

Rethinking Pedagogy in Kerala's Traditional Performing Arts: Bridging Classical Knowledge and Contemporary Learners

Dr. Rachitha Ravi

Assistant Professor & Head of the Department
Department of Mohiniyattam, Kerala Kalamandalam Deemed to be University for Art and
Culture, Thrissur, Kerala, India
kalarachitharavi@gmail.com, +9495567990

Kerala's traditional performing arts, including Mohiniyattam, Kathakali, and Koodiyattam, are embodied systems of knowledge that preserve centuries of artistic practice, cultural memory, and sophisticated modes of communication. Their pedagogy has traditionally relied on the guru-shishya tradition, where knowledge is transmitted through demonstration, repetition, and embodied practice. While this approach has been instrumental in preserving technical excellence and artistic authenticity, it presents significant challenges in addressing the educational needs and expectations of contemporary learners. The research problem addressed in this study is the growing gap between traditional pedagogical practices and the learning experiences of present-day students. Although these art forms possess immense communicative and cultural potential, existing pedagogical approaches often emphasise technical mastery and embodied memory without adequately fostering critical thinking, reflective inquiry, contextual understanding, and meaningful dialogue. The objectives of the study were to examine the pedagogical practices followed in Kerala's traditional performing arts institutions, to explore students' perceptions and expectations regarding learning, and to propose a learner-centred pedagogical framework that integrates embodied practice with critical thinking, educational psychology, and ethical teaching practices. The study adopted a qualitative research design used a sample survey among students of Kerala Kalamandalam, India's premier institution for traditional performing arts education. The survey examined students' learning experiences, expectations, and perceptions of existing pedagogical approaches. The collected data were analysed to identify pedagogical strengths, limitations, and opportunities for innovation. The study proposed a pedagogical framework that complements experiential and embodied learning with critical inquiry, reflective learning, and contextual understanding. The findings indicated that preserving the artistic integrity of Kerala's traditional performing arts did not require preserving pedagogical practices unchanged; rather, sustainable arts education depended on integrating traditional modes of transmission with contemporary educational principles. Such a framework could be contribute to healthier learning environments, stronger student engagement, and the long-term sustainability of Kerala's classical performing arts.

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