CONTENTS

Social Awareness and Relationship Management as Correlates of Academics' Career Performance in Colleges of Education in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: The study examined social awareness and relationship management as factors related to academics' career performance in colleges of education in Zone C, Benue State. *Design:* The study adopted a correlational research design. *Instruments:* Three instruments were developed by the researcher and validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Reverend Father Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi: The Academic Staff Social Awareness Questionnaire (ASSAQ), the Academic Staff Relationship Management Questionnaire (ASRMQ), and the Academic Staff Career Performance Questionnaire (ASCPQ). The instruments had reliability coefficients of 0.87, 0.84, and 0.86, respectively, and were used for data collection. *Sampling:* A multistage sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 213 academics from a population of 1,146 staff in colleges of education across Zone C, Benue State. *Method:* Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics were applied to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. *Findings:* The findings indicated that social awareness and relationship management have significant positive correlations with the career performance of the academic staff. It was concluded that social awareness and relationship management significantly relate to the career performance of academics in colleges of education in Zone C, Benue State. *Conclusions:* Professional bodies responsible for teacher education in Nigeria should liaise with National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Universities Commission to integrate the social awareness and relationship management skills in teacher education curriculum so as to train future teachers on how to cope with the relationships at work place with students and colleagues.

Keywords: social awareness, relationship management and career performance

1. Introduction

Across the globe, career performance is considered an extremely important criterion that relates to organizational outcomes and successes. Career performance denotes a situation where an employee discharges the duties of their engagement and contributes to the outcomes and success of an organisation (Ochiagha, 2019). Institutions of higher learning, such as Colleges of Education, rely extremely on the career

performance of academics to achieve their aims and objectives. Nigeria, like other countries of the world, recognises the role of academics as a key element in the training of teachers who would teach at the basic foundational level of education. There is, however, a seeming consensus about the falling standard of education as a big problem that is hindering the posterity of the nation in terms of human resources that are needed for effective development of basic education in Nigeria. This menace is often attributed to academics in colleges of Education since they are responsible for training the individuals who will, in turn, train individuals at the foundation of basic education. It seems many of the academic staff are experiencing challenges in their career, leading to poor performance in their various work positions (Ajayi & Uyeh, 2023).

The upsurge in poor career performance of academics in the public Colleges of Education in Nigeria seems to have become an issue of concern confronting the educational stakeholders, the government and the society in general. Many stakeholders in education, such as counsellors, educational managers, researchers and some government officials, seem to be worried about the future of basic education in Nigeria. For instance, Duze (2011), Owoeye and Yara (2019), Uyeh, Tor-Anyiin and Ajayi (2020), Afeez (2022) and Dotun (2025), apprehensively stated that academics in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria have failed to produce the desired result in terms of teaching and research, and consequently, they are producing 'half-baked' graduates who in most cases, do not have intellectual and moral justifications for the certificates they hold. The major work of academics is research and human resource development, and no nation can develop beyond its human resources. Thus, academics are very important in the actualisation of the educational goals and national development. Apparently, it is apt to say that without 'academics' there can be no meaningful development of a nation. It is equally true that if academics do not perform effectively in their career, there will be no meaningful national development. An academic in a College of Education is a qualified professional who is responsible for teaching and instructing learners in a particular subject area related to education (Omeje et al, 2020). Academics are also responsible for developing course syllabi, delivering lectures and seminars, assessing students and mentoring them. Oftentimes, they are also involved in research activities and publishing in books and academic journals related to the field of their expertise. Undoubtedly, academics in a College of Education play critical roles in preparing future educators and contributing to the field of education.

In spite of the central role expected of academics in the realization of school objectives, which translate into national development, academics in Nigeria seem not to be performing optimally (Jilomes, 2015; Ajayi & Uyeh, 2023). Academics in Benue state are not exempt from this poor attitude to work. The researcher, as an academic in the College of Education, surmised that many academics seem to exhibit a poor attitude towards attending lectures, a delay in administering continuous assessment, poor supervision of students' teaching practice exercises, supervision of students' projects, grading and recording students' performances and lateness to work, among others. Factors that might be responsible for the seemingly poor career performance of academics have been viewed from different perspectives. Kazeem (2016) opined that factors such as fewer rewards, workload, existence of too many students, tight institutional policies, poor relationship with colleagues and less career progression usually put pressure on academics and ultimately result in poor career performance. Jack and Punch (2017), also identified factors such as increase in work load, a hostile environment, large classes, non-payment of salaries, poor working environment and conditions of service, delay in promotions, inadequate instructional materials and infrastructural facilities, lack of staff development, misbehaviour of students, lack of social recognition and time pressure as factors that might lead to poor career performance.

The researcher, however, observed through a review of literature that there appears to be a nexus between some psychological constructs and the career performance of academics. For instance, studies by Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo (2015) revealed that health care, reasoning ability, mental adjustment and occupational stress are some of the psychological factors that relate to career performance. The considerations of factors affecting the career performance of academics in tertiary institutions in Benue state have not been adequately explored. The influence of some crucial psychological variables which contribute to

personal and professional development and success of individuals, such as social awareness, relationship management, growth mindset and adaptability, is generally neglected.

Social awareness generally refers to the ability of an individual to read people's intentions accurately. Goleman (2015) defines social awareness as the ability to be sensitive to other people's feelings. It involves empathy, which means having astute awareness of others' emotions, concerns and needs. It also includes the ability to identify people's unstated needs and the ability to read situations objectively without biases and assumptions. Spencer and Spencer (2016) explained that social awareness helps in an organisation. Academics' ability to read situations objectively, without the distorting lens of their own biases and assumptions, allows them to respond effectively to issues and situations in their institutions.

Hence, for effective career performance to take place, academics must have the ability to network and build bonds with other members of the institution and beyond. By implication, nobody has all the knowledge and skills to do it all alone, and so needs the support of others, if high career performance is to be achieved. Relationship management refers to the interpersonal skills an individual use to relate effectively with others. It also means the ability to inspire, influence and develop others. The interpersonal skills include listening and taking criticism non-defensively. It also means individuals humbling themselves to learn from their subjects or colleagues. Poor relationship causes crises in an organisation and bring about low productivity output. Blyton (2019) opined that employees do not put in their best performances at work when they are unhappy with management, government or even their colleagues. By implication, academics may not perform their duties effectively if there is no proper relationship management. Actions taken by aggrieved academics may include strike actions, lock out and propaganda against the institutions, among others. Rifts between the academics, students, the management and government, which hamper academic programmes and activities, may be an indication that academics in colleges of education in educational zone C of Benue state may be having reduced relationship management skills.

In Nigeria today, it is not surprising to discover that many workers cannot perform in their chosen careers, and academics seem not to be an exception. Studies by Gunu and Oladepo (2020), Uyeh, Tor-Anyiin and Ajayi (2020) and Anderson (2016) reveal that academics are not performing optimally in their various ranks and positions of work. The researcher, as an academic, observed that academics in the colleges of education in Zone C of Benue State are not exempt from the menace of poor career performance. This is evident in their persistent coming late to work, absenteeism, stagnation (in knowledge & promotion), change of authorship, inclusion of their names in publications they do not contribute academically to, wanes of motivation, falsification of data, changing of grades for money, among others. These behaviours of academics evidently show that some academics are maladjusted and frustrated with their career. This brings about notable learning gaps among students, such as unethical behaviours, lack of enthusiasm and teamwork, low academic achievement and school dropout, among others. Invariably, the students who are like raw materials in the hands of such academics suffer significant setbacks in their performances and subsequently in their goal achievement. It is certain that if this abysmal situation is allowed to thrive for a longer time, it will lead to a total collapse of teacher education in the zone. Consequently, there will be fewer opportunities for viable sustainability, growth and development.

1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1) What is the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State?

2) What is the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State?

1.2. Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1) The correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State is not statistically significant.

2) There is no significant correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public

Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Awareness

Social awareness generally refers to the ability of an individual to read people's intentions accurately. Goleman (2015) defined social awareness as the ability to be sensitive to other people's feelings. It involves empathy, which means having astute awareness of others' emotions, concerns and needs. It also includes the ability to identify people's unstated needs and the ability to read situations objectively without biases and assumptions. Spencer and Spencer (2016) explained that social awareness helps in an organisation. Academics' ability to read situations objectively, without the distorting lens of their own biases and assumptions, allows them to respond effectively to issues and situations in their institutions. Hence, for effective career performance to take place, academics must have the ability to network and build bonds with other members of the institution and beyond. By implication, nobody has all the knowledge and skills to do it all alone, and so needs the support of others, if high career performance is to be achieved.

2.2 Relationship Management

Relationship management refers to the interpersonal skills an individual use to relate effectively with others. It also means the ability to inspire, influence and develop others. The interpersonal skills include listening and taking criticism non-defensively. It also means individuals humbling themselves to learn from their subjects or colleagues. Poor relationship management causes crises in an organisation and brings about low productivity. Blyton (2019) and Ajayi and Uyeh (2023) opined that employees do not put in their best performances at work when they are unhappy with management, government or even their colleagues. By implication, academics may not perform their duties effectively if there is no proper relationship management. Actions taken by aggrieved academics may include strike actions, lock out and propaganda against the institutions and individuals, among others. The rifts between the academics, students, the management and government, which hamper academic programmes and activities in colleges of education in educational Zone C of Benue state, may be a result of reduced relationship management skills by academics.

2.3 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Numerous studies have investigated the relationships between social awareness, relationship management and career performance of employees. For instance, Firmansyah and Havidz (2019), carried out a study on the effect of social awareness and work environment on training and its implementation on the performance of employees. The study was conducted in Cahaya Lantern Esa Abdi Nusantara, Indonesia.

The study aimed to determine and clarify the effect of social awareness and work environment on training and its implementation on employee performance. Ninety-five employees were used for the study as respondents. Data collection was done through interviews and questionnaires. Data were analysed using path analysis and a correlation matrix between dimensions. The results of the study showed that social awareness and work environment both partially and simultaneously affect training. It was also found that social awareness, work environment and training both partially and simultaneously affect employee performance.

Dlamini, Suknunan and Bhana (2022), carried out a study on the influence of employee-manager relationship management on employee performance and productivity in South Africa. The study was conducted in a financial organisation based in Durban, South Africa. A quantitative approach was utilised with a census method targeting a total population of 40 administrative employees. Three research questions guided the study.

The questionnaire was constructed based on the research aims and was administered to all 40 respondents. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was used for data analysis. As a result, the response rate was 65%. The findings indicated that the relationship management between managers and employees affects employee performance and productivity. A positive relationship with a manager is closely linked to increased motivation and performance, while a negative relationship is linked with poor performance.

In addition, Ume and Agha (2020) carried out a study on employee relationship management as a correlate of employee commitment in the primary health care sector in Oshodi/Isolo, Lagos. The objective of the study was to establish

the role of employee relationship management in enhancing employees' commitment. The study adopted the survey design. A sample size of 211 respondents was obtained from a population of 350 health workers using a convenience sampling technique. A descriptive research design was used in the study. The data collected were analysed using Spearman's correlation. It was concluded that relationship management had a positive effect on the employees' commitment to Oshodi /Isolo Primary Health Centres.

While existing research provides strong evidence for the positive relationship between social awareness and relationship management and career performance of employees, there is limited research specifically focusing on their application in colleges of education in Education Zone C of Benue State. The unique cultural, educational, and socio-economic context of this region may influence the effectiveness of these variables, making it necessary to investigate how they impact the career performance of academics in this particular setting. Additionally, much of the existing research has focused on performance in other aspects of life, with less attention given to the teaching profession in general. This study is focused on academics whose role is critical for sustaining teacher education.

The current study aims to address these gaps by correlating the social awareness and relationship management skills with the career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Education Zone C of Benue State. By building on the findings of previous studies and applying them in a new context, this research will provide valuable insights into the potential of these crucial psychological constructs to enhance the career performance of academics in colleges of education in this region. The outcomes of this study could inform academic practices and policy decisions, ultimately contributing to the achievement of the educational goals outlined in the National Policy on Education.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational survey design. This is because the research seeks to find out the existing characteristics and their interrelations. The study area was the educational zone C, comprising nine local government areas in Benue state. There are 5 accredited Colleges of Education in the zone. The population of the study consisted of all the academic staff in the 5 colleges of education in the educational zone C, totalling 1146 academic staff (BSTSB Statistics Units, 2023). A sample size of 213 Academic Staff was drawn from the population using a multistage sampling procedure.

Three instruments were used in the study. These included the: Academic Staff Social Awareness Questionnaire (ASSAQ), Academic Staff Relationship Management Questionnaire (ASRMQ) and Academic Staff Career Performance Questionnaire (ASCPQ). The researchers presented the instruments to three experts in the Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi (2 experts in Counselling Psychology & 1 expert in Measurement and Evaluation), who scrutinised them to ensure that the items were capable of measuring the variables that were to be used to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses. The Cronbach's Alpha was used to ascertain the reliability index of ASSEQ, ASEIQ and ASCPQ. This gave reliability values of 0.87, 0.84 and 0.86, respectively, to determine the reliability of the instruments. The instruments were administered to the respondents using the direct contact approach in order to minimize non-response from respondents. Research assistants assisted the researchers in administering the instruments. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical method was used to analyze the data collected. The statistics (PPMC) were used to answer research questions and also to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

Presentations in this section are based on research questions and null hypotheses.

4.1 Research Question 1

What is the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State? The answer to research question one is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation analysis between social awareness and career performance

Variables	N	Mean x	Std.dev δ	R	Remark
Social awareness	213	3.1268	.84557	.624**	**Moderate correlation**

Career Performance	213	2.8545	.84811

Table 1 shows the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The result indicated that there is a moderate positive correlation between social awareness and career performance (r =.624). This implies that as social awareness changes, career performance also changes in a moderate.

4.2 Research Question 2

What is the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State? Research question two is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation analysis between relationship management and career performance

Variables	N	Mean x	Std.dev δ	R	Remark
Relationship management	**213**	3.1174	.85248	.711**	**Strong correlation**
Career performance	213	2.8545	.84811		

Table 2 shows the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The result indicated that there is a strong positive correlation between relationship management and career performance (r =.711). This implies that as relationship management changes, career performance also changes in a strong magnitude.

4.3 Hypothesis One

The correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State, is not statistically significant. The answer to hypothesis one is presented on Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between social awareness and career performance

Variables	N	r	$p-value$	Remark
Social Awareness	213			
Correlation 'r'		.624**	0.000	Significant
Career Performance	213			

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation test result for the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The data in Table 3 reveal that the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation of social awareness and career performance was found statistically significant (r =.624, P<0.005). Hence, the null hypothesis, which states that the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue state, is not statistically significant, was rejected. This implies that the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue state, is not statistically significant.

4.4 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The answer to hypothesis two is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Pearson correlation between relationship management and career performance

Variables	N	r	$p-value$	Remark
Relationship management	213			

Correlation 'r'		711[**]	0.000	**Significant**
Career performance	213			

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation test result for the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The data in Table 4 reveal that the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation of relationship management and career performance was found statistically significant (r =.711, P<0.005). Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant correlation between relationship management and the career performance of academics was rejected. This implies that there is a significant correlation between relationship management and the career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State.

5. Discussion

This research investigated the correlation between social awareness and relationship management and the career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The first hypothesis found that there was a significant correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue state. This finding agrees with Gunu and Oladepo (2020), Firmansyah and Havidz (2019), who revealed that social awareness has a relationship with employees' performance and organizational commitment, teamwork, and career performance of physicians in California, respectively. Thus, the likely explanation for this outcome may be connected to the fact that academics with strong social awareness should be able to develop and sustain positive relationships with co-academics and students. Academic staff members infused with social awareness exhibit a transformative impact on their roles within academia, permeating their teaching, research, advocacy, and community engagement endeavours. In their teaching practices, they foster inclusive environments, catering to diverse student needs and backgrounds, thus enhancing learning outcomes and student satisfaction. Their research endeavours are imbued with a commitment to addressing pressing societal challenges, forging connections with communities, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Advocating for diversity and inclusion, they influence

institutional policies and practices, leading to more equitable environments for all.

Through community engagement, they bridge academia with society, facilitating knowledge exchange and addressing community needs. This comprehensive integration of social awareness not only enhances their effectiveness as educators and researchers but also contributes to the creation of more inclusive, equitable, and socially responsible academic institutions, thus shaping the future of academia and fostering positive change within and beyond their academic communities.

The second finding of the study is that the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public colleges of education in Benue and Cross River states is statistically significant. This finding agrees with Dlamini, Suknunan and Bhana (2022), Ume and Agha (2020), who found that relationship management has a significant influence on employee productivity and job satisfaction, and employee commitment in the primary health care sector, respectively. Thus, the likely explanation for this outcome may be connected to the fact that academics cannot perform better and achieve their objectives if there is a bad relationship between co-academics, students and management; therefore, it is very important to create and maintain good relationships. Academics are the major valuable assets of an institution which without whom it will be hard to realize the basic objectives of such a higher institution. To harvest more from academics, it requires creating a conducive working environment which satisfies the needs of individual academics. Effective relationship management is essential in ensuring academics perform together as a collective unit and contribute equally towards the realization of a common goal. Effective academic staff members seamlessly integrate relationship management skills into their multifaceted roles, enriching every aspect of their work within the academic community. As educators, they foster an inclusive and engaging learning environment by actively listening to students, empathizing with their needs, and communicating clearly to facilitate understanding. In research endeavours, they leverage these skills to collaborate

effectively with colleagues, students, and external partners, fostering meaningful partnerships and driving collaborative initiatives forward. Additionally, in administrative capacities, they build and maintain professional networks, advocating for their institution's interests and forging strategic partnerships to support academic endeavours. Their ability to navigate conflicts constructively, adapt communication styles, and demonstrate trustworthiness underpins their success in fostering positive relationships and advancing the institution's mission. Ultimately, these academic staff members exemplify how relationship management skills are integral to promoting a culture of collaboration, innovation, and excellence within the academic community.

6. Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of this study that social awareness and relationship management have a strong positive relationship with academics' career performance. This means that there will be an improvement in an academic's career performance if there is an increase in social awareness and relationship management skills, and the reverse will be the case if there is a decrease in social awareness and relationship management skills. Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1) Professional bodies responsible for teacher education in Nigeria should liaise with the National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Universities Commission to integrate the social awareness and relationship management skills in the teacher education curriculum to train future teachers on how to cope with the relationships at work workplace with students and colleagues.

2) A policy should be enacted for Colleges of Education that Relationship management be incorporated as one of the soft-skill indicators in performance appraisal and promotion criteria, ensuring that academics who demonstrate strong relational and teamwork abilities are recognised and rewarded.

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Impact of Modernisation on the Socioeconomic and Living Conditions of Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi PVTG

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Abstract

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are some of the most marginalised groups in India. Pre-agricultural technology, low literacy, tiny populations, and a heavy reliance on forests typify them. This report looks closely at how modernisation—through things like building more infrastructure, making conservation rules, integrating markets, extractive industries, and government welfare programs—has affected the living conditions, economy, and culture of three PVTGs: the Dongria Kondh (Odisha), Chenchu (Telangana & Andhra Pradesh), and Kondareddi (Andhra Pradesh). The chi-square test for monthly household income distribution shows no statistically significant difference across the three tribes ($\chi^2 = 0.90$, df = 4, p > .05). These findings suggest that age composition and income distribution are broadly comparable across the three PVTGs in the study sample.

1. Introduction

The government classifies 75 PVTGs by four criteria: (a) pre-agricultural technology, (b) very low literacy, (c) small or stagnant populations, and (d) reliance on primitive subsistence (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2023). The Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Konda Reddy stand out for their unique cultures, fragile ecosystems, histories of marginalisation, and interactions with modern forces such as mining, conservation, and welfare programs.

In this context, modernisation refers to the provision of roads, electricity, and housing in remote areas. Digital access and education.

Changes from subsistence farming in forests to wage work. Getting into the market. Laws about conservation that affect access to forests. Displacement caused by mining and development. Welfare programs (PM-PVTG Mission). The effects vary from person to person and are both positive and negative. They bring gains and losses simultaneously, altering lives, institutions, and cultural identity.

PVTGs are the most at risk among tribal communities in India, showing primitive features, low literacy rates, negative or stagnant population growth, and reliance on pre-agricultural technology and subsistence

activities. India has 2.8 million PVTGs across 75 tribes in 18 states and Union Territories (Valya, 2024).

2. Review of the Literature

The trend of globalisation has changed the lives of indigenous people all around the world in ways that have never happened before. However, the levels of exploitation and marginalisation differ across states and tribal groups (Lal, 2021). Women can also play an important part in gathering small forest products, including honey, gum, beedi leaves, adda leaves, brooms, firewood, pala pandlu, morri pandlu, thuniki pandlu, and various fruits, roots, and vegetables. This can be a part-time job that helps tribal people in remote areas earn extra money (Lal, 2005). Adopting reasonable policies, such as price stabilisation, and investing in infrastructure to advance technology and diversify all tribal and forest products (Lal, 2020) should help people market and connect (particularly via e-market linkages during the pandemic). People in developed countries drink less, while those in underdeveloped countries drink more. Over half of those aged 25 to 35 drinks regularly, and many drink excessively. Teenagers use alcohol more than any other drug. A national survey found that many people regularly drink excessively (Naik, 2013).

3. Objectives of the Study

The goals of this study are: (1) to systematically examine the living and economic conditions of Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi primitive tribal communities; (2) to analyse the specific ways modernisation has transformed their tribal cultures, social institutions, and cultural identities.

4. Methodology

This exploratory study examines how modernisation affects traditional tribal societies. Both primary and secondary data have been used. The Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi PVTGs have discussed the positive and negative effects of modernity. We have conducted chi-square tests and examined percentages. These sources provide many facts we can use to examine how modernisation has affected the three PVTGs.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Dongria Kondh (Odisha)

The Dongria Kondh live in the Niyamgiri Hills, which are famous for their opposition to the Vedanta bauxite mining project. Their culture is closely associated with Niyam Raja, their principal deity, and the holy mountains.

5.1.1 Effects on Society and Culture

Good and bad effects: Residential schools and NGO programs have improved youth literacy. Legal empowerment, following the Supreme Court's confirmation of Gram Sabha rights under the FRA (2013), strengthened community government (Marshall, 2016). The anti-mining campaign revived culture and bolstered the Dongria's pride in their identity. Contemporary schooling disconnects youths from shifting agriculture and herbal medicine (Borde, 2021). Cultural insecurity: Mining threatens spiritual ties to sacred highlands. Ritual decline: Migration and media reduce traditional music, dress, and stories.

5.1.2 Economic

Positive and Negative Effects: Road access facilitates the sale of turmeric, pineapple, and NTFPs in markets. The PM-PVTG Mission offers accommodation, food, and job support. Market dependence necessitates reliance on intermediaries, reducing earnings. Land Conflict Watch (2016) said that mining proposals could permanently end livelihoods. Shifting agriculture declines due to environmental and policy pressures.

5.1.3 Conditions of Living

Good and Bad: Mobile health units improved vaccination and maternity care. New housing programs improve safety and stability. Solar and electricity programs improved connectivity. Mining-related environmental change harms water, soil, and biodiversity. Processed foods have increased the prevalence of lifestyle diseases. Social disintegration occurs when people leave to go to school or work.

5.2 Chenchu (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana)

The Chenchu are among India's last hunter-gatherers, living in the Nallamala jungles, which are home to several tiger reserves.

5.2.1 Effects on Society and Culture

Good and Bad: Health and literacy awareness have increased (Ramamurthy, 2023). The capacity to work with welfare agencies has grown. Conservation rules that limit access to forests, rituals, and resource use create

significant cultural problems. Displacement harms clan structures, rituals, and the group's spirit (ResearchGate, 2019). Media exposure erodes traditional pride in identity among youth.

5.3 Konda Reddy (Kondareddi) in Andhra Pradesh

The Konda/Konda Reddy live in the Eastern Ghats and depend on fishing, podu farming, and NTFP collection.

5.3.1 Effects on Society and Culture

Good and Bad: Knowledge of schemes has improved; more students attend school. The government recognises indigenous ecological expertise. Displacing people because of dam construction disrupts the ceremonial cycles associated with podu. Migration and schooling cause youth language loss. Scattered communities weaken ritual and clan unity.

5.3.2 How People Live

Good and Bad: Electrification and pucca dwellings improve living conditions. Connectivity enables faster health service access. At relocation sites, water is insufficient, and sanitation is poor. Deforestation restricts access to medicinal herbs and firewood. Food insecurity is rising.

6. The Positive and Negative Impact of Modernisation

Table 1. Socio-Cultural Impacts

Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Dongria Kondh	Improved literacy; Gram Sabha empowerment	Cultural erosion; mining threats to sacred sites
Chenchu	Rights awareness; schooling access	Loss of forest-based rituals;

		displacement
Konda Reddy	Increased school enrollment	Language loss; disruption of podu-linked traditions

Table 2. Economic Impacts

Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Dongria Kondh	Market access for turmeric & NTFPs	Dependency on intermediaries; livelihood threat from mining
Chenchu	Welfare support; NTFP collection	Loss of hunting/gathering; wage dependence
Konda Reddy	Market access for bamboo & hill produce	Loss of podu land; unstable wage labour

Table 3. Living Condition Impacts

Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Dongria Kondh	Better health outreach; improved housing	Ecological threats: rising lifestyle diseases
Chenchu	Housing & immunisation improvements	Malnutrition, loss of wild foods, and poor resettlement
Konda/Konda Reddy	Electrification; housing	Sanitation issues; food insecurity post-displacement

Table 4. Demographic Profile of the Sample Respondents

Variable	Dongria Kondh (n=60)	Chenchu (n=60)	Kondareddi (n=60)
Age 18–30	14 (23.3%)	16 (26.7%)	15 (25.0%)
Age 31–45	22 (36.7%)	20 (33.3%)	21 (35.0%)
Age 46–60	16 (26.7%)	14 (23.3%)	15 (25.0%)
Age 60+	8 (13.3%)	10 (16.7%)	9 (15.0%)
Male	29 (48.3%)	31 (51.7%)	30 (50.0%)

Female	31 (51.7%)	29 (48.3%)	30 (50.0%)
Married	44 (73.3%)	41 (68.3%)	43 (71.7%)
Unmarried	10 (16.7%)	12 (20.0%)	11 (18.3%)
Widowed/Separated	6 (10.0%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (10.0%)
Illiterate	28 (46.7%)	30 (50.0%)	26 (43.3%)
Primary Education	18 (30.0%)	16 (26.7%)	17 (28.3%)
Secondary Education	10 (16.7%)	9 (15.0%)	12 (20.0%)
Higher Secondary & Above	4 (6.6%)	5 (8.3%)	5 (8.4%)
Household Size ≤3	12 (20.0%)	14 (23.3%)	13 (21.7%)
Household Size 4–6	34 (56.7%)	32 (53.3%)	33 (55.0%)
Household Size >6	14 (23.3%)	14 (23.4%)	14 (23.3%)
Forest-based Livelihood	26 (43.3%)	30 (50.0%)	22 (36.7%)
Agriculture/Podu	18 (30.0%)	10 (16.7%)	20 (33.3%)
Wage Labour	12 (20.0%)	16 (26.6%)	14 (23.3%)
Monthly Income < ₹5,000	21 (35.0%)	24 (40.0%)	20 (33.3%)
Monthly Income ₹5,001–10,000	27 (45.0%)	23 (38.3%)	26 (43.3%)
Monthly Income > ₹10,000	12 (20.0%)	13 (21.7%)	14 (23.4%)

Table 4: Information about the demographics of the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes. There were 180 participants in the study, 60 from each of the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes. The age distribution across all three groups shows that the economically active population is the largest. Most respondents were between 31 and 45, followed by those between 46 and 60. Across the tribes, there is a very even split between men and women. The Dongria Kondh have a slight majority of women, while the Chenchu and Kondareddi have almost equal numbers of men and women. Most of the people who answered are married, which shows that most households are stable. However, a lesser but significant number of people are widowed or separated, especially among the Chenchu.

The three PVTGs still have low levels of education, with almost half of the respondents in each tribe being illiterate. For a large part of the population, primary school is the greatest degree of education they have completed. Only a small number of people have completed secondary or higher secondary school. Most homes have four to six people, which shows that extended family arrangements are still common. Forest-based activities remain very important for livelihoods, particularly for the Chenchu and Dongria Kondh. On the other hand, the Kondareddis are more involved in farming and podu cultivation. Wage work has become a significant way to make extra money for all three categories. Most households still earn less than ₹10,000 a month, indicating that the economy remains weak even as people become more involved in markets and government programs.

Table 5. Chi-Square Analysis of Demographic Variables among PVTGs

Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value
Gender	0.133	2	0.936
Education	0.536	2	0.765
Livelihood	2.172	2	0.338

Table 5 shows that the chi-square tests do not reveal statistically significant differences among the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes for gender (χ^2 = 0.13, p > 0.05) or literacy (χ^2 = 0.54, p > 0.05). This means that the three PVTGs have a similar demographic structure with respect to these variables. Differences in ways of making a living (those that depend on forests against those that don't) also don't meet the usual level of statistical significance (χ^2 = 2.17, p > 0.05). But the observed frequencies show that the Chenchu and Dongria Kondh

depend on forest-based livelihoods more than the Kondareddi do. Overall, the data suggest descriptive differences, but the demographic disparities across the three tribes are not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

Table 6. Chi-Square Tests: Age Group and Income by Tribe

Test	χ^2 Value	df	p-value
Age Group × Tribe	0.584	6	0.997
Income × Tribe	0.896	4	0.925

Table 6 reveals that the chi-square test for age group distribution across the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes shows that there is no statistically significant link between age structure and tribal affiliation (χ^2 = 0.58, df = 6, p > .05). The chi-square test for monthly household income distribution also demonstrates that there is no statistically significant difference between the three tribes (χ^2 = 0.90, df = 4, p > .05). These results show that the age and income distribution of the three PVTGs in the study sample are mostly the same.
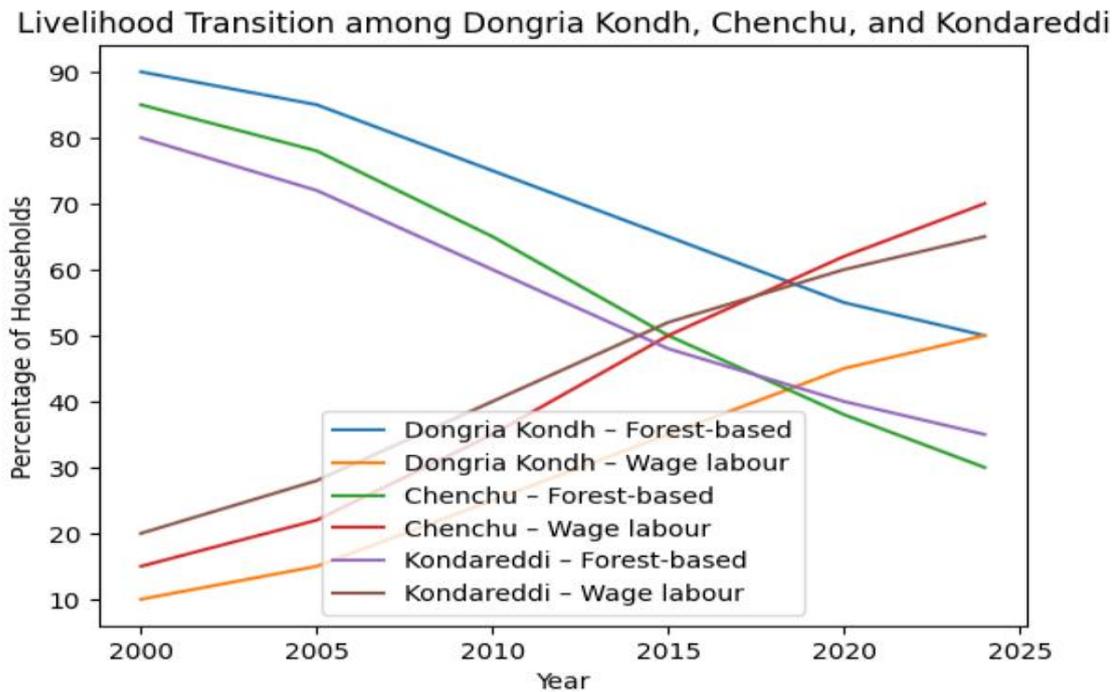

Figure 1. Forest Dependence vs. Wage Labour: A Change in Livelihood

The share of forest-based livelihoods declined from over 85% in 2000 to approximately 30% in 2024, as shown in Figure 1. At the same time, research indicates that the proportion of people in these three primitive tribal groups who depend on wage employment has risen from approximately 15% to about 70%. Dongria Kondh: A slow change from making a living in the forest to working for wages, but they still depend on the forest more than the other two groups. Chenchu: A sharp drop in reliance on forests and a quick rise in wage work show how big an effect conservation limits and relocation have had. Kondareddi: A steady shift from living off of podu and forests to working for wages, due to irrigation projects, land flooding, and market integration.

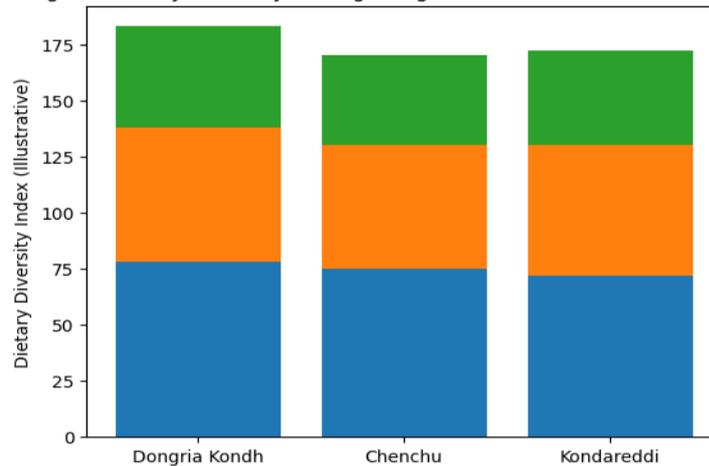Change in Dietary Diversity among Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi

Figure 2. Change in the Variety of Foods

Figure 2 illustrates the alteration in dietary diversity among these three archaic tribal groups. Dongria Kondh: Historically, they had the most diverse diets since they had access to a lot of different things from the forest, like tubers, fruits, millets, and other minor forest products. Modernisation clearly shifts towards market/PDS foods, thereby reducing the diversity of the food supply. Chenchu: The most significant drop in food diversity, primarily because of conservation rules, the loss of hunting and gathering, and the need for PDS rice and wage income. Kondareddi: A moderate drop in value due to podu limits, moving away from dam and irrigation projects, and becoming more dependent on the market.

7. Suggestions for Policy

Grant the FRA and Gramme Sabha greater authority. Co-management of conservation with Chenchu through participation. NTFP cooperatives and local value-added units. Education in two languages and a curriculum that is appropriate to different cultures. Policies for humane resettlement that restore people's livelihoods. Intense surveillance under the PM-PVTG Mission.

8. Final Thoughts

Modernisation has had both good and bad effects. It has improved health, education, and mobility, but it has also caused cultural loss, job losses, and relocation. To protect the future of PVTGs such as the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Konda Reddy, we need a model of development rooted in rights, culture, and the environment.

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Does Variation in the Pronunciation of Common French Ballet Terms Systematically Affect Adolescent Dancers' Perceived Movement Quality and the Accuracy of Their Executed Steps?

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Abstract

This pilot investigates whether systematic properties of teachers' pronunciation of ballet terminology function as motor-relevant cues for adolescent dancers. Framed narrowly, we ask whether the acoustic realization of a spoken ballet term immediately preceding movement, indexed by a transparent Pronunciation Feature Index (PFI) that aggregates terminal segment class, consonant-vowel balance, and final-syllable stress, and complemented by ΔPFI (absolute deviation from a native-French reference), biases (1) audio-only legato–staccato perception and (2) the quality of a single standardized movement execution. Framed broadly, within routine Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) pedagogy, we ask whether the acoustic properties of terminology operate as effective motor cues that shape timing and segmentation beyond semantics and visual demonstration. Four teachers (two Mandarin-L1, two Canadian-English L1) produced ten high-frequency terms. Four trained dancers (12–18 y) rated perceived staccato-legato from audios and then executed one repetition per audio. Perception showed clear between-teacher divergence for several items (e.g., *balancé*, *chaînes*, *développé*), consistent with salient acoustic variation. In execution (N = 144 trials; *cambré* excluded), ΔPFI correlated weakly with movement quality overall (r ≈ −0.04), with a small negative trend for legato steps and near-zero for staccato. An OLS with interaction estimated a legato slope of ≈ −0.34 per ΔPFI unit and an implied staccato slope of ≈ +0.13. These effects are small at single-rep granularity. We conclude that pronunciation differences are perceptually meaningful and may modestly bias phrasing for legato-anchored actions, but strong changes in execution should not be expected from terminology alone.

Keywords: ballet pedagogy, speech acoustics, speech prosody, phonetics, perception-action coupling, sensorimotor synchronization, acoustic-motor entrainment

1. Introduction

Ballet pedagogy relies on a shared lexicon of French terminology that is used worldwide across syllabi and schools. In practice, however, these terms are pronounced differently by teachers with different linguistic backgrounds

and accents. Pronunciation can vary in segmental features, prosody, and phenomena such as epenthesis.

Despite the significance of spoken cues in daily class, there is little empirical research on whether the sound patterns of ballet terms influence movement perception or performance quality. Prior work suggests that variations in auditory cues, such as rhythm, can bias the timing, continuity, and rate of movement in response; however, this connection has not been systematically tested in ballet classrooms by analyzing variations in the pronunciation of real terminology (Pranjić et al., 2024).

This study investigates whether, within routine Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) studio pedagogy, the acoustic properties of teachers' terminology function as effective motor cues that shape dancers' timing and segmentation beyond semantic labels and visual demonstrations. We situate the work within the RAD framework to control for curricular variability while retaining ecological validity. RAD provides globally standardized terminology and graded syllabi, a common studio routine in which the spoken term precedes or accompanies demonstration, and widely used adolescent training levels (Grades-Intermediate) that match our participant population. Constraining stimuli and movement scoring to RAD conventions reduces confounds due to heterogeneous expectations across methods (e.g., Vaganova vs. Cecchetti) and makes any observed pronunciation effects interpretable as modulation of phrasing within a single, well-specified pedagogical system.

More specifically, we ask whether the acoustic realization of spoken ballet terms, indexed by a Pronunciation Feature Index (PFI) and related correlates of "staccato-like" versus "legato-like" speech, systematically biases (1) audio-only staccato-legato perception and (2) the quality of a single standardized execution. We quantify pronunciation using a numerical scoring based on the Pronunciation Feature Index (PFI) and analyze dancer ratings and performances of ten frequently taught steps that span inherently legato and staccato movements. Controlling for term familiarity, it is hypothesized that a higher PFI, or more consonant-weighted pronunciations, will bias both perception and performance: (1) a higher PFI will elicit lower perceived movement fluidity rating from listening to audios and lower execution scores for inherently legato steps; (2) a greater absolute deviation from a native French pronunciation (ΔPFI) will result in poorer movement execution across dancers.

Aiming to address the research gap, this study provides evidence-based guidance for ballet teachers on how to effectively introduce and present terminology in class. If certain phonetic features consistently bias student perception or execution of the movement, teachers might adjust pacing or stress to reinforce intended movement quality and increase execution accuracy.

2. Background

In multilingual classrooms, the same French lexicon in which ballet is uniformly instructed through is often realized with different segmental and prosodic features. These phonetic differences raise a pedagogical question of whether systematic properties of pronunciation bias how dancers perceive a ballet step's intended quality and how they execute that step after hearing the accented terminology pronunciation.

2.1 Linguistics

Classic work in linguistics categorizes phonemes according to their distinctive features, with consonants being categorized under the place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voicing. This study primarily focuses on two manners of articulation: plosives and nasals. Plosives are stops produced with a complete oral closure and a subsequent release of built-up air, while nasals are produced while the velum is lowered so airflow passes through the nasal cavity and resonates to make a sound (Association, 1999, p. 8). The prosodic organization structures speech based on rhythmic and melodic features such as pitch, loudness, and duration. Categorizing the various properties of accented French terminology, this study analyzes fixed and lexical stress, as well as rhythmic timing (e.g., stress-timed and syllable-timed pronunciations).

2.2 Dance Pedagogy

Classical ballet codifies movement qualities as part of technique, not merely as theatrical style. Across major training systems (e.g., RAD, Vaganova, Cecchetti), instructions explicitly alternate adagio phrases that demand continuity of weight transfer, sustained lines, and uninterrupted *port-de-bras* that require discrete initiation and termination. In this literature and in studio practice, the labels legato and staccato are tied to allegro and adagio, respectively; ballet

accompaniments often use staccato, meaning to play in a detached or bouncy manner, for "movements involving lightness and single-leg jumps" and legato, meaning to play in a connected and smooth manner, for combinations that "require fluidity and continuous movement" (İşsever & İşsever, 2024, p. 5). When using "inherently legato" or "inherently staccato," the paper thus refers to how the accompaniment usually denotes the movement. For empirical purposes, we therefore evaluate movement execution on a rubric aligned to the step's pedagogical target.

2.3 Perception-Action Links

A substantial amount of previous research demonstrates tight links between auditory perception and motor planning. Neuroimaging and behavioral work in music cognition demonstrate auditory-motor co-activation during listening alone and performance without feedback, consistent with predictive mapping from heard cues to motor programs (Zatorre et al., 2007).

Building on this, work on sensorimotor synchronization (SMS), which involves coordinating movement to an external rhythm, shows that auditory input can shape not only when an action occurs but also how it is executed. Repp and Su (2013) demonstrate that people do not simply react to beats; they tend to move slightly in advance of the next event, utilizing phase-correction mechanisms to maintain alignment even when small timing deviations are not consciously noticed. In other words, auditory timing establishes a forward model that the motor system uses to schedule movement.

For this research, two SMS findings are especially relevant. Synchronization behaviour extends beyond timing and reshapes movement kinematics. Studies report distinct "legato-like" versus "staccato-like" tapping styles that differ in trajectory features such as dwell or hold time and where the motionless phase occurs (Repp & Su, 2013). Additionally, auditory pacing elicits stronger coupling than visual pacing, as seen in the 2013 paper's example of metronome clicks and flashes. Perceived stimulus properties can also scale movement amplitude in an involuntary manner, as this happens when observers adopt larger tap amplitudes after viewing larger

movements. Together, these results support a concrete mechanism for the present study. If a teacher's spoken cue carries a more "staccato-like" acoustic profile with greater consonant weight, clear final release, and tighter syllabic grouping, dancers may anticipate shorter, more segmented actions; if it is more "legato-like," they may anticipate smoother, more connected phrasing.

A parallel line of evidence comes from unison speech. When speakers time their production to a partner's audio, metrical (beat-regular) stimuli improve motor output, meaning that participants produce more accurate syllables and exhibit more anticipatory, less variable alignment than with conversational timing (Kershenbaum et al., 2023). This is commonly interpreted as entrainment, where a predictable auditory pattern strengthens perception-action coupling, making synchronous production easier. Although those studies target speech rather than dance, the logic is the same. The acoustic structure of the cue, instead of its semantics, can change the quality of the ensuing motor behavior. In the ballet classroom, terminology is an auditory cue with its own segmental and prosodic shape. It is therefore plausible that systematic differences in pronunciation will bias both perceived staccato-legato quality and executed phrasing in the direction of the cue's acoustic profile.

3. Methods

3.1 Stimuli

The repertoire of ten terms was chosen to balance frequency in everyday ballet classes and provide a predicted contrast in archetypal movement quality. All ten terminologies appear in the RAD, Cecchetti, and Vaganova syllabi and are thus familiar to student dancers aged 14-18. This prevalence ensures that the experiment is not confounded by the dancers' unfamiliarity with the term. Additionally, the first five steps (*balancé* to *arabesque*) are typically taught in adagio or sustained contexts, whereas the other five (*jeté* to *piqué*) require sharper executions. This 50:50 split allows the experiment to test whether the perceived pronunciation profile impacts a dancer's execution of an expected legato or staccato move. The stimulus set comprises the ten terms listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Stimulus set of ten French ballet terms with English glosses from Wiktionary, brief movement descriptors, IPA transcriptions, predicted Pronunciation Feature Index, and the Movement Ratings

Term	Literal English Translation	Movement Description	Transcription	Pronunciation Rating (0-5)	Movement Rating (1-10)
Balancé	(Dance) A type of step where the body swings from one foot to the other in equal time.	Triple-step sway in 3/4: step side in plié, rock back, and rock forward; continuous weight transfer	balɑ̃se	2	8
Chaînes	A succession of rings or links, interlocked with each other.	Series of rapid half-turns in 1st position on demi-pointe	ʃɛn	1	3
Cambré	Which presents an arch, speaking of a part of the human body.	Upper-body back-bend from the waist	kɑ̃bʁe	2	7
Développé	To develop.	Draw the leg to the knee of the standing leg, then extend the leg to an open position with a sustained adagio	devlɔpe	1	9
Arabesque	A type of ornament whose invention has been attributed to the Arabs.	One-leg balance with the free leg extended behind	aʁabɛsk	3	8
Jeté	Thrown.	Brush the working foot of the ground and spring off the supporting leg into a big split jump	ʒəte	1	2
Glissade	Slide.	Low travelling step brushing through 2nd position feet and ending in a demi plié	glisad	1.5	3
Frappé	Struck.	The ball of the foot strikes the floor sharply, and the leg extends	fʁape	2	2
Battement tendu	Battement: Action of beating, when speaking of things.	Brush the foot along the floor to a fully pointed extension, then close back	batmɑ̃ tɑ̃dy	2	4

	Tendu: Tense.				
Piqué	(Surname, no definition)	Step directly onto pointe/demi-pointe with an immediate weight transfer	pike	1	3

Four teacher voices were recorded: two Mandarin Chinese L1 RAD teachers and two Canadian English L1 RAD teachers. All four currently teach within the Royal Academy of Dance syllabus to maintain pedagogical comparability. Recordings were captured in quiet, isolated surroundings at a fixed distance. Each teacher produced all ten terms in the order listed in Table 1. To suppress list intonation in the Anglophone recordings, each term was embedded in a carrier sentence, pasted below, which yields a more natural prosodic contour while preserving the target token.

"From the corner, travel on a *balancé* to the right, then spot the mirror and take your *chaînes* cleanly down the diagonal. Lift through the sternum for a back *cambré*, and unfold a *développé* before lengthening into an *arabesque*. Brush strongly through the floor for a *jeté*, then travel with a quiet *glissade* to set up the next phrase. At the barre, strike from the ankle on each *frappé*, brush and close a precise *battement tendu*, and finish by stepping straight into a *piqué* turn."

3.2 Derivation of the Pronunciation Feature Index (PFI)

We required a compact, rule-based measure that (1) maps established phonetic cues onto a single scale reflecting perceived connectedness vs. edge-accenting in speech, (2) is transparent and replicable for non-phoneticians, and (3) can be computed consistently from all terminologies and pronunciations. The resulting PFI (0–5) is the unweighted sum of five binary and half-point criteria motivated by classic segmental and prosodic effects on perceived temporal structure.

Rule set (with rationale).

1) +1 if the final segment is a voiceless plosive (/p t k/). Voiceless stops exhibit abrupt release bursts with stronger high-frequency energy than their voiced counterparts, yielding a sharper perceptual edge at word offset. We treat this as a canonical marker of segmentation.

2) +0.5 if the final segment is a voiced plosive (/b d g/). Voiced stops retain a closure–release pattern but with reduced burst salience due

to voicing; they are intermediate on the edge cue, hence a half-point weight.

3) −1 if the final segment is nasal (e.g., /n, m, ɑ̃/). Nasals are characterized by sustained, low-frequency energy and often coarticulatory vowel nasalization, which perceptually smooths edges; we therefore subtract one point.

4) +1 if the global consonant-to-vowel ratio (C:V) exceeds 1.2. A higher proportion of consonants increases the number of constrictions per unit vowel, promoting a more consonant-weighted envelope and greater perceived segmentation; we operationalize this with a conservative threshold of C:V > 1.2 computed over the realized phones in the token (not orthography).

5) +1 if primary lexical stress occurs on the final syllable. Final-syllable prominence (indexed by relative duration, intensity, and F0) creates a terminal accent and perceived abruptness at offset.

The weights (±1, +0.5) were set a priori to (a) preserve a simple 0–5 range, (b) reflect ordinal salience among the cues (voiceless stop > voiced stop; nasal in the opposite direction), and (c) avoid discretionary adjustments that could invite bias. Epenthesis (insertion of a vowel that breaks up clusters) is annotated as a binary flag for auxiliary analyses because it can change both the C:V count and the location of stress; however, to maintain parsimony in the primary index, epenthesis is not itself scored as an additional point.

Teacher recordings were annotated in Praat with TextGrid. C:V was computed as the count of consonantal phones divided by vowel phones across the token, and stress placement was assigned to the syllable showing the largest combination of duration, intensity, and F0 (with ties resolved by duration).

To anchor the feature scale to a canonical model, we computed a Reference PFI for each term using a native-French recording drawn from authoritative pronunciation sources. For each

teacher token, we then calculated

$$\Delta PFI = |PFI_{teacher} - PFI_{reference}|.$$

This absolute deviation quantifies how far a realization is from the canonical profile and serves as an additional predictor of perception and execution, where larger deviations may increase processing cost or shift expectations.

Example. Arabesque realized as [a.ʁa.bɛsk]: final /k/ → +1; voiced stop final? (no) → 0; nasal final? (no) → 0; C:V = (three consonant clusters across four vowels) → if C:V > 1.2 then +1; final-syllable stress present → +1. PFI = 3. By contrast, a realization with final nasalization (e.g., [a.ʁa.bɛ̃]) would score a PFI reduced by 1, reflecting a smoother perceptual tail.

Ultimately, the PFI provides a transparent, low-variance mapping from well-attested phonetic cues to a single index that can be related to dancers' audio-only legato judgments and execution scores in subsequent analyses.

3.3 Movement Task for Dancers

Participants (n = 4) were adolescents aged 12–18 with ≥ 3 years of RAD-based classical ballet training. For each lexical item, the dancer first heard the audio token, then provided an audio-only staccato-legato rating (1–10), and immediately executed one standardized repetition of the step as specified in the movement rubric (legato steps capped at one eight-count at ≈ 60 bpm; staccato steps a single clean action). The rating sheet that participants used to rate the audios is attached in the Appendix section.

3.4 Filming

Movements were recorded with a fixed camera positioned ~45° from the front at barre height (~130 cm). The camera remained stationary throughout; dancers performed on a marked spot to preserve a consistent frame.

3.5 Data Handling and Privacy

Videos were used solely to score movement quality. For any materials that may be shared, faces will be blurred or cropped to protect privacy. All files are stored securely, with access restricted to the research team, and are deleted after scoring in accordance with the ethics/data-management plan.

4. Analysis

The recordings from the four teachers were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Table 2. IPA transcriptions by reference and by teacher (per term)

Term	French Transcription	Teacher H Transcription	Teacher L Transcription	Teacher M Transcription	Teacher Q Transcription
Balancé	balɑ̃se	bʊlɑ̃se	bælənseɪ	bæln̩seɪ	balɑ̃seɪ
Chaînes	ʃɛn	ʃəneɪ	ʃəneɪ	ʃəneɪs	ʃəne
Cambré	kɑbʁe	ˈkɑ̃mbɹeɪ	kambɹeɪ	ˈkɑ̃mbɹeɪ	ˈkɑ̃mbɹeɪ
Développé	devlɔpe	dævlɔpeɪ	dɛvləˈpeɪ	dɛvələpeɪ	dɛvlɔpe
Arabesque	aʁabɛsk	ˈəʁbɛs	ɛɹəˈbɛsk	ɛɹəbɛsk	aɹbɛsk
Jeté	ʒəte	ʒəteɪ	ʒəˈteɪ	ʒɛteɪ	ʒəte
Glissade	glisad	gliˈsa	gliˈsad	glisɑd	glisa
Frappé	fʁape	fɹʷapeɪ	fɹæpeɪ	ˈfɹæpeɪ	flape
Battement tendu	batmɑ̃ tɑ̃dy	batmɑ̃ tɑ̃dʉw	bætmɑ̃ tɑ̃˞dʉw	bætmɑ̃ tɑ̃dʉw	batmɑ̃ tɑ̃dʉw
Piqué	pike	pikeɪ	ˈpikeɪ	pikeɪ	pike

Using the transcriptions in Table 2, we computed a PFI for each teacher pronunciation using the rules of the PFI derivation, and calculated $\Delta PFI = |PFI_{teacher} - PFI_{reference}|$ per term to compare the teach PFI to the standard French value.

Table 3. PFI of the four ballet teachers' pronunciations and absolute deviations (ΔPFI) from the French reference

Term	PFI	PFI H	ΔH	PFI L	ΔL	PFI M	ΔM	PFI Q	ΔQ

	(French reference)								
Balancé	2.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
Chaînes	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.0
Cambré	2.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
Développé	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.0
Arabesque	3.0	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.0
Jeté	1.0	1.0	0.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
Glissade	1.5	1.0	0.5	2.5	1.0	2.5	1.0	1.0	0.5
Frappé	2.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
Battement tendu	2.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
Piqué	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0

Inspection of the transcriptions reveals accent-linked regularities that help interpret the PFI shifts. Teachers L and M exhibit canonical North American rhoticity and diphthongization, with post-vocalic /ɹ/ and nuclei such as /eɪ/ in *balancé*, *jeté*, and *piqué*, which increase consonantal load and reconfigure vowel structure. This pattern aligns with higher PFIs for some items. For example, *jeté* for Teacher L has a PFI of 2.0, compared to French at 1.0. Teacher M also favours a rising terminal contour on multi-syllabic items such as battement tendu, an intonational choice not counted by the PFI but plausibly relevant to perceived phrasing. Teacher H's pronunciations exhibit flatter prominence with frequent schwa-like support, generally keeping PFIs near the reference except where rhoticity raises the consonant-vowel balance, as seen in examples like *chaînes*, where PFI 2.0. Teacher Q retains uvular /ʁ/ and non-rhotic ending. In her *arabesque*, the uvular /ʁ/ and final /k/ yield a PFI equal to the French reference (3.0), and similar non-rhotic endings elsewhere keep PFIs close to the reference. Notably, all four teachers produced *chaînes* with English-influenced features, most commonly an initial affricate [tʃ-] and an /eɪ/ nucleus; thus, this item is systematically non-standard relative to the French reference. Although Q's PFI matches the reference value, such segmental departures are not fully captured by the index. In the analyses that follow, we therefore treat *chaînes* cautiously, examining ΔPFI alongside PFI to mitigate term-specific deviation and absorb its term-specific deviation, thereby preventing inflation of between-teacher contrasts.

Table 4. Raw 1-10 staccato-legato perception ratings from four participants for all 40 audios, including per-audio means

Audio #	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Mean
Q1	10	7	8	9	8.5
Q2	10	9	8	6	8.25
Q3	6	7	7	7	6.75
Q4	2	6	9	6	5.75
Q5	8	6	8	7	7.25
Q6	8	6	7	6	6.75
Q7	8	6	8	6	7
Q8	9	5	5	5	6
Q9	6	2	7	8	5.75
Q10	3	2	2	2	2.25

H11	8	2	9	6	6.25
H12	10	7	7	6	7.5
H13	7	4	5	7	5.75
H14	3	1	4	6	3.5
H15	7	7	8	6	7
H16	4	3	8	6	5.25
H17	4	7	8	6	6.25
H18	4	6	7	3	5
H19	5	1	5	8	4.75
H20	2	2	2	1	1.75
L21	5	6	4	4	4.75
L22	4	9	4	7	6
L23	7	8	7	7	7.25
L24	9	5	4	4	5.5
L25	4	5	4	7	5
L26	5	6	3	4	4.5
L27	9	6	7	6	7
L28	4	5	3	5	4.25
L29	4	5	3	6	4.5
L30	1	1	3	1	1.5
M31	7	5	7	6	6.25
M32	8	4	4	6	5.5
M33	8	4	3	4	4.75
M34	6	8	6	5	6.25
M35	7	6	4	6	5.75
M36	4	5	4	4	4.25
M37	5	7	8	7	6.75
M38	4	3	4	3	3.5
M39	5	5	5	5	5
M40	3	3	3	1	2.5

Aggregating the four teacher recordings per term (Q/H/L/M) reveals an uneven distribution of teachers in terms of perceived staccato–legato quality, as shown in Table 5. The largest ranges (max-min of per-audio means) occur for Term 1 (*balancé*, range ≈ 3.75), Term 2 (*chaînes*, ≈ 2.75), and Term 4 (*développé*, ≈ 2.75). By contrast, Term 7 (*glissade*) exhibits a tight spread (≈ 0.75). These descriptive differences motivate testing whether pronunciation features, rather than semantics alone, account for variability across teacher pronunciations.

Table 5. Per-audio mean rating (mean of 4 participants) for each teacher recording (Q/H/L/M), with term-level minimum, maximum, range, and mean ± SD

Term	Item	Minimum across four teacher recording means	Maximum across four teacher recording means	Range	Mean ± SD

1	Balancé	4.75	8.50	3.75	6.44 ± 1.55
2	Chaînes	5.50	8.25	2.75	6.81 ± 1.28
3	Cambré	4.75	7.25	2.50	6.12 ± 1.11
4	Développé	3.50	6.25	2.75	5.25 ± 1.21
5	Arabesque	5.00	7.25	2.25	6.25 ± 1.06
6	Jeté	4.25	6.75	2.50	5.19 ± 1.12
7	Glissade	6.25	7.00	0.75	6.75 ± 0.35
8	Frappé	3.50	6.00	2.50	4.69 ± 1.07
9	Battement tendu	4.50	5.75	1.25	5.00 ± 0.54
10	Piqué	1.50	2.50	1.00	2.00 ± 0.46

The ordering of ranges suggests that certain lexical items (*balancé, chaînes, développé*) are more acoustically variable across teachers, with pronunciations diverging enough to shift listeners' staccato-legato judgments by roughly two to four points on a ten-point scale, whereas *glissade* appears comparatively stable. This pattern is consistent with the segmental and prosodic differences highlighted in Table 3, such as phenomena of diphthongization, rhoticity, and final-syllable stress, and it motivates modeling Teacher as a random factor while testing whether PFI and ΔPFI account for between-teacher variance at the term level. Given the small rater sample (N = 4), these inferences are descriptive; formal confirmation will rely on the planned mixed-effects models and sensitivity checks, including the cautious treatment of "*chaînes*."

Within-audio disagreement, meaning the range across four participants for a single audio, is generally modest but shows a few spikes. The largest ranges occur for Audio 4, 11, 19, and 9 (range ≥ 6 points). These items will be flagged for review, as a preregistered rule can exclude an audio if the within-audio range exceeds a threshold (e.g., > 6) or if comments note confusion about the pronunciation.

Table 6. Within-audio rating disagreement for single pronunciations (selected high-range cases)

Audio #	Teacher block	Within-audio range (max.- min. across 4 participants)
4	Q (1–10)	7
11	H (11–20)	7
19	H (11–20)	7
9	Q (1–10)	6

Ratings were collected on a ten-point scale from four raters per audio, so a within-audio range of six points or more signals extreme disagreement and can distort mean-based summaries. To limit this influence, the primary analysis summarizes each rating with the per-audio median and retains all observations, and mean-based summaries are reported in a supplementary table for completeness. As a robustness check, the full model is re-estimated after excluding pronunciations whose within-audio range is at least six or where contemporaneous notes indicate confusion about the stimulus. Effects are considered reliable only when they are observed under both specifications. When the sample is enlarged, the fixed threshold will be replaced by an interquartile-range rule that flags values above the upper fence, defined as the third quartile plus one and a half times the interquartile range, computed on within-audio ranges. This approach preserves transparency while reducing the risk that a small number of highly discordant ratings dominate the results.

As a first pass, we correlated the per-audio mean

rating with PFI$_{teacher}$ across all 40 audios. The association is small (Pearson r ≈ 0.14; Spearman ϱ ≈ 0.11). Given N = 4 participants and only one trial per audio, this is underpowered; the planned mixed-effects model (*PerceivedFluidity ~ PFI + (1|Dancer) + (1|Teacher) + (1|Term)*) will provide a more appropriate estimate once additional participants and trials are available. We also computed residuals relative to each term's mean (teacher deviation within term); these residuals will be used in the mixed model to test whether PFI explains within-term differences.

We analyzed n = 4 dancers executing 36 audio tokens (ten terms × four teachers minus "*cambré*," Term 3, which was excluded because dancers were unsure of the prescribed movement), yielding N = 144 trials. As preregistered, we relate execution quality (10-point rubric) to $\Delta PFI = |PFI\_teacher - PFI\_reference|$.

Table 7. Movement execution scored by another RAD ballet teacher for each participant

Audio #	Participant 1	Audio #	Participant 2	Audio #	Participant 3	Audio #	Participant 4
17	7	39	6	38	7	1	8
10	5	34	5	34	7	2	5
9	4	2	3	6	7	3	6
3	4	36	0	36	7	4	4
35	6	5	5	27	6	5	7
33	5	27	6	26	7	6	8
40	6	22	7	32	8	7	6
7	7	31	5	23	7	8	5
37	6	38	4	18	7	9	4
1	5	16	3	31	8	10	7
39	3	40	5	30	5	11	6
13	5	3	4	16	6	12	8
25	4	1	6	25	6	13	5
19	4	12	7	29	7	14	7
38	4	25	6	20	7	15	4
23	5	18	6	3	4	16	6
16	3	6	6	2	5	17	8
26	4	13	5	12	6	18	5
34	6	24	4	13	5	19	7
6	5	4	4	24	5	20	6
20	7	37	7	33	6	21	4
31	6	14	6	4	6	22	8
27	7	11	7	8	7	23	5
14	6	19	4	14	5	24	6
28	3	9	5	22	7	25	7
24	7	8	5	19	6	26	4
18	5	23	4	15	5	27	8
32	5	32	6	40	6	28	6
12	6	35	6	37	7	29	5

4	5	10	7	9	6	30	7
30	7	30	7	1	8	31	6
5	7	17	6	35	6	32	4
8	5	20	5	10	7	33	8
11	4	28	4	17	7	34	5
15	6	33	3	5	5	35	7
22	6	15	6	28	7	36	6
2	7	26	5	39	8	37	5
29	7	29	2	11	8	38	6
21	4	7	7	7	7	39	8
36	6	21	6	21	5	40	5

Mean execution score was 5.78/10 (SD = 1.32). Step-type means were comparable (Legato ≈ 5.83; Staccato ≈ 5.72; see Table 7a).

Across all trials, the correlation between ΔPFI and execution was r ≈ −0.04 (tiny, negative). By step type, the association was Legato r ≈ −0.15 and Staccato r ≈ +0.04. A simple OLS with an interaction $(Exec = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \Delta PFI + \beta_2 \cdot Staccato + \beta_3 \cdot \Delta PFI \times Staccato)$ yielded:

Table 8. OLS regression of execution scores on ΔPFI with step-type interaction (all dancers; N = 144 trials; *cambré* excluded)

Parameter	Estimate
Intercept (Legato baseline)	5.969
ΔPFI (Legato slope)	−0.344
Staccato (baseline shift)	−0.240
ΔPFI × Staccato	+0.478

Interpreting the coefficients: for legato-anchored steps, execution decreases slightly as ΔPFI grows (slope ≈ −0.34 per PFI unit); for staccato-anchored steps, the implied slope is small and slightly positive (≈ +0.13). Effect sizes are small, and with a pilot-scale sample we do not draw inferential conclusions here; these estimates guide the preregistered mixed-effects model in the full dataset.
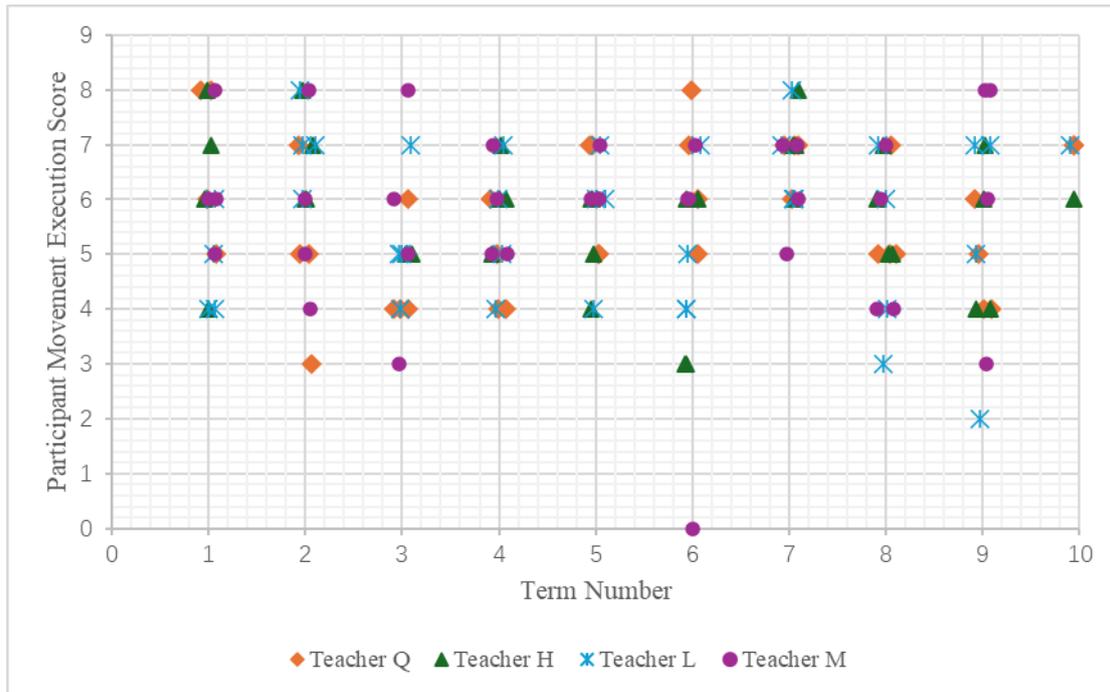
Graph 1. Distribution of single-repetition execution scores by term and teacher

Graph 1 plots data from Table 7 to show the distribution of the four participants' movement execution scores. The x-axis indexes the ten lexical items, and the y-axis is the movement-quality score. Each marker represents one trial, with a small, fixed horizontal jitter applied to reduce overplotting at each term. Marker shapes denote the four teacher recordings (Q, H, L, M). Vertical dispersion within a term quantifies variability in execution across dancers and teacher tokens, but the horizontal spread carries no analytic meaning (jitter only). Execution scores concentrate between 5 and 7 across terms, with modest within-term dispersion and no teacher whose tokens are consistently higher or lower across the set. Legato-anchored items show slightly broader spreads than staccato-anchored items, consistent with greater phrasing variability in sustained actions. These patterns preview the regression results, where ΔPFI shows only a small, directionally negative trend for legato steps and near-zero association for staccato steps.

Consistent with the perception results, *chaînes* was systematically realized with English-influenced segments across teachers. Despite this, ΔPFI effects on execution remained near-zero after accounting for term-level variation, suggesting that segmental deviations alone did not strongly degrade single-rep performance in this pilot. We maintain *chaînes* in

models with Term as a random effect and will report sensitivity analyses with this item removed if it influences fixed-effect estimates.

5. Discussion

This pilot set out to test whether pronunciation features of ballet terminology, operationalized by a simple, transparent PFI and its deviation from a reference French token, bias both perceived staccato-legato quality and executed phrasing. Three provisional observations emerge.

Across teachers, the acoustic realization of the vocabulary varied in ways that listeners detected. Several items (*balancé*, *chaînes*, *développé*) exhibited shifts of roughly two to four points in perceived legato–staccato quality across teacher tokens, indicating that segmental and prosodic differences are salient to dancers and perceptually meaningful in the studio context.

At the level of executed movement, the effects observed in this pilot were small. With four dancers and a single repetition per token, ΔPFI showed a near-zero overall association with movement quality (r ≈ −0.04), with a weak negative tendency for legato steps and essentially no relation for staccato steps. These magnitudes counsel caution and motivate a larger, confirmatory sample before drawing inferential claims.

Finally, the coverage of the index likely constrains what it can predict. The PFI encodes

terminal segment class, consonant-to-vowel balance, and final-syllable stress, but it does not presently represent intonational contours (e.g., rising terminals), within-word timing microstructure, or within-syllable energy profiles. Qualitative observations such as diphthongization, rhoticity, and sentence-final rise suggest that such features plausibly influence phrasing; their absence may explain why ΔPFI alone under-predicts variance in execution.

Limitations are as follows: (1) Power: N = 4 dancers and single tokens limit precision, (2) Single repetition: one-rep trials increase noise relative to short phrases, (3) Rater model: one rater per execution introduces measurement error, where inter-rater reliability will be added ($\kappa \geq 0.70$ target), (4) PFI scope: lack of intonational features may attenuate effects. These constraints, common in lab-in-the-studio pilots, motivate the confirmatory mixed-effects analysis and an expanded acoustic feature set.

Within the constraints above, the findings suggest that pronunciation alone is unlikely to strongly improve or harm single-rep execution in trained adolescents; however, for legato-anchored actions, there is a small, consistent trend whereby more edge-accented pronunciation (larger ΔPFI) corresponds to slightly lower smoothness scores. Teachers may therefore benefit from avoiding terminal bursts and front-loaded stress when the goal is connected phrasing, while not expecting dramatic changes from terminology alone.

6. Conclusion

We present an auditory-to-action pilot linking pronunciation features of ballet terminology to both perceived phrasing and executed movement quality in adolescent dancers. The stimulus set balances pedagogical frequency and phonetic contrast, and the PFI offers a replicable bridge between segmental and prosodic cues and a staccato-legato continuum. In perception, between-teacher differences are clear, however, in execution, ΔPFI effects are small at the granularity tested, with a weak negative trend for legato steps. The preregistered next stage will (1) add dancers and repetitions, (2) incorporate a second movement rater and inter-rater calibration, (3) extend the acoustic feature set to include intonation and micro-timing, and (4) fit a mixed-effects model controlling for Dancer, Teacher, and Term. This will allow a decisive test of whether pronunciation acts as an effective

motor cue in routine studio pedagogy or whether its influence is primarily perceptual.

These results matter for multilingual classrooms where the same ballet term is often pronounced differently across accents. Those pronunciation differences can subtly steer how students execute a movement and its dynamic, so teachers can choose prosody that matches the quality they want to elicit. In practical terms, when teaching legato-anchored actions, avoiding terminal bursts and final-syllable stress, lengthening syllabic linkage, and aligning the cue with a smooth counting pattern can support connected execution. For staccato-anchored actions, a crisper onset, clearer consonantal release, and stress timed to the intended accent can reinforce articulation without sacrificing accuracy. These recommendations do not require uniform pronunciation but intentional prosody that matches the target quality, especially in mixed-accent classrooms where learners hear multiple realizations of the same term.

Mechanistically, the results are consistent with entrainment accounts of music and speech: predictable acoustic structures, such as stress placement, consonant-vowel balance, and terminal energy, provide weak but usable timing information that the motor system can adopt when planning action. The small execution effects observed here likely reflect the limited strength of the speech cue relative to the richer entrainment sources available in class, such as teacher demonstrations and musical accompaniment. Future confirmatory work should therefore model speech prosody alongside music-derived metrical structure and explore brief multi-rep phrases, where entrainment benefits typically grow.

Overall, this study contributes an explicit, replicable bridge between speech acoustics and movement pedagogy in ballet. By formalizing pronunciation with a transparent index and testing its relation to both perception and execution in an ecologically valid RAD setting, we show how linguistic variation can be leveraged, rather than avoided, to make verbal cues more informative. For teachers, the takeaway is pragmatic: pair terminology with prosody that mirrors the intended phrasing; for researchers, the next step is to integrate speech, music, and demonstration in a unified entrainment model of classroom skill acquisition.

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Appendix

Participant Perception Scoring Sheet

How to rate "staccato" vs "legato"?

When you hear each audio clip, focus on how the sound feels (not the movement you'll do next!)

- Staccato = short, crisp, punchy, separated syllables (like dots).
- Legato = smooth, connected, flowing syllables (like a long line).

Use the 1–10 slider:

- 1–3 = very staccato (choppy, lots of separation)
- 4–7 = mixed/medium (some connection, some bite)
- 8–10 = very legato (smooth, continuous)

There are no right or wrong answers. Please rate your first impression, and try to use the whole scale across clips.

Term #:

Staccato   Legato
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Term #:

Staccato   Legato
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Term #:

Staccato   Legato
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Research on the Construction Status, Objectives and Innovative Development Paths of the Virtual Teaching and Research Office for College English

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Abstract

In July 2022, the *Notice of the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education on Launching the Pilot Construction of Virtual Teaching and Research Offices* explicitly stated that virtual teaching and research offices (VTOs) serve as the core carriers for the innovation of grassroots teaching organizations in the "Intelligence +" era. As a pivotal initiative for foreign language education in universities to respond to the national strategy of connotative development of higher education, the construction of VTOs for College English is not only an inherent requirement for advancing the reform of English teaching modes, but also a critical pathway to enhance the quality of foreign language education. Current academic research in this field primarily focuses on the exploration of macro-models among universities included in the pilot list of the Ministry of Education, whereas there exists a notable deficiency in studies summarizing practical experience of non-pilot universities and conducting micro-level research on content construction. Based on this observation, the present study systematically sorts out the construction patterns and development features of domestic VTOs for College English, clarifies their core construction objectives, and constructs practical and operable development paths from four dimensions: the innovation of teaching and research forms, the deepening of teaching research, the co-construction of high-quality resources, and the professional development of teachers. This study aims to provide theoretical references and practical paradigms for universities to deepen the reform of foreign language education and teaching, and to facilitate the high-quality development of higher education.

Keywords: virtual teaching and research offices (VTOs) for college English, construction status, objectives and innovative development paths

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the in-depth integration of intelligent technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data with education and teaching, traditional grassroots teaching organizations are confronted with an urgent demand for morphological innovation and functional upgrading. To strengthen teachers' capacity in information technology application and cultivate a high-quality and professional teaching workforce, the Ministry of Education has continuously advanced the transformation

of grassroots teaching organizations, including teaching and research offices and course teaching teams in recent years, advocating the improvement of teaching quality driven by teaching and research innovation. In February 2021, the *Key Work Points of the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education for 2021* first incorporated "virtual teaching and research offices" as a key task for the innovation of talent training modes in universities. The pilot construction notice issued in July of the same year further specified that as a novel form of teaching organization under the background of "Intelligence + Education", VTOs are required to achieve breakthroughs in the innovation of teaching and research modes, the deepening of teaching research, the co-construction and sharing of resources, and the quality enhancement of teacher training.

As a core course of general education in universities, the teaching quality of College English is directly linked to the achievement of the goal of cultivating compound talents. VTOs offer a new avenue for breaking inter-university barriers in College English teaching, integrating regional educational resources, and promoting the coordinated development of teaching. Nevertheless, current research has obvious limitations. On the one hand, research objects are concentrated in pilot universities, neglecting the practical exploration of non-pilot universities—despite lacking policy support and resource advantages, these universities have accumulated distinctive experience in localized construction. On the other hand, most studies focus on the construction of macro-models, with insufficient discussions on micro-level aspects such as curriculum content optimization and teaching activity design. Therefore, based on the overall construction status of domestic VTOs for College English, this study clarifies their core construction objectives, explores multi-dimensional innovative development paths, and provides universal references for universities of various types to carry out the construction of VTOs.

2. Analysis of the Construction Status of Virtual Teaching and Research Offices for College English

2.1 Construction Pattern and Regional Distribution Characteristics

Since the implementation of the pilot policy of VTOs by the Ministry of Education, the construction of VTOs for College English has exhibited a development pattern characterized by "full coverage, regional imbalance, and diversified types". In terms of quantity and scale, more than 100 universities nationwide have participated in the construction of VTOs for College English, forming a three-tier construction system at the national, provincial, and university levels. In terms of regional distribution, eastern coastal provinces (e.g., Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shandong) have taken a clear leading position in construction progress due to their advantages in economic strength and educational resource aggregation. Not only do the number of VTOs account for over 45% of the national total, but these regions have also developed a mature model of "provincial-level overall planning, inter-university alliance, and resource sharing". Central regions (Henan, Hubei, Hunan, and Anhui) feature the model of "leading role of backbone universities and collaborative co-construction within the region", with the construction scale expanding steadily, and the number of VTOs accounting for approximately 30% of the national total. Some provinces have promoted resource complementarity among universities of different levels by establishing provincial-level virtual teaching and research platforms. Although the western regions (Shaanxi, Sichuan, Chongqing, and Gansu) have a relatively small number of constructions (accounting for around 25% of the national total) due to constraints in educational resources and technical conditions, they have demonstrated a trend of "differentiated development and characteristic breakthroughs". For instance, relying on the geographical advantages of the "Belt and Road", some universities in Shaanxi Province have established the "Virtual Teaching and Research Office for Language and Culture of Countries along the Silk Road", integrating College English teaching with the cultivation of intercultural communication competence, and thus forming a unique construction model.

In terms of university types, comprehensive universities, leveraging their advantages of complete disciplinary categories and strong teaching staff, occupy a dominant position in the construction of VTOs, primarily undertaking core tasks such as resource integration and platform construction. Science and engineering universities focus on characteristic directions including scientific English and engineering

English, and construct a differentiated model of "English teaching + professional application". Normal universities give play to their strengths in teacher education, focusing on the innovation of teaching methods and the construction of teacher training systems. Industry-specific universities such as finance and economics universities and medical universities have developed targeted teaching resources and teaching and research projects in response to the demands of professional English.

2.2 Construction Types and Operation Mode Innovation

At present, VTOs for College English have mainly developed three core types, each of which demonstrates significant differences in construction objectives, organizational structure, and operation mechanism:

2.2.1 Curriculum (Group) Collaborative Teaching Type

Taking core College English courses (e.g., Integrated English, Academic English, and Audio-Visual-Speaking) or course groups as the link, teachers from multiple universities form teaching teams to conduct inter-university collaborative teaching. Its operation mode is centered on "resource sharing, collective lesson planning, and joint teaching", realizing the synchronization of teaching progress, intercommunication of teaching resources, and unification of teaching evaluation via online platforms. For example, some VTOs adopt the teaching mode of "leading teachers + auxiliary teachers", where backbone teachers from core universities serve as lecturers, and teachers from other universities are responsible for offline tutoring and personalized teaching, thus forming a collaborative teaching mechanism of "unified online teaching and targeted offline tutoring".

2.2.2 Professional Integration and Innovation Type

Focusing on the in-depth integration of College English and professional education, teaching and research teams are co-established by English teachers and professional teachers to carry out work related to the construction of professional English courses and the cultivation of compound talents. The operation mode of this type of VTO emphasizes "demand orientation, cross-border collaboration, and practice orientation". By investigating industry demands and analyzing the objectives of professional talent training, it develops a distinctive English curriculum system. For example, the "Medical English Virtual Teaching and Research Office" led by a medical university has united 15 medical universities, developed a curriculum system covering modules such as basic medical English, clinical communication English, and medical paper writing, compiled 3 sets of industry-specific textbooks, and established practical teaching bases in collaboration with multiple hospitals, thus realizing the organic integration of English teaching and medical professional practice.

2.2.3 Teaching Reform and Research Type

Taking key and difficult issues in College English teaching as research objects, research teams are composed of university teachers, educational experts, and researchers from teaching and research institutions to conduct special teaching research. Its operation mode is centered on "project-driven, thematic discussion, and achievement transformation", focusing on hot topics such as the integration of curriculum ideology and politics, the application of information-based teaching, and the reform of teaching evaluation. For example, some VTOs have conducted research on topics including "the application of the Production-Oriented Approach in College English teaching" and "artificial intelligence technology empowering English writing teaching", forming a series of teaching reform achievements, which have been promoted and applied in member universities through teaching and research activities and special training programs.

3. Core Construction Objectives of Virtual Teaching and Research Offices for College English

3.1 Constructing a Collaborative Professional Learning Community for Teachers

With the core objective of breaking the isolated state of teachers' teaching and promoting the coordinated improvement of professional competence, VTOs for College English aim to construct a professional learning community for teachers characterized by "exchange and sharing, mutual assistance and common progress, and sustainable development". By establishing a regular teaching and research platform, organizing inter-university teaching discussions, teaching experience sharing, and teaching problem diagnosis activities, it promotes in-depth communication and

ideological collision among teachers. It invites domestic and foreign experts in foreign language education to deliver online lectures and special training sessions, introducing cutting-edge teaching concepts and research findings to broaden teachers' academic horizons. It organizes inter-university teaching observation, teaching competitions, joint teaching and research projects and other activities to provide teachers with platforms for practical training and capacity demonstration.

Meanwhile, VTOs establish a mentorship mechanism to promote pairing assistance between backbone teachers and young teachers, facilitating the rapid growth of young teachers. Through the co-construction of teaching resource libraries, joint application for teaching and research projects, and collaborative publication of academic papers, it enhances teachers' teaching and research capabilities. It establishes teachers' professional development portfolios, recording teachers' participation in teaching and research activities, training programs, and achievement output, providing references for teachers' professional title promotion and selection of excellent teachers, and thus forming a virtuous circle of "teaching and research promoting professional growth, and professional growth facilitating teaching practice".

3.2 Creating an Open and Shared Ecosystem of Teaching Resources

Following the principle of "resource co-construction, complementary advantages, and on-demand utilization", it builds a diversified resource library covering teaching resources, academic resources, and practical resources, creating an open and shared ecosystem of teaching resources. In terms of teaching resources, it integrates core resources including high-quality textbooks, courseware, teaching videos, question banks, and teaching cases, classifying and organizing them according to course types, teaching modules, and difficulty levels to achieve accurate retrieval and efficient utilization of resources. It encourages teachers to develop personalized teaching resources (e.g., micro-lectures, virtual simulation teaching materials, and professional English cases) combined with teaching practice, and ensures the quality of resources through resource evaluation mechanisms (peer review, student feedback, and expert evaluation).

In terms of academic resources, it collects and organizes academic papers, research reports, monographs, and conference materials in the field of foreign language education, establishing an academic resource sharing platform to support teachers in conducting teaching research. It establishes an academic exchange mechanism, regularly organizing academic lectures, thematic seminars, paper writing workshops and other activities to promote the dissemination and transformation of academic achievements. In terms of practical resources, it integrates on-campus and off-campus practical teaching bases, enterprise resources, and intercultural communication platforms to provide students with integrated online and offline practical opportunities, such as virtual simulation language practice, inter-university cooperation projects, and enterprise internship matching, realizing the organic connection between theoretical teaching and practical teaching.

3.3 Establishing a Cross-Border Integrated Collaborative Teaching Mechanism

Breaking inter-university, regional, and disciplinary boundaries, it establishes a teaching mechanism featuring "inter-university collaboration, disciplinary integration, and teacher-student interaction", promoting the innovation of College English teaching modes. In terms of inter-university collaboration, via virtual teaching and research platforms, it enables synchronous classes for students from different universities, cross-university team learning, and joint development of practical projects, facilitating the radiation of high-quality teaching resources to underdeveloped universities. It establishes inter-university teaching teams, assigning teaching tasks according to teachers' professional strengths, forming a teaching pattern of "complementary advantages and division of labor and collaboration".

In terms of disciplinary integration, it promotes the in-depth integration of College English with professional disciplines, ideological and political disciplines, and information technology disciplines, integrating professional knowledge, ideological and political elements, and technological applications into the English teaching process. It develops interdisciplinary curriculum modules, such as "English + professional literature reading", "English + intercultural communication", and "English +

digital technology application", to improve students' comprehensive application capabilities. In terms of teacher-student interaction, it builds teacher-student communication channels using online platforms, realizing real-time answers to teaching questions, dynamic tracking of learning progress, and customization of personalized learning plans. It encourages students to participate in the construction of teaching resources and teaching evaluation feedback, forming a positive interaction mechanism of "teacher-led, student-centered, and mutual promotion of teaching and learning".

4. Innovative Development Paths of Virtual Teaching and Research Offices for College English

4.1 Innovation of Teaching and Research Forms: Multi-Dimensional Integration and Mode Upgrading

4.1.1 Deep Integration of Curriculum Ideology and Politics, Realizing the Unity of Value Guidance and Knowledge Imparting

Based on the characteristics of College English courses, it constructs a three-in-one teaching system of "language teaching + cultural inheritance + value shaping". It thoroughly explores ideological and political elements in textbooks. For example, in the teaching of western cultural themes, it guides students to compare the differences between Chinese and western cultures and enhance cultural confidence; in the teaching of social hot topics, it combines China's development achievements to cultivate students' sense of national identity and social responsibility; in the teaching of intercultural communication themes, it advocates the values of mutual learning and inclusive coexistence among civilizations. It innovates the approaches to integrating ideological and political elements into teaching, naturally incorporating them into the teaching process through case teaching, thematic discussions, role-playing and other activities, avoiding rigid implantation. For instance, some VTOs have carried out a series of teaching activities themed "Telling Chinese Stories in English", organizing students to introduce Chinese traditional culture, scientific and technological achievements, and social development in English, enhancing their language proficiency while strengthening their awareness of cultural communication.

4.1.2 Integration of Curriculum, Certification and Competition in Talent Cultivation, Constructing a Competence-Oriented Teaching System

With the goal of "improving students' employment competitiveness and career development capabilities", it promotes the organic integration of curriculum teaching with vocational qualification certificate examinations and discipline competitions. In curriculum design, referring to the competence requirements of certificates such as CET-4, CET-6, National Business English Test (NBET), Business English Certificate (BEC), and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), it optimizes teaching content and increases practical English skill training. In teaching methods, it introduces real examination questions and simulation training of certificate examinations, conducting teaching practice of "promoting learning and teaching through examinations". Meanwhile, it integrates discipline competitions into the teaching process, organizing students to participate in competitions such as the "FLTRP · NBET Cup" National English Competition for College Students, the National College Students English Writing Competition, and the Intercultural Communication Competition, improving students' language application capabilities and innovative thinking through "promoting practice and innovation through competitions". Some VTOs have established an integrated training program of "curriculum, certification and competition", incorporating certificate examination results and competition awards into the students' comprehensive evaluation system, forming a virtuous circle of "teaching – certification – competition – employment".

4.1.3 Digital Transformation of Teaching and Research Activities, Innovating the Forms of Teaching and Research Organization

With the assistance of intelligent technology, it optimizes the forms of teaching and research activities, constructing a teaching and research mode of "combination of online and offline, and complementarity of virtual and real scenarios". Online, relying on virtual teaching and research platforms, it conducts inter-university real-time discussions, teaching video observation, and online collective lesson planning, breaking the constraints of time and space. It employs functions such as live broadcast, recorded broadcast, and bullet screen interaction to

improve the participation and effectiveness of teaching and research activities. Offline, it organizes teaching salons, special workshops, teaching achievement exhibitions and other activities to promote face-to-face communication and practical discussions among teachers. It innovates the content of teaching and research activities, carrying out characteristic activities such as "micro teaching and research", "thematic teaching and research", and "project-based teaching and research". For example, conducting special discussions on specific teaching difficulties, carrying out joint research around teaching reform projects, and conducting collective lesson planning combined with the construction of high-quality courses. Some VTOs have introduced the flipped teaching and research model, first allowing teachers to independently learn cutting-edge teaching concepts and methods, and then conducting exchange discussions and practical application through a combination of online and offline methods, improving the pertinence and effectiveness of teaching and research activities.

4.2 Co-Construction of High-Quality Resources: Integration, Sharing and Dynamic Optimization

4.2.1 Refined Construction and Sharing of Teaching Resources

It establishes a closed-loop mechanism of "demand investigation – resource development – quality review – sharing and application – feedback and optimization". Through questionnaires, teacher interviews, student feedback and other methods, it accurately identifies the English learning needs of students from different universities and different majors. It organizes teachers from member universities to jointly develop characteristic teaching resources, such as scientific English textbooks for science and engineering students, academic English courseware for liberal arts students, and professional English case libraries for industry-specific universities. It establishes a resource quality review committee, composed of subject experts and backbone teachers, to conduct rigorous reviews on the scientificity, applicability, and innovation of resources. Through virtual teaching and research platforms, it realizes classified retrieval, on-demand download, and online utilization of resources, and establishes a resource use feedback mechanism to continuously optimize resource quality based on the use evaluation of teachers and students. For example, the teaching

resource library built by a VTO includes 8 modules and more than 1,200 resources, achieving "full coverage of basic resources, differentiation of characteristic resources, and regular updating of resources".

4.2.2 Collaborative Construction and Dissemination of Academic Resources

It integrates the academic research achievements of member universities, building a four-in-one academic resource library of "academic papers – research reports – teaching and research cases – academic lectures". It encourages teachers to upload published academic papers, completed teaching and research project achievements, and award-winning teaching cases to the platform to realize the sharing of academic resources. It regularly invites renowned domestic and foreign experts to deliver online academic lectures and special reports, recording and uploading them to the resource library for teachers' independent learning. It organizes inter-university academic seminars and paper exchange meetings to promote the collision of academic ideas and the transformation of research achievements. It establishes an academic resource dissemination mechanism, promoting high-quality academic resources through platform recommendation and special push notifications. It encourages teachers to conduct secondary research based on shared academic resources and jointly apply for teaching and research projects at various levels, improving the overall academic research level.

4.2.3 Cross-Border Integration and Sharing of Talent Resources

It constructs a talent resource sharing system featuring "expert guidance, backbone support, and full participation". It invites domestic and foreign experts in foreign language education, information technology experts, and industry elites to form an advisory team to provide theoretical guidance and practical support for the construction of VTOs. It selects backbone teachers from member universities to form a core team, undertaking core tasks such as resource development, teaching and research organization, and teaching demonstration. It establishes an inter-university talent exchange mechanism, organizing teachers to teach across universities, take temporary positions, and conduct joint teaching and research, promoting the rational flow of talent resources. It builds a talent training platform, cultivating a group of

compound teachers with teaching capabilities, research capabilities, and technology application capabilities through expert lectures, mentoring pairs, and project cooperation. Some VTOs have established a talent resource pool, integrating professional talents from different fields to provide personalized teaching guidance, teaching and research support, and technical services for member universities.

4.3 Quality Improvement of Teacher Training: Precise Empowerment and Long-Term Incentives

4.3.1 Construction of a Personalized Training System

Based on teachers' professional development needs, it constructs a three-stage training system of "basic competence – professional competence – innovative competence". Basic competence training focuses on core teaching skills such as teaching design, classroom management, and teaching evaluation, improving teachers' basic teaching skills through workshops, case teaching, and practical drills. Professional competence training focuses on cutting-edge theories of foreign language education, disciplinary development trends, and professional English teaching methods, broadening teachers' professional horizons through academic lectures, thematic seminars, and course learning. Innovative competence training focuses on information technology application, teaching mode innovation, and teaching and research project development, improving teachers' innovative capabilities through technical operation, project practice, and achievement incubation. It formulates differentiated training programs for teachers of different levels, providing a step-by-step training of "entry – growth – maturity" for young teachers, an advanced training of "breakthrough – leadership – radiation" for backbone teachers, and adaptive training of "adaptation – improvement – innovation" for senior teachers.

4.3.2 Construction of an Intelligent Training Platform

Relying on information technology, it builds an intelligent training platform combining "online + offline" and "synchronous + asynchronous" modes. The online platform integrates high-quality training resources, providing a wealth of online courses, expert lecture videos, teaching case analyses and other learning content, supporting teachers' independent learning, real-time interaction, and achievement display. It uses big data technology to analyze teachers' learning behaviors and needs, pushing personalized learning suggestions and training resources. Through functions such as live classrooms, online discussions, and virtual workshops, it conducts inter-university synchronous training. Offline training focuses on practical operation and face-to-face communication, organizing teachers to participate in teaching observation, field visits, and centralized training activities, promoting the integration of theoretical learning and practical application. Some VTOs have introduced the "AI + training" mode, using artificial intelligence technology to conduct teaching ability evaluation, personalized learning path planning, and teaching effect feedback, improving the precision and effectiveness of training.

4.3.3 Improvement of Long-Term Incentive Mechanisms

It establishes a diversified incentive mechanism combining "material incentives + spiritual incentives + development incentives". In terms of material incentives, teachers who actively participate in the construction of VTOs and achieve outstanding results are provided with funding subsidies, resource support, and bonuses. In terms of spiritual incentives, through commending advanced individuals, publicizing typical cases, and issuing honorary certificates, it enhances teachers' sense of achievement and belonging. In terms of development incentives, the participation in VTO work is included as a key indicator in teachers' performance evaluation, professional title promotion, and selection of excellent teachers, providing teachers with more development opportunities and platforms. It establishes a mechanism for the identification and transformation of teaching and research achievements, conducting joint identification of co-developed teaching resources, jointly completed teaching and research projects, and collaboratively published academic papers, and promoting their popularization and application in member universities. It sets up a special reward fund for VTOs, commending outstanding collectives and individuals in resource construction, teaching and research activities, and teaching reform, stimulating teachers' enthusiasm and initiative to participate in the construction of VTOs.

5. Conclusion

By systematically sorting out the current construction status of domestic VTOs for College English, this study clarifies that their core construction objectives are to build a College English education and teaching community integrating teachers' professional development, teaching resource sharing, and collaborative teaching implementation, in accordance with the principles of "demand orientation, collaborative innovation, and co-construction and sharing". At present, VTOs for College English have formed a construction pattern of "full coverage, regional differentiation, and diversified types", presenting three core types: curriculum collaborative teaching, professional integration and innovation, and teaching reform and research. However, problems remain, such as insufficient research on non-pilot universities and weak micro-level content construction.

To promote the high-quality development of VTOs for College English, efforts should be made in three aspects. First, innovate teaching and research forms, and construct diversified teaching and research modes through the integration of curriculum ideology and politics, the integration of curriculum, certification and competition, and the digital transformation of teaching and research activities. Second, strengthen resource co-construction, realize the in-depth integration and dynamic optimization of teaching resources, academic resources, and talent resources, and create an open and shared resource ecosystem. Third, improve the teacher training system, and enhance teachers' professional literacy and participation enthusiasm through personalized training, intelligent platform construction, and long-term incentive mechanism development. In the future, the construction of VTOs for College English should further strengthen technology empowerment, highlight characteristic development, deepen cross-border integration, provide stronger support for the reform of foreign language education and teaching in universities, and contribute to the high-quality development of higher education.

Fund Project

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The Unequal Tolerance of Delayed Marriage for Men and Women in China

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Abstract

Delayed marriage has become increasingly common in China, yet social responses to this phenomenon remain unevenly distributed between men and women. This paper examines how delayed marriage is evaluated through a gendered lens, focusing on the unequal tolerance extended to men and women who postpone marriage. Rather than treating delayed marriage as a neutral demographic outcome, the study conceptualizes it as a socially constructed category shaped by normative expectations, moral judgments, and everyday interaction. Drawing on a sociological and gender-oriented perspective, the paper analyzes how gendered life scripts, family expectations, public discourse, and informal social sanctions work together to regulate marriage timing. It argues that marriage timing functions as a key mechanism of gender regulation, granting men greater temporal flexibility while subjecting women to heightened scrutiny and moral pressure. Through the cumulative effects of labeling, media narratives, peer comparison, and familial negotiation, unequal tolerance is internalized and incorporated into individual life planning. By shifting attention from marriage behavior to social evaluation, this study contributes to understanding how gender inequality is reproduced through ordinary norms and interactions in contemporary China.

Keywords: delayed marriage, gender norms, social tolerance, family expectations, public discourse

1. Introduction

In recent decades, delayed marriage has become an increasingly visible phenomenon in China, particularly among urban populations. Rising levels of education, changing labor markets, housing pressures, and shifting personal aspirations have all contributed to the postponement of marriage for both men and women. From a demographic perspective, delayed marriage is often treated as a rational response to structural transformation. Yet beyond demographic explanation, marriage timing is also a deeply social matter, shaped by cultural norms, moral expectations, and gendered life scripts. As a result, the social meaning of delayed marriage cannot be understood solely through age thresholds or statistical trends.

Although both men and women experience later marriage, social responses to this phenomenon are far from gender neutral. In everyday interactions, family discussions, media representations, and public discourse, delayed marriage tends to be evaluated differently depending on gender. Men who postpone marriage are often perceived as focusing on

career development or personal growth, while women in similar situations are more likely to encounter moral judgment, anxiety-driven concern, or stigmatizing labels. This asymmetry suggests that delayed marriage functions not only as an individual life choice but also as a site where gender norms are actively produced and reinforced.

This paper examines the unequal tolerance of delayed marriage for men and women in China. Rather than asking why individuals marry later, it focuses on how delayed marriage is socially interpreted and evaluated through a gendered lens. The central concern is not marriage behavior itself, but the norms, expectations, and judgments that surround marriage timing. By analyzing delayed marriage as a socially constructed category, the paper highlights how tolerance operates unevenly, shaping different moral boundaries for men and women.

The analysis adopts a sociological perspective that emphasizes gendered life scripts, family dynamics, and public discourse. It argues that marriage timing serves as a key mechanism through which gender regulation is exercised in contemporary China. Unequal tolerance of delayed marriage is sustained through interlocking processes, including normative expectations about adulthood, familial pressure grounded in filial responsibility, and everyday social judgments circulated through media and interpersonal interaction.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 conceptualizes delayed marriage as a socially constructed category rather than a neutral demographic marker. Section 3 examines gendered life scripts and normative timelines that define appropriate marriage timing for men and women. Section 4 focuses on family expectations and the gendered distribution of pressure within intergenerational relationships. Section 5 analyzes public discourse and everyday social judgment surrounding delayed marriage. Section 6 brings these strands together to discuss unequal tolerance as a mechanism of gender regulation. The conclusion summarizes the main arguments and reflects on their broader implications for understanding gender, family, and social change in China.

2. Delayed Marriage as a Socially Constructed Category

Delayed marriage is often discussed as a demographic outcome defined by age, statistical

averages, or policy benchmarks. In such accounts, marriage timing appears as an objective indicator that can be measured and compared across populations. However, this approach obscures the fact that "delayed marriage" is not merely a chronological condition but a socially constructed category shaped by norms, expectations, and value judgments. What counts as "late" marriage is neither fixed nor neutral; it is produced through cultural definitions of appropriate life timing.

In the Chinese context, the classification of marriage as "on time" or "delayed" is closely linked to normative ideas about adulthood and life progression. Marriage is widely regarded as a key milestone that signals maturity, stability, and social responsibility. As a result, age thresholds associated with marriage acquire moral significance. Individuals who do not conform to these expectations are not simply described as unmarried but are often evaluated in relation to perceived deviation from a socially approved life course. Delayed marriage thus becomes a label that carries implicit judgments about normality and success.

Importantly, the boundaries of delayed marriage are flexible and context dependent. They vary across historical periods, regions, and social groups, and they are continuously renegotiated through public discourse and everyday interaction. Rather than being determined solely by biological age or economic readiness, the perception of delay is shaped by collective assumptions about what a "proper" life trajectory should look like. These assumptions are embedded in cultural narratives about family formation, generational responsibility, and social order.

Viewing delayed marriage as a socially constructed category also draws attention to its evaluative function. The label does not merely describe a timing difference; it organizes social responses such as concern, pressure, tolerance, or stigma. Once marriage timing is framed as delayed, it invites interpretation and intervention from others, including family members, peers, and institutions. In this sense, delayed marriage operates as a mechanism through which social norms are activated and enforced.

This perspective is essential for understanding why tolerance toward delayed marriage is unevenly distributed. If delayed marriage were

simply a demographic fact, differences in social reaction would be difficult to explain. By recognizing delayed marriage as a normative category, it becomes possible to analyze how judgments about timing are intertwined with broader expectations about gender, responsibility, and social roles. This conceptualization provides the foundation for examining the gendered dynamics of tolerance explored in the following sections.

3. Gendered Life Scripts and Normative Timelines

3.1 Gendered Expectations of Appropriate Life Timing and Adulthood

Ideas about appropriate life timing in China are closely tied to culturally embedded expectations about adulthood. Adulthood is not defined solely by age or legal status but by the completion of a sequence of socially recognized milestones, among which marriage occupies a central position. While these expectations apply to both men and women, they are structured through distinctly gendered life scripts that assign different meanings and deadlines to the transition into married life.

For men, adulthood is commonly associated with economic capability, career stability, and the ability to provide. Marriage is often understood as desirable but conditional upon the achievement of these prerequisites. As a result, delayed marriage among men is frequently interpreted as a temporary and understandable stage of self-development. Postponement can be framed as evidence of ambition, responsibility, or prudence, reinforcing the idea that men are allowed a flexible timeline in which personal and professional preparation precedes family formation.

In contrast, expectations surrounding women's adulthood are more tightly linked to marital status itself. Marriage is often treated as a defining marker of female maturity, social belonging, and life completion. Delayed marriage for women is therefore more likely to be read as a deviation from the expected life course rather than a strategic choice. The timeline for women's marriage is commonly perceived as compressed, shaped by assumptions about fertility, caregiving roles, and emotional suitability. As a result, the same age that appears acceptable or even unremarkable for unmarried men may be considered

problematic when applied to women.

These gendered timelines are reinforced through everyday language and social interaction. Expressions that associate women's age with urgency or decline coexist with narratives that portray men as "late bloomers" or "still on the way." Such distinctions normalize different standards of patience and tolerance, embedding inequality into seemingly common-sense understandings of life progression. Adulthood, in this sense, is not a neutral stage reached through age alone but a gendered status achieved through conformity to differentiated expectations.

By structuring adulthood around unequal temporal norms, gendered life scripts establish the foundation for asymmetric social tolerance toward delayed marriage. These scripts do not merely describe typical life paths; they actively shape how individuals are evaluated and treated when they depart from expected timelines. Understanding these expectations is therefore essential for explaining why delayed marriage becomes a more salient and problematic issue for women than for men, a dynamic that underlies the unequal tolerance examined throughout this paper.

3.2 Unequal Moral Evaluation of Delayed Marriage for Men and Women

Beyond differences in expected life timing, delayed marriage is subject to unequal moral evaluation for men and women in China. Social responses do not merely register marital status as a factual condition; they attach moral meanings that assess character, responsibility, and social worth. These evaluations are deeply gendered, producing divergent interpretations of similar marital trajectories.

For men, delayed marriage is often morally neutral or even positively reframed. Unmarried men beyond socially expected ages may be perceived as exercising autonomy, prioritizing career advancement, or seeking appropriate conditions before settling down. Their marital delay can be interpreted as evidence of self-discipline or long-term planning, rather than as a failure to meet social obligations. Moral concern, when it appears, is frequently softened by explanations that emphasize external constraints such as economic pressure or housing costs.

Women's delayed marriage, by contrast, is far more likely to trigger moral scrutiny. Unmarried

women beyond certain age thresholds are often evaluated through narratives of deficiency, risk, or deviation. Delayed marriage may be interpreted as a sign of excessive selectiveness, improper priorities, or an inability to fulfill expected relational roles. These judgments frequently carry an implicit tone of warning, suggesting that continued delay reflects personal miscalculation rather than structural circumstance.

This asymmetry reveals how moral evaluation is anchored in gendered assumptions about responsibility and desirability. Women's marital status is more directly linked to evaluations of femininity, emotional suitability, and social contribution, while men's status is assessed through a broader and more flexible set of criteria. As a result, identical behaviors—remaining unmarried at a given age—are moralized differently depending on gender, producing unequal standards of accountability.

Such moral evaluations are rarely articulated through formal condemnation. Instead, they operate through subtle cues, advice, comparisons, and expressions of concern that position delayed marriage as more morally consequential for women than for men. These everyday judgments reinforce gender hierarchies by normalizing unequal tolerance and framing women's life choices as morally riskier. In this way, moral evaluation functions as a key mechanism through which gendered norms surrounding marriage timing are sustained and reproduced.

3.3 Reproductive Norms, Age Anxiety, and Their Gendered Implications

Reproductive norms play a central role in shaping social anxiety around marriage timing in China, and their impact is profoundly gendered. While marriage and reproduction are formally separable, they are widely treated as sequential and mutually reinforcing stages of the life course. As a result, concerns about reproduction often become embedded in evaluations of delayed marriage, intensifying pressure in ways that differ markedly for men and women.

For women, age is closely linked to assumptions about reproductive capacity. Cultural narratives that emphasize a limited "optimal" window for childbirth contribute to heightened age anxiety, particularly once women pass socially

recognized thresholds. Delayed marriage is therefore frequently interpreted not only as a postponement of partnership but as a potential threat to reproductive success. This framing transforms marriage timing into a matter of urgency, where delay is perceived as carrying irreversible biological and social consequences.

Men, by contrast, are largely insulated from similar reproductive time pressure. Male fertility is rarely foregrounded in public or familial discourse, and age-related concerns are often minimized or ignored. As a result, delayed marriage for men is less likely to be linked to reproductive risk and more easily detached from anxiety about future family formation. This asymmetry reinforces the perception that time is more forgiving for men than for women, legitimizing greater social tolerance toward male marital delay.

Age anxiety surrounding reproduction is further amplified through everyday discourse, including advice from family members, media commentary, and informal peer conversations. Women are frequently reminded of declining fertility, caregiving responsibilities, and social expectations tied to motherhood, while men encounter fewer comparable reminders. These discursive patterns naturalize gendered responsibility for reproduction and position women as primary bearers of temporal risk.

The gendered implications of reproductive norms extend beyond biological considerations. They shape how delayed marriage is evaluated morally and emotionally, framing women's delay as a potentially irresponsible gamble while allowing men's delay to remain a flexible choice. In this way, reproductive norms transform age into a gendered constraint, embedding inequality into social judgments about marriage timing. This dynamic reinforces unequal tolerance by presenting women's delayed marriage as more consequential and less socially acceptable than that of men.

3.4 Marriage Timing as a Key Site of Gender Norm Enforcement

Marriage timing functions as a critical site through which gender norms are actively enforced in contemporary China. Rather than operating solely as a personal decision, the timing of marriage becomes a social checkpoint where conformity to gendered expectations is monitored and evaluated. Through repeated assessment of whether individuals are "on time"

or "late," marriage timing serves as a mechanism that translates abstract gender norms into concrete judgments about everyday life choices.

For women, marriage timing is closely tied to expectations surrounding care, reproduction, and emotional responsibility. Delayed marriage is often treated as a sign that these responsibilities are being postponed or neglected, triggering corrective responses from family members, peers, and broader social networks. Advice, concern, and subtle criticism function as forms of normative pressure, signaling that deviation from expected timelines requires justification. In this process, women's life trajectories are measured against a narrow temporal standard that leaves limited room for variation.

Men encounter gender norm enforcement through marriage timing in a different, more conditional manner. Expectations for men are often framed around economic readiness and social status rather than age itself. As long as men are perceived as progressing toward these goals, delayed marriage is more likely to be tolerated or even normalized. Norm enforcement thus operates unevenly, allowing men greater temporal flexibility while holding women to stricter and earlier benchmarks of conformity.

Importantly, gender norm enforcement through marriage timing does not rely on formal sanctions or explicit rules. It is sustained through everyday interactions, including questions, comparisons, and expressions of concern that appear benign but collectively exert pressure. These practices reinforce the idea that marriage timing is not merely a private matter but a public indicator of gender-appropriate behavior. Compliance is rewarded with social approval, while delay—especially for women—invites scrutiny and intervention.

By functioning as a site of gender norm enforcement, marriage timing helps stabilize broader patterns of inequality. It aligns individual life choices with socially prescribed gender roles, ensuring that expectations about reproduction, care, and responsibility are reproduced across generations. Understanding marriage timing in this way reveals how unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage is not accidental but embedded within routine social processes that regulate gendered life courses.

3.5 The Naturalization of Unequal Tolerance Through Cultural Narratives

Unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage for men and women is further sustained through cultural narratives that present gendered expectations as natural, reasonable, or inevitable. These narratives do not usually appear as explicit prescriptions; instead, they operate by framing social judgments as reflections of common sense, tradition, or biological difference. In doing so, they obscure the normative work involved in evaluating marriage timing and render unequal standards socially acceptable.

Popular cultural narratives often depict women's marriage timing as inherently constrained by nature, emphasizing themes such as biological clocks, emotional suitability, and the need for stability. These stories portray concern over women's delayed marriage as protective or pragmatic rather than disciplinary. By contrast, men's delayed marriage is frequently framed through narratives of self-development, ambition, or readiness, suggesting that postponement is a rational response to personal or structural conditions. Such contrasting portrayals normalize patience toward men while legitimizing anxiety toward women.

Media representations, everyday sayings, and intergenerational advice play an important role in circulating these narratives. Television programs, online discussions, and informal conversations repeatedly reproduce the idea that women face shrinking opportunities with age, while men gain value through experience and accumulation. Over time, repetition transforms these assumptions into taken-for-granted truths, making unequal tolerance appear as a reflection of reality rather than a product of social judgment.

These cultural narratives also function by depoliticizing inequality. By attributing differences in tolerance to nature, tradition, or personal disposition, they divert attention away from structural and normative forces. Gendered expectations surrounding marriage timing are thus presented as unavoidable outcomes of biological difference or cultural continuity, rather than as social arrangements that could be questioned or reshaped. This framing discourages critical reflection and limits the space for alternative life trajectories to be

recognized as legitimate.

Through the circulation of such narratives, unequal tolerance becomes embedded in everyday understanding. What begins as differentiated evaluation gradually acquires the status of common sense, reinforcing gender norms without the need for overt enforcement. In this way, cultural narratives play a crucial role in stabilizing unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage, ensuring that gendered standards of life timing persist even as social and economic conditions continue to change.

4. Family Expectations and Gendered Pressure

4.1 Parental Expectations and Gendered Marriage Anxiety

Family expectations play a central role in shaping experiences of delayed marriage in China, and parental attitudes are a key source of gendered pressure. For many parents, children's marriage is not only a private life event but also a reflection of family success, moral standing, and intergenerational continuity. As a result, anxiety surrounding marriage timing often emerges first and most strongly within the family, where gendered norms are articulated and reinforced through concern, advice, and emotional appeal.

Parental expectations regarding marriage timing are rarely symmetrical for sons and daughters. Daughters' delayed marriage is more likely to be interpreted as a source of risk, uncertainty, or loss. Parents may express worry about future security, reproductive prospects, or social reputation, framing concern as care and responsibility. This anxiety often intensifies as daughters approach socially defined age thresholds, transforming marriage timing into an urgent family matter rather than an individual choice.

By contrast, parental anxiety toward sons' delayed marriage tends to be more conditional. While parents may express concern, it is frequently tempered by considerations of employment stability, housing acquisition, or financial readiness. Sons' postponement is more easily justified as temporary or strategic, especially when framed as part of career development. As a result, anxiety surrounding male delayed marriage is often deferred or softened, allowing greater temporal flexibility.

Gendered marriage anxiety within families is also shaped by intergenerational expectations about responsibility and care. Parents may perceive daughters' marriage as closely tied to future caregiving roles, both within their marital family and toward aging parents. This perception heightens emotional investment in daughters' marital timing and intensifies pressure to conform. Sons, while also expected to fulfill familial duties, are less frequently subjected to the same immediacy of concern regarding marriage timing.

Through these dynamics, parental expectations transform delayed marriage into a gendered source of emotional strain. Anxiety is communicated through repeated reminders, comparisons with peers, and expressions of fear or disappointment, creating a moral environment in which delay becomes harder to justify for women than for men. This family-based pressure contributes significantly to the unequal tolerance of delayed marriage, reinforcing gendered norms at the most intimate level of social life.

4.2 Differential Emotional and Moral Pressure Placed on Daughters and Sons

Emotional and moral pressure surrounding marriage timing is distributed unevenly between daughters and sons within Chinese families. While both may encounter concern or advice, the tone, intensity, and moral framing of this pressure differ in ways that reflect deeply gendered expectations. These differences shape how delayed marriage is experienced and interpreted, turning family interaction into a key arena where unequal tolerance is enacted.

Daughters are more likely to face emotionally charged forms of pressure that combine care with moral appeal. Expressions of worry are often framed in relational terms, emphasizing emotional fulfillment, future security, and family harmony. Parents may invoke themes of loneliness, regret, or missed opportunity, implicitly positioning daughters' delayed marriage as a source of potential emotional failure. Such appeals blur the line between concern and moral obligation, making resistance difficult without appearing ungrateful or irresponsible.

In addition to emotional appeals, daughters often encounter moralized expectations regarding duty and sacrifice. Delayed marriage may be interpreted as prioritizing individual preference over family interest, prompting subtle accusations of selfishness or

impracticality. These judgments are rarely stated directly but are conveyed through disappointment, comparison with peers, or repeated reminders of "what is best." Moral pressure thus operates through affective channels that link daughters' personal choices to broader family values.

Sons, by contrast, are more frequently subject to pragmatic rather than moralized pressure. Family concern tends to focus on material readiness, such as employment stability or housing conditions, rather than emotional fulfillment or moral timing. When sons delay marriage, their decision is more likely to be discussed in instrumental terms, allowing postponement to appear reasonable and reversible. Emotional pressure is present but less personalized, and moral judgment is more easily deferred.

These differential pressures reinforce unequal tolerance by shaping how delay is interpreted within the family. For daughters, delayed marriage becomes a moral issue tied to emotional responsibility and family well-being. For sons, it remains a conditional choice contingent on external circumstances. Through everyday interaction, families thus reproduce gendered standards of patience and urgency, ensuring that daughters bear a heavier emotional and moral burden when deviating from expected marriage timelines.

4.3 The Role of Filial Responsibility in Shaping Marriage Timing

Filial responsibility plays a significant role in shaping expectations around marriage timing in China, particularly in the context of family-centered moral frameworks. Marriage is often understood not only as a personal milestone but also as a fulfillment of intergenerational obligation. Within this framework, decisions about when to marry are evaluated in relation to duties toward parents, and these duties are interpreted in gendered ways.

For daughters, filial responsibility is frequently intertwined with emotional responsiveness and relational care. Parents may frame marriage as a way for daughters to achieve stability, avoid future hardship, and reassure the family about their long-term well-being. Delayed marriage can therefore be perceived as prolonging parental worry, implicitly positioning daughters as failing to meet expectations of emotional

consideration and obedience. In this sense, filial responsibility becomes temporal, requiring daughters to align their life choices with parental expectations within a socially acceptable timeframe.

Sons are also expected to fulfill filial duties, but these duties are more often linked to material provision and future security rather than immediate marital timing. Parents may tolerate sons' delayed marriage if it is associated with efforts to improve economic conditions or secure housing. Filial responsibility for sons is thus framed as contingent and goal-oriented, allowing marriage to be postponed as part of a longer process of preparation. This distinction grants sons greater flexibility in managing the timing of marriage without being perceived as neglecting filial obligations.

Filial responsibility also shapes how resistance to marriage pressure is interpreted. When daughters postpone marriage, their actions are more likely to be read as neglecting parental feelings or disregarding family priorities. Sons, by contrast, can more easily justify delay as an investment in future filial capacity. These differing interpretations reinforce unequal tolerance by aligning filial morality with gendered expectations of care and readiness.

Through these dynamics, filial responsibility functions as a moral framework that regulates marriage timing unevenly. It embeds gendered expectations into intergenerational relations, making delayed marriage more socially consequential for daughters than for sons. As a result, marriage timing becomes a site where filial duty and gender norms intersect, contributing to the persistence of unequal tolerance within family life.

4.4 Negotiation, Resistance, and Symbolic Compliance within Families

Faced with sustained family pressure regarding marriage timing, individuals who delay marriage do not respond in uniform or passive ways. Instead, family interactions often involve ongoing negotiation, selective resistance, and forms of symbolic compliance that allow individuals to manage expectations while preserving relational stability. These strategies, however, are shaped by gendered power dynamics that influence who can resist, how resistance is expressed, and at what emotional cost.

Negotiation is a common strategy through

which delayed marriage is temporarily legitimized within families. Individuals may frame postponement as contingent upon external conditions such as career progression, financial preparation, or personal readiness. For sons, such justifications are more readily accepted, as they align with prevailing expectations about economic responsibility and gradual preparation for marriage. Negotiation thus provides a socially acceptable language through which sons can defer marriage without openly challenging parental authority.

For daughters, negotiation often takes a more constrained form. While similar justifications may be offered, they are more likely to be questioned or met with skepticism. As a result, daughters may rely on emotional reassurance, emphasizing ongoing efforts to meet expectations in the future rather than asserting present autonomy. Resistance is therefore softened and indirect, designed to reduce conflict rather than redefine norms.

Symbolic compliance plays a particularly important role in managing family pressure. This may include agreeing to blind dates, participating in matchmaking activities, or expressing openness to marriage without concrete commitment. Such gestures signal respect for parental concern while allowing individuals to maintain control over actual timing decisions. Symbolic compliance is often more heavily expected of daughters, who face stronger moral scrutiny and are encouraged to demonstrate willingness even when delaying.

These patterns of negotiation and compliance reveal how family pressure is not simply imposed but continuously managed through interaction. However, the unequal conditions under which negotiation takes place mean that resistance carries different risks for sons and daughters. For daughters, resisting marriage pressure can threaten emotional harmony and moral standing within the family, while sons are more likely to negotiate delay without similar consequences. Through these everyday strategies, unequal tolerance of delayed marriage is both navigated and reproduced within family life.

5. Public Discourse and Everyday Social Judgment

5.1 Gendered Labels and Social Categorization

Gendered labels such as "leftover women" and "leftover men" occupy a central place in public discourse surrounding delayed marriage in China and function as powerful tools of social categorization. Although both terms ostensibly refer to unmarried individuals beyond socially expected ages, they do not operate symmetrically. Instead, they encode distinct moral judgments and expectations, shaping how delayed marriage is perceived and how individuals are positioned within the social order.

The label "leftover women" is strongly associated with deficiency, urgency, and decline. It implies that unmarried status reflects personal failure, misjudgment, or a loss of social and relational value. Embedded in this label is the assumption that women are primarily responsible for managing their marriage timing and that delay represents a deviation requiring correction. As a result, the term carries an implicit warning, framing delayed marriage as a risky condition that worsens over time. This framing intensifies pressure by suggesting that women's options narrow with age and that inaction has irreversible consequences.

By contrast, "leftover men" is used with noticeably less moral weight and emotional urgency. While it may signal deviation from an expected life course, it is more frequently contextualized through external or structural explanations, such as housing affordability, employment instability, or demographic imbalance. The label often positions men as temporarily delayed rather than fundamentally flawed, leaving open the possibility of future correction without stigma. In this way, male delay is normalized as circumstantial and reversible, rather than as evidence of personal inadequacy.

These asymmetrical meanings demonstrate that labeling is not a neutral descriptive practice but a mechanism of social categorization that embeds gendered expectations into everyday language. Labels function by simplifying complex life trajectories into recognizable social types, making unequal tolerance appear natural and self-evident. Once individuals are categorized, social responses follow predictably: concern, advice, pressure, or indifference are distributed according to the moral weight attached to the label.

Importantly, the power of these labels lies in their routine and casual use. They circulate widely in media, online discussion, and

everyday conversation, often without explicit intent to stigmatize. Their repetition normalizes gendered judgments, allowing unequal evaluation to persist without direct confrontation. Over time, labels such as "leftover women" and "leftover men" shape not only how others view delayed marriage, but also how individuals understand their own position and possibilities. In this sense, gendered labeling operates as a foundational process through which unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage is produced and sustained.

5.2 Media Narratives and Popular Discourse

Media narratives play a powerful role in amplifying and legitimizing gendered interpretations of delayed marriage in China. Through news reports, lifestyle programs, talk shows, and online platforms, media discourse does not merely reflect social attitudes but actively participates in shaping how marriage timing is understood and evaluated. By selecting certain themes, tones, and explanatory frames, media narratives transform delayed marriage into a public issue that invites judgment and intervention.

Women's delayed marriage is frequently framed as a social concern closely linked to fertility decline, emotional well-being, and family stability. Media stories often emphasize biological limits, emotional risk, and future insecurity, presenting unmarried women beyond certain ages as facing urgent and irreversible consequences. This framing encourages an interventionist stance, in which advice, warnings, and corrective guidance are positioned as necessary and benevolent. Women are portrayed as subjects in need of timely decision-making, and delay is constructed as a problem that must be addressed before it becomes unmanageable.

In contrast, men's delayed marriage is more commonly explained through structural and contextual factors. Media discussions tend to highlight economic pressure, employment competition, housing affordability, or broader demographic conditions. Men's postponement is thus framed as a rational response to external constraints rather than as a personal failure. This narrative situates delayed marriage within a landscape of social challenge, allowing men's delay to appear understandable, strategic, and even responsible.

The coexistence of these contrasting narratives

normalizes unequal tolerance by assigning different meanings to similar behaviors. Women's delay is moralized and individualized, while men's delay is contextualized and externalized. Through repetition across media platforms, these interpretive frameworks become familiar and persuasive, shaping public perception without requiring explicit endorsement of inequality. Gendered evaluation is presented as reasonable, empathetic, or practical, rather than as a form of bias.

Popular discourse, especially in online spaces, further reinforces these distinctions through commentary, humor, and informal advice. Viral articles, discussion threads, and short-form media often recycle simplified narratives that amplify gendered expectations. Over time, the accumulation of such representations contributes to a shared cultural understanding in which unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage appears natural. Media narratives thus function as a key site where gendered judgments are stabilized, legitimized, and circulated within everyday social consciousness.

5.3 Informal Social Sanctions in Daily Interaction

Everyday social interactions serve as a crucial mechanism through which broader public discourse on delayed marriage is translated into lived experience. Informal social sanctions—such as repeated questioning, unsolicited advice, jokes, comparisons, and expressions of concern—operate as subtle but effective forms of regulation. These practices rarely appear as direct criticism or explicit condemnation. Instead, they function through tone, repetition, and implication, communicating clear expectations about appropriate marriage timing while maintaining an appearance of normal social interaction.

Questions such as "Why are you still single?" or "Have you considered settling down?" are often framed as casual conversation or genuine concern. However, their persistent repetition signals that delayed marriage is being monitored and evaluated. Advice offered without solicitation positions the unmarried individual as someone in need of guidance, implicitly marking their status as problematic. Humor and teasing further soften the expression of judgment, allowing normative pressure to be applied without overt conflict. In this way, informal sanctions regulate behavior while remaining socially acceptable.

Women are more likely to encounter personalized, frequent, and emotionally charged forms of such scrutiny. In family gatherings, social events, and workplace interactions, questions about women's marital plans often carry an undertone of urgency. Expressions of concern may reference age, future security, or emotional fulfillment, reinforcing the idea that delay is risky and time-sensitive. Because these interventions are framed as care, resisting them can be socially costly, as it may appear ungrateful or dismissive of others' goodwill.

Men, while not entirely exempt from informal sanctions, generally experience them with less intensity and moral weight. Inquiries directed at unmarried men are more likely to be occasional, conditional, or framed around practical considerations such as career or financial readiness. Moral judgment is less pronounced, and repeated questioning is more easily deflected or postponed. This difference allows men greater latitude in navigating social interaction without being persistently reminded of deviation from expected timelines.

Through their routine and cumulative nature, informal social sanctions embed gendered judgment into everyday life. They reinforce unequal tolerance by making delayed marriage more visible, consequential, and emotionally demanding for women than for men. Over time, these interactions shape not only external evaluation but also self-perception, encouraging individuals to internalize social expectations and adjust behavior accordingly. In this sense, informal sanctions function as a continuous, low-intensity form of social control that sustains gendered norms around marriage timing.

5.4 Social Comparison and Peer Pressure

Social comparison within workplaces and friendship networks further intensifies pressure surrounding marriage timing by establishing shared reference points for evaluating life progress. Observing peers marry, have children, or receive social recognition for these milestones creates implicit benchmarks that define what is considered timely and successful. These benchmarks are not neutral; they are embedded in gendered expectations that shape how individuals assess their own trajectories in relation to others.

For women, peer comparison often links marriage directly to personal accomplishment, emotional fulfillment, and social maturity. When

friends or colleagues marry, these events are frequently framed as natural progress or personal success, reinforcing the idea that marriage represents an essential step forward. Remaining unmarried in such contexts can produce feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, or falling behind, particularly when comparisons are made visible through social gatherings, workplace conversations, or social media updates. Collective narratives that prioritize marital status intensify these feelings by presenting marriage as a key indicator of a well-ordered life.

Men, by contrast, are more often evaluated through professional achievement, income level, and career advancement. Within peer networks, occupational progress can serve as a counterbalance to marital delay, allowing men to maintain social recognition despite remaining unmarried. Career success provides an alternative metric through which progress and maturity are assessed, reducing the symbolic cost of delayed marriage. As a result, men can more easily reposition delay as temporary or strategic without losing social standing.

Peer pressure operates not only through explicit comparison but also through subtle cues and shared assumptions. Casual remarks, celebratory events, and normative conversation topics reinforce the idea that certain milestones should occur in a particular sequence. Because these interactions are embedded in everyday social life, they shape self-evaluation continuously rather than episodically. Over time, repeated comparison aligns individual expectations with gendered norms, making unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage appear both reasonable and inevitable.

Through these processes, social comparison and peer pressure reproduce gendered standards of life evaluation. They link success and maturity to different criteria for men and women, ensuring that marital timing carries unequal symbolic weight. In doing so, peer contexts reinforce broader patterns of unequal tolerance, embedding gendered judgment into routine assessments of personal progress.

5.5 Cumulative Effects on Life Planning

The cumulative impact of labels, media narratives, informal social sanctions, and peer comparison plays a decisive role in shaping how individuals plan their lives over time. These influences do not operate independently or

intermittently; instead, they interact and reinforce one another across different social settings. Repeated exposure to gendered judgment gradually narrows the range of life choices that appear socially acceptable, transforming external evaluation into an internalized framework for decision-making.

For women, persistent scrutiny surrounding marriage timing can heighten anxiety and accelerate perceived deadlines. Continuous reminders of age, comparison with peers, and moralized concern about future security shape how women evaluate personal priorities. Decisions about relationships, career paths, and geographic mobility may be made under the pressure of an imagined time constraint, where delay is framed as increasingly costly. Even when women express satisfaction with their current circumstances, the anticipation of social judgment can influence planning in subtle but enduring ways.

Men, while not entirely free from social evaluation, are more likely to retain a sense of temporal flexibility in life planning. Because delayed marriage is less heavily moralized, men can integrate postponement into broader narratives of career development or personal growth without facing equivalent pressure. Their future plans can accommodate uncertainty and gradual progression, allowing marriage to remain one option among many rather than an urgent requirement.

Over time, these cumulative effects internalize unequal tolerance, shaping aspirations and expectations before choices are consciously articulated. Individuals come to anticipate social reactions and adjust their plans accordingly, often without direct confrontation or explicit instruction. Public discourse and everyday judgment thus function not only as external pressures but as formative forces that guide life trajectories in gendered ways. Through this process, unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage becomes embedded in how men and women imagine their futures, reinforcing gendered patterns of life planning across social contexts.

6. Discussion

The preceding analysis demonstrates that unequal tolerance toward delayed marriage in China is not a series of isolated attitudes or individual prejudices, but a patterned social mechanism through which gender norms are regulated and reproduced. Across life scripts, family expectations, public discourse, and everyday interaction, marriage timing emerges as a key site where acceptable forms of femininity and masculinity are defined. Tolerance operates unevenly, granting men greater temporal flexibility while imposing stricter and earlier constraints on women.

Unequal tolerance functions as a regulatory mechanism precisely because it appears informal and non-coercive. There are no explicit rules dictating when men or women must marry, yet social responses consistently reward conformity and penalize deviation in gendered ways. Advice, concern, and moral evaluation work together to guide behavior without the need for formal sanction. This form of regulation is particularly effective because it is embedded in ordinary social relations, making pressure feel natural rather than imposed.

Through marriage timing, broader gender expectations are translated into everyday practice. Norms surrounding reproduction, care, emotional responsibility, and adulthood are condensed into a seemingly simple question of "when" one should marry. For women, delayed marriage becomes a focal point through which anxieties about fertility, family continuity, and social stability are expressed. For men, marriage timing remains more loosely connected to these concerns, allowing delay to be reframed as preparation rather than deviation. In this way, unequal tolerance reinforces asymmetrical gender roles while maintaining the appearance of individual choice.

The analysis also reveals how unequal tolerance is sustained through interaction across multiple social levels. Family pressure, media narratives, and peer comparison do not operate independently; they reinforce one another, creating a dense normative environment. Individuals encounter consistent messages across contexts, making resistance costly and compliance appear rational. Over time, this consistency naturalizes gendered expectations, limiting the range of imaginable alternatives even in the absence of direct coercion.

Understanding unequal tolerance as a mechanism of gender regulation highlights the importance of focusing on social evaluation rather than behavior alone. Delayed marriage itself does not inherently produce inequality; it is the uneven social response to delay that

shapes divergent life experiences for men and women. By regulating marriage timing through tolerance and judgment, society reproduces gendered life courses that align with existing power relations.

This perspective also helps explain why changes in economic conditions or personal aspirations do not automatically lead to more symmetrical tolerance. Even as marriage is postponed for both genders, the normative framework governing acceptable timing remains uneven. Unequal tolerance thus serves as a stabilizing force, ensuring continuity in gender norms despite broader social transformation.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the unequal tolerance of delayed marriage for men and women in China by shifting attention from marriage behavior itself to the social evaluations surrounding marriage timing. Rather than treating delayed marriage as a neutral demographic outcome, the analysis has shown that it functions as a socially constructed category shaped by gendered norms, moral judgments, and everyday interactions. The meaning of delayed marriage is produced through social response, not simply through age or marital status.

By tracing gendered life scripts, family expectations, public discourse, and informal social sanctions, the paper has demonstrated how tolerance toward delayed marriage is unevenly distributed. Men are generally afforded greater temporal flexibility, with delay framed as preparation or choice, while women face stricter expectations and heightened scrutiny. These differences are reinforced through cultural narratives, parental anxiety, media representation, and peer comparison, forming a dense normative environment that shapes individual life planning.

The findings suggest that marriage timing operates as a subtle but effective mechanism of gender regulation. Unequal tolerance guides behavior without relying on formal rules or explicit coercion, embedding gender norms within ordinary social relations. Through repeated evaluation and judgment, individuals internalize expectations about appropriate life timing, often adjusting their choices in response to perceived social limits rather than personal preference alone.

Understanding delayed marriage in this way contributes to broader discussions of gender inequality and social change in contemporary China. It highlights how inequality can persist even as social practices evolve, maintained through informal norms rather than institutional mandates. By focusing on tolerance and evaluation, this study offers a framework for analyzing how gendered life courses are regulated through everyday social processes, providing insight into the ongoing negotiation between individual autonomy and normative constraint.

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