"ALLOW ME TO DANCE, DOES MY AGE OR GENDER COUNT?": A STUDY OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN THE EFUTU MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA.

Latipher Amma Osei
Department of Theatre Arts,
University of Edcuation, Winneba

ABSTRACT
Undeniably, it is widespread in Ghanaian communities to see children dancing freely at any given opportunity. However, less scholarly attention has been given to the phenomenon of the dance movements of children in Ghanaian preschools. The purpose of the study was to investigate and report the extent to which age and gender affect the dance movements of preschool children in the Effutu Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. The study employed the quantitative method approach and had a sample size of 120 children between the ages of four and five years from six preschools. Data was collected and analyzed using content analysis and observation. Results indicated that although dancing among children was common at community gatherings, dancing in schools was not a common phenomenon. The results also indicated that although there was no statistically significant difference between the dance movements of boys and girls, there was a statistically significant difference between the dance movements of children aged four and five years. The study concludes that the method of allowing children to engage in self-initiated activities through playing and creative movement allows for a lot of freshness, and tolerance, all preliminary conditions for successful education.

Keywords: Dance Movement, gender and dance, Age and dance, preschool dancing, kindergarten, Effutu.

INTRODUCTION

At the thought of the word dance, many things come to mind. Images of culture, scenes from a youth party to some moments in physical activities (Chua, 2015). Undeniably, it is widespread in Ghanaian communities to see children dancing freely at any opportunity. However, less scholarly attention has been given to the phenomenon of the dance movements of children in Ghanaian schools. The purpose of the study was to investigate and report the extent to which age and gender affect the dance movements of preschool children in the Effutu Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana.

Children's engagement with music and Dance

There is a large body of knowledge concerning human beings, especially children, and their engagement with dance. However, much of the literature discusses using dance as therapeutic (Yetti, Widianti, and Nurlita, 2018; Berger, 1995; Loman, 1998) means to correct some deficiencies in children like autism (Richardson, 2018; Moraes, et al., 2017; Scharoun, Reinders, and Bryden, 2014), Down's syndrome (Snyder, 2018), and physical disabilities. Most of these studies have proved to some extent how dance assists children in improving health-related mobility issues.

From as far back as the 1980s, numerous studies have been conducted by European and American scholars on children's reactions to music and are not limited to the spontaneous, self-initiated movements to music (Gluschankof, 2005), music and movement (Retra, 2010, 2005; Chen-Hafteck, 2004; Andress, 1991), and expressions of emotional meaning through body movement (Boone & Cunningham, 2001).

Coming closer to Ghana, Addo (2013, 1998, 1997, 1996, & 1995) and Dzansi (2004 & 2002) have conducted a number of studies in the area of Ghanaian children, their music, and play. Addo's works dwell around Ghanaian children's play songs, language, and the development of singing in the curriculum, while Dzansi's works have focused on Ghanaian children's singing games, playground music, and indigenous culture. All

of these studies have contributed greatly to the literature on Ghanaian children.

With the above studies, it is axiomatic to say that children's engagement with music and dance has been extensively studied across the world. However, in as much as numerous studies worldwide have discussed children's engagement with dance there is scanty evidence in the literature on the dance movements of Ghanaian children.

Undeniably, as much as dance comes in many forms and certain skills can be mastered over time, not all of them are appropriate for young children. According to Stinson (1988), the kind of dance that is most suitable for this age is often referred to as creative dance or creative movement. "It is an art form that is based on natural movement rather than a movement of a particular style such as one might see in tap dance or ballet" (Stinson, 1988, p. 2).

Laban (1975) expressed the view that spontaneous moves by children lead to movement expressiveness and recommends embedding them in the curriculum. For Laban, the role of the school is to nurture spontaneous movement and make the child aware of the principles that direct its motion. For children to have sound development in their growth, it is important that they be active. One good way of ensuring that children become active is encouraging movement to music in everyday school activities. Music and movement are fundamental aspects of children's play. It is therefore important that musical activities are imbibed into class activities and the results will be children having opportunities to enjoy moving, listening, and singing. Children not only hear music but also experience emotional reactions to it, which motivates movement. Kieff and Casbergue (2000) encourage children to engage in movement activities with music since it helps them appreciate the importance of vigorous physical activity by naturally enhancing joy and playfulness. No wonder Isenberg and Jalongo (2001) indicate that children's early experiences with movement activities influence their later knowledge, concept development, skills, and attitudes.

Scholars (Lutz & Kuhlman, 2000; Stinson, 1988), revealed that movement through dance helps children to learn about their bodies and how to express themselves through it. Some engagement in dance teaches children how to handle different situations and social interactions. Additionally, scholars have indicated that an engagement in rhythmic activities develops neuromuscular coordination and synchronization, which results in strengthening movement perceptions (Laban, 1975; Sanderson, 1988). The child also learns to cooperate with others, take up responsibilities and roles, and learn to respect the views of others.

Together with other pursuits such as movement and play, dance often experiences a restricted or limited existence. Consequently, dance is barely visible within educational programs. As noted by other authors, dance as a subject is often marginalized within educational institutions, being considered as an extracurricular or, of limited pedagogical value or meant to expend children's energy in preparation for other more serious areas of learning (Schiller& Meiners, 2003). From this standpoint, dance and its counterpart movement are considered as frivolous and therefore, not taken seriously as a way of active learning.

However, there exists a collection of social issues surrounding dance which exclude dance from the curriculum even further. Aspects such as eroticizing dance as a sensuous and seductive activity (Ehrenreich, 2007) tend to place dance in serious jeopardy. In Ghana, many parents frown on their kids engaging in dance because they believe it has sexual connotations that they would not want their wards to pick up (Osei, Gyebi, & Aidoo, 2020).

The big question then is, of what value is dance to the development of a child? Although the actual value of dance is still being researched, Reimer, (2009), has identified a noteworthy value of the arts to human development. For him exposing a child to the arts is a way of educating the child's human feelings or subjectivity. Though his thoughts have been subjected to critical reviews from other scholars, it happens to be one of the few thoughts that stand for the value of the arts in human development.

Movement Patterns of Children

According to Gallahue and Ozmun (2006), young children are likely to participate at different levels in music and movement activities. Some preschoolers may just listen to music, some may just observe others' movements, and others may join in the activity (Humpal & Wolf, 2007). A study by Eerola, Luck, and Toiviainen (2006), recorded children's movement to music in a more natural setting. The findings of their study indicated that the children were found to display one of three main movement types (hopping, circling, or swaying), and peri- odic movements were identified in all three types. These periodic movements were at times synchronized with the music, but there was little evidence of tempo-adjustment in movement periodicities. This goes to support the kind of dances performed by children in their communities or natural settings such as funerals and parties.

Studies by scholars (Eerola, Luck, and Toiviainen, 2006; Sims, 1985; Moog, 1979) indicate that preschoolers aged 3 to 5 years exhibit a wide range of rhythmic movements that do not generally synchronize to a musical beat. According to Sims (1985), musical tempo and musical stimuli contribute to the varied movement types by children, while Moog (1979) attributes a decrease in the variety of movements, as a child grows older.

In another study, Sims (1985) focused on types of creative movement in children and their reactions to changes in music type. The study also supports the idea that children have difficulty in matching body movement with the rhythm of a musical stimulus. Previous research suggests that "hopping" is the most common movement type when children move to music (Eerola, Luck, & Toiviainen, 2006).

Dance: Gender and Age

The Engel-Yeger, Rosenblum and Josman (2010) survey results have shown that the performance of motor tasks in preschool children is affected by age and gender. However, in a study by Jelovcan and Zurc (2016) on motor difficulties, they assess a sample of 4- and 5-year-old preschool children's motor skills, with the help of a checklist

questionnaire and movement ABC tests. In their study, one of the objectives was to identify differences in performance on movement ABC tests between boys and girls. They hypothesised that there are significant differences between girls and boys in the results of the movement ABC tests. In their results though, statistically significant differences between the genders did not occur. In other tests, the boys showed statistically significant, better results in the tests of gross motor skills, whereas girls did not show significantly better results in any of the measured motor skills tests (Graci, Van Dillen, & Salsich, 2012). Though the study by Jelovcan and Zurc (2016) is similar to the current study; in terms of the age group, their study was more interested in motor difficulties with this age group.

Although, scholars (Stanborough, 2019; Gallahue & Ozmun, 2006) have indicated that motor development occurs at certain stages in a majority of children due to individual differences, individual stages of development may occur in different age groups even though the order of their occurrence may generally be the same. Gallahue and Ozmun (2006) explain that "every child has his or her own biological clock" (p. 5) therefore, it is possible to notice among children of the same age that some children are more adept than others, while other children stand out as being clumsier than the others.

Methods

The study adopted the quantitative approach, and stemming from the purpose of the study, the specific objectives of the study were to (a) examine significant differences in the dance movements of kindergarten children in relation to age (4 and 5 years), and (b) examine significant differences in the dance movements of kindergarten children about gender (boys and girls).

Two research instruments were employed: Content analysis (existing movement assessment tools to generate a protocol guide) and observation (children dancing to some selected Ghanaian tunes), which was video recorded and assessed by three independent judges to assist in answering the various questions generated in the protocol guide.

Participants were selected from Six (6) kindergarten schools in the Effutu municipal area and the schools were Akosua Village School, St. John's Anglican School, Alswel Academy, Smart Start School, Mothers Unique Love School, and Proving God Academy. The sample consisted of one hundred and twenty kindergarten (120) children with each school consisting of twenty children. Out of the total sample of 120 children, fifty-four (54) were boys and sixty-six (66) were girls, aged four years (N = 48) and 5 years (N = 72). The children were randomly selected for the study using class registers with two constraints: (a) any child with a diagnosed sensory, physical, or intellectual disability was excluded and (b) In cases where the child selected was uncomfortable participating, another child's name was drawn from the class list.

The following null hypotheses were formulated and subjected to statistical testing to help establish factors that account for differences in spontaneous dance movements of four (4) and five (5) year-old boys and girls in Effutu.

1. H_0: There is no significant difference between the dance movements of kindergarten children by age.
2. H_0: There is no significant difference between the dance movements of kindergarten children by gender.

Research Instrument / Data and Statistical Analysis

The spontaneous dances of the kindergarten children were video recorded and scored by three independent judges using the 3 Point-Likert scale protocol guide. Analysis of data for this study was guided by the research questions formulated for the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of the data. The statistical package SPSS, v. 23.0 for Mac was employed. Specifically, descriptive statistics analysis and frequencies were used in order to identify the percentage (%) incidence of each variable. The aim of the quantitative data was to assess the significant differences in the variables *age* (4 and 5 years.), and *gender* (male-female)

Results

The first research question examined the extent to which age affects the dance movement of kindergarten children. For this, a null hypothesis was postulated and subjected to a statistical test. The mean scores displayed in

Table 1 indicate that 5-year-old children have better spontaneous dance movements than 4-year-old children.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Dance Movement

	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Dance movement	4 years	48	100.54	38.684	5.584
	5 years	72	113.57	26.092	3.075

H_0 There is no statistically significant difference between the dance movement of 4-years and 5-years kindergarten children.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Overall score for spontaneous dance movements	Equal variances assumed	14.242	.000	-2.205	118	.029	-13.028	5.909	-24.730	-1.326
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.044	75.252	.044	-13.028	6.374	-25.725	-.330

Table 2: Independent Sample Analysis

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the dance movement scores for 4 and 5-year-old children in kindergarten. From the analysis in Table 2 there was enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, $t(118) = -2.04, p < .05$ and state that there was a statistically significant difference in the score for dance movement between kindergarten children of age 4 and 5 years.

This second research question explored any significant difference in the mean performance of boys and girls in kindergarten in their dance movements. To test the hypothesis that boys and girls were associated with statistically different mean scores, an independent sample *t*-test was performed on the two groups, the boys' group (N = 54) and the girl's group (N = 66).

A descriptive statistic and the independent sample t-test analysis on the dance movement by gender are presented in *Table 3* and *Table 4* respectively.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Boys' and Girls' Dance Movements

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The overall score for dance movement	Boy	54	113.13	31.897	4.341
	Girl	66	104.45	32.201	3.964

H_0 There is no statistically significant difference between the dance movements of kindergarten children by gender.

An independent sample t-test was computed to compare boys' and girls' dance ability at kindergarten to see if gender impacts children's dance-movement ability. The test was not statistically significant $t(118) = 1.47, p = .143 > .05$ hence, the result indicated that the dance-movement ability of boys ($M = 113.13, SD = 31.897$) and girls ($M = 104.45, SD = 32.201$) is the same.

Table 4: Independent Samples Analysis

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Overall score for dance movement	Equal variances assumed	.496	.483	1.474	118	.143	8.675	5.884	-2.976	20.326
	Equal variances not assumed			1.476	113.749	.143	8.675	5.878	-2.970	20.320

Findings

On the factors that account for differences in the dance movement of kindergarten children, three main factors were observed and examined. It was observed that although the magnitude of the differences in the means for the score of both ages was small, indications were that 5-year-old children had better-developed dance movement than 4-year-old children. These results suggest that the use of different body parts and the use of dance elements in dance movements by kindergarten 4 and 5-year-olds are not the same. However, the results suggested that 4 and 5-year-old kindergarten children have the same dance movement intention.

On the extent of gender effect on the spontaneous dance movement of children, results indicated that the spontaneous dance movement of kindergarten boys and girls is the same. Further investigations into the three themes under study suggested that the use of different body parts and dance elements by kindergarten boys and girls in dance is

the same. However, the results suggested that kindergarten boys and girls do not have the same dance movement intention.

Conclusion

Dancing is a fun activity enjoyed by both young and old and has the potential for self-expression. However, indications are that Ghanaian children are not given the chance to enjoy this activity, especially in the classroom, and may be limited to movements performed by their teachers during lessons. These movements are rhyme oriented and are used to interpret or give meaning to the rhymes. The only time Ghanaian children are allowed to demonstrate their self-initiated movements are on special days like the last day of school commonly known as *our day.* Most of these challenges may stem from the limited resources on the abilities of children to dance. Much of the literature discusses dance as a tool for aiding children with mobility issues rather than the ability of children to dance.

Dancing and creative movement stimulate the development of general motor skills, mostly coordination of movement, orientation in time and space, balance and speed, stamina, and precision. It is important to emphasise that dancing has a positive effect on a child's self-esteem, social and emotional relations in a group, and an easier understanding of the world. Creative movement methods, dance, and relaxation education can contribute to the development of a child's creative capacity, which is why it is necessary to make it an element of today's education.

This study aimed to investigate and report on the dance movement of kindergarten children. Children have various degrees of dance movement abilities and are ready to exhibit them if given the chance. Results indicated that although children's dancing was common at community gatherings. Most children are generally stimulated to dance by upbeat tunes, which are uncommon in the usual classroom setting. These findings can largely form a base for structuring programs and teaching methods for children in preschool since

specifics such as gender and age have been identified. The method of allowing children to engage in self-initiated activities through playing and creative movement allows for a lot of freshness, and tolerance, all preliminary conditions for successful education.

REFERENCES

Addo, A. O. (2013). What's in a singing game? Exploring children's oral Literature. African traditional and oral literature as pedagogical tools in content area classrooms. *Pre-K-12*, 22-41.

Addo, A. O. (1996). A multimedia analysis of selected Ghanaian children's play songs. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 129,* 1-28.

Addo, A. O. (1997). Children's idiomatic expressions of cultural knowledge. *International Journal of Music Education, 30,* 15-25.

Addo, A. O. (1995). *Ghanaian children's music cultures: a video ethnography of selected singing games.*

Addo, A. O. (1998). Melody, language and the development of singing in the curriculum. *British Journal of Music Education, 15* (2), 139-148.

Andress, B. (1991). *From research to practice: Preschool children and their movement responses to music.*

Berger, M. R. (1995). *Dance and other expressive art therapies: when words are not enough.* (F. J. Levy, Ed.) New York: Routledge.

Boone, R. T., & Cunningham, J. G. (2001). Children's expression of emotional meaning in music through expressive body movement. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 5* (1), 21-41.

Chen-Hafteck, L. (2004). Music and movement from zero to three: A window to children's musicality. *In L. A. Custodero (Ed.), ISME Early*

Childhood Commission Conference - Els Móns Musicals dels Infants (The Musical Worlds of Children), July 5-10, 2004, Escola Superior de Musica de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain. International Society of Music Education

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4 ed.). California, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Dzansi, M. P. (2004). Playground music pedagogy of Ghanaian children. *Research Studies in Music Education, 22* (1), 83-92.

Dzansi, M. P. (2002). Some manifestations of Ghanaian indigenous culture in children's singing games. *International Journal for Education in the Arts*.

Eerola, T., Luck, G., & Toiviainen, T. (2006). An investigation of pre-schoolers corporeal synchronization with music. *9th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition*. Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna.

Engel-Yeger, B., Rosenblum, S., & Josman, N. (2010). Movement Assessment Battery for Children (M-ABC): Establishing construct validity for Israeli children. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 31* (1).

Gallahue, D. L., & Ozmun, J. C. (2006). *Understanding motor development* (6 ed.). New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies.

Gluschankof, C. (2005). Spontaneous musical behaviours in Israeli Jewish and Arab kindergarten: Searching for a universal principle within cultural differences. Hebrew: University of Jerusalem.

Graci, V., Van Dillen, L. R., & Salsich, G. B. (2012). Gender differences in trunk, pelvis and lower limb kinematics during a single leg squat. *PubMed, 36* (3), 461-466.

Humpal, M. E., & Wolf, J. (2007). Music in the Inclusive Classroom. *Young Children, 58* (2), 103-107.

Jelovcan, G., & Zurc, J. (2016). Preschool children's results in Movement ABC tests: Differences between girls and boys in movement deficit. *Annales Kinesiologiae*, 3-19.

Kieff, J. E., & Casbergue, R. M. (2000). *Playful learning and teaching: Integrating play into preschool and primary programs.* Allyn & Bacon.

Laban, R. (1975). *Modern educational ance.* Macdonald & Evans.
Loman, S. (1998). Employing a developmental model of movement patterns in dance/movement therapy with young children and their families. *American Journal of Dance Therapy, 20* (2), 101-115.

Moog, H. (1979). On the perception of rhythmic forms by physically handicapped children and those of low intelligence in comparison with non-handicapped children. *Research in Music Education*, 73-78.

Retra, J. (2010). Music is movement. A study into aspects of movement representation of musical activities among preschool children in a Dutch music education setting.

Retra, J. (2005). Musical movement responses in early childhood music education practice in the Netherlands.

Richardson, K. (2018). Autism, social attachment and things in challenging sociality. *Social and Cultural Studies of Robots and AI*.

Scharoun, S. M., Reinders, N. J., & Bryden, P. J. (2014). Dance/movement therapy as an intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders. *American Journal of Dance Therapy, 36* (2), 209-228.

Snyder, J. (2018). Dancing with down syndrome: A look at the effects and benefits of dance movement therapy on the emotional well-being

and overall quality of life for individuals with down syndrome. Rome, Italy: Assumption College.

Stanborough, R. J. (2019). *Ages and stages: How to monitor child development.* Retrieved from Healthline.com: https://www.healthline.com/health/childrens-health/stages-of-child-development.

Stinson, S. (1988). *Dance for young children: Finding the magic in movement.* Amer Alliance for Health Physical.

Yetti, E., Widianti, R., & Nurlita. (2018). An investigation into children's gender stereotypes and the effect they have on children's career aspirations. *Advanced Science Letters, 24* (10), 7117-7119.