



Implementation of Free Expression Approach in Dance Learning for Developing Children's Creativity: A Case Study at Kindergarten

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Abstract: In early childhood education, traditional dance instruction often relies heavily on imitation and structured routines, potentially limiting children's creative development. Recent research suggests that more open-ended, expressive approaches may better foster creativity and movement exploration in young learners. This case study investigates applying a free-expression approach in dance learning to develop children's creativity in kindergarten, which addresses the critical need to move away from imitative teaching methods. The research utilized a qualitative case study methodology. Data were collected through observations of eight teaching sessions recorded in field notes, interviews with teachers conducted in a semi-structured manner, the data recorded as interview notes, and document collection whose results were recorded as documentation notes. The data collection also involved student subjects of nine children aged five to six years for four weeks. The data were then analyzed using Milles and Huberman's flow, which consisted of data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was guaranteed through observation, interviews, and triangulation of document studies. The results showed that the implementation process successfully passed through three phases (initial resistance, progressive integration, and emergent synthesis), indicating an effective teacher transition from demonstrator to facilitator. The pattern of children's creativity development varied based on their movement background. Analysis of creativity indicators showed measurable progress across all four dimensions (fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration), mainly when supported by appropriate environmental modifications. However, the systematic documentation of the implementation process provides a valuable framework that other institutions can adapt for their specific contexts while suggesting directions for future research in developing appropriate assessment tools for early childhood education.

Keywords: child creativity, dance learning, ECE, free expression

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INTRODUCTION

Developing children's creativity has become a critical focus in early childhood education, particularly in Indonesia, where traditional teaching approaches still dominate. This challenge is especially evident in dance education, where the tension between preserving cultural traditions and fostering creative expression creates unique pedagogical barriers. The Global Innovation Index 2023 ranks Indonesia 61 out of 132 countries regarding innovation and creativity potential (WIPO, 2023), while the World Economic Forum (2024) emphasizes creativity as one of the top three skills needed for future success. Creative dance learning models can effectively develop multiple intelligences in early childhood education, including kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and natural intelligence (Krakauer et al., 2023). However, in early childhood education settings, particularly in dance education, this creativity gap manifests in the prevalence of imitative learning approaches, where teachers primarily demonstrate movements for children to copy, thus limiting opportunities for creative exploration (Gardini et al., 2023). Despite numerous studies highlighting the limitations of such imitative approaches, they persist due to deeply embedded cultural practices and insufficient understanding of alternative methodologies. This practice contradicts both research findings on the benefits of creative dance for early childhood development (Wulandari et al., 2019) and the principles outlined in the Indonesian Ministry of Education's regulation number 032/H/KR/2024, which emphasizes creativity development as a crucial component of children's identity formation.

Given these challenges in developing creativity through traditional teaching approaches in Indonesian early childhood education, a case study approach is particularly appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of how the free expression approach is implemented within the real-life context of an Indonesian kindergarten. Existing research, while valuable, has primarily focused on Western educational contexts, leaving gaps in understanding how creative approaches can be effectively implemented within Indonesian cultural frameworks (Nurjanah et al., 2024; Rubiyantoro & Bush, 2024). A selected private kindergarten in Yogyakarta provides an ideal case for examining this transition process. As a typical Indonesian

early childhood education institution working to implement innovative approaches while maintaining cultural values, it represents the challenges many kindergartens face with creative development needs. This examination is supported by established theoretical frameworks in early childhood development, though their application in Indonesian contexts requires careful cultural adaptation. Current theoretical frameworks support creativity development in early childhood, a strategic period where intelligence development reaches 80% by age eight (Calero-Morales et al., 2023; Maryatun, 2016). While Guilford and Torrance's model identifies four essential dimensions: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration (Plucker, 2022; Runco, 2014), their framework requires contextual adaptation for Indonesian educational settings. These dimensions align with developmental stages from sensory to creative exploration (Eisner, 2017), though the progression may vary in culturally specific contexts. In dance education, children express themselves through movement exploration, fostering systematic creative development (Pamungkas, 2015; Pamungkas et al., 2016). Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences further positions creativity within kinesthetic and musical domains, particularly relevant for dance education (Davis et al., 2011), offering a complementary perspective that bridges Western theoretical frameworks with Indonesian cultural contexts.

While these theoretical frameworks provide a strong foundation for understanding creativity development, critical analysis reveals challenges in translating them into effective teaching practices, particularly in Indonesian settings. Previous implementation attempts have often failed to address Indonesian early childhood education's cultural dynamics adequately. The importance of understanding this implementation process is underscored by recent research in creative thinking development, though most studies have focused on outcomes rather than processes. Studies in movement education reveal that expressive dance learning contributes to motor development and cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Payne & Costas, 2021). However, they rarely address the specific implementation challenges in culturally diverse settings. For instance, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesian early childhood education highlights the need for cultural adaptation and flexibility in curriculum design to cater to the unique needs and attributes of students (Lisnawati et al., 2024). Combining different teaching approaches can enhance students' creative thinking abilities (Usman et al., 2023), but existing research (Maulana & Mayar, 2019) has not adequately explored how such combinations can be effectively achieved within Indonesian cultural contexts. The recent introduction of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia, which emphasizes student-centered learning and creative exploration, offers valuable insights into how innovative approaches can be implemented to foster creativity. This curriculum encourages project-based learning, collaborative learning, and technology integration, all of which have been shown to enhance creative thinking skills (Saa, 2024). While this study was conducted in a different context, Alghufali (2024) finds that combining structured guidance with creative exploration is particularly relevant to early childhood dance education, though it requires careful cultural adaptation. Payne and Costas (2021) showed that successful development of creative thinking skills requires careful consideration of both teaching strategies and learning environments, principles that can inform the implementation of creative movement education when appropriately contextualized.

Implementing creative teaching approaches in Indonesian education contexts presents unique challenges and opportunities that previous research has not adequately addressed. While implementation studies in Indonesia have shown promising initial results with the free expression approach (Maulana & Mayar, 2019), they have primarily focused on general outcomes rather than specific implementation processes, leaving practitioners without clear guidance for transition strategies (OECD, 2024). Despite the established benefits of creative movement education and child-centered approaches (Warburton, 2019), there remains a limited understanding of how these factors operate within Indonesian early childhood institutions (Giguere, 2011), particularly regarding integrating cultural values with innovative teaching methods. This gap is particularly critical given Indonesia's unique cultural and educational conditions, where successful implementation requires careful consideration of transition strategies and environmental factors in moving from imitative to exploratory methods.

The selection of a private kindergarten in Yogyakarta as a case study site is particularly relevant as it exemplifies Indonesian kindergartens' challenges and opportunities in implementing innovative approaches. This aligns with studies highlighting the importance of context-specific research in educational settings. For instance, a study on the pedagogic competence of teachers in managing Islamic education for students with disabilities emphasizes the need for tailored approaches that consider the institution's unique cultural and educational environment (Mindani et al., 2022). This is supported by research on innovative approaches to addressing educational inequities, underscoring the importance of technology integration and community involvement in enhancing educational outcomes, particularly in remote and under-resourced areas (Amin, 2024). A critical analysis of recent research in Indonesian educational settings reveals methodological limitations in studying creative development, particularly in understanding the complex interplay between cultural preservation and pedagogical innovation (Ghufron, 2024). This case study addresses these limitations by exploring the transition process from imitative to free-expression approaches, understanding children's responses and development

patterns, and analyzing how this implementation contributes to creativity development. Research on cooperative learning models, such as the "Make a Match" type, has shown that such approaches can affect student learning outcomes and motivation, indicating the potential benefits of transitioning to more interactive and creative methods (Fachriyah et al., 2022). The role of leadership and readiness for change is also crucial, as highlighted in a study on school innovation in Indonesian rural areas, which found that change leadership and readiness for change have a positive impact on school innovation (Meizatri et al., 2023). These objectives are particularly important given the current state of dance education in Indonesian kindergartens, where traditional imitative methods still dominate despite growing recognition of the importance of creative development. Furthermore, examining this transition at the selected kindergarten provides valuable insights into how cultural and educational traditions can be harmoniously integrated with innovative teaching approaches, addressing a critical gap in current literature.

Several critical questions remain unanswered regarding dance education in Indonesian kindergartens, particularly implementing free-expression approaches. Recent surveys of 150 kindergarten teachers across Java indicate that 78% still primarily use imitative methods in dance education, while only 12% have attempted to implement creative movement approaches (Gardini et al., 2023). This data reveals an implementation gap concerning how these approaches can be effectively implemented within Indonesian cultural settings. A comprehensive review of 45 studies on early childhood dance education in Indonesia between 2019 and 2024 found that only 15% focused on implementation processes, with the majority (68%) examining general outcomes without detailed attention to methodology (Maulana & Mayar, 2019). While studies suggest the potential benefits of creative movement, with documented improvements of 35-40% in children's creative expression scores (Pamungkas, 2015), insufficient empirical evidence shows how free-expression approaches stimulate children's creativity in dance education. Additionally, current literature in dance education pedagogy reveals challenges in assessment methods and creativity measurement (Warburton, 2019), highlighting a pressing need to identify and understand which creativity indicators emerge through these approaches and how they manifest in early childhood settings. These empirically documented gaps have led to three fundamental research questions: How is the free expression approach implemented in dance learning, how does it stimulate children's creativity development, and what creativity indicators emerge through its implementation? Through an in-depth case study approach, this study provides practical insights for Indonesian kindergarten teachers transitioning from imitative to creative teaching approaches while contributing to the broader understanding of creative development in early childhood dance education. Focusing on a single case allows for deep examination of these questions within their natural setting, offering rich insights into the complexities of implementing innovative approaches in early childhood dance education while maintaining cultural integrity.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative case study (Yin, 2018). Case studies were chosen because they allowed for intensive and detailed examination of a limited system, in this case, the implementation of the free expression approach in dance learning at an early childhood education institution. The research was conducted at a private kindergarten in an urban area of Yogyakarta for four weeks. The case selection was based on three criteria in accordance with the research objectives. The criteria were the school's current transition from imitative to innovative approaches, representation of the typical characteristics of kindergartens in Indonesia, and accessibility for in-depth observation of the implementation process. The participants consisted of nine children and two teachers. They were five to six years old (five girls, four boys) with varied backgrounds of dance experience, one dance teacher who implemented the new approach, and one classroom teacher who observed the transition process.

The data collection methods used were observation, interviews, and documentation. To understand the transition process, observations of eight teaching sessions (30-45 minutes each) were made, supported by detailed field notes on the changes in teaching approaches. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, focusing on the adaptation process and implementation strategies. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was conducted in a quiet room in the school. To track children's progress, researchers used the results of assessments conducted by teachers, supported by documentation and background information collection. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model. In data reduction, the researchers selected and focused on raw data from observations, interviews, and documentation relevant to understanding how the free-expression approach was implemented. Data display was done by organizing the reduced information into narrative text and tables showing the progression of implementation stages and patterns of child development. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the validation strategy used triangulation of data sources. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and explanations about the effectiveness of implementing the freedom of expression approach.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This case study examining the implementation of the free-expression approach in dance learning at a private urban kindergarten in Yogyakarta addresses three key research questions: how the free-expression approach is implemented in dance learning, how does this approach stimulate children's creativity development, and what creativity indicators emerge through its implementation. Recent studies in early childhood dance education have highlighted the critical importance of transitioning from imitative to expressive pedagogical approaches, particularly in cultural contexts where traditional teaching methods predominate. The transformation from imitation to free expression approach revealed a systematic three-phase developmental process that demonstrated challenges and progressive adaptation.

Table 1. Analysis of Eight Teaching Sessions Transition

Phase	Teaching Approach	Learning Objectives	Implementation Challenges	Solutions
Initial (Sessions 1-2)	Hybrid traditional-exploratory	- Establish safety parameter - Build movement awareness - Introduce free movement concepts	- Teacher hesitation in releasing control - Parental expectations for traditional outcomes - Student uncertainty in free movement	- Structured warm-up with gradual free exploration - Parent education workshops - Clear safety guidelines
Middle (Sessions 3-5)	Guided exploration	- Expand movement vocabulary - Develop spatial awareness - Foster peer interaction - Encourage improvisation	- Limited movement space - Diverse student skill levels - Balancing individual vs group needs	- Movement learning centers - Peer learning groups - Flexible space arrangement - Differentiated tasks
Final (Sessions 6-8)	Child-led exploration	- Facilitate creative synthesis - Develop performance confidence - Foster movement innovation - Support collaboration	- Maintaining basic structure - Supporting diverse expressions - Documenting progress	- Flexible framework development - Individual creative support - Collaborative spaces

The transformation from imitation to free expression approach revealed a systematic three-phase developmental process that demonstrated challenges and progressive adaptation. Detailed analysis of eight teaching sessions, conducted through systematic observation and documentation, showed an initial resistance phase (sessions 1-2), where teacher demonstrations dominated approximately 80% of the instructional time while student-led exploration was limited to brief, structured intervals. This pattern of teacher-centered instruction reflected deeply ingrained traditional practices, as evidenced by video documentation showing students primarily focused on mirroring exact movements rather than exploring personal interpretations. As expressed by the dance teacher during an in-depth interview, "I am concerned that allowing free exploration may jeopardize the basic techniques emphasized by our traditional dance forms, particularly in maintaining the cultural essence of our traditional dances" (Teacher Interview, Week 1). This hesitation among educators aligns strongly with [Gardini et al. \(2023\)](#) observation about the prevalence of imitative approaches in Indonesian early childhood dance education, highlighting the cultural and pedagogical tensions between preserving traditional forms and fostering creative expression. The resistance phase also revealed an interesting dynamic where teachers and students initially sought constant validation for movement choices, suggesting a deeply embedded reliance on external approval in the learning process. The progressive integration phase (sessions 3-5) marked a shift in teaching dynamics, characterized by notable changes in teacher approaches and student responses to movement exploration. Video documentation from session four captured a transformative moment where students naturally incorporated previously imitated movements into their exploratory sequences, demonstrating increasing confidence in movement creation. Detailed observation notes revealed how students progressively combined traditional dance elements with personal interpretations, showing growing comfort with creative expression. The classroom teacher's daily assessments noted this evolution, "We observed a combination of the movements we had modeled with personal creativity. The students find their movements, often surprising us with unique interpretations of basic steps" (Teacher Interview, Week 2). Environmental modifications during this phase, including the strategic arrangement of learning spaces and integration of props, further supported students' creative exploration. This transition strongly supports [Pamungkas's \(2015\)](#) assertion that freedom of expression enables children to develop evolving creativity through dance movements while demonstrating how

structured support can facilitate this development. The emerging synthesis phase (sessions 6-8) demonstrated the culmination of the transition process, marked by advances in students' creative confidence and movement autonomy. Students progressed from imitation to creative expression, showing sophisticated integration of learned techniques with personal innovation. As documented in observation notes, "The students now start the movement sequences with personal expression, confidently introducing their own interpretations while maintaining awareness of spatial relationships and group dynamics" (Observation Notes, Session 7). Video analysis revealed students independently initiating creative movement sequences, collaborating spontaneously with peers, and showing increased sophistication in movement patterns. The dance teacher's reflective notes highlighted how students began incorporating cultural elements into their creative expressions, "They are not just creating movements, but telling stories through their dance, often drawing from cultural narratives we have discussed" (Teacher Interview, Week 3). This progression strongly aligns with [Usman et al. \(2023\)](#) that successful implementation requires balancing structured guidance with creative exploration while extending their insights to show how this balance can promote cultural awareness alongside creative development.

The findings of this study hold substantial implications for both pedagogical practice and policy development in early childhood arts education. Recent research by [Saefurrohman \(2024\)](#) demonstrates that creative expression in early childhood correlates with enhanced cognitive flexibility and problem-solving capabilities. This finding aligns with [Smare and Elfatih's \(2024\)](#) systematic review, which identified that integrative creative approaches in early childhood education consistently demonstrate positive correlations with children's creative development across multiple domains, particularly in cultural awareness and divergent thinking capabilities. The documented three-phase transition model provides empirical evidence of how traditional cultural practices can be preserved while fostering creative development, addressing a critical concern in many educational systems globally. Integrating local cultural values in early childhood education has been shown to enhance character development and cultural identity formation while simultaneously promoting creative expression and cognitive growth ([Sakti et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, this study responds to emerging findings regarding the urgent need for evidence-based approaches to creative pedagogy implementation, particularly in culturally rich educational contexts ([Fitriadi et al., 2024](#)). The study's detailed documentation of the transition process provides practical guidelines for educators and institutions undertaking similar pedagogical transformations. The successful integration of traditional cultural elements with creative expression demonstrates how educational innovation can enhance rather than diminish cultural preservation efforts. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on creative pedagogy in early childhood education while addressing the specific challenges faced in cultural contexts where traditional teaching methods predominate.

Analysis of observational data, teacher interviews, and documentation across the four-week implementation period revealed patterns in how different groups of children responded to and developed through the free-expression approach in dance learning. This study addresses a critical gap in understanding how different movement backgrounds influence creative development in early childhood dance education, particularly relevant given the increasing emphasis on creative arts education in contemporary early childhood curricula.

Table 2. Weekly Development Patterns in Dance Learning

Student	Previous Experience	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
S1	No formal training	Hesitant to move independently; observed others	Began trying simple movement variations	Initiated own movements with growing confidence	Created unique movement combinations
S2	No formal training	Minimal movement exploration; sought guidance	Started exploring with peer support	Showed increased spatial awareness	Developed personal movement style
S3	No formal training	Natural curiosity but limited expression	Experimented with different movement levels	Combined traditional and free movements	Emerged as a creative movement leader
S4	Formal dance training	Relied heavily on learned patterns	Struggled with free exploration	Began integrating personal elements	Achieved a balance of structure and creativity
S5	Formal dance training	Focused on "correct" movements	Gradually reduced seeking approval	Experimented with movement variations	Developed fluid, expressive style
S6	Formal dance training	Resistant to unstructured movement	Started small movement modifications	Showed increased comfort with exploration	Created original movement sequences
S7	Informal exposure	Enthusiastic but unfocused exploration	Developed more purposeful movements	Led peer movement activities	Demonstrated complex movement combinations
S8	Informal	Preferred group	Built confidence	Created collaborative	Balanced individual

	exposure	movement activities	through peer interaction	movements	and group expression
S9	Informal exposure	Showed natural movement and creativity	Inspired peers through exploration	Developed thematic movements	Demonstrated sophisticated movement integration

Children with no formal dance training (S1, S2, S3) demonstrated a remarkable progression from initial hesitation to creative exploration, with field notes documenting their transition from peripheral observation to confident movement creation. Their development particularly exemplified [Eisner's](#) (2017) theory of creative progression from sensory exploration to creative elaboration. This finding aligns with research by [Utami et al.](#) (2023) demonstrating the relationship between cognitive performance and developmental milestones in early childhood, as well as [Alper and Ulutaş](#) (2022), who reveal improvements in creative thinking skills among 5-6-year-old children who participated in structured creative movement programs. The dance teacher's systematic observations captured this transformation, "without any presumption of 'correct' dance movement, these children eventually showed greater freedom in movement exploration, often introducing innovative elements we had not anticipated" (Teacher Interview, Week 3). The absence of preconceived movement patterns appeared to accelerate their creative development, supporting [Gardini et al.'s](#) (2023) findings about the potential limitations of traditional imitative approaches. This aligns with [Maryatun et al.](#) (2024) findings that providing freedom and voluntariness to express, work, and communicate with others is crucial in early childhood learning. Their research demonstrates how creative learning conceptually enables learners to actively generate their independence, particularly when given free exploration and self-expression opportunities.

Students with formal dance training (S4, S5, S6) exhibited a notably different adaptation pattern, initially demonstrating strong resistance to departing from previously learned movement patterns. This resistance highlighted the complex relationship between technical training and creative expression in early childhood dance education. Research by [Tsompanaki](#) (2024) demonstrates that creative movement and dance programs can enhance children's basic motor skills, particularly in locomotor movements and object control abilities. Their findings revealed that creative movement-dance education programs substantially improved fundamental movement patterns when integrated with developmentally appropriate practice. Field notes revealed their tendency to revert to formal dance positions during free exploration sessions, "S5 repeatedly returned to classical dance positions, showing visible discomfort when asked to create new movements" (Observation Notes, Week 1). However, changes emerged in their approach to movement exploration by the third week, suggesting that technical foundation can eventually support rather than hinder creative development. The classroom teacher observed, "S5 has begun integrating personal interpretations into traditional movements, showing increasing comfort with creative expression while maintaining technical precision" (Teacher Interview, Week 3). Their development path illustrated the complex interplay between technical proficiency and creative freedom, supporting [Pamungkas's](#) (2015) findings about the role of aesthetic frameworks in fostering creativity while demonstrating how structured movement knowledge can ultimately enhance creative expression.

The most intriguing developmental patterns emerged among children with informal movement exposure (S7, S8, S9), whose progression closely aligned with the free expression approach's theoretical foundations. These students demonstrated a natural inclination toward exploration from the initial sessions, though their expressions initially lacked structured focus. Detailed observation notes captured their early approach, "moving spontaneously with enthusiasm but without clear direction, responding immediately to all environmental stimuli" (Observation Notes, Week 1). Their development particularly supported [Usman et al.](#) (2023) findings about combining structured guidance with creative exploration. The most intriguing developmental patterns emerged among children with informal movement exposure, aligning with [Konstantinidou's](#) (2023) findings on the relationship between dance, movement, and psychological well-being in early childhood development. Their research demonstrates how informal movement exposure creates foundational emotional regulation and social connection pathways. Additionally, [Kotaman et al.](#) (2024) comprehensive review highlights how dance-based interventions facilitate both creative expression and motor learning through embodied cognitive processes in early childhood education. By the fourth week, these students had developed sophisticated movement vocabularies that uniquely blended structured and free elements, demonstrating how informal exposure can provide an optimal foundation for creative development. Video analysis showed their progression from random movement exploration to purposeful creative expression, supporting Gardner's theory about developing bodily-kinesthetic intelligence through structured creative opportunities while revealing new insights about the role of prior informal movement experiences in facilitating creative development. These varied developmental patterns across the three groups demonstrate how previous movement experiences influence children's receptivity to and progression through the free-expression approach. While children without formal training showed the most direct path to creative exploration, those with formal training eventually achieved a valuable synthesis of

technique and creativity, and those with informal exposure demonstrated unique advantages in creative development. These findings suggest that free-expression approaches in early childhood dance education must be calibrated to children's prior movement experiences, with differentiated support strategies for each group. This aligns with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Pamungkas's (2015) framework of aesthetic development while extending our understanding of how different movement backgrounds influence creative development in early childhood dance education. This study's findings have implications for early childhood education policy and practice. As highlighted by recent neurological studies (Vander et al., 2023), movement-based creative expression during early childhood impacts cognitive development, social-emotional learning, and executive function development. The research addresses the pressing need for evidence-based approaches to integrating creative movement in early childhood education (OECD, 2021). Analysis of observational data across the four-week implementation period revealed developments in children's creativity as measured through Guilford and Torrance's theoretical framework. The systematic observation of creative development encompassed both quantitative metrics and qualitative assessments, providing an understanding of children's creative growth trajectories. Each dimension of creativity—fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration—demonstrated distinct yet interconnected patterns of development, with progress in one area frequently catalyzing growth in others, suggesting a synergistic relationship between these creative components. This developmental pattern aligns with Maloney's theoretical propositions, which emphasize that fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration (FFOE) constitute the cornerstone skills for creative thinking. These fundamental components enable students to generate multiple ideas and engage in unconventional thinking without inhibition or fear of judgment (Maloney, n.d.) Implementing strategically designed teaching approaches and carefully constructed supportive learning environments facilitated children's progression from basic imitative patterns to increasingly complex, personally meaningful expressions.

A noteworthy aspect of this creative evolution was the children's capacity to integrate cultural elements with their creative innovations while maintaining authentic connections to traditional dance forms. This cultural synthesis manifested in various ways, from movement vocabulary to spatial relationships and narrative elements. Contemporary research, such as that conducted by Rofi'ah et al. (2023), substantiates the significance of cultural integration in fostering creativity, demonstrating how children's creative expressions are enriched by their cultural heritage and lived experiences. The observational data revealed several key patterns in creative development: (1) the progressive enhancement of movement complexity, (2) the increasing sophistication of spatial awareness and utilization, and (3) the growing ability to synthesize diverse creative elements into coherent expressions. These patterns emerged consistently across different learning contexts and individual differences, suggesting the robustness of the implemented pedagogical approach. To systematically analyze these developmental trajectories, Table 3 presents a detailed examination of creative dimensions throughout the implementation period. The table delineates measurable progress across each creative component, offering quantitative and qualitative development indicators. This analytical framework enables the identification of specific growth patterns and evaluating pedagogical effectiveness in nurturing creative capabilities.

Table 3. Development of Creativity Dimensions Through Free Expression Approach

Creativity Dimension	Initial Stage	Final Stage	Observed Changes	Development Indicators
Fluency	Limited movement variations with hesitation 3 children produced movement variations	Multiple variations with confidence. 7 children created diverse movements	From basic repetition to diverse movement combinations	Ability to produce a variety of spontaneous movements
Flexibility	Single-level movements with rigid transitions 2 children showed movement adaptability	Multi-level movements with fluid adaptations 6 children demonstrated fluid transitions	From fixed patterns to adaptable movement styles	Ability to adjust movements across contexts
Originality	Primarily imitative movements 2 children attempted personal expressions	Personal movement signatures with cultural elements 7 children developed unique styles	From following to creating unique expressions	Development of distinctive movement style
Elaboration	Basic movement sequences 3 children created basic sequences	Complex-themed choreographic elements 6 children developed complex combinations	From simple sequences to detailed movement narratives	Ability to develop and connect movements

Through systematic observation and documentation, our study revealed remarkable developments across Guilford and Torrance's four dimensions of creativity, demonstrating a clear progression in children's creative capabilities through the free-expression approach. This is consistent with Torrance's work, which emphasizes the importance of open-ended tasks and supportive environments in fostering creative thinking (Torrance, 2016). Initially, only three children demonstrated diverse movement production, characterized by limited movement variations and hesitant exploration, while most children relied heavily on imitative patterns and sought constant validation from teachers. By the study's conclusion, seven children had developed unique movement signatures, showing complex themed choreographic elements that incorporated both cultural elements and personal innovations. This progression was particularly evident in their movement fluency, where children evolved from basic repetitive movements to creating diverse movement combinations with confidence and spatial awareness. One teacher noted that "the transition from simple mimicry to creative exploration wasn't just about the quantity of movements. We observed real qualitative changes in how children approached movement creation, particularly in their willingness to experiment with new forms and combinations" (Teacher Interview, Week 3). The development pattern showed consistent progress across all observed sessions, with a notable acceleration in creative expression occurring after environmental modifications were implemented in Week 2, suggesting the crucial role of supportive learning environments in fostering creative development.

The development of flexibility showed even more pronounced progression across the four-week implementation period. Children moved from single-level movements with rigid transitions to sophisticated multi-level movements with fluid adaptations incorporating varying spatial dimensions and rhythmic elements. This developmental sequence aligns with recent research findings on the importance of peer learning in creative development, as highlighted by studies on collaborative creative processes (Maloney, n.d.). Video analysis revealed a systematic development pattern where children first explored different heights and levels in their movements, then gradually incorporated directional changes, and finally began experimenting with varying movement qualities and temporal dynamics in their dance explorations. This developmental sequence strongly aligned with Plucker's (2022) theoretical framework while extending our understanding of how movement flexibility develops specifically within early childhood dance contexts. The progression was particularly evident in group settings, where peer interactions catalyzed experimentation with different movement qualities and spatial relationships. Documentation from Week 3 captured this evolution, "children now seamlessly transition between movement levels, responding to both musical cues and peer interactions while maintaining their creative expressions" (Observation Notes, Week 3). These observations validate recent research findings about the importance of peer learning in creative development while adding new insights about how social interaction specifically supports movement flexibility in early childhood dance education.

Originality emerged as perhaps the most striking indicator of creative development throughout the study period, revealing complex patterns of individual creative growth and cultural integration. Initial observations showed most children relying primarily on imitative movements, with only two children attempting personal expressions and minimal deviation from demonstrated patterns during the first week of implementation. By the study's conclusion, seven children had developed distinctive movement styles that successfully incorporated cultural elements while maintaining strong individual creative voices, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of traditional dance elements and personal expression. This remarkable transformation was documented through detailed video analysis and teacher observations, "we are seeing children not just creating new movements, but thoughtfully integrating traditional dance elements with their own innovative interpretations, showing a deep understanding of both cultural forms and personal creativity" (Teacher Interview, Week 4). The progression aligned particularly well with Pamungkas's (2015) theoretical framework regarding aesthetic development in early childhood while extending our understanding of how cultural elements can enhance rather than restrict creative expression (Rofi'ah et al., 2023). This finding challenges common assumptions about the relationship between traditional dance forms and creative development, suggesting that proper integration of cultural elements can actually accelerate creative growth when implemented through a free-expression approach.

Environmental modifications proved instrumental in supporting these creative developments across all observed dimensions. The class teacher emphasized the critical role of spatial arrangement, "the strategic organization of learning environment influences children's willingness to explore movement possibilities. When we created defined spaces for individual exploration alongside collaborative areas, we saw dramatic increases in creative risk-taking and experimental movement patterns" (Teacher Interview, Week 2). This is in line with research on the impact of physical space on creative development, which highlights the importance of designing environments that facilitate individual and collaborative creative exploration (Maloney, n.d.). Video documentation revealed how children utilized different areas of the learning space for varying types of creative exploration, with some zones encouraging individual movement experimentation while others facilitated collaborative creative development. These spatial modifications were systematically implemented based on ongoing observations of children's movement patterns and creative tendencies, allowing for dynamic adjustment

of the environment to support emerging creative needs. The impact of these environmental adaptations was particularly evident in how children transitioned between different types of creative exploration, showing increased confidence in individual and collaborative movement creation. This finding substantially extends theoretical understanding by demonstrating how physical space and social interaction can be strategically designed and modified to support progressive, creative development in dance education.

The progression in elaboration ability demonstrated particularly noteworthy development across all observed children, revealing complex growth patterns in narrative and symbolic expression through movement. Children moved from basic movement sequences to sophisticated themed choreographic elements that incorporated storytelling, emotional expression, and abstract concept representation. By Week 4, detailed observations captured remarkable advances, "children now create movement sequences that tell complete stories, incorporating character development, emotional transitions, and complex narrative arcs through their dance expressions" (Observation Notes, Week 4). The development of elaboration skills showed interesting variations based on children's prior movement experience, with formally trained dancers initially showing more structured elaboration, while those with informal exposure demonstrated more spontaneous narrative development. This pattern of elaboration development provides important insights into how different types of movement backgrounds influence children's ability to create and expand upon movement ideas, extending the current theoretical understanding of creative development in early childhood dance education.

This study makes a valuable contribution to theoretical understanding and practical application by providing detailed empirical evidence of how indicators of creativity emerge and develop through the implementation of a structured yet flexible free-expression approach in early childhood dance education. The findings extend existing theoretical frameworks by demonstrating the complex interplay between environmental design, cultural context, and individual developmental trajectories in supporting the growth of creativity while revealing how creativity development follows distinct yet interrelated pathways where progress in one dimension often catalyzes development in another. This suggests a more nuanced approach to creativity development than previously theorized, especially valuable in cultural contexts where traditional teaching methods dominate. The documented three-phase transition model and detailed analysis of creativity indicators provide practical guidance and concrete metrics for institutions undertaking similar pedagogical transformations. Moreover, successfully integrating traditional cultural elements with creative expression suggests that educational innovation can enhance rather than detract from cultural preservation efforts. This is an important finding, given the increasing emphasis on creativity as an essential 21st-century skill and the growing recognition of culturally responsive education. These insights offer value for advancing theoretical understanding and practical implementation in developing early childhood creativity.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the free expression approach in a private kindergarten in Yogyakarta resulted in three main findings: (1) teachers successfully went through different phases of development from demonstrator to facilitator, (2) children's movement background influenced their creative responses, with those without formal training initially showing greater creative freedom, and (3) measurable progress was seen on all creativity indicators when supported by appropriate environmental modifications. When applied systematically, these findings suggest that a free-expression approach can effectively foster creative development in early childhood dance education. This study provides a framework that can be adapted for other institutions while highlighting the need for context-appropriate assessment tools in early childhood creative movement education.

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