

**Managing Inclusive Dance Exercise Programme: An Exercise Physiology and Sports Administrative Approach to Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Higher Education**

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**Abstract**

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are essential pillars for creating fair and supportive learning environments within higher education institutions. However, the integration of these values into sports and recreational activities remains limited. Self-determination theory was adopted for this study. This position paper argues that dance exercise programme when designed through the combined perspectives of exercise physiology and sports administration offer a sustainable and inclusive approach to fostering participation, wellness, and social cohesion among students and staff. It highlights the physiological benefits of dance exercise, explores administrative strategies for inclusive programme management, and presents evidence-based recommendations for embedding EDI principles into campus recreation. The paper advocates for institutional leadership to prioritize inclusive dance exercise programme as a means for health promotion, cultural exchange, and equitable engagement across all demographics.

**Keywords:** Aerobic Dance, Exercise Physiology, Sports Administration, Equity, Diversity  
**Word Count:** 128

**Introduction**

In contemporary higher education, the pursuit of **equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)** has become an institutional priority for ensuring that all members of the university community regardless of gender, culture, age, ability, or social background have equal opportunities to learn, participate, and thrive. Higher education institutions are increasingly recognising the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as fundamental components of academic and social development. While EDI initiatives often focus on teaching, research, and policy, less attention is given to how physical activity and recreation can reinforce these principles. Dance exercise, as a rhythmic, non-competitive form of exercise, presents an innovative platform for advancing inclusion, community building, and wellness on campus. From an **exercise physiologist's perspective**, dance exercise improves cardiovascular endurance, muscular coordination, and mental health, and from a **sports administrative standpoint**, it provides an opportunity to plan and manage programmes that reach across gender, cultural, and ability boundaries. This position

paper argues that inclusive dance exercise programmes, guided by these dual lenses, can significantly enhance EDI outcomes in higher education.

Sports administration entails planning, organisation, and management of physical activity programme that promote holistic development in school settings (Valiyev et al., 2025). Administrators have a critical role in making such programme accessible, egalitarian, and culturally appropriate. However, traditional sports programmes may struggle to recruit diverse athletes owing to competitiveness, skill hurdles, or social isolation. As a result, there is a rising interest in non-competitive, inclusive physical sports like aerobic dancing that prioritise pleasure, social engagement, and universal accessibility (Wintle, 2025).

Aerobic dancing provides a unique opportunity for sports administrators to integrate physical activity activities with EDI goals by fostering participation environments in which everyone feels included (Arora & Wolbring, 2022). Aerobic dancing is a rhythmic, music-based physical exercise that combines health, creativity, and social interaction (Rąglewska & Demarin, 2021). Aerobic dancing, unlike traditional sports, crosses gender, cultural, and age barriers, making it accessible to a diverse variety of people. In the academic context, it may be used for both wellness and social inclusion. Dance exercise's expressive and participatory character encourages cooperation, communication, and cultural awareness via shared movement and a variety of music styles. When properly handled, such initiatives may improve psychological well-being, decrease stress, and develop a sense of belonging among staff and students from diverse backgrounds. Empirical evidence suggests that participation in inclusive dance exercise programmes can serve as a measurable indicator of institutional EDI progress (Gagnon, 2023). Increased engagement across gender, cultural, and ability groups reflects equitable access and social cohesion, providing tangible metrics for assessing diversity and inclusion outcomes in higher education settings.

The integration of dance exercise into higher education is consistent with the inclusive management concept of sports administration, which emphasises involvement, empowerment, and accessibility (Singh & Parmar, 2023). Effective management entails establishing programme that take into account schedule flexibility, cultural sensitivity, gender parity, and physical accessibility. Sports administrators must also guarantee that aerobic dancing programme have inclusive policies, skilled facilitators, and suitable facilities (Demirpençe & Kemalöglü, 2021). When these aspects are deliberately coordinated, aerobic dancing has the potential to become a long-term and inclusive physical activity that represents the institution's overall commitment to diversity and equity.

Despite the potential advantages, obstacles to involvement in campus wellness programme frequently still exist. Engagement may be hampered by elements including ignorance, cultural preconceptions about dancing, issues with body image, and unequal access to resources. Furthermore, social inequality may be unintentionally strengthened by institutional disregard for inclusive program administration. Sports administrators must so consciously use inclusive management techniques that recognise and eliminate these obstacles (MacIntosh & Burton, 2024). This strategy will help create a more diverse, inclusive, and cohesive campus culture in addition to increasing dance exercise participation.

In higher education, overseeing inclusive dance exercise programme is a creative sports administration approach to furthering EDI goals. Such initiatives have the potential to foster empathy, understanding, and cooperation among university community members by bridging socioeconomic and cultural divides in addition to enhancing physical health. Through the equitable

management and inclusive design of dance exercise programme, sports administrators may improve the well-being of individuals and foster inclusion within their institutions.

### **Assessing the Level of Participation in Dance exercise Programme among Diverse Groups within Higher Education Institutions**

Dance exercise in university settings varies significantly depending on demographic, social, and institutional factors. According to Ayangeakaa (2025), dance exercise classes are popular among young female students and health-conscious staff, but male and older participants are still under-represented. Owusu (2022) found that facility accessibility, class timing, and social acceptance of dance as a valid fitness activity for all genders all influence participation rates, highlighting an imbalance in participation that reflects wider disparities in access to recreational and wellness programme in higher education.

University cultural diversity has an impact on dance exercise participation as well. Students from conservative cultural backgrounds may see dance-based exercise as improper or gender-restrictive, which might result in lower engagement, according to (Christensen., et al.,2021). On the other hand, more diverse individuals are typically drawn to inclusive programme that use multicultural music and dance forms. According to Brown and Donnelly (2023), dance's expressive and social qualities can only promote inclusivity if program administration formally recognises and values cultural diversity. This shows that if dance exercise is created with consideration for diversity and cultural identity, it may be an effective engagement strategy.

Furthermore, a major factor in affecting participation levels is the institutional support system. Universities that provide funding and policy support for wellness initiatives report increased engagement from both staff and students (Ugwueze., et al., 2021). When colleges incorporate aerobic dancing into their wellness week programme, staff retreats, or physical education classes, the number of participants tends to increase. Therefore, in addition to statistics, program design inclusiveness, accessibility, and administration commitment to diversity goals should all be taken into account when evaluating participation levels.

### **Exercise Physiology Perspective: Promoting Wellness and Participation**

The scientific basis for comprehending how physical activities, such as dancing exercises, affect general health and performance is provided by exercise physiology. Dance exercises improve physical strength, flexibility, coordination, and cardiorespiratory fitness (Andrieieva.,et al., 2022). Dancing's rhythmic and repeated elements encourage oxygen consumption and metabolic efficiency, which can lessen weariness and improve mental clarity, all of which are essential for staff productivity and student academic achievement.

Additionally, by promoting endorphin release, lowering stress levels, and encouraging self-expression via movement, dance exercise promotes mental and emotional well-being (Zygmunt, et al., 2021). Because of these physiological advantages, it is a feasible type of inclusive exercise that can be done by people of all ages, fitness levels, and cultural backgrounds. Exercise physiologists can adapt programme to individuals with physical limitations or chronic diseases by altering the choreography and intensity of movements, guaranteeing fair access and participation.

Despite growing recognition of the significance of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in higher education, many universities continue to struggle to convert these concepts into actionable programmes that encourage holistic involvement and well-being. Sports and leisure activities, which should serve as inclusive platforms for social integration, are frequently underutilised or poorly managed, restricting their ability to create belonging across various campus communities (Bebee, 2021). Competitive sports programmes may discourage participation from people who feel excluded due to their gender, culture, body type, or physical aptitude. As a result, there is a demand for non-competitive, socially engaging, and inclusive physical exercise programmes, such as aerobic dancing, that can attract and accommodate a diverse group of people. However, limited administrative focus, inadequate program management, and insufficient inclusion policies hinder the development and sustainability of such initiatives in universities (Valiyev., et al., 2025).

Exercise physiologists and sports administrators in many universities have a difficult time creating and overseeing dance exercise programmes that successfully apply EDI concepts. The absence of gender-sensitive or culturally responsive program design, inadequate financing, a shortage of educated staff, and a lack of institutional support for inclusive wellness efforts are some of these issues. For this reason, there are still many unexplored chances to employ dance exercise as a means for physical wellbeing, diversity promotion, and social cohesion (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020).

### **Sports Administrative Perspective: Planning and Managing Inclusive Programmes**

Sports administration plays a crucial role in converting physiological information into programmes that are durable and effective. Policies and management frameworks must be created by administrators with fairness in participation, accessibility, and inclusion as top priorities (Hums & MacLean, 2023). Evaluating the requirements of various groups, assigning resources, setting up accessible class schedules, and educating teachers on inclusive facilitation methods are all components of effective administrative planning.

In order to make sure that programmes are in line with institutional EDI goals, inclusive sports administration also requires departmental relationship development, including working with student unions, health services, and diversity offices. Additionally, the establishment of feedback systems fosters community ownership by enabling people to exchange ideas and experiences. Administrators strategically keep an eye on participation trends to make that historically under-represented groups in sports like older individuals, those with disabilities, and gender minorities are appropriately supported and represented.

### **Role of Sports Administration in Planning and Managing Inclusive Dance exercise Activities**

Sports administration serves as the backbone of inclusive program management in higher education. The administrative structure determines the goals, rules, and procedures that either support or impede inclusion in leisure activities, claim by (Hums & MacLean, 2023). Proactively fostering circumstances where aerobic dancing may flourish as a varied and participative activity is a responsibility of effective sports managers. According to (Zygmunt, et al., 2021), administrative engagement in planning is essential to guaranteeing equitable participation chances for all groups. This includes establishing inclusive recruiting procedures, obtaining resources, and assigning teachers who are culturally competent.

According to Olugboyege (2023) empirical research, inclusive management techniques, such as needs assessments and participant feedback systems, greatly increase group fitness activity satisfaction and participation. Program administrators tend to see higher participation rates when they include diversity concerns into their design, such as providing beginner-friendly alternatives, flexible scheduling, and adapted motions for people with impairments. As participants view the setting as encouraging and safe for expression. According to Owadara (2025) also noted that program viability is closely correlated with leadership commitment to inclusiveness. This illustrates how sports administration may strategically turn aerobic dancing into an inclusive institutional culture.

In addition, sports administration's responsibilities go beyond lobbying and coordination. Institutional norms about diversity, equity, and wellness are shaped in part by administrators who support inclusive programming. According to Ossai & Nwabuwe (2025), participation in dance exercise programme becomes a part of a larger cultural change rather than a solitary leisure activity when sports departments link them with university EDI policy. In order to ensure that diversity is ingrained in the culture of dance exercise programming throughout the institution, sports administrators must serve as both managers and advocates.

### **Barriers and Facilitators Affecting Equitable Access to Dance exercise Programme among Staff and Students**

Many factors that restrict equal access to dance exercise exercise programmes in higher education have been identified by empirical research. According to Ndupu.,et al. (2023), staff and student poor engagement is mostly caused by time restrictions, academic burden, and a lack of knowledge. Additionally, male employees and students are sometimes deterred from participating in dance-based exercise, which is commonly regarded as a "female activity," due to societal stigma and gender stereotypes. Ferreira Silva et al. (2022) highlighted that excessive program expenses, inadequate facility availability, and a lack of administrative support all play a role in unequal participation, particularly among lower-income students and non-teaching personnel.

On the other hand, inclusive program design, culturally sensitive education, and administrative support are frequently seen as access facilitators. Kaur & Rawat (2025) found that participation is more evenly distributed across demographics when aerobic dancing classes include a variety of musical genres and non-competitive settings. According to Arora & Wolbring (2022), staff and students are more likely to attend classes that are available at convenient times, are free or inexpensive, and are promoted through wellness initiatives that prioritise diversity above fitness alone. Therefore, perceptual and structural variables affect dance exercise participation and access.

Furthermore, perceived accessibility and involvement are mediated by social connectivity. Peer support, a sense of community, and institutional acknowledgement of wellness initiatives can boost motivation and dismantle gender or cultural obstacles (Kia., et al., 2023). Therefore, ensuring fair access necessitates a two-pronged approach resolving practical issues and cultivating a positive social atmosphere. When creating inclusive aerobic dancing programme that embody genuine equality and diversity ideals, sports administrators must take these interconnected dynamics into account.

### **Participation in Dance exercise and Perceptions of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging in the University Environment**

Participation in dance exercise can significantly shape individuals' perceptions of inclusion and belonging. Famayo (2024) claimed that joint and self-expression-focused shared physical activities improve participants' feelings of social connection and cultural appreciation. Aerobic dancing serves as a social equaliser in academic settings, lowering the barriers of hierarchy between faculty and students. Group dancing sessions may serve as a microcosm of diversity in action, as demonstrated by Justin (2021) finds that participants frequently express increased empathy, openness, and cross-cultural understanding.

Additional empirical study relates dance exercise involvement to results related to inclusion and psychological well-being. Dance-based group fitness programme enhance participants' sense of belonging and lessen social isolation, particularly for foreign and minority students (Sango & Pickard, 2024). Participants may express their uniqueness while participating in the group performance, which represents the harmony between variety and togetherness, thanks to the welcoming environment created by group choreography and music. These kinds of settings also assist participants in internalising the institutional principles of cooperation, equity, and respect.

These results highlight the potential of aerobic dancing as a purposeful inclusion strategy from an administrative perspective. It not only enhances health but also provides a forum for social interaction among people of different identities when included into university wellness or cultural programme. Schools that acknowledge this psychological aspect might use aerobic dancing to improve campus unity and promote an inclusive culture. As a result, aerobic dancing is more than just physical exercise; it's a lived feeling of equity and belonging.

### **Administrative Strategies for Integrating Inclusive Dance exercise Programme into University Wellness and Diversity Initiatives**

Sports administrators must take strategic, evidence-based measures to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of dance exercise programme. Wolbring & Nguyen (2023) suggest that inclusive policy frameworks that support institutional diversity goals and offer equal access to facilities should be put in place, and that instructors should receive training on inclusive pedagogy, gender sensitivity, and cultural competence. Furthermore, based on Wolbring & Nguyen (2023) submission, they suggested that strategic partnerships between student unions, diversity offices, and university wellness departments can increase participation and foster ownership among all stakeholder groups.

Making decisions based on data is another crucial tactic. Administrators can quantify the inclusiveness impact of dance exercise programme and identify gaps by regularly monitoring and evaluating participation statistics by demographic groups (Swaine et al., 2022). Accessibility and visibility can also be improved by incorporating technology, such as digital promotion, online sign-ups, and feedback forms. Additionally, providing staff or students with mobility, time, or geographical restrictions with hybrid (in-person and virtual) dancing sessions guarantees their involvement. These procedures show how diversity goals may be operationalised through program design in inclusive sports administration.

Finally, sustainable inclusion depends on cultivating a supportive institutional culture. According to Judge & LivergoodII (2024), including aerobic dancing into health and diversity initiatives

requires inclusive communication and leadership commitment. Participation and belonging may be strengthened through interdepartmental cooperation, inclusive marketing, and recognition initiatives. Sports administrators may turn university wellness programme into venues for empowerment, intercultural understanding, and a sense of shared institutional identity by proactively overseeing dance exercise programme via an EDI lens.

### **Self-determination Theory**

Self-determination theory as propounded by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, in their 1985 book titled *Self-Determination and Intrinsic motivation in Human Behavior*, which states that “people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfillment” (Deci & Ryan 1985). It is an important concept that refers to each person’s ability to make choices and manage their own life. This ability plays an important role in psychological health and well-being. Self-determination allows people to feel that they have control over their choices and lives. This theory was reviewed by David Susman on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 and states that, people are motivated to grow and change by three innate and universal psychological needs {Autonomy, Competence and Connection or relatedness}. {People are able to become self-determined when their needs for competence are fulfilled.

This theory explains the motivation behind human behaviors and what informs their choices actions ranging from work to recreation. While some people exercise regularly for the sheer pleasure of it, others appear to exercise in order to get intrinsic or extrinsic pleasures such as weight loss, improved appearance, or acknowledgment from important others } (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Individuals who exercise for pleasure rather than for intrinsic or external benefits are more likely to stick to a prescribed exercise regimen according to previous study (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This could have positive effect on reduction of weight and regulation of the heart, because an individual is carrying out that particular exercise out of the pleasure derived and in this case, consistency will be observed by the individual’s. The objective of health professionals is to encourage people to maintain an active lifestyle even if they aren't currently fulfilling the current exercise requirement, examining motivated cognitions has lately been at the core of a lot of research on how to encourage long-term behavior change. The self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation that has been widely applied to the study of exercise behavior (Dishman & Buckworth, 1996).

Despite the fact that there are several techniques to behavior modification, research has shown that without adequate behavioral intervention, nearly half of those who begin a PA Programme will drop out within the first six months (Dishman & Buckworth, 1996). The SDT, on the other hand, focuses on the mechanisms through which a person gains the desire to begin and maintain new health-related behaviors over time. Individuals are energetic, interested, curious, self-motivated, and eager to achieve, according to the thesis.

It also acknowledges that people may feel alienated, inactive, or dissatisfied, and it explains these differences in terms of motivational styles, which come from the interaction between people's fundamental active nature and the social surroundings that either promote or block that nature (Dishman & Buckworth, 2008). According to the SDT, the degree to which a behavior is autonomous (self-determined), which involves behaving with a full sense of volition and choice, or controlling, which involves behaving with the experience of pressure and demand toward specific outcomes that comes from forces perceived to be external to the self is determined by the

degree to which it is autonomous (self-determined) (Dishman & Buckworth, 1996). Individuals have three primary psychological needs, according to the theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Being viewed as the source or origin of one's own conduct is referred to as autonomy. Competence relates to feeling competent in one's continual interactions with the social environment and enjoying possibilities for fulfillment, whereas Relatedness refers to feeling linked to others and a sense of belonging to individual's and the community (Dishman & Buckworth, 2008).

When these three essential psychological prerequisites are satisfied, an individuals' intrinsic activity is encouraged, optimum motivation is supported, and positive psychological, developmental, and behavioral outcomes are obtained. On the other hand, social situations that block the fulfillment of these needs result in less optimal motivation and have negative effects for a variety of well-being outcomes. To conclude, the SDT is a dialectic theory that views the environment as a source of motivation and need fulfilment.

### **Conclusion**

This study offers inclusive dance exercise programme as a strategic instrument to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education through exercise physiologist and sports administration. The physiological dimension ensures health and adaptability, while the administrative dimension ensures accessibility, equity, and sustainability. Research demonstrates that effectively designed dance exercise programme increase participation, foster a sense of belonging, and fortify institutional cohesion. However, policy integration, resource commitment, and deliberate administrative planning are necessary to realise this promise.

### **Position Statement**

In order to convert university wellness programme into inclusive, participatory platforms that represent institutional diversity and promote a sense of belonging for all individuals, this paper takes the stance that exercise physiologists and sports administrators must take the lead. Aerobic dancing provides a distinctive and long-lasting method of accomplishing this aim because of its worldwide appeal and social dynamic. Higher education institutions may improve well-being, bridge cultural gaps, and demonstrate inclusion in action rather than just policy by including inclusive dance exercise programme into their EDI strategy.

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