

## **Learning traditional dances through cooperative method and life skills improvement of children aged 9-12 years old**

Zetou, E., Gouridou, E., Filippou, F., Pitsi, A., Blani, N.  
*Democritus University of Thrace, School of Physical Education and Sport Sciences*  
Correspondence author: Dr Eleni Zetou,  
Professor in School of Physical Education and Sport Sciences  
Democritus University of Thrace  
Komotini 69100

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research was to evaluate the impact of the cooperative method on the learning two Greek traditional dances (Tsamikos and Enteka) and life skills improvement, in children. The participants were 68 children aged 9-12 years ( $MO = 11,8 \pm 2,8$ ), of which 40 were girls and 28 boys, with the basic condition that the trainees do not know any kind of dance. The participants were randomly divided into two groups, the experimental ( $n = 36$ ) that followed the cooperative teaching method and the control group ( $n = 32$ ) that followed the teacher-oriented (order style teaching). The intervention lasted 8 weeks (2 lessons/ week, 45'). There were three measurements: initial, final and retention to determine the learning. For the evaluation of the dance performance, the scale/roubrika of Pitsi, Diggelidis and Filippou, (28), was used. The instrument contains eight criteria. In addition, the questionnaire of Hogan, (13), which validated for the Greek population by Papacharisis (23), for the assessment of knowledge, perception and transfer of the use of life skills, was used. Analysis of variance with repeated measures showed that there was group and measurement interaction, but also main effect for the overall performance of the Tsamikos and Enteka dances. In terms of life skills there was group and measurement interaction, main effect of the group, and main effect of the measurement, which means that participants of both groups improved life skills, but the participants of experimental group were better. As they defined, participants understand the concept of thinking positively, setting goals and solving problems. In conclusion, it is recommended that teachers could use the cooperative method for teaching and learning traditional dances and at the same time trainees may develop life skills that are very important for their later adult lives.

**Keywords:** Cooperative method, traditional dances, performance, life skills.

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### **Introduction**

The Greek traditional dance is a kind of physical activity that contributes to the physical and mental health of the dancers (Zisi, Giannis, Bouyoussi, Pollatou, & Michalopoulou, 2014). Serbezis (2012) proved that the most suitable age to start the children to be taught dances as complete ensembles is that of 9-11 years. At the age of 10, complex brain commands are assimilated, audiovisual perception develops and the child can make precise judgments for objects that move in space, and its development matures global perception of individual movements. Moreover, at the age of 9-10, children have a well-defined perception of the laterality and gain kinesthetic integration in 11-12 years. In a survey of Koshland, Wilson, and Wittaker (2004) the dance was used with great success in tackling school violence and aggression, improving emotions, internal stimulation and improving the image for themselves. Traditional dance, as part of the curriculum physical education, aims to develop the student in the motor, emotional and psychomotor fields. Therefore, the cultivation of social and emotional skills is necessary in order to ensure the full development of students (5).

In the international bibliography there are many definitions for cooperative learning. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1998), "Cooperative Learning is the organization of classroom in small groups with the aim of creative collaboration of pupils to maximize their own learning, as well as the learning of other members of the group". Through cooperative learning there is no competitiveness, since members of a group work together to achieve the goal and for the good of the group.

Another definition from Dyson (2002) states that cooperative learning is a form of learning based on the group's effort in order to achieve a specific goal. Cooperative learning also means that pupils and teachers are actively involved in the educational process. The collaborative method develops communication between students and through it they transfer information, ideas, thoughts, feelings to another person or group in order to influence ideas, deeds or feelings. Therefore, the collaborative method is ideal for life skills development through traditional dances.

The term "life skills" refers to a wide range of social, cognitive and emotional skills (Danish, 2000). According to the same research life skills are divided into the intrapersonal, referred to in the individual himself

(self-confidence, attention, stress control, concentration, etc.) and the interpersonal ones mentioned in his relationships with others (cooperation, careful listening, contribution to society, etc.). Life skills describe a range of skills acquired through learning and/or through everyone's experience and used to help individuals and groups manage effective problems and issues of everyday life. Creativity, critical thinking, ability to solve problems and decision-making, communication and cooperation, citizenship, relationship of everyday life with career, personal and social responsibility are essential characteristics for success in the 21st century, useful both for healthy societies and for strong, dynamic, and resonance in the labor market, people.

In their research, Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1992) and Papacharisis and Goudas, (2003) argued that the knowledge with which an individual will be supplied, the way in which previous experiences will be prepared in similar situations, would be prepared, determine how he will deal with new situations in his daily life. The advantage of teaching life skills is that they can be transferred and used in other areas of life (Danish, 2000). Pierce, Gould, and Camiré (2017) argue that the life skills transfer process is defined as "an ongoing process by which a person develops further or learns, internalizes a personal advantage in sport and then experiences personal change in one or more areas of his life beyond the context in which he has initially learned.

A large number of scientists in education support the development of life skills through the school's daily program with educational programs and interventions (Goleman, 1998; Lv & Takami, 2015; Magotsiou & Goudas, 2007). Solomon and co., (2000) implemented a life skills program in the school environment aimed at developing social, moral and spiritual values. Also, the fact that life skills can be taught and have an effect is demonstrated by the research by Craig-Unkefer and Kaiser (2002). In another research on the physical education course, Kolovelonis, Goudas, Dimitriou, and Gerodimos (2006) implemented a life skills program aimed at increasing self-determination. Also, Goudas and Magotsiou (2009) implemented a collaboration skills program in the physical education course and examined its impact on the social skills and attitudes of students/three on teamwork.

Research has shown that teaching life skills can have a positive effect on their performance in sports activities (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005; Papacharisis, Theofanidis, & Danish, 2006; Diggelidis, Theodorakis, Zetou, & Demas, 2007). The design and implementation, therefore, of a dance program combining the teaching of life skills is expected to have positive results and help achieve the course's goals. In this context, programs combining the teaching of life skills and learning sports skills were developed and used, with emphasis on personal and social development while promoting the sports skills of young athletes (Goudas, Hatzidimitriou, & Kikidi, 2006; Goudas & Giannoudis, 2008; Goudas & Giannoudis, 2010). According to Danish and Nellen (1997), an appropriate age to teach life skills is considered early adolescence.

From the above it is found that several studies have been done in a school environment using traditional dances and collaborative method for learning dances while developing social skills. In conclusion, by speaking about the importance of research on the one hand, the review of the literature found that there are not enough research in Greece related to the learning of traditional dances using the cooperative method, for life skills development on the other hand, there are no surveys to consider the learning of traditional dances with the cooperative method in children aged 9-12 years, also there are no similar surveys in a club of traditional dances environment aimed at learning dances, but also developing life skills through the collaborative method. It was therefore considered appropriate to explore the above parameters.

Consequently, the aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of cooperative method on learning two Greek traditional dances (Tsamikos and Enteka) and life skills improvement, in children aged 10-12 years old. The hypothesis that is set, is that the cooperative method will help participants to learn the dances and also improve life skills.

## **Materials and Method**

### **Participants**

The participants were 68 children aged 10-12 years ( $MO = 11.8 \pm .28$ ), of which 55 (61.80%) were girls and 34 (38.20%) were boys. They were randomly divided in two groups, with a basic constraint, to have nothing to do with any kind of dance. One group was the experimental ( $n = 36$ ) that followed the cooperative teaching method and the other the control group ( $n = 32$ ) which followed the typical teaching. Parents were requested to give written permission to allow their children to participate in the program after having been briefed on the aim of the research and receiving the assurance that the results of the study will be strictly used only for educational and scientific purposes.

### **Procedure**

The intervention program lasted for eight (8) weeks. In total, the experimental group attended 16 lessons (2 per week, lasting 45' for 8 weeks), concerning the learning of traditional dances through the cooperative method of teaching. The method used was that of group assignment or team working. The participants were

divided into heterogeneous four-member groups of mixed performance and gender. During the program, the dance teacher played a supervising and encouraging role, eager to resolve any issue, should it occur, and giving assignments such as the collection of information on a dance such as Tsamikos or Enteka (where it was danced, social characteristics of the era, the songs of the dance, etc.). After the demonstration of some new steps by a skillful local dancer, a member of each group is assigned to help the rest of the members improve their performance. By the fourth lesson, each pair of groups was united into one and in the last two lessons the whole experimental group was united in one team, according to the teaching method suggested by Kanakis (2001). In a 10-minute unit in each session children of the experimental group were taught and practiced in setting goals and the way to make a plan to reach them, in positive thinking and the way to change a negative thought into positive a one. Moreover, they were informed for the way that they could use those skills in other domains of their everyday life.

The control group was taught the same dances at the same period along with the experimental group. However, the method that was applied was teacher-oriented which adopted the order style (Serbezis, 2012), since it underlined only the kinetic form of dances. In a 10-minute unit in each session children of the control group were informed for the subjects of doping, fair play, Olympic Games and healthy diet.

The participants of both groups were evaluated for the dance performance in the beginning, before the intervention, after 8 weeks of intervention and one week after the final measurement, without having any practice and in the same time they complemented the questionnaire. The result was the general improvement of the majority of the participants.

### **Instruments**

For the evaluation of the dance performance in Greek traditional dances the scale of scheduled criteria (Roubrika) of Pitsi, Diggelidis and Filippou, (2013) was used, in which the evaluation of the respective criterion was made separately and cumulatively in the overall performance. The eight criteria of Roubrika were used in the present investigation because of the age of the children.

Also, the questionnaire of Hogan, (2000), -adapted for the Greek population by Papacharisis, (2004)- for the assessment of knowledge and perceptions of the use of life skills (setting goals, positive thinking and strategic problem-solving) was used. The trainees completed the questionnaire in order to assess knowledge and perceptions about the functioning of life skills, before the intervention, after 8 weeks of intervention and one week after the final measurement, without any practice. The questionnaire consists of 10 questions which evaluate 3 factors, to which those involved were asked to be evaluated on a 7-stage scale (1=I totally disagree up to 7=I fully agree):

1. Understanding the concept of life skills, the factor that refers to whether those who perceive the content of teaching life skills (e.g. "I fully understand what a goal definition means and its difference from the dream").
2. Perceptions of the functioning of life skills, the factor that refers to whether those who perceive the value of life skills (e.g. 'life skills produce positive results').
3. Transfer of life skills to other areas, the factor that refers to whether trainees perceive the use of life skills in other fields and courses within school and outside school (e.g. "life skills can be applied in our lives in general"). The score performance of life skills was the sum of the individual factors (understanding, perception and transfer).

### **Statistics**

For the analysis of data, descriptive statistics, t-test analysis for initial measurements, analysis of variance with repeated measures (ANOVA Repeated Measures), and Post hoc Bonferroni analysis to find differences between groups were used. The SPSS 21 statistical package was used and the level of significance was set to  $p < .05$ . Prior to the repeated measures, distribution normality with Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S test) and homogeneity of variance (Box's M test) were carried out. There was a non-significant value ( $< .05$ ), which indicated that the data did not differ significantly from the multivariate normality of variables, thus parametric tests could be applied. The internal consistency of the questionnaire has been tested by the Cronbach alpha.

## **Results**

### **Initial measurements**

From the t-test analysis for independent samples, no significant differences were found in the initial measurements between the two groups, which states that the participants of the groups prior to intervention started from the same level in terms of performance in dances Tsamikos and Enteka. Table 1 shows the score of participants in the initial measurements.

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations of the participants' performance in the initial measurement

Groups	Experimental		Control		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Tsamikos	2.08	.39	2.22	.46	-1.38	.171
Enteka	1.74	.38	1.82	.35	-.880	.382

\* $p < 0.05$

**The effect of the intervention on the participants' performance in the dance of Tsamikos**

The analysis of variance with repeated measurements showed that there was group and measurement interaction ( $F_{(2,132)} = 100.42, \eta^2 = .603, p < .01$ ), main effect for the group ( $F_{(1,66)} = 29.85, \eta^2 = .311, p < .01$ ), and main effect of Measurement ( $F_{(2,132)} = 242.9, \eta^2 = .786, p < .01$ ), for the overall performance of the Tsamikos dance (sum of the individual criteria, but even the criteria). This is interpreted as the groups had significant differences between the three measurements in the overall performance of the dance. Table 2 shows the overall performance of participants of the three measurements at the Tsamikos dance.

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations of participants of the groups in the overall performance at the Tsamikos dance, in the three measurements

Groups	<i>N</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement		2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement		3 <sup>rd</sup> measurement	
		<i>(pre)</i>		<i>(post)</i>		<i>(retention)</i>	
Experimental	36	2.08	.39	3.81	.80	3.92	.82
Control	32	2.22	.46	2.77	.65	2.50	.59
Total	68	2.15	.42	3.32	.89	3.25	1.01

\* $p < 0.05$

The Bonferroni analysis of multiple comparisons between the individual levels of the "measurement" factor showed that there were significant differences between the groups from the first to the second measurement ( $p < 0.05$ ) and from the first to the third measurement ( $p < 0.05$ ). Both groups showed improvement, with the experimental being better than the control group in the final, but also in the retention measurement.

**The effect of the intervention on the participants' performance in the dance of Enteka**

The analysis of variance with repeated measurements showed that there was group and measurement interaction ( $F_{(2,132)} = 51.191, \eta^2 = .437, p < .01$ ), main effect for the group ( $F_{(1,66)} = 19.08, \eta^2 = .224, p < .01$ ), and main effect of Measurement ( $F_{(2,132)} = 160.99, \eta^2 = .709, p < .01$ ), for the overall performance of the Enteka dance (sum of the individual criteria, but even the criteria). This is interpreted as the groups had significant differences between the three measurements in the overall performance at the dance Enteka. Table 3 shows the overall performance of participants of the three measurements at the Enteka dance.

**Table 3.** Means and standard deviations of participants of the groups in the overall performance of the Enteka dance, in the three measurements.

Groups	<i>N</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement		2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement		3 <sup>rd</sup> measurement	
		<i>(pre)</i>		<i>(post)</i>		<i>(retention)</i>	
Experimental	36	1.74	.38	3.25	1.03	3.34	1
Control	32	1.82	.34	2.22	.512	2.28	.49
Total	68	1.78	.36	2.76	.97	2.84	.96

\* $p < 0.05$

The Bonferroni analysis of multiple comparisons between the individual levels of the "measurement" factor showed that there were significant differences between the groups from the first to the second measurement ( $p < 0.05$ ) and from the first to the third measurement ( $p < 0.05$ ). Both groups showed improvement, with the experimental being better than the control group in the final, but also in the retention measurement.

**The effect of intervention on life skill improvement**

**Internal consistency**

Checking the reliability of the knowledge, perception and transfer in the use of life skills questionnaire, using the coefficient a Cronbach, gave high internal consistency values. For *Knowledge*  $\alpha=.934$ , *Perception*  $\alpha=.659$ , *Transfer*  $\alpha=.850$ .

**Initial measurements**

From the One-way analysis of variance, no significant differences were found in the initial measurements between the two groups, which states that the participants of the groups prior to intervention started from the same level in terms of knowledge, perception, transfer and the total score of life skills. Table 4 shows the score of the initial measurements for three factors and for total score of life skills.

**Table 4.** The participants' performance in the initial measurement of three factors (knowledge, perception and transfer) and total score of life skills

Groups	Experimental		Control		p
	M	SD	M	SD	
Knowledge	5.10	.42	5.01	.56	.431
Perception	5.34	.44	5.19	.37	.147
Transfer	5.07	.46	5.07	.43	.975
Total score of Life skills	5.20	.27	5.09	.25	.216

\* $p < 0.05$

**Knowledge**

In terms of knowledge there was group and measurement interaction ( $F_{(1,66)} = 190.57, \eta^2 = .743, p < .01$ ), also there was main effect of the group ( $F_{(1,66)} = 76.58, \eta^2 = .537, p < .01$ ), and main effect of the measurement ( $F_{(1,66)} = 168.86, \eta^2 = .719, p < .01$ ), which means that participants of life skills group were improved in understanding the life skills, but the participants of control group have significantly reduced in the second measurement. The performance of participants of the groups in the life skills understanding, is shown in table 5.

**Table 5.** The evaluation of participants of the groups in the three measurements in life skills understanding

Groups	N	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement (pre)	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement (post)
Experimental	36	5.10	.43
Control	32	5.01	.56
Total	68	5.06	.49

\* $p < 0.05$

**Perception**

In terms of perception there was group and measurement interaction ( $F_{(1,66)} = 71.52, \eta^2 = .520, p < .01$ ), also there was main effect of the group ( $F_{(1,66)} = 35.065, \eta^2 = .994, p < .01$ ), and main effect of the measurement ( $F_{(1,66)} = 40.38, \eta^2 = .380, p < .01$ ), which means that participants of life skills group were improved in understanding the life skills, but the participants of control group have significantly reduced in the second measurement. The performance of participants of the groups in the life skills perception, is shown in table 6.

**Table 6.** The evaluation of participants of the groups in the three measurements in perception of life skills

Groups	N	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement (pre)	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement (post)
Experimental	36	5.34	.45
Control	32	5.19	.37
Total	68	5.27	.42

\* $p < 0.05$

**Transfer**

In terms of perception there was group and measurement interaction ( $F_{(1,66)} = 113.09, \eta^2 = .631, p < .01$ ), also there was main effect of the group ( $F_{(1,66)} = 80.439, \eta^2 = .993, p < .01$ ), and main effect of the measurement ( $F_{(1,66)} = 3.209, \eta^2 = .046, p < .01$ ), which means that participants of life skills group were improved in understanding the life skills, but the participants of control group have significantly reduced in the second measurement. The performance of participants of the groups in the life skills transfer, is shown in table 7.

**Table 7.** The evaluation of participants of the groups in the three measurements in life skills transfer

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> measurement (pre)</i>		<i>2<sup>nd</sup> measurement (post)</i>	
Experimental	36	5.07	.46	6.19	.81
Control	32	5.08	.43	4.29	.46
Total	68	5.07	.44	5.29	1.16

\* $p < 0.05$

**Life skills (total score)**

In terms of total score of life skills there was group and measurement interaction ( $F_{(1,66)} = 201.13, \eta^2 = .753, p < .01$ ), also there was main effect of the group ( $F_{(1,66)} = 133.45, \eta^2 = .669, p < .01$ ), and main effect of the measurement ( $F_{(1,66)} = 66.73, \eta^2 = .503, p < .01$ ), which means that participants of both groups were improved in the life skills. The performance of participants of the groups in the life skills, is shown in table 8.

**Table 8.** The evaluation of participants of the groups in the three measurements in life skills

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> measurement (pre)</i>		<i>2<sup>nd</sup> measurement (post)</i>	
Experimental	36	5.17	.27	6.36	.57
Control	32	5.09	.25	4.77	.23
Total	68	5.14	.26	5.61	.91

\* $p < 0.05$

**Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the impact of the cooperative method on the learning of traditional dances (Tsamikos and Enteka) and life skill improvement, in children aged of 9-12. The results showed that the participants of both groups learned the dances, but the participants of experimental group were better in the performance of two dances. The results of this investigation coincide with the results of the Dyson (2002). The differentiation of the results of the present investigation in relation to the results of other surveys, may be due to different ages, since the sample of this research consisted of pupils aged 10-12 years, while others were 14, 15, 16 and 17 years old (Dyson, 2002).

Many researchers (Karkou, Fullarton, & Scarth, 2010; Kazela, 2009; Kakana, 2008; Magotsiou & Goudas, 2007), propose the use of the cooperative method of learning in various activities such as dance, because trainees learn in a group, friendly/ pleasant environment, open channels of communication with their co-workers, recognize the diversity, and socialized. They also take a role of leader, become independent and learn to help others. They realize that they can achieve the goals they set by working as a team, which is very important for their real life later. All of the above can prepare children to become emotionally healthy individuals.

As far as life skills are concerned, participants of both groups have improved (in anticipation, understanding and transfer the life skills) but the participants of experimental group (cooperative method) were better. So coaching life skills should be efficiently and systematically provided to children through intervention programs that integrate dance and life skills training, with children's active participation. This conclusion agrees with the results of previous studies that indicate the effectiveness of life skills programs in children and youth (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005), and of other relative studies in the sport and physical education contexts that confirm the positive effect in learning and performance enhancement of sports skills in young students (Goudas & Giannoudis, 2010). In this line are also the results of previous studies that have been extracted from research on specific sports such as volleyball, basketball, tennis, soccer, swimming, strength and flexibility (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005; Kolovelonis, Goudas, Dimitriou, & Gerodimos, 2006; Goudas, Hatzidimitriou, & Kikidi, 2006).

The present findings agree with the results of previous researches on the qualitative evaluation of life skills programs (Goudas & Giannoudis, 2010). Furthermore, it adds to the results of extended researches in the following distinct points: First, according to Papacharisis et al., (2005), the intervention program was effective and applicable to students of age from 10 to 12 years old, while teaching life skills and sports skills in an integrated framework promotes students' abilities in learning and practicing skills that help them coping the

complexity of their daily life. Secondly, it confirms the argument that skills are learned best when students have the opportunity to observe and actively practice them, being in line with the promising results of previous studies that recognize the effectiveness of the intervention life skills programs in children and youth (Danish, 2000; Goudas, Hatzidimitriou, & Kikidi, 2006). Third, the result of the study that life skills learnt in the school setting through intervention programs may be transferred to other domains outside school, agrees with the results of Goudas and Giannoudis (2010). However, in a deeper investigation it seems that Goudas and Giannoudis (2010) came to this conclusion by using specific strategies and methods in teaching life skills, which were confirmed as effective. The importance of life skills applicability and transferability to domains of life other than those that have been taught has been occasionally highlighted by various researchers (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1992).

In conclusion, dance teachers should first understand the importance of cooperative method for improving dance performance and then they need to give students understanding the importance of this method. The cooperative method of practice helped participants to learn the Tsamikos and Enteka dances, as both groups showed improvement, with the experimental being better than the control group in the final, but also in the retention measurement. Still, both groups improved life skills, but participants of experimental group were better than them of control group. In order to determine at what age, the differences are beginning to appear with the use of the cooperative method, more research should be applied to elementary and high school children.

Also, in future investigations could be explored the impact of the cooperative method on the satisfaction and enjoyment of the participating children. Finally, it is proposed in subsequent studies to explore the ways in which teachers develop psychological, social or emotional skills to children.

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