

The Effects of Different Types of Feedback on Dancers in Competitions, a Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Dance teachers have used various coaching techniques on competitive dancers, specifically involving positive and negative feedback, which affects dancers' performances and how they score in competitions. Current knowledge focuses on how dancers receive positive and negative feedback psychologically, however, there is no current research evaluating the relationship between the amount of types of feedback given to dancers with the placement of the performance in a competition. This gap leads to the question: How does the amount of positive and negative feedback given to a dancer affect the placement of the dancer's performance in the results of a competition, as depicted on the reality television show, *'Dance Moms'*? This study implements a content analysis method of the television show *Dance Moms* to determine how the amounts of positive and negative feedback with respect to the total amount of feedback a coach gives affects the placement of that dance at competition. My results demonstrate that dances which receive greater amounts of positive or negative feedback place better at competition than dances which receive about equal amounts of feedback types. Additionally, dances that receive more feedback tend to score better than those which receive less. Therefore, I filled a knowledge gap surrounding the effects of feedback on dancers, establishing a starting point for coaches and future researchers to better understand how dancers are affected by feedback. Future research can be conducted on larger groups of dancers using my same criteria to classify feedback types in order to expand upon my results.

Introduction

Modern competitive dance was first introduced in the late 1970s, and as a result, many different coaching techniques and ideologies have been developed (Roberts, 2018). However, some of these techniques are not beneficial to the dancers and can have negative effects on them as a result. More specifically, different types of feedback have different effects on competitive dancers' performances and how they score in competitions. This relationship between feedback and performance can be analyzed on various reality television shows involving competitive dance. Ineffective coaching styles based on positive or negative feedback can have negative effects on dancers' performance and placement in dance competitions.

Literature Review

Dance teachers around the world use various coaching techniques, specifically involving positive and negative feedback. One of the most important roles of coaches in any sport is to give feedback to the athletes. Feedback, described by Hendrien Duijnhouwer and colleagues from the Department of Child Development and Education at University of Amsterdam, is "information provided by an external agent regarding some aspects of the learner's task performance, intended to modify the learner's cognition, motivation, and/or behavior for the purpose of improving performance" (Duijnhouwer et al., 2012). However, not all feedback is the same, as most feedback is either positive or negative.

Martin and colleagues, professor of communication studies at West Virginia University, found that negative feedback types did not benefit athletes and negatively affected their intrinsic motivation, causing the athletes to perform worse (Martin et al., 2009). This is generally assumed to be true, however, in a peer-reviewed study executed by Fong and associates, from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, it was determined that negative feedback may work to increase students' motivation and overall performance (Fong et al., 2019). This leaves the question of whether negative feedback is beneficial to athletics, which also applies to dancers. These studies have shown that athletes, including dancers, are affected by the type of feedback given by their coach in their performance.

In modern competitive dance, dance coaches use a variety of approaches to provide feedback for dancers. In a peer-reviewed study published by the Journal of Dance Medicine and Science, executed by Ana Garcia-Dantes from the Department of Personality, Evaluation, and Psychological Treatment at the University of Sevilla, anecdotal evidence suggests that many dance teachers try to motivate dance students by providing overly generous or unnecessarily harsh feedback that may not accurately represent the quality of the performance they witnessed. For example, some teachers provide lower-evaluated feedback than they perceive the students' performance actually to warrant. Other teachers may use the opposite strategy, giving higher marks than they consider to be appropriate (Garcia-Dantes et al., 2015). These different ways of giving feedback, either more positively or more negatively, may differently affect the dancer's performance and the result of their performance, however, no researcher has studied this. These strategies are assumed not to be evidence-based, and their impact on dance students' motivation and performance remains unknown.

Dance reality shows have recently become popular, and in shows which present the dancer-coach relationship in a competition environment, the true culture of competition dance is revealed. As described in a blog surrounding the reality television show *Dance Moms* by Matt Bruenig, who has a degree in philosophy at the University of Oklahoma, there is a consistent group of dancers coached by a main dance teacher who learn new dances each week and attend a dance competition on the weekend in *Dance Moms*. Every week, the show portrays the environment of these competition dancers as they practice each dance routine and receive feedback from their coach. Finally, the show presents these dancers competing at a competition and receiving awards for the quality of their performance (Bruenig, 2013). This presents an accurate competitive dance environment, including the coach-dancer relationship, which can be analyzed. In a peer-reviewed study, Olivia Wong, from Simon Fraser University, conducted a content analysis, utilizing this example of a competitive dance environment, of the reality show 'Dance Moms' and found the negative effects on girls as a result of the negative behaviors of their coaches, as they are sexualized in the dances their coach choreographs. This study presents how there are negative aspects of coaches in competitive dance and the negative effects on the dancers as a result, as they are sexualizing the dancers. The author connects this outside of the show to modern competitive dance culture, as this commonly occurs in dance competitions across the United States (Wong, 2021). Just as negative behaviors from dance coaches have negative effects on dancers, negative feedback from coaches similarly may harm the dancers. Although feedback from dance coaches is not included in this study, the show also presents the different types of feedback dancers receive in a competitive environment, which may be both positive and negative, as well as how the dancers do in competition.

One of the most important aspects of dance, if not the most, is a dancer's performance. As discussed by Krasnow and associates in their research paper published by the Medical Problems of Performing Artists Journal, dance performance can be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively (Krasnow et al., 2024). Standardly, performance is primarily judged on the execution of the movements and tricks, along with the emotional performance a dancer displays. In a peer-reviewed study conducted by Moran and colleagues, published by the Public Library of Science, the researchers found that the performance of athletes was improved by the specific coaching cues given to the athletes, as specific feedback allowed the athletes to improve overall (Moran et al., 2023). This research demonstrates that specific, positive feedback can help to improve the performance of athletes, however, it is not known if this can benefit dancers as well and help them to have better-scoring performances at competitions. Current knowledge surrounding different types of coaching and feedback in dance focuses on how dancers receive positive and negative feedback psychologically. There is no current research evaluating the relationship between the amount of positive

and/or negative feedback given from coaches with the placement of the dancers' performance in a dance competition. This gap relating to positive and negative feedback from dance coaches and the placement in a competition led me to the question: How does the amount of positive and negative feedback given to a dancer affect the placement of the dancer's performance in the results of a competition, as depicted on the reality television show, '*Dance Moms*'? Given research by Duijnhouwer and Moran surrounding the benefits of positive feedback and research by Martin and colleagues surrounding the negative psychological effects of negative feedback on athletes, I hypothesize that more positive feedback will cause dancers to have a higher placement of a performance in competition. Through an analysis of the reality television show *Dance Moms*, which highlights the effect of coaching on dancers in a competitive environment, I will research this relationship between feedback and performance in competitive dance and determine if this hypothesis is in fact true.

Method

Overview

This study implements a content analysis method of the television show *Dance Moms* to determine how the amounts of positive and negative feedback a coach gives to a dance affects the placement of that dance at competition. I watched and collected data from the first 6 seasons of the show, with a total of 141 episodes. There are 3 main steps in my content analysis method. The first step is to gain access to the television show *Dance Moms* and watch each episode. The second step is to analyze and record the category of dance, average age, dancers in the dance, competition title, amount of positive feedback (Table 1), amount of negative feedback (Table 2), amount of total feedback, and placement at competition for each dance present on the show in each episode. The final step is to calculate the percentages of positive and negative feedback for each dance with respect to the total amount of feedback and separate the data into classes based on the total number of feedback.

Dances

In this study, I collected data from the reality television show *Dance Moms* to analyze the relationship between the amounts of positive and negative feedback given to a dancer from their coach on a specific dance and how that dance performs and places at competition as a result. I chose to analyze the show *Dance Moms* because the show accurately reflects the environment of competitive dance, which allowed me to effectively analyze the dances and the effects of different types of feedback on them. A content analysis best answers my research question since it allows me to watch and analyze dance rehearsals and their respective competitions through a focus group of competitive dancers and a primary dance coach. Through this I can collect data on the types of feedback a dance receives and how that dance places at competition. Also, I chose the first 6 seasons of the show because it contained a consistent group of dancers with the same coach for every dance, allowing me to control factors which could interfere with the results if they do not remain constant.

Focusing on this specific group allowed me to collect stable, sufficient data, since the group would not greatly differ how they respond to feedback from week to week. Also, focusing on this group of dancers provided enough information that I can derive accurate results. Furthermore, the show also provides the same amount of time, approximately one week, for each dance to be prepared, further controlling my method. In order to effectively analyze the amounts of positive (Table 1) and negative feedback (Table 2), I created standard criteria to classify each individual feedback given by the coach as either positive or negative.

Table 1. Positive Feedback Criteria

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Example</u>
1C	Constructive Criticism	Feedback given which provides a corrective action or an instruction that improves that routine which can be fixed by the dancer	“You need to do...” or “Try not to do...”
2C	Praise	Giving praise or complementing the dancer in regards to the routine	“Good job” or “That looked good”

Table 2. Negative Feedback Criteria

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Example</u>
3C	Feedback with no Corrective Action	Feedback that does not provide a corrective action or instruction for the dancer to improve with the indication that something was wrong or not executed well	“What are you doing?” or “That looked bad”
4C	Character Attack	Feedback that attacks one’s character by giving feedback directed at the dancer with negative or hurtful terms and descriptions rather than giving feedback to improve the dance	“Are you stupid?” or “You are [negative adjective]”

Gathering Content

To collect data for my research, I watched each episode in order for seasons 1-6. While I watched each episode, I used a spreadsheet to collect specific data on each dance presented in the show. My content analysis yielded quantitative data for each of the following categories in each individual dance routine; the amount of positive feedback, the amount of negative feedback, and the total amount of feedback. To produce the number of positive and negative feedback, I used the criteria presented in Table 1 and Table 2, and counted how much positive feedback was given and how much negative feedback was given based on whichever criteria it fell under. Every piece of feedback I recorded fell under one of the four criteria; feedback under 1C or 2C was recorded as positive and feedback under 3C or 4C was recorded as negative. To produce the total number of feedback, I took the sum of the number of positive feedback and the number of negative feedback. I calculated this in order to determine if the total amount of feedback has any effect on the competition results, as results may differ for routines which received 5 total feedback compared to 20 total feedback, even if they have the same percentages of positive and negative feedback. Since the total number of feedback may affect the results, I found it important to analyze if how much feedback was given contributes to the results. Furthermore, I gathered additional data from my content analysis for each dance such as the category (solo, group, etc.), the dancers included, the title, the season and episode, and the competition competed at, in order to better organize my data and have access to the information if it were to be needed for my results.

Data Percentages and Classifications

After I collected data for every dance included in seasons 1-6 of *Dance Moms*, I organized my data so I would be able to better analyze my results. First, I found the percentages of positive and negative feedback for each dance so I could group together all the dances with similar percentages, or ratios, of positive to negative feedback. I calculated the percent of positive feedback and the percent of negative feedback with respect to the total amount of feedback for each individual dance. I found each of these numbers by taking the number of positive or negative feedback and dividing it by the total amount, and multiplying that number by 100%, in order to get the percentage of feedback that is positive/negative compared to the total feedback for each dance, as presented in **Equation 1**.

$$\frac{\# \text{ of Positive Feedback}}{\text{Total \# of Feedback}} \times 100\% = \% \text{ of Positive Feedback}$$

$$\frac{\# \text{ of Negative Feedback}}{\text{Total \# of Feedback}} \times 100\% = \% \text{ of Negative Feedback}$$

Equation 1. Equation for Percentages of Positive and Negative Feedback

I chose to do this to be able to compare the amount of positive or negative feedback more effectively and clearly, as I can group together the dances with approximately the same ratios of positive feedback to negative feedback and compare how each percentage placed at competition. Doing this makes the ratios more clear, since, for example, it is easier to see that a dance with 3 positive feedback and 2 negative feedback and a dance with 9 positive feedback and 6 negative feedback have the same ratios of positive/negative feedback by grouping them under the percentages of 60% positive and 40% negative. Doing this allows me to determine generally how the ratio of positive to negative feedback given to a dance affects the results at competition without using specific numbers, as the exact numbers of the ratio vary for each dance. However, by doing this I am not accounting for how the overall amount of feedback given affects the results. To account for this, I created 3 classes for the feedback to be grouped under based on the total amount of feedback the dance received, presented in Table 3. Within these classes, the feedback will be sorted by their percentages and evaluated. Furthermore, I can analyze if there are relationships in the placement at competition in each percentage between the 3 classes, allowing me to fully answer my research question. I divided each class by eights, as demonstrated in Table 3, as the greatest amount of feedback was 24. I divided the classes into groups of 8 because it allowed me to get specific results based on similar and smaller ranges of feedback. Also, the classes were not too small so I still have enough data for each class and I will still have accurate results. In each class, the feedback would be separated by percentages of positive feedback and their respective negative feedback, to allow me to analyze the result of each ratio of positive/negative feedback with respect to the total amount of feedback, as presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Classifications of Total Amount of Feedback

Class	Category A	Category B	Category C
Amount of total feedback	0-8	9-16	17-24

Table 4. Percentages of Positive Feedback Within Each Class

Category A (Positive Feedback)	Category B (Positive Feedback)	Category C (Positive Feedback)
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81-100%	81-100%	81-100%
61-80%	61-80%	61-80%
41-60%	41-60%	41-60%
21-40%	21-40%	21-40%
0-20%	0-20%	0-20%

In this figure, although it only displays the positive feedback percentages in each group, the negative feedback percentages are also accounted for even though they are not explicitly stated. It is implied that the inverse percentage of feedback is the percent of negative feedback, as each percentage always adds up to 100%. For example, if there is 80% positive feedback of a dance, it is implied that the other 20% of the total feedback is negative.

Results

Content Analysis Results

The following results present the data I collected from the top 20 dances with the most feedback of the 473 dances I analyzed. The data included in Table 5 includes the title of the dance, the amount of positive feedback, the amount of negative feedback, the total amount of feedback, and the placement of that dance. This can be seen for every dance I analyzed in Appendix A, however, Table 5 presents the 20 dances with the most feedback since more feedback allows for more specific and a better variety of results, generally representing all of the data collected from the 473 dances.

Table 5. Content Analysis Data from the Top 20 Dances

Number	Dance Title	Amount of Positive Feedback	Amount of Negative Feedback	Total Amount of Feedback	Placement at Competition
1	“Born to Dance”	18	8	26	1st
2	“I Want it Now”	16	7	23	5th
3	“Red”	6	17	23	1st
4	“Gold Digga”	14	8	22	1st
5	“The Huntress”	11	11	22	2nd
6	“Frozen Together”	13	7	20	2nd
7	“Bad Apples”	6	14	20	1st
8	“Country Cuties”	14	5	19	1st

9	"The Investment"	13	6	19	1st
10	"Don't Ask Just Tell"	10	7	17	7th
11	"Why Not Me"	8	9	17	1st
12	"Money is the Root of All Evil"	7	10	17	1st
13	"Pink Lemonade"	10	6	16	1st
14	"Amazing Grace"	8	8	16	2nd
15	"Snapshot"	7	8	15	DNP
16	"Follow You"	12	2	14	3rd
17	"Electricity"	8	6	14	DNP
18	"Sassy Dolls"	7	7	14	1st
19	"Runaways"	7	7	14	2nd
20	"Take It"	10	3	13	1st

Table 5 reports the data for each variable in my method for the twenty dances with the greatest amounts of total feedback. Additional dances that I analyzed can be seen in *Appendix 1*, however these twenty dances were specifically included in my results since they have the most amounts of feedback to analyze. The dances were numbered 1-20 based on the total amount of feedback received, 1 being the most total feedback and 20 being the least. Dance number 1 had the most positive feedback of 18. Next was Dance 2 with 16 positive feedback. Third was tied with Dance 4 and Dance 8, both with 14 positive feedback. These dances with the most positive feedback most commonly placed 1st, however Dance 2 was an exception to this placing 5th. Dance 3 had the most negative feedback with 17. Next was Dance 7 with 14 negative feedback. Third was Dance 5 with 11 negative feedback, followed by Dance 12 with 10 negative feedback. These dances with the most negative feedback received 1st place, with an exception from Dance 5 which placed 2nd in competition. Although there were outliers, dances which received either the most positive or the most negative amounts of feedback tended to place the best (1st) in competition. The dances which placed the worst in Table 5 were Dances 15 and 17, which both did not place (DNP). Dance 15 received 7 positive and 8 negative feedback, and Dance 17 received 8 positive and 6 negative feedback, demonstrating about equal ratios of positive to negative feedback. The next lowest placing dance was Dance 10, which placed 7th and received 10 positive and 7 negative feedback. The three lowest scoring dances (Dances 15, 17, and 10) all received about equal amounts of positive and negative feedback. This produces the idea that dances which receive greater amounts of positive or negative feedback place better at competition than dances which receive about equal amounts of positive and negative feedback.

Percentage Results

The following results present the average placement of each grouping of percentage positive feedback (Table 4) in relation to their classification (Table 3). As demonstrated in Table 6, my method yielded the average placement of the

dances in each category, proving which percentage of positive feedback with its coordinating percentage of negative feedback in regards to the amount of feedback given averagely placed the highest at competitions. The highest placement that can be earned is 1 (first place), indicating that a dance routine is placed well. Lower placements (indicated by higher numbers) indicate that a dance routine did worse and placed worse at competition. In **Table 6**, the higher the average number is, the lower that category of dances placed at competition and the worse the dance scored.

Table 6. Average Placement

Percentage of Positive Feedback	Category A Average Placement	Category B Average Placement	Category C Average Placement
81-100%	2.7	2.8	NA
61-80%	3.2	3.5	1.8
41-60%	4.6	3.4	4.2
21-40%	3.8	2.4	1.8
0-20%	3.8	NA	NA

Table 6 reports the percentages of positive feedback in relation to the classification of the feedback. The routines that most commonly placed highest were those with 21-40% and 61-80% of positive feedback under Class C, as those categories both had the same placement of 1.8. The next highest placement was the 21-40% under Class B, which averaged 2.4. The third highest placements were the 81-100% under Classes A and B, receiving placements of 2.7 and 2.8 correspondingly. Following this, the next three placements were the third to lowest, which were the 41-60% under Class B, and the 61-80% under Classes A and B, placing an average of 3.4, 3.2, and 3.5 correspondingly. Next were the 0-20% and 21-40% under Class A, and 41-60% under Class C, which averagely placed 3.8, 3.8, and 4.2. Finally, the most common lowest scoring routines were those with 41-60% of positive feedback under Class A, with a placement of 4.6. Additionally, some categories were marked NA, as there was not enough or no data to record an accurate average.

As demonstrated by my results, the highest placements tended to appear around the extremes of the percentages of positive feedback, meaning the highest and lowest percentages, although the placements were generally better at the highest percentage of positive feedback for all 3 classes. The lowest and worst placements appear to be in the center of the table, where the percentage of positive to negative feedback is about equal for all 3 classes. This means that dance routines averagely place better at competition when they receive a great amount of positive feedback with little negative feedback or when they receive a great amount of negative feedback with some positive feedback from their coach. Additionally, dance routines tend to place worse when they receive equal parts of positive and negative feedback. As a result, dances at dance competitions tend to averagely place better when the percentage of positive feedback with respect to negative feedback they receive is at an extreme rather than equal. Furthermore, Class C, which was the largest amount of feedback given, tended to have the highest and best placements of the three classes at its extremes. This proves that greater amounts of feedback contribute to a better placement, as well. Additionally, Class A, which was the least amount of feedback given, tended to have lower and worse placements in each percentage category compared to Class B and Class C, further demonstrating that greater amounts of feedback support better placements. Overall, my research data proves that a greater amount of feedback given by a coach with either a high percentage or a low percentage of positive in regards to negative feedback receives the best placement at competition.

This fills my gap, as my results determined that great amounts of either positive or negative feedback cause dancers to place higher in competition, which was not previously known.

Conclusion

The results of my content analysis prove that the amount of positive and negative feedback a dance receives has an effect on the placement of that dance in a competition. Dances with a large majority of positive feedback and dances with less positive feedback averaged the highest, however, those with a majority of positive feedback tended to average slightly higher. Furthermore, dances that received a great amount of feedback, compared to dances that received a small amount of feedback, tended to place higher, as well. Therefore, it can be inferred through this study that either a great amount of positive or a great amount of negative feedback is most beneficial for dancers to score higher at dance competitions, based on my criteria for each type of feedback in Table 1 and 2. Although these results may seem to oppose each other, since they are on opposite ends of the spectrum with one being mostly positive and one mostly negative, these feedback groups do have in common that they are both extremes. Future research could examine why the extreme ratios of feedback tend to perform better, allowing there to be a better understanding of how feedback is received by dancers and other athletes.

Given previous research from Martin and colleagues surrounding how negative feedback has negative effects on athletes, combined with research from Moran and colleagues on how athletes perform based on feedback from coaches, I hypothesized that more positive feedback would cause a higher placement of performance in competition. More positive feedback has had more positive effects on athletes because it provides clearer instructions for dancers to follow. This proved to be true, as dances averaged higher when they received more positive feedback, however, my research also proved that this is true for more negative feedback as well. This could be due to the fact that my previous learning related to positive and negative feedback was more focused on the psychological effects it had on the dancers rather than if the feedback was effective in improving the dancer and overall dance. This presents an implication, given that the overall effects of negative feedback on dancers are unknown since they have been proven to both improve dancers' performance as well as hurt them psychologically. Future research is needed to investigate the overall impact of negative feedback on dancers, specifically over longer periods of time.

Although some dances varied with their placement at competitions regarding the amount of positive versus negative feedback they received, each category averaged placed in the same range. All of my results came to the conclusion that dances place higher at competitions when they receive a great amount of positive feedback or a great amount of negative feedback, as feedback in the extremes resulted in better placements. Thus, I filled the knowledge gap in research regarding the relationship between the amounts of positive and negative feedback and how a dance is scored and placed in competition. Although previous research has addressed the relationship between positive and negative feedback types and the effect on athletes, as in a study conducted by Martin and associates, this has not been researched specifically in competitive dancers. Along with this, there has been no research on the relationship between positive and negative feedback and the scoring or placement at competition. Therefore, I filled a knowledge gap surrounding the effects of feedback on dancers, establishing a starting point for coaches and future researchers to better understand how dancers receive feedback and are affected by it in order to improve dancers both physically and mentally. My research is limited in the sense that I focused specifically on one group of dancers, as I was not able to research how a great number of dancers respond to feedback and how they place as a result of feedback. Given that the group I focused on was large enough to conclude that these results would not be specific to one or a few dancers, my research demonstrates that this may be how most dancers respond to different types and amounts of feedback. Focusing on a specific group of dancers was also necessary for my research, as I was able to analyze how the dancers consistently responded to feedback through their placements in a controlled environment. Future research can be conducted on larger groups of dancers using my same criteria to classify feedback types (Table 1 and 2). Additionally, my research is also limited in the sense that I collected my data based on a reality television show. Although reality television may have some false or scripted elements to it, the show *Dance Moms* accurately presents the competitive

dance environment, as proven by Bruenig. This allows me to collect accurate data surrounding feedback given by a coach to a dancer throughout rehearsals, and how the dancers place as a result at competition. Future research could be conducted on dancers in studios, instead of on television, involving the relationship between feedback and placement in competition to further my findings.

Rather than giving feedback to dancers randomly and without consideration of the effects of the feedback, competitive dance coaches should focus more on what types of feedback they give to their dancers in order to benefit the dancers the most and produce the best results at competition. Dance coaches should also aim to give dancers more feedback rather than less, as well. Coaches could focus on either giving more positive or in giving more negative feedback to their students, however, this decision may vary based on the group of dancers. Furthermore, both positive and negative feedback have effects on the dancers mentally and psychologically which need to be considered in this decision as well. In conclusion, dance coaches should consider adjusting their coaching style based on my findings to best support their dancers in order to place the best at competitions.

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