

Sources of Occupational Stress Experienced by Sports Dance Teachers at Universities in Shaanxi Province

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ABSTRACT

Teaching sports dance at universities is a demanding and stress-laden occupation, particularly for educators in Shaanxi Province, China. When sports dance teachers are subjected to occupational stress, they often suffer from physical and mental health issues, which not only impair their teaching performance but also negatively impact students' learning outcomes and overall development in sports dance. This study aims to identify and analyze the sources of occupational stress experienced by university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province. A qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, was adopted. Six sports dance teachers from three universities in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, were selected using purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, and the interview data were manually transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the main sources of occupational stress for these teachers included heavy workload, insufficient professional support, inadequate teaching resources, external performance demands, challenges in student management, and personal professional development pressure. This study highlights the urgent need for targeted support measures to alleviate occupational stress among university sports dance teachers, thereby improving their well-being and the quality of sports dance education in the region.

KEYWORDS

Occupational stress; Sports dance teachers; University education; Shaanxi province

1 Introduction

In recent years, with the promotion of national fitness policies and the integration of aesthetic education into higher education, sports dance has gradually become an important part of university physical education curricula in China (He & Luo, 2021). It combines artistic expression with physical exercise, contributing to students' physical health, aesthetic cultivation, and social skills development (Tan & Guang, 2022). However, the teaching of sports dance in universities is accompanied by unique challenges, which impose significant occupational stress on teachers.

Occupational stress in the teaching profession has been a global concern, and university sports dance teachers face distinctive stressors due to the dual nature of their subject—combining sports technical training and artistic performance guidance (Wang et al., 2021). In Shaanxi Province, a region with a rich cultural heritage but uneven educational resource distribution, university sports dance teachers encounter additional difficulties. For instance, the lack of standardized curriculum systems, insufficient professional training opportunities, and high expectations from students and institutions all add to their stress burden (Du, 2025).

Existing studies on teacher occupational stress have primarily focused on general education or other specialized subjects, with limited attention to sports dance teachers in higher education institutions (Liu et al., 2024). Understanding the specific sources of stress for these teachers is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies, improving their job satisfaction, and promoting the sustainable development of university sports dance education. Therefore, this study investigates the sources of occupational stress experienced by university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Occupational Stress in Teaching

Occupational stress is defined as the adverse physical and psychological responses that occur when the demands of a job exceed an individual's ability to cope with them (Li et al., 2019). For teachers, stress can arise from various factors, including heavy workload, student behavior issues, insufficient resources, and external performance evaluations (Kyriacou, 2001). Long-term exposure to occupational stress can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and even physical health problems such as fatigue and anxiety (Collie et al., 2012).

In the context of higher education, university teachers face unique stressors such as research pressure, curriculum

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innovation requirements, and the need to balance teaching and academic development (Yang et al., 2022). For sports-related subjects like sports dance, the practical nature of teaching adds another layer of complexity. Teachers not only need to impart theoretical knowledge but also demonstrate and guide technical movements, which requires high physical and mental engagement (Magat et al., 2024).

2.2 Stressors for Sports Dance Teachers

Previous studies have identified several stressors specific to sports dance teachers. One major source is the heavy workload. Sports dance teaching involves not only regular classroom instruction but also organizing extracurricular activities, such as dance competitions and performances, and preparing teaching materials tailored to students' diverse skill levels (Liu et al., 2024). This multi-faceted work often leads to long working hours and increased stress.

Insufficient professional support is another key stressor. Many sports dance teachers lack access to systematic professional training programs, especially in emerging teaching technologies and methods (Chen & Liu, 2023). For example, the integration of multimedia and intelligent devices into sports dance teaching requires specific skills, but few teachers receive training in this area, leaving them unable to meet the demands of modern education (Chen & Zhang, 2024).

Inadequate teaching resources also contribute to stress. Universities in Shaanxi Province, particularly those with limited funding, often lack professional sports dance studios, high-quality audio-visual equipment, and updated teaching materials (Du, 2025). Teachers have to spend extra time and effort creating their own teaching resources or adapting to suboptimal teaching environments, which increases their workload and frustration.

External performance demands further exacerbate stress. Sports dance teachers are often evaluated based on students' performance in competitions, the number of extracurricular activities organized, and student satisfaction rates (Yu & Buck, 2024). These high expectations from universities and parents put immense pressure on teachers to achieve excellent results, leading to increased anxiety and stress.

Challenges in student management are also a significant stressor. University students have diverse sports dance backgrounds, with some having no prior experience and others with advanced skills (Wang & Liu, 2021). Catering to these varying needs while maintaining classroom order and student engagement is a constant challenge for teachers. Additionally, some students lack motivation to learn sports dance, viewing it as an optional course rather than a valuable part of their education, which further increases teachers' stress (Huang, 2023).

2.3 Research Gap

While existing studies have explored occupational stress in teaching and identified some stressors for sports dance teachers, most research has focused on primary and secondary school education or broader sports education fields. There is a lack of in-depth research on the specific sources of stress for university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province, a region with unique educational and cultural characteristics. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the stressors experienced by these teachers and providing insights for targeted support.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach. Qualitative research is suitable for exploring complex phenomena from the perspective of participants, focusing on understanding their experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2007). A case study design allows for an in-depth investigation of a specific group (university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province) in their real-life context, enabling the identification of detailed and context-specific stressors (Yin, 2009).

3.2 Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. The selection criteria were as follows:

- (1) The teacher has been teaching sports dance at a university in Shaanxi Province for at least 5 years, ensuring they have sufficient experience to reflect on occupational stress;
- (2) The teacher is currently engaged in sports dance teaching, including both theoretical and practical courses;
- (3) The teacher voluntarily participates in the study and is willing to share their experiences openly.

A total of six sports dance teachers from three universities in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, were selected. The participating universities include Xi'an Peihua University, Xi'an Institute of Technology, and Xi'an Euroasia University, which represent

different types of higher education institutions in the region (Table 1). The participants consist of 2 male and 4 female teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 8 to 15 years. All teachers have a professional background in sports dance and are proficient in both Chinese and English teaching.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Participants

No.	Gender	Teaching Experience	University	Main Teaching Content
1	Male	10 years	Xi'an Peihua University	Modern dance (Waltz, Tango)
2	Female	8 years	Xi'an Peihua University	Latin dance (Rumba, Cha-Cha)
3	Male	12 years	Xi'an Institute of Technology	Sports dance theory and choreography
4	Female	9 years	Xi'an Institute of Technology	Latin dance (Samba, Paso Doble)
5	Female	15 years	Xi'an Euroasia University	Modern dance (Quickstep, Viennese Waltz)
6	Female	11 years	Xi'an Euroasia University	Sports dance competition

3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method. The interview protocol was developed based on the research objectives and previous literature, covering the following topics:

- (1) Daily work content and workload;
- (2) Experiences of stress during teaching;
- (3) Factors contributing to stress;
- (4) Coping strategies used to manage stress;
- (5) Suggestions for improving the work environment.

Before the interviews, the researcher obtained informed consent from each participant, explaining the purpose of the study, the interview process, and the confidentiality of the data. The interviews were conducted in a quiet and private environment (either the teacher's office or a conference room at the university) to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's permission. After the interviews, the audio recordings were manually transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the data.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. The analysis process followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- (1) Familiarizing with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts;
- (2) Generating initial codes to label key concepts and experiences mentioned by participants;
- (3) Searching for themes by grouping related codes together;
- (4) Reviewing themes to ensure they are consistent with the data and represent meaningful patterns;
- (5) Defining and naming themes to clearly describe the content of each theme;
- (6) Writing the analysis to present the themes and support them with quotes from the participants.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, the researcher conducted member checks by sharing the initial themes and transcript excerpts with the participants, asking for their feedback to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, two experts in sports education and qualitative research reviewed the analysis process and results to ensure objectivity and rigor.

4 Findings

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed six main sources of occupational stress for university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province: heavy workload, insufficient professional support, inadequate teaching resources, external performance demands, challenges in student management, and personal professional development pressure. Each theme is discussed in detail below, supported by quotes from the participants.

4.1 Heavy Workload

All six participants identified heavy workload as a major source of occupational stress. Sports dance teaching involves a wide range of tasks beyond regular classroom instruction, including preparing teaching materials, organizing extracurricular activities, guiding student competitions, and grading assignments.

One teacher (Participant 5) explained: "Every week, I have 12 hours of classroom teaching, but that's just the tip of the

iceberg. I spend at least 8 hours preparing teaching plans and making multimedia materials, because I need to adapt the content to students with different skill levels. Additionally, I have to organize the school's annual sports dance competition, which takes up most of my weekends for two months. I often work until midnight to finish all these tasks."

Another teacher (Participant 3) mentioned the pressure of administrative work: "Apart from teaching, we have to attend various meetings, fill out numerous forms, and participate in school-wide evaluation activities. Last semester, I spent more time on administrative tasks than on teaching and research. It's exhausting, and I feel like I don't have enough time to focus on improving my teaching quality."

4.2 Insufficient Professional Support

Participants reported that insufficient professional support, particularly in terms of training and mentoring, is a significant stressor. Many sports dance teachers lack access to systematic professional development programs, making it difficult for them to keep up with new teaching methods and industry trends.

Participant 2 stated: "I haven't attended a professional sports dance teaching training course in three years. The university rarely provides such opportunities, and when they do, the content is often outdated. For example, I want to learn how to use virtual reality (VR) technology in sports dance teaching to improve students' learning experience, but there's no training available. I have to learn on my own by watching online videos, which is time-consuming and inefficient."

Participant 6 added: "There's no mentoring system for sports dance teachers in our university. New teachers have to figure everything out on their own, and experienced teachers like me don't have the time or support to share our experiences. This isolation makes it hard to solve teaching problems and leads to increased stress."

4.3 Inadequate Teaching Resources

Inadequate teaching resources, including poor teaching facilities and limited teaching materials, were also identified as a key stressor. Most participants reported that their universities lack professional sports dance studios with proper flooring, mirrors, and audio equipment.

Participant 1 described the situation: "Our sports dance studio is small and poorly ventilated. There's only one full-length mirror, so students in the back can't see my demonstrations clearly. The audio system is broken most of the time, so I have to use my own Bluetooth speaker. It's hard to create a good teaching environment, and students often complain, which makes me feel frustrated."

Participant 4 mentioned the lack of updated teaching materials: "The textbooks we use are outdated, and there are few high-quality online resources tailored to Chinese university students. I have to spend a lot of time creating my own teaching videos and worksheets. This not only increases my workload but also makes me worried that the materials I provide aren't sufficient for students' learning needs."

4.4 External Performance Demands

High external performance demands, such as student competition results and teaching evaluation scores, contribute significantly to teachers' stress. Universities often evaluate sports dance teachers based on the number of awards their students win in competitions and student satisfaction ratings.

Participant 3 said: "The university sets strict targets for us: at least two students must win provincial-level sports dance competitions every year. If we don't meet this target, our annual performance evaluation will be poor, which affects our salary and promotion opportunities. I feel immense pressure to train students, even during my spare time."

Participant 5 added: "Student satisfaction surveys are another source of stress. Some students don't take sports dance seriously and give low ratings because they think the course is too difficult or time-consuming. These ratings don't reflect the actual quality of teaching, but they still have a big impact on our careers. It's unfair and stressful."

4.5 Challenges in Student Management

Managing students with diverse skill levels and low motivation is a major challenge for sports dance teachers. Participants reported that it is difficult to cater to the needs of both beginners and advanced students in the same class, and some students lack interest in learning sports dance.

Participant 1 explained: "In my class, some students have been learning sports dance for years, while others have never danced before. It's hard to design a curriculum that meets the needs of both groups. Beginners feel overwhelmed, and advanced students get bored. I have to spend extra time providing one-on-one guidance, which adds to my workload."

Participant 4 mentioned the issue of low student motivation: "Many students take sports dance as an elective course

just to earn credits. They don't practice outside class and don't pay attention in class. It's demotivating to put so much effort into teaching when students don't care. I often feel like my work is meaningless."

4.6 Personal Professional Development Pressure

Participants expressed stress about their personal professional development, including the need to conduct research and keep up with industry trends. Sports dance teachers are expected to balance teaching, research, and professional growth, but limited time and support make this difficult.

Participant 6 stated: "The university requires us to publish research papers and participate in academic conferences, but it's hard to find time for research when I'm busy with teaching and administrative tasks. Sports dance research is also relatively niche, so there are few funding opportunities and academic resources. I feel like I'm falling behind in my field, which makes me anxious."

Participant 2 added: "Sports dance is constantly evolving, with new styles and techniques emerging every year. I need to practice regularly to maintain my technical skills, but I don't have enough time because of my heavy workload. I'm worried that my skills will decline, which will affect my teaching ability."

5 Discussion

This study identifies six main sources of occupational stress for university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province: heavy workload, insufficient professional support, inadequate teaching resources, external performance demands, challenges in student management, and personal professional development pressure. The heavy, multi-faceted workload aligns with findings that it leads to long hours and negatively impacts teaching and well-being (Liu et al., 2024). Insufficient professional support, including limited training for new technologies, is a previously overlooked stressor that hinders adaptation and innovation (Chen & Zhang, 2024). Inadequate resources, such as poor facilities, are particularly problematic in regions with uneven distribution and contribute to job dissatisfaction (Du, 2025).

External demands for competition results and high evaluation scores pressure teachers to prioritize measurable outcomes over holistic student development (Yu & Buck, 2024). Student management is stressful due to diverse skill levels and low motivation, complicating curriculum design (Wang & Liu, 2021). Finally, the dual pressure to excel in both teaching and research, with limited time and support, constrains professional growth and field advancement (Li, 2024).

6 Conclusion

This study investigates the sources of occupational stress experienced by university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province. The findings reveal that these teachers face multiple stressors, including heavy workload, insufficient professional support, inadequate teaching resources, external performance demands, challenges in student management, and personal professional development pressure. These stressors not only impact teachers' physical and mental health but also hinder the quality of university sports dance education.

To address these issues, several recommendations are proposed. First, universities should reduce teachers' administrative workload and provide more time and resources for teaching and research. This can be achieved by hiring additional administrative staff and streamlining administrative processes. Second, universities should establish a systematic professional development program for sports dance teachers, including training in new teaching technologies and industry trends, and a mentoring system to support both new and experienced teachers. Third, universities should invest in improving teaching facilities, such as building professional sports dance studios with proper equipment, and providing updated teaching materials. Fourth, universities should reform their evaluation systems to focus on holistic teaching quality rather than just competition results and student satisfaction scores. Finally, teachers should be provided with support for their personal professional development, such as research funding and time off for skill training.

This study has some limitations. The sample size is small (six participants), and the study is limited to universities in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Future research should expand the sample size and include universities in other regions of Shaanxi Province to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sources of occupational stress for university sports dance teachers. Additionally, quantitative research methods, such as surveys, can be used to verify the findings of this qualitative study and identify the prevalence of different stressors.

Overall, this study highlights the urgent need for targeted support measures to alleviate occupational stress among university sports dance teachers in Shaanxi Province. By addressing these stressors, we can improve teachers' well-being, enhance the quality of sports dance education, and promote the sustainable development of university physical education.

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About the Author

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