

A Phenomenological Study of Dance Troupe Virtual Training in a State University

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of the University Dance Troupe members in Eastern Visayas as they adapted to virtual dance training during the COVID-19 pandemic. With dance traditionally reliant on in-person practice, the transition to online platforms posed significant challenges. The study aims to understand the impact of virtual training on dance practices and the emotional, social, and technical experiences of students. Guided by Rudolph Laban's Dance Theory, this research employed descriptive phenomenology to explore how participants navigated their training in an online environment. Using purposive sampling, nine dancers who had been part of the company since 2019 were selected. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, and Colaizzi's method was used to analyze the responses. Themes that emerged included Preparation in Virtual Training, Flexible Online Dance Training, Emotional Responses, and both Positive and Negative Impacts of Virtual Learning. Results revealed that while challenges such as technical difficulties, space limitations, and lack of real-time feedback were present, virtual training also provided flexibility, emotional resilience, and opportunities for personal growth. The study emphasizes the significance of adopting hybrid learning approaches to combine the benefits of virtual training with in-person interaction. Recommendations include enhancing technological infrastructure, promoting professional standards in virtual training, and fostering virtual communities to support emotional well-being. This research contributes valuable insights into how virtual dance education can be improved, offering a deeper understanding of its implications for students' learning and development.

Keywords: Virtual dance; virtual training, lived experiences, dance education, online learning

1. Introduction

An unprecedented health crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic—has recently imperiled the education system, shaking its foundation. In response, traditional face-to-face learning transitioned to online platforms. This shift posed significant challenges for fields like dance, which rely heavily on in-person practice and interaction. Dance, an art form thriving in communal settings, faced unique obstacles in adapting to online learning environments. Virtual dance training necessitated innovative approaches to teaching, movement, and community building, all tested by the limitations of technology and space. Studies from various regions, including the Philippines, have highlighted how the pandemic compelled educational institutions to develop new teaching methods. For instance, Lobo et al. (2024) explored how online videoconferencing platforms can enhance participation in learning Philippine traditional dances, emphasizing the importance of technology acceptance in dance engagement. Similarly, Tanucan et al. (2024) examined the impact of online videoconferencing on dance education, focusing on Philippine traditional dances and the factors influencing student engagement. This research emphasizes the necessity for adaptable solutions in dance instruction and virtual training.

Rudolph Laban's Dance Theory is the theoretical basis for this study. It is a pioneering concept from the early 20th century that stresses how important movement is in human expression. Laban's ideas give us a lot of different ways to think about dance, such as philosophical, choreological, social-scientific, and medical. These frameworks will help us figure out how virtual training changes the physical, emotional, and social

lives of dance troupe members. The study will look into how Laban's ideas about movement analysis, body awareness, and spatial utilization may be used in a virtual setting. It will also look into the problems with online dance instruction while keeping the art form's core. This notion backs up the idea that dance may still be a great way to express yourself and improve your skills, even in a virtual world.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), are much connected to this study. The pandemic made it clear that we need new ways of teaching that are both inclusive and strong. Virtual dance lessons aren't a perfect replacement for in-person lessons, but they do help us reach our aims by making it possible for people with physical limitations to have a good education. The Philippine government also knows how important remote learning is. The Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Republic Act No. 11494) was meant to help schools and other educational institutions adjust to the new normal. This study adds to the larger discussion on how to keep education going amid crises by looking at the pros and cons of virtual dance training.

In finding out how the members of a state university dance troupe are adapting to virtual dance classes; two key questions will be addressed by the study: (1) What specific practices are employed by dance troupe members in the virtual training? (2) What are the lived experiences of the dance troupe members in the virtual training? By examining these experiences, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how to improve virtual dance training for dancers at the collegiate level.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized descriptive phenomenology as its research design. The qualitative research approach was chosen to explore the lived experiences of participants and understand how they perceive and interact with their environment (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Descriptive phenomenology allows for a detailed examination of how individuals make sense of specific phenomena, providing rich insights into their personal experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2021). This approach is widely used in social science research to understand the lived experiences of people and the common meanings they attach to those experiences (McLeod, 2024). This research design is particularly appropriate for this study as it allowed for a deep exploration of how Dance Troupe members in a State University at Eastern Visayas adapted to virtual dance training, identifying shared experiences and insights into the transition from in-person to online dance training.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at a state university in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. The findings were specific to the dance troupe members at this institution and may not be generalized to all dance groups in the region. However, this context provided an opportunity to examine how dance troupe members adapted its training to an online format during the pandemic. This experience offered valuable insights into the impact of the transition to online education on arts-based programs, which faced unique challenges during the global health crisis. Such challenges, particularly within the arts community, were widely discussed in existing research that highlighted the disruption to traditional learning methods and the struggles faced by both students and educators (Savin-Baden & Fraser, 2023).

2.3 Research Participants

The participants in this study were nine members of dance troupe in Eastern Visayas, particularly those who had been with the group since 2019. This year marked the transition to virtual training. These members had received training both in-person and online, making them ideal candidates to discuss how the format of training had evolved. To participate in the study, participants met the following criteria: (1) They had to have been active members since 2019, when virtual training began; (2) They had to have participated

in virtual training sessions to ensure their experience with the format; and (3) They had to be willing to share their experiences regarding what they had learned. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were most likely to provide relevant and meaningful insights based on their experiences (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

2.4 Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data. This allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words. Since the interviews were open-ended, participants were able to provide extensive, personal answers based on their own experiences with virtual dance training. Three specialists in qualitative research reviewed the guide to ensure the interview questions were clear and aligned with the study's goals. Additionally, an expert in English checked the instrument to ensure the questions were intelligible and grammatically correct before the interviews began (Sánchez-Guardiola et al., 2021).

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

After the interview guide had been approved, all the selected participants received informed consent forms. These forms described the purpose of the study, how it worked, and emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. Once the participants agreed, the researchers set up online interviews, providing adequate time for preparation. Interviews were conducted on a virtual platform that accommodated the participants' schedules and preferences. All responses were kept confidential, and participants were reminded that their identities would not be used in the final report. Additionally, they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2021).

2.6 Data Analysis

This study used Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method to analyze the data. Colaizzi's method remains one of the most effective approaches for qualitative data analysis, particularly for phenomenological research. The method involves several key steps: (1) Transcribing the interviews and reading them multiple times to achieve a deep understanding of the data; (2) Identifying significant statements related to the phenomenon under study; (3) Making sense of these statements; (4) Grouping the meanings into themes based on commonalities; (5) Writing a detailed description of the phenomenon; (6) Developing a fundamental structure that captures the essence of the experience; and (7) Verifying the findings with participants to ensure they accurately reflect their lived experiences (Moustakas, 2011; Smith et al., 2021). This approach is effective in capturing the essence of participants' experiences while ensuring that the analysis remains faithful to their accounts and interpretations. Colaizzi's method is widely recognized for its rigor and ability to extract meaningful insights from qualitative data, making it particularly suitable for this study's examination of virtual dance training experiences.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This study primarily focused on addressing ethical considerations. The researchers ensured that participants' identities and responses remained confidential. Before the interviews, participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, their involvement, and their rights. They were also informed that they could ask questions about the study and could withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participants were provided with informed consent forms online to ensure they understood the study's protocols and their rights. Furthermore, all collected data was anonymized, and no reports or publications would contain any information that could identify the participants (Nic Mhuirí et al., 2021).

2.8 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of our qualitative study, we emphasized credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, following established best practices. We employed techniques such as member checking and peer debriefing to enhance the truthfulness of our interpretations (Noble & Smith, 2024). We maintained an audit trail and rigorous documentation of data collection and analysis to support dependability, ensuring that others could follow our procedures (Noble & Smith, 2024). Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling and discussions among researchers to reduce bias and keep findings grounded in participants' narratives (Ahmed, 2024). Finally, transferability was facilitated by providing thick,

context-rich descriptions that allow readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings (Ahmed, 2024; Zainal Abidin et al., 2024). These strategies collectively strengthened confidence in our results and aligned with current qualitative research standards.

2.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a critical aspect of qualitative research, acknowledging that researchers' personal biases, experiences, and perspectives can shape the interpretation of findings. The aim of this study was to explore the virtual training experiences of members of the University Dance Company in Eastern Visayas, a subject of personal interest to the researchers, especially given the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. The researchers acknowledged that their own beliefs and prior experiences could influence the analysis, and thus, they made a continuous effort to reflect on their biases throughout the study. This process of reflexivity ensured that the findings remained grounded in the real-life experiences of the participants, maintaining transparency and authenticity in the study. Reflexivity helped maintain openness, allowing for a more accurate representation of the participants' viewpoints and enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the research (Finlay & Gough, 2008).

3. Results and Discussion

The study's goal was to find out two important things about the Dance Troupe of a State University in Eastern Visayas move to online training: how the dancers trained and what they went through. The results show how dancers changed their schedules, technology, and physical environment, as well as the emotional and technical problems they had to deal with. There were both good and bad things about virtual training. It helped with routines and emotional health on the one hand. However, it had issues such as internet access that wasn't always reliable and limited space. It gives a full picture of what it's like to learn online.

3.1 Specific practices employed by dance troupe members in the virtual training

University dance company members who took dance lessons online had to find new ways to practice. During their practices, two main ideas came up: Preparation in Virtual Teaching and Flexible Online Dance Training. Dancers got their spaces ready, set up to train, and changed schedules to fit in with online practice sessions. Preparation in Virtual Training led us to how important it is to have the right tools or materials and large space to practice. Flexible Online Dance Training on the other hand, talks about how dance instructors and dancer members were able to adapt to different schedules and places to learn. These themes all show how dancers were able to practice and perform well even though they had to deal with the problems of digital training.

Theme1. Preparation in the Virtual Training

In adapting to virtual dance training, participants highlighted these practices such as organizing physical space, ensuring technology readiness, preparing physically and maintaining a professional mindset through attire. These sub-themes demonstrate how dancers prepared their environment and mindset to maximize their online training experience.

Sub-theme 1.1 Space Organization and Setup

Dance troupe members express how important it is to set up a quiet, open space for practice in order to get the most out of their virtual training. To cut down on distractions and make sure they stayed focused, participants moved their home furniture around or found quiet places to practice. As Nussli and Oh (2024) point out, making the right space is important for learning, especially in hybrid or virtual settings. A well-organized space helps dancers focus and improves the quality of the training experience. Participants' statements are "I had to move my furniture around" (P1) or "I find quiet places to focus" (P6), show that they were trying to make the space better for virtual training.

Sub-theme 1.2 Technology Readiness

It was important to make sure that the web link, camera positions, lighting, and sound quality were

all set up properly as virtual training would go smoothly. It might be hard to give feedback in real time if the technology isn't set up right or having intermittent internet. This could make the dancers less interested and less likely to learn. Garlinska et al. (2023) say that new tools are important for online learning because they give students more freedom. When people talk to each other in real time, especially online, they stress how important sturdy technology is. It made the dancers feel the same way, so they made sure their gadgets and internet access would work when practicing. "I check my internet connection and gadgets" (P3, P4) was stated by participants. This shows how important it is to have the right technology to get the most out of virtual dance training.

Sub-theme 1.3. Physical and Mental Preparation

Dance troupe members who trained virtually had to be ready to take part. They specify how important it was to stretch and warm up before each online training so they wouldn't get hurt and could do better. Because they did this, they were ready for the lessons both mentally and physically. According to Sarupuri et al. (2024), being physically fit and talking to other people online are both good for your holistic health. Doing things like warming up and stretching can help get your body and mind ready for action. It's important to get ready for virtual practices, as participants said, "First I stretch and warm up my body" (P1, P2, P6, P9).

Sub-theme 1.4. Professional look

Dance troupe members who took part of virtual practices express how important it is to dress properly for dancing, both for safety reasons and to show professional manner. This helped them stay grounded and focused during virtual training classes, which made the setting more like a real studio for learning. Liu (2021) says that what you wear to a professional dance class is very important because it helps you stay focused and on task, which makes it easier to learn. "Prepare appropriate dance attire" (P5, P7, P8) was said by collegiate dancers, which shows how important it is to dress properly for virtual dance practice to keep things professional and in order.

Theme 2. Flexible Online Dance Training

It became important being able to be flexible with online dance lessons as dance troupe members of a state university would keep coming and participating. Dance troupe members who danced could keep training in the virtual environment, even though it was hard to switch to online platforms. This was because the routines were open, as dancers could plan their time around their personal and school obligations.

Sub-theme 2.1. Adaptable Scheduling

The online dance classes were flexible, as dance troupe members could fit them into their school and personal lives. Many of the people who took part said that they had lessons once a week, usually on "every Wednesday" (P1, P3, P5, P7, P8, P9). Some participants stated that they trained "once a month" (P4) or whenever they needed to (P2, P6). The results gave dance troupe members the freedom to work on their skills while also doing other things, as they could take virtual classes without getting too busy. According to Garlinska et al. (2023), flexible timing in online education helps students be more active and interested because it works with their busy lives and other responsibilities.

Sub-theme 2.2. Autonomy in Learning

Giving dance troupe members the freedom to pick their own workout times helped them stay motivated and dedicated. Dance troupe members liked being able to pick their own lessons times because it gave them more energy and helped them concentrate. One said, "I could pick a time that worked best for me, which helped me stay focused and motivated" (P3). Dancers felt less worried and more in charge of their learning when they could change their schedules. Li and Chai (2025) talk about how tailor-made and adaptable learning paths, like in virtual classrooms, can help students stay interested and inspired. This makes it easy to give students what they want and need when it comes to learning.

3.2. Lived experiences of the dance troupe members in the virtual training

The second study question looked at how the dancers actually used virtual dance training in their daily lives. There were four main themes that came up that showed the emotional challenges, physical problems, and different effects that dancers experienced. These themes showed both the pros and cons of switching from in-person to virtual dance training.

Theme 3. Emotion towards the Virtual Dance Training

Dance troupe members in the virtual dance training had a range of emotions, from being excited to being frustrated. Their experiences showed how much their emotions affected their ability to change, stay interested, and be motivated in online dance class.

Sub-theme 3.1. Nervousness

Dancers were nervous when they went from practicing in groups to working on their own at home. It made them more anxious and unsure, which hurt their confidence in their performances. "I'm nervous because I trained dancing with my co-dancers," said one dancer (P1). Significantly shows how hard it is to deal with this change emotionally. Moreover, the feeling fits with study that students' mental health and social lives get worse when they learn online by themselves (Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma, & Singh, 2021).

Sub-theme 3.2. Excitement

Participants were excited about the virtual training, even though some were unsure at first. They liked the change in how they trained because it made them more excited and interested in practicing online. University dance company members said, "I was so excited because we don't have virtual training all the time" (P2, P3, P6, P8). Horovitz and Mayer (2021) say that students are more likely to be motivated and excited to learn when they are in interesting learning environments as virtual training with dynamic and positive emotional cues.

Sub-theme 3.3. Frustration

The dancers had trouble because of technical issues such as bad internet connections and not enough data. These breaks made it harder for participants to pay attention, which made online trainings less helpful and fun. University dance company members (P4, P5) stated, "It was a bit of a hardship because of the data." This Frustration is what Novak et al. (2022) found where technical issues such as unstable connections can make user very angry in classrooms with a lot of technology which can then make students or dance members less motivated and less able to do well.

Theme 4. Virtual Dance Training Challenges

When dance troupe of a state university switched to virtual dance training, problems arise. It was easy for dancers to learn online but they had problems like internet connections that weren't stable, not enough room to practice, and not being able to talk to other dancers. These problems not only made it harder for them to train but made them less motivated and less connected. The main challenges that dancers had were unreliable internet access, not enough space to practice, and not being able to talk to other people. These problems made it harder for them to learn and recover during the virtual training time.

Sub-theme 4.1. Intermittent connection

State university dance troupe members had trouble staying focused during virtual training due to their internet connections weren't always reliable. Participants (P2, P5, P7, P8, P9) stated, "We're having trouble with our internet connection." Fabriz et al. (2021) show that unreliable internet connections during synchronous online learning make it harder for students to interact and participate in real time, which makes their overall experience worse. Goletti and Milovanovic (2022) stated that poor internet connections can make it harder for students to communicate and learn in online dance classes resulting to poor interactive learning process.

Sub-theme 4.2. Limited Space

Dance troupe members struggled with lack of space at home which made it difficult to execute choreography effectively. One of the issues raised by participants was "finding space for execution and choreography" (P6, P3). Spatial limitations are significant barrier in digital dance instruction as Li and Wong (2023) who observed that lack of physical space at home reduces mobility, detracts from overall performance and impairs practice quality.

Sub-theme 4.3. Loss Social Interactions

They couldn't engage with others face-to-face, dancers felt more alone. They missed the encouragement and support they often received from being in a real studio with co-dancers and instructors. The statement "We live near the highway, so I still need to turn on the speaker" (P1) was made by one dancer in reference to external distractions. It demonstrates how distractions caused participants to feel more alone and less engaged in their activities. Results supported by Marler et al. (2024) who claim that while students learned online, their motivation, social ties and general mental health all declined. Nevertheless, online dance classes aided in personal development. According to Mohanraj (2024) on digital learning settings promote self-regulated learning, which teaches people to be adaptable and disciplined even when things are first challenging.

Theme 5. Virtual Dance Training Positive Impact

Even there were problems with technology, dance troupe members found that taking virtual dance lessons had contribute to emotional and mental benefits. The dancers stated taking online dance classes regularly made them feel better mentally and emotionally. The two main subthemes that came out were Improved Emotional Well-Being and a Continued Sense of Routine and Normalcy.

Sub-theme 5.1. Improved Emotional Well-Being

Even when there are technical problems, participants express virtual dancing sessions made them feel much better by giving them a sense of release and relaxation. "It's good for the dancers' health, even if it's hard to get a good signal. I don't regret going virtually," as stated by the participants (P6, P8). Pizzagioni's (2022) research showed creative dance movement is a good way to lower mental stress during the new normal because it gives people a specific way to heal and feel better emotionally.

Sub-theme 5.2. Routine and Normalcy

Collegiate dancers felt better and more satisfied because they could keep dancing during the epidemic. It gave them a sense of order and routine. "Of course, I'm glad I can do virtual dance even though we're in a pandemic," one participant said (P2, P7, P9). In line with the research by Rugh et al. (2024) which found dancing online during COVID-19 improved mental health by keeping people on track with their daily routines, lowering their stress levels and promoting emotional stability through social interaction and physical activity.

Theme 6. Virtual Dance Training Negative Impact

It was easy to get to and could be done at any time due to, many members of university dance groups found virtual dance training had some problems. The switch to online forms changed the social environment of studio practice and made it harder to fix mistakes on the spot, work together as a group, and get around. Participants stated they were having technical and emotional problems, which showed that even though digital platforms made training possible, they couldn't fully replicate the depth and effectiveness of in-person training.

Sub-theme 6.1. Limited Feedback

Dance troupe members assert studying dance online made it harder for them to improve their talents since they didn't get feedback from their dance instructors or engage with other students right away. Dance members stated, "Our skills aren't really that advanced and our understanding of the dance we're doing" (P1, P4, P5). Rugh et al. (2024) agree with this worry, distant dance training settings frequently don't have the

subtle real-time corrections and collaborative energy needed for technical development which makes learning slower and less interesting.

Sub-theme 6.2. Technical Barriers

Dancers who joined virtual trainings had to deal with bad internet connectivity. Participant said, "We're having trouble with our internet connection," and "Sometimes the connection to our virtual meeting here at my house is really bad" (P3). Fabriz et al. (2021) support these feelings by saying that technical problems such as slow internet connections make it harder for students to focus, talk to each other and learn from virtual training.

4. Conclusion

The Dance Troupe in a State University in Eastern Visayas' lived experiences to virtual training and what they went through when they switched to online learning emphasized benefits and practical difficulties. To make the most of digital instruction, they changed their surroundings, set up their devices, changed their routines, and got ready mentally for a very different way of dancing. Setting up a good practice space, dressing professionally and managing time well all helped keep participants focused and interested. Being able to learn at their own pace made them much more motivated. But their stories went beyond just technical changes. Dancers had a lot of different feelings. Some feel freedom while others had problems such as unreliable internet, not enough places to practice and feeling less connected to their peers. Problems encountered made it harder to stay motivated but university dance company members still found good things about them. The virtual training gave them a structure, helped their mental health and gave them chances to grow as people. Overall, the dancers' stories show a quiet strength and a willingness to try things virtually. Online learning was so hard, participants found ways to keep dancing, learn new things and stay connected with themselves and each other. The study shows how dance education is always changing and movement is still important even in digital settings.

5. Recommendations

The study recommends ways to improve virtual dance training. First, university need to put budget into strong internet infrastructure and help collegiate dance group members who are having technical problems so as everyone has a good time online. Using blended and hybrid learning methods can combine the flexibility of virtual training with the benefits of face-to-face interaction making the training experience meaningful. Moreover, setting clear rules how to set up good practice areas at home can help dancers make the most of their space and cut down distractions. Encouraging the importance of acting professionally such as wearing the right clothes for virtual training can help university dance company have a stronger mindset and focus better. Giving dancers more freedom to plan their own training schedules allowing for self-paced learning and flexible class times boost motivation and engagement. Building virtual communities and working together on projects can help dancers deal with the social and emotional problems by making them feel more connected and less alone. Finally, it's important to have ways for university dance company members to give feedback during virtual sessions as it immediate corrections are necessary for progress in dance education. These ideas are meant to make virtual dance training better by making it more useful, interesting and helpful in collegiate level.

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