.16	VLPL	

Note. 1.75 - 2.49 Low Participation Level (LPL); 1.00 - 1.74 Very Low Participation Level (VLPL)

However, The four indicators with low participation level (LIL) were Indicator 5, *I have completed a Standard dance routine in an informal even* (M = 2.06, SD = 0.43, LPL, Rank 1); Indicator 4, *I have performed Standard dances in a school program* (M = 2.01, SD = 0.39, LPL, Rank 2); Indicator 7, *I participated in rehearsals or practices for Standard dances in preparation for a performance* (M = 2.00, SD = 0.44, LPL, Rank 3); Indicator 2, *I have performed Standard ballroom dance in a school or club setting* (M = 1.99, SD = 0.35, LPL, Rank 4).

Furthermore, the overall standard deviation (SD = 0.19) is meaningfully smaller than the range (R = 1.20), suggesting low variability. It connotes that the data points are clustered closely around the mean, and the data set has less dispersion.

2.2 Latin Dance Sports

Table 4 displays the very low participation level (VLPL, M = 1.54) of male students in Latin dance sports. This was upheld by eight (8) of the ten (10) indicators with computed means ranging from 1.07 to 1.10. The top three of these eight indicators were: Indicator 3, *I have participated in Latin Ballroom class or workshop* (M = 1.74, SD = 0.49, VLPL, Rank 3); Indicator 2, *I have performed Latin dance styles in school or club settings* (M = 1.70, SD = 0.49, VLPL, Rank 4.5); and Indicator 6, *I have received Latin ballroom dance instruction* (M = 1.70, SD = 0.48, VLPL, Rank 4). On the other hand, the lowest three of these eight indicators were: Indicator 8, *I am or have been a member of an ensemble or team that has performed Latin dances* (M = 1.02, SD = 0.13, VLPL, Rank 8.5); Indicator 10, *I participate in Latin dance activities regularly as part of my extracurricular activities* (M = 1.02, SD = 0.13, VLPL, Rank 8.5); and Indicator 7, *I have practiced Latin dances regularly (through rehearsal or practice)* (M = 1.01, SD = 0.09, VLPL, Rank 10).

Table 4

Participation Level of Male Students in Dance Sports in terms of Latin Sports

Indicator	M	SD	VI	Rank
1. I watch some Latin ballroom dance performance or event.	2.72	0.46	HPL	1
2. I have performed Latin dance styles in school or club settings.	1.70	0.49	VLPL	4.5
3. I have participated in Latin Ballroom class or workshop.	1.74	0.49	VLPL	3
4. I learned the basic steps of Latin Dances with friends	1.69	0.47	VLPL	6
5. I have danced a Latin dance routine in an informal or school event.	1.77	0.45	LPL	2

6. I have received Latin ballroom dance instruction.	1.70	0.48	VLPL	4.5
7. I have practiced Latin dances regularly (through rehearsal or practice).	1.01	0.09	VLPL	10
8. I am or have been a member of an ensemble or team that has performed Latin dances.	1.02	0.13	VLPL	8.5
9. I have performed in Latin Ballroom Dance Competition	1.03	0.17	VLPL	7
10. I participate in Latin dance activities regularly as part of my extracurricular activities.	1.02	0.13	VLPL	8.5
Overall Result	1.54	0.17	VLPL	

Note. 1.75 - 2.49 Low Participation Level (LPL); 1.00 - 1.74 Very Low Participation Level (VLPL); R = 1.20

The only one indicator with a high participation level (HPL) was Indicator 1, *I watch some Latin ballroom dance performance or event* (M = 2.72, SD = 0.46, HPL, Rank 1), and the only indicator with low participation level (LPL) was Indicator 5, *I have danced a Latin dance routine in an informal or school event* (M = 1.77, SD = 0.45, LPL, Rank 2).

Additionally, the overall standard deviation (SD = 0.17) is expressively smaller than the range (R = 1.20), suggesting low variability. It implies that the data points are clustered closely around the mean, and the data set has less dispersion.

3. Relationship between the Interest and Participation Levels in Dance Sports of the Respondents

The relationship between the interest and participation levels in dance sports of the respondents was measured using Spearman's rho after getting the non-normality test result using Kolmogorov-Smirnov ($p = 0.00$).

Table 5 uncovers the **significantly strong relationship** upheld by the relationship that exists between standard interest level and standard participation level ($\rho = 0.743$, $p = 0.000$) as well as by the Latin interest level and Latin participation level ($\rho = 0.762$, $p = 0.00$).

Table 5

Relationship between the Interest and Participation Levels in Dance Sports of the Respondents

			Participation Level		
			Standard	Latin	Overall
Interest Level	Standard	Correlation Coefficient (ρ)	.743**		
		Verbal interpretation	SPR		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
		Verbal interpretation	Significant		
		N	250		
	Latin	Correlation Coefficient (ρ)		.762**	
		Verbal interpretation		SPR	
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
		Verbal interpretation		Significant	
		N		250	

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. 0.68 – 0.88 Strong (Positive/Negative) Relationship (S(P/N)R

4. Proposed Recruitment Strategies for Male Students' Participation in Dance Sports

This section presents recruitment strategies designed to enhance male students' participation in dance sports. Table 6 outlines the strategies guided by key dimensions, including significant findings, recruitment strategy, activities, persons involved, and expected outcomes.

The proposed recruitment strategies were structured based on the study's significant findings. The study's data indicated a strong interest in dance sports. However, the actual participation in dance sports is low, as it exists in a context of gender stereotypes, fear of judgment from peers, and the idea that dance is not a masculine activity. Interestingly, the study's data also revealed a positive linear relationship between interest and participation. By implementing the recruitment strategies identified in this study, we cannot only stimulate interest in the dance sport activity but also sustain participation by using student-centred, inclusive, and supportive strategies.

Table 6

Proposed Recruitment Strategies for Male Students' Participation in Dance Sports

Significant Findings	Recruitment Strategy	Activities	Persons Involved	Expected Outcome
Strong interest in dance sports, especially in Standard ballroom styles, among male students	Promote Interest-Driven Engagement and Peer-Led Recruitment	Conduct surveys on preferred dance styles; personalize dance modules in PE based on student interests Form male student dance clubs or interest groups; encourage peer invitations to join beginner sessions	PE teachers, curriculum planners Student leaders, dance mentors, club advisers	Improved alignment between student interest and program content, encouraging participation Increased peer influence leading to active recruitment and participation
Participation is low despite high interest due to gender stereotypes and fear of judgment	Rebrand Dance Sports for Males with Low-Pressure Initiatives	Launch male-focused campaigns (e.g., "Strength in Rhythm"); feature male dance athletes as ambassadors Host open-forum dance clinics, movement workshops, or no-performance-required sessions	PE department, school media team, male alumni Event coordinators, external dance coaches	Reduced stigma and enhanced male identity association with dance Increased initial exposure and comfort with participation among hesitant students
Interest positively correlates with participation when motivation is supported	Incentivize and Recognize Participation	Offer recognition certificates, PE credits, or rewards for active involvement in dance sports	PE teachers, school administrators	Strengthened motivation leading to consistent and goal-driven engagement

The proposed recruitment strategies for increasing male students' participation in dance sports include interest-based strategies, peer recruitment, re-branding of dance sports in terms of male identity, and rewarding active involvement. Interest-based strategies draw on the curriculum by leveraging learners' interest in participating in dance sports. This is achieved by administering surveys about preferred dance styles and making personal adaptations to physical education dance courses based on the interests of male students. Physical education teachers and curriculum designers can collaborate with student leaders, dance mentors, and club advisers to establish male dance clubs or interest groups, encouraging peer invitations to help students feel more comfortable and supported. Simultaneously, re-branding strategies aim to counteract gender stereotypes by marketing male-focused campaigns, with male dance athletes serving as ambassadors. This approach includes providing open-forum clinics, workshops, and other non-performance-based initiatives. Since these initiatives are less intimidating and often more informal in nature, they have the potential to normalize a student's experience while simultaneously decreasing stigma, helping to build comfort among physical education students while being facilitated by the physical education department and dance coaches. Finally, sustaining ongoing participation can be achieved through recognition (i.e., appropriate certificates of accomplishment, credits in physical education, opportunities to earn rewards), which can reinforce motivation to engage and encourage ongoing participation, with venues for teaching staff and school administrators to enhance attendance through incentives. In conjunction, the initiative to align dance programs with male students' interests and develop a favourable peer environment would foster normalizing the experience of male students participating in dance sports.

Discussion

The data from this study reveal that male students consistently showed high levels of interest in dance sports, particularly in standard ballroom styles such as the waltz, foxtrot, and quickstep. These dances appealed to them due to their structured and refined nature, as well as their alignment with values such as discipline, confidence, and personal growth. Standard styles were also considered socially acceptable, consistent with traditional masculine and educational values of order and achievement. Concepts of 'dance' are framed by Zhang et al. (2021) not just as physical activity, but as a comprehensive form of development that includes the acquisition of emotional intelligence and self-control. Burt (2022) also supports challenges and promotes the value of structured and inclusive dance programs in developing students' mobility skills and encompassing both physical abilities and intrapersonal skills. Moreover, Risner (2023a) notes that activities recognized and validated as a part of physical education in co-educational environments validate dance as a socially legitimate activity in the eyes of male students. This intense interest in dance was evident, yet the low levels of self-competence in dance perceived by male students led to hesitancy in dance, especially in formal 'dance' or structured dance contexts. While participating in dance, their physiological engagement conveyed genuine enthusiasm for the activity, and this dissociation of self-worth revealed potential sociocultural barriers that mediated engagement, including peer judgment, gender stereotypes, and the feminization of dance in schools (Huang et al., 2025; Li & Chen, 2025).

There was clear interest in Latin dance genres by male students, but more selectively and informally than their stronger preference for Standard ballroom dance. Latin dance styles, such as cha-cha and samba, were appreciated for their rhythm and emotional expressiveness, as well as the non-verbal dialogue often present between dance partners. However, many students were reluctant to engage with Latin styles in formal and structured situations due to the emotional expressiveness and physicality involved in these dances. Forestier and Larsson (2023) suggest such features are often contradictory to feelings that are discouraged by normative masculine ideals, such as vulnerability, emotional openness,

and physical proximity among other boys during adolescence. Also note that the possible sexual and theatrical elements surrounding Latin dance make it less attractive for boys to engage with seriously, especially in spaces featuring surveillance of their masculinity by peer groups. In addition, Latin dances are often misunderstood as a matter of stillness versus capacity to learn, which limits their recognition as a sport or profession that men may participate in (McCrary et al., 2021). Also, with Standard dances such as the waltz and foxtrot, the former were recognized as structured, disciplined dance experiences with traditional masculine norms regarding control, composure, and formality in mind (Risner, 2023b; Yin & Potimu, 2024). These characteristics allowed Standard styles to be a more socially “safe” space for boys to receive the benefits of dance developmentally, such as confidence, coordination, and self-discipline, without social exclusion and stigma. The preference is indicative of the impact of cultural narratives, peer dynamics, and school settings that continue to feminize expressive movement and prescribe only certain styles of dance for boys (Huang et al., 2025; Li & Chen, 2025) for equitable dance education that interrogates gender norms and allows for more diverse ways for boys to participate. Additionally, this finding contributes to Gender Schema Theory by demonstrating how cultural understandings of masculinity shape male students’ selective engagement in dance sports, favoring Standard over Latin styles, as they fall under greater control and formality (Bem, 1981). Moreover, therefore contributes to gendered beliefs influencing behaviour by filtering what activities appear to be allowable.

The level of participation by male students in Standard dance sports was found to be extremely low, with most participating infrequently or in informal situations, and never in structured dance activities. While some participants indicated they may have had limited exposure to Standard styles in school performances or informal settings, they also stated that they had never seriously participated in private lesson settings, workshops, events, competitions, or extracurricular groups. This shallow participation highlights the cultural and institutional barriers that men face in dance, as Edberg (2025) notes that schools often lack male-inclusive programs or programming that may appeal to them, contributing to low participation. Furthermore, Palfrey (2024) adds that the lack of early contact and role models for boys in dance education can have a diminishing impact on males’ confidence in dance as a meaningful pursuit. Keane (2022) notes that where dance is not contextualized into the wider curriculum and does not represent multiple genders, male students may perceive dance as irrelevant to or incompatible with themselves. Therefore, even with the possible benefits of Standard dance for students, it remains an under-explored activity by boys who lack the supportive structural and cultural context.

A concurrent trend was identified in the context of Latin dance with eight of the ten participation indicators rated very low. There were most male students who had low levels of formal training, either alone or in group memberships, and little preparation towards performance preparation. The most reported behavior was passive, indicating that they perceived indirect engagements more acceptable. Mateu et al. (2021) noted that male students are often more comfortable as observers than participants in expressive physical activities. Although societal norms historically inhibited self-expression in dance for males, especially in dramatic forms, Dai (2020) highlighted how dominant cultural narratives in Chinese culture situate expressive dance with attributes associated with femininity and emotional exposure. Wong (2022) stated that dance education must be intentionally contextualized as a safe space for education or there will continue to be marginal, inhibited participation rates from male students. With that said, informal participation rates of dance across school events were rated relatively higher indicating that male students as observers in socially neutral or non-judgmental contexts offers less potential for psychological barriers to participation. Informal spaces offer potential for less inhibited opportunities for expression without the pressure of performance, especially under judgement, so students can engage and express more freely.

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between interest and engagement in dance sport. Interest is an essential condition when making decisions regarding

participation, particularly with respect to activities that can often be subjected to social or cultural judgment. When interest is present and students feel they have agency in their decision to engage, the chances of them doing so are significantly higher (Martin et al., 2023). Additionally, Vasiutiak et al. (2021) highlighted that interest has a unique predictive capacity for engagement over time, as long as students are placed in social contexts that affirm their interests and mitigate social risks. Leo et al. (2022) also alluded to the contribution of motivation fit (i.e., degree to which instruction is closely aligned to students perceived notions of competence and individualism) and that where opportunities exist to engage in physical education that does closely align to students perceived notions of their competence and individuality, students are more likely to engage (Prevandos & Martin, 2022). Richmond (2021) thirdly highlighted that students can experience a sense of intrinsic motivation through the role of inclusive pedagogy and peer encouragement, particularly in non-traditional settings (such as dance) within physical education contexts. Collectively, these insights align with the stipulations outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), in that all three components—autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be present and constructed for long-term, sustained engagement to occur. They also connect with Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) regarding the pathway: If students have positive expectations of value, and they feel they may afford to be successful (or at least have been placed in contexts where they feel they can succeed), they are more likely to engage with the activity.

Despite this intrinsic interest, male students are often limited in their participation in dance sports, which is frequently hindered by societal assumptions related to gender and a fear of social disapproval. Although many male participants acknowledge the dance sports for their artistic and physical benefits, there are still anticipated barriers to participation, such as public humiliation, peer group pressure, and multiple concepts of masculinity (Lindsey, 2020). A corresponding narrowing of possibilities may exist due to the absence of role models for men in dance, inadequate teacher preparation in inclusive pedagogy, and insufficient choreography in the school curriculum (Siskos, 2025). Ultimately, the educational and sociocultural conditions from which male students learn reinforce gendered stereotypical beliefs about the physical expressiveness of dance sports practice, hence limiting students' willingness to engage in them. Based on these findings, even when there is interest, broader cultural and institutional factors may suppress a student's engagement in physical activity. To combat these issues, educators must provide inclusive environments that support students and offer opportunities for physical expression free from stigma, thereby challenging traditional gender norms.

To address the strong interest in dance sport among male students as an activity with relatively low participation, a multi-level strategy incorporating all stakeholders is necessary. Schools should adopt interest-based recruitment practices that identify the types of dance in which male students prefer to engage, and facilitate peer-led dance clubs that encourage student agency, belonging, and leadership. In addition, training in high-performing with peers as a method to foster engagement in dance should be facilitated by PE teachers, curriculum developers, and student leaders who can utilize their knowledge of students' interests to create relevant and engaging programs (Amado et al., 2020; Baligad & Martin, 2016). At the policy level, schools would enact gender-inclusive practices around dance in physical education standards, or frame dance not as a gendered activity, but instead as a form of physically educated movement based on skill and expression (Garcías de Ves & Beltran-Garrido, 2024). Teacher education also needs to transition toward implementing strategies that include gender sensitivity and inclusivity training, allowing teachers to question stereotypical views of dance while emphasizing male dance role models to build positive and supportive classroom cultures. The curriculum can include a diverse range of dance forms that demonstrate the physical and cognitive benefits of dancing, while also encouraging co-educational participation opportunities. Finally, schools need to collaborate with families and the broader dance community to change the narratives that societies attribute to dancing, thereby marginalizing boys' participation within social narratives. When schools, educators, and communities

come together to create affirming, stigma-free environments, boys can be empowered to engage in dance sports in ways that are confident and authentic without the fear of social judgment or conflicting with their identity (Christofidou, 2021; Ritchie & Gaultier, 2020).

While this research is limited explicitly to male students' interest and levels of participation in dance sports, there are undeniable limitations that must be acknowledged in order to contextualize the results. A cross-sectional design limits researchers in determining causation as well as tracking changes in interest, levels, motivation, and participation over time. It would be advisable for future studies to adopt a longitudinal approach to track and observe the evolution of these changes. Furthermore, the use of self-report questionnaires inherently limits the overall self-reported data due to social desirability bias, question misconstrues, and the vagueness surrounding self-reports, each of which has indirect consequences. Finally, the findings may not be readily generalizable due to their cultural context. Attitudes towards gender roles, dance participation, and masculinity ultimately vary from culture to culture and country to country, suggesting that other populations, which are more culturally diverse or international, may not display the same patterns as the current study. Lastly, a representativeness issue likely further limits the study's context, as the sample as a whole may not accurately reflect variations in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, regional educational policies, or school culture. Each of these factors has the potential to influence the outcomes of this study. Another significant limitation relates to a surprising observation: male students were significantly more inclined to be interested in Standard ballroom dance than in Latin forms of dance. This was unexpected considering the vivaciousness and expressiveness of Latin dance, particularly when we assume those abilities would resonate more closely with adolescent preference. Latin dance embodies an energetic quality that is often assumed to align with less restraint, freedom and physicality. These results may also suggest deeper cultural scripts that surround structure, discipline, and emotional control—likely more aligned with traditional masculinity that also warrant further examination. These limitations suggest the need for larger, more diverse, and longitudinal research to develop a more robust understanding of male engagement in dance education.

Conclusions

To conclude, this study highlights a strong yet underutilized interest among male students in dance sports, especially standard ballroom and Latin styles, contrasted with their limited participation. Sociocultural factors, including influence, traditional gender norms, and a lack of supportive, inclusive environments, primarily shape this gap. The most prominent barriers include the feminization of expressive movement, the absence of male role models, narrow constructions of masculinity, and ineffective institutional support. These factors contribute to males feeling excluded from dance, despite personal interest. To address this, schools should adopt targeted, interest-driven recruitment strategies—such as anonymous surveys to determine preferred dance styles, peer-led dance clubs, and co-designed dance units — implemented within a six-month timeline.

The recruitment initiatives should be supported by teacher training programs that focus on gender equity, inclusive pedagogies, and strategies for fostering peer support. Required resources include staff development budgets, community partnerships with male dancers or local dance groups, and peer mentorship frameworks. Success metrics include increased male enrollment in dance units, improved student self-efficacy in expressive movement, and a reduction in stigma in peer interactions. Instruction that links dance participation to personal identity, emotional expression, and intrinsic motivation can help renegotiate boys' engagement with dance on their own terms, creating culturally and developmentally responsive opportunities for sustained participation.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings extend and refine existing motivational frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory by emphasizing the importance of autonomy-supportive

environments in overcoming gendered barriers to participation. The positive correlation between interest and engagement further validates the role of Expectancy-Value Theory, demonstrating how perceived value and social support can mediate willingness to engage. Similarly, Gender Schema Theory is advanced through this research by illustrating how institutional and peer narratives shape boys' internalized beliefs about what kinds of physical activity are appropriate or permissible.

Practical implementation should begin with institutional policy reviews that remove gendered language from dance curricula and mandate inclusive practices in PE. Schools should revise curricula to include a broader array of dance styles that appeal to diverse identities, and implement policy measures that normalize boys' participation in expressive movement. A step-by-step approach could include: (1) conducting baseline interest surveys, (2) forming inclusive student advisory groups, (3) piloting co-educational dance units with teacher and peer mentorship, and (4) evaluating engagement through both qualitative feedback and participation data. Future research should focus on in-depth qualitative studies exploring lived experiences of male students in dance, with attention to identity formation, peer dynamics, and sociocultural narratives. These insights can then inform how to develop more intentional, gender-sensitive, and sustainable opportunities for students in physical education programs.

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