ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 9| September 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

NEW RESEARCH METHODS IN TEACHING PERFORMING ARTS

Dr. Gyanesh Chandra Pandey
Associate Professor, Department of Vocal Music. BHU

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra24237
DOI No: 10.36713/epra24237

ABSTRACT

The performing arts – music, dance, drama, and interdisciplinary practices – are rapidly evolving in response to cultural, technological, and pedagogical transformations. Teaching methods must adapt to accommodate shifting learner needs, digital innovations, and globalized artistic practices. This paper explores emerging research methods in teaching performing arts, focusing on practice-as-research (PaR), ethnographic inquiry, digital ethnography, performance-based pedagogy, and arts-based research (ABR). It highlights the integration of new media technologies, interdisciplinary collaboration, and reflective practice in contemporary performing arts education. Drawing from recent case studies, it argues for a holistic and flexible research approach that bridges practice and theory, enabling students to become both critical thinkers and innovative practitioners.

KEY WORDS: *Music, Dance, Drama, Drawing, Performing Art*

INTRODUCTION

The performing arts have historically been transmitted through apprenticeship, oral traditions, and experiential learning. However, globalization, digitalization, and interdisciplinary innovation have disrupted these conventional models. Teachers of performing arts now face the challenge of balancing tradition with innovation, embodied practice with theoretical inquiry, and local cultural contexts with international frameworks. New research methods in teaching performing arts emphasize critical reflection, practice-as-research, and the use of digital tools. This research paper examines how these methods reshape performing arts pedagogy, creating new opportunities for artistic and intellectual growth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Any discussion of new research methods in teaching performing arts must be situated within broader theoretical frameworks. Performance Studies, as defined by Richard Schechner (2002), recognizes performance not only as art but as a central mode of human communication, ritual, and identity. This lens positions performing arts pedagogy as a practice of cultural inquiry as much as technical training.

Similarly, constructivist pedagogy emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through embodied and collaborative experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this framework, practice-as-research and arts-based methodologies emerge as natural pedagogical extensions, as they enable learners to engage with knowledge through creation and reflection.

Critical pedagogy, influenced by Paulo Freire (1970), further underpins research-based teaching in the performing arts. By viewing education as a dialogical and liberating process, critical pedagogy aligns with methods such as Forum Theatre, where students and communities collaborate to interrogate power, oppression, and social transformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on performing arts pedagogy reveals a significant shift from traditional master-apprentice models to innovative, research-driven approaches. Historically, performing arts education has relied on repetition, imitation, and repertoire-focused training (Sørensen, 2019). While effective in transmitting technical skills, such methods often neglect critical inquiry and reflective practices. Eugenio Barba (1995), in his work on theatre anthropology, also reminds us that transmission of performance knowledge is as much cultural as it is technical.

Eugenio Barba, founder of the Odin Teatret and a key figure in contemporary performance studies, introduced the concept of **Theatre Anthropology** as a cross-cultural study of performers' techniques. Theatre Anthropology does not examine theatre as a literary or sociological practice but focuses on the **pre-expressive level of performance**—the underlying bodily principles that make stage presence effective, regardless of cultural or stylistic differences. Barba observed that actors and dancers across diverse traditions— such as Kathakali, Noh, Balinese theatre, and Western avant-garde—share certain principles of energy, balance, and movement.

Central to his theory is the idea of the **"extra-daily body"**: a performer transforms ordinary movements into heightened, disciplined actions that capture attention. This transformation involves techniques such as altered balance, dynamic opposition,

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and precise use of tension. Barba stresses that these principles are not bound to specific cultures but reveal a **transcultural foundation** of performance.

Theatre Anthropology also emphasizes the performer's **presence and energy transmission** over narrative or text. Barba highlights the importance of apprenticeship, embodied knowledge, and intercultural dialogue in training. His approach critiques Eurocentric theatre models, advocating instead for a global, comparative understanding of performance traditions.

Ultimately, Theatre Anthropology provides tools to analyze what makes a performer compelling on stage, moving beyond interpretation to the physiology and craft of performance. Barba's work has influenced actor training worldwide, creating a bridge between traditional and contemporary practices while promoting respect for cultural diversity in performance.

Practice-as-Research (PaR) has gained recognition as a transformative methodology in the arts. Robin Nelson (2013) asserts that 'PaR acknowledges that practice embodies forms of knowing irreducible to words.' This model challenges the dominance of text-based scholarship by validating the knowledge embedded in performance.

Similarly, Arts-Based Research (ABR) has provided educators with strategies to integrate creative practice into research. According to Leavy (2018), 'ABR blurs the line between art and science, privileging creative expression as a pathway to understanding.' This positions performing arts pedagogy as both a site of creativity and rigorous inquiry.

Technology has further transformed the field. Bay-Cheng (2016) explores how digital platforms, motion capture, and virtual performance spaces have redefined pedagogy and research in performing arts. These innovations allow educators to expand access, foster hybrid practices, and enhance intercultural collaboration. Eisner (2008) has also argued that arts-based educational research offers ways of knowing that resist the reductive tendencies of purely scientific models.

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN TEACHING PERFORMING ARTS

Contemporary performing arts pedagogy is characterized by a range of methodological innovations that reflect the interdisciplinary and technologically mediated nature of artistic practice. Among these, practice-as-research (PaR), ethnographic inquiry, arts-based research (ABR), and digital ethnography are central.

PaR emphasizes performance as a process of inquiry. Students are encouraged to develop reflective journals, video documentation, and creative portfolios that articulate the knowledge gained through practice. For instance, an improvisational dance workshop may serve as a site for exploring trauma recovery, with the performance itself constituting research data (Nelson, 2013).

Ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches extend this framework by situating performance within social and cultural contexts. Performance ethnography transforms fieldwork into staged narratives (Madison, 2011), while autoethnography draws upon performers' lived experiences to deepen personal and collective insights. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe autoethnography as 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness.'

Arts-Based Research (ABR) allows students and teachers to co-create knowledge through performance, storytelling, and collaborative devising. As Leavy (2018) notes, ABR legitimizes artistic practice as critical inquiry, expanding the scope of what can be considered knowledge.

Digital and technological tools have also become integral to pedagogy. Motion capture, virtual reality, and AI-driven composition tools facilitate new forms of experimentation, while online platforms extend access to rehearsal processes and intercultural collaborations (Bay-Cheng, 2016).

TEACHING STRATEGIES BASED ON NEW RESEARCH METHODS

Building upon these methodologies, educators have developed innovative teaching strategies that align research with pedagogy. The flipped classroom model, for example, enables students to engage with theoretical materials online while reserving class time for embodied practice. Devised theatre and collaborative composition encourage collective authorship and improvisation, aligning with research principles of co-creation.

Digital performance pedagogy integrates online rehearsal platforms, virtual theatre labs, and AI-assisted analysis. Such approaches allow students to navigate hybrid performance spaces that reflect the realities of contemporary practice. Meanwhile, somatic practices such as Feldenkrais and the Alexander Technique, grounded in research on embodied cognition, support physical awareness and creativity. According to Hanna (1988), somatic education 'aims to enhance sensory awareness and voluntary control of movement, essential to artistic training.'

CASE STUDIES

Case studies illustrate the practical application of these methods. At Trinity Laban Conservatoire, motion capture technology has been used to study dancers' spatial awareness and rhythm. This digital feedback complements embodied practice, offering a multi-dimensional approach to learning.

In India, Forum Theatre, developed by Augusto Boal (1979), has been employed to address community conflicts. Students learn to conduct participatory action research through performance, using theatre as a medium for social critique and transformation. As Boal famously wrote, 'Theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it.'

In the United States, AI-assisted music composition software has been incorporated into pedagogy. This approach combines

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traditional harmonic analysis with machine learning, fostering new hybrid modes of research and creativity. At MIT, for instance, students experiment with machine learning systems to generate improvisational music in real-time, creating collaborative dialogues between human and machine.

Another compelling example comes from Japanese Noh theatre education, where digital archives and VR tools are used to preserve and transmit centuries-old embodied knowledge. Such innovations highlight the intersection of tradition and modernity in performing arts pedagogy.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite these innovations, challenges remain. Some scholars question the epistemological rigor of practice-based research, arguing that it lacks the objectivity of scientific methodologies. Universities often struggle to evaluate performances as research outputs, raising concerns about assessment criteria and academic legitimacy.

Additionally, technological tools are not equally accessible. High costs and limited infrastructure create disparities in who can engage with digital methodologies. Assessment practices must also evolve to capture the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of practice-based research.

Cultural diversity also presents challenges. While global digital platforms encourage cross-cultural exchange, there is the risk of homogenization and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems. Educators must remain attentive to power dynamics in intercultural pedagogy.

DISCUSSION

The adoption of new research methods reflects a paradigm shift in performing arts pedagogy. No longer confined to skill transmission, education now emphasizes reflective practice, creativity, and interdisciplinarity. Practice-as-Research and Arts-Based Research empower students to embody critical inquiry, while digital tools expand accessibility and innovation. At the same time, these approaches raise questions about rigor, accessibility, and institutional recognition.

As Schechner (2002) argues, performance is not a closed event but 'a twice-behaved behavior,' capable of repetition, reflection, and transformation. This conception reinforces the role of pedagogy as iterative, research-driven practice.

CONCLUSION

New research methods in teaching performing arts are reshaping the field by integrating practice, reflection, and technology into pedagogy. These methods validate performance as a form of knowledge production, encourage socially engaged research, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. While challenges persist, especially in assessment and access, these innovations provide educators with powerful tools for nurturing critical, creative, and socially conscious practitioners. The future of performing arts pedagogy lies in embracing hybridity, experimentation, and research-informed teaching.

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