

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON DANCE COURSES: A STUDY ON FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE TEACHING SYSTEMS

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Abstract: The year 2020 marked a drastic change in the activity of dance instructors, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced us to adapt to a new "normal." Until the state of emergency was declared, dance classes were conducted almost exclusively face-to-face, offering opportunities for direct interaction and immediate correction, essential for properly learning dance techniques. With the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, instructors were compelled to integrate online methods into the teaching process, completely transforming their educational approach. This transition was not without challenges, as it required adjusting teaching methods and identifying the most effective learning strategies to maintain student motivation and engagement. In this context, the aim of the research was to identify the differences in teaching methods used during the pandemic and to evaluate their effectiveness from the perspectives of both instructors and students. The results obtained will provide a clear picture of the impact of these changes and will contribute to the development of more effective strategies for the future, thus ensuring the continuity and quality of the learning process in the field of dance.

Cuvinte cheie: COVID-19, dance, teaching, training

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a radical transformation in the way educational activities in the field of dance are conducted. Dancers and artists, who used to invest countless hours honing their skills, faced unprecedented challenges, including severe restrictions that threatened not only their livelihoods but also their artistic futures. According to a report

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published by Dance/USA in 2021, the devastating effects of the pandemic on dance companies and independent dancers included significant economic losses and an increase in virtual productions, adapted to the new public health realities (Segundo, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic also created opportunities for students to pursue courses and complete their programs through online platforms, without the need for physical attendance. A recent study (Dos Santos, 2021a) revealed that the number of students enrolled in online courses increased from 30% to 70% during the pandemic. One hundred international students participated in the research and provided positive feedback regarding their online learning experience, based on social cognitive career theory. Another recent study (Dos Santos, 2021d) showed that both local and international students appreciated the online learning environment, as many were able to continue their education, especially during the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Participants suggested that online learning options should be maintained to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Atmojo și Nugroho, 2020; AbuSa'aleek și Alotaibi, 2022; Chen și Du, 2022)..

Artists and educators in the field of dance demonstrated creativity and adaptability, quickly generating online content to address educational needs. Online platforms, such as "Dancing Alone Together," were created to provide solutions to the gaps felt by dancers due to social distancing (Rugh et al., 2024). Additionally, a study conducted by Dos Santos in 2022 investigated changes in post-pandemic online education, discussing the reasons why students choose digital platforms and analyzing their experiences, with an emphasis on the challenges faced (Dos Santos, 2022)..

The transition to online education has been the subject of research exploring how digital technologies enhance interaction between teachers and students. These studies highlighted how new educational tools can maintain international relationships in dance education, while also stimulating creativity and facilitating learning, despite the limitations imposed by the online environment (Hou, 2022). Furthermore, research conducted by Martin in 2020 examined how the pandemic reshaped education in dance on an international level, emphasizing the challenges and emerging innovations in this context (Martin, 2020).

However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the comparison of the effectiveness of face-to-face and online teaching methods in dance courses. This research aims to examine the differences in information and skill acquisition between the two methods, as well as the perceptions of instructors and students regarding the effectiveness of each approach.

Thus, the central question of this study is: What are the differences in efficiency and student preferences between face-to-face dance classes and online ones? This research is essential to provide instructors and dance organizations with valuable insights into the effective integration of these teaching methods. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to assess the impact of these methods on the learning process and to propose recommendations for optimizing dance education in the future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our research was based on the premise that there are significant differences in the teaching and information assimilation processes, depending on the method employed by instructors. The methodology involved administering an online questionnaire to students who participated in both face-to-face classes and online sessions. The questionnaire was distributed through digital communication platforms, thereby facilitating access for a diverse range of participants.

The statistical analysis of the collected data allowed for a detailed assessment of their experiences and preferences, taking into account both demographic factors and the level of experience in the field of dance. The aim of the research was to identify the differences in the teaching methods used and to evaluate their effectiveness for both instructors and students.

We utilized a comparative research design, applying a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions to collect relevant data from a sample of 40 participants, both male and female, aged between 10 and 42 years, from several dance centers in Timișoara, Cluj, and Oradea. This approach allowed us to analyze the impact of various teaching methods on the learning process.

RESULTS

Following the analysis of the results collected through the administered questionnaire, which included a set of 20 questions, we selected the most relevant aspects that reflect the participants' experiences in dance.

When analyzing the years of experience, we observe that the largest proportion of participants who practice dance falls within the range of 1 to 4 years, accounting for 40%. Those who have been dancing for over 8 years represent the smallest percentage, at 15%. Simultaneously, 22.5% of participants have less than 1 year of practice, while another 22.5% practice dance for a period between 4 and 8 years, with the same percentage applying to those with less than one year of practice (Fig. 1).

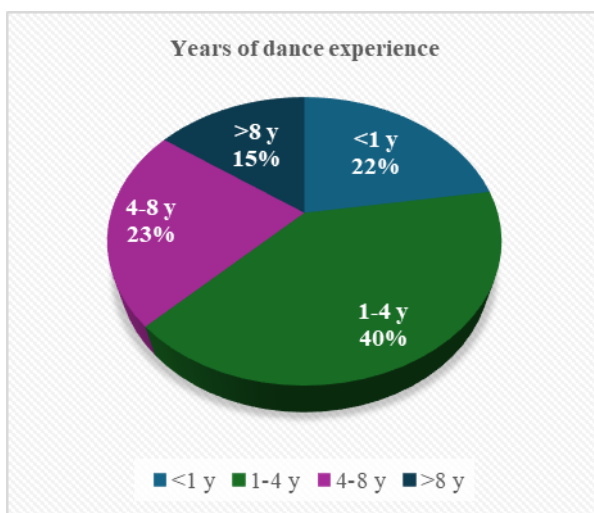


Figure 1. Years of dance experience

Before the quarantine, the majority of participants in dance classes attended, on average, less than 4 hours per week, with 40% falling into this category. Additionally, 35% of participants dedicated between 4 and 8 hours, 17.5% between 8 and 12 hours, and only 7.5% participated in training for more than 12 hours per week. During the quarantine, the trend was similar, with 67.5% of participants choosing to attend less than 4 hours of online training, 25% between 4 and 8 hours, and only 7.5% for more than 12 hours. This suggests a significant decrease in the time dedicated to training, regardless of the format (Fig. 2).

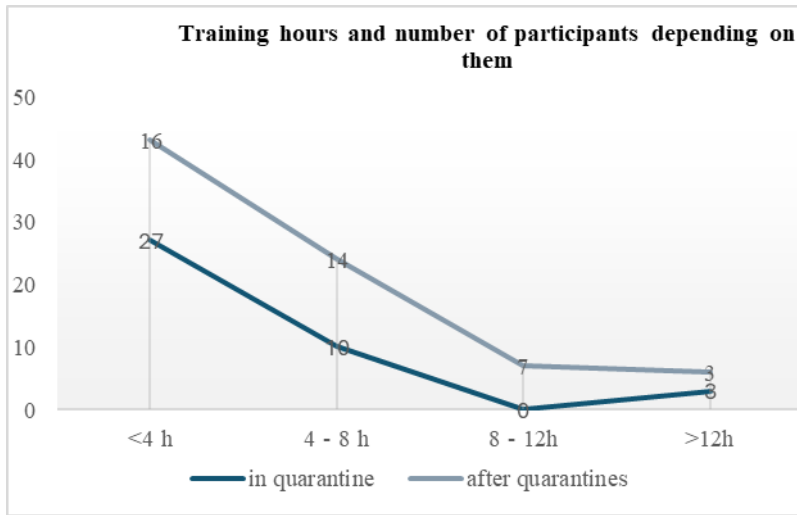


Figure 2. Training hours and number of participants depending on them

Regarding the benefits of online courses during the quarantine, the majority of subjects believed that the most significant advantage was the stimulation of creativity, with 37.5% of participants highlighting this aspect. Additionally, 25% of subjects reported improvements in body posture, suggesting an increased awareness of posture and movement. Progress in rhythm and musicality was mentioned by 20% of subjects, while 17.5% emphasized improvements in the coordination of different body segments. These data suggest that, despite the constraints imposed by the quarantine, participants found online courses to be an effective way to develop their skills and maintain their motivation in dance (Fig. 3).

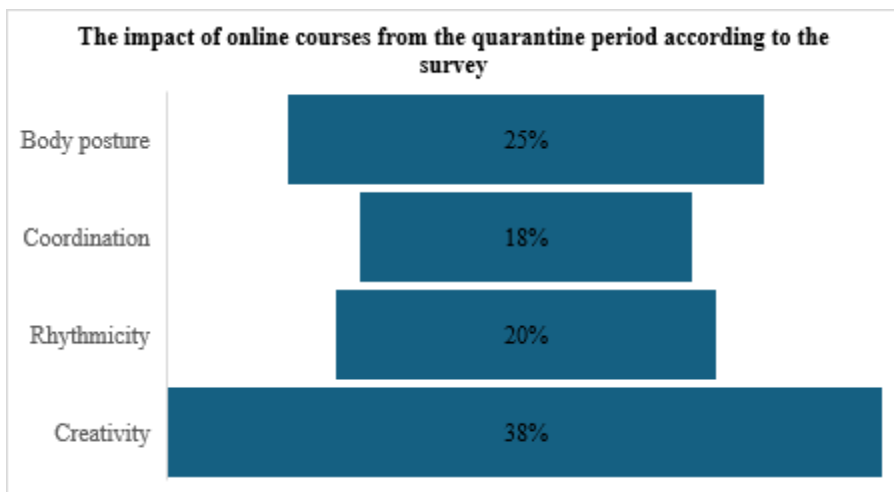


Figure 3. The impact of online courses from the quarantine period according to the survey

The results clearly indicate which aspects of the courses and training sessions participants missed the most during the analyzed period. First and foremost, an overwhelming majority (85%)

stated that the direct interaction with their instructor and peers during face-to-face classes was what they missed the most. This finding highlights the importance of social interaction in their motivation and satisfaction related to learning and training activities.

Regarding competitions, approximately 57.5% of participants reported that they missed them greatly, while 27.5% partially agreed with this statement. There was also a percentage of 15% (10% partially disagreeing and 5% completely disagreeing) who did not feel the need for competitions to the same extent, suggesting that for these individuals, the focus is more on the learning process and personal development rather than competition.

Additionally, a significant percentage of 70% of participants indicated that they missed the pre-quarantine classes, while another 25% partially agreed with this sentiment. Only 5% completely or partially disagreed, indicating that the majority valued the continuity of these online sessions, which represented an important part of their educational or athletic experience (Fig. 4).

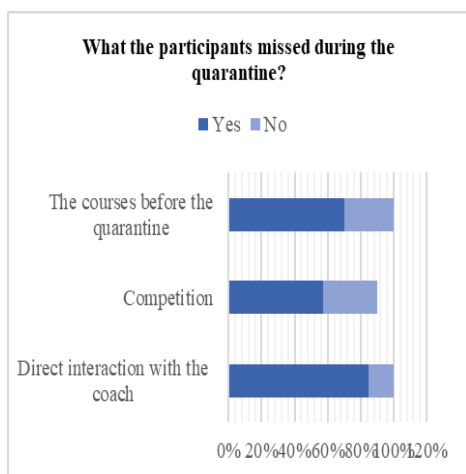


Figure 4. What the participants missed during the quarantine?

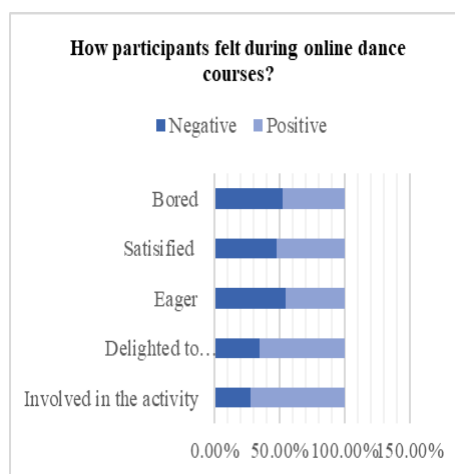


Figure 5. How participants felt during online dance courses?

In Figure 5, it can be observed that during the online classes and training sessions in the quarantine period, the majority of participants felt supervised and actively engaged in activities, indicating a high level of adaptation to the online environment. Approximately half of them (50%) reported feeling monitored by instructors, and if we add those who partially agreed (27.5%), we reach a majority of 77.5% who perceived some form of supervision, suggesting an active presence of instructors in the virtual setting.

Regarding engagement, 72.5% of participants stated that they felt fully involved in the activity, while only 5% claimed they did not feel this way at all. This shows a high rate of attention and active participation, confirming the effectiveness of the online format. The feeling of enjoyment was also high, with 65% of participants completely agreeing that the classes provided them with a pleasant experience, and an additional 25% partially agreeing, meaning that almost all participants had a positive perception of the online activities.

Furthermore, 45% of those surveyed declared that they were eager to start the online classes, and when adding the 35% who partially agreed, we have a total of 80% who showed a positive attitude at the beginning of the sessions. Overall satisfaction with the classes was expressed by 52.5% of participants who completely agreed that these classes provided them with a satisfying experience, while another 27.5% partially agreed. Only a small percentage (12.5%) was

dissatisfied with these sessions, indicating a generally positive perception of this online learning and training format (Fig. 5).

Analyzing how participants felt and the effectiveness of learning movement structures during online classes, we observe a significant difference between emotional comfort and the feeling of involvement, on the one hand, and the difficulty of remembering movement combinations, on the other. During online training sessions, the majority of participants felt engaged, monitored, and satisfied with the classes. Approximately 65-72% reported positive feelings (engagement, enjoyment, eagerness) and overall satisfaction, suggesting that the online classes managed to maintain their attention and enthusiasm. At the same time, 75% of participants felt that they received all the necessary information to learn the dance, suggesting a positive perception of the quantity and quality of knowledge provided by the instructors.

However, despite this emotional comfort and satisfaction with the information received, only 30% of participants felt that they were able to learn movement combinations more easily in the online environment. The remaining 70% encountered difficulties in memorizing the movements, signaling an issue with the effectiveness of distance teaching methods for this specific aspect. This may suggest that while online classes provided a positive and well-structured experience, the lack of direct practice and physical feedback contributed to the difficulty in correctly learning complex movements (Fig. 6).

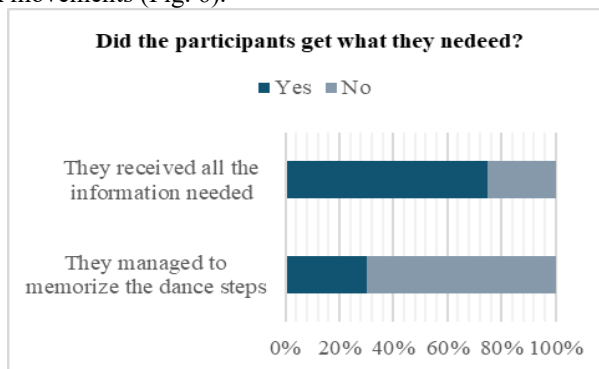


Figure 6. Did the participants get what they needed?

Regarding the preferred type of course/training format, participants indicated, unanimously, that they prefer the face-to-face format conducted in the dance studio, with a 100% agreement. This unanimous preference shows a clear inclination toward direct interaction and physical presence, which are essential elements in learning dance (Fig. 7).

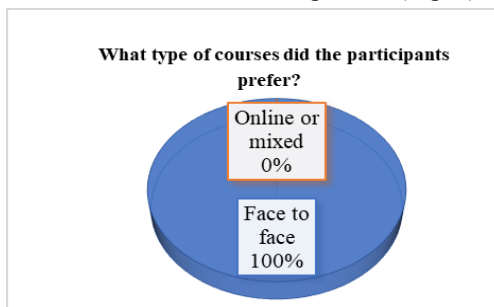


Figure 7. What type of courses did the participants prefer?

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaire reveals both the challenges and opportunities encountered by participants during dance classes, particularly in the context of the transition to the online format imposed by the pandemic. Despite the rapid adaptation to online training, the majority of participants (67.5%) reported a significant decrease in the time dedicated to practicing dance compared to the pre-pandemic period. This reduction suggests that while online classes provided an alternative framework for training, they could not fully replace the structure and dynamics of direct interactions during face-to-face lessons.

A positive aspect highlighted by the research is that 37.5% of participants perceived the stimulation of creativity as the most significant benefit of online courses, suggesting that instructors succeeded in providing a conducive environment for creative development, even under conditions of social distancing. However, the difficulties faced by 70% of participants in memorizing movement combinations underline the limitations of the online method regarding the practical learning of dance, which requires direct feedback and immediate corrections.

The unanimous preference of 100% for face-to-face classes confirms that physical interaction and personal connection with instructors and peers are essential in the dance learning process. This desire to return to a traditional learning environment underscores the importance of direct contact, which not only facilitates technical corrections but also enriches and motivates the group experience.

In conclusion, while online courses were a necessary solution during the quarantine, they could not provide the same practical value and collaborative atmosphere found in face-to-face sessions. It is evident that, for optimal development of dance skills, physical interaction remains indispensable. These findings underscore the importance of adapting teaching methods in the future, considering the need to integrate online learning experiences with traditional ones to better meet the needs and preferences of participants.

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