

## THE CRITICAL THINKING STATUS OF DANCE MAJOR STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES IN INNER MONGOLIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to study the current status of critical thinking among dance major students in universities in Inner Mongolia. Adopting quantitative research methods, 308 dance major students from three universities in Inner Mongolia are selected as research samples. Data is collected through questionnaire survey and analyzed by SPSS 26.0 statistical software. Through descriptive statistical analysis and dimensional analysis, the demographic characteristics of students, the overall level of critical thinking, and the performance of critical thinking ability in different dimensions are discussed.

#### The results of the research found that:

- 1) The average score of 308 dance major students is 114.19 points, indicating that their overall critical thinking ability is at a medium level.
- 2) Students still have room for improvement in aspects such as maturity (average 14.56), openness (average 14.78), and truth-seeking (average 15.92), but they show strong critical thinking ability in dimensions such as analysis (mean = 17.75), confidence (mean = 17.38), and curiosity (mean = 17.19).
- 3) The results of this study are partially different from related studies, which also reflects the effectiveness of dance major education in cultivating students' critical thinking.

**Keywords:** Critical Thinking; Dance Major Students; Universities in Inner Mongolia

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term “critical thinking” originated in ancient Greece, “critical” is a Greek word with roots “kriticos” and “kriterion”, the former means appropriate judgment and the latter means standard, its basic meaning is “making appropriate judgments according to certain standards” (Wu Hongzhi, 2016). In education, cultivating students’ critical thinking ability is usually regarded as an important goal.

Dance, as an art that combines creativity and performance, in its education and teaching not only requires students to master solid dance skills but also demands that students have the ability to analyze, evaluate, and innovate dance works. As a high-level ability and skill, critical thinking, on the one hand, can effectively cultivate students’ logical thinking ability, problem-solving ability, and in-depth analysis ability, providing strong support for students’ thinking development. On the other hand, it helps students creatively conceive dance movements and enhance the expressiveness of dance (Nabatov & Mankovska, 2021). Critical thinking is not only a teaching tool for problem-solving and reasoning but also a key component for achieving excellent teaching and efficient learning (Nora, 2015). It plays an irreplaceable important role in improving the quality and level of dance and injects new vitality and motivation into students’ all-round development. In the “National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Regular Institutions of Higher Learning” (dance majors) issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2018, critical thinking and innovation ability are clearly included in the talent review standards. (Higher Education Teaching Steering Committee of the Ministry of Education, 2018). However, actual dance teaching still faces challenges. In the dance major teaching in universities in Inner Mongolia, the concept of “emphasizing skills and neglecting intelligence” in traditional dance teaching may lead to teachers and students possibly ignoring the cultivation of critical thinking (Jung, 2012). The lack of critical thinking among students may lead to getting lost in the face of a large amount of knowledge (Luo & Tong, 2005).

This study aims to study the current status of critical thinking among dance major students in universities in Inner Mongolia. Through an in-depth survey of dance major students in representative universities in Inner Mongolia, it analyzes the overall level of students’ critical thinking from multiple dimensions such as dance learning, choreography, and performance, as well as the performance of critical thinking ability in different dimensions. It further discusses the relationship between critical thinking and dance education and teaching, and puts forward corresponding improvement suggestions. It is hoped that through this study, it can provide a useful reference for improving the critical thinking ability of dance major students in universities in Inner Mongolia and promoting the development of dance education.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

To study the current status of critical thinking of dance major students in universities in Inner Mongolia.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Critical Thinking

The concept of “critical thinking” can be traced back to ancient Greece. Its core connotation is making appropriate judgments based on certain standards. From different disciplinary backgrounds and research perspectives, the definitions of critical thinking in the academic community show diversified characteristics. The Delphi Project research group in the United States (1990) defined critical thinking as “purposeful, self-calibrated judgment”. Robert in Canada (1988) defined it as “the tendency or skill to engage in activities with a thoughtful and skeptical attitude”. Another view holds that critical thinking is a series of thinking processes for making personal judgments on the authenticity, accuracy, nature, and value of what has been learned (Wu Hongzhi, 2016:4). There is also a definition that describes critical thinking as “a thinking activity that uses cognitive skills and strategies to increase the possibility of obtaining desired results”, including making personal judgments on the authenticity, accuracy, nature, and value of what has been learned and thus making reasonable decisions (Facione, 1990). These definitions can mainly be classified into two viewpoints: regarding critical thinking as an ability and as a thinking process, reflecting the academic community’s diverse exploration and in-depth understanding of critical thinking. The assessment methods of college students’ critical thinking ability at home and abroad mainly focus on two paradigms: scale evaluation and qualitative analysis. The currently internationally accepted assessment tools include the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) constructed by Luo Qingxu (2002), the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) designed by Facione (1994), the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Test (WGCTA) developed by Bordage G (1990), the Yoon Critical Thinking Disposition Test (YCTD) by Shin H (2015), and the Chinese version of the Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CTDI-CV) constructed by Peng Meici (2004), etc. In addition, the Health Sciences Reasoning Test (HSRT) designed by Cox W C (2013) has also become part of the assessment tools. These assessment tools construct a multi-dimensional measurement framework and provide theoretical and empirical support for exploring the aspects and levels of individual critical thinking ability. In both education and other disciplinary fields, these methods provide practical tools and references for in-depth discussion and cultivation of critical thinking ability.

#### 3.2 Dance Major Education and Critical Thinking

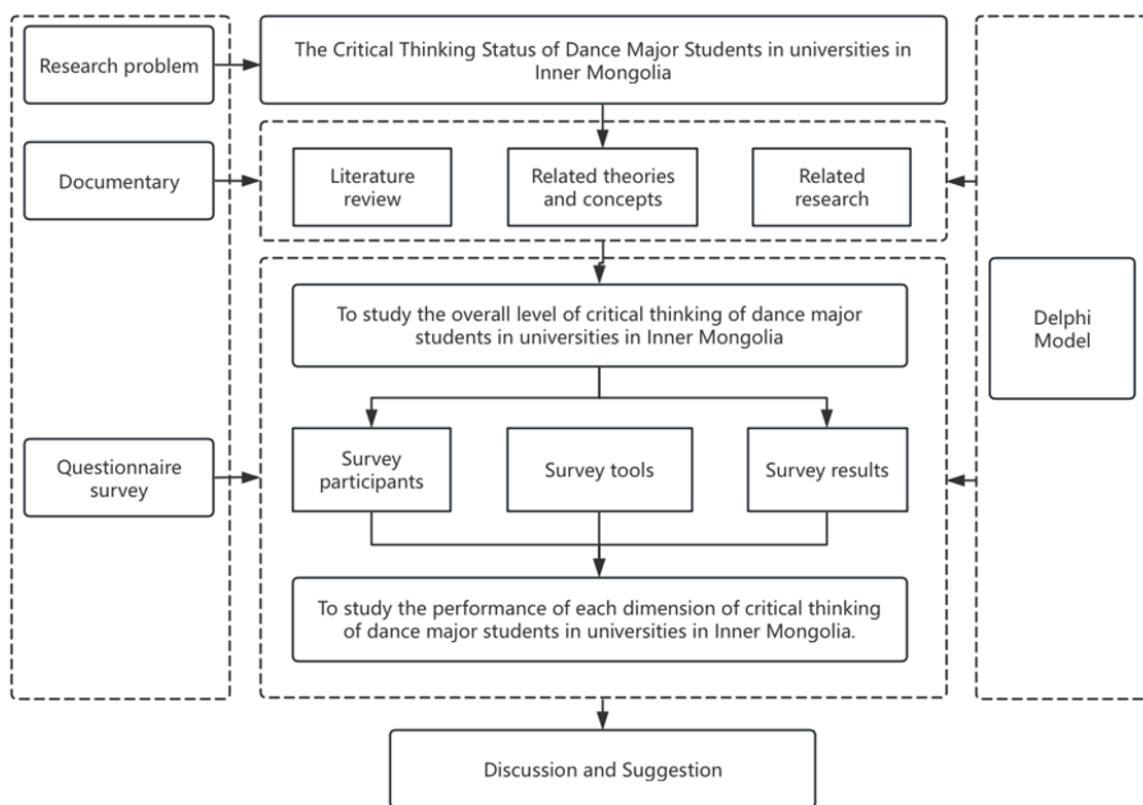
In the field of dance, scholars have long been aware of the key needs of dance education. The National Dance Association of the United States (1994) clearly defined national dance education standards and proposed that critical thinking skills are an inherent part of a comprehensive dance education curriculum. Pamela Matt (2003) emphasized the urgency of cultivating critical thinking in the field of dance science and called for understanding its necessity in dance teaching research and practice. Warburton (2004) highlighted the promoting role of critical thinking on teacher education practice from different angles in multiple studies. The research on its advantageous effects shows that the value of critical thinking in teaching is applicable to dancers at different levels. Adesola Akinleye and Rose Payne (2016) believe that critical thinking assessment and feedback are helpful for learning dance techniques. Dancers can adapt to different dance concepts and movement styles and improve

their skill levels through cultivating critical thinking. The research of Nabatov and Mankovska (2021) shows that critical thinking helps create more expressive dance movements and sequences. With the continuous deepening of international exchanges, more and more Chinese dance scholars have also realized the significance of critical thinking for dance teaching. Luo Honglu and Tong Jing (2005) pointed out that the lack of critical thinking among students in college dance art education may lead to getting lost in the face of a large amount of knowledge. Liu Yan (2017) pointed out in the research on modern dance education that dance educators should have a positive thinking attitude, go beyond traditions, be brave in innovation and guide students. At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of cultivating and shaping learners with creative and critical thinking. In 2018, the “National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Regular Institutions of Higher Learning” (dance majors) clearly included critical thinking and innovation ability in the talent review standards, which fully illustrates that critical thinking has an irreplaceable significance for the innovation and development of dance art (Teaching Steering Committee of Institutions of Higher Learning of the Ministry of Education, 2018:915).

#### 4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework*



## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to conduct an in-depth investigation into the current status of critical thinking among dance major students in universities in Inner Mongolia. Adopting quantitative research methods, through a survey of 308 dance major students from three representative universities in Inner Mongolia, it analyzes their overall level of critical thinking ability and the performance of critical thinking ability in different dimensions. The research process includes the selection of participants, the design of data collection tools, and the selection of data analysis methods.

### 5.1 Participant Selection

This research focuses on universities with dance majors in the Inner Mongolia region. Three universities with the largest enrollment, best reputation, and greatest professional influence are selected as samples, including the Inner Mongolia Arts University, Inner Mongolia Normal University, and Baotou Teachers' College. Through random sampling, students from different groups are selected as research samples. Eventually, a total of 308 students participated in this study.

### 5.2 Design of Data Collection Tools

This The questionnaire design in this study was based on the "Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory - Chinese Version" (CTDI - CV) translated and revised by Peng Meici et al. (2004). A Likert five - point scale was adopted, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Since the focus of the survey was on the critical thinking of dance - major students, the scale of questionnaire options was adjusted from a six - point scale to a five - point scale. Some questions that were difficult for students to understand were deleted, and some important but difficult - to - read items were rewritten to facilitate students' reading and understanding and better adapt to the evaluated students. After the modification, SPSS 26.0 was used to conduct a reliability test on the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.888, indicating good internal consistency of the questionnaire and its suitability for subsequent research.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part covered demographic information, including aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, academic year, dance - learning duration, and email. The second part was the "Critical Thinking Questionnaire for Dance - major Students", which included seven dimensions: truth-seeking, openness, analysis, systematic thinking, confidence, curiosity, and maturity. Each dimension had five sub - questions, with a total of 35 questions. Each sub - question had five options, and the score range was 1 - 5 points. The total score range of the questionnaire was 35 - 175 points. Among them, there were 17 positive questions, and the remaining 18 were negative questions.

### 5.3 Data Analysis Methods

The data collection period for this study was from March 2023 to October 2023. This study employed statistical software SPSS 26.0 for data analysis. In response to different research questions and variable

characteristics, we applied methods such as descriptive statistical analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and t-tests to investigate the description of student demographics, levels of critical thinking, and critical thinking levels across different dimensions. Throughout the data collection process, strict adherence to research ethics principles was maintained, and informed consent was obtained from participants. Anonymity and privacy protection for participants were ensured, with a commitment to utilizing the data solely for research purposes.

In conclusion, this study effectively explored the current status of critical thinking among students in the dance studies program at Inner Mongolian universities, providing a reliable data foundation for subsequent discussions and conclusions through rigorous research design, data collection tools, and appropriate data analysis methods.

## 6. RESULT

### 6.1 Analysis of the Overall Level of Critical Thinking of Dance Major Students in Universities in Inner Mongolia

#### 1) Description of Students' Basic Characteristics

To comprehensively understand the current status of critical thinking among dance major students in Universities in Inner Mongolia, we distributed 308 questionnaires to the target population and received 308 valid responses. Detailed descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire data from the 308 participants was conducted using SPSS software.

As shown in Table 1, among the 308 participants, 269 were female (constituting 87.3%) and 39 were male (constituting 12.7%). This distribution aligns with the predominant trend of female students in dance majors in Chinese universities. Participants' ages were mainly concentrated between 18 and 23 years old, particularly with the most participants at 19 and 21 years old, reflecting the typical age structure of students in the dance studies program. Additionally, in the study region, Han Chinese students accounted for 83.1%, while students from ethnic minorities accounted for 16.9%, aligning with the characteristics of the student population in minority regions. Regarding the duration of dance study, among the surveyed students, 80 individuals (26.0%) had studied for less than 3 years, 110 individuals (35.7%) had studied for 3 to 5 years, 65 individuals (21.1%) had studied for 5 to 10 years, and 53 individuals (17.2%) had studied for more than 10 years, providing important insights and clues about students' experiences in dance education.

Table 1

*Distribution Table of Sample Subjects*

		Number	Percentage (%)
Sex	male	39	12.7
	female	269	87.3
	other	0	0
Ethnicity	Han nationality	256	83.1
	Minority nationality	52	16.9
Grade	freshman	99	32.1
	sophomore	94	30.5
	junior	69	22.4
	senior	46	14.9
Dance learning time	within 3 years	80	26.0
	3-5 years	110	35.7
	5-10 years	65	21.1
	More than 10 years	53	17.2

## 2) Analysis of Students' Overall Critical Thinking Level

Since this study employed a questionnaire survey to analyze the current status of critical thinking among dance major students in Universities in Inner Mongolia , the questionnaire data directly reflect the level of critical thinking in the dance studies program.

Firstly, the current status of critical thinking among dance major students is presented through the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of the questionnaire are presented in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics of questionnaire*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sum	308	85	175	114.19	14.147
Valid N (listwise)	308				

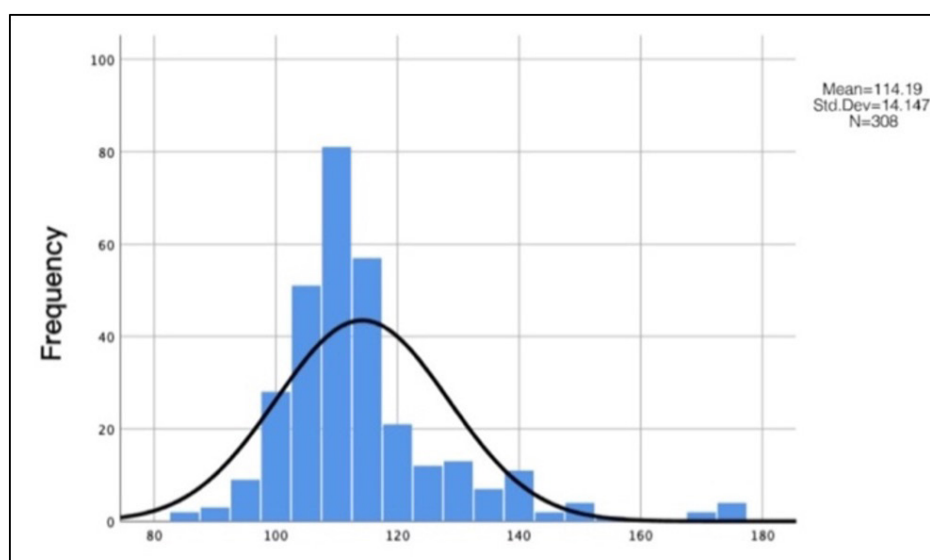
From the data in Table 2, we can understand the overall level of critical thinking among the study participants. The descriptive statistics results show that the average score of the 308 participants is 114.19 points. The highest score is 175 points, and the lowest score is 85 points. The standard deviation is approximately 14.147 points. According to the findings of Peng Meici et al. (2004:7), a value lower than 109 indicates weak levels of

critical thinking among the participants. Values between 109 (inclusive) and 135 suggest a moderate level of critical thinking among the participants. Values higher than 135 indicate strong levels of critical thinking among the participants. In this study, the total score is higher than 109 but lower than 135. Therefore, the data here implies that the participants exhibit a moderate inclination toward critical thinking. The study findings indicate that dance major students in Universities in Inner Mongolia show a positive tendency in critical thinking, suggesting that students generally possess a certain level of critical thinking ability.

Secondly, the results of the overall analysis of students' critical thinking were obtained by statistically calculating the frequency and number of occurrences of critical thinking dimensions among the students. The results of the analysis are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*The distribution of questionnaire*



From the data in Figure 1, the most common values fall within the range of 105 to 115. Through the analysis of the questionnaire data from the study participants, we have been able to discern the general level of critical thinking among the participants and the specific distribution of their critical thinking.

#### 6.2 Analysis of the Performance of Each Dimension of Critical Thinking of Dance Major Students in Universities in Inner Mongolia

In order to deeply understand the current situation of critical thinking of dance major students, the research selected the “Delphi” model as the theoretical support for the research and further analyzed different dimensions of critical thinking. SPSS was used to analyze the mean, minimum value, maximum value, standard deviation and variance of the critical thinking data of seven dimensions: Truth-seeking, Openness, Analysis,



Systematic thinking, Confidence, Curiosity, and Maturity. According to the research viewpoints of Peng Meici et al. (2004), a single score greater than 16 indicates a strong tendency. The specific statistical data is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics of each dimension*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Truth-seeking	308	9.00	25.00	15.9188	2.72578	7.430
Openness	308	8.00	25.00	14.7792	3.02055	9.124
Analysis	308	10.00	25.00	17.7500	2.24968	5.061
Systematic thinking	308	10.00	25.00	16.6169	2.32869	5.423
Confidence	308	12.00	25.00	17.3799	2.24011	5.018
Curiosity	308	11.00	25.00	17.1948	2.24284	5.030
Maturity	308	7.00	25.00	14.5552	3.31715	11.003
Valid N (listwise)	308					

1) Maturity: In the study, the score for maturity was the lowest, with an average of 14.56 and a standard deviation of 3.32. This suggests that students have relatively lower critical thinking in terms of maturity. This might imply a challenge for students in making rational and mature judgments regarding issues and situations. Further investigation could help identify the reasons for this lack of maturity, which may include insufficient in-depth handling of complex issues or a lack of sufficient accumulated experience.

2) Analysis: The score for analytical thinking was the highest, with an average of 17.75 and a standard deviation of 2.25. This indicates that students have strong abilities in analyzing problems and situations, putting forward rational viewpoints, and making inferences. This implies that students tend to conduct in-depth analysis when solving problems and contemplating complex issues, which is of significant importance in dance education and creation.

3) Openness: The score for openness was relatively low, with an average of 14.78 and a standard deviation of 3.02. This might suggest that students face challenges in accepting new ideas, trying new methods, and maintaining an open attitude toward diversity, which could influence students' reception of new artistic concepts and aesthetic ideals in dance education.

4) Truth-seeking: The score for truth-seeking was an average of 15.92, with a standard deviation of 2.73. This might indicate that students have a certain ability to pursue truth and evaluate the authenticity and accuracy of information, but there is still room for improvement. Further training and curriculum design could help enhance students' critical thinking abilities in this area.

5) Systematic thinking: The score for systematic thinking was an average of 16.62, with a standard deviation of 2.33. This indicates that students have a certain ability to analyze and organize issues systematically, but it also needs further strengthening. In dance education, cultivating students' systematic understanding and application of dance elements and structures is crucial.

6) Curiosity: The score for curiosity was an average of 17.19, with a standard deviation of 2.24. This suggests that students have strong abilities in exploring new ideas, accepting new challenges, and maintaining curiosity about knowledge and information. In dance education, fostering students' curiosity and thirst for knowledge can stimulate their creativity and performance.

7) Confidence: The score for confidence was an average of 17.38, with a standard deviation of 2.24. This indicates that students have high confidence in expressing their viewpoints and beliefs and believing in their ability to solve problems. In dance education, encouraging students to cultivate confidence can enhance their performance and creative abilities.

The scores for Analysis (mean = 17.75, SD = 2.25), Confidence (mean = 17.38, SD = 2.24), Curiosity (mean = 17.19, SD = 2.24), and Systematic thinking (mean = 16.62, SD = 2.33) were all above 16, indicating that students possess these aspects of critical thinking. This can be seen as early signs of students exhibiting positive characteristics in critical thinking. Dance educators can further develop and consolidate these abilities by inspiring students' curiosity through teaching activities, providing more opportunities for autonomous learning, and fostering a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to express their viewpoints. The scores for Truth-seeking (mean = 15.92, SD = 2.73), Openness (mean = 14.78, SD = 3.02), and Maturity (mean = 14.56, SD = 3.32) were all below 16, indicating that dance major students slightly lag in these dimensions. There is room for improvement in students' pursuit of truth, open acceptance of new ideas, and mature thinking about issues. Dance educators can introduce more case studies, open discussions, and interdisciplinary learning to encourage students to examine issues from multiple perspectives and accept new viewpoints. Additionally, guiding students to participate in practice and project-based learning can help them cultivate mature thinking abilities in real-life situations.

Interestingly, the results of this study are somewhat similar to the findings of (Wu & Fang2021:509) and (Ma & Qin2016:60). They found that among the seven dimensions of critical thinking, some negative or ambiguous thinking features, such as truth-seeking and confidence, existed. For Truth-seeking (mean = 15.92, SD = 2.73), the scores of dance major students were relatively low, possibly influenced by traditional teaching methods and years of test-oriented education. Students might consider teachers as absolute authorities in the classroom, making it difficult for them to raise questions and limiting their pursuit of truth. However, regarding Confidence (mean = 17.38, SD = 2.24), it might be because dance education provides a stage for students to fully showcase themselves, leading to higher scores in the dimension of confidence among dance major students.

Overall, dance major students demonstrate positive critical thinking overall, while also exhibiting some areas that need strengthening. Educators should focus on stimulating students' curiosity, encouraging confident expression, advocating open acceptance of new ideas, and promoting the ability to think maturely when cul-

tivating students' critical thinking abilities. Improvements in these areas will help students develop a more comprehensive critical thinking ability in the field of dance education, laying a solid foundation for their future learning and career development. Educators should also formulate personalized teaching plans and guidance measures based on students' actual performance to better meet the needs and potential of different students.

## 7. DISCUSSION

This study selected the "Delphi" model proposed by Facione (1990) as the theoretical support for the research. Using the two-dimensional structure of the "Delphi" model, including cognitive skills and affective tendencies, it discussed the level of students' critical thinking and analyzed students' performance in cognitive skills such as interpretation, evaluation, and inference. At the same time, paid attention to different dimensions of affective tendencies, such as truth-seeking, openness, analysis, systematics, confidence, curiosity, and maturity. This helps to evaluate students' critical thinking more comprehensively.

By comparing and discussing the research results with existing related research, it was found that previous studies had extensively examined critical thinking from a multidisciplinary perspective. For example, Gao Junli (2019) focused on the level of critical thinking of students majoring in educational technology, which is somewhat similar to the object of this study, but the research fields and methods are different. Wu Beibei and Fang Yiling (2021) and Ma Rong and Qin Xiaoqing (2016) respectively studied the correlation between the critical thinking tendency and reading level of English majors and the characteristics of the critical thinking tendency of English majors. Although the two studies are in different disciplines from this study, there are similarities and differences in the research results. Their research found that in the seven dimensions of critical thinking, there are some negative or ambiguous thinking characteristics, such as truth-seeking, confidence, etc. For the dimension of truth-seeking, it is similar to the results of this study, and students' scores are relatively low. However, for confidence, there is a significant difference in the research results. Dance majors have higher scores in the confidence dimension, which is inconsistent with the two studies. The reason may be that dance teaching provides more stages, and students can fully show themselves and promote the growth of the confidence dimension.

Based on the above research results, we believe that this study is consistent with the existing research directions, and it is necessary to investigate the current situation of critical thinking of dance majors. By combining the "Delphi" model, we can more comprehensively and deeply understand the level of critical thinking of dance major students and the relationship between the growth of each dimension and dance teaching. At the same time, it provides more specific guidance and suggestions for improving teaching quality and students' critical thinking ability.

## 8. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

1. This study provides a unique perspective on the critical thinking status of dance major students in universities in Inner Mongolia. By focusing on this specific region and population, it fills a gap in the existing literature on the relationship between dance education and critical thinking in this context.

2. The research combines quantitative methods and a comprehensive analysis of multiple dimensions of critical thinking. This approach offers a more in-depth understanding of the complex nature of critical thinking among dance students and contributes to the body of knowledge on educational assessment and instructional strategies for enhancing critical thinking in dance education.

## 9. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Implication of the Study

1. The findings of this study have important implications for dance educators in Inner Mongolia. They can use the results to design targeted curriculums and teaching methods that focus on developing students' critical thinking skills. For example, educators can incorporate activities that stimulate curiosity, encourage open discussions, and promote mature problem-solving.

2. The study also highlights the need for a reevaluation of traditional dance teaching methods that may be overly focused on skills and neglect the cultivation of critical thinking. By integrating critical thinking into dance education, educators can help students become more independent thinkers and creative performers.

### 2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future research can explore in more depth the impact of different teaching methods on the cultivation of critical thinking and how to better integrate critical thinking education into dance major courses. For instance, comparative studies could be conducted between traditional lecture-based teaching and more interactive, project-based learning methods to determine which approaches are most effective in enhancing critical thinking.

2. In addition, exploring the application of critical thinking in dance education in other regions or countries can conduct cross-cultural comparisons. This could help identify cultural factors that influence the development of critical thinking in dance students and provide insights into best practices that can be shared across different educational contexts.

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