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Nusantara Dance Experiences for Multicultural Education: Improving Quality in Higher Learning

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Abstract: This study aims to test the effectiveness of an experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance course in improving multicultural competence and perceived quality of education for university students. The lack of empirical evidence on experiential learning in traditional dance is the background of this study. Embedded mixed methods were used with 68 Dance Education students participating in four Nusantara dances (Saman, Kandagan, Ngarojeng, Jejer) for 16 weeks based on the Kolb cycle; quantitative data were collected through the Multicultural Competence Scale (MCS) and the Perception of Educational Quality Scale (PEQS), while qualitative data were collected through interviews, reflective journals, and observations. Quantitative results showed a highly significant increase in multicultural competence and perceived quality of education; the embodied awareness dimension increased the most. Qualitative findings revealed that direct dance experiences shifted multicultural understanding from an abstract cognitive realm to a "felt in the body" awareness, marked by a decrease in intercultural stereotypes, an increase in cross-cultural empathy, and an internalization of values of togetherness, politeness, joy, and harmony. In conclusion, experiential Nusantara Dance significantly enhanced multicultural competence and fostered an inclusive, democratic learning environment aligned with quality higher education.

Keywords: *multicultural education; experiential learning; Nusantara dance; quality of higher education; quality education*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's higher education landscape is increasingly pluralistic, creating an urgent need for pedagogies that cultivate intercultural competence and sustain high-quality learning experiences. Arts-based experiential learning, exemplified by Nusantara Dance, offers a culturally rich medium to foster embodied understanding, cross-cultural empathy, and shared values within a diverse student body (Nadhifah & Pamungkas, 2023). Grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the approach posits that learning emerges from transforming concrete experience through reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, thereby integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning through embodiment (Purnomo & Sujiono, 2023; Sujud & Utomo, 2023). Nusantara Dance has been implemented as an experiential-learning course across four regional dances (Saman, Kandagan, Ngarojeng, Jejer) with an embedded mixed-methods design to evaluate effects on multicultural competence and perceived educational quality; Arsih's study reports substantial gains in Multicultural Competence and Perception of Educational Quality, with embodied awareness emerging as the strongest driver of change. Qualitative data further show that direct dance experiences translate cross-cultural understanding into bodily, felt knowledge and internalized values such as togetherness, politeness, and harmony (Arsih, Lanjari, et al., 2025; Arsih, Raharjo, et al., 2025). This corpus of evidence demonstrates the promise of Nusantara Dance as a vehicle for experiential learning and for promoting high-quality education in Indonesian higher education contexts (Anam & Marlina, 2022; Sutisnawati et al., 2023).

Indonesia is a multicultural country with a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and religions. Constitutionally, six religions are recognized, reflecting the plurality of national identities (Nadhifah & Pamungkas, 2023). Research on multicultural education emphasizes the need for an inclusive curriculum in higher education that fosters empathy, tolerance, and equality as a foundation for quality education (SDG 4) (Purnomo & Sujiono, 2023; Sujud & Utomo, 2023). This diversity underscores the importance of multicultural pedagogy as a response to social, economic, and globalization dynamics. The challenge of intolerance on campus arises from the dynamics of heterogeneous identities; discrimination, stereotypes, and ethno-religious conflict have the potential to undermine the academic climate. Research demonstrates the need for a locally contextualized multicultural pedagogy that fosters respect for differences and builds a democratic, inclusive learning culture in higher education (Anam & Marlina, 2022; Purnomo & Sujiono, 2023; Sutisnawati et al., 2023). Nusantara dance serves as a multicultural medium through its richness of regional dances that represent values,

identities, and cross-cultural understanding. Learning dance embodiment offers opportunities for empathy through body awareness; studies on dance embodiment and Nusantara modules show its potential to shape student character amid diversity (Indriati et al., 2022; Tricahyono et al., 2020). Previous research demonstrates the potential of arts-based learning to foster tolerance and cultural understanding; however, many studies focus on elementary/secondary school contexts or applied cultural programs, while empirical evidence in higher education remains limited (Muchlis, 2024; Sutisnawati et al., 2023; Tricahyono et al., 2020). The research gap lies in the limited empirical evidence linking experiential learning through traditional dance with measurable improvements in multicultural competence and indicators of educational quality (SDG 4) at the higher education level (Muchlis, 2024; Oktoberi et al., 2021; Sutisnawati et al., 2023; Tricahyono et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study was to examine whether an experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance course significantly improves students' multicultural competence. The research questions included: how the program impacts multicultural awareness, cultural understanding, and cross-cultural skills; and how perceptions of educational quality change. What are the students' lived experiences during the course? The urgency of this research lies in the opportunity to bridge gaps among traditional dance, multicultural education, and the quality of higher education (SDG 4). Utilizing Nusantara dance as a learning medium enriches intercultural learning, strengthens national identity, and enhances graduates' readiness to face global challenges.

This state-of-the-art research examines the use of Indonesian dance in higher education as a measurable experiential vehicle for multicultural competence and perceived educational quality. This novelty combines arts-based learning, Indonesian cultural studies, and SDG 4 evaluation through a blended approach. The theoretical framework positions the multicultural education paradigm as a framework for developing multicultural competence, awareness, understanding, and cross-cultural skills. The research also emphasizes the curriculum's role in shaping inclusive attitudes in higher education. Indonesia's cultural diversity and the need for multicultural pedagogy provide a crucial context for higher education. Indonesia displays rich cultural diversity through regional dances, cultural identities, languages, and social practices that transcend ethnic and religious boundaries. Therefore, higher education institutions need pedagogical approaches that strengthen tolerance, cross-cultural dialogue, and inclusive learning (Luturmas, 2020; Nugraheni, 2021; Riyanti & Sungkono, 2020). In Indonesian literature, learning based on multicultural values has been promoted as a response to the dynamics of pluralism, with a focus on reducing discrimination, fostering empathy, and fostering a democratic learning climate (e.g., studies on the implementation of multicultural education in various school and university contexts) (Gunawan, 2022; Hartutik et al., 2023; Luturmas, 2020). These studies emphasize the urgency of integrating local cultural content and culture-based learning practices to achieve a more inclusive higher education. Nusantara dance, as a multicultural medium, combines a richness of regional dances that represent values, identity, and cross-cultural understanding. The Nusantara module has been studied as a tool for developing student character in multicultural classrooms, emphasizing the strengthening of tolerance, patriotism, and nationalism through bodily presence in artistic practice (embodiment) and cultural reflection (Indriati et al., 2022; Suanto et al., 2020). Cultural arts practices such as Nusantara dance have the potential to serve as experimental learning vehicles that integrate cognition, affection, and social skills, in accordance with Kolb's experiential learning framework, which emphasizes the role of concrete experience and the transformation of that experience through reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Gapari, 2021; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022; Priyandari et al., 2020). In line with this literature, the Nusantara module study demonstrates how cultural experiences can strengthen national identity on a multicultural campus.

Previous research on arts- and culture-based learning has demonstrated the potential to develop cultural competency and inclusive policy values. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been extensively explored as a learning design that transforms experience into learning (Concrete Experience; Reflective Observation; Abstract Conceptualization; Active Experimentation) and has been applied in various educational domains, including higher education, with impacts on problem-solving, independent learning, and cultural literacy. (Anggreni, 2020; Priyandari et al., 2020). Research across various contexts indicates that direct experience and reflection enhance students' cross-cultural understanding and analytical skills. Although many studies still focus on primary/secondary education or non-artistic contexts, empirical evidence at the higher education level remains limited. (Gunadi et al., 2023; Nicolas et al., 2024; Suanto et al., 2020). The effectiveness of Experiential Learning Theory in facilitating cross-cultural learning is also supported by several studies showing how explicit experiences improve students' critical thinking and social skills. (Azzahra & Darmiyanti, 2024; Prasetya, 2021; Riyanti & Sungkono, 2020).

The research gap lies in the lack of empirical evidence linking experiential learning through traditional dance with measurable improvements in multicultural competence and indicators of educational quality at the university level. Several studies in Indonesia highlight the need for multimodal evaluation of multicultural learning and its impact on students' cultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills. However, these are still lacking in the context of Nusantara Dance programs as a measurable vehicle for experiential learning at the university level. (Berryman-Miller, 1991; Djamaluddin et al., 2024; Jayadi et al., 2022; Sutisnawati et al., 2023). Studies

on the explicit integration of Nusantara Dance into higher education curricula to enhance multicultural competence still need to be tested quantitatively and qualitatively, especially in measuring educational quality indicators relevant to SDG 4 (access, relevance, quality, and accountability) (Gunawan, 2022; Luturmas, 2020; T. Rahman, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap through experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance instruction, measured in two ways (quantitatively for multicultural competence; qualitatively for perceptions of educational quality and students' life experiences).

The literature on experiential learning theory demonstrates that Kolb's theory provides a robust framework for transforming experiences into measurable learning through four fundamental phases. Several studies have also adopted mixed-method designs to evaluate the impact of Experiential Learning Theory on students' competencies, attitudes, and learning processes (Azzahra & Darmiyanti, 2024; Nurcahyandi & Purwaningrum, 2022; Priyandari et al., 2020; Sholihah et al., 2021). The theoretical framework combines Kolb's experimental learning with the notion of embodied cognition. In the context of Indonesian dance, the bodily experience of dance movement, visual perception, rhythm, and social contact are proxied as drivers of the formation of cultural concepts, identity, and cross-cultural understanding. This understanding aligns with the Experiential Learning Theory literature, which emphasizes that transforming experience through reflection and abstract conceptualization enables students to internalize cultural meanings more sustainably. Several studies also emphasize how embodied experiences in the arts can enrich understanding of ethics and human values within a humanistic learning framework (A. Rahman et al., 2023; Sholihah et al., 2021; Syarifuddin, 2022).

The theory of quality education in higher education emphasizes that educational quality is not only about academic outcomes, but also the process, curriculum relevance, and graduates' ability to contribute to society. The literature on educational quality in the Indonesian context indicates that culture-based learning, inclusivity, and the evaluation of various aspects (affective, cognitive, psychomotor) contribute to improving graduate quality and learning that is locally and globally relevant (Gunawan, 2022; Luturmas, 2020; Sholihah et al., 2021). Within this framework, a Nusantara Dance course integrating Experiential Learning Theory has the potential to improve the quality of higher education by enhancing students' multicultural competencies and positive perceptions of learning, as discussed in multicultural studies and curriculum evaluations across various Indonesian institutions.

A synergy between Kolb's theory, embodied cognition, and a multicultural education framework to assess the impact of experimental learning of Nusantara Dance on multicultural competence and the quality of higher education. This study not only quantitatively measures changes in cultural competence but also qualitatively explores students' lived experiences to understand the learning mechanisms linking Nusantara dance to identity, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding. This study also fills an empirical gap in Indonesian higher education by testing a dance-based program as an experimental learning vehicle oriented toward quality education, using relevant educational quality indicators. Overall, this paper offers an implementation model that can be replicated in dance education and other study programs seeking to improve diversity, inclusivity, and graduate quality.

METHODS

The chosen approach was a mixed-methods embedded design (quantitative integrated with qualitative) (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Proudfoot, 2023; Shannon-Baker & Martinez, 2022). The qualitative approach used phenomenological studies to explore students' lived experiences. In contrast, the quantitative approach used a pre-posttest design to statistically measure changes in multicultural competence and perceptions of educational quality. Phenomenology has long been used to deeply understand the meaning of students' learning experiences (Husain et al., 2024), while qualitative case studies are commonly used to analyze the dynamics of learning within specific courses or study programs (Hamzah & Siregar, 2023; Sumarlin et al., 2022). In this study, the researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by a semi-structured interview guide, field notes, and recordings. Primary data included in-depth interviews and student reflective journals, while secondary data included participant observation and supporting documents (syllabus, semester lesson plans, teaching materials) (Istianah et al., 2021; Tiaradita, 2023). The research was conducted in the Dance Education Study Program at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang. The implementation time was planned for the odd semester of the 2024 academic year, with a data collection duration of approximately 8–12 weeks to allow for continuous monitoring of the experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance course, including course meetings, Nusantara dance practice, and student reflections (Pamenang et al., 2023; Putraningsih, 2020). This design aligns with qualitative studies conducted within dance study programs at various universities in Indonesia (Setiawan et al., 2020).

The study subjects were undergraduate Dance Education students from the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 intakes who had taken or were currently taking Nusantara Dance courses using an experiential learning approach. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the representativeness of learning experiences and variation in Nusantara Dance abilities among participants (Pamenang et al., 2023). Criteria included having taken or currently taking an experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance course, being willing to participate voluntarily,

and being able to express their experiences verbally and in writing. Data saturation was reached after interviewing 68 participants, as the embedded mixed-methods design requires a large sample size for quantitative analysis. Primary data were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews and student reflective journals during Nusantara Dance learning; secondary data were obtained through participant observation during the learning process and documentation (syllabus, semester lesson plans, teaching materials) (Putraningsih, 2020; Widyawati, 2021). Qualitative instruments include an interview guide (focusing on learning experiences, changes in multicultural attitudes, and perceptions of educational quality), a reflective journal (guiding questions for each meeting/week), and an observation sheet (field notes format); researchers will be supported by a voice/video recorder to validate the data (Pamenang et al., 2023).

To statistically measure the effectiveness of the intervention, this study used two scales adapted from previous research: (1) The Multicultural Competence Scale (MCS) consists of 20 items measuring four dimensions: cultural knowledge, tolerance, cross-cultural skills, and embodied awareness (adapted from Indriati et al. (2022) and Purnomo and Sujiono (2023)). It is on a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's ∑ α, with values of 0.87 (pre-test) and 0.91 (post-test). (2) The Perceived Educational Quality Scale (PEQS) consists of 16 items measuring four dimensions: environmental inclusiveness, curriculum relevance, student engagement, and freedom from discrimination. It is on a 1–5 Likert scale. Its reliability was indicated by Cronbach's ∑ α of 0.84 (pre-test) and 0.89 (post-test).

Measurements were conducted twice: a pre-test was administered in the first week before the intervention began, and a post-test was administered in the 16th week after the entire Nusantara Dance learning series was completed. All participants (n=68) completed both scales online via a form, with assistance from the researcher to ensure comprehension of the items. Qualitative analysis followed a reflexive thematic framework. (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Bräuninger & Reips, 2020) and an interpretive phenomenological analysis, with data reduction, presentation, and conclusion-drawing steps consistent with the qualitative literature (Hamzah & Siregar, 2023; Sumarlin et al., 2022). Data validity was maintained through data trustworthiness checks, including triangulation of data sources and methods (Nitte & Mbuik, 2022). Quantitative analysis was conducted using: 1) the Shapiro-Wilk normality test to determine whether the data were parametric or nonparametric; 2) paired t-tests were used if the data were normally distributed, or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests if not. Effect size calculations used Cohen's d (small = 0.2; medium = 0.5; large = 0.8); the significance level was set at ∑ = 0.05; all analyses used SPSS version 26 or Jamovi software.

The study obtained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of LP2M, Universitas Negeri Semarang. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant; confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through a participant code, and students were free to withdraw at any time. Cultural values and local sensitivities were respected throughout the research process, addressing the dynamics of Indonesian culture in dance learning. These ethical practices are supported by qualitative research literature on case studies and phenomenology in dance education and the arts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study comprised 34 students from the 2022/2023 intake and 34 from the 2023/2024 intake, with a gender ratio of 62% female and 38% male. Their cultural backgrounds were diverse, with Central Java (70%) dominant, and the remainder from outside Central Java. Data were collected through 16 weeks of experiential Nusantara dance instruction, including four dances: Saman (Aceh), Jejer (Surabaya), Ngarojeng (Betawi), and Kandagan (West Java). Each dance was taught over 2–3 weekly sessions, emphasizing direct bodily experience, reflection, and discussion of diversity. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 68 participants until saturation was reached, 136 reflective journal entries (twice per week per participant), and 40 hours of participant observation (4 hours per week). The interviews explored multicultural experiences, changes in competency, and the meaning of diversity. The reflective journals recorded emotional, cognitive, and social responses following the dance sessions. Observations focused on intercultural interactions, group dynamics, and the process of movement repetition. Overall, the data demonstrated active engagement and a transformation in participants' understanding of diversity.

A reflective thematic analysis of interviews, reflective journals, and observations revealed that the dance experience directly shifted students' multicultural understanding from an abstract cognitive realm to a "felt" awareness within the body. Before the intervention, most students knew the Saman Dance only as fast, unified movements; after experiencing synchronized breathing and body movements, they reported a new understanding of cooperation and togetherness as life values rather than just concepts. Dewi Nursaidah, a 2023/2024 student from Pekalongan, stated, "I used to memorize the definition of tolerance, but when I danced Saman and had to feel the pressure of a friend with a different faith, I truly 'knew' the meaning of mutual need." Mental observations revealed changes in body language, resulting in greater openness during post-practice intercultural discussions. Each Nusantara dance embodies implicit local values that are gradually revealed through experience. The Sundanese Ngarojeng dance, for example, teaches not only fluid movement but also the philosophy of mutual love, sharpening, nurturing, and caring. Students from outside Java admitted that they

had previously considered Sundanese dance "gentle and lacking in assertiveness"; after practicing it, they recognized that its strength lies in control and sensitivity. A study of reflective journal entries showed that most reflections expressed appreciation for previously unknown local values.

The decline in stereotypes about other regional cultures was the most consistent finding. In-depth interviews revealed significant shifts, for example, in perceptions of the Kandagan dance, which some students from northern Indonesia initially considered "old-fashioned and stiff." After eight weeks, Andika Kusumanegara, a student from Pontianak, West Kalimantan, said, "I thought West Javanese dance was formal and boring, but it turns out there is agility and humor in it. I was wrong." Observations showed a decrease in stereotypical comments, from 42 incidents in the second week to only 5 in the tenth week. Thus, experiential learning of Nusantara dance effectively builds multicultural competence through embodied awareness. The overall matrix is presented in Figure 1.

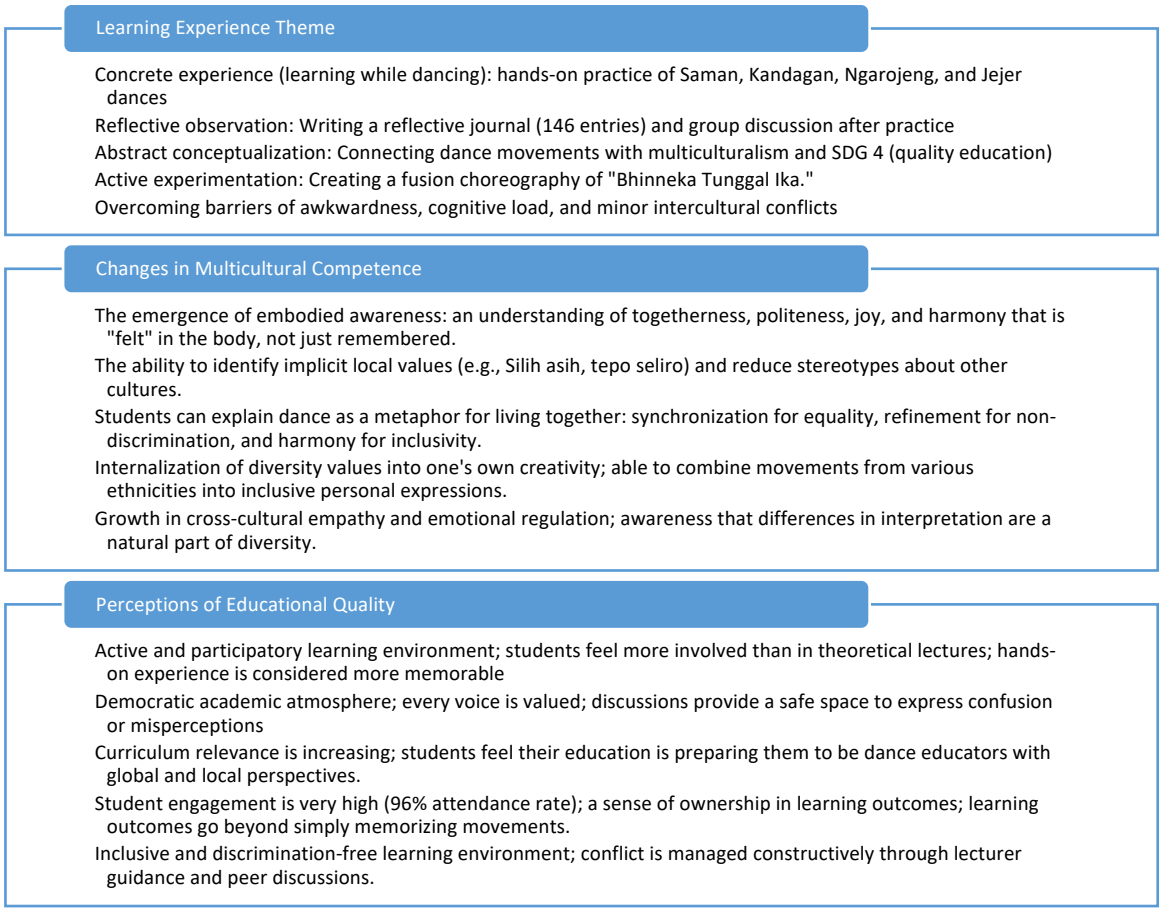


Figure 1. Integration Matrix Between Themes: Learning Experience, Multicultural Competence, and Educational Quality

The Saman dance from Aceh proved to be the most powerful medium for directly experiencing the meaning of togetherness. Observations during rehearsals showed that students from various regions, including those who had never previously interacted with Acehnese culture, had to synchronize chest, hand, and body clapping to the same rhythm. Theodora, a student from East Nusa Tenggara, said in an interview, "When one person makes a mistake, the whole line feels chaotic. I learned that togetherness is not just about being side by side, but that my body is dependent on the bodies of others." Reflective journals noted that most reflections described "synchronization" as a new experience that transformed the perception of collectivity from an abstract concept into an undeniable physical sensation.

Through the Kandagan dance (Sundanese) and Ngarojeng dance (Betawi), students internalized the values of politeness and joy as two facets of cross-cultural empathy. In the Kandagan dance, slow movements, a slightly bowed posture, and a lowered gaze teach refinement and respect. A student from North Sumatra said, "I am used to firm and fast movements, but dancing the Kandagan forced me to feel that politeness is strong, not weak." In contrast, the Ngarojeng dance features cheerful facial expressions, spontaneous handclaps, and dynamic movements that reflect the openness of Betawi culture. Observations noted increased laughter and interaction among participants from various ethnicities during Ngarojeng dance practice, accompanied by journal entries such as, "I am no longer ashamed to express my joy with people of different cultures."

The Jejer dance from East Java symbolizes collective harmony and combines elements from earlier dances. In its complementary barik formations and repetitive movements, students describe the experience of "dancing for others, not for oneself." Interviews with 22 students from the 2022/2023 intake revealed that the Jejer dance is a peak moment when individual differences in region, gender, and even faith merge into a harmonious movement. A documentary study of 146 reflection journal entries revealed that the words "harmony" and "without conflict" appeared significantly more often in weeks 8 to 10. One student from Papua concluded, "I used to think harmony was still. It turns out harmony moves together, like in Jejer." Thus, the four Nusantara dances experientially build cross-cultural empathy through authentic bodily experiences. A phenomenological analysis of student experiences indicates that learning Nusantara dance naturally follows Kolb's experiential learning cycle. The concrete experience stage occurs when students "learn while dancing." A student from the 2023/2024 intake revealed in an interview, "The lecturer explained diversity in class for two hours, but I forgot. It was not until I danced the Saman and felt my body sway to the rhythm of my friend from Aceh that the understanding really stuck." Observations noted that participants were more enthusiastic and able to repeat movements with meaning after direct practice than after only a lecture. Reflective journals supported this finding, with most student reflections stating that the direct dance experience felt more "real" than the previous multicultural theory lecture.

Entering the reflective observation stage, reflective journals and group discussions sharpened the understanding of each dance's cultural meaning. In a discussion after the Kandagan Dance practice, participants exchanged interpretations of subtle movements and lowered gazes. A student from Kalimantan wrote in her journal, "At first, I just imitated the movements. After writing the journal and hearing a friend from West Java explain the philosophy of 'ngahormat,' I realized that every movement contains ethics." Observations during group discussions showed that the collective reflection process sparked critical questions, such as "Why does the Ngarojeng dance end happily?" and "What is the difference between togetherness in Saman and in Jejer?" A documentary study of 146 student reflections in reflective journals identified an increase in the use of local cultural terms (e.g., Mutual understanding, *tepo seliro*) from week 1 to 10.

During the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages, participants connected dance movements to multiculturalism and the Sustainable Development Goal of quality education. In-depth interviews revealed that they began to see dance as a metaphor for living together: the synchronicity of the Saman dance for SDG 4 (global education), the subtlety of the Kandagan dance for eliminating discrimination, and the harmony of the Jejer dance for an inclusive society. Ultimately, the participants collaboratively created a fusion choreography titled "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity), combining the movements of the four dances. Observations noted that this active experimentation process became a tangible manifestation of internalization: they no longer danced as imitation, but as self-expression that embraced diversity. A student from Papua stated, "We made a transitional movement from Saman to Ngarojeng. That is where I felt that differences can be harmonious." Thus, the Kolb cycle as a whole builds multicultural competence through the body.

Experiential Indonesian dance instruction creates an inclusive and respectful learning environment, an important indicator of the quality of higher education. Observations over 10 weeks revealed that students from various regions of Indonesia, with diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, could practice in a single space without tension. A student from Madagascar (an exchange program) revealed in an interview, "I was the only non-Indonesian in the class. At first, I was afraid of being seen as an outsider, but when I danced Jejer, everyone took turns. No one felt more important." Reflective journals showed that most students mentioned the words "accepted" or "comfortable" in weeks 6 to 10. This environment actively reduced the psychological and social barriers that often hinder multicultural learning in higher education.

The curriculum's relevance was evident in the participants' readiness to become multiculturally aware dance educators. The 68 participants were students in the Dance Education Study Program at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang. After the intervention, interviews with 30 students revealed that they felt they had concrete provisions for teaching dance in highly diverse areas. A student from the 2022/2023 intake stated, "I used to be able to teach only one dance from my hometown. Now I have four dances from different ethnicities and experience how to present them inclusively." A document review of the syllabus and student reflections showed that most planned to integrate a similar experiential approach into their future teaching practice. This aligns with SDG 4's demands on education for sustainability and global citizenship.

High student engagement and a democratic academic atmosphere were the most consistent findings. Observations recorded a 96% attendance rate over 10 weeks, far above the average for theory courses. Students not only attended but also actively proposed movements, took turns leading warm-ups, and collaboratively evaluated the fusion choreography "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika." A Papuan student wrote in her journal, "No lecturer judged my movements as incorrect. There was a discussion about why my movements were different and how to harmonize them." No observations of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or gender were found during the process. In fact, both male and female participants have equal opportunities to be the main driving force in each dance. Thus, learning the Nusantara dance significantly improves the quality of higher education by fostering an inclusive, participatory, and discrimination-free academic climate.

Awkwardness and shyness were the most dominant initial obstacles students faced when they first danced in another culture. Observations during the first two weeks noted that more than half of the students exhibited stiff movements, downcast eyes, and tense body positions, especially when practicing the Kandagan Dance (Sundanese), which demands refinement, and the Ngarojeng Dance (Betawi), which is expressive. A male student from Kalimantan revealed in an interview, "I felt stupid when I tried the refined movements of Kandagan. My body is used to firm and fast movements, so it felt like I was forcing myself to be someone else." Reflective journal documentation also noted that most students in the first week mentioned the words "embarrassment" or "fear of making mistakes." This awkwardness stemmed not only from unfamiliarity with the movements but also from a fear of violating the sacred values or ethics of the dance's culture of origin.

Cognitive load was a second challenge, as participants had to remember the sequence of movements and their cultural meanings at the same time. Observations during weeks 3 to 5 revealed that many students frequently stopped mid-movement, skipped sequences, or mixed up movements between dances (for example, the rhythmic Saman dance into the slow Jejer pattern). One student from the 2022/2023 intake wrote in her journal, "My head felt like it was splitting: on the one hand, I had to memorize the positions of my feet and hands, and on the other, I had to remember that these movements symbolized togetherness, not just choreography." A documentary review of 146 reflections in reflective journals identified that peak cognitive load occurred in week 4, with half of the students reporting difficulty integrating motor memorization and conceptual understanding. Group dynamics also gave rise to minor conflicts due to differences in cultural interpretations. Observations recorded three incidents of minor conflict over the 10 weeks, all related to the meaning of movement. For example, during a Jejer dance practice, a student from East Java reprimanded a participant from Sumatra for considering her hand movements too wide and therefore "impolite." Conversely, the participant from Sumatra felt that wider movements reflected enthusiasm. Interviews revealed that these conflicts did not escalate into serious disputes, but did create temporary tension. One student admitted, "I was initially frustrated, but then realized that this was part of multicultural learning: it turns out different cultures can interpret the same thing differently."

Strategies for overcoming obstacles were implemented through three main channels: lecturer guidance, peer discussions, and independent practice. Lecturers provided repeated demonstrations with contextual explanations and normalized mistakes as part of the learning process. Observations noted that lecturers often said, "It is okay to be stiff; the important thing is for you to experience it first." Peer discussions took place after each practice session, where students corrected each other's movements and exchanged stories about cultural meanings from their perspectives. Independent practice took place outside of class hours, with most students reporting that they used video tutorials and movement-description notes to review the movements. By week 8, observations indicated a drastic decrease in awkwardness and a well-managed cognitive load. Thus, initial obstacles were transformed into constructive learning momentum. To strengthen the qualitative findings, quantitative measures were administered to the same 68 students using the Multicultural Competence Scale (MCS) and the Perception of Educational Quality Scale (PEQS). The measurements were taken before the intervention (pre-test) and after 16 weeks of experiential learning-based Nusantara dance instruction (post-test).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Multicultural Competence Scores (n=68)

Dimensions	Pre-test (Mean ± SD)	Post-test (Mean ± SD)	Σ (Increase)
Cultural Knowledge	3,12 ± 0,54	4,35 ± 0,48	+1,23
Tolerance	3,05 ± 0,62	4,58 ± 0,44	+1,53
Cross-Cultural Skills	2,89 ± 0,71	4,42 ± 0,52	+1,53
Embodied Awareness	2,45 ± 0,83	4,70 ± 0,39	+2,25
Total MCS	2,88 ± 0,59	4,51 ± 0,40	+1,63

According to Table 1, scores range from 1–5 (1 = very low, 5 = very high). The largest increase occurred in the embodied awareness dimension (∑=+2.25), which validates the qualitative findings of a shift in multicultural understanding into the realm of bodily experience.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Education Quality Perception Scores (n=68)

Dimension	Pre-test (Mean ± SD)	Post-test (Mean ± SD)	Σ (Increase)
Environmental Inclusivity	3,20 ± 0,70	4,65 ± 0,45	+1,45
Curriculum Relevance	3,35 ± 0,68	4,55 ± 0,50	+1,20
Student Engagement	3,10 ± 0,75	4,80 ± 0,38	+1,70
Freedom from Discrimination	3,00 ± 0,80	4,75 ± 0,42	+1,75
Total PEQS	3,16 ± 0,68	4,69 ± 0,40	+1,53

According to Table 2, all dimensions increased, with freedom from discrimination and student engagement showing the largest increases (∑ > +1.70), consistent with decreased stereotypes and a 96%

attendance rate. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test showed that the pre-test and post-test data for all dimensions were normally distributed (p > 0.05). Therefore, a paired t-test was used to test the significance of the differences, and the results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Results of the Paired t-test of Multicultural Competence

Dimensions	t-count	df	p-value	Conclusion
Cultural Knowledge	14,23	67	<0,001	Significant
Tolerance	17,45	67	<0,001	Significant
Cross-Cultural Skills	15,89	67	<0,001	Significant
Embodied Awareness	22,10	67	<0,001	Significant
Total MCS	21,67	67	<0,001	Significant

Table 4. Results of the Paired t-test on Perception of Education Quality

Dimension	t-count	df	p-value	Conclusion
Environmental Inclusivity	16,23	67	<0,001	Significant
Curriculum Relevance	13,45	67	<0,001	Significant
Student Engagement	18,90	67	<0,001	Significant
Freedom from Discrimination	17,34	67	<0,001	Significant
Total PEQS	19,87	67	<0,001	Significant

All dimensions showed a statistically significant increase at the ∑ = 0.05 level (p < 0.001). The highest t-value for the embodied awareness dimension (t = 22.10) confirmed that direct dance experience had the greatest impact on multicultural understanding. To determine the magnitude of the intervention effect, Cohen's d (paired samples) was calculated, and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Effect Size (Cohen's d)

Variable	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Total MCS	2,28	Very Large
Total PEQS	2,95	Very Large

In summary, the quantitative analysis shows. Multicultural competence increased significantly (total MCS: 2.88 → 4.51; p<0.001; Cohen's d=2.28). Perceptions of educational quality increased significantly (total PEQS: 3.16 → 4.69; p<0.001; Cohen's d=2.95). The embodied awareness dimension experienced the highest increase (∑=+2.25; t=22.10), confirming that learning through the body is effective in building cross-cultural understanding. The student engagement and freedom from discrimination dimensions on the PEQS increased dramatically, consistent with the 96% attendance data and the absence of discrimination observed during the observations. All these quantitative findings strengthen and complement the results of the phenomenological analysis presented in subchapters 4.1–4.4.

This research demonstrates that experiential learning of Nusantara dance activates cultural knowledge through the body, not just through verbal discourse. Movement, posture, rhythm, and interaction among dancers directly shape cultural meaning, making the body a site of cultural learning that translates that meaning into practice. This finding is supported by the literature, which emphasizes Nusantara dance as a cultural learning platform that functions as a "cultural encyclopedia" (dance art as cultural encyclopedia) and by an embodied learning approach in the Nusantara context (Anasta, 2021), as well as evidence of practices at various levels of education that emphasize learning through experiential bodily movement (Jayanti, 2023; Komala, 2022; Putri et al., 2024). Specifically, studies of Nusantara dance in multicultural training programs and curricula demonstrate how the body practices cultural symbols, costumes, rhythms, and values of diversity in an integrated manner (Borges et al., 2022; Komala, 2022). This finding aligns with other research emphasizing that the physical experience of dance enables the reading of cultural meanings that are difficult to grasp through text alone (Arini et al., 2023), making the body a primary mediator in multicultural learning.

From movement to meaning: transforming experience into multicultural competence is achieved through collaboration and co-creation, building character and cross-cultural understanding. Research shows that collaboratively developed, project-oriented Nusantara dance transforms movement experience into an understanding of cultural diversity and national values through Nusantara creative dance practices, cultural projects, and learning grounded in the nation's noble values (Jayanti, 2023; Raihan et al., 2023). Quantitatively, multicultural competence increased, as shown by a jump in the total MCS score from 2.88 to 4.51 (p<0.001; Cohen's d=2.28), with the embodied awareness dimension showing the largest increase (∑=+2.25). This reinforces the claim that direct dance experiences produce more lasting understanding than theoretical lectures. The fundamental difference with conventional learning is that learning is achieved through feeling, not just cognition. The literature shows that learning dance through authentic experiences, movement exploration, and

collaboration enhances holistic cultural understanding compared to purely didactic lectures (Arini et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024).

The quantitative findings in this study both strengthen and complement the phenomenological analysis. Statistically, the total score for multicultural competence increased from 2.88 to 4.51 ($p<0.001$; Cohen's $d=2.28$), and the perceived quality of education increased from 3.16 to 4.69 ($p<0.001$; Cohen's $d=2.95$). The largest increase occurred in the embodied awareness dimension ($\Sigma = +2.25$), directly validating the qualitative claim that learning Indonesian dance shifts understanding from the abstract cognitive realm to a "felt in the body" experience. Similarly, the dimensions of freedom from discrimination and environmental inclusivity showed significant increases (Σ +1.75 and +1.45, respectively), aligning with participants' narratives of reduced stereotyping and the creation of a safe learning space. Observations showed a decrease in stereotypical comments, from 42 incidents in the second week to only 5 in the tenth week. Thus, the mixed-methods approach not only confirms the qualitative findings but also provides limited generalization that the experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance learning model is statistically and practically effective in improving multicultural competence and the quality of higher education. The very large Cohen's d value (>2.9) confirms that the intervention effect is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

Theoretical Discussion: Validation of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle in Nusantara Dance

This study examines Kolb's cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, Active Experimentation, as seen in experiential Nusantara dance through movement, rhythm, and costume practices as cultural experiences (Concrete Experience); reflection through class discussions and movement journals (Reflective Observation); cultural meaning through symbol interpretation (Abstract Conceptualization); and the creation of new choreography through project collaboration (Active Experimentation) (Payne & Costas, 2020). Empirical evidence is supported by literature on cultural learning through Nusantara dance works and embodied learning (Haryati et al., 2022; Putraningsih, 2020; Sugiharto, 2022). Quantitative findings strengthen the validity of this cycle: cross-cultural skills scores (reflecting Active Experimentation) increased from 2.89 to 4.42 ($t=15.89$; $p<0.001$), while embodied awareness (from Concrete Experience) showed the highest t-value (22.10).

The strengthening of embodied cognition theory from student experiences was also confirmed. Embodied cognition theory views the body as a site of cultural learning: the practices of movement, posture, and rhythm shape cultural understanding, not just expression, and are supported by somaesthetics. (Kaczmarska, 2023; Sugiharto, 2022). The drastic increase in the embodied awareness dimension of the MCS (from 2.45 to 4.70) is the strongest empirical evidence for this theory. Relevance to the multicultural education framework (Afifah et al., 2023; Jayadi et al., 2022) is also evident in content integration, prejudice reduction, and equality pedagogy. These findings align with studies of Nusantara modules and cultural projects that demonstrate opportunities to integrate cultural content into the curriculum and foster character development in tolerance, patriotism, and nationalism (Ayu & Nursilah, 2024; Raihan et al., 2023).

Experiential Nusantara dance learning can support SDG 4 (quality education) by integrating Nusantara cultural content into the curriculum through experiential learning, building cross-cultural competencies, and shaping global citizens. Quantitatively, the total PEQS score increased from 3.16 to 4.69 ($p<0.001$; Cohen's $d=2.95$). The student engagement dimension showed the largest increase ($\Sigma=+1.70$; $t=18.90$), consistent with the 96% attendance rate and democratic academic atmosphere. The emphasis on embodied learning and project collaboration enhanced learning quality not only in the cognitive domain but also in the affective and social domains. These findings align with the literature on Nusantara modules that encourage student character development in multicultural classrooms (Indriati et al., 2022), as well as research on Nusantara cultural media-based learning that enhances student understanding of cultural values and participation (Amilleanda et al., 2022; Hutagalung et al., 2022).

Comparison with previous research: Indriati's study on the Nusantara module demonstrates its potential to shape students' character through multicultural learning. This research fills an empirical gap by focusing on the Indonesian higher education context, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Globally, the literature on multicultural education, particularly through innovative approaches, aligns with international findings indicating that culture-based learning experiences enhance students' cultural literacy and social responsibility. A tangible contribution to SDG 4 is also evident in the dimension of freedom from discrimination, which increased from 3.00 to 4.75 ($\Sigma=+1.75$; $t=17.34$), indicating the creation of a safe and inclusive learning environment. Implications for graduates and society: graduates with cross-cultural competence are ready to engage with a diverse global community, improve the quality of intercultural relations, and contribute to the development of an inclusive culture at the national and international levels.

The main obstacle to implementing experiential learning-based Nusantara dance in a multicultural context is the awkwardness that arises when participants encounter diverse cultural backgrounds. Theoretically, intercultural contact theory holds that structured contact can improve attitudes toward other groups and transform preconceived notions into learning. This is achieved through a learning design that facilitates mutually respectful interactions, is supported by a facilitator, and is structured around reflection (Indriati et al., 2022;

Natadjaja, 2022). Although all dimensions increased statistically significantly, the smaller post-test standard deviations (MCS: 0.40 vs. Pre-test 0.59; PEQS: 0.40 vs. 0.68) indicate that initial obstacles (awkwardness, cognitive load) were successfully overcome across all participants. The initial weeks' dominant awkwardness and shyness were successfully transformed through the lecturer's guidance, peer discussions, and independent practice. The role of the facilitator (lecturer) and structured reflection (reflective journals, directed discussions) are key contextual factors in transforming discomfort into learning. The dynamics of minor conflicts are a natural part of the multicultural process. Differences of opinion, cultural interpretations, and aesthetic preferences can give rise to minor conflicts that, when managed through an experiential curriculum design, can enrich learning rather than hinder it. Quantitatively, the increase in tolerance and cross-cultural skills (∑=+1.53 each) indicates that the minor conflicts that occurred (3 incidents over 10 weeks) did not hinder learning but rather catalyzed it. A replicable model for the experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance course design includes implementing project-based and experiential learning, as outlined in the Choreography design of the Dance Education Study Program (Lestari et al., 2022). These implications can also be replicated in non-dance study programs through service-learning approaches and off-campus experiences to build inclusive character and cultural competency (Dabamona et al., 2021; Kesuma & Kaban, 2022). Lecturer training should include facilitating reflection and fostering an inclusive climate as integral parts of curriculum and study program development.

This study has several limitations. Participants were from only one study program (Dance Education) at one university, so the transferability of the findings to other contexts needs further testing. The 16-week intervention duration was insufficient to measure long-term retention of multicultural competency; further studies with follow-up testing (e.g., 6 months post-intervention) are needed. The potential for social desirability bias in interviews and reflective journals may have affected the honesty of responses, although quantitative scores that were consistent with qualitative narratives mitigated this bias. Furthermore, the number of participants in the qualitative research (68) is relatively large; however, with an embedded mixed-methods design, the quantitative data benefited from an adequate sample size for statistical testing. Future research is recommended to use a control group or a quasi-experimental design to strengthen causal inference.

CONCLUSION

Based on published research, experiential learning-based Nusantara Dance instruction significantly improves students' multicultural competence in the Dance Education Study Program at Semarang State University. Quantitatively, multicultural competence increased significantly from a total MCS score of 2.88 to 4.51 ($p<0.001$; Cohen's $d=2.28$), and the perception of educational quality increased from 3.16 to 4.69 ($p<0.001$; Cohen's $d=2.95$). Qualitative findings indicate that direct dance experience shifts multicultural understanding from the abstract cognitive realm to embodied awareness, which is reflected in a decrease in intercultural stereotypes, an increase in cross-cultural empathy through four dances (Saman, Kandagan, Ngarojeng, Jejer), and the internalization of the values of togetherness, politeness, joy, and harmony. The learning process, following Kolb's cycle (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation), proved effective and culminated in the creation of the fusion choreography "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" as a manifestation of internalized diversity. From a higher education quality perspective, this learning created an inclusive, democratic, and discrimination-free learning environment and increased student engagement (96% attendance rate). It strengthened the curriculum's relevance in preparing future dance educators with multicultural insights. The embodied awareness dimension of the MCS showed the largest increase (∑=+2.25; $t=22.10$), supporting the claim that learning through the body is more memorable than lectures alone. The student engagement and discrimination-free dimensions of the PEQS also increased dramatically (∑ +1.70 and +1.75, respectively), consistent with the absence of discrimination during observations. Despite initial obstacles such as awkwardness, cognitive load, and minor intercultural conflicts, the lecturer's guidance, peer discussions, and independent practice strategies transformed these challenges into constructive learning momentum. Thus, experiential Nusantara Dance not only addresses the research objective of enhancing students' multicultural competence but also significantly contributes to achieving quality education (SDG 4) in higher education. The results of this mixed-methods study provide strong empirical evidence that integrating traditional arts into an experiential curriculum can serve as a model for inclusive and transformative arts education.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing process of this manuscript.

CONFLICTING INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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