



Cultural revitalization through dance as a panacea for peacebuilding

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Abstract

This paper delves into the transformative power of cultural revitalization through dance as a potential panacea for peacebuilding efforts. It explores the role of dance in preserving cultural identity, fostering community cohesion, and promoting positive societal change. The paper aims to highlight the significance of traditional dance forms in preserving and promoting a community's cultural heritage. The research methodology involves a comprehensive review of literature, case studies, and expert opinions to provide a holistic understanding of the impact of dance on cultural revitalization and peace building. The findings underscore the profound social benefits of dance, including its ability to enhance health, mental well-being, and social connections, while serving as a catalyst for social cohesiveness and empathy. Successful case studies exemplify the effective use of traditional dances to counter cultural erosion and strengthen cultural identity. Additionally, the paper addresses the challenges faced in using dance as a tool for peacebuilding and offers potential solutions to overcome these obstacles. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the importance of embracing dance's inherent social benefits to unlock its transformative potential in shaping a more interconnected, empathetic, and harmonious society. Based on the findings and implications of the study, it is recommended that people in society should be involved and empowered by implementing educational programs to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of traditional dances, investing in thorough documentation and research of traditional dance forms, and facilitating cultural exchange programs to expose communities to a variety of dance forms.

Keywords: Community cohesion, Cultural identity, Cultural revitalization, Dance, Peacebuilding

1. Introduction

Peacebuilding is basically about the process of attaining peace (Hancock, 2016). Nonetheless, peacebuilding differs significantly regarding methods, scope of undertakings, and time frame depending on how one understands the concept of peace (Baser & Ozerdem, 2021). Dance, deeply intertwined with culture, serves as more than just a performance. It embodies traditions, values, and historical narratives unique to each community (Edensor, 2002). Through initiatives such as language preservation, traditional arts promotion, and community engagement, traditional dance forms serve as a means of preserving and promoting a community's cultural heritage. This paper aims to explore the transformative power of cultural revitalization through dance as a potential panacea for peacebuilding efforts. The paper also gives successful case studies of cultural revitalization through dance, highlighting the role of dance in preserving cultural identity and fostering community cohesion. Furthermore, the paper addresses the challenges faced in using dance as a tool for peacebuilding and offers potential solutions to overcome these obstacles.

2. Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study involves a systematic review of literature, case studies, and expert opinions to provide a holistic understanding of the impact of dance on cultural revitalization and peacebuilding. By synthesizing existing knowledge and insights from diverse sources, this study aims to present a well-rounded perspective on the role of dance in fostering harmony among different cultures and societies.

3. Importance of cultural revitalization through dance

The culture of a people encompasses the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that characterize them. It includes language, traditions, art, social norms, and various aspects that shape the way individuals within a society interact and express themselves. Cultural revitalization involves efforts to renew, preserve, and promote a community's cultural heritage, traditions, and practices. It often includes initiatives such as language preservation, traditional arts promotion, and community engagement to ensure the vitality of a culture. Traditional Dance forms can be defined as any local dancing tradition, often strongly connected with local musical forms and/or local beliefs. Traditional dance forms serve as a means of preserving and promoting a community's cultural heritage. Dance serves as a powerful expression of identity, storytelling, and connection to history (Jenks, 2023). Long before written language was invented; dance was a vital component of human culture and was used for narrative, communication, and self-expression. Dance has been a part of human culture for thousands of years, on all continents, and in both ceremonial and festive contexts.

Through initiatives like dance performances, workshops, and education, communities can revitalize and pass on their cultural values and narratives to future generations. According to Eze (2021), dance plays a significant role in revitalizing and preserving cultural heritage, serving as a powerful tool for celebrating traditions and fostering cultural exchange. Vibrant dance festivals, intense research, and meticulous training are some of the ways through which communities across the globe are reclaiming their cultural traditions and sharing them with new generations. Dance is important for much more than just having fun; it contributes to maintaining cultural traditions and communicating social ideals and historical narratives. Dance helps people learn about a community and connect with each other, which turns it into a culture.

Every culture has its own distinct forms of dance through which it communicates in earnest unique cultural narratives, values, and emotions. The vibrant and energetic movements of African tribal dances, the graceful and precise motions of Indian classical dances, and the enchanting and fluid steps of Ballet – all in their way evoke a sense of cultural identity and heritage. Whether it is the expressive Flamenco of Spain, the rhythmic Tango of Argentina, or the traditional Hula dance of Hawaii, these dances distinctively capture the essence of their respective cultures and serve as multi-dimensional art forms (Jenks, 2023).

Dances are deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of various regions and ethnic groups. Each dance embodies the specific essence of the community it symbolizes through its unique costumes, choreography, and musical accompaniments. It often reflects the daily activities, rituals, and celebrations of the community, providing valuable insights into their way of life. In an era of globalization, cultural heritage faces the risk of being overshadowed or diluted by external influences. However, dance provides a means of celebrating and revitalizing cultural heritage in addition to preserving it. Communities across the globe have recognized the power of dance as a catalyst for reclaiming their roots (Eze, 2021).

4. Role of dance in cultural preservation

In addition to being a performance art, dance has long been used as a means of social commentary and as an integral part of intangible cultural heritage. Dance is humanity's oldest expression. It is a living art, a true indicator of the health of a culture. It is a form of cultural expression that reinforces and transmits cultural traditions and values. Marwa (2022) opines that dance has played a significant role in the social structure of all human civilizations throughout history. This is because dance reveals something about a person's identity, feelings, and thinking. Dance is more than simply physical movements; it's a way for people to express themselves. Every dance will have a story that corresponds to the ideas, topics, and themes that the culture wants to communicate. The cultural dances will be distinctive from other sorts of dances since a cultural dance cannot be made without a story. The dance will need a backstory to help other cultures understand it (Marwa, 2022).

There is no dance without music. Furthermore, one of the first types of communication that kids learn in life is music. Mothers play and sing for their unborn children. A majority of parents and guardians sing and dance to/with their kids from an early age because music is an integral aspect of language development. In today's globalized world, dances play a vital role in preserving cultural identity and combating cultural homogenization. There's a chance that dominating global influences will eclipse native customs as civilizations grow increasingly intertwined. Dances act as a stumbling block against cultural erosion, offering a space for communities to celebrate their unique heritage and resist cultural assimilation. Through dance, communities can revitalize and preserve their cultural heritage, ensuring that future generations are exposed to and understand the significance of their traditions (Marwa, 2022).

The role of dance in cultural preservation is pivotal as it:

1. **Embodies Cultural Narratives:** Dance serves as a living repository of cultural stories, myths, and traditions, embodying the essence of a community's heritage.
2. **Transmits Traditional Knowledge:** Through dance, intricate details of customs, rituals, and historical events are conveyed, facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.
3. **Preserves Language and Symbols:** Dances often incorporate language, symbols, and gestures specific to a culture, aiding in the preservation of linguistic and symbolic aspects of heritage.
4. **Engages Community Participation:** Dance often involves community participation, creating a shared experience that reinforces social bonds and a collective commitment to preserving cultural practices.
5. **Celebrates Festivals and Ceremonies:** Many cultural celebrations are marked by specific dances, making dance an integral part of festivals and ceremonies that contribute to the vibrancy of cultural traditions.

6. **Resists Cultural Erosion:** In the face of globalization and cultural homogenization, traditional dances act as a resilient form of resistance, preserving unique cultural elements from getting eroded.

In summary, dance plays a multifaceted role in cultural preservation by embodying, transmitting, and celebrating the diverse aspects of a community's heritage.

5. Role of traditional dance in cultural identity

The involvement of numerous nations has appeared that there is no measured or specific course to assemble and accomplish national identity, which is the foremost required fixing for national cohesion and sustainable development. Societies trying to establish or strengthen their sense of self can usually do so by mobilizing language, symbols, historical events, folklore, and politics. Although dance as an art of movement that transmits images of feelings, ideas and intentions into movement sequences, has featured pertinently in mobilising people to create a national identity, its pivotal role in ensuring cultural identity is underutilized (Marwa, 2022).

Traditional dance plays a crucial role in shaping and preserving cultural identity. It serves as a tool for communication, expression, and storytelling, conveying cultural traditions and heritage through movements, music, and costumes. It is a cornerstone of cultural identity. Reviving and performing these dances helps communities maintain their unique cultural heritage in an increasingly homogenized world (Preserving Cultural Heritage, n.d.). A few of the many notable ways through which traditional dances help in portraying cultural identity include:

1. **Expressing Cultural Values:** Traditional dances often convey specific cultural values, norms, and beliefs, providing a tangible expression of a community's identity.
2. **Preserving Heritage:** By performing dances passed down through generations, communities actively preserve and showcase their historical and cultural heritage.
3. **Distinctive Cultural Markers:** Different regions and communities have unique dance forms, costumes, and movements, serving as distinctive markers of cultural identity.
4. **Community Bonding:** Participation in traditional dance fosters a sense of belonging and unity within a community, strengthening social bonds and shared identity.
5. **Rituals and Ceremonies:** Many cultural rituals and ceremonies involve traditional dances, making them integral to important events that define and reinforce cultural identity.
6. **Connecting Generations:** Traditional dances serve as a bridge between generations, allowing the transfer of cultural knowledge and practices from older to younger members of the community.
7. **Symbolism and Storytelling:** Dances often incorporate symbolic gestures and storytelling elements, providing a means to communicate cultural narratives and collective experiences.

In essence, traditional dance is a dynamic and living expression of cultural identity, contributing significantly to the preservation, celebration, and transmission of a community's unique heritage from generation to generation.

6. The transformative power of dance: fostering community cohesion

Khicha (2023) defines dance as a sublime art form that holds the power to transcend the ordinary and resonate with the very essence of what it means to be human. The scholar says it is a dynamic celebration of life, a universal language of the soul, and a profound expression of our collective spirit (Khicha, 2023). People from all areas of life may come together through dance in a truly remarkable way, breaking down barriers and creating lasting bonds that cut across decades and countries. Often hailed as the universal language of expression, dance possesses a profound power to uplift lives and drive positive societal change (The Transformative Power of Dance, 2023)

Beyond its stunning aesthetic appeal, dance fosters talent and the human spirit while providing a range of social benefits that profit both individuals and communities. Through meaningful talks, it becomes apparent that it is a powerful catalyst for social cohesiveness, bridging gaps and fostering empathy – unleashing strands of unity that transcend traditional barriers. Odunze believes that by fully embracing dance's inherent social benefits, we unlock its transformative potential to shape a more interconnected, empathetic, and harmonious society. Each graceful movement, synchronized rhythm, and heartfelt expression becomes a beacon of hope, igniting positive change and uniting humanity through the universal language of art and emotion. Dance is not merely a sequence of movements set to music; it is a profound form of expression that has the power to improve various aspects of our lives. Beyond the physical benefits, dance has been proven to positively impact mental health, emotional well-being, social connections, and personal growth (Odunze, 2021).

It has a transformative power that goes beyond the preservation of cultural heritage. It molds individuals, strengthens communities, and fosters social cohesion. In many cultures, dance is an essential element of rites of passage, tribal rituals, and ceremonies marking significant life events. Through a common experience that binds people in their cultural identity and heritage, these dances strengthen the bonds between members of the community.

The transformative power of dance is evident in its ability to foster community cohesion and promote cultural exchange. Dance transcends language barriers and connects individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering empathy and understanding (Khicha, 2023). Some ways in which dance can be used to educate people about cultural heritage and promote community cohesion include:

1. **Community Dance Projects:** These projects aim to revitalize communities by encouraging people to share concerns and negotiate issues together, ultimately strengthening the human network

2. *Dance-based Community Practices*: Participation in community dance can be a road to empowerment and transformation, as individuals engage in meaningful dialogues and create connections.
3. *Cultural Exchange*: Dance organizations and artists often work together internationally, fusing various forms and methods to produce groundbreaking and enthralling performances. These partnerships create mutual tolerance and understanding for one another's artistic expressions.
4. *Dance Outreach Programs*: These initiatives employ dance to foster social cohesion and cultural exchange. They frequently include seminars and performances that unite people from various backgrounds.
5. *Dance as a Tool for Social Change*: Throughout history, marginalized groups have used dance to express their struggles, challenge societal norms, and promote social change.

7. Case studies: Successful cultural revitalization through dance

The traditional dance, an essential component of our folk custom, carries and transmits cultural traditions and legacy from one generation to the next. As such, it plays a pivotal part in our society's "cultural development" and significantly reinforces our sense of cultural identity. Several case studies demonstrate the successful revitalization of cultural heritage through dance. Some examples include:

7.1.1. Maori cultural revitalization (New Zealand)

Context: The Maori people of New Zealand faced cultural erosion over the years. To counter this, initiatives were taken to revive traditional Maori dances, such as the Haka (Mahrooqi and Asante, 2012).

Implementation: Haka, a powerful war dance, was incorporated into various aspects of Maori culture, including ceremonies, sports events, and educational programs. Dance workshops and performances were organized to engage the community.

Impact: The widespread adoption of Haka helped instil a renewed sense of pride and identity among the Maori people. It became a symbol of cultural strength, with global recognition through its use in international sports and events.

7.2. Hula revitalization (Hawaii)

Context: The traditional Hawaiian dance, Hula, faced challenges as Western influences threatened its authenticity (Warschauer and Donaghy, 1997).

Initiatives: Cultural organizations and dance schools in Hawaii worked to preserve and promote Hula. They offered classes, organized festivals, and collaborated with communities to integrate Hula into various events.

Outcome: Hula experienced a resurgence, not only as a performance art but also as a means of storytelling and cultural expression. It became a central element in Hawaiian ceremonies, festivals, and even educational programs, contributing to the preservation of Hawaiian cultural identity.

7.3. Soweto Gospel Choir (South Africa)

Context: In post-apartheid South Africa, there was a need to celebrate and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the diverse communities (Coetzer, 2008, April 19).

Initiatives: The Soweto Gospel Choir, formed in the early 2000s, incorporates traditional African dances, rhythms, and languages into their performances. They blend these elements with contemporary influences to reach a global audience.

Impact: The choir has not only garnered international acclaim but has also played a crucial role in preserving and promoting South African cultural traditions. Their performances showcase the vibrancy and diversity of African music and dance.

7.4. Ijo Vudu Dance Company (Nigeria)

Context: The Ijo Vudu Dance Company operates in Lagos, Nigeria, where urbanization and modernization pose threats to traditional cultural practices (Benkadi, 2011, October 07).

Initiatives: The dance company focuses on researching and reviving traditional Nigerian dances, incorporating them into contemporary performances. They conduct workshops and collaborate with local communities to ensure the participation of different generations.

Outcome: Ijo Vudu Dance Company has successfully revitalized and popularized traditional Nigerian dances. Through their efforts, they have increased awareness and appreciation for the cultural richness of various ethnic groups in Nigeria. These case studies illustrate how the revitalization of traditional dances has played a key role in preserving cultural heritage, fostering community engagement, and creating a sense of identity and pride among different cultural groups across the world.

8. Challenges for cultural revitalization through dance

Cultural revitalization through dance involves a multifaceted approach aimed at preserving, promoting, and rejuvenating traditional dance forms within a community. It is a dynamic process that not only preserves traditions but also ensures their continued relevance and vibrancy within the community.

As with every other process, there are challenges faced when cultural revitalization through dance aims to take place. Some of these challenges include:

1. *Loss of Authenticity:* Modern interpretations or commercialization of traditional dances may dilute their authenticity, risking the distortion of cultural meanings.
2. *Limited Documentation:* Lack of comprehensive documentation for certain dances can hinder efforts to revive them accurately, especially if there are few surviving practitioners.
3. *Changing Demographics:* Migration and changing demographics can lead to the dispersion of communities, making it challenging to sustain and pass down traditional dance practices.
4. *Resistance to Change:* Some community members may resist changes in dance forms or expressions, making it difficult to introduce innovative elements while preserving tradition.
5. *Resource Constraints:* Insufficient funding, lack of training facilities, and limited access to qualified instructors can impede the development and sustainability of cultural dance initiatives.
6. *Globalization Influences:* External influences from popular culture may overshadow traditional dances, making it challenging for communities to maintain their unique cultural practices.
7. *Language Barrier:* Traditional dances often have strong connections to specific languages. If the language is endangered, understanding the full cultural context of the dance may become challenging.

9. Solutions for cultural revitalization through dance

To overcome these challenges, the following solutions are proffered:

1. *Community Involvement and Empowerment:* Encourage active participation and decision-making within the community to ensure a sense of ownership and commitment to cultural revitalization efforts.
2. *Education and Awareness Programs:* Implement educational programs to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of traditional dances, emphasizing their importance in preserving heritage.
3. *Documentation and Research:* Invest in thorough documentation and research of traditional dance forms, ensuring accurate preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge.
4. *Inter-generational Transmission:* Facilitate mentorship programs and inter-generational initiatives to transfer traditional dance skills and knowledge from experienced practitioners to younger generations.
5. *Technology Integration:* Utilize digital platforms, virtual workshops, and online resources to make traditional dance accessible to a wider audience, overcoming geographical constraints.
6. *Collaborations and Partnerships:* Forge partnerships with cultural organizations, educational institutions, and government bodies to secure funding, resources, and support for sustained cultural revitalization efforts.
7. *Innovation and Adaptation:* Introduce innovative elements in dance presentations to make them appealing to younger generations while respecting and preserving the core elements of traditional forms.
8. *Cultural Exchange Programs:* Facilitate cultural exchange programs to expose communities to a variety of dance forms, fostering cross-cultural appreciation and inspiration for their own revitalization efforts.
9. *Promotion and Celebrations:* Organize cultural events, festivals, and performances that showcase traditional dances, providing platforms for communities to celebrate and share their heritage.

By addressing these aspects, communities can create a holistic and sustainable approach to cultural revitalization through dance, ensuring the preservation and continued vibrancy of their cultural practices.

10. Cultural revitalization through dance and peacebuilding

Dance is a potential asset for the peacebuilding field especially as related to positive peace. Positive peace encompasses more than just the lack of conflict or physical violence. It also includes overall quality of life. Positive peace is structural incorporation, hopeful, precautionary, and peace by peaceful means (Catholic Relief Services, 2018).

Dance has been recognized as a powerful tool for peace-building, fostering relationships, and promoting cultural exchange. It offers nonverbal, embodied learning, and can be more convincing than verbal communication. In conflict-torn societies, dance has been used to communicate messages of peace and has the potential to dissolve cultural barriers, and promote empathy, and respect for various lifestyles. Dance outreach programs have emerged as powerful agents of change, using dance to promote cultural exchange and social cohesion. While the potential of dance in peace-building is encouraging, there is also a need for ongoing reflection regarding implementation and possible misuse of the arts. Overall, dance plays a significant role in peacebuilding by promoting empathy, understanding, and respect for diverse cultural heritages (Herd & Rosillo, 2023).

Cultural revitalization through dance can play a significant role in peacebuilding by fostering understanding, reconciliation, and community cohesion through the following ways:

1. *Cross-Cultural Dialogue:* Dance is a powerful tool for communication that does not rely on spoken language. Participants and observers alike can experience emotions and ideas through the physical expression of dance, which can transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. This makes dance a unique and potent form of non-verbal communication across diverse groups (Hanna, 2015).
2. *Conflict Resolution:* Dance facilitates a shared space for dialogue and expression, often allowing individuals and groups to articulate their experiences and grievances without direct confrontation. Through the rhythms and movements of dance, participants can explore their identities, histories, and narratives, thereby fostering a sense of understanding and empathy among conflicting parties (Cynthia, 2018).

3. *Building Bridges*: Dance provides a platform for building bridges between divided communities, encouraging collaboration, and fostering connections that transcend cultural and social divides (Nash, 2023).
4. *Cultural Exchange*: Cultural revitalization through dance promotes cultural exchange, enabling communities to appreciate each other's traditions, thereby reducing stereotypes and fostering a sense of unity (Iwasawa, n.d).
5. *Community Healing*: Dance has therapeutic qualities and can contribute to the healing process within communities affected by conflict, helping individuals express emotions and find solace through collective movement (Gökçen, et al., 2020).
6. *Celebrating Diversity*: Through dance, communities can celebrate their diverse cultural backgrounds, emphasizing the richness of their heritage and reinforcing the idea that diversity can be a source of strength (Onyima, 2016).
7. *Youth Engagement*: Involving young people in dance initiatives promotes intergenerational understanding and empowers the youth to contribute positively to peace-building efforts within their communities (Pruitt, 2008).
8. *Public Diplomacy*: Cultural dance performances can be used as a form of public diplomacy, showcasing the cultural identity of a community and promoting positive relationships between different groups (Odunze, 2020).

By integrating dance into peace-building initiatives, communities can leverage its transformative power to promote unity, empathy, and reconciliation, ultimately contributing to sustainable peace.

11. Implications of the study

The implications of this study extend to various stakeholders involved in peacebuilding, cultural preservation, and community development. By recognizing the significance of dance as a tool for cultural revitalization and peacebuilding, this study underscores the potential for integrating dance into broader societal goals and initiatives aimed at promoting unity, empathy, and reconciliation. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for tailored approaches to address the challenges and barriers hindering the effective use of dance in peacebuilding efforts.

12. Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of the study, some recommendations and suggestions are proposed to enhance the integration of dance into peacebuilding initiatives. These recommendations include fostering community involvement and empowerment, implementing educational programs to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of traditional dances. Furthermore, there should be investment in thorough documentation and research of traditional dance forms, and facilitating cultural exchange programs to expose communities to a variety of dance forms.

13. Conclusion

In conclusion, cultural revitalization through dance is a dynamic and transformative process that goes beyond preserving traditions. It fosters identity, community cohesion, and even contributes to broader societal goals. By engaging in the rich tapestry of traditional dances, communities breathe life into their cultural heritage, ensuring its continuity across generations. Dance becomes a powerful medium for expressing narratives, fostering intergenerational transmission, and promoting a sense of pride and belonging. Moreover, cultural revitalization through dance is not merely a sentimental endeavour. It is a contemporary response to the challenges of cultural erosion, globalization, and changing demographics. Integrating innovative elements into traditional dance forms ensures their relevance and resonance with diverse audiences, including younger generations. This adaptive approach strikes a balance between preserving the authenticity of cultural expressions and embracing the evolving dynamics of the world.

Beyond the community level, cultural revitalization through dance has broader implications, contributing to cross-cultural understanding, peacebuilding, and global appreciation for cultural diversity. As communities share their stories through dance, they not only connect with their roots but also invite others to appreciate and respect the richness of human cultural expression. In essence, cultural revitalization through dance is a celebration of heritage, a means of creative expression, and a pathway toward building resilient, interconnected communities in this ever-evolving world.

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