

Differentiating Dance Performance Curricula in Chinese Higher Education: A Comparative Study Across Four Institutional Types

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Abstract

Dance performance programs in China have expanded rapidly across multiple tiers of higher education, a tendency toward curricular homogenization risks marginalizing institutional identity and misaligning educational provision with regional, cultural, and industry-specific needs. Existing literature has primarily focused on elite conservatories, offering limited comparative insight into how diverse institutional types implement dance curricula under national policy pressures. This study addresses that gap by conducting a multi-dimensional comparative analysis of dance performance programs at four representative institutions in China: Beijing Dance Academy, Shaanxi Normal University, Hebei University of Economics and Business, and Hebei Vocational Art College. Using an integrated analytical framework that combines the CIPP evaluation model and the Four-Component Instructional Design (4C/ID) model, the research explores institutional histories, educational objectives, curriculum structures, pedagogical content, and evaluation mechanisms. Data were collected through 28 faculty interviews, 48 classroom observations, and 112 institutional documents, and were analyzed using a three-stage NVivo coding process. The results reveal substantial differentiation across the four institutional types in terms of curricular intensity, instructional logic, and pedagogical innovation. BDA demonstrates elite conservatory characteristics with deep specialization in heritage-based content; HVAC follows a vocational logic aligned with regional industry demands; SNU integrates teacher education with digital innovation and regional culture; HUEB, though positioned as applied, struggles with curricular coherence and interdisciplinary sustainability. Notably, while general education curricula show high degrees of national standardization, specialized course offerings vary significantly in credit allocation, artistic depth, and employment relevance.

Keywords: Dance Performance Education, Curriculum Comparison, Evaluation Model, Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Introduction

Amid China's pursuit of cultural revitalization and educational modernization, higher dance education has emerged as an arena of both symbolic value and institutional innovation (Bing et al., 2024). The proliferation of dance performance programs across universities reflects the policy imperatives of 'cultural confidence' and the growing demand for creative industries talent (Liu & Kalimyllin, 2024; Sun, 2024). However, the rapid expansion of these programs has led to a structural dilemma: while institutional diversity has increased—spanning professional arts universities, teacher-training universities, comprehensive applied universities, and vocational colleges—curriculum design has remained largely homogenized, often modelled after the national exemplar, Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) (Jin & Snook, 2022). This disjunction between standardized curricula and heterogeneous institutional missions' risks eroding cultural responsiveness, pedagogical relevance, and regional distinctiveness (Fitch, 2024; Muhammad, 2016).

Existing scholarship has provided important insights into dance pedagogy, performance traditions, and institutional legacies, but remains skewed toward elite conservatories. Comparative analyses across different institutional types are rare, and even fewer studies have explored how structural differentiation—across institutional origins, governance affiliations, and program mandates—translates into curriculum architecture and teaching practice (Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Klassen, 2023; Rowan, 1982). Moreover, although global models such as Practice-as-Research (PaR) in the UK, liberal arts-based creativity education in the US, and competence-based curriculum reforms in South Korea. Chinese institutions have yet to systematically adapt these frameworks to local contexts due to institutional inertia, policy constraints, and resource fragmentation (Krug & Hendrischke, 2008; Shen & Tsai, 2016).

In response to these gaps, this study conducts a qualitative comparative analysis of dance performance curricula across four representative Chinese institutions: Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), Shaanxi Normal University (SNU), Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB), and Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC). These institutions exemplify four distinct models of dance higher education provision—professional, pedagogical, applied, and vocational—each operating under different historical legacies, administrative affiliations, and educational goals. Drawing on an integrated framework that combines the CIPP evaluation model (Zhang et al., 2011) and the Four-Component Instructional Design (4C/ID) model (Costa et al., 2022), the study constructs a three-dimensional axis—context, curriculum, and evaluation—to analyze how institutional logics shape curricular design and implementation.

Methodologically, the study employs multi-source qualitative data collection—including 28 faculty interviews, 48 classroom observations, and 112 institutional documents—supported by a three-stage NVivo coding process. The comparative analysis reveals structural variations in credit allocation, curriculum content, and pedagogical intensity, and identifies five key dimensions of differentiation: institutional path dependency, strategic goals, curriculum architecture, content focus, and innovation capacity. These differences are not merely technical but reflect embedded educational philosophies and sectoral constraints (Mihail, 2023; Oliver et al., 2008).

To address the revealed tensions, this study puts forward a ‘three-tiered curriculum and five-platform integration model’ as a conceptual and practical reference for enhancing curriculum responsiveness in Chinese higher dance education. The framework outlines a progressive pathway that spans foundational training, professional specialization, and interdisciplinary innovation, supported by five resource platforms aimed at strengthening digital integration, cultural transmission, international collaboration, career development, and cross-sector engagement. Rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all solution, the model provides a flexible blueprint upon which institutions of different types—professional, pedagogical, applied, and vocational—can build context-specific adaptations aligned with their respective missions, resources, and student profiles. As such, it contributes a foundational reference for institutions and policymakers seeking to balance national standards with institutional distinctiveness and educational innovation. More broadly, this research enriches the comparative discourse in arts education by linking institutional classification to curriculum structure and pedagogical content through a theoretically informed and empirically grounded approach.

Literature Review

Historical Evolution and Institutional Stratification of Chinese Dance Higher Education

The institutionalization of Chinese dance education began with the founding of Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) in 1954, influenced heavily by the Soviet-style ballet conservatory model that prioritized technical precision and elite performance training (Heyang et al., 2021; Rowe et al., 2015; Rowe et al., 2020). For over two decades, Chinese dance education remained confined to vocational-level institutions with an emphasis on physical technique, offering little integration of theoretical or cultural knowledge (Chen, 2014). This technocentric model laid the groundwork for standardized curricula but also triggered concerns about educational depth and artistic autonomy. Scholars critiqued this narrow orientation, calling for a broader educational vision that merges bodily training with emotional, intellectual, and cultural formation (Immordino-Yang & Gotlieb, 2017).

Since the 1980s, the sector has undergone rapid expansion in both scope and level. BDA became the first institution to offer undergraduate and later postgraduate programs in dance performance, paving the way for a national model rooted in classical Chinese aesthetics (Chen, 2024). By 2022, the number of universities offering dance majors in China had surpassed 350, a tenfold increase since 2001. However, this rapid proliferation has resulted in widespread curricular homogenization. Studies show that over 85% of institutions replicate BDA’s program structure, leading to redundant content and limited innovation. Parding et al. (2024) highlights the misalignment between externally imposed structural formats and the internal logic of content and pedagogy, creating a disconnect that hinders responsiveness to regional and institutional diversity.

Global Models and the Localization Challenge

Across global contexts, higher dance education has evolved into a multidimensional discipline that integrates bodily training, cultural inquiry, creative research, and critical pedagogy. The United States pioneered a liberal arts-based dance education system by the 1940s, framing dance as a vehicle for creativity, identity, and critical inquiry (Risner, 2023). Margaret H'Doubler—often regarded as the mother of American dance education—asserted that “the body is the instrument through which life is experienced and understood,” framing dance as

a method of inquiry grounded in lived experience (Hagood, 2000). Subsequent theorists have reinforced this orientation, viewing dance as an epistemological tool capable of fostering creativity, agency, and embodied knowledge (Pakes, 2003).

In the United Kingdom, higher dance education has been deeply integrated into broader academic discourses such as cultural studies, ethnography, and dance science, reflecting a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to dance pedagogy. This model emphasizes the synthesis of practical training with scholarly engagement in areas such as dance history, choreography, anatomy, and somatic theory (Eddy, 2009). Institutions such as Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, the University of Surrey, and the University of Roehampton have positioned Practice-as-Research (PaR) as a central component of their postgraduate curricula, thereby legitimizing choreographic and performance practices as valid and rigorous forms of academic inquiry. Li, & Chin (2024) stated that within this framework, students often undertake interdisciplinary investigations that combine artistic creativity with themes such as cultural identity or gender (Cotantino et al., 2010). In contrast, Chinese higher dance education remains primarily structured around performance mastery and technical standardization.

Across Asia, dance education has evolved in response to globalization and the need for curriculum reform. In South Korea, the Ministry of Education has revised national arts curricula multiple times since 1988, with the 2015 version emphasizing competence-based learning and character development through artistic expression (Muchira et al., 2023). Dance is positioned as both cultural heritage and a means of developing creativity and identity. In Japan, post-war education reforms integrated modern dance into physical education, enhancing creativity but marginalizing traditional forms (Baldock, 2022). Recent efforts aim to reintegrate classical Japanese dance within university programs through hybrid models that blend somatic learning and cultural aesthetics. Thailand maintains a heritage-focused model rooted in traditional dance. Since 1934, institutions like Withayalai Natsin have emphasized preservation and vocational application. The Ministry of Education updates curricula every five years, incorporating diverse regional styles and reinforcing dance's role in national culture (Liu et al., 2024).

Collectively, these models reflect a shared regional commitment to cultural preservation, yet they diverge in institutional strategy. While Korea emphasizes national identity through standardized curriculum design, Japan navigates modernity through hybridization, and Thailand sustains a vocational-heritage model closely tied to community and state policy. These trajectories offer valuable perspectives and reference points for China's curriculum reform, suggesting that curricular differentiation, rather than homogenization, may be the key to sustainable excellence.

Theoretical Shifts and Curricular Contestations in Chinese Dance Education

The discourse around curriculum reform in Chinese higher dance education reveals a landscape that is theoretically ambitious but structurally constrained. Scholars have called for a shift away from monolithic, performance-centric models toward more integrative, humanistic, and interdisciplinary approaches. Walker (2020) positions dance education as inherently aesthetic and culturally grounded, warning that a weak cultural base undermines its educational mission. Scholars have increasingly highlighted structural contradictions

within China's diverse institutional landscape. Meng and Hsieh (2013) identifies a core tension between the 'cultural depth' of professional universities and the 'disciplinary breadth' of comprehensive universities. The former risk becoming trapped in stylistic rigidity, while the latter often suffer from fragmented resources and diluted specialization. Yet these conceptual visions have seldom translated into robust curricular transformation. Institutional practices remain constrained by inherited 'academy standards'—technical norms, codified choreographies, and routinized assessment systems—that limit creativity and reflexivity. Even among innovative choreographers, the embodied memory of institutional training often inhibits post-graduation experimentation.

These essential competencies cannot be developed solely through isolated courses or specific knowledge domains. Despite the rhetorical shift toward 'service-oriented' and 'application-based' goals, few comparative studies address how different institutions actually interpret and implement these mandates. The 4C/ID model (Costa et al., 2022) is widely used in the education of complex skills and fits well with these aforementioned dance curriculum design concepts. Its components—learning tasks, supportive information, procedural guidance, and part-task practice—enable layered curriculum construction that combines technical mastery with conceptual depth and transferability. The 4C/ID model supports this shift by providing a scaffolding framework that integrates artistic, culture, and technology learning, effectively promoting the transition of dance courses from experience-driven teaching to a systematic curriculum paradigm.

Existing research has typically focused on elite conservatories or single-institution case studies, with limited comparative analysis across diverse institutional types such as vocational colleges, teacher-training universities, and applied undergraduate institutions. This study intervenes in this under-theorized space by conducting a comparative analysis of four representative models of dance higher education institutions. Using a comprehensive analytical framework (CIPP + 4C/ID), it investigates how institutional mission, curriculum design logic, and evaluation systems interact in the development of the dance performance major. In doing so, the study contributes empirical data and critical insight into how differentiated curriculum models can support pedagogical excellence and cultural responsiveness within China's increasingly diversified higher education landscape.

Methodology

Research Design and Case Selection

To examine how institutional mission, resource context, and pedagogical logic influence the curriculum design and implementation of dance performance majors, a qualitative comparative research design was employed across four distinct types of Chinese higher education institutions. The selected cases—Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), a national-level specialized university; Shaanxi Normal University (SNU), a teacher-training university; Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB), a comprehensive applied Universities with a cross-disciplinary focus; and Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC), a provincial vocational college—represent the four dominant models of dance education provision in China. These institutions were purposefully chosen for their typological clarity, curricular autonomy, and regional diversity across North and Northwest China.

The research adopts an interpretivist and inductive approach to uncover how localized pedagogical practices interact with national directives and cultural mandates. To structure the comparison, a composite analytical model was developed by integrating the CIPP Evaluation Model and the Four-Component Instructional Design (4C/ID) Model (Paripour et al., 2021). This integrated framework enables the analysis to connect macro-level institutional dynamics with micro-level instructional strategies. The research process is outlined in Figure 3.1.

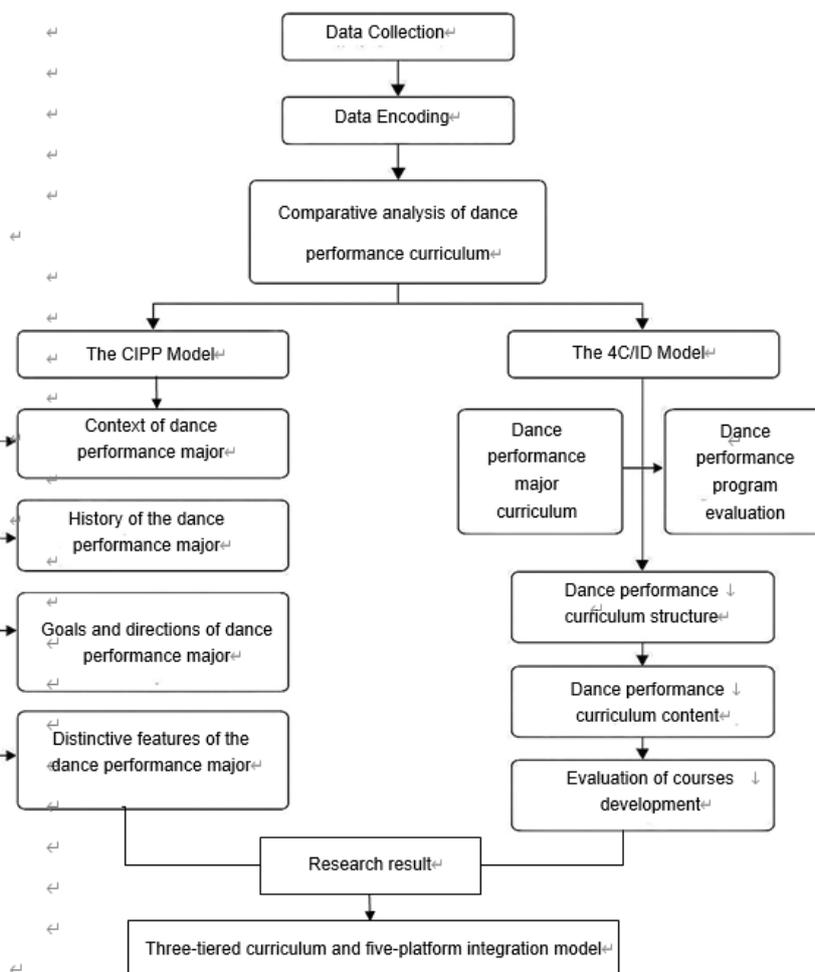


Figure 3.1 Research process framework

Data Collection Procedures

To support the comparative framework, this study employed a multi-source qualitative data collection strategy over a 12-month period. Data were gathered from four Chinese universities representing distinct institutional types. The triangulated sources included: (1) Semi-structured interviews: A total of 28 in-depth interviews were conducted with program directors and senior faculty members. The interview protocol focused on institutional positioning, curricular goals, instructional design, and pedagogical challenges; (2) Classroom observations: Forty-eight dance classes were observed, covering both foundational and advanced levels (e.g., Chinese Classical Dance Technique at BDA; Creative Repertoire Development at HVAC). Field notes captured teaching methods, instructional strategies, and student engagement; (3) Document analysis: A total of 112 institutional documents were reviewed, including curriculum guidelines, teaching plans, course syllabi, and annual quality assurance reports. These documents were used to triangulate and contextualize interview

and observation data. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. They were then translated into English for analysis. Observations and documents were systematically coded using structured protocols. Data triangulation across the three sources enhanced both internal validity and conceptual reliability.

Data Encoding Strategy

The qualitative data were analyzed using a three-stage coding process via NVivo 14, following grounded theory procedures (Charmaz, 2015). The stages included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, leading to the construction of a three-dimensional comparative framework.

In the first stage, open coding was used to identify and label conceptual fragments across all data sources. This generated a total of 360 initial codes: 59 (BDA), 89 (SNU), 132 (HUEB), and 80 (HVAC). For example, ‘multi-style classical dance instruction’ was coded as integration of traditional elements, and “industry-partnered choreography modules” was categorized as practice-industry linkage. In the second and third stages, axial and selective coding were applied to organize the initial codes into coherent thematic categories. Eight axial themes were identified—ranging from institutional history and educational goals to curriculum structure, teaching content, and evaluation systems. These themes were then mapped onto three overarching dimensions: Context, Curriculum, and Evaluation. The final structure served as the foundation for cross-institutional comparison. The coding validity was ensured through member checking, triangulation, and the traceability features of NVivo. A schematic representation of this process is presented in Figure 3.2.

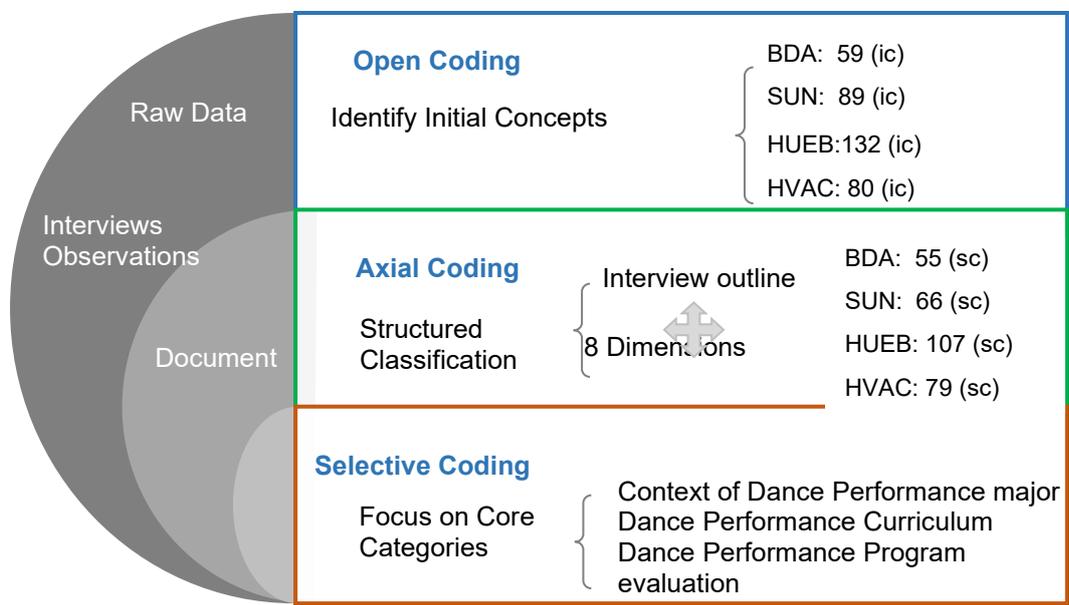


Figure 3.2 Data encoding process

Notes: 59(ic), 89(ic), 132(ic) and 80(ic) are the number of concepts after initial coding of the interview data from the four universities. 55(sc), 66(sc), 107(sc) and 79(sc) are the number of conceptualizations after axial coding that have been integrated.

Theoretical Integration: CIPP and 4C/ID Models

To enhance analytical depth, the study integrates the CIPP model and the 4C/ID model as complementary interpretive lenses. The CIPP model provides a macro-structural evaluation framework through four dimensions: Context, Input, Process, and Product. Meanwhile, the 4C/ID model contributes a micro-level instructional perspective, comprising Learning Tasks, Supportive Information, Procedural Guidance, and Part-Task Practice. By combining these models, the study bridges institutional evaluation and curriculum execution. The CIPP model supports systemic comparison across universities, while the 4C/ID model informs an analysis of how instructional components contribute to the development of complex dance competencies. This synergy results in a robust comparative structure aligned with the study's three analytical dimensions: Context, Curriculum, and Evaluation.

Structural Differentiation and Comparative Insights into Dance Performance Curricula in Chinese Higher Education

This section presents a comparative analysis of the dance performance curricula at four representative institutions in China, focusing on their historical trajectories, strategic objectives, program features, structural designs, and curricular content. Drawing on the CIPP and 4C/ID frameworks, the analysis examines how institutional context, governance affiliations, and educational missions shape the formulation and implementation of dance curricula. By mapping key dimensions such as program evolution, instructional goals, credit structure, and course offerings, the study reveals systemic patterns of differentiation across institutional types—professional arts universities, teacher-training universities, comprehensive applied universities, and vocational colleges. The following subsections provide a step-by-step comparative account that illuminates both the structural logic and pedagogical implications underlying these curriculum models.

Institutional Histories and Evolutionary Trajectories

A university's disciplinary history reveals its institutional mission, administrative affiliation, and positioning within China's evolving higher education system. The four selected institutions—Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), Shaanxi Normal University (SNU), Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB), and Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC)—demonstrate divergent developmental trajectories shaped by historical timing, governance affiliation, and regional mandates.

As shown in Table 4.1, BDA and HVAC were both established in the 1950s under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, reflecting the early state-led vocational training model. However, their developmental paths diverged significantly in the subsequent decades. BDA was upgraded to a bachelor-level institution in 1980 and initiated China's first Master of Fine Arts program in dance performance in 2010. Its evolution reflects a trajectory of elite professionalization and national cultural leadership, supported by sustained ministerial endorsement. By contrast, HVAC retained its vocational orientation, with a strong focus on performance training for local cultural and tourism industries, and has consistently remained at the associate degree level. SNU and HUEB, both affiliated with educational authorities rather than cultural ministries, represent later entrants into the dance education sector. SNU initiated its dance performance major in 1988 but only achieved full master's degree independence in 2018. HUEB launched its program in 2006 under the broader umbrella of music performance and gained full programmatic independence in 2013. These institutions

illustrate the 'latecomer disadvantage' often seen in comprehensive universities, where dance programs are embedded within broader departments and constrained by institutional hierarchy.

Table 4.1

Coding results of the history of dance performance major for the four selected universities.

Context of Dance Performance Major (CIPP) model	I. History of the Dance Performance Major
Beijing Dance Academy (BDA)	<p>a1. In 1954, a secondary vocational dance performance program was introduced.</p> <p>a2. In 1980, the higher education dance performance major was established; subdivided into Chinese dance performance and ballet performance direction.</p> <p>a3. The first enrollment was made in 1982 with a 2-year associate degree.</p> <p>a4. In 2003, integrating the performance major with the education major, restructuring of the two-year system into a four-year system, and focus on dance performance ability.</p> <p>a5. 2010, opened the first batch of Master of Fine Arts in dance performance program in China.</p> <p>a6. Attributed to the Ministry of Culture of China.</p>
Shaaxi Normal University (SNU)	<p>b1. The dance performance major was established in 1988 as a 2-year, associate degree.</p> <p>b2. Expand and popularize teacher education in the new direction of dance performance.</p> <p>b3. In 1999, the associate degree was abolished and an undergraduate degree in dance performance was introduced.</p> <p>b4. In 2004, began offering graduate degree education, but was affiliated with the musicology major.</p> <p>b5. In 2018, the master's degree in dance major became fully independent.</p> <p>b6. Attributed to the Ministry of Education of China.</p>
Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB)	<p>c1. In 2006, the first undergraduate dance performance students were admitted, but under the music performance program.</p> <p>c2. In 2013, the Dance Performance program became fully independent.</p> <p>c3. A second degree in inter-professional studies was once implemented but was eliminated in 2020.</p> <p>c4. Attributed to Hebei Provincial Department of Education.</p>
Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC)	<p>d1. In 1955, a secondary vocational dance performance program was introduced.</p> <p>d2. In 2003, the higher vocational dance performance major was established and has been offering associate degrees ever since.</p> <p>d3. Attributed to the Hebei Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism.</p>

Notes: All letters "serial numbers stand for BDA, 'b' stands for SNU, 'c' stands for HUEB, and 'd' for HVAC. These codes include a1., a2., b1., b2. and so on, refer to the interview recording and open coding sequences.

Three structural dimensions emerge from the comparative data. First, ministerial affiliation significantly affects access to funding, prestige, and curricular influence. BDA's affiliation with the Ministry of Culture positioned it to set national standards, leading to curriculum models that are emulated by over 85% of similar programs nationwide. HVAC's alignment with the Hebei Department of Culture and Tourism ensures high integration with regional industry needs. Second, the timing of degree elevation influences curricular autonomy and institutional status. BDA's early transition to higher education allowed it to pioneer programmatic innovations, while SNU and HUEB lagged due to slower administrative processes. Third, institutional type affects curricular agility. HVAC's simplified governance structure enables annual curriculum revisions, compared to BDA's four-year cycles and HUEB's more bureaucratically constrained system.

These differences echo the path dependency logic of historical institutionalism, where initial institutional configurations produce long-lasting effects on program structure and adaptability. Institutions like BDA resemble leading global conservatories such as Juilliard and UNC School of the Arts in their focus on technical excellence and cultural prestige, while vocational colleges such as HVAC mirror practice-oriented models like Italy's La Scala Theatre Ballet School. Meanwhile, SNU and HUEB follow more integrative models akin to UCLA or USC, embedding dance within broader arts and humanities curricula but facing challenges in curricular coherence and identity.

In sum, the developmental histories of the four universities illustrate a stratified landscape shaped by administrative affiliation, historical timing, and institutional type. These factors jointly determine resource access, curricular scope, and innovation capacity, forming structurally embedded constraints and opportunities that continue to influence curriculum development in contemporary Chinese dance education.

Educational Objectives and Institutional Missions

Program objectives reflect the institutional mission and its alignment with national educational policy, market expectations, and cultural mandates. As illustrated in Table 4.2, the four selected institutions present distinct patterns in the articulation of goals, frequency of revision, and implementation orientation.

Table 4.2

Coding results of the goals and directions of dance performance major for the four selected universities

Context of Dance Performance Major (CIPP) model	II. Goals and Directions of Dance performance Major
Beijing Dance Academy (BDA)	a7. Developing top dance artists. a8. Technical skills with excellence in Chinese dance performance. a9. Emotionally rich stage dance performance skills. a10. Dedicated to the inheritance and development of Chinese dance art and the promotion of the excellent traditional Chinese culture. a11. The main role ability of the dance drama. a12. Emphasizes the international communication capability. a13. Fusion education of ideological character and professional ethics. a14. To revise the training objectives and graduation specifications every four years.
Shaaxi Normal University (SNU)	b7. To familiarize and master the performance styles of different dance genres. b8. Having adequate dance technical skills and stage performance ability. b9. To improve cultural literacy and comprehensive artistic qualities. b10. Having a profound knowledge of traditional Chinese culture. b11. Have solid knowledge of basic dance theory. b12. Fusion education of ideological character and professional ethics. b13. To revise the training objectives and graduation specifications every four years.
Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB)	c5. Rooted in the regional culture of Hebei and oriented to the art industry in the economic zones of Hebei, Beijing and Tianjin. c6. To have solid and systematic professional knowledge of dance, music literacy and technical skills in dance performance. c7. To improve cultural literacy and comprehensive artistic qualities c8. Fusion education of ideological character and professional ethics. c9. To revise the training objectives and graduation specifications every two years.
Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC)	d4. For the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei cultural and tourism performing arts industry. d5. To acquire practical knowledge and technical skills in stage performance of multiple dance genres. d6. Integration of ideological and moral development with dance skills. d7. Strong employ ability and comprehensive quality for sustainable development. d8. A sense of innovation and spirit of the craftsman. d9. To improve cultural and humanistic literacy. d10. Adapt to the new demand for new job competencies in the cultural tourism and performing arts industry. d11. The training objectives and graduation specifications are revised annually.

The comparison reveals three key patterns. First, BDA's curriculum is rooted in an 'excellence-and-cultu' logic, emphasizing artistic mastery as a form of national cultural capital. This reflects its historical role as a normative setter in Chinese dance education and its engagement in soft power diplomacy through international exchange. Second, HVAC

exemplifies a 'market-adaptive' logic, continuously revising its curriculum goals to match local industry trends, cultural tourism needs, and graduate employment data. This high responsiveness supports agile adaptation but may constrain long-term cultural depth. Third, SNU and HUEB demonstrate a 'hybrid logic' that blends educational, regional, and labor market rationales. However, this integration is often fragmented, as these institutions operate under broader university structures where dance performance is subordinated to music or general arts faculties. Such settings lead to tensions between innovation and policy compliance, limiting the consistency of curricular goals across program levels. While each model reflects legitimate institutional imperatives, their divergence highlights systemic stratification in goal-setting mechanisms and evaluative criteria. Institutions like BDA operate within a cultural-elite framework, setting aspirational goals with national visibility. HVAC, meanwhile, prioritizes functionality and stakeholder alignment. SNU and HUEB seek synthesis but face structural tensions in delivering coherence.

These comparisons demonstrate that curriculum goals are not merely administrative statements but reflect deeper institutional typologies and governance models. Their revision cycles, conceptual foci, and strategic orientations reveal how policy, tradition, and market interact in shaping educational missions in Chinese dance higher education.

Signature Features and Disciplinary Positioning

Distinctive curricular features reflect each institution's strategy for positioning itself within the broader dance education ecosystem. As detailed in Table 4.3, institutional identities are manifest through distinctive educational approaches and course configurations.

Table 4.3

Selective coding results of the distinctive features of the dance performance major for the four selected universities.

Context of Dance Performance Major	III. Distinctive Features of the Dance performance Major
Beijing Dance Academy (BDA)	a15. The educational concept of "one with diverse" of Chinese Classical Dance Performance major. a16. Fusion of Beijing opera dance, Dunhuang dance and Chinese Tang Dynasty dance
Shaaxi Normal University (SNU)	b14. Combining local folk rice-planting art and ancient Silk Road culture, reflecting the characteristics of the region in which it is located. b15. Immersive education and the application of digital curriculum. b16. Incorporating the development of teaching skills for teachers of aesthetic education.
Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB)	c10. Incorporating Hebei folk dance characteristics. c11. Implement a dual-degree system to promote employment. c12. Establish student research clubs to expand second area of specialization.
Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC)	d10. A four-in-one teaching model that includes training-performance-competition and choreography. d11. Highlighting the regional style of Hebei folk dance. d12 Forms a cluster of dance performance major.

BDA employs the educational philosophy of 'unity in diversity' (a15) to structure its specialized curriculum centered on classical Chinese dance. Notably, integrated modules such

as opera dance, Chinese Tang Dynasty dance and Dunhuang dance constitute approximately 81% of its specialized courses, effectively forming a robust cultural heritage pathway. In contrast, HVAC implements a distinctly practical "four-in-one" instructional model (d10), with regional Hebei folk dance courses accounting for 67% of the curriculum. This strategy supports seamless integration with local cultural and tourism industries through a 'specialized clustering' approach. SNU, leveraging the rich Han and Tang cultural heritage of Xi'an, combines traditional Shaanxi 'Yangge Art' (b14) with digital curriculum initiatives (b15), notably integrating virtual reality technologies into 45% of its specialized courses. Meanwhile, HUEB pursued an interdisciplinary 'Dance and Business' dual-degree model (c11), ultimately discontinued due to employment rates being 12% lower compared to single-degree programs. Nevertheless, its continued commitment to aligning curriculum with the regional economic context underscores the complex challenges comprehensive universities face in achieving sustained interdisciplinary integration. Faculty from HUEB candidly acknowledged, 'Ultimately, distinctive courses have become mere decorative electives' (Interview, December 16, 2024), highlighting critical structural limitations in curricular innovation.

In short, curricular distinctiveness across these institutions is deeply shaped by historical context, administrative backing, and strategic educational vision. Institutions like BDA and HVAC, benefiting from clear governance alignment, achieve higher curricular coherence and market responsiveness. Conversely, comprehensive institutions like SNU and HUEB struggle to reconcile innovation with broader educational mandates. This comparative perspective highlights critical factors necessary for sustained curricular innovation and strategic coherence in Chinese higher dance education.

Curriculum Architecture and Credit Distribution

The curriculum system is the core of a university's discipline or major. Through the design of courses, selection of content, and innovation in teaching methods, universities can showcase their unique educational philosophy and academic direction. Curriculum design theory posits that a curriculum system serves as a fundamental pillar in the development of an academic discipline. It synthesizes the theoretical framework, core content, and essential skills required by the field. The way a curriculum is structured profoundly influences students' knowledge acquisition, skill development, and readiness for professional practice, but also drives the progression of the discipline itself, fostering both academic rigor and practical relevance.

Based on a collation of the syllabi of the four universities, the curriculum structures across the four institutions encompass four primary components: liberal studies, specialized courses, practical courses, and quality development courses. However, the proportional emphasis and academic depth vary significantly. For instance, some programs prioritize specialized courses to cultivate technical expertise, while others allocate more resources to general education to promote broader cultural and intellectual development.

Figure 4.1 below illustrates the proportion of four major curriculum components—General Education, Specialized Courses, Practical Courses, and Quality Development—within the total credit structure of the dance performance programs at BDA, SNU, HUEB, and HVAC. The data reveal divergent structural emphases: BDA prioritizes specialized training, SNU and HUEB invest more heavily in general education, while HVAC allocates the highest proportion of

credits to practical courses, aligning with its vocational mandate. These structural differences reflect distinct institutional identities and educational missions.

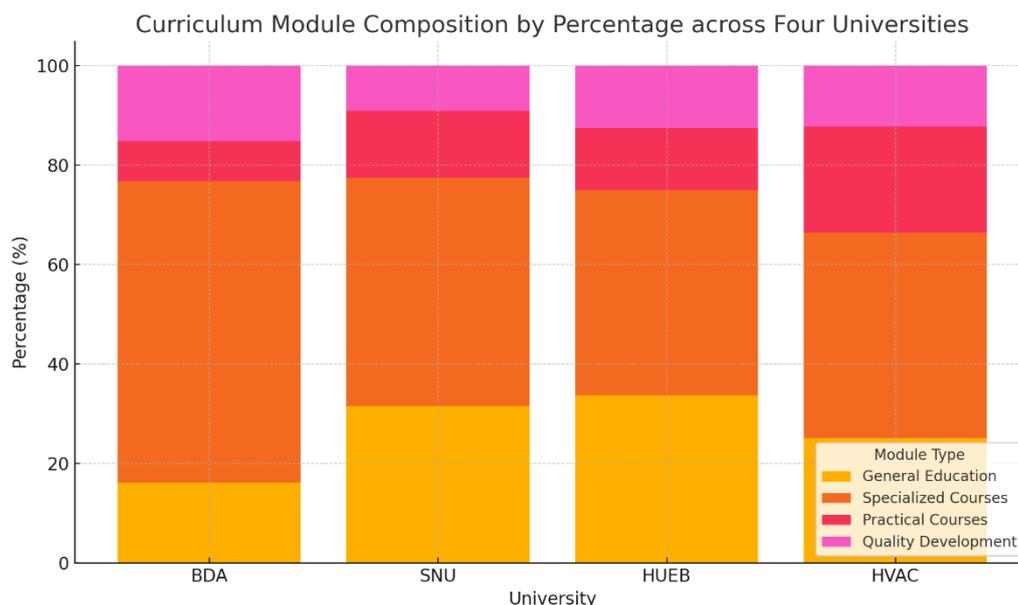


Figure 4.1 Curriculum Module Composition By Percentage Across Four Universities.

Table 4.4 below shows the statistics of the credits and hours included in the program structure of the Dance Performance program at the four universities, and a comparative analysis will be conducted thereafter based on these results.

Table 4.4

Course structure and credit hour statistics for dance performance major

Curriculum Structure	BDA	SNU	HUEB	HVAC
	Number of credits/Credit hours			
Liberal Studies Courses	32/576	59/1152	54/972	39/702
Specialized Courses	120/2160	86/1386	66/1188	64/1152
Practical Courses	16/288	25/450	20/360	33/594
Quality Development Courses	30/540	17/306	20/360	19/198
Total:	198/3564	187/3366	160/2880	155/2646

Notes: Each 1 credit is 18 credit hours. Each credit hour is 45 minutes.

Total Credits and Hours: BDA leads in overall academic volume, offering 198 credits over 3564 hours, emphasizing intensive training. SNU follows with 187 credits/3366 hours, while HUEB and HVAC provide 160/2880 and 155/2646, respectively. Notably, HVAC's structure, although shorter in duration (three years), achieves a comparable intensity to four-year programs, underscoring its focus on technical skill development.

Liberal Studies Courses: SNU (59 credits/1152 hours) and HUEB (54/972) dedicate more than 30% of total credits to general education, reflecting their identity as comprehensive institutions aiming for interdisciplinary development. In contrast, BDA limits liberal studies to 32 credits (576 hours), focusing more heavily on professional artistry, while HVAC offers 39 credits (702 hours), constrained by the shorter program.

Specialized Courses: BDA allocates the most extensive resources (120 credits/2160 hours), over 60% of its curriculum, reflecting its elite training model. HVAC follows closely (64/1152), illustrating its commitment to employment-readiness. SNU (86/1386) and HUEB (66/1188) reflect a more balanced model, yet HUEB shows the lowest investment in specialization, possibly due to institutional limitations in faculty and facilities.

Practical Courses: HVAC allocates the highest proportion to practical training (33 credits/594 hours), aligning with its vocational objectives. SNU follows with 25/450, reflecting moderate emphasis. BDA (16/288) and HUEB (20/360) invest less in explicit practical modules, potentially integrating practice within specialized courses instead.

Quality Development Courses: BDA (30/540) and HUEB (20/360) support broad student development, including entrepreneurship and innovation. HVAC, though vocational, maintains 19 credits (198 hours) in this area. SNU (17/306) reflects a slightly reduced emphasis on holistic development.

The structural data reveal a clear stratification in curriculum architecture that closely aligns with each institution's educational mission and strategic orientation. BDA exemplifies the conservatory model with intensive specialization and rigorous technical training, tailored to produce elite performers and uphold national cultural prestige. HVAC follows a compressed yet practical structure rooted in vocational education principles, emphasizing skill acquisition and industry alignment within a three-year framework. SNU reflects its teacher-education heritage by integrating professional dance training with broad liberal studies, aiming to foster educators with cultural depth and interdisciplinary knowledge. Meanwhile, HUEB presents the least intensive program in both total credits and specialization, constrained by limited institutional support, which may hinder its effectiveness in cultivating competitive dance professionals.

These differentiated structural profiles substantiate Tyler's (1949) assertion that curriculum embodies institutional values, while also illustrating the varied strategic responses of Chinese higher education institutions to policy mandates, resource environments, and labor market demands. Whether these structural choices effectively support deeper disciplinary development within higher dance education remains a question to be clearly verified through further comparative analysis of specific course content.

Curriculum Content and Pedagogical Priorities

While Section 4.4 mapped the structural composition and credit allocations of the dance performance programs across the four universities, it is essential to recognize that curriculum architecture not only reflects institutional priorities but also directly conditions the scope and depth of course content. The distribution of credit hours—particularly the relative emphasis placed on general education, specialized modules, and practical training—establishes the pedagogical bandwidth within which curricular content can be designed, delivered, and evaluated. For instance, institutions such as BDA, which allocate over 60% of total credits to specialized coursework, are structurally positioned to develop in-depth, genre-specific modules with greater artistic rigor.

Conversely, institutions like SNU and HUEB, which place higher emphasis on general education, often face limitations in curricular depth and specialization due to time and resource constraints. HVAC, with its compressed three-year program and elevated share of practical courses, focuses its content on industry-oriented skills development. This section builds on the architectural analysis by examining how these structural logics manifest in the actual content and pedagogical focus of liberal studies and specialized dance courses, thus revealing the interdependence between curricular form and function.

Result And Analysis

This study produced a set of substantive and analytical findings on the comparative structure, content, and institutional logics of dance performance curricula across four representative types of Chinese higher education institutions: Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), Shaanxi Normal University (SNU), Hebei University of Economics and Business (HUEB), and Hebei Vocational Art College (HVAC). Drawing on the CIPP evaluation model and the Four-Component Instructional Design (4C/ID) framework, the analysis was organized around five core dimensions, revealing five key results:

The historical trajectory of each institution shapes its curricular autonomy and innovation capacity. BDA's early establishment and affiliation with the Ministry of Culture allowed it to lead national standardization efforts. In contrast, HVAC retained a vocational orientation with regional cultural training, while SNU and HUEB faced delayed programmatic independence and structural limitations within larger university frameworks. These timelines influence their curriculum development cycles, responsiveness to change, and access to resources.

Each institution articulates its curriculum goals in alignment with distinct institutional logics. BDA emphasizes cultural excellence and national representation; HVAC pursues market adaptability and employability; SNU and HUEB combine pedagogical and regional goals with varying degrees of coherence. Revision cycles vary—HVAC annually, BDA and SNU every four years, and HUEB every two years—reflecting their strategic orientation and feedback mechanisms.

The curriculum is composed of four major modules: general education, specialized courses, practical training, and quality development. BDA allocates over 60% to specialization, embodying the conservatory model. HVAC maximizes practical training within a shorter three-year program. SNU and HUEB prioritize general education, highlighting their identity as comprehensive institutions. However, HUEB's overall credit and hour load are the lowest, potentially impacting student preparedness.

General education content is highly standardized across institutions due to national policy mandates, resulting in limited integration with dance-specific learning outcomes. Conversely, specialized courses display significant divergence. BDA includes heritage-rich courses like Han and Tang Dynasty Dance, while HVAC integrates folk dance and choreography aligned with industry needs. SNU emphasizes regional culture and digital integration. HUEB experimented with a "Dance + Business" model that was later discontinued due to poor outcomes.

While all institutions attempt to adapt to evolving cultural and market contexts, only BDA and HVAC maintain curricular coherence through strong governance alignment. SNU and HUEB

struggle with fragmented curricula due to disciplinary subordination and resource constraints. Interview data reveal a gap between institutional rhetoric and on-the-ground curricular integration, especially in interdisciplinary or innovative courses.

Discussion

Building upon the above findings, this study proposes a structured interdisciplinary curriculum framework for dance education. Drawing on the conception of curriculum as a dynamic and continuously evolving construct, the framework is grounded in the principles of shared disciplinary foundations, proximity across technical domains, and the integration of teaching resources. It adopts a comprehensive structure that spirally integrates three progressive curriculum levels, five interdisciplinary resource platforms, and dual developmental goals. The framework aims to connect dance arts, education, and academic resources across both Chinese and global contexts.

The three-tiered curriculum structure establishes a progressive learning model that scaffolds students' development from foundational knowledge to advanced interdisciplinary application. At the foundational level, the curriculum integrates general education with basic dance technique, theoretical courses in dance history, aesthetics, and cultural studies. This phase cultivates critical thinking, cultural literacy, and bodily awareness as a basis for higher-level artistic expression. The core professional level emphasizes intensive training in specialized dance genres, alongside creative development and interdisciplinary exposure. Courses in theater, music, and stagecraft are introduced to expand artistic competencies and performance versatility. Finally, the interdisciplinary innovation level engages students in project-based learning, collaborative creation, and industry-driven practice. Through real-world engagements and cross-sector integration, students apply their disciplinary expertise to contemporary performance environments, fostering reflective practice, knowledge transfer, and adaptive innovation.

To support this progression, the framework is anchored by five interdisciplinary resource platforms, each designed to extend curricular impact beyond the classroom and foster synergies between academic, professional, and cultural domains. (1) The Dance Digital Innovation and Creative Practice Platform equips students with digital tools and emerging technologies—such as motion capture, virtual reality, and digital scenography—to facilitate experimentation and new media integration in choreography. (2) The Global Dance Academic Alliance Platform promotes international cooperation, joint teaching initiatives, and curricular benchmarking to ensure global compatibility and exposure. (3) The Cross-Cultural Dance Management and Arts Collaboration Platform connects students with training in cultural policy, arts administration, and festival production, preparing them for leadership roles in the cultural sector. (4) The Dance Career Development and Innovation Practice Platform provides entrepreneurial education, industry internships, and personalized career services to bridge the gap between academic preparation and professional employment. (5) Lastly, the Chinese Dance Heritage and Global Communication Platform situates traditional dance forms within contemporary educational frameworks, ensuring cultural continuity while enhancing their global transmission through bilingual resources and international performance exchange.

Conclusions

This study offers a theoretically grounded and empirically informed framework for understanding and advancing dance performance curricula in Chinese higher education. By employing a dual-level analytical approach—integrating the CIPP evaluation model at the macro level and the 4C/ID instructional design model at the micro level—the research critically examined the contextual foundations, curriculum structures, and pedagogical logic of four distinct institutions. The findings reveal systemic disparities in institutional missions, curricular coherence, and instructional alignment, underscoring the need for a more structured, interdisciplinary, and forward-looking curriculum model in dance education.

This research makes theoretical and contextual contribution. It constitutes the first systematic attempt within Chinese higher dance education to construct a three-dimensional comparative model that integrates institutional logic (context), curriculum architecture (structure), and pedagogical practice (content). By combining the macro-level CIPP model with the micro-level 4C/ID instructional framework, the study bridges evaluative and instructional theories, contributing to an integrated analytic paradigm for comparative curriculum research. Moreover, the proposed ‘three-tiered curriculum and five-platform integration model’ advances the discourse on curriculum differentiation by demonstrating how institutional types shape not only educational goals but also pedagogical depth and course granularity. In doing so, the study expands the methodological repertoire of arts education scholarship, offering quantifiable and replicable indicators of curricular variation across institutional categories—an area largely neglected in prior research. The study also provides actionable insights for policymakers, university leaders, and curriculum designers seeking to reform and differentiate dance education in line with national strategies and regional demands. The proposed framework can serve as a diagnostic and developmental tool for evaluating existing programs and guiding future reforms. For professional arts universities, it supports the deepening of cultural heritage through intensified specialization; for vocational institutions, it validates practice-based learning tied to labor market outcomes; and for comprehensive universities, it suggests strategies for resolving structural tensions through interdisciplinary integration. The five-platform resource system offers a scalable blueprint for promoting digital innovation, global engagement, and cross-sector collaboration within dance curricula, enhancing both student employability and institutional adaptability in a fast-evolving educational and cultural landscape.

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study's institutional scope was confined to four universities in northern and western China. Second, the data were primarily drawn from educator interviews; incorporating perspectives from students, alumni, and industry stakeholders would enrich the understanding of curriculum relevance and responsiveness. Third, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, offering a snapshot rather than a dynamic view of curricular evolution. As a result, it lacks longitudinal tracking of student learning outcomes and graduate employment trajectories. Addressing these limitations, future studies should adopt broader geographic sampling, stakeholder-inclusive methodologies, and long-term tracking of curricular adaptation. These directions will be essential in refining the proposed framework, ensuring its applicability in diverse educational contexts, and sustaining its relevance amid the evolving landscape of dance performance and arts education in China and beyond.

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