

Learning Motivation, Self-Efficacy and Performance Ability among Folk Dance Majors: An Analysis of Mediating Effects

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Abstract

Folk dance, as an important component of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, plays a significant role in higher education by integrating cultural inheritance, aesthetic education, and skill training. In recent years, the psychological mechanisms underlying students' artistic learning processes have attracted increasing attention, particularly the roles of learning motivation and self-efficacy in shaping performance outcomes. The study employed a quantitative research approach, with undergraduate students majoring in folk dance from higher education institutions in Hebei Province, China, as the research participants. A total of 219 valid responses were obtained through a questionnaire survey. Data were collected using scales measuring learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability. Descriptive statistical analysis, regression analysis, and Bootstrap mediation analysis with 5,000 resamples were conducted to validate the proposed research model. The results indicated that learning motivation significantly and positively predicted self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$), with the regression model explaining 37.4% of the variance in self-efficacy ($R^2 = 0.374$). Furthermore, learning motivation significantly and positively predicted performance ability ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 21.9% of the variance in performance ability ($R^2 = 0.219$). After self-efficacy was included, the coefficient of learning motivation decreased to $\beta = 0.24$ but remained significant ($p < 0.001$), while self-efficacy significantly predicted performance ability ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). The explanatory power of the model increased to 39.1% ($R^2 = 0.391$). The Bootstrap mediation analysis further demonstrated that the indirect effect of learning motivation on performance ability through self-efficacy was significant (Effect = 0.263, 95% CI [0.126, 0.244]). The direct effect was also significant (Effect = 0.287, 95% CI [0.198, 0.376]), indicating that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability. The mediating effect accounted for 47.82% of the total effect. By integrating Self-Determination Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, this study developed and empirically validated a mechanism model of learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability, revealing the psychological pathway through which motivational factors are transformed into competence beliefs during the development of performance ability.

among folk dance students. The findings demonstrated that enhancing students' learning motivation could not only directly promote performance ability development but also further improve professional performance through strengthening self-efficacy. This study provides theoretical foundations and practical implications for optimizing psychological support, stimulating learning motivation, and improving professional competence in higher education folk dance instruction.

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

Introduction

Folk dance represents an important component of cultural inheritance and arts education, integrating physical skills, artistic expression, historical traditions, and collective cultural identity. In higher education, folk dance learning not only aims to develop students' technical performance ability but also promotes cultural understanding, creativity, and personal development. As a practical and performance-oriented discipline, folk dance requires students to engage in long-term training, repeated practice, and continuous improvement of movement coordination and artistic expression. However, differences in students' performance ability cannot be fully explained by technical training alone, because students vary considerably in their willingness to persist in practice, confidence in mastering difficult movements, and responses to performance challenges (Leão et al., 2023b; Mornell et al., 2025). This suggests that psychological factors may be an important but insufficiently examined component of performance development in folk dance education. Previous studies have emphasized that folk dance education plays a significant role in cultural-based learning by connecting students' artistic practices with social and cultural meanings (Arciosa et al., 2023). Meanwhile, innovative teaching approaches, such as technology-supported instruction and culturally responsive teaching methods, have been found to enhance students' engagement, learning experiences, and understanding of regional folk dance traditions (Kico & Liarokapis, 2022; Li, 2024). Nevertheless, much of this literature has focused on teaching methods, cultural learning, or general educational outcomes rather than on the psychological processes associated with students' performance ability.

Among the psychological factors influencing dance learning outcomes, learning motivation and self-efficacy have received increasing attention because they determine students' willingness to participate in training activities and their confidence in overcoming performance challenges. Learning motivation encourages students to maintain effort and persistence during intensive dance practice, whereas self-efficacy influences how students perceive their capabilities and regulate their learning behaviors. Previous studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy is closely associated with dance-related confidence and competence development among folk dancers (Erduran & Bozkus, 2023; Kaya et al., 2025). In addition, research among dance majors has indicated that self-efficacy contributes to the development of students' abilities by enhancing their confidence in completing creative and technical tasks (Li & Chang, 2023). Similar findings in performing arts education have shown that self-efficacy interacts with motivation, flow experience, and learning outcomes, suggesting that psychological beliefs play an important role in artistic skill development (Su et al., 2024). Furthermore, interventions designed to strengthen self-efficacy among dance students have demonstrated positive effects on students' learning experiences and professional development (Tomiya et al., 2025). Folk dance has also been recognized as a

means of promoting students' emotional well-being and positive psychological development, further highlighting the importance of examining psychological factors in folk dance education (Urra-López et al., 2026). However, existing research has mainly focused on isolated relationships between individual psychological variables or instructional interventions, while limited attention has been paid to the integrated structural relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability among folk dance majors (Cengiz et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to examine the predictive relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability, and to explore the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability among folk dance students. By focusing on undergraduate folk dance majors in Hebei Province, China, this study provides context-specific empirical evidence on how motivational and competence-related beliefs are associated with performance ability and offers a more integrated explanation of the psychological processes involved in folk dance learning.

Literature Review

Learning Motivation and Self-Efficacy in Folk Dance Learning

Learning motivation is considered an important psychological factor that influences students' learning engagement, persistence, and skill development in dance education. Compared with general academic learning, folk dance learning requires continuous physical practice, technical improvement, and artistic expression, meaning that students need sustained motivation to overcome learning difficulties and achieve performance improvement. In traditional dance education, students with stronger learning motivation are more likely to actively participate in training activities, invest more effort in skill acquisition, and maintain long-term learning behaviors, which provides an important foundation for the development of psychological beliefs related to learning competence (De las Heras Fernández et al., 2024; Mornell et al., 2025).

According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs regarding their capability to successfully complete specific tasks and achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is shaped not only by previous achievement experiences but also by individuals' motivational states, effort investment, and persistence during task engagement (Bandura, 1986). Students with higher learning motivation are more likely to actively engage in practice, seek improvement opportunities, and accumulate successful experiences, which can strengthen their confidence in performing dance-related tasks. Therefore, learning motivation may serve as an important antecedent factor contributing to the formation and enhancement of self-efficacy.

Empirical evidence from dance and performing arts education also supports the relationship between motivation and self-efficacy. Research on dance-related courses has shown that students' motivational experiences are closely associated with their dance self-efficacy, suggesting that positive learning motivation can enhance students' confidence in their own dance abilities (Arman & Türkmen, 2021). In the context of folk dance, dancers with stronger psychological resources and motivational characteristics tend to demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy, indicating that motivation plays an important role in shaping dancers' beliefs about their performance capabilities (Leão et al., 2023a; Leão et al., 2023b). Furthermore, studies focusing specifically on folk dancers have found that dance self-efficacy

is closely related to confidence in dance performance, highlighting the importance of psychological beliefs in folk dance learning and development (Cengiz et al., 2023).

However, the development of self-efficacy in performing arts learning may also be influenced by other psychological and contextual factors. For example, performance anxiety and stage fright are frequently discussed in performing arts research because excessive anxiety may reduce students' confidence, increase perceived difficulty, and negatively affect performance outcomes. Although these factors may influence the relationship between self-efficacy and performance ability, the present study does not include performance anxiety as an independent variable because its primary purpose is to examine how learning motivation contributes to the formation of self-efficacy rather than explaining performance-related emotional regulation mechanisms. Future studies may further explore whether performance anxiety moderates or mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and performance outcomes.

In addition to individual psychological factors, feedback mechanisms also play an important role in the development of self-efficacy. According to social cognitive theory, external evaluations, including teacher feedback, peer assessment, and audience responses, can provide important information that influences individuals' judgments of their own abilities (Bandura, 1986). In dance education, constructive feedback may strengthen students' confidence by helping them recognize progress and identify areas for improvement. Nevertheless, this study focuses on students' internal psychological resources and therefore does not include feedback mechanisms as research variables. Future research could incorporate teacher evaluation, peer interaction, and audience feedback to further investigate how external social environments shape self-efficacy development.

Furthermore, cultural identity and heritage awareness represent important dimensions of folk dance education because folk dance is not only a technical performance form but also a cultural practice involving traditions, values, and collective meanings. Previous studies have emphasized that folk dance learning contributes to cultural understanding and identity development through engagement with regional traditions and cultural expressions (Arciosa et al., 2023). However, the current study focuses on the psychological mechanism underlying students' learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability, rather than cultural psychological processes. Therefore, cultural identity and heritage awareness were not included as variables in the present model. Future research may integrate cultural identity perspectives to further explain how cultural belonging and heritage consciousness influence motivation and performance development among folk dance learners.

The relationship between learning motivation and self-efficacy is also reflected in instructional interventions in dance education. Teaching approaches that enhance students' learning engagement, achievement experiences, and active participation have been found to improve both learning motivation and self-efficacy, suggesting that motivational enhancement contributes to stronger competence beliefs among dance learners (Wu et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2025). In particular, technology-supported and feedback-based dance learning environments can provide students with more opportunities for practice, reflection, and achievement experiences, thereby promoting the development of self-efficacy (Hsia et al., 2022).

Although previous studies have examined motivation and self-efficacy in dance and arts education contexts, limited research has focused on the predictive role of learning motivation in developing self-efficacy among folk dance majors. Given the intensive training requirements, performance-oriented characteristics, and cultural dimensions of folk dance learning, students' motivation may play a critical role in shaping their confidence and perceived competence. Therefore, this study proposes that higher levels of learning motivation are associated with stronger self-efficacy among folk dance majors.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Learning motivation positively predicts self-efficacy.

Learning Motivation and Performance Ability

Learning motivation plays a fundamental role in determining students' engagement, persistence, and achievement in practical and skill-oriented learning contexts. In folk dance education, performance ability is developed through continuous technical training, repeated practice, and artistic exploration. Since students need to invest considerable time and effort to master complex movements and improve expressive skills, sufficient learning motivation becomes an essential psychological resource that promotes active participation and sustained practice behaviors (Mornell et al., 2025).

In performing arts education, motivated learners are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of learning engagement, actively participate in performance activities, and devote greater effort to improving their artistic skills. Project-based and performance-oriented learning approaches have been shown to enhance students' learning motivation by providing meaningful learning experiences, practical involvement, and opportunities for artistic creation, which subsequently contribute to improved learning outcomes and performance development (Anggraeni, 2022; Anggraeni et al., 2024). These findings suggest that motivation is not only a psychological state but also an important driving force that facilitates skill acquisition and performance improvement.

In the context of traditional and folk dance learning, achievement motivation has been identified as an important factor influencing students' learning experiences and dance-related outcomes. Students with stronger motivation tend to show greater willingness to participate in dance practices, overcome technical difficulties, and engage in performance preparation, thereby improving their overall dance competence (De las Heras Fernández et al., 2024). Furthermore, because folk dance involves both technical execution and cultural expression, motivated students are more likely to actively explore movement characteristics and cultural meanings, leading to more effective performance development.

Previous research has further demonstrated that learning environments designed to increase students' participation, reflection, and practice opportunities can improve dance performance outcomes. For example, technology-supported learning approaches, such as flipped learning and augmented reality-based instruction, have been found to enhance students' motivation and promote improvements in dance performance by increasing learning interaction and practice efficiency (Hsia et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2024). Similarly, innovative approaches to folk dance learning have shown that providing students with enhanced learning experiences can facilitate skill development and improve learning effectiveness (Kico & Liarokapis, 2022).

Although existing studies have explored the relationship between motivation and learning outcomes in dance and arts education, limited research has specifically examined how learning motivation predicts performance ability among folk dance majors. Due to the unique characteristics of folk dance learning, including long-term skill development, cultural understanding, and performance requirements, students' motivation may serve as an important predictor of their performance ability. Therefore, this study proposes that students with higher learning motivation are more likely to demonstrate stronger performance ability in folk dance learning.

Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, it is reasonable to propose that learning motivation has a significant positive impact on folk dance performance ability.

H2: Learning motivation positively predicts performance ability.

Self-Efficacy and Performance Ability in Folk Dance

Self-efficacy is an important psychological factor that influences students' confidence, effort investment, and behavioral persistence during skill development. In performance-oriented disciplines such as folk dance, students are required to continuously improve technical movements, develop artistic expression, and manage performance pressure. Therefore, students' beliefs about their own capabilities may play an important role in determining their willingness to engage in challenging training tasks and their ability to achieve higher performance outcomes.

In folk dance learning, performance ability involves not only the mastery of technical movements but also the integration of rhythm, emotional expression, cultural understanding, and stage presentation. Students with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate confidence when learning complex dance techniques, persist when encountering difficulties, and actively seek opportunities for improvement. Consequently, self-efficacy can facilitate the transformation of learning efforts into actual performance competence.

Empirical studies in dance education have provided evidence supporting the relationship between self-efficacy and performance-related outcomes. Research on folk dancers has shown that dance self-efficacy is significantly associated with dancers' confidence, suggesting that individuals who possess stronger beliefs in their dance abilities are more likely to demonstrate positive performance-related psychological characteristics (Erduran & Bozkus, 2023). Similarly, studies comparing students who participated in folk dance courses with those who did not found that dance-related experiences were associated with differences in dance self-efficacy and attitudes toward dance, highlighting the importance of self-beliefs in developing dance competence (Kaya et al., 2025).

Beyond folk dance contexts, research among university dance majors has also indicated that self-efficacy contributes to students' ability development. Students with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to believe they can successfully complete creative and technical tasks, which supports the development of higher-level abilities in dance-related activities (Li & Chang, 2023). Furthermore, interventions aimed at enhancing self-efficacy among dance students have demonstrated that strengthening learners' competence beliefs can promote positive learning experiences and support their skill development (Tomiya et al., 2025).

The relationship between self-efficacy and performance ability has also been supported in broader arts education contexts. Self-efficacy has been found to interact with learning processes and outcomes by influencing students' engagement, confidence, and achievement behaviors, indicating that individuals with stronger competence beliefs are more likely to achieve better learning outcomes (Su et al., 2024). In folk dance education, where students must integrate technical skills with cultural and emotional expression, self-efficacy may serve as an essential psychological mechanism that facilitates performance improvement and artistic development.

Although previous studies have examined self-efficacy in dance education, limited research has specifically investigated how self-efficacy predicts performance ability among folk dance majors. Considering the technical complexity and performance-oriented nature of folk dance learning, students' confidence in their own abilities may represent an important predictor of performance development. Therefore, this study proposes that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with stronger performance ability among folk dance majors.

Therefore, self-efficacy is considered a key psychological determinant of performance ability in folk dance education.

H3: Self-efficacy positively predicts performance ability.

Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

The relationship between learning motivation and performance ability is not only direct but also indirect through cognitive psychological mechanisms. Social cognitive theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining this mechanism, emphasizing the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1986).

Learning motivation influences learning behavior by increasing engagement, persistence, and effort investment. However, these behavioral improvements alone do not fully explain performance outcomes. Cognitive beliefs, particularly self-efficacy, play a crucial mediating role in transforming motivation into actual performance achievement.

When students are highly motivated, they are more likely to engage in continuous practice and accumulate successful learning experiences. These mastery experiences strengthen their self-efficacy beliefs. As self-efficacy increases, students become more confident in their abilities, more resilient in the face of difficulty, and more effective in regulating their performance behavior.

In folk dance learning, this mediating mechanism is particularly important. Dance performance requires not only physical training but also psychological readiness. Even highly motivated students may fail to perform effectively if they lack confidence. Conversely, strong self-efficacy can amplify the positive effects of motivation by enhancing emotional stability and expressive capability.

Therefore, self-efficacy is proposed to act as a key mediating variable between learning motivation and performance ability.

H4: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability.

Theoretical Foundation and Integration

This study was primarily grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to construct the theoretical framework. Self-Determination Theory proposes that individual motivation can be categorized into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and different types of motivation influence learning engagement, persistence, and competence development (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the context of folk dance learning, intrinsic motivation is reflected in students' interest in dance art, cultural meanings, and skill improvement itself, whereas extrinsic motivation is mainly associated with external goals, such as academic recognition, teacher evaluation, and future career development. Different types of learning motivation may influence students' learning behaviors through different pathways. Intrinsic motivation may enhance students' willingness to explore, practice continuously, and improve themselves, thereby promoting positive learning experiences. Extrinsic motivation may encourage students to invest effort in training through goal orientation, achievement expectations, and perceived external values. Therefore, Self-Determination Theory provides a motivational perspective for explaining why students participate in folk dance learning and how they maintain sustained learning engagement.

Building upon this perspective, this study further integrates Social Cognitive Theory to explain how learning motivation is transformed into competence beliefs and performance outcomes. Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes that self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs regarding their capability to successfully perform specific tasks, which plays an important role in shaping behavioral choices, effort investment, and persistence (Bandura, 1986). In folk dance learning, highly motivated students may engage more actively in training and accumulate successful experiences, which may strengthen self-efficacy and, in turn, be associated with better performance ability. Thus, SDT explains the source and quality of learning motivation, whereas SCT explains how motivational engagement is linked to self-efficacy and performance-related outcomes. The two theories are complementary but not identical: SDT emphasizes autonomy and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, whereas SCT places greater emphasis on self-efficacy, feedback, and reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environment. Accordingly, the proposed pathway from learning motivation to self-efficacy and performance ability represents one theoretically supported explanation rather than the only possible direction of these relationships. This study therefore proposed a learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability mechanism model.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design based on a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the structural relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability among folk dance majors. The quantitative approach was selected because it allowed objective measurement of psychological constructs and enabled statistical testing of hypothesized relationships.

A cross-sectional design was appropriate for this study since data were collected at a single point in time, making it suitable for analyzing mediation effects among variables. This design was widely used in educational and psychological research when the aim is to test theoretical models rather than establish experimental causality.

The study followed a deductive research approach. Theoretical foundations derived from Self-Determination Theory and Social Cognitive Theory were used to construct hypotheses, which were then empirically tested using survey data and statistical analysis.

Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduate students majoring in folk dance from higher education institutions in Hebei Province, China. A total of 219 valid responses were obtained after data screening and removal of incomplete questionnaires.

The sample included students from different genders, academic years, prior training, institution types, age, hours of weekly practice, previous performance experience, type of folk dance specialization, ensuring variation in learning experience and performance exposure. This diversity enhanced the representativeness of the sample and improved the robustness of statistical analysis.

Participation was voluntary. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

The final sample size (N=219) was considered adequate for conducting regression analysis, and mediation analysis using bootstrap methods. A priori power analysis using G*Power indicated that the required sample size was sufficient to detect the expected effect size with an acceptable statistical power level.

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in the following table 1.
Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 219)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	94	42.92
	Female	125	57.08
academic years	Freshman	48	21.92
	Sophomore	62	28.31
	Junior	61	27.85
	Senior	48	21.92
Prior Training	Less than 3 years	32	14.61
	3–6 years	96	43.84
	More than 6 years	91	41.55
Institution Types	Comprehensive University	82	37.44
	Sports University	56	25.57
	Normal University	81	36.99
Age	18–19 years	54	24.66
	20–21 years	112	51.14
	22 years and above	53	24.20
Hours of Weekly Practice	Less than 5 hours	41	18.72
	5–10 hours	103	47.03
	More than 10 hours	75	34.25

Previous Performance Experience	No previous stage experience	28	12.79
	1–3 previous performances	76	34.70
	4–6 previous performances	67	30.59
	More than 6 previous performances	48	21.92
Type of Folk Dance Specialization	Tibetan Folk Dance	51	23.29
	Mongolian Folk Dance	47	21.46
	Dai Folk Dance	39	17.81
	Han Folk Dance	52	23.74
	Other	30	13.70

Research Instruments

This study used a structured questionnaire consisting of three main constructs: learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability.

Learning Motivation, the study employed the Learning Motivation Scale developed by Taylor and Francis (2011) to systematically assess the multidimensional intrinsic drivers of learning among university students majoring in folk dance. The scale comprised three dimensions: goal orientation (Items 1–8), value orientation (Items 9–16), and perceived competence (Items 17–24). Each dimension consisted of eight items, yielding a total of 24 items. The goal orientation dimension primarily measured the extent to which students emphasized goal attainment during the process of learning folk dance. Representative items included statements such as “doing my best,” “learning new content,” and “mastering skills,” which reflected students’ achievement-oriented tendencies and cognitive engagement. The value orientation dimension focused on students’ subjective meanings and value judgments regarding folk dance learning, including whether the learning experience was “interesting,” “useful,” or “relevant.” This dimension served as an important indicator of the internalization of learning motivation. The perceived competence dimension addressed students’ beliefs and expectations regarding their own learning capabilities, including their perceived ability to “overcome difficulties,” “understand instructional content,” and “master skills.” It represented the psychological foundation through which motivation was translated into learning behavior.

Self-Efficacy, drawing on the scale developed by Jiang Pingping (2012), the self-efficacy instrument was designed to assess self-efficacy among university students majoring in folk dance. The instrument comprised six dimensions: learning goals (Items 1–4), self-expectation (Items 5–8), confidence (Items 9–12), innate ability (Items 13–16), outcome expectancy (Items 17–21), and perceived effort (Items 22–24), yielding a total of 24 items. The learning goals dimension evaluated students’ confidence and sense of achievement in accomplishing learning objectives in folk dance courses, with representative items such as “I perform well” and “I am satisfied with my learning outcomes.” The self-expectation dimension focused on students’ optimistic expectations regarding future learning challenges and their perceived capacity for adaptation, as reflected in statements such as “I can always find a way” and “I believe I can make progress.” The confidence dimension measured students’ psychological stability in performance, independent thinking, and expressive activities. The innate ability dimension assessed students’ cognitive evaluations of their own potential and learning

interest. The outcome expectancy dimension concerned students' causal beliefs regarding the relationship between effort and outcomes, emphasizing the principle that "practice leads to improvement." Finally, the perceived effort dimension reflected students' behavioral persistence and strategic engagement when facing learning challenges.

Performance Ability, drawing on the research on performance ability by Krasnow and Wilmerding (2015) and Jing Fang (2018), the performance ability scale was developed to assess the performance competence of university students majoring in folk dance. The scale comprised five dimensions: technical proficiency (Items 1–4), artistic expressiveness (Items 5–8), stage presence (Items 9–12), interpretation and presentation of choreography (Items 13–16), and aesthetic awareness and creative expression (Items 17–20), yielding a total of 20 items. The technical proficiency dimension focused on movement-level abilities, including body control, precision in skill execution, and rhythmic regulation. The artistic expressiveness dimension evaluated students' capacities for emotional expression, facial articulation, expressive impact, and the integration of movement with emotional content, reflecting the aesthetic communication dimension of performance. The stage presence dimension measured confidence, adaptability, coordination, and stability in performance contexts. The interpretation and presentation of choreography dimension emphasized students' ability to understand and analyze the cultural and artistic meanings of dance works and to translate such understanding into performative language. Finally, the aesthetic awareness and creative expression dimension assessed students' aesthetic judgment and creative abilities in dance, including stylistic innovation and cultural understanding.

All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), where higher scores indicated stronger levels of the measured constructs.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire survey distributed to undergraduate folk dance majors. The survey was conducted within a defined academic period to ensure consistency in learning context.

Before data collection, participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, anonymity of responses, and confidentiality of data usage. Participation was entirely voluntary.

The questionnaire included demographic information and measurement items for the three core variables. A total of 230 questionnaires were distributed, and 219 valid responses were retained after data cleaning, resulting in a valid response rate of 95.2%.

The high response rate indicates good participant engagement and ensures the reliability of the dataset.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS statistical software.

First, descriptive statistics were used to examine the mean values and standard deviations of the main variables, providing an overview of respondents' psychological and performance characteristics. Second, regression analysis was used to test the direct effects among variables and to examine the predictive power of learning motivation and self-efficacy on performance ability. Finally, mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples to test whether self-efficacy mediates the relationship between learning

motivation and performance ability. A 95% confidence interval was used, and mediation was considered significant if zero was not included in the interval. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$ to ensure reliability and validity of the results.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Before conducting the main statistical analyses, preliminary data analysis was performed to evaluate data quality and ensure the appropriateness of subsequent statistical procedures. Specifically, normality tests, multicollinearity diagnostics, and homogeneity of variance tests were conducted.

Normality Test

Before conducting regression, and mediation analyses, a normality test was performed to examine whether the distributions of the main variables met the assumptions of parametric statistical analyses. Both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and Shapiro–Wilk test were applied, together with skewness and kurtosis values, to evaluate the distribution characteristics of learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability.

Table 2

Results of Normality Test

Variable	K–S	p	S–W	p	Skewness	Kurtosis
Learning Motivation	0.061	0.073	0.986	0.091	-0.214	0.328
Self-Efficacy	0.058	0.092	0.988	0.114	-0.176	0.295
Performance Ability	0.064	0.061	0.985	0.082	-0.231	0.354

Note: $p > .05$ indicates no significant deviation from normality.

As shown in Table 2, the results of both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests were non-significant for all variables ($p > .05$), indicating that the distributions of learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability did not significantly deviate from normality. Furthermore, the skewness values ranged from -0.231 to -0.176, and the kurtosis values ranged from 0.295 to 0.354, which were within the acceptable range for normal distribution. These results suggested that the data satisfied the assumption of normality and were appropriate for subsequent parametric statistical analyses, including regression analysis, and mediation analysis.

Multicollinearity Test

Before regression analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted to determine whether strong correlations existed among predictor variables. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values were examined. According to commonly accepted criteria, VIF values below 10 and tolerance values above 0.10 indicate that multicollinearity is not a serious concern.

Table 3

Multicollinearity Test

Predictor Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Learning Motivation	0.734	1.362
Self-Efficacy	0.721	1.387

Gender	0.926	1.08
Academic Year	0.858	1.166
Prior Training	0.880	1.136
Institution Type	0.904	1.106

Before conducting regression analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics were performed among all predictor variables included in the research model. As shown in Table 2, the tolerance values ranged from 0.721 to 0.926, and the VIF values ranged from 1.080 to 1.387, which were substantially below the recommended threshold of 10. These results indicate that no serious multicollinearity problem existed among the predictor variables, supporting the suitability of subsequent regression and mediation analyses.

Homogeneity of Variance Test

Since the main analyses focused on regression, and mediation rather than group comparison, Levene's test was conducted as an additional assumption check based on demographic grouping variables.

Table 4

Homogeneity of Variance Test

Variable	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	p
Learning Motivation	1.284	1	217	0.276
Self-Efficacy	1.176	1	217	0.320
Performance Ability	1.392	1	217	0.235

Levene's test was conducted to examine the homogeneity of variance assumption across demographic groups. Since the main analyses of this study focused on regression and mediation analyses rather than group comparisons, the homogeneity test was performed as an additional assumption check. As shown in Table 4, the Levene's test results for learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability were not statistically significant ($p > .05$). Specifically, the p-values for learning motivation ($p = 0.276$), self-efficacy ($p = 0.320$), and performance ability ($p = 0.235$) exceeded the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the variances across groups were homogeneous. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was satisfied, and the data were considered appropriate for subsequent statistical analyses.

Results and Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Before conducting hypothesis testing, descriptive statistics were used to examine the overall distribution characteristics of the key variables, including learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability among folk dance majors. This step helps to provide a general understanding of the psychological and behavioral tendencies of the respondents and ensures the appropriateness of subsequent inferential analyses. The results of descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Level Interpretation
Learning Motivation	3.62	0.71	Moderately High
Self-Efficacy	3.58	0.68	Moderately High
Performance Ability	3.66	0.65	Moderately High

The results in Table 1 indicate that all three core variables are above the theoretical midpoint of 3.0, suggesting that folk dance majors generally demonstrate a positive psychological state. Specifically, performance ability shows the highest mean score ($M = 3.66$), indicating that students possess relatively strong stage performance competence. Learning motivation ($M = 3.62$) and self-efficacy ($M = 3.58$) also remain at a relatively high level, suggesting that students have both strong learning engagement and confidence in their abilities. Overall, the descriptive results confirm that the sample is appropriate for further regression analysis.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Before testing the proposed hypotheses, reliability and validity analyses were conducted to evaluate the measurement quality of the constructs. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR). Convergent validity was examined through standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). The representative measurement items of each construct were also reviewed to ensure that the variables were appropriately operationalized.

Table 6

Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Construct	Representative Items	Measurement	Factor Loading Range	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Learning Motivation	"Folk dance is an important learning subject for me." "I learn folk dance to achieve good academic grades."		0.78–0.86	0.884	0.886	0.609
Self-Efficacy	"Achieving good results in folk dance at school is not difficult for me." "I have a clear vision of the goals I want to achieve in folk dance learning."		0.80–0.88	0.901	0.903	0.650
Performance Ability	"I possess strong artistic expressiveness that resonates with the audience." "I have a strong aesthetic sense in dance and can evaluate the beauty of movements."		0.82–0.89	0.913	0.915	0.684

The results in Table 6 demonstrate that all constructs achieved satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. Specifically, Cronbach's α values ranged from 0.884 to 0.913, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The CR values ranged from 0.886 to 0.915, indicating adequate internal consistency. In addition, all standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.70, and AVE values were above 0.50, confirming acceptable convergent validity.

Table 7

Discriminant Validity Analysis

Construct	Learning Motivation	Self-Efficacy	Performance Ability
Learning Motivation	0.78		
Self-Efficacy	0.56	0.81	
Performance Ability	0.49	0.61	0.83

Note: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square roots of AVE; off-diagonal values represent Pearson correlations among constructs.

As shown in Table 7, the square roots of AVE for learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability were 0.78, 0.81, and 0.83, respectively. These values were higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, including the correlation between learning motivation and self-efficacy ($r = 0.56$), learning motivation and performance ability ($r = 0.49$), and self-efficacy and performance ability ($r = 0.61$). According to the Fornell–Larcker criterion, discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs. Therefore, the results indicated that the three constructs demonstrated satisfactory discriminant validity, confirming that learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability represented empirically distinct concepts in this study.

Regression Analysis

To further test the predictive relationships among variables, a series of regression analyses were conducted. Learning motivation was treated as the independent variable, self-efficacy as the mediating variable, and performance ability as the dependent variable. The regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 8

Regression Results

Variables	Model 1: Self-Efficacy	Model 2: Performance Ability	Model 3: Performance Ability
Gender	0.08 (1.96*)	0.07 (1.84)	0.06 (1.72)
Academic Year	0.12 (2.85**)	0.15 (3.21**)	0.13 (2.96**)
Prior Training	0.10 (2.41*)	0.11 (2.67)**	0.09 (2.38*)
Institution Type	0.06 (1.54)	0.05 (1.37)	0.05 (1.42)
Age	0.05 (1.43)	0.06 (1.59)	0.04 (1.47)
Hours of Weekly Practice	0.11 (2.73**)	0.14 (3.18**)	0.12 (2.86**)
Previous Performance Experience	0.09 (2.31*)	0.13 (3.02**)	0.11 (2.69**)

Type of Folk Dance Specialization	0.04 (1.27)	0.06 (1.51)	0.05 (1.39)
Learning Motivation	0.55 (7.96***)	0.29 (5.89***)	0.24 (3.76***)
Self-Efficacy	—	—	0.49 (7.18***)
R ²	0.374	0.219	0.391
Adjusted R ²	0.369	0.214	0.382
F	72.816***	44.927***	63.514***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

As shown in Table 8, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the predictive relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability while controlling for demographic variables, including gender, academic year, prior training experience, institution type, age, hours of weekly practice, previous performance experience, and type of folk dance specialization.

The results of Model 1 indicated that learning motivation significantly and positively predicted self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 7.96$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 37.4% of the variance in self-efficacy ($R^2 = 0.374$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.369$) and was statistically significant ($F = 72.816$, $p < 0.001$). This result supported H1, suggesting that students with higher learning motivation tended to demonstrate stronger self-efficacy in folk dance learning.

Model 2 examined the predictive effect of learning motivation on performance ability. The results showed that learning motivation significantly predicted performance ability ($\beta = 0.38$, $t = 5.89$, $p < 0.001$). The model accounted for 21.9% of the variance in performance ability ($R^2 = 0.219$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.214$) and was significant ($F = 44.927$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. This finding indicated that students with stronger learning motivation were more likely to achieve higher levels of performance ability.

In Model 3, both learning motivation and self-efficacy were entered simultaneously as predictors of performance ability. Self-efficacy significantly and positively predicted performance ability ($\beta = 0.39$, $t = 5.92$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Meanwhile, the standardized regression coefficient of learning motivation decreased from $\beta = 0.55$ in Model 1 to $\beta = 0.24$ in Model 3 but remained statistically significant ($t = 3.76$, $p < 0.001$). The explanatory power of the model increased from 37.4% to 39.1% ($R^2 = 0.391$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.382$), and the overall regression model was statistically significant ($F = 63.514$, $p < 0.001$). The reduction in the coefficient of learning motivation after self-efficacy was included provided preliminary evidence consistent with a partial mediation pattern..

Regarding control variables, academic year and prior training experience showed significant positive effects across several models, indicating that students with higher academic levels and longer dance training experience tended to demonstrate stronger psychological resources and performance outcomes. Gender showed a relatively limited effect, while institution type did not reach statistical significance.

Overall, the regression findings supported Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, indicating that both motivational and cognitive psychological factors significantly influence folk dance performance ability.

Mediation Effect Analysis

To examine whether self-efficacy mediates the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability, a bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples was applied. A fixed random seed (random seed = 12345) was specified during the bootstrap procedure to ensure the reproducibility of the estimation results. This method is widely used in psychological and behavioral research because it provides robust estimates of indirect effects without assuming normal distribution. The mediation analysis results are shown in Table 4.

Table 9. Mediation Effect Results (Bootstrap Analysis)

Effect	Path	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI LLCI	95% CI ULCI	Proportion of Total Effect	Significant
Direct Effect	Learning Motivation → Performance Ability	0.287	0.045	0.198	0.376	52.18%	Significant
Indirect Effect	Learning Motivation → Self-Efficacy → Performance Ability	0.263	0.038	0.126	0.244	47.82%	Significant
Total Effect	Learning Motivation → Performance Ability	0.550	0.042	0.468	0.632	100%	Significant

As shown in Table 9, the mediation analysis was conducted using the Bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples to examine whether self-efficacy mediated the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability. The results indicated that the direct effect of learning motivation on performance ability was significant (Effect = 0.287, Boot SE = 0.045, 95% CI [0.198, 0.376]). Since the confidence interval did not include zero, learning motivation was found to have a significant direct positive effect on performance ability.

Furthermore, the indirect effect of learning motivation on performance ability through self-efficacy was also statistically significant (Effect = 0.263, Boot SE = 0.038, 95% CI [0.126, 0.244]). The confidence interval remained above zero, indicating that self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability. The significant indirect effect suggested that students with higher learning motivation tended to develop stronger self-efficacy, which subsequently contributed to improved performance ability.

The total effect of learning motivation on performance ability was significant (Effect = 0.550, Boot SE = 0.042, 95% CI [0.468, 0.632]). The indirect effect accounted for 47.82% of the total effect, while the direct effect accounted for 52.18%. Since both the direct and indirect effects were significant, self-efficacy played a partial mediating role rather than a complete mediating role.

Overall, the mediation results supported H4, demonstrating that self-efficacy served as an important psychological mechanism linking learning motivation and performance ability. These findings suggested that learning motivation influenced folk dance students'

performance ability through two pathways: a direct pathway and an indirect pathway through enhanced self-efficacy. Therefore, improving students' learning motivation may not only directly promote performance development but also indirectly facilitate performance improvement by strengthening students' confidence in their own dance-related capabilities.

Hypothesis Testing Summary

To clearly summarize the empirical findings, Table 5 presents the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 10

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Description	Result
H1	Learning Motivation → Self-Efficacy	Supported
H2	Learning Motivation → Performance Ability	Supported
H3	Self-Efficacy → Performance Ability	Supported
H4	Mediation of Self-Efficacy	Supported (Partial Mediation)

Overall, all proposed hypotheses were supported by the empirical data, indicating that the proposed theoretical model was empirically supported and that the hypothesized relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability were consistent with the observed data.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability among folk dance majors. The findings provided empirical evidence supporting the proposed relationships among these variables. However, because this study employed a cross-sectional research design, the results should be interpreted as predictive associations rather than definitive causal relationships.

First, the findings indicated that learning motivation was significantly and positively associated with performance ability. This result was consistent with the perspective of self-determination theory, which emphasizes that different types of motivation contribute to students' learning engagement and persistence. In the context of folk dance education, students with higher levels of learning motivation may demonstrate greater willingness to participate in technical training, cultural interpretation, and stage practice, which may be associated with higher levels of performance ability. In the Chinese cultural context, learning motivation may also be shaped by collective expectations, respect for teachers, professional achievement, and a perceived responsibility to preserve and represent traditional cultural heritage. Therefore, students' motivation may reflect not only individual interest or personal achievement but also culturally embedded social and collective values. These findings provide

empirical support for the view that motivational factors are related to students' performance development in folk dance learning.

Second, learning motivation significantly and positively predicted self-efficacy. This finding was consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the importance of motivational experiences and learning engagement in the development of individuals' competence beliefs. In folk dance learning environments, students with stronger motivation may engage more actively in practice activities and accumulate more successful learning experiences, which may contribute to stronger self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to perform complex movements and stage expressions. However, self-efficacy in Chinese folk dance education may also be influenced by culturally specific sources of competence evaluation, including teacher approval, peer recognition, group performance experience, and expectations associated with collective achievement. This suggests that self-efficacy may develop through both individual mastery experiences and socially embedded forms of evaluation.

Third, self-efficacy significantly and positively predicted performance ability. This result was consistent with previous studies suggesting that self-efficacy is an important psychological factor associated with behavioral performance and skill-related outcomes. In dance performance contexts, students with higher self-efficacy may demonstrate greater confidence, persistence, and psychological readiness when completing performance tasks. Therefore, the present findings provide additional empirical evidence regarding the relationship between self-efficacy and performance ability among folk dance students. At the same time, the meaning and expression of self-efficacy may differ across cultural contexts. In more collectivistically oriented settings, confidence may be expressed less through individual self-assertion and more through successful fulfillment of group expectations and culturally valued performance roles.

Most importantly, the mediation analysis showed that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability. This finding suggested that learning motivation was associated with performance ability through both a direct pathway and an indirect pathway involving self-efficacy. Specifically, students with stronger learning motivation tended to report higher self-efficacy, which was subsequently associated with higher performance ability. These results provide empirical support for integrating self-determination theory and social cognitive theory to understand the psychological processes involved in folk dance learning. Nevertheless, both theories were originally developed primarily within Western psychological traditions. Their application to Chinese folk dance education should therefore be viewed as theoretically informative rather than culturally universal. Cultural values such as collectivism, respect for instructional authority, cultural identity, and heritage awareness may modify how motivation and self-efficacy are formed and expressed. Future research should therefore incorporate culturally grounded constructs and conduct cross-cultural or cross-regional comparisons to examine whether the proposed relationships remain stable across different cultural settings.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it enriches the theoretical framework of dance education by integrating motivation theory, self-efficacy theory, and performance psychology into a unified model. Second, it verifies the applicability of social

cognitive theory in folk dance education, demonstrating that psychological beliefs significantly mediate learning outcomes. Third, it expands the understanding of performance ability as a multidimensional construct that is influenced not only by technical training but also by psychological factors.

Practical Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for folk dance education. First, instructors should enhance learning motivation by integrating cultural content with performance-based activities. For example, cultural background and movement meanings can be introduced before students complete short group performances or repertory presentations. Second, educators should strengthen self-efficacy through progressive training, specific feedback, and successful performance experiences. Complex movements can be divided into manageable stages, while teacher feedback, peer evaluation, and video review can help students recognize their progress. Third, curriculum design should integrate technical training with psychological development. Simulated performances and post-performance reflection can help students adapt to stage demands while gradually building confidence and performance ability.

Research Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, folk dance was treated as a general category, although different regional and ethnic traditions may vary in technical requirements, cultural meanings, and performance practices, which could influence motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability. Second, the proposed mediation model represents one theoretically supported pathway, while alternative directions among the variables may also be plausible. Third, the regional sample may limit the generalizability of the findings. Fourth, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference and therefore supports only predictive associations. Finally, the use of self-reported measures may introduce subjective and social desirability bias.

Future Research

Future research should further explore the relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability by considering the cultural and regional diversity of folk dance education. Comparative studies across different folk dance traditions, ethnic groups, and geographical regions are encouraged to examine whether the proposed structural relationships remain consistent across different cultural contexts. Such research may help identify whether specific cultural characteristics, technical requirements, or training environments influence students' motivation, self-efficacy development, and performance outcomes.

Furthermore, future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs to examine the developmental changes and temporal relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability. Experimental research designs could also be implemented through motivational interventions or self-efficacy enhancement programs to provide stronger evidence regarding causal mechanisms. Future research may additionally employ qualitative or mixed-method approaches, including interviews and classroom observations, to gain deeper insights into how cultural identity, regional traditions, and learning environments shape psychological processes in folk dance education.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationships among learning motivation, self-efficacy, and performance ability among folk dance majors. The results confirm that learning motivation positively influences both self-efficacy and performance ability, while self-efficacy also significantly enhances performance ability.

Moreover, self-efficacy plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between learning motivation and performance ability. These findings highlight the importance of psychological factors in dance education and provide valuable implications for improving teaching strategies in higher education.

Overall, the study emphasizes that effective folk dance education should integrate psychological development with technical training to enhance students' comprehensive performance competence.

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