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Flow-Driven Emotion–Competence Coupling in Dance Teaching Assessment: A Closed-Loop Design for Teacher Accreditation

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Abstract

Assessment reform is a key link for dance (teacher-education) programs in meeting China's teacher education accreditation standards. Current dance teaching assessment suffers from four problems: misaligned orientation, absence of the affective dimension, suppressed learning experience, and missing feedback loops. Taking flow theory as the engine and outcome-based education (OBE) as the benchmark framework, this study constructs a flow-driven, emotion–competence dual-dimension coupled assessment model. The model consists of four modules: flow-driven design, the affective dimension, the competence dimension, and closed-loop feedback. "Coupling" is precisely defined as the bidirectional causal and synergistic relationship between emotional engagement and competence development mediated by the flow channel. The indicator system is accompanied by a weighting scheme and a four-level attainment rubric. Theoretical justification shows that the model is consistent with constructive alignment and is supported by empirical flow research and dance assessment studies.

Keywords: flow, dance teaching assessment, teacher education accreditation, emotion–competence duality, coupling, closed-loop mechanism

1. Introduction

In 2017, the Ministry of Education of China issued the Measures for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs in Regular Institutions of Higher Education (Trial) (Ministry of Education, 2017). The Measures govern teacher preparation programs under three principles: student-centeredness, outcome-based orientation, and continuous improvement.

The core logic of accreditation is "backward design, forward implementation": program outcomes are first translated backward into course objectives, and training quality is then verified forward through the attainment of those objectives. Within this framework, course assessment is no longer a tool for screening and ranking, but a mechanism for producing evidence and driving improvement.

The "golden course" initiative raises course quality requirements of "higher-order thinking, innovativeness, and challenge". Wu (2018) pointed out that the essence of a golden course is enabling students to experience authentic challenges and gain substantive learning. Li (2018) clarified, from an OBE perspective, that the "gold" of a golden course lies in the alignment of objectives, teaching, and assessment.

For dance (teacher-education) programs, assessment must answer two questions: what to assess, so that both "skill" and "person" are seen? And how to assess, so that evidence is produced while growth is fostered?

Measured against these requirements, however, current dance teaching assessment exhibits four problems worthy of inquiry. First, the orientation problem: why does assessment deviate from accreditation principles? Most technique courses still rely on the final technique examination as the dominant, or even sole, assessment method. What is assessed is "a performance in one exam", not "a portfolio of outcome evidence".

Such "forward scoring without targets" is structurally misaligned with backward design and forward implementation. The low discriminability and explanatory power of the results also leave teachers unable to adjust teaching accordingly. Second, the dimension problem: why is the affective dimension long absent? Dance is the art of the body, and more so the art of emotion.

Emotional expressiveness directly bears on pre-service teachers' future teaching charisma and aesthetic education capacity. Yet current assessment focuses on technical specifications and seldom examines emotional engagement, aesthetic experience, or the desire to perform. To assess technique alone is to assess only "half a dancer". Third, the experience problem: why does assessment suppress learning experience?

Flow theory indicates that when challenge and skill are dynamically balanced, goals are clear, and feedback is immediate, individuals enter a state of absorbed optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The high-pressure setting of a single assessor, summative scoring, and one-shot grading destroys precisely these conditions, leaving students "practicing without absorption and testing without joy".

Fourth, the closed-loop problem: why do assessment results fail to feed back into teaching? "One exam, one grade, and it ends" severs the chain of "assessment → feedback → improvement → re-assessment". Assessment produces neither process evidence nor a shared improvement contract between teachers and students. The deeper reason is that assessment is positioned as the endpoint of the teaching cycle rather than the starting point of the next.

Accordingly, this study poses the core question: how can dance teaching assessment move toward "flow orientation, dual-dimension coupling, and an accreditation closed loop"? This is decomposed into four progressive research questions. First, what are the mainstream models and core deficiencies of current dance teaching assessment in teacher preparation? Second, what coupling mechanism exists among flow experience, emotional engagement, and competence development? Third, how should a dual-dimension coupled assessment model oriented to teacher accreditation be designed? Fourth, how can the model's plausibility be supported by literature and case evidence?

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the literature along three lines—policy, dance assessment, and flow—and diagnoses the current state.

2.1 Policy Evolution and the OBE Assessment Logic

Along the policy line, accreditation operationalizes "outcome orientation" as level-by-level decomposition and evidence retrieval. Course assessment must answer: what can students do, to what extent, and where is the evidence? The learning-theoretical foundation of this shift is Biggs's (1996) constructive alignment: intended learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks must be aligned.

The assessment task should be the very learning outcome students are expected to achieve. Viewed this way, dance technique courses aim at outcomes of "being able to demonstrate, to explain, to choreograph, and to educate", whereas current assessment often replaces the full evidence with one exam combination—an obvious misalignment.

Recent golden-course research has further operationalized OBE into workable indicator systems with weights (Xie et al., 2023), providing methodological references for course-level implementation. Notably, accreditation assessment emphasizes the completeness and traceability of the evidence chain: every conclusion must be traceable to concrete coursework, performance records, and scoring bases.

2.2 Dance Assessment Research: From Talent Identification to Multidimensional Assessment

International dance education research has long reflected on monolithic dance assessment. Warburton (2002) traced the shift from "talent identification" to "multidimensional assessment", advocating coverage of technical, cognitive, affective, and creative dimensions. He further argued that dance teachers' professional knowledge extends far beyond "steps": pedagogical and contextual knowledge are equally objects of assessment (Warburton, 2008).

Domestic studies echo these views. Zhao (2019) examined the chronic problems of "valuing technique over affect and relying on a single assessor" in higher dance education and argued for student development as the center of assessment. Ren (2026) constructed a "three-dimensional collaboration, closed-loop empowerment" assessment system for folk dance, attempting to close the feedback loop.

Ma et al. (2023) proposed a "diversified, whole-process, dynamic" indicator system for blended courses. Li and Dong (2023) built a dance teaching and evaluation system based on big data and the analytic hierarchy process (AHP), quantifying indicator weights; the system handles group assessment information with triangular fuzzy numbers and verified its accuracy through system testing.

Taken together, existing studies converge on a four-point diagnosis: technique over affect, single assessor, outcome orientation, and delayed feedback—highly consistent with the four questions of this study. However, most existing solutions focus on adding indicators or broadening assessors, seldom addressing a more fundamental question: how can assessment reform simultaneously improve evidence quality and learning experience? This is precisely where flow theory enters.

2.3 Flow Theory and Its Educational Applications

Flow, proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), denotes an optimal experience in which action and awareness merge and enjoyment is intrinsic. Its core antecedents are the dynamic balance of challenge and skill, clear goals, and immediate feedback. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) further noted that optimal experience and optimal learning are two faces of the same structure.

Chinese review studies show that educational flow research concentrates on learning engagement and learning environment optimization (Ren et al., 2009; Chen, 2014). The claim that flow experience positively predicts learning outcomes has received consistent support.

At the empirical level, Shernoff et al. (2003) found in a large-scale study that classroom flow significantly predicted student engagement. Challenge–skill matching is the primary condition of classroom flow, while examination settings are often its greatest destroyer. Vaughan (2014) advanced the "assessment connection" thesis: assessment design directly determines student engagement in blended environments.

Kiili (2005) operationalized flow antecedents into design principles of "clear goals—immediate feedback—challenge matching". These studies jointly suggest that assessment can be designed as a flow-inducing learning situation rather than a flow killer.

Flow measurement has also matured. Early studies mostly used experience sampling, collecting repeated immediate reports in real activities (Ren et al., 2009). Short-form scales for classroom and sport contexts were later developed, reducing instructional interference (Chen, 2014; Shernoff et al., 2003). For dance classrooms, self-report scales should complement teacher observation to reduce social desirability bias.

This measurement consensus provides the methodological basis for the affective assessment design of this study.

2.4 Empirical Evidence on Flow and Dance Learning

Flow research in dance offers direct experiential evidence. Hefferon and Ollis's (2006) interpretive phenomenological analysis of professional dancers found that flow experience features "just clicks". Facilitators included thorough preparation, clear goals, musical envelopment, and bodily freedom; inhibitors included external scrutiny, evaluation pressure, and excessive self-consciousness.

This shows that the way assessment situations are designed directly determines whether learners are in the flow channel or the anxiety zone. Mateu et al. (2021) showed that dance assessments significantly altered students' mood profiles, implying that dance assessment must take emotional-affective consequences into design consideration. Yu et al. (2025) demonstrated experimentally that multi-dance training promotes both physical fitness and aesthetic skills.

Gang (2021) developed the Dance Flow measurement scale and empirically tested the path by which flow factors influence learning outcomes through teacher–student interaction, finding a significant positive effect of flow experience on learning outcomes. This provides an indigenized theoretical and instrumental foundation for "reconstructing assessment with flow as the engine".

2.5 Summary

The three lines of research converge in this study. The policy line establishes the reform direction of outcome orientation and continuous improvement. Dance assessment research diagnoses four structural deficiencies. Flow research reveals the design principle that optimal experience and optimal learning are isomorphic.

However, no study has integrated the three into an operable model for teacher accreditation—especially one that elevates "flow" from an assessed object to the operating engine of the assessment system. This study aims to fill that gap.

3. Construction of the Flow-Driven Emotion–Competence Coupled Assessment Model

The model construction addresses three questions in turn: the guiding design principles, the components of the model, and how the components interact.

3.1 Design Principles

The model follows three principles. First, flow-driven design: flow is not a bonus item in the assessment system but the engine of assessment activity design. The difficulty gradient, goal statements, and feedback rhythm of assessment tasks are all designed according to dynamic challenge–skill matching, turning the assessment process

itself into a learning situation that induces optimal experience. Second, dual-dimension coupling: affect and competence are not two parallel score sheets but a mutually reinforcing coupled system. Third, accreditation closed loop: dual-dimension evidence ultimately flows into attainment accounting and the continuous improvement loop (Ministry of Education, 2017; Li, 2018).

3.2 Defining "Coupling"

This study defines "coupling" as follows: coupling refers to the bidirectional causal and synergistic relationship between emotional engagement and competence development, formed through the flow channel (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Gang, 2021). Its meaning has three layers. The first is bidirectional causality: increased emotional engagement accelerates competence development, and growing competence deepens emotional experience. The second is synergistic gain: the learning outcomes produced by their joint change exceed the sum of their separate changes. The third is evidential crossover: affective evidence corroborates the authenticity of competence performance, while competence evidence explains the source of emotional engagement. Accordingly, "dual-dimension coupled assessment" means simultaneously collecting both types of evidence and examining their mutual corroboration.

The flow channel is the mechanism mediating coupling: the dynamic balance of challenge and skill allows emotional engagement and competence deployment to occur synchronously in the same activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

3.3 Model Architecture: Four Modules

The flow-driven module. This is the power layer, imposing three design rules on assessment activities. First, tiered challenge: assessment tasks are set at basic, developmental, and challenge levels; students choose entry points by their own level, ensuring goals are "within reach with effort". Tiered challenge also serves attainment accounting: different entries correspond to graded evidence against the same standard, ensuring fairness. Second, immediate feedback: "process observation points + immediate feedback + periodic profiles" replace the one-shot final grade. Third, reducing scrutiny threat: repertoire performances and simulated teaching replace exam combinations, weakening the excessive self-consciousness induced by external scrutiny (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006).

The affective module. It assesses three sub-dimensions: emotional engagement, aesthetic experience, and teaching charisma. Evidence sources include records of engagement behavior in class, reflective writing, self-report data from Dance Flow-type scales (Gang, 2021), and performance commentary. Affective assessment relies primarily on descriptive evidence, supplemented by graded scoring.

Narrative evidence must observe two boundaries: describe only observable behavior without personality inference, and use only for improvement diagnosis, never for public ranking.

The competence module. Aligned with program outcome indicator points, it assesses technical, teaching, and creative competence, with attainment standards preset for each indicator point. Assessment produces a "chain of attainment evidence" rather than isolated scores (Ministry of Education, 2017; Biggs, 1996). Attainment is computed as the "evidence-point pass rate": for a given indicator point, an observation is counted as attained if it reaches level C or above.

The closed-loop feedback module. After each assessment cycle, a three-step loop is executed. Diagnosis: individual and class profiles are generated from dual-dimension evidence. Improvement: teachers and students sign improvement contracts and adjust teaching and learning. Re-assessment: improvement points are re-tested in the next cycle (Li, 2018; Ren, 2026).

Profiles combine radar charts with written comments, preventing a single score from masking structural differences.

3.4 The Indicator System: Weights and Rubrics

The indicator system adopts a structure of "2 primary dimensions—6 sub-dimensions" with a weighting scheme (Table 1). Initial weights are determined following the analytic hierarchy process (Li & Dong, 2023; Yuan et al., 2024): course-group experts construct a pairwise comparison matrix, which is normalized after consistency testing. Programs may adapt weights to their training plans, with adjustments documented for review.

Weights and rubrics must be published to students before the course begins and remain stable within a cycle; any adjustment requires collective deliberation by the course group and documentation.

Table 1. Dual-dimension coupled indicator system and weights

Primary dimension (weight)	Sub-dimension (weight)	Example observation points	Assessors	Main evidence sources
Affective (40%)	Emotional engagement (15%)	Focus and persistence, voluntary extra practice, helping peers	Teacher + peer + self	Class observation records, growth portfolios
Affective (40%)	Aesthetic experience (10%)	Expression of aesthetic judgment, interpretation of works	Teacher + self	Reflective writing, seminar contributions
Affective (40%)	Teaching charisma (15%)	Emotional expressiveness, stage conviction	Teacher + peer	Performance commentary, simulated teaching
Competence (60%)	Technical competence (20%)	Movement accuracy, skill transfer, execution quality	Teacher	Tiered task demonstration, process observation points
Competence (60%)	Teaching competence (25%)	Demonstration, explanation, organization, error correction	Teacher + peer + school mentor	Simulated teaching, lesson plans and records
Competence (60%)	Creative competence (15%)	Choreographic conception, individualized treatment	Teacher + peer	Choreographic works, secondary creation of repertoire

Beyond weights, each sub-dimension is equipped with a four-level attainment rubric anchored in behavioral descriptors. The four levels are defined as follows: A—excellent (≥90), full attainment; B—good (75–89), substantial attainment; C—pass (60–74), basic attainment; D—needs improvement (<60), non-attainment. The anchoring points for each level are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Attainment rubrics for sub-dimensions (sample behavioral anchors)

Sub-dimension	A (full attainment)	B (substantial)	C (basic)	D (non-attainment)
Emotional engagement	Consistently focused; practices extra and helps peers	Stable engagement, occasionally self-initiated	Completes tasks but passively engaged	Frequently disengaged; needs repeated prompting
Aesthetic experience	Independently analyzes works with personal views	Participates in analysis with basically accurate views	Restates key aesthetic points with few own views	Unresponsive to works; unable to comment
Teaching charisma	Emotionally abundant performance with strong stage persuasion	Complete emotional expression, fairly engaging	Flat expression, dependent on prompting	Mechanical performance lacking emotion
Technical competence	Precise technique, transfers to new combinations	Good accuracy, transfer needs guidance	Masters core movements with average accuracy	Below-standard technique; cannot complete combinations
Teaching competence	Standardized demonstration and explanation; well-organized correction	Complete phases, some immature	Completes simulated teaching with limited methods	Unable to organize effective teaching
Creative competence	Novel conception with personal style	Shows revision awareness, well executed	Completes required choreography with limited creativity	Copies existing works without personal treatment

The flow-driven module runs through as the power layer: tiered challenge governs task design, immediate feedback governs assessment rhythm, and reduced scrutiny threat governs the assessment situation. The closed-loop module requires all evidence to flow periodically into attainment accounting and improvement contracts.

3.5 Implementation Procedure

Implementation proceeds in three phases: "setting standards before class—observing during class—closing the loop after class". Before class, teachers and students jointly clarify the cycle's tiered goals, weights, and rubrics, with assessment rules published in advance. During class, teachers collect dual-dimension evidence in authentic learning activities, give immediate feedback, and adjust the challenge gradient dynamically.

After class, they complete profile diagnosis, improvement contracts, and re-test arrangements, archiving attainment evidence. The three-phase flow transforms assessment from the endpoint of teaching into a learning scaffold running through the whole process. This flow places high demands on teachers' observation and feedback skills; sharing observation tasks within a teaching-research community is recommended to reduce individual burden.

4. Justification of the Model

This chapter is titled "justification" rather than "validation" because the study is model-constructive in nature and systematic empirical testing has not yet been conducted. Evidence is offered from four aspects.

4.1 Dialogue with International Dance Assessment Research

The model's dual-dimension structure aligns with Warburton's (2002) multidimensional direction, with two advances. First, the flow mechanism answers "how can multidimensional assessment avoid increasing test burden": dual-dimension evidence collection is embedded in flow-inducing learning activities, making assessment itself learning. Second, the closed-loop module answers "how multidimensional information is used", remedying the "much collection, little feedback" deficiency of existing multidimensional assessment (Ren, 2026).

4.2 Alignment with Constructive Alignment and Golden-Course Standards

Competence observation points map directly onto course objectives and program outcome indicator points. The assessment task is the intended learning outcome itself, achieving triple alignment of "objectives—teaching—assessment" (Li, 2018; Biggs, 1996). This also echoes recent golden-course research implementing "higher-order thinking, innovativeness, and challenge" through indicator systems and weights (Xie et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2024).

4.3 Support from Empirical Evidence

The prior Dance Flow research provides the scale instrument and indigenous evidence for the "flow → learning outcomes" path (Gang, 2021). Hefferon and Ollis's (2006) qualitative evidence supports design rules such as "reducing scrutiny threat". Mateu et al.'s (2021) mood research implies assessment must monitor affective consequences; the model's affective dimension provides exactly the institutionalized channel. Yu et al. (2025) corroborate the multidimensional nature of dance learning outcomes. Li and Dong (2023) show that assessment weights can be determined through proceduralized methods.

4.4 Preliminary Evidence from Local Reform Practice

This study is grounded in the university-level teaching reform project "A new flow-plus-competence dual-drive assessment model for dance teacher education", with follow-up support from a university-level Teacher Education Innovation Mechanism Reform Project. The model has been preliminarily trialed in repertoire and stage performance courses.

Observations by the teaching team indicate that tiered tasks and performance-based assessment reduced examination tension; process observation points gave routine grading a documented basis; improvement contracts built consensus between teachers and students on "what to practice next". These observations are recorded in teaching-research minutes and teacher reflection journals, available for inspection. They remain qualitative; reliability and validity testing and quantitative evaluation await subsequent action research.

5. Conclusions

Addressing the core question of how dance teaching assessment can move toward flow orientation, dual-dimension coupling, and an accreditation closed loop, four conclusions are drawn. First, the four deficiencies of current assessment are structurally interrelated and cannot be remedied in isolation. Second, flow theory offers a unique engine perspective: optimal experience and optimal learning are isomorphic, and assessment can be designed as a flow-inducing learning situation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Third, built on four modules and the coupling mechanism, with weights and rubrics,

the model transforms assessment from a screening tool into a learning scaffold and an evidence-producing mechanism (Ministry of Education, 2017; Li, 2018). Fourth, theoretical justification and reform observations provide preliminary support for the model's plausibility; effect verification depends on subsequent action research.

The study has two limitations. First, no systematic empirical work has been conducted, so the model's effects lack quantitative data. Second, affective measurement still relies on self-report and observation, with objectivity to be improved.

Future research will proceed along two paths: testing and iterating the model through three-phase action research in real courses, building an evidence chain of "design—implementation—reflection—optimization"; and exploring technology-supported automatic evidence collection and attainment accounting for more immediate and precise closed-loop feedback (Li & Dong, 2023). Moreover, the model raises the demands on teachers' assessment literacy; before wider adoption, targeted training on assessment protocols, rubric use, and data interpretation should be provided.

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