



E-ISSN 2338-6770

Submitted date : -

Revised date : -

Accepted date : -

Correspondence Address:

Thai Studies, Faculty of Arts,
Chulalongkorn University 254 Phaya
Thai Rd, Wang Mai, Pathum Wan,
Bangkok 10330. E-mail:
6688031022@student.chula.ac.th

EXPLORING EMOTIONS THROUGH MOVEMENT EXPLORATION AND IMPROVISATION AS ART THERAPY IN DANCE EXTRACURRICULAR AT STATE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 21 SURABAYA

Nabila Budhi Pratiwi¹, Warih Handayani²

¹State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

²Unesa University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: nabilabudhi.21005@unesa.ac.id , warihhandayani@unesa.ac.id

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the implementation of dance learning in extracurricular activities at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya, with a focus on the steps of exploration and improvisation of movement as a medium for pouring out students' emotions. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, this study involved dance extracurricular participants as the main subjects. The results of the analysis show a strong impact between the emotions experienced and the displayed movement expressions, including aspects of body posture, direction and space of movement, tempo, quality, and symbolic meaning. Quantitative assessment scores on the aspects of openness, expression, coordination, and energy indicate excellent performance in integrating emotions into movement. This extracurricular activity proved to be a safe space for participants' emotional expression which was nurtured through stages of warm-up, exploration, improvisation, and evaluation. The conclusion of this study confirms that the exploratory and improvisational approach is effectively used as a form of art therapy that supports the emotional and psychological development of students.

Keywords: emotional outpouring, movement exploration, movement improvisation, art therapy, dance extracurricular activities

1. INTRODUCTION

Arts education is a learning process that utilizes art as a means and method of delivering material across various educational pathways (Rohidi, 2014). Through arts education, individuals gain aesthetic experiences, enhance their appreciation, and understand the values of beauty, which play a role in strengthening emotions and character (Jazuli, 2022). Furthermore, art serves as a medium for emotional expression and creativity, such as in dance, which combines cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Therefore, arts education emphasizes exploration and movement experimentation as meaningful learning strategies. (Yeningsih, 2018).

At SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya, dance is an extracurricular activity implemented as a form of art therapy that focuses on expressing emotions through free movement or pure movement without musical accompaniment. This activity is held every Friday for two hours, with stages including warm-up, exploration, and movement improvisation based on students' emotions. This activity not only trains physical sensitivity and creativity but also serves as a medium for positive emotional expression.

The dance material is structured over a semester, encompassing traditional, contemporary, and creative dance. Exploration and improvisation sessions aim to help students explore emotions verbally before processing them through movement. This approach integrates elements of wiraga, wirama, and wirasa, creating a holistic and reflective learning experience.

The theoretical framework used in this study refers to the theory of exploration and improvisation proposed by (Hadi, 2011 & Dharson, 2023). Movement exploration has two main objectives. First, as a process of searching for movement through creative thinking, imagining,



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feeling, and responding to surrounding objects. Second, as an initial step in developing dancers' creativity in exploring ideas and stimuli. This process helps dancers create new movements, develop existing ones, and combine dance techniques with creative imagination.

Meanwhile, movement improvisation is the spontaneous release of the body, which, although seemingly directionless, can produce expressive and authentic movements. These stages are interconnected with exploration, forming a unified choreographic process that provides space for freedom of expression within a structure that remains directed. Thus, exploration and improvisation play a crucial role in creating original movement, strengthening technical skills, and constructing a cohesive and meaningful dance work.

Based on this, this study aims to examine the exploration and improvisation activities of movement in dance extracurricular activities as a form of art therapy that helps students channel and manage emotions creatively.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study to in-depth explore phenomena occurring in a natural context. In line with Abdussamad (2021), a qualitative approach is a method that examines objects in natural situations, with the researcher as the primary instrument. The research focuses on the process of expressing emotions in extracurricular dance activities at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya, encompassing learning materials, activity implementation, and their impact on adolescents' emotional expression through movement exploration and improvisation.

Data collection techniques in this study included participant observation, structured interviews, and documentation. In participant observation, the researcher was actively involved in the emotional expression process in the dance extracurricular at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya. Furthermore, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted during the emotional expression process through movement exploration and improvisation. This activity was part of the observation to evaluate student development.

Next, structured interviews were conducted by systematically compiling questions to the research subjects, namely dance instructors and students participating in extracurricular dance activities. These interviews aimed to explore in-depth the learning process and the expression of emotions through movement exploration and improvisation. Furthermore, documentation techniques were utilized to collect various archives, photos, and videos related to the implementation of extracurricular dance activities at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya. This documentation plays a role in increasing the credibility of the data, as it provides tangible, verifiable evidence to describe the processes and dynamics that occurred during the research.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and systematic drawing of conclusions to gain a contextual understanding of the phenomena being studied. Data validity was tested using triangulation of sources, techniques, and methods to ensure data accuracy and credibility. Validation was conducted to ensure that the data obtained reflected actual conditions in the field (Sugiyono, 2013).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The implementation of dance extracurricular activities at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya, the material provided each semester is designed in a varied manner covering various types of dance such as traditional dance, creative dance and contemporary dance. This aims to

enrich students' insight in the field of dance, covering technical aspects, creativity, and understanding of the cultural values inherent in it. In this extracurricular activity, students are introduced to and trained in various types of dance, including traditional dance, creative dance, and contemporary dance. As an effort to develop self-expression and character building, this activity also includes special sessions to channel emotions through exploration and movement improvisation, which are scheduled regularly every two months. This session functions as a form of art therapy, which aims to be a means of developing creativity, training sensitivity, and a medium for students to channel and manage emotions positively through dance movements.

In the 2025-2026 academic year, extracurricular dance materials are structured around a different theme for each semester. In the first and second months of semester 1, the material focuses on traditional dances, specifically East Javanese. Then, in the third through sixth months, the material shifts to creative dances, specifically Banyuwangi dances. In the last week of each month, students also receive additional material in the form of contemporary dance to broaden their knowledge and skills in the field of dance.

The fourth meeting, as has become a regular bimonthly event, featured a special session on "Emotional Outpouring," also known as art therapy. This session was designed to provide a platform for emotional expression, allowing students to freely and reflectively express their emotions through dance movements, utilizing an exploratory and improvisational approach.

The application of emotional expression through movement exploration and improvisation in dance extracurricular activities at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya shows that each student has unique emotional expression characteristics. Observations and interviews revealed that this activity is not only artistic but also serves as an effective medium for channeling emotions. The movements displayed reflect the participants' emotional states, both positive and negative, thus becoming a form of authentic nonverbal communication. The process includes three main aspects: movement exploration, improvisation, and specific stages in expressing emotions.

3.1.1 Movement Exploration

In its implementation at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya, exploration was carried out through the following stages :

1. Students are invited to explore movements based on the emotions they feel.
2. Students are asked to imagine or recall an event that evokes strong emotions, such as sadness, anger, disappointment, happiness, or fear.
3. Students move according to their body's response to the feelings evoked in the memory.

3.1.2 Movement Improvisation

The stages of improvisation carried out include :

1. Participants express their explorations through a series of free movements.
2. Movements can be performed individually to foster sensitivity to space, time, and dynamics.
3. Spontaneous interaction as a response to collective emotions

3.1.3 Langkah – Langkah Khusus Penuangan Emosi

1. Warm-up Stage

The following is the sequence of heating stages applied:

- a. Stretch your muscles gradually from head to toe, for example, slowly turning your head, rolling your shoulders, stretching your arms, back, and legs. Move at a slow tempo to avoid shock and injury.
- b. Perform dance movements such as mendak, tercet, and others.



Picture 3.1. 1 Warmup

2. Sharing Session

The activity then continued with a story-sharing session as an emotional warm-up and a focus group discussion. This stage is crucial for opening up space for self-reflection, encouraging students to recognize and acknowledge their emotions. According to Malchiodi (2006), recognizing emotions is a crucial first step in art therapy, as it lays the foundation for healthy and meaningful expression.



Picture 3.1. 2 sharing session

3. Expressing Emotions Through Movement Exploration and Improvisation

Observations during the movement exploration and improvisation sessions showed that students experienced and expressed diverse emotions. Each movement demonstrated a strong connection between verbal emotion and visual expression. This finding supports Syarif's (2016) argument that emotional aspects of movement can be reflected through posture, direction, space, tempo, and quality, which represent emotional states nonverbally. Thus, movement serves as a medium for authentic and meaningful emotional expression. The following are the students sampled in this study :

Table 3.1. 1 Emotional Aspects of Movement

Participant Name	Emotion	Posture	Direction of Motion	Space	Tempo	Motion Quality	Motion Examples	symbolic meaning
Alexa	Happy, Joyful	Open and upright	Turning the body to the side	Dynamic and expansive	Medium and fast	Light, flowing, dynamic and full of spirit	Hand movements wave, swing and open. Rotating leg movements, stepping and jogging	Reflecting passion, freedom, and enthusiasm, demonstrating positive emotions and a readiness to perform and face challenges with confidence.

Kesita	Fear, Panic	Closed	Narrow and back and forth	Wide and narrow	fast, irregular and intermittent	Hesitant, stiff, jerky, and rough	Hand movements are fast and strong.	reflects fear, stress, and a desire to avoid uncomfortable situations. This is evident in a closed body posture and unstable movement.
Marsha	Calm	Open	Turning the body to the side	Wide	Stable and consistent	Smooth, soft and flowing	The arms are swinging and opening wide. The gaze is focused but not tense. The footsteps are light and patterned.	Her movements indicate stable emotions, gratitude, and an inner connection to positive experiences.
Yuyun	Bored, Tired	Closed and lethargic	Limited	Narrow and minimal movement	Slow and monotonous	Weak and lacking energy	Hand movements rolled up, body posture limp, footsteps irregular, head bowed and facial expression flat	Lack of energy and exploration of space indicates a lethargic psychological state and a desire to avoid the pressures of daily activities.

4. Reflection and Discussion

The session concluded with a group reflection, where students were given the opportunity to uncover the meaning behind their movements. This stage is crucial for emphasizing that movement is not simply a physical activity, but a form of emotional communication. During the discussion, participants were able to identify the feelings they expressed, and some even expressed feeling more relieved and calm after dancing.

3.2 Discussion

The research summary results show that the dance extracurricular at SMA Negeri 21 Surabaya serves as a safe and supportive space for students to express their emotions openly. Through planned and reflective movement exploration and improvisation, this activity has a positive impact on the emotional development of participants. Each movement becomes a form of authentic nonverbal communication, reflecting psychological conditions while helping participants understand and manage emotions that are difficult to express verbally. This emphasizes the function of dance not only as an artistic expression, but also as a medium for emotional therapy. The following is the format for the movement assessment summary from the results of the process of pouring out emotions through movement exploration and improvisation :

Table 3.1. 2 Assessment Recapitulation

No	Participant Name	Openness of Movement (15%)	Space Exploration (15%)	Movement Coordination (15%)	Kinetic Energy (15%)	Body Expression (15%)	Motion Flow (10%)	Emotion and Movement (15%)	Total Score	Category
1	Alexa	95 (14.25)	90 (13.5)	95 (14.25)	96 (14.4)	96 (14.4)	98 (9.8)	98 (14.7)	95.3	Very good
2	Kesita	93 (13.95)	90 (13.5)	95 (14.25)	96 (14.4)	95 (14.25)	95 (9.5)	96 (14.4)	94.25	Very good
3	Marsha	90 (13.5)	90 (13.5)	90 (13.5)	88 (13.2)	90 (13.5)	90 (9.0)	88 (13.2)	89.4	Very good
4	Yuyun	90 (13.5)	88 (13.2)	90 (13.5)	88 (13.2)	70 (9.0)	80 (8.0)	75 (11.25)	81.65	good

Based on an assessment of seven key aspects of expressing emotion through movement: openness of movement, spatial exploration, coordination of movement, energy of movement, body expression, flow of movement, and the relationship between emotion and movement, a picture was obtained that strengthened the results of observations and interviews with the four students. Each participant demonstrated different and unique movement characteristics according to their emotional state and how they managed and expressed those emotions through dance.

1. Alexa with a total score : 95.3 (Very good)

Alexa demonstrated excellent and consistent performance among all participants. She was able to integrate all aspects of movement with positive and expressive emotional power. She achieved the highest scores in the movement flow (98) and emotion & movement (98), demonstrating that her emotional expression was deeply connected to her movement patterns.

Her movements were energetic, open, and dynamic, conveying genuine and convincing emotions of happiness. Her open body and exploration of space reflected freedom and confidence. Alexa clearly demonstrated that positive emotions like joy can translate into fluid, purposeful, and energetic movement.

2. Kesita with a total score : 94.25 (Very good)

Kesita demonstrated powerful movements under emotional pressure, particularly fear and panic. Her movements appeared jerky and rapid, yet she managed to maintain precise coordination and powerful energy. This was reflected in her high scores for movement coordination (95), energy (96), and emotion & movement (96).

Although the emotions she expressed were negative, she managed to channel this emotional energy effectively through movement. Her bodily expressions conveyed an authentic response to the panic, yet she did not lose control. Kesita demonstrated that even negative emotions can be transformed into aesthetic and meaningful expressions in the context of dance.

3. Marsha with a total score : 89.4 (Very good)

Marsha demonstrated calm, controlled, and stable movement characteristics. All aspects assessed showed high and even average scores. She did not excel in any particular aspect, but her consistency reflected a reflective and peaceful personality.

Her body expression and movement flow scores (90) indicated that she danced with a calm and confident flow. Her movements were not exaggerated, but possessed a gentle, artistic quality. Her emotional interpretation, namely a sense of calm, was successfully conveyed through a blend of body and emotion, albeit with a not overly explosive energy.

4. Yuyun with a total score : 81.65 (Good)

Yuyun displayed clear emotional expressions of boredom and fatigue, but these were not fully translated into dance movements. Her scores for bodily expression (70), movement flow (80), and emotion & movement (75) indicated that her emotional and physical engagement was still lacking.

Her movements tended to be limited, sluggish, and less exploratory. Although she maintained technical coordination and basic movement structure, her expressive power and emotional energy were not conveyed optimally. This reflects internal challenges that were not fully channeled through dance. Nevertheless, her participation remained significant as a representation of negative emotions in the emotional outpouring process.

Observations of the four students who participated in the emotional expression activity through movement exploration and improvisation demonstrated consistency between the emotions they felt and the movement patterns they displayed. This was reinforced by participants' statements after the activity, who reported feeling relieved, helped in managing their feelings, and able to recognize their own emotional states.

They reported that art therapy activities were very effective as a medium for :

1. Help them express their feelings honestly,
2. Provide space to recognize and understand one's emotional state,
3. Become a medium to express pent-up emotions that are not expressed in everyday life.

Thus, extracurricular dance activities not only function as a forum for developing artistic skills, but also as an effective medium for emotional therapy.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the application of emotional expression through movement exploration and improvisation, it can be concluded that extracurricular dance learning activities serve as a safe space for students to understand the meaning of movement and channel and manage emotions constructively. Through an exploration and improvisation approach, the body becomes a medium of nonverbal expression that reflects an individual's psychological condition. The process of expressing emotions through movement exploration and improvisation as art therapy demonstrates emotional recognition, movement exploration according to feelings, movement improvisation based on personal experience, and strengthening expression as a form of emotional release. Observation results show a correlation between movement characteristics and the type of emotion displayed, with students' excellent performance in expressing emotions aesthetically. Participation in this activity has a positive impact on the participants' emotional state. For future researchers, it is hoped that this can serve as a reference for further studies using quantitative or mixed approaches, as well as

cross-disciplinary collaboration with educational psychologists to enrich the study of art therapy in the educational context.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was actively involved in all stages of the research, from planning and field data collection to data analysis and writing the scientific article. Observations and interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth and authentic data related to the expression of emotions through movement exploration and improvisation. Furthermore, the author was fully responsible for the entire data collection process, analysis of the implementation of extracurricular dance learning, and in-depth study of the process of expressing emotions through movement exploration and improvisation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses his gratitude to Allah SWT for His abundant grace and blessings, enabling him to complete this article well and on time. This article was made possible thanks to the support, encouragement, and prayers of those around him who consistently provided encouragement and motivation. Therefore, the author would like to express his gratitude to all those who have helped, guided, and provided direction throughout the writing process, none of whom can be mentioned individually. May all the good deeds given be rewarded accordingly by God Almighty.

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