



Dance benefits children by enhancing physical fitness and coordination, boosting cognitive skills like memory and problem-solving, and fostering emotional expression, confidence, and social connection.

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Dancing Toward Well-Being



How ChezaCheza Uses Dance to Transform Education in Kenya

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It's a warm and sunny afternoon in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi. After a hot school lunch with *ugali* (a porridge-type food) and beans, students are sluggishly returning to their desks. But when their teacher announces, “Your ChezaCheza teacher is here!” a surge of energy ripples through the room. The students eagerly gather outside, where Churchill, their ChezaCheza dance teacher, is waiting, Kenyan rhythms already pulsing through speakers. The children quickly form a circle, buzzing with excitement.

These sessions are not just about learning and practicing dance steps; they are about life skills. Churchill explains that, today, they will learn about resilience. Soon, the students are moving, laughing, and absorbing the day’s lesson through dance exercises designed to foster self-awareness, body control, and confidence.

This scene repeats itself in schools across Nairobi, where ChezaCheza, which means playful in Kiswahili, brings dance-based learning to students who need it most. The organization’s approach brings a refreshing shift to traditional education, making space for well-being, self-expression, and social-emotional learning. This is especially critical in Kenya, where educational challenges threaten to stifle the potential of many young people.



The Educational Challenge: Barriers to Student Learning

Kenyan schools face systemic issues, including overcrowded classrooms, resource constraints, and a heavy emphasis on academic achievement over holistic development. The Kenya National Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) aims to address these challenges by focusing on equipping learners with practical skills and competencies for the 21st century. However, implementing CBC effectively requires innovative and creative approaches that engage students beyond traditional methods.

The CBC's student-centered approach has been particularly challenging for teachers to implement. Teachers are burdened

by large class sizes, making personalized attention difficult. The training they receive is often not comprehensive and does not provide them with the skills and resources necessary to make the CBC work in their classrooms.

In addition, student well-being is often poor, marked by high stress levels, disengagement, and low motivation to attend school regularly. This environment makes it challenging for students to thrive. In some (maybe even many) cases, children are faced with trauma, anxiety, or self-doubt due to the complex challenges they face in their communities. For these students, traditional education alone often isn't enough to spark curiosity, motivation, or confidence. They need something

different — something that fosters a sense of belonging and joy in their learning journey.

The Innovation: Dance in Education Supporting the CBC

ChezaCheza is responding to this need by integrating dance-based social-emotional learning (SEL) into Kenyan education, directly supporting the objectives of the CBC. The concept is simple yet transformative: use dance to create safe spaces where students can explore emotions, build self-esteem, and develop essential life skills.

The CBC emphasizes the development of competencies such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and citizenship. ChezaCheza's dance



programs align seamlessly with these goals, supporting student engagement in activities that promote these competencies in a natural and fun way.

At ChezaCheza, dance isn't just a fun activity; it's a structured tool to develop social-emotional skills through a three-module curriculum. Each module focuses on different core skills:

- **Self-Awareness and Emotional Intelligence** — helping students understand and express their emotions
- **Self-Esteem and Confidence Building** — guiding students to recognize their strengths and appreciate their uniqueness
- **Conflict Resolution and Responsible Decision-Making** — teaching students to navigate social situations and make positive choices.

By integrating these modules into dance sessions, ChezaCheza provides an experiential learning

environment that reinforces the CBC's competencies. Teachers trained by ChezaCheza can incorporate the dance-based activities into their lesson plans, making learning more interactive and student-centered in every classroom.

The Benefits of Dance Education Aligned With CBC

The impact of ChezaCheza's program reaches far beyond the dance floor. Integrating dance into education fosters several well-documented benefits that directly impact students' mental health, social-emotional well-being, and aligns with CBC objectives:

- **Enhanced Student Engagement:** Dance encourages active participation, allowing students to connect deeply with the material and one another. This active learning approach is a cornerstone of the CBC, promoting learner involvement and enthusiasm.

- **Development of Core Competencies:** Through collaborative dance activities, students enhance their communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, directly supporting the CBC's focus on competencies over rote memorization.
- **Stress Reduction and Improved Well-Being:** Physical movement reduces stress and anxiety, helping students approach learning with a clear mind and greater focus. This contributes to a healthier school environment conducive to learning.
- **Improved School Behavior and Attendance:** Engaging and enjoyable activities like dance increase students' motivation to attend school and participate actively, addressing issues of absenteeism and disengagement.
- **Cultural Relevance and Inclusivity:** ChezaCheza incorporates local music and dance styles, making learning culturally relevant and inclusive, which is essential in a diverse society and encouraged by the CBC.

The Evidence of Impact

ChezaCheza's work aligns with a growing body of research supporting the benefits of arts integration in education. Studies have shown that students participating in dance programs experience improved emotional resilience, better academic performance, and enhanced problem-solving skills. However, ChezaCheza believes that it's important to look holistically at education and child development, considering more than academic performance. Through their ongoing data collection, using the standardized



Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire, they have been able to spot the following results:

- **Enhanced Social Skills:** Students show increased empathy, cooperation, and ability to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- **Improved Focus:** Students, especially boys, have more room to express themselves emotionally and physically, show an increased ability to focus, and feel less restless.
- **Greater Confidence and Self-Esteem:** Participants express themselves more freely and take on leadership roles within the classroom.

By training teachers to deliver these programs, ChezaCheza ensures that the integration of dance and SEL into the curriculum is sustainable and scalable, providing a model that can be adopted widely within the CBC framework.

Future Adaptation: Kakuma and Beyond

ChezaCheza envisions taking its dance-based SEL model beyond Nairobi to support the CBC's implementation in diverse contexts. The next

frontier lies in places like Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) or Bidibidi Refugee Settlement (Uganda), where education and mental health services are scarce and children face unique traumas related to displacement and instability. Implementing the CBC in such settings presents challenges that ChezaCheza's model is uniquely positioned to address.

Working with local refugee-led organizations, like Faulu Productions in Kakuma or Sina Loketa in Bidibidi, ChezaCheza aims to adapt its curriculum to resonate with the camp's multicultural demographic, providing an innovative model of education that can be replicated in other African contexts facing similar challenges. By aligning with the CBC, ChezaCheza ensures that even in refugee settings, education remains relevant, competency-based, and focused on holistic development.

A Sustainable Vision for Educational Transformation

As ChezaCheza grows, it remains focused on creating sustainable change by supporting national educational goals. The organization's model is rooted in training local leaders and teachers, ensuring the

impact persists long after direct support ends. This grassroots approach makes ChezaCheza's model highly adaptable, scalable, and resilient, able to evolve with the needs of the communities it serves and the CBC objectives.

In a world where educational reform is too often limited to policy discussions, ChezaCheza offers a model of change that is both immediate and lasting. The organization's innovative use of dance isn't just an extracurricular activity — it's a blueprint for reimagining education in a way that places well-being and joy at its core while fulfilling curriculum requirements.

Through ChezaCheza, Kenya is witnessing the power of movement not just to entertain but also to educate, heal, and empower. As more educators and communities embrace this approach, ChezaCheza is poised to play a significant role in the successful implementation of the Kenya CBC, ensuring that students are emotionally and socially prepared for the future as well as academically equipped.

Disclosure Statement:

The author is co-founder and Director of ChezaCheza.

