

The Lived Experiences of Dance School Teachers on Parental Engagement

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Abstract

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Dance education plays a vital role in the holistic development of learners, fostering not only creativity and self-expression but also discipline, collaboration, and confidence. This qualitative study is a study of the lived experiences of Beijing, China dance schoolteachers as they work with parents as part of dance education. The research discusses a gap in the current literature regarding teachers using their understanding of parental involvement dynamics, specifically in extracurricular dance. With a transcendental phenomenological approach, descriptive narratives of the rich were gathered from respondents, in depth interviews with ten experienced dance schoolteachers. They shared their thoughts, emotions and strategies for instructionally and emotionally working with students and parents. Thematic analysis of the data yielded ten discrete themes surrounding adaptability in teaching, emotional labour, proactive communication, managing parental expectations, and accountability. Challenges and successful tips for establishing meaningful partnerships with parents as second caregivers as teachers provide. The findings indicate that teacher-parent communication needs to be improved, teachers need increased emotional support, and there are institutional programmes that should promote collaborative engagement with one another. At the end of the study, the paper presents several practical implications for the dance school, including the formation of training seminars and parent education programmes for the improvement of teacher-parent relationships. This research adds to the understanding of arts education parental engagement through insight into the complex roles teachers play and within the emotional labour of working as a teacher.

Keywords: lived experiences, qualitative research, parental engagement, dance education, thematic analysis, teacher-parent relationships

1. Introduction

As dance education serves to assist in the holistic development of patients, much in the same way it helps with the development of learners, it develops creativity and self-expression, discipline, collaboration, and confidence. Due to its benefits, dance education (mostly in the setup of private or specialised dance schools) has been given little or no weightage by parents who ensure the process of effective education of their children. Studies abound where it is emphasised in broader educational contexts that parental engagement plays an important role in increasing overall student motivation and achievement, as well as their overall well-being (Epstein, 2019).

However, there is little research on how parents are involved or not and how their involvement; or the absence thereof, impacts teaching and learning in dance education, particularly beyond the institutionalised educational setting.

1.1. Background and Context

The dance school landscape is often traversed by teachers in such a way that the informal learning environments coincide with artistic pedagogy. Unlike traditional educational systems which are quite structured by formal channels allowing parental involvement, the dynamics of parental engagement in dance are highly varied from mere compromising presence to total absence. This dynamic has a very great impact on teaching strategies, student progress and the classroom environment. While parental support in music and sports education has been studied, there are few similar studies around dance. Even more, difficulties in managing parental relationships are experienced by dance teachers, at least to some extent, based on cultural expectations, institutional policies, and personal pedagogical philosophies. This means that for teachers there might be challenges like miscommunication, unrealistic parents expecting their children to dance, or the lack of knowing the purpose of the educational value of dance. However, there has been a gap in the literature when it comes to living these realities and understanding the complexities of the interaction between teachers and parents in dance education.

1.2. Research Gap and Rationale

Concerning parental involvement in a child's education research has consistently demonstrated its importance, however, there remains a lack of knowledge about the unfolding of how this engagement occurs in the context of dance schools. Specifically, we know little about how dance teachers perceive and act upon degrees of parental involvement. As a result, we are limited in developing supportive strategies or programmes designed to build the teacher-parent relationship in dance education. Building off this gap in the literature, this present study investigates the lived experiences of dance schoolteachers regarding parental engagement to provide a more textured view of the opportunities and the challenges embedded within that dynamic.

1.3. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how dance schoolteachers come to live with parents in the dance education context. Secondly, the study attempts to understand how these teachers navigate through relationships with parents, and challenges, and even utilize strategies aiming at helping to create constructive partnerships that enhance the students' growth in a performance-based, out-of-class learning environment. Specific objectives of the study are to:

- Explore how dance schoolteachers perceive and interpret parental involvement in dance education.
- Identify the emotional, cultural, and practical challenges teachers face when working with parents.
- Examine the strategies and communication practices used by teachers to establish and maintain effective parent-teacher relationships.
- Generate practical insights that can inform school policy, improve teacher-parent collaboration, and guide the development of training and support programs in dance school settings.

1.4. Research Questions

- How do dance schoolteachers describe their lived experiences with parental engagement?
- What are the key challenges they encounter when involving parents in dance education?
- What strategies do they use to build trust and strengthen collaboration with parents?
- In what ways can the insights from their experiences contribute to enhancing teacher-parent relationships and informing school support programs?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Where this study counts as contributing lies in filling a major gap currently occupied by the arts education research literature by exploring parental engagement in arts education as experienced from the minds of dance schoolteachers. As compared with traditional academic subjects, dance education—instead of being traditionally

delivered in formal and compulsory curricular contexts—more commonly takes place in informal and extracurricular contexts where structured parental involvement may be either more limited or less consistent. The research centralises teachers' lived experience to understand how they both educate and care for emotionally and how they deal with interactions with families with different expectations. The findings encapsulate the nuances of teachers' relationships with their parents and illustrate the emotional labour it requires to sustain these ties. Through three examples of communication training, parental education seminars, and institutional support systems that support the field, the three evidence-based suggestions for improving collaboration between teachers and parents. In the end, these insights can help shape policies and practises that will strengthen business relationships and better support student growth in dancing schools and educational institutions.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Based on Edmund Husserl's (1970) philosophical underpinnings, a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was used in this study. Epoch or bracketing refers to the process of transcending the research biases of the researcher and moving on to exploring and describing the 'lived experiences' of individuals. To better understand how dance schoolteachers perceive and bar the engagement of parents in the settings of dance school teaching, an approach was chosen. In line with phenomenological rigour, the focus was exclusively on participants' views, and the researcher's reconstructions were excluded.

2.2. Participants and Sampling

A total of ten dance schoolteachers were included in this study. The participants who meet the following inclusion criteria were selected using purposive sampling:

- Must be a dance schoolteacher of legal age but under 59 years old
- Must have a minimum of three years of teaching experience in a dance school
- Must be willing to share their lived experiences about parental engagement
- Inclusive of both male and female participants

All participants were referred to as co-researchers to honour their active role in shaping the findings.

2.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted to collect data, which is an ideal form of data in phenomenological research because it offers the participants the chance to tell their own stories differently and in detail. Choices were made to interview (despite the time expended), as they proved exceptionally successful in capturing rich, descriptive data and emotional subtleties that are key to understanding lived experience.

We approached each participant formally, informed them of the research goals and offered to do the interview online or face-to-face at the participant's convenience. Before each interview:

- The researcher introduced herself and explained the study's purpose
- Informed consent was obtained, including consent for audio recording
- Participants were provided with an interview protocol outlining key guiding questions
- Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, allowing sufficient time for detailed sharing.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were transcribed and analysed with Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, a commonly used framework in transcendental phenomenology. The analysis followed these steps:

- **Bracketing (Epoch):** The researcher actively set aside personal biases and preconceptions to focus purely on participants' narratives.
- **Horizontalization:** All significant statements from the transcripts were listed and given equal value.

- **Meaning Units and Themes:** Related statements were grouped into meaning units, which were then organized into emergent themes grounded in the participants' own words.
- **Textural and Structural Descriptions:** A textural description (what was experienced) and a structural description (how it was experienced) were developed for each participant.
- **Essence Statement:** A composite description capturing the essence of the shared experience was constructed from the themes.

Themes and insights were derived strictly from the participants' data and not influenced by the researcher's interpretations.

2.5. Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure credibility and dependability, the following measures were applied:

- **Member checking:** Participants were given a copy of their transcribed interviews to validate accuracy and provide clarification if needed.
- **Triangulation:** Emerging themes were cross-checked against multiple data sources (different participants) to ensure consistency.
- **Audit trail:** Detailed notes were maintained during all stages of data collection and analysis for transparency.
- **Peer debriefing:** The researcher consulted with colleagues and experts in qualitative research to review interpretations and strengthen objectivity.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to all ethical principles in the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A. 10173) of full confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants were informed of their right to:

- Decline participation or withdraw at any point without consequence
- Refuse to answer any question they found uncomfortable
- Choose the most convenient time and mode of interview

Informed consent form of the study detailing aims, procedure and data handling process was given to each of the participants. The research proposal and protocol were approved by the Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC) before the commencement of the study so that the research was carried out in line with the established compliance.

3. Results and Findings

From ten lived interviews of dance schoolteachers, ten core themes were identified that were found as they work with parents. Dance education provides an emotionally drawn, professionally rich, and pedagogically charged context within which parental involvement must be construed, and these themes illustrate parental involvement in this environment. The themes are then depicted by a concise summary and illustrative quotes from participants. Names used in the paper are pseudonyms to protect participant participation.

3.1. Theme 1: Adaptability in Teaching Approaches

Participants consistently emphasized the need to modify their teaching methods to accommodate students' varied learning styles. The adaptability of their instruction was shaped not only by student needs but also by how parents supported or misunderstood these needs.

"Every child learns differently, so I adjust my teaching approach to suit their individual needs. It's not always easy when parents expect one standard path (Participant 1)".

There was an eclectic teaching style among all the co-researchers, and they adapted to a lot of types of learners. This theme is a focus on personalised instruction where the teachers can adjust their strategies on how well or not the students match the prescribed pathway. In line with Keefe and Jenkins (2002), individualised teaching and

learning is an in-school project that works towards arranging learning environments considering everyone's interests and needs then as well as ensuring flexible teaching. Xie Li has said that all children are not the same, so I adjust my teaching, so it is suitable for their needs. This theme reflects that flexible teaching is not pedagogical likes but one that responds to parents' expectations and pressures that vary.

3.2. Theme 2: Embracing Individuality and Expression

Teachers expressed appreciation for the uniqueness of each student and the importance of fostering self-expression. This often requires advocating to parents about the value of creative freedom in dance.

"Some parents expect perfection. But I tell them, that dance is also about expressing who you are. That's where true learning happens (Participant 1)"

Teachers recognised each student's assets and potential and were appreciative of the differences between the students. We shared a little on dance the power of student voice and the need for a safe space for students to speak what they have to say about their artistry. We must respect our children's particularity as Katz and Foster (2006) say. Likewise, Li Mutong also discussed this by seeing how cultivating students to convey themselves boosts their confidence and makes them develop not just as dancers, but also as individuals. It is this theme which remarks how teachers encourage individuality by being mediators between students' creativity and parental expectations.

3.3. Theme 3: Teachers as Second Parents

Teachers described themselves as stepping into nurturing roles, often extending care and emotional support beyond academic instruction.

"We are not just teachers; we guide them, protect them, and help them grow. Many of them see us as a second home (Participant 3)"

Teachers were exposed to narrate how they also worked and cared for their charges just as parents did so that they nurtured them beyond school instruction. This shows you just the emotional and social welfare that they provide to students. It was also cited by Blasco (2002) that teachers are like students' second parents since a student spends half of his life in school and teachers offer more support to the students. Liu Bin acknowledges that the dual role of teachers as supervisors and second family for students builds trust and cultivates a healthy learning environment for these students under the umbrella of good teachers. Here, in this theme, we learn how teachers emotionally get attached to their students even though it's just as much as how teachers parallel the responsibilities of parents.

3.4. Theme 4: Resilience in the Face of Diversity

Teachers described their resilience in working with students and parents from various cultural, social, and emotional backgrounds.

"Respecting diversity and practising patience is fundamental to fostering a positive and supportive classroom dynamic (Participant 4)"

Tolerance refers to the need to accept people's views that they disagree with through sacrificing oneself (Verkuyten & Killen, 2021). A lack of heavy bias on the part of co-researchers, who usually tend to accept or tolerate differences in background and opinion between students and parents at great levels. This main theme resonates because this central thing is lived by the teachers in giving a learning space that is inclusive and respectful and in turn this is something the teachers are dedicated to giving. One of the co-researchers, Xie Li, not real name, said that "respecting and being patient with diversity is key to building a community of support and praise in our classroom" This theme represents how this trend fosters the inclusion and the endurance of emotional of teachers while dealing with multicultural and conflicting family expectations.

3.5. Theme 5: Importance of Honest Communication

All participants stressed the value of transparent communication with parents, even during difficult conversations.

"Being honest and direct with parents, even when it's hard, builds trust and shows them we care (Participant 5)"

The message of this study was about the significance of teachers and parents being open and honest about their communication. Teachers stressed the need to speak freely with all other students about whatever was troubling or troubling them. Parents will be pleased if the information is disseminated openly and honestly (Bonnot et al., 2022). Parents should see this honesty and directness as something that will make them contented if the information is given openly and honestly, if a mutual understanding and trust are established, stated Xiao, co-researcher. The teachers realised that trust is created with open conflict addressing, not ignoring it.

3.6. Theme 6: Building Bridges of Understanding

Teachers made conscious efforts to establish rapport and shared understanding with parents, often initiating conversations to align expectations.

“When we work with parents, not against them, we create a strong support system for the child (Participant 6)”

Research has previously shown that having effective relationships between parents and teachers in the past is important (Schuster, Bormann, & Hein, 2025). To create such a social support system, the co-researchers had to put in substantial effort in the process of developing relationships with parents. This theme illustrates the teachers' intentions for consultation with parents, and to share an understanding and reciprocity. In her storeys, Wang Lu narrates that 'fostering partnerships with parents' bridges gaps and enhances the community's ability to support student growth'. This theme shows how school and home efforts to seek mutual understanding are foisted upon by the teachers.

3.7. Theme 7: Proactive Communication Builds Trust

Participants emphasized that reaching out to parents before problems arise promotes collaboration and prevents misunderstandings.

“When I reach out early, it shows I'm invested. It changes how they see me—not just as a teacher but as a partner (Participant 7)”

Teacher-initiated proactive communication is confirmed to be better able to confront a teacher's legitimate concerns and misunderstandings. This strand urges students to begin conversations and pay attention to parents. In terms of the emerging economy, proactive communication can remind customers about the prevention of e-banking fraud, due to the rising number of fraud cases (Rachel Barker, 2020). Yao Yujie said that before an issue arises, it has been reaching out to parents and telling them that we care, and we want their child to succeed. Yao Yujie noted that proactively reaching out shows care and determination to ensure students' success in resolving misunderstandings well. The thematic connection here is with the role played strategically by proactive engagement in guarding against the possibility of friction.

3.8. Theme 8: The Protective Instinct

Teachers acknowledged the parental instinct to protect their children but also pointed out how it can sometimes hinder student growth.

“We need to respect parents' concerns, but also help them see that their child can handle more than they think (Participant 8)”

Children's rights are a top issue for practitioners around the world. It is also incorporated into laws, public health policies, child development, clinical services and community planning to protect children from violence (Wekerle, 2024). Like all parents, it is an instinct of a parent to keep their children away from physical, mental or emotional distress so he or she may grow smart and achieve. In her narratives, Jiaojiao occasionally 'got a bit' with pointed 'it is important to accommodate parents' expectations; for student's physical and emotional wellbeing, it is the most important goal.' Teachers balance respecting parental fears by encouraging student independence in this theme.

3.9. Theme 9: Managing High Parental Expectations

Teachers shared that those unrealistic expectations placed pressure on both students and instructors.

“They expect top results after a few lessons. Managing that pressure—on me and the child—is part of my job (Participant 9)”

Li Hong, co-researcher, ‘reflected on whether or not communicating these expectations without watering them down, as well as creating realistic plans to compensate for them, is through effective communication and careful planning.’ In the stories shown, parents could usually always expect a great performance from their children on stage or for their children to get better as better dancers. The theme looked at how these expectations influenced teachers in what they did when they tried to fulfil or manage them. In the realm of China, traditional Confucian culture greatly affects parents, and their expectations are an idea impossible to revisit (Shen, et al., 2025). The theme suggests the high expectations of parents on them, and how it cultivates teaching strategies towards the students and their confidence.

3.10. Theme 10: Parental Anxiety and Fear

Some participants spoke about encountering parental anxiety, which often stemmed from a lack of information or fear of failure.

“Most of the time, when parents act defensive, it’s fear. They don’t know what to expect, and they worry their child won’t do well.” – Participant 10

Liu Bin wrote in her stories: ‘Parental anxiety is in the dark, it has to do with lack of understanding.’ Clear communication helps the fears be addressed and a more collaborative relationship can be fostered.” In the process of educating children, parents put too high educational expectations for their children, which greatly puts psychological pressure on their children in terms of behavioural disorders and depression and causes the parents’ educational anxiety (Chen et al., 2022), that is to say, parents’ worry and anxiety about the education of their children will affect the top quality of assistance to teachers. This module looks at the psychological basis for parental involvement and what obstacles it entails. In addition, this theme highlights the emotional labour of teachers to blend anxious parents who call in and support students.

The final reflections lead the researcher to see what the dance schoolteachers meant in handling the class and how they respond to challenges by the parents and students’ needs as the researcher thinks those are things which need deepening relationships with their constituents.

3.11. Deepening Relationships

The parents and the teachers have no perfect relations with each other. The parents and teachers both have the same objective of laying out a flat path in front of their children/students. Despite this, it is necessary to reach this goal to further deepen the parent-teacher relationship so that there is clear goal setting between the two. Parents must realise that as the teachers are expected to act as their child’s second parents; guiding and supporting the child away from the home environment, their instinct to keep their child safe also gets involved. A person full of potential waiting to be unlocked is a child. It goes both ways, the parents and the teachers must agree on this child’s plans of unleashing their talents, and the realisation that this child has his or her sense of self. To do this, the parents should not put so much pressure on the child by setting very high standards. Flexibility in implementing and guiding a student is the most crucial to be able to know how a student can best learn in a sense of efficiency.

3.12. Eidetic Insights and Symbolism

The “Padlock and Key” metaphor emerged from the data as a symbolic summary of the teachers’ collective experience.

- The Padlock symbolizes the parents, protective, sometimes closed, driven by fear and concern for their children.
- The Key represents the teachers, whose role is to gently unlock parental trust through patience, communication, and expertise.



Figure 1: Padlock and Key

As a padlock needs a key for it to work, a strong Teacher Parent relationship needs mutual understanding and goals lining up. Neither can support the child alone; they must team up and unlock the child's full potential. This mirrors a key insight that collaboration, not control, is the primary path to success for students.

4. Discussion

It discusses the results, interpreting and explaining the findings in terms of the research questions as well as existing literature. Each theme is an aspect of the teachers' lived experience of dance schoolteachers engaging with parents. Recurring factors of these experiences were adaptability, proactive communication, and emotional labour. As well as teachers, they are also emotional caregivers and intermediaries between students and their families. All of this leads to the challenges put in front of them, particularly trying to manage high parental expectations and parental anxiety, which is a reflection of the larger societal pressure that is currently acting upon children's success, especially in performance-based fields such as dance.

Consistent with previous research finding the teacher as a 'second parent', the 'second parent' identity fits well the behaviour of the teacher beyond academic into socio-emotional development. Luckily, this study breaks down this dual role from its more simplistic portrayal because as it turns out, parental distrust or overprotection often complicates this role. In contrast to the usual parent engagement frameworks used in traditional schooling contexts, dance education takes place in an emergent space. Parent relationships underway are started and managed by teachers alone, without an institution's guidance. This is represented through the Padlock and Key metaphor, the ability to unlock trust must be level-headed not forced and collaboration must be mutual. This research adds to the paucity of the field on parental contribution in arts education, and to the new state of the field within the study of parents in arts education through teachers' lived experience.

5. Conclusion

Within this study, the danced experiences of dance schoolteachers regarding parental engagement, through a transcendental phenomenological stance, were explored. The research involved in-depth interviews with ten dance schoolteachers who had uncovered several emotional, social and pedagogical challenges for educators when in contact with parents. It identified ten key themes: teachers' adaptability to teaching, proactive communication, second parents, and teachers' dual role, and the stress caused by the tension between high parental expectations and anxiety. Based on two studies, in this study teachers stressed that open communication, mutual trust and collaboration with parents were essential for the support of student growth. As a powerful symbol, the Padlock and Key metaphor took shape that the teacher and the parent must work in balance to unlock a student's potential.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

While the study offers valuable insights, it is limited by the following factors:

- **Sample Size:** The study included only ten participants from specific dance schools, which may limit generalizability.
- **Geographical Context:** All participants were drawn from similar cultural and educational contexts, which may not reflect broader experiences in other regions or countries.
- **Methodological Constraints:** As a phenomenological study, findings are descriptive and subjective, based on the co-researcher's narratives rather than measurable outcomes.

5.2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could expand on this research by:

- Including parents’ perspectives to compare their lived experiences with those of teachers.
- Conducting a longitudinal study to explore how teacher-parent relationships evolve.
- Exploring institutional strategies that can bridge the gap between parents and dance educators, particularly in diverse cultural settings.

5.3. Suggested Program for Dance School Teachers

Among the study's aims was to develop actionable recommendations coming from participants’ experiences. It resulted in the development of a Suggested Programme for Dance School Teachers which encourages collaboration between teachers and parents and the development of students.

Objectives	Strategy	Resources	Time Frame One-year-Round	Expected Output
To design personalized dance routines and practice schedules tailored to everyone’s abilities and goals.	Individualized dance skills program	Dance school coach/teacher	As per request on the availability of student’s schedules	Personalized dance routines and practice schedules
To develop a comprehensive and user-friendly assessment form that captures all relevant personal information, skills, and progress metrics.	Making of Individualized assessment form	Dance school coach/teacher	Monthly	Individualized assessment form
To explore the impact of cultural differences on communication, behaviour, and relationships.	Seminar on Understanding Cultures	Resource Experts speaker	Twice a year	Respecting other cultures

To follow up on scheduled consultations to maintain engagement and address any arising issues promptly.	Provisions of form of individual Scheduling of consultation	Dance school coach/teacher	Depending on the preferred schedules	Consultations schedules
To educate parents on various parenting styles and their impacts on child development.	Seminars on Parenting style	A resource speaker from social work experts	Twice a year	Improvement of parenting styles
To discuss the factors that influence development, including genetics, environment, and social interactions.	Seminar on child and adult development	A resource speaker from child and adult development experts	Twice a year	Applying the importance of Child and adult development

The program includes seminars, training, and regular consultation opportunities aimed at:

- Promoting individualized learning approaches
- Enhancing cultural sensitivity
- Supporting parents through educational and developmental workshops
- Improving teacher-parent communication practices

At the end of the study, the table offered suggests interventions for these in a formatted manner. This is a practical study outcome that must be useful both to teachers and parents: it provides a framework for the schools to support teachers and parents in fostering a more collaborative environment. This work adds to the few but growing literature on parental involvement in the arts, particularly on the emotional and professional troubles that permeate dancing teachers' lives.

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