

## **DANCE TEACHER EDUCATION: PROGRAMME ANALYSIS AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS**

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### **Abstract**

*The principles of education for sustainable development implemented in Lithuanian education system shifted the perceptions of teachers' roles from disseminating knowledge towards developing students' competencies of responsible, critical and creative thinking and acting. The objective of this research is to find out whether pre-service dance teachers in Lithuania are ready to meet challenges of contemporary educational paradigms. A questionnaire was administered to 59 pre-service dance teachers, and the analysis of five dance teacher education programmes was carried out. The findings reveal that, in general, pre-service dance teachers are not satisfied with the quality of the study process, although, according to their statement, they acquire the necessary knowledge.*

**Key words:** *dance teacher, teacher education, pedagogical practice, competencies*

### **Introduction**

The quality of life is interpreted differently by different people, social and cultural groups, and is underpinned by a number of core principles and values (Tilbury & Wortman, 2004). Since 1990, when Lithuania declared the independence of the state, understanding of the quality of life has gone through huge changes. Less people think about common goals for future, especially for sustaining it for the future generations. Unconscionable usage of natural, human, cultural and social resources lead to the extinction not only of certain animal and plant species, fresh air or water, but also to destruction of cultural heritage. As a result, an idea of an active and creative, positive and responsible person was highlighted during Lithuanian educational reform, which started in 1988. Later, Lithuanian educational documents (Law on Education, 2003; Provisions of the National Education Strategy for 2003–2012, 2003; General Programmes of Primary and Basic Education, 2008) emphasized and implemented the principles of the transformational function of education, holistic perception of reality, integrity, the development of critical and creative thinking, developing of virtue oriented attitudes, which are essential principles of sustainable development and education for sustainability (Brūzgelevičienė, 2006).

Most of the latter documents on education in Lithuanian conform to the recommendations of European institutions and underline a need to strengthen key competencies to fulfil personal well-being and the well-being of the entire society and lifelong learning principles in education. It is stated that, in order to develop key competencies of young people, teachers have to obtain these competencies (Aramavičiūtė & Martišauskienė, 2006).

The shift of educational paradigms, which was the core of Lithuanian educational reform, changed perceptions of teacher's roles and competencies, strategies of teaching and learning (Brūzgelevičienė & Žadeikaitė, 2008). The system of teacher education and training in Lithuania was improved by taking into consideration main principles of sustainable development regulated by various documents, such as Guidelines and Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability, 2005; Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications, 2005; UNESCO and Sustainable Development, 2005; Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, 2007. The documents which regulate teacher education in Lithuania (Profile of Teacher Professional Competences, 2007; Regulations on Teacher Education, 2010) declare the aim to prepare teachers capable of being on the forefront of society. Foreseen objectives include the implementation of sustainable development by challenging the aspirations of consumption, encouraging people to imagine a different future and engage in new ways of perception and behaviour.

It is possible to assume that, since the beginning of Lithuanian educational reform, the quantity and content of documents on teacher education and training created favourable conditions to realize the principles of sustainable education in practice. Research (Adomaitienė, Zubrickienė, & Andriekienė, 2006; Brūzgelevičienė, 2006) reveals contradictions between the documentary and the practical level of implementation of the principles of sustainable development in teacher training and education.

The situation in dance teacher education in relation to sustainability emerges as a problem in the context of completed researches and lack of scientific sources on the contribution of dance education to education for sustainable development. The aim of this research is to investigate the situation in dance teacher education on a programme and students' perceptions level. The research seeks to find out whether: (1) principles of sustainability are observed while educating dance teachers; (2) pre-service dance teachers understand principles of sustainability and implement them in their activities; (3) in-service dance teachers know how to develop key competencies of pupils to create a sustainable future.

## **Materials and methods**

An analysis of scientific literature on education, education documents of the European Union and Lithuania permitted to structure the main aspects of a questionnaire, an interview and an analysis of dance teacher education programmes (Figure 1). A comparative analysis of dance teacher education programmes, a questionnaire survey and an interview of pre-service dance teachers were grounded in this model.

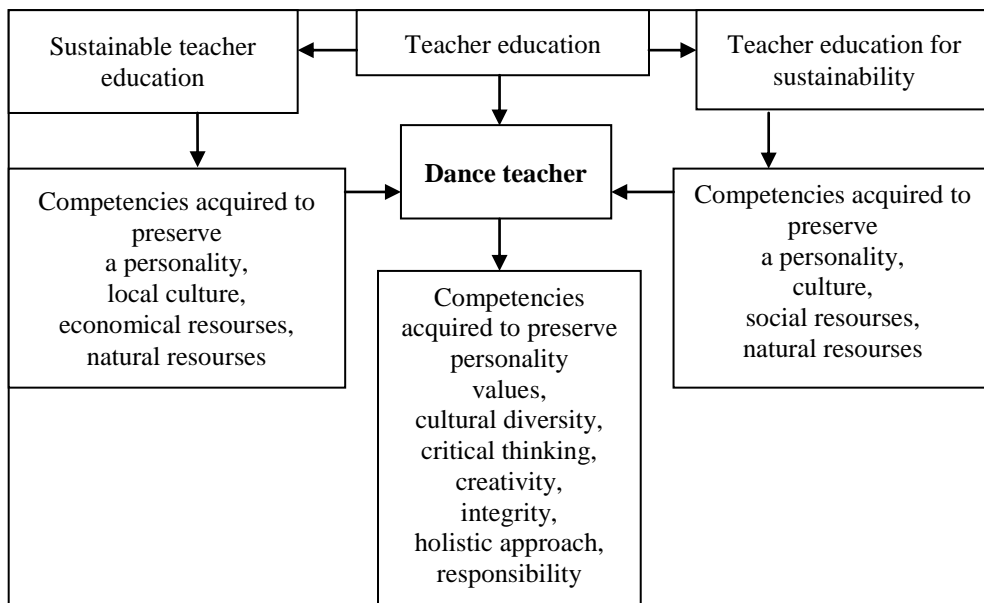


Figure 1. Model of the inquiry and analysis

The research was carried out in Vilnius Pedagogical University in 2008 and 2009. The research sample included 59 students out of 61 students of dance education (educology) study programme in Vilnius Pedagogical University.

A questionnaire involved three groups of questions which revealed the following aspects: 1) characteristics of the respondents (gender, study year, study form); 2) the extent to which dance teacher education programme complies with the students' needs and expectations and students' motivation to acquire a dance education programme; 3) development of key competences in relation to sustainable education. A qualitative analysis of questionnaire results was carried out.

An interview was carried out with 16 full-time third and fourth year students who had participated in the questionnaire survey. The interview included questions on the students' perceptions of the sustainability of dance teacher education, involving their view on the balance of subjects, the quality of course content, the competencies of lecturers and the impact of these factors on developing professional and pedagogical competencies.

Data for comparative analysis of dance teacher education programmes was obtained from the open electronic database AIKOS (Open System of Information, Consulting and Orientation), which is stored at the central service station in the Centre of Information Technologies of Education. Additional data was gathered from official websites of Lithuanian secondary schools.

## Results

To reveal a system of dance teacher education in Lithuania, an overview of higher education establishments which offer dance teacher training programmes was given. In

Lithuania, there are 6 higher education establishments (2 universities, 2 academies and 2 colleges) where one can obtain a dance teacher education programme.

Study programmes of universities and academies were chosen for further analysis. The comparative analysis of study programmes of dance teacher education revealed that graduates from Vilnius Pedagogical University (VPU) and Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education (LKKA) get a teacher's qualification, which is necessary to earn the right to teach in formal education (primary and secondary schools) according to the Law of Education. Two programmes of Klaipeda University (KU) and Lithuanian Music and Theatre Academy (LMTA) give a choreographer's qualification. Although KU declares that graduates of this institution can work in schools as dance teachers, in fact, graduates have to attend additional courses of pedagogy and psychology in order to get the right to teach children. There is evidence given by graduates of KU that sometimes the administration of the schools where they work does not pay attention to the fact they do not have the necessary qualification.

Only VPU programme's title indicates that this programme is intended for dance teacher education. The degree of other institutions does not clearly indicate their relation to dance teacher education. An exceptional situation is with LMTA since the programme offered at this higher education establishment was designed particularly for in-service or former ballet dancers who have secondary education and cannot teach anywhere when they finish their active professional career. They get a choreographer's qualification in LMTA bachelor studies and receive a teacher's qualification only in master studies.

The study courses were examined to reveal the content of dance teacher education. An analysis of course content showed that mostly all main dance types (modern, ballet, folk, and ballroom, historical) are taught alongside with dance composition, history of dance, teaching methods, as well as general university study courses, though their distribution among programmes is different. LMTA emphasizes study courses related to classical ballet – more than 54 local credits (1 local credit equals 1.5 ECTS). KU sport dance programme emphasizes sport dance (57 credits), while KU choreography programme underlines Lithuanian national dance (25 credits). In VPU and LKKA, none of the dance types predominates and the amount of credits is more balanced, ranging from 2 to 10.

Examining study courses that are directly connected with pedagogical competency, it appears that, in LMTA, only pedagogical psychology is taught in 4 credits. In KU, both programmes include psychology, cultural education, teaching methods, and their amount ranges from 2 to 14 credits. In VPU and LKKA, besides the aforementioned study courses, arts education, special education, special arts education, education (didactics and theory of upbringing), health education, research in education are taught with the number of credits varying from 4 to 8. LKKA should also be mentioned since they include study courses related to the physical aspect of dance – anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, nutrition, injury prevention, etc.

Pedagogical practice is another important part of dance teacher education programmes, especially underlined in the latest requirements of the Regulations on Teacher Education (2010). It is stated that pedagogical practice should cover 20 local credits (30 ECTS) and start in the first study year, including several modules: observation practice (the first study year), a teacher's assistant (the second study year), practice with supervision of a mentor

teacher (the third study year), independent practice with a mentor teacher (the fourth study year). An analysis of dance teacher education programmes revealed that the requirement of 20 credits of pedagogical practice which starts in the first year is observed only in VPU dance education programme. In other examined institutions pedagogical practice covers from 4 to 6 credits and start in third or fourth year. The final thesis of pedagogical studies is written in VPU and LKKA. Both programmes in KU and the studies in LMTA end with a concert or a dance project.

Generalising the comparative analysis of study programmes, it might be stated that there is no clear relation between a title, a qualification, a degree, possible and real areas of a job, subjects and their amount in dance teacher study programmes. The data revealed that the principles of sustainable teacher education are not followed fully in dance teacher education and training since study courses are not well-balanced and graduates either have to acquire a needed qualification or study subjects in which they are already professionals (as in the case of LMTA where professional ballet dancers follow study course related to ballet). This data could constitute a basis for a more thorough approach from the institutions in charge of quality assessment in higher education. The Resolution of Lithuanian Government on Fields and Types of Study in High Education (2009) form the grounds for balancing and reorienting towards sustainability study programmes, related degrees and qualifications alongside with content, outcomes and evaluation strategies in dance teacher education. For this purpose, all study programmes should be revised, adopted according to the requirements of the Resolution and registered in the Ministry of Education and Science in order to be able to organize entrance exams and admission of students.

A qualitative analysis of data obtained through a questionnaire and an interview with pre-service dance teachers of VPU data was carried out. The answers of the students to open questions indicated lack of a positive attitude to the accordance of dance teacher education programme to their needs and expectations. In the students' opinion, the study courses related to dance are well-balanced, though a wish to have a wider range of dance styles was expressed. According to the pre-service dance teachers, some of the general university study courses, such as psychology or health education, need more obvious linkage with dance teaching; some study courses related to dance, such as ballet or ballroom dance, need more integrity with daily life or pedagogy. Few study courses, such as dance didactics, educational movement, were reported to have a holistic approach to the development of pedagogical and professional competencies.

The respondents maintained that they would appreciate openness of university teachers to share their own experience of teaching, especially their mistakes and thinking patterns. The pre-service dance teachers indicated that some of the university teachers of general university study courses do not allow to debating or questioning their statements, use teacher-centred teaching methods. These factors do not encourage students' critical and creative thinking, which according to Tilbury and Wortman (2004), help people to interpret the world, knowledge and information, recognize when they are manipulated by those around them and try to resist it. Statement that "few university teachers use active group work methods or research projects" featured in students' answers. Besides, the factor that teachers do not use ICT frequently and ask students to bring printed paper works and make

paper copies of them emerged. Accepting electronic version of the works was mentioned by the students as a possibility to sustain natural resources through using less paper.

View of the future dance students on gained competencies to develop pupils' key competencies of creative and critical thinking, acceptance of cultural diversity, understanding the importance of responsible behaviour, and forming humanistic values revealed that the students are not fully satisfied with their achievements. The questionnaire showed that, at the beginning of studies, the pre-service dance teachers are engaged in acquiring competencies in dance techniques and they expressed a wish to have more and a wider variety of dance styles (Table 1).

Table 1. Pre-service dance teachers' attitude towards the development of competencies

Competency	year 1	year 2	year 3	year 4	
				before PP	after PP
Techniques in various dance styles	H	H	H	H	M
Organization of pedagogical process	L	L	M	M	H
Evaluation of dance achievements	L	L	L	L	H
Organization of creative activities	L	L	M	M	H
Communication with pupils	L	L	M	M	H
Cooperation with pupils	L	L	M	M	H
Cooperation with parents	L	L	L	L	M
Cooperation with colleagues	L	L	M	M	M

PP – pedagogical practice, H – high importance, M – medium importance, L – low importance

The data shows that competencies such as organisation of creative activities, communication with pupils and cooperation with colleagues start to interest the pre-service dance teachers from the third year. The reason for this might be study subjects of dance didactics, educational creative movement and such where students are introduced to the principles of teaching and evaluating creativity, motivating pupils, integrated arts projects, etc. An especially evident shift is observed in the fourth year after independent pedagogical practice at school. The respondents indicated that the area where they need improvement and more competencies is educational process and psychology of children. Nearly all dance education students stated that during and after pedagogical practice they started to study independently the issues dealing with pedagogical activities. Competence to cooperate with parents even after pedagogical practice was not evaluated by the respondents as of high importance. It might be because of the fact that more time is needed in order to get in touch with parents and to understand their essential role in communication with children.

Questioning of the pre-service dance teachers revealed that they lack comprehension of the importance of personal responsibility in sustainable education. Especially students of the first year do not pay due attention to the outcomes of their pedagogical actions. On the one hand, they maintain that children have to obey their instructions and execute given tasks; on the other hand, they declare that the main goal of dance education in a comprehensive school is creativity. Nevertheless, the pre-service dance teachers do not think that they have to allow children to debate, question, disagree with given tasks or suggest other tasks. This shows that the students are not ready to develop critical and

creative thinking of children alongside with preserving the child's personality. Respondents indicated motivation for dance activities and the necessity to inquire into pupils' interests in order to raise their motivation, however they failed to suggest any method of how to solve the contradiction between different (or sometimes opposite) interests of pupils and teachers. For instance, to the question 'how is it possible to resolve the situation when a dance teacher has an aim to teach Lithuanian folk dances and pupils want to learn hip hop dance steps' the answer of a third year student was "but they have to understand that at first they have to learn folk dances of their nation". For sustainability it is important to recognize the value and relevance of local knowledge and culture; however, none of the pre-service dance teachers prior to pedagogical practice could suggest how to explain especially to adolescents the importance of national dances for the preservation of local cultural values. In this context it should be mentioned that dance teachers who have background in Lithuanian folk dance usually complain that the young generation does not like to dance Lithuanian folk dances, though in the Dance Day of the Song festival (which is declared by UNESCO a nonmaterial heritage) more than 7000 young dancers danced folk dances and this figure only reflects those who were chosen to participate. On the other hand, investigations (Baneviciūtė, 2009) show that few dance teachers find appropriate balance while introducing dances of different cultures from different countries. Interviews with the pre-service dance teachers of the third and fourth year showed that none of them would choose to present to pupils traditional dances of European countries. These facts reveal contradiction with the given principles of ESD which declare that cultural diversity should be valued and respected both by teachers and learners.

The research by Levin and He (2008) confirms that teacher education programmes can influence the future teacher's beliefs about the most significant aspects of teachers work. Interview of the fourth year students after their independent pedagogical practice revealed that their attitude towards their profession had changed. The data distributed as follows: half of the respondents' shift in attitude was positive, the other half – negative. Those who declared that they realized they did not want to work at school nearly all said that their motivation to enter dance education studies was connected with the wish to get a diploma of higher education or to improve their dance skills. Among those who stated they had proved themselves they could work at school and wanted to do this, the motivation for entering dance education studies was related to the wish to become a dance teacher. These findings give reason to believe that it is possible to avoid a negative shift in attitude to teacher's profession by starting pedagogical practice from the first year and step by step introducing various aspects of problem solving in educational process. This information might be useful in order to improve the organisation of pedagogical practice since questioning of dance education students revealed that in most cases diploma is the most frequent expectation for entering a pedagogical university. Another characteristic feature is that full time students, who usually are young people around 19–20 years of age immediately after graduation of a comprehensive school, expect to improve dance technique skills and learn new dance styles. This shows that they do not fully realize the goals and type of dance education study programme. Part time students mostly are people about 30–40 years of age, who have been working as dance teachers already for several years; they mentioned that a diploma of high education and a teacher's qualification is the

most common expectation upon entering a dance education study programme since, according to the Law on Education (2003), in order to work at a school one has to have teacher's qualifications.

During the interview, pre-service dance teachers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> year stated that pedagogical practice should start from the first year because this way they could get more comprehension about education process and avoid the misconception that teaching dance at school is very easy and there is nothing to study, "I will teach as I was taught", or another misconception that teaching is such a hard work that it is impossible to handle it without being hard and autocratic. Furthermore, the question of the qualification of supervisor of the dance teacher's pedagogical practice arises. Investigations (Banevičiūtė, 2009) show that there are few dance teachers who work creatively and underline the importance of creative education of children during dance lessons at school. Dance teachers mostly teach dance steps or dances of various kind (usually folk and ballroom). Not enough attention is paid to developing competencies in understanding and analysing dance as a means of communication and expression. University teachers who are in charge of students' pedagogical practice face shortage of in-service dance teachers capable of being good examples for the pre-service dance teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The research through analysis of dance teacher education programmes and the views of pre-service dance teachers on dance teacher education system and process indicate three aspects of teacher education for sustainability. The first aspect relates to sustainability of dance teacher education in secondary school. The data revealed that the principles of sustainable teacher education are not observed fully because of insufficient qualification of some academic staff, inappropriate teaching methods and lack of responsibility both from students and teachers. The second aspect relates to pre-service dance teachers' competencies. Pre-service dance teachers do not fully acquire the competencies needed to develop the competencies of pupils to understand, take responsibility for and create a sustainable future for future generations. The data showed that the pre-service dance teachers need to enhance their learning towards the improvement of dance education organisation process, teaching methods and communication with pupils. It was indicated that pedagogical practice is an essential subject for improving the competences of sustainable education. The third aspect relates to the implementation of principles of sustainability as far as pre-service dance teachers' thinking and behaviour are concerned. Pre-service dance teachers do not fully comprehend the transformative role of education in changing the ways people think and act.

The results of the research indicate that the system and process of dance teacher education need to be improved on a basis of recent documents of teacher education in Europe and Lithuania by balancing study subjects, their contents and teaching methods.

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