

The Relationship Between Learning Motivation and Performance Ability Among Folk Dance Major Students in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: In the context of the transformation and modernization of ethnic folk dance education, improving students' performance ability has become a central concern in higher education. While learning motivation is widely acknowledged as a key psychological driver in arts education, existing studies have largely examined motivation, self-efficacy, and performance outcomes in isolation. Consequently, insufficient theoretical attention has been given to the internal psychological mechanisms through which learning motivation translates into performance ability among students majoring in folk dance. To address this theoretical gap, this study develops a theoretical framework integrating Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Expectancy–Value Theory. Within this framework, learning motivation is positioned as the independent variable, self-efficacy as the mediating mechanism, and performance ability as the outcome variable. Drawing on the core assumptions of these theories, the model proposes that autonomous motivation enhances students' perceived competence and agency, which in turn strengthens performance quality and artistic expression. By embedding key variables within complementary motivational and cognitive perspectives, the proposed model offers a logically coherent explanation of how internal psychological processes facilitate performance development in folk dance education. The theoretical contributions of this study are threefold. First, it extends the application of Self-Determination Theory to the domain of performance ability in arts education. Second, it integrates Social Cognitive Theory and Expectancy–Value Theory to construct a multi-theoretical explanatory framework, moving beyond single-theory approaches. Third, it addresses a contextual gap by focusing specifically on ethnic folk dance majors, thereby enriching the theoretical understanding of motivation and performance mechanisms within culturally embedded artistic disciplines.

Keywords: Learning Motivation, Performance Ability, Self-Efficacy, Folk Dance.

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of ethnic folk dance education in higher education alongside the advancement of traditional cultural inheritance, the issue of enhancing the performance ability of students majoring in folk dance has become increasingly prominent. At the phenomenological level, although curricular systems have been continuously refined and instructional technologies have been progressively updated, substantial differences remain in students' stage stability, artistic expressiveness, and creative embodiment. On the one hand, the cultural value of traditional dance in education has been widely recognized [1], and folk dance education in Chinese universities has undergone systematic development [2]. On the other hand, practical teaching contexts continue to reveal insufficient learning engagement, declining persistence in training, and performance-related anxiety among students. Although technology-enhanced instruction has improved classroom participation to some extent—such as through augmented reality applications [3], AI-assisted feedback systems [4], and flipped classroom models [5], which have all been shown to enhance learning motivation and performance outcomes—these studies primarily focus on the optimization of pedagogical tools and strategies, offering limited explanation of students' internal psychological mechanisms. Meanwhile,

research on performance quality assessment [6] and peak performance experiences [7] suggests that high-level dancers typically possess strong psychological regulation and stable efficacy beliefs. However, existing scholarship tends to examine learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability separately, lacking an integrated theoretical framework. Although empirical evidence has indicated that learning motivation influences class satisfaction [8], that self-evaluation affects dance learning motivation [9], that dance self-efficacy is significantly associated with self-confidence [10], and that self-efficacy may function through chain mediation mechanisms such as group identity or emotional processes [11], these studies largely remain at the level of bivariate relationships. From a theoretical perspective, dance psychology research has not yet systematically explained the mechanism linking learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, which constitutes a notable limitation in the current body of research.

From the perspective of research gaps, three major issues can be identified. First, studies on dance learning motivation have predominantly focused on instructional interventions [12] or differences across dance genres [13], while in-depth investigations specifically targeting students majoring in traditional folk dance remain limited. Second, although research on self-efficacy within dance populations has gradually increased—examining, for instance, the association

between resilience and self-efficacy [14], the predictive role of innovative self-efficacy on ability development [15], the facilitative effect of artistic sports on academic self-efficacy [16], and experimental evidence regarding the enhancement of self-efficacy through dance interventions [17] —the mediating mechanism of self-efficacy between learning motivation and performance ability has not yet been systematically validated. Third, research on performance ability has primarily approached the topic from the perspective of creative potential enhancement [18] or comprehensive performance improvement strategies, lacking a structured explanation of its underlying psychological generation mechanisms. Even though some studies have revealed the association between self-efficacy and well-being [19] or proposed multidimensional interaction models linking motivation and learning outcomes [20], a comprehensive theoretical model tailored specifically to folk dance major students has not yet been established. Therefore, building upon the integration of existing findings, this study proposes a theoretical assumption that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability, aiming to address the insufficiency of psychological mechanism integration in the field of dance education. By constructing a research model grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory, this study not only enriches the psychological explanatory perspective of ethnic folk dance education but also provides theoretical support for curriculum design and talent cultivation strategies in higher education, thereby contributing meaningfully at both theoretical and practical levels.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Cultural Value and Developmental Status of Folk Dance Education

As an important carrier of traditional culture, folk dance has received extensive attention regarding its cultural function and educational value within contemporary educational systems. Arciosa et al. (2023) argued that traditional Philippine folk dance courses significantly enhance students' cultural identity and historical consciousness, highlighting the formative role of dance in culture-based education. Similarly, Zhong and He (2022), through a visual analysis of research on Chinese ethnic folk dance education from 2001 to 2021, found that existing studies have largely focused on instructional innovation and intangible cultural heritage transmission, while investigations into psychological mechanisms remain notably insufficient. Lin et al. (2022), in their intervention study on Guozhuang dance, demonstrated that group identity exerted a chain mediating effect through self-efficacy, suggesting a structural linkage between cultural experience and psychological variables. From the perspective of creative development, Richard et al. (2024) further indicated that creative dance promotes holistic enhancement of creative potential, implying that dance serves not only a cultural function but also an integrative psychological function. Collectively, these studies suggest that folk dance education embodies both cultural inheritance and psychological cultivation; however, a theoretical framework integrating cultural context with individual psychological mechanisms has yet to be fully developed.

From the perspective of developmental pathways and

curriculum structure, Li (2025) found a significant positive relationship between learning motivation in traditional folk dance and class satisfaction, indicating that cultural value recognition can be transformed into sustained learning engagement. Kaya et al. (2025) [21], comparing students who enrolled in folk dance courses with those who did not, reported that course participation significantly enhanced dance self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward dance. Cengiz et al. (2023) further demonstrated a strong association between dance self-efficacy and self-confidence among folk dancers, suggesting that traditional dance learning possesses psychological reinforcement functions. Moreover, Pigott (2024), through a cross-genre comparative study, identified a stable relationship between self-efficacy and life satisfaction, indicating that dance training may exert enduring effects on psychological well-being. Nevertheless, existing research has predominantly examined single variables or outcome indicators in isolation, and has not yet systematically explored the structural relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability within the context of folk dance education.

2.2. Learning Motivation and Instructional Intervention Mechanisms

Learning motivation constitutes a central variable in dance education research, and its theoretical pathways have demonstrated increasing diversification. Kukhar and Bilous (2023) reported that in classical dance learning, intrinsic motivation serves as a stronger predictor of sustained practice, whereas the influence of external rewards is comparatively limited. Bao and Mao (2025) further found that self-evaluation mechanisms significantly affect the level of learning motivation among youth dancers, suggesting that motivational formation is closely associated with cognitive feedback processes. De las Heras Fernández et al. (2024) [22], through a QR-code-based instructional intervention, demonstrated that digital tools can enhance students' achievement motivation in learning traditional dance. Likewise, Qian (2024), in a study of the TARGET instructional model, indicated that structured goal design significantly improves both learning motivation and behavioral engagement among sports dance students. These findings collectively suggest that learning motivation is shaped not only by individual cognitive factors but also by instructional environments; however, the underlying mechanisms remain fragmented and insufficiently integrated.

Technology-enhanced instruction has provided new empirical perspectives for motivation research. Hsia et al. (2022) [23] found that a WSQ-based flipped learning approach improved dance performance outcomes through reflective mechanisms. Wu et al. (2024) confirmed in an augmented reality instructional context that immersive technologies significantly enhance learning motivation and performance results. Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Wu et al. (2025) indicated that flipped classroom approaches simultaneously promote intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Xu et al. (2025) demonstrated that AI-assisted skill feedback improves both learning motivation and performance outcomes, suggesting that instructional technologies may influence the learning process by strengthening learners' judgments of competence. Nevertheless, these studies primarily emphasize a direct "instruction-motivation-performance" pathway, and lack systematic exploration of the mediating role of self-efficacy within this process.

2.3. The Psychological Mechanisms of Self-Efficacy and Performance Ability

In recent years, self-efficacy has gained increasing prominence in dance-related research. Leão et al. (2023) indicated that psychological resilience predicts both self-efficacy and motivation levels, suggesting that self-efficacy may function as a bridge between positive psychological traits and learning motivation. In the field of music education, Su et al. (2024) identified multidimensional interactions among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes, implying that efficacy beliefs may regulate or shape learning effectiveness. Tian and Wang (2025) further confirmed that participation in artistic sports significantly enhances academic self-efficacy. Meanwhile, Waugh et al. (2023) [24] developed a task-based dance self-efficacy scale, strengthening the reliability of measuring this construct within dance research. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that self-efficacy should not merely be regarded as an outcome variable; rather, it may serve as a pivotal psychological mediator within the learning process.

From the perspective of performance ability and performance quality, Nam et al. (2024), through qualitative inquiry, found that dancers who achieved peak performance commonly exhibited high levels of confidence and sustained attentional focus. Zhou et al. (2023) demonstrated through a Latin dance intervention that dance training significantly enhances individuals' self-efficacy levels. Yao et al. (2025) [25] further indicated that intelligent classroom environments simultaneously promote learning motivation and self-efficacy. In addition, Wirdnam et al. (2025), in a systematic review, emphasized that performance quality assessment should integrate both technical and psychological indicators. These findings collectively suggest that performance ability is not merely a product of technical execution, but rather the outcome of the interaction between psychological beliefs and behavioral engagement. However, an integrative model systematically explaining how learning motivation influences stage performance ability through self-efficacy remains lacking.

Synthesizing the above literature reveals three critical observations. First, research on folk dance has gradually shifted from a cultural inheritance paradigm toward a psychological mechanism paradigm, yet integration among key variables remains insufficient. Second, although self-efficacy has been shown to be significantly associated with dance attitudes, performance quality, and psychological well-being, its mediating role between learning motivation and performance ability requires further elaboration. Third, most existing studies adopt cross-sectional empirical designs and lack theory-driven model construction and analytical interpretation. Therefore, it is necessary to construct an integrative model within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory to examine how learning motivation influences the performance ability of folk dance major students through self-efficacy, thereby addressing the current fragmentation and the absence of systematic mechanism explanations in the literature.

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1. Self-Determination Theory and the Formation Mechanism of Performance Ability

This study adopts Self-Determination Theory to explain the psychological formation of performance ability among folk dance major students. The core mechanism of this theory posits that when individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied within learning contexts, they are more likely to develop stable intrinsic motivation and high-quality engagement, which in turn facilitates higher levels of performance output. When embedded into the variable system of the present study, performance ability is conceptualized as an external manifestation of high-quality engagement. It encompasses not only technical proficiency in movement execution but also stage expressiveness, performance stability, and creative expression. Accordingly, learning motivation - particularly intrinsic motivation - is regarded as the key psychological energy driving sustained practice and self-regulation. Through the pathway of voluntary practice, deep cognitive processing, and reflective refinement, this motivation gradually accumulates into enhanced performance ability. Existing dance education research provides substantial support for this theoretical logic. For instance, Hsia et al. (2022) demonstrated that learning designs emphasizing reflection and effort promotion improve process quality and enhance dance performance. Wu et al. (2024) found that immersive technological environments increase learning motivation and improve performance outcomes, suggesting a close coupling between high-quality motivation and performance. Kukhar and Bilous (2023) emphasized the critical role of intrinsic motivation in sustaining engagement in classical dance learning. Furthermore, Wirdnam et al. (2025), in a systematic review of performance quality assessment, argued that performance quality should integrate not only technical dimensions but also artistic expression and psychological states. Based on the logical reasoning of Self-Determination Theory, it can therefore be inferred that when folk dance learning environments provide autonomy-supportive opportunities, clear and attainable progress feedback, and supportive peer-teacher relationships, students are more likely to develop high levels of intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement, thereby enhancing the stability and expressiveness of their performance ability.

3.2. Social Cognitive Theory and the Mediating Logic of Self-Efficacy

This study adopts Social Cognitive Theory as the core theoretical foundation for explaining the mechanism of self-efficacy. The central proposition of this theory is that individual behavior is shaped by the reciprocal interaction among cognitive beliefs, behavioral effort, and environmental feedback. As a core component of capability beliefs, self-efficacy determines individuals' goal setting, persistence, emotional reactions, and self-regulation strategies when facing challenges. In the present study, self-efficacy is embedded as the key psychological bridge linking learning motivation and performance ability. Learning motivation provides the initiation and direction of engagement, whereas self-efficacy determines whether individuals can translate motivation into high-quality action—namely, the confidence to practice, the ability to practice effectively, and the

perseverance to sustain practice—thereby influencing ultimate performance outcomes. Empirical findings within dance contexts repeatedly support this logical chain. Cengiz et al. (2023) found a significant association between dance self-efficacy and self-confidence, indicating that capability beliefs and stage psychological states share a common foundation. Kaya et al. (2025) reported that students enrolled in folk dance courses demonstrated significantly higher levels of dance self-efficacy and more positive attitudes compared to those not enrolled, suggesting that accumulated experience strengthens efficacy judgments. Leão et al. (2023) further indicated that resilience, self-efficacy, and motivation function jointly as positive psychological characteristics contributing to dancer development, implying that self-efficacy may occupy a pivotal position between motivation and performance. In addition, Waugh et al. (2023) developed and validated a task-based dance self-efficacy scale, reinforcing the conceptualization of efficacy as a context-specific belief in capability. From this theoretical reasoning, it can be inferred that in folk dance training environments characterized by repetitive practice and public evaluation, learning motivation may initiate engagement; however, only when students possess strong self-efficacy are they more likely to adopt proactive coping strategies, maintain sustained effort, regulate emotions effectively, and ultimately achieve higher-quality performance ability on stage.

3.3. Expectancy–Value Theory and the Formation Logic of Learning Motivation

This study employs Expectancy–Value Theory to explain the cognitive foundation and formation mechanism of learning motivation. The core premise of this theory is that individuals' learning choices and sustained engagement are determined by two central judgments: their subjective expectancy of success and their evaluation of task value. These two components jointly shape the strength of learning motivation and the persistence of behavior. When embedded within the variable system of the present study, learning motivation is conceptualized as the integrated psychological drive derived from students' judgments about whether they can succeed in learning folk dance and whether the learning task is worth pursuing. In this framework, self-evaluation, classroom experience, technological instructional support, and cultural value identification may all influence expectancy and value judgments, thereby shaping motivational intensity. Existing research demonstrates the explanatory power of the expectancy–value mechanism in dance and related artistic learning contexts. Bao and Mao (2025) found that self-evaluation significantly influences dance learning motivation, which can be interpreted as self-evaluation reshaping students' expectancy of success. De las Heras Fernández et al. (2024) showed that learning traditional dance through QR-code-supported instruction enhanced achievement motivation, suggesting that instructional support and information accessibility strengthen both success expectancy and perceived task value. Li (2025) reported that learning motivation in traditional folk dance significantly predicts class satisfaction, indicating a reciprocal reinforcement between perceived task value and experiential evaluation. Similarly, Su et al. (2024), in the context of music education, identified multidimensional interactions among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes, further supporting the cross-contextual consistency of the pathway from expectancy–value to motivation and subsequently to

performance-related outcomes. Based on Expectancy–Value Theory, it can be logically inferred that when folk dance courses enhance students' perceptions of attainability (e.g., through clear standards, timely feedback, and visualized demonstrations) and strengthen their recognition of cultural meaning and personal growth value (e.g., cultural identity, stage opportunities, and professional development prospects), learning motivation will be intensified. In turn, stronger learning motivation provides the psychological energy and directional orientation necessary for the development of self-efficacy and the subsequent enhancement of performance ability.

4. Research Gap

From the perspective of contextual gaps, although existing research has extensively examined dance education, learning motivation, and various psychological constructs, systematic investigations focusing specifically on folk dance major students remain notably insufficient. Prior studies have largely concentrated on sport dance, classical dance, or general arts education contexts, and have frequently employed samples drawn from general university students, vocational students, or even older adult dance participants. Such trends reflect a generalized research orientation and lack in-depth exploration of folk dance major students as a distinct population characterized by strong cultural attributes and specialized professional training. Folk dance not only embodies cultural identity and traditional values but also entails distinctive training approaches, stage presentation forms, and performance evaluation standards. However, research on ethnic folk dance education has predominantly emphasized curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, or cultural inheritance, with comparatively limited attention to students' individual psychological mechanisms. In the context of Chinese higher education, folk dance major students face high-intensity training, competitive stage environments, and responsibilities related to cultural representation. Their developmental pathways of learning motivation and performance ability are therefore contextually unique, yet empirical and theoretical studies have not established a coherent analytical framework. Consequently, examining the psychological and behavioral mechanisms of folk dance major students within a specific cultural and professional setting represents a significant contextual research gap.

From the perspective of mechanism gaps, existing studies often focus on single variables or bivariate relationships, such as the association between learning motivation and class satisfaction, self-efficacy and innovative ability, or motivation and performance outcomes. However, few studies have systematically constructed an integrative framework encompassing learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability simultaneously. Most investigations remain at the level of correlation analysis or simple predictive modeling and lack theoretically grounded explanations of the internal logical pathways among variables. Particularly within arts and dance education, performance ability is frequently treated as a training outcome, rather than being interpreted through a structured psychological mechanism. Although self-efficacy has been shown to correlate with confidence, resilience, and academic achievement, whether it mediates the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability has not been structurally validated or theoretically elaborated. In other words, current research

lacks multivariate integrative models and clear pathway explanations supported by theoretical reasoning. A comprehensive framework capable of explaining the developmental logic of performance ability among dance major students has yet to be established. Therefore, theoretical integration remains insufficient, and a comprehensive explanatory framework grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory has not yet been developed to systematically reveal the logical relationships and mechanism pathways among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability. Therefore, a theoretical framework is needed.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualizes learning motivation as the intrinsic driving force and value orientation demonstrated by folk dance major students throughout their professional training. From the perspective of Expectancy-Value Theory, learning motivation is not merely reflected in learning intensity; rather, it represents students' subjective evaluation of the value of dance-related tasks and their degree of autonomous engagement. Given that folk dance learning integrates artistic expression and cultural inheritance, its motivational structure often encompasses multiple dimensions, including cultural mission awareness, artistic aspirations, and professional competitive pressure. Accordingly, within the theoretical framework, learning motivation is positioned at the starting point of the model as the core driving factor influencing psychological beliefs and

performance outcomes.

This study defines self-efficacy as students' subjective belief in their capability to successfully complete folk dance training and stage performance tasks. Based on Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy functions as a key cognitive determinant of behavioral choice, effort intensity, and persistence. Learning motivation influences students' perceptions of task meaning and their level of engagement, thereby facilitating the accumulation of mastery experiences and enhancing their judgments of capability, which ultimately strengthens self-efficacy. In this sense, self-efficacy serves as a psychological transformation mechanism in the present study, functioning as the central cognitive bridge through which motivation is converted into performance ability.

This study conceptualizes performance ability as the comprehensive capability demonstrated by folk dance major students in stage presentations. It includes technical accuracy of movement, rhythmic control, emotional expressiveness, and overall artistic impact. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, when students experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness during the learning process, they are more likely to exhibit sustained engagement and higher-quality behavioral output, thereby facilitating ability development. Simultaneously, according to Expectancy-Value Theory, when students hold strong success expectations and perceive high task value, they invest greater effort and persist in practice, which ultimately manifests in enhanced performance quality. Therefore, performance ability is regarded as the behavioral outcome of long-term interaction between motivation and efficacy beliefs.

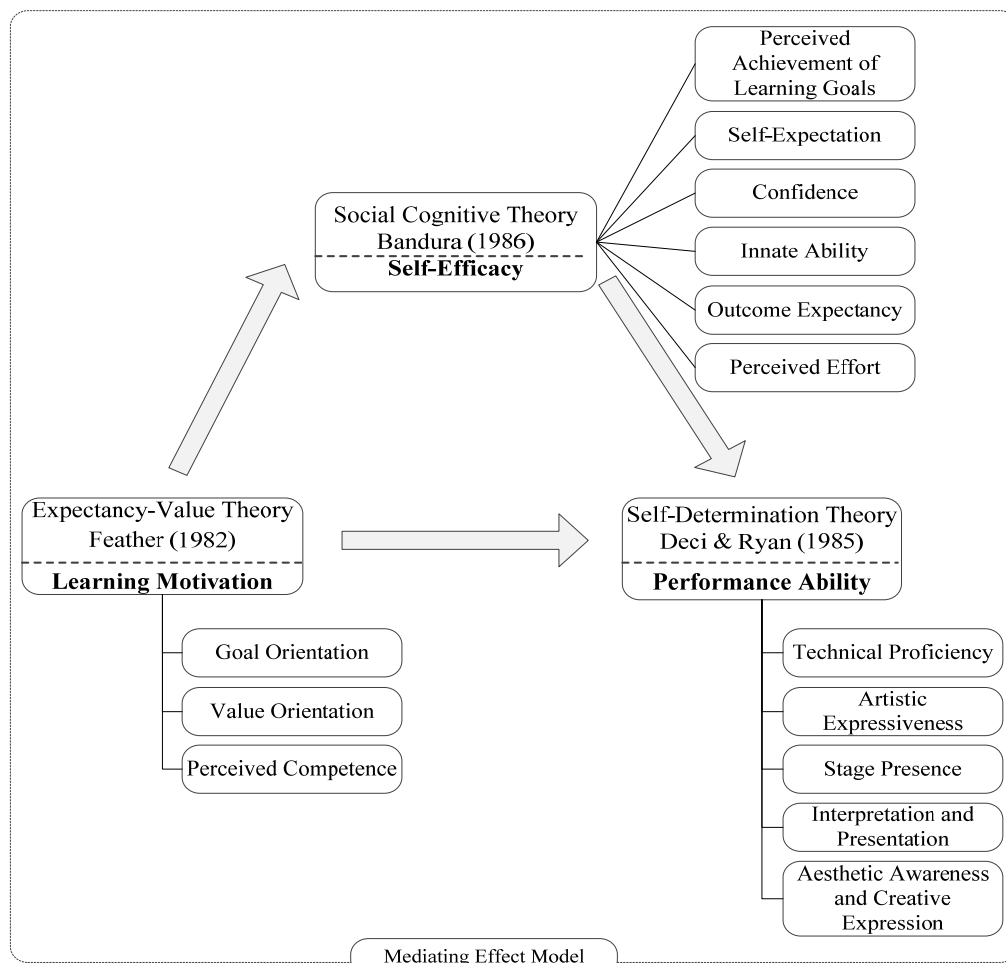


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

As illustrated in Figure 1, the theoretical framework of this study embodies three core logical pathways. First, learning motivation directly influences performance ability. When folk dance major students possess strong intrinsic interest and value identification toward dance learning, their autonomous engagement increases, leading to intensified and sustained training, which directly enhances performance ability. Second, learning motivation indirectly affects performance ability through self-efficacy. High levels of learning motivation encourage students to actively participate in training, reflection, and improvement; through repeated practice, they accumulate mastery experiences, which strengthen their self-efficacy beliefs. Elevated self-efficacy, in turn, enhances students' confidence and emotional stability under stage pressure, thereby improving actual performance outcomes. Third, self-efficacy directly influences performance ability. According to Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy determines individuals' effort intensity, persistence, and emotional regulation in task situations. In stage contexts, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to maintain focus, perform consistently, and achieve optimal performance at critical moments.

In summary, this study constructs a research model in which learning motivation serves as the starting point, self-efficacy functions as the central psychological mechanism, and performance ability represents the outcome variable. At the theoretical level, the model reveals the underlying psychological dynamics through which performance ability is generated among folk dance major students.

6. Propositions Development

P1: Learning motivation is positively related to performance ability.

Based on Self-Determination Theory, when individuals experience autonomy and competence during the learning process, their intrinsic motivation is significantly strengthened, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustained engagement and high-quality performance. In the context of folk dance education, learning motivation is reflected not only in interest toward technical training but also in identification with ethnic cultural values and the pursuit of artistic expression. Arciosa et al. (2023) argued that the role of folk dance in culture-based education enhances students' identity formation and engagement, thereby establishing a value foundation for ability development. Bao and Mao (2025) further found that self-evaluation mechanisms reinforce adolescents' dance learning motivation, which subsequently influences the quality of classroom engagement. De las Heras Fernández et al. (2024) demonstrated that integrating QR technology into traditional dance instruction enhances students' achievement motivation and correspondingly improves dance learning performance. Similarly, Wu et al. (2024) confirmed that augmented reality technologies significantly enhance university students' dance learning motivation and indirectly promote performance outcomes.

P2: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability.

According to Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy represents a core cognitive mechanism influencing behavioral choice, effort intensity, and persistence. Although learning motivation can activate engagement behaviors, its impact on performance ability often requires transformation through an

individual's system of capability beliefs. Cengiz et al. (2023) indicated that dance self-efficacy is closely associated with self-confidence and constitutes a critical psychological variable in explaining performance differences among dancers. Kaya et al. (2025) further found that students who participated in folk dance courses demonstrated significantly higher levels of self-efficacy and more positive attitudes than those who did not, suggesting that learning engagement strengthens efficacy beliefs through accumulated mastery experiences. Leão et al. (2023) argued that motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience jointly form a positive psychological structure in dancers, within which self-efficacy functions as a key linkage between motivation and performance.

At the level of performance outcomes, self-efficacy determines individuals' emotional stability and attentional focus in high-pressure contexts. Nam et al. (2024), through interviews with dancers who achieved peak performance, found that psychological stability before and after stage performance was closely associated with dancers' beliefs in their own abilities. Su et al. (2024), using multidimensional interaction analysis, demonstrated that learning motivation influences learning outcomes through the enhancement of self-efficacy, thereby empirically supporting the mediating mechanism of efficacy beliefs. Similarly, Xu et al. (2025), in an AI-assisted dance teaching context, found that self-efficacy played a crucial role in linking instructional intervention and performance outcomes. Synthesizing theoretical reasoning and empirical findings, it can be logically inferred that learning motivation enhances self-efficacy by promoting the accumulation of mastery experiences and strengthening capability cognition; in turn, elevated self-efficacy improves stage performance stability and technical execution. Therefore, self-efficacy mediates the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability.

7. Theoretical Contributions

At the theoretical level, this study extends Self-Determination Theory within a specific disciplinary context. Prior research has predominantly applied Self-Determination Theory to general educational or physical education settings, emphasizing the roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting learning engagement. However, within the specialized domain of folk dance, which integrates artistic expression and cultural heritage, performance ability represents not merely technical proficiency but a comprehensive capacity encompassing emotional expression, cultural understanding, and stage presentation. By situating performance ability within the framework of Self-Determination Theory, this study expands the outcome of "competence" from general academic achievement to artistic performance ability, thereby enriching the explanatory scope of the theory in arts education. Furthermore, this study incorporates the mechanism of self-efficacy from Social Cognitive Theory into the motivation-ability model, clarifying its mediating function in artistic skill development. In doing so, Social Cognitive Theory is applied in a more structurally integrated manner within dance education, rather than being confined to single-variable prediction.

At the level of theoretical integration, this study constructs a tripartite framework combining Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory. Unlike models grounded in a single theoretical lens, the

present study differentiates the functional roles of the three theories through systematic reasoning: Expectancy–Value Theory explains the cognitive origins of learning motivation; Self-Determination Theory elucidates the dynamic mechanism linking intrinsic motivation to competence development; and Social Cognitive Theory clarifies the cognitive transformation pathway through self-efficacy. Together, these theories form a hierarchical structure of “motivational drive–efficacy belief–behavioral performance,” achieving mechanism-level integration rather than superficial theoretical aggregation. In addition, this study addresses a contextual gap by focusing specifically on folk dance majors. Existing research has largely concentrated on sport dance, general dance education, or music education, with limited attention to the psychological mechanisms underlying learning among students majoring in folk dance. By constructing a theoretical framework tailored to folk dance students within the context of Chinese higher education, this study provides both contextual enrichment and theoretical refinement in the field of ethnic arts education.

8. Conclusion

Grounded in the integrated perspectives of Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Expectancy–Value Theory, this study constructs a theoretical framework to explain the relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability among students majoring in folk dance. Through logical deduction, the study proposes both the direct effect of learning motivation on performance ability and the mediating role of self-efficacy in this relationship. This framework moves beyond prior single-theory approaches to explaining dance learning outcomes by clarifying the hierarchical relationships among value cognition, motivational drive, and efficacy beliefs at the theoretical level, while addressing the contextual gap in research on the psychological mechanisms of folk dance majors. Given that folk dance education embodies both artistic training and cultural heritage transmission, understanding the internal psychological logic underlying performance ability development contributes to the advancement of arts education theory and provides a theoretical basis for optimizing professional training models. Therefore, the theoretical framework proposed in this study holds significant theoretical value and practical implications for the development of folk dance education.

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