PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TALENTED YOUNG PEOPLE IN BALLET IN SOUTH KOREA

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PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TALENTED YOUNG PEOPLE IN BALLET
IN SOUTH KOREA

by

Kyung Hyun Park

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Educational & Counseling Psychology
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ABSTRACT

Talent development occurs throughout an individual’s everyday life in a complex, evolving, and dynamic way. Focusing on the developmental perspective of human talent, this study aimed to comprehensively explore the long-term learning paths of students majoring in ballet in Korea. Six research questions were investigated regarding individual talent profiles in ballet, psychological and social stressors, the role of family and home, peer relationships, educational environments, and socio-cultural context. This qualitative study conducted in-depth interviews with 20 undergraduates and 14 parents about the students’ experiences in ballet. Through reflexive thematic analysis based on a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, six themes emerged as results: jagged profiles of individual talent in ballet, close connections between physical and mental stress, wraparound parental support, effective school curriculum and competent teachers, mixed feelings of rivalry and camaraderie among ballet peers, and culturally specific norms and priorities. The findings support conceptual changes in the definition of talent as an individual profile with a combination of multiple aptitudes and dispositions. The findings imply that the talent development process overlaps with various dimensions of a person’s daily life through multi-directional interactions between the person and environmental layers. The findings provide rich information about ballet education in Korea from an ecological perspective that supports the dynamics and complexity of talent development. This study provides more practical suggestions for parents, teachers, and policymakers on supporting artistically and physically talented students in pursuing their careers in safer, healthier, and higher-quality environments.

Keywords: artistic and physical talent, ballet, complexity in talent development, ecological perspective, qualitative studies, Korea
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Chapter I: Introduction

There is a traditional ceremony in Korean culture to celebrate a baby’s first birthday, called Doljabi. In Doljabi, parents usually set up symbolic objects, such as a book, pencil, money, thread, and other things representing respected occupations or luck for the baby to have in the future as the parents wish. As time goes by, parents would add new items representing promising jobs of the time, such as a stethoscope in the wish that the baby would become a doctor, a microphone with the hope for the baby to become a K-pop star or computer accessories for a technology guru. Similar types of this ritual are commonly found in other Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Vietnam. Interestingly, Romania’s culture has a similar tradition for baptizing newborn babies (Hulubaş, 2020). These traditional ceremonies for celebrating newborn babies might connote parents’ wishes across different cultures and history for their precious baby to become somebody talented with a promising career that society admires.

As traditional ceremonies show in several cultures, manifesting exceptional abilities and accomplishing a high level of performance in a career has fascinated many people for a long time. However, sparkling talent does not guarantee the glory and happiness of the person in their daily life with excellent skills and performance. Think of many geniuses in history, Vincent van Gogh, Amadeus Mozart, Camille Claudel, Frida Kahlo, Arthur Rimbaud, etc. Depending on individual personality, familial or educational experiences, times, history, culture, and social values the people live in, exceptionality and excellence could bring them misfortunes as well as happy days. Anxiety, stress, adversity, even bad luck, or unexpected obstacles could happen to anyone, and that may be the way life goes. Nevertheless, those who desire to rise with a big dream and shining talents try to overcome obstacles and barriers and keep motivating themselves to achieve their goals. As Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) articulated, the proverb, “there is no
such thing as a free lunch” (p. 149) in the real life of someone who wants to achieve excellence in a specific area. Basically, in order to be successful, a talented person’s exceptional skills and knowledge have to be coupled with several other factors such as the personality and socio-emotional characteristics, level and quality of education, the support from family, friends, teachers, or the times and cultures.

**Statement of the Problems**

Despite the importance of the interactions among these various factors, talent has been understood as the person’s endogenous abilities in educational and psychological research. The long-lasting debate about talent versus giftedness was also caused by the perspective of putting more weight on individual traits than the interaction of internal and external factors. Traditionally, the term giftedness has been more frequently and commonly used to mention outstanding abilities a person manifested at an early age, typically in childhood. However, the concept of giftedness should be distinguished from talent in that giftedness implies innate and general intellectual abilities across domains. On the other hand, talent is more appropriately used to refer to systematically developed competencies within a specific subject matter or work domain (Dai, 2010; Gagné, 2004; Subotnik et al., 2011; Worrell et al., 2018, 2019; Ziegler & Stoeger, 2019). Talent can also be manifested as encompassing several types of performances in music, art, sports, and dance or even as psychosocial competencies such as social negotiation skills. However, giftedness, at least in traditional academic areas such as language, mathematics, or science, often implies a pervasive influence and exceptionality. On the other hand, the concept of talent is more flexible and appropriate for understanding every child’s potential in various domains, and how we can support children in developing their potential into excellence.
Among the various talent areas beyond the traditional academic boundaries, artistic talent and athletic talent have been regarded as important areas that exceptional abilities can be manifest at an early age. For example, Gardner (1995, 2006) included musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence in the eight essential cognitive profiles in terms of intelligence. Gagné (1985, 1999b, 2013, 2021) consistently included the creative and sensorimotor abilities into the ability domains that can be developed into specific fields of talent. Dai (2017) proposed psychomotor ability as one of the five essential human effectivities. In the Mega-model of talent development (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015; Subotnik et al., 2011), artistic and athletic-related domains are also importantly addressed as the academic domains. Based on these theories, the present study will pay attention to dance talent since excellence in dance involves both artistic and athletic abilities. In particular, the present study selects ballet as a traditional and exemplary field in dance talent.

The most fundamental purpose of the present study is to explore how ballet talent develops in the context of dynamic interactions between multiple personal characteristics and environmental factors. Peter Darling, a choreographer of the movie Billy Elliot, once said in his interview (Daldry, 2003) that “Ballet is as close to an athletic sport as anything. To me, the great ballet dancers combine self-expression with athleticism.” Ballet requires highly complex and integrated abilities across physical fitness and strength, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, and creative artistic expressive sensitivity, and interpersonal skills such as teamwork.

Above all, mental toughness is important to maintain a competitive edge and endure the pressures to be a better dancer, even eventually going “pro” (i.e., becoming a professional dancer). According to interviews, principal dancers in the New York City Ballet company agreed that doing ballet is a “mind game,” which means that mental well-being and strength are more
important than physical strength (AOL Originals, 2013). Gaining professional status in ballet means a lifestyle full of competition at every threshold to move forward to the next level. For professional ballet dancers, going to a more prestigious level of a ballet company is an important milestone and achievement because there is a hierarchy with ranks in doing ballet professionally (Hutchinson et al., 2013). Passing through the entry gate to the upper-level ballet company is not sufficient unless they are eventually promoted to soloists or principal dancers. Interpersonal interaction is important in the beginning stages for professional ballet dancers (e.g., corps de ballet). However, promotion to the upper rank, such as a principal dancer, means that they have to endure all the pressure as a solo dancer and endure the lonely struggles to maintain the best performance in a big position. Anxiety and pressures under high concentration, fear of failing or falling behind, and perseverance to keep a daily training routine could occur in the everyday lives of ballet dancers. For these reasons, psychological factors, such as personality, motivation, resilience, perseverance, and other social abilities, should be given attention to and investigated in-depth to understand talent developmental paths in ballet.

Interestingly, it is implicitly stated in the definition of the term, psychomotor, how psychological factors are important even in physical motor skills. The term psychomotor is an adjective form with the meaning of “relating to movements or motor effects that result from a mental activity” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Psychomotor talent may be the most suitable area that explains the mind-body unity in that the human body is not separated from cognition, and the mind is embodied in perception and action (Gibbs, 2019; Thompson & Cosmelli, 2011; Varela et al., 2016). The intertwined work between body and cognition represents the psychomotor abilities human beings have. Psychomotor abilities do not simply
represent physical movements but encompass a complex level of a combination and integration of sensorimotor perceptions and cognitive functions.

Despite the importance of psychomotor abilities that connect and integrate psychological functions and physical movements, giftedness or talent development research has given less attention to psychomotor-related abilities compared to traditional academic abilities. Specifically, performing arts, such as acting or dancing, have not been studied as thoroughly as other domains (Kozbelt, 2019). The present study argues that talent in performing arts such as ballet is worth more investigation with more depth, especially in terms of the interaction between physical, cognitive, social, and emotional abilities, given the lack of relevant previous research.

In talent development, it is also important to investigate the effect of environmental factors. The environmental system is made of several layers of home, school, and culture that directly and indirectly influence individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). First, parents play the most primary role in recognizing their children’s potential and deciding what support they could provide and whether they would allow their children to continue to do it or not. Due to the nature of the ballet field, which shows early onset of talent, early starting age of training (Hutchinson et al., 2013; Ureña, 2004), and early peak points and retirement (Kim et al., 2020; Roncaglia, 2006) in a professional career, the roles of parents or caregivers are significant in recognizing and supporting children’s potential (e.g., body conditions) and interest in daily home situations. According to my informal interview with a ballet instructor currently teaching young children in South Korea, many preschoolers start their first ballet class because of their parents’ interest rather than theirs. The instructor said that the children’s early ballet experiences usually begin with enjoying interesting movements with music and wearing a “princess-like” ballet tutu. As this phenomenon tells us, parents usually play the role of the first guide to
exposure their child to formal or informal situations for gaining relevant knowledge and skills. Once the child gets old enough to decide to “go pro”, more support and high dedication are expected of parents to support their ballet-talented children in terms of attention, time and money, and emotional support (Bloom, 1985; Witte et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the parental factor could also be a barrier for the child to continue to do ballet. For example, parents’ negative cultural values on ballet as an insecure occupation and financial difficulties in affording the expensive ballet training costs (e.g., Hamera, 2007), or underestimating professions in arts compared to academic-related jobs (e.g., Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011) might hamper children’s talent development process.

Second, schooling, coaching, and mentoring are also critical factors in nurturing and training talented children in ballet. Practically, a public school system based on a standardized curriculum may not be suitable for young people who want to concentrate on ballet training and performance experiences. In South Korea, parents usually find private and extra-curricular ballet studios for their talented children rather than relying on schools. Even though there are prestigious art schools for learning ballet, parents and students tend to actively seek private tutoring to gain experience that is more effective and suitable to an individual’s abilities and preferences outside the public school system. This phenomenon seems to be found in other cultures as well. Seeking private tutoring or training programs outside of school is also common for gifted children in sports or performing arts in the U.S. (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2015). These choices imply that it is important to investigate the roles of coaches or mentors who can discover and strengthen the potential and abilities of the young “hidden gems” outside the public school system.
Third, peer relationship is another important external factor for ballet talent development. The early differentiation of specific career paths and intensive training in doing ballet could limit young people’s social relationships to ballet-related networks. According to interviews with ballet dancers in New York City Ballet, their interpersonal activities predominantly occur with their ballet peers within the same world, such as art school, ballet studio, or performances (AOL Originals, 2013). This phenomenon might seem to be taken for granted because ballet requires students to pour intensive time and effort into training inside the ballet studio, and they cannot help but spend most of their time with their ballet peers. However, the peer relationship of young talented people has not been empirically studied or seriously discussed as much as influences by parents or teachers. Other than a small number of studies about boy ballet students’ peer pressure due to the gender stereotype in the female-dominated field (e.g., Mulvey & Killen, 2015), little is known about peer support or peer pressure for talent development in ballet from the psychosocial perspective. With the importance of peer relationships in ballet as a unique interpersonal relationship environment, the present study will investigate how peer relationships significantly influence ballet talent development, in addition to home and educational environments.

Lastly, the role of socio-cultural influence is another necessary part to consider a person’s talent development. Culture and society can impose the social value of the specific domains and provide a tangible and intangible support system for encouraging talent development in particular areas (Dai, 2021). Currently, dance talent, including ballet, is a highly regarded and popular field in South Korea. For example, ballet has been treated as one primary subject of gifted education through the Korea National Institute for the Gifted in Arts (KNIGA) under the Gifted and Talented Education Promotion Act (GTEPA) in South Korea. KNIGA also provides a gifted education curriculum in contemporary modern dance and traditional Korean dance in
addition to ballet. (KNIGA, n.d.; Lee & Oh, 2018). Furthermore, at the non-professional level, hobby-based ballet courses for all children have been widely spread through public community sports facilities. These national education policies and public infrastructure grant many children easy access to opportunities to learn ballet at an everyday level. These phenomena show us that cultural attention and educational investment at the national level can attract talented young people and encourage them to remain in the field with a promising future. However, there is still a lack of previous studies that closely addressed socio-cultural factors on how ballet talent development is encouraged in Korea, specifically written and published in English. Also, except for a few studies on Singapore and Hong Kong’s cases (Chua, 2014b, 2019), there are hardly any educational psychology studies on how ballet talent is discovered and promoted, even in Asian and non-western cultures with a relatively short history of ballet. Therefore, the present study will importantly address the cultural factors in terms of what support the society and culture have established and provided, and how the support influences the individual’s talent development in ballet.

According to Evolving Complexity Theory (ECT), talent development is an ongoing, evolving dynamic process throughout an individual’s life (Dai, 2017, 2021). This perspective claims to understand several types of exceptional human abilities as developmental, pluralistic, contextual, and dynamics with external factors in the temporal and contextual aspects (Dai, 2019; Dai & Renzulli, 2008; Renzulli & Delcourt, 1986). Along with the complexity and multiplicity of our lives, someone’s talent-developing process is idiosyncratic and not easily fragmented or reduced into a few things that fit all paths. The dynamics among the individual’s characteristics, family and home, peers, education, and cultures draw differentiated patterns of the person’s unique talent development. Yet, at the same time, similar common experiences also
exist within the people who chose the same discipline or occupation. For example, non-cognitive factors such as motivation or work ethics are commonly important to every talented people regardless of the domains. Thus, it is meaningful to simultaneously look into each person’s talent development process in a specific domain and to find a common essence in the experiences of people within the same domain.

**Purpose of the Study**

The present study aims to take a comprehensive look at the unique developmental paths of talented people in ballet, considering the multiple layers of contextual factors that influence talent development. In addition to each differentiated developmental path, home and family, peer relationships, educational institutes, and socio-cultural context will also be investigated to find the essential component of talent development in ballet. As the theoretical framework, the present study assumes that talent development is a dynamic, complex, and contextual process for these purposes. In terms of methodology, the present study also argues that developmental processes should be investigated based on people’s actual life experiences rather than measuring static properties of abilities or motivation outside of the context. For this reason, phenomenological qualitative research will be applied to achieve the research purposes based on the basic assumptions. The phenomenological research will be appropriate to explore how a talented person in ballet developed a unique developmental trajectory depending on their everyday experiences, external resources, temporal and physical environments, and discover common phenomena of the patterns and experiences among the talented people in ballet.

**Research Questions**

According to the above purposes and rationale, the present study will address the following questions:
1) What kinds of profiles do talented students in ballet commonly have in terms of characteristic aptitude and disposition for ballet talent potential?

2) How have the students sustained rigorous training and psychosocial pressure at different junctures in their ballet talent development?

3) What roles do family and home environments play in building the momentum of individual talent development in ballet?

4) What roles do educational experiences, including schooling or coaching, play in the talent development in ballet and at what developmental phases?

5) How do peer relationships play a role in their talent development in ballet, and how they interact with other contextual factors?

6) How do socio-cultural factors play a role in individual talent development in ballet, and in what way or when do they become crucial?
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

An independent person is the main agent of all behaviors and processes in talent development. This fundamental point means that there exist diverse individual patterns in the talent developmental process between the onset, peak, and endpoints in achieving successful outcomes, which cannot be drawn as a general linear line of sequences (Dai, 2017, 2019; Dai & Renzulli, 2008; Dai & Sternberg, 2004; Papierno et al., 2005). Meantime, there are general characteristics as well as idiosyncratic features that exist independently in each individual’s life. With intersecting regularities and idiosyncrasies, human development occurs in the dynamics of interaction between nature and nurture (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; McCall, 1981; Thelen & Smith, 2006). Talent development is one branch of general human development, and it is conceptualized as consisting of diverse individuals’ complex life patterns, pathways, and trajectories (Ceci et al., 2016; Dai, 2017; Dai & Renzulli, 2008). The present study is aligned with this perspective that talent development has the common nature of human development for everyone and has the nature of complexity and dynamics by the interaction between intrapersonal factors and environments. From this perspective, this chapter will review the studies addressing the interaction of nature and nurture that influence talent development. Ballet-focused previous studies will also be reviewed and discussed in terms of what abilities and personal characteristics beneficially affect how the family, peers, teachers, school, and culture influence the young students pursuing ballet dancers.

Understanding the Concept of Talent

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary online version (n.d.), vocabulary talent is defined as “a special often athletic, creative, or artistic aptitude” and “general intelligence or mental power” as one of the synonyms of ability for the first meaning. For the second meaning,
the dictionary defines talent as “the natural endowments of a person.” These dictionary definitions imply that talent in general has been conceptualized as something inherited and special that occurs to a minority of people stochastically. This dictionary definition may imply a general sense of the concept of talent; however, the current study will analyze how the term talent has been conceptualized from the education and psychology perspectives.

**Talent versus Giftedness**

Conceptualizing talent has been in the middle of a long-lasting debate on giftedness versus talent as to how to define excellence in human abilities. The term *giftedness* has been conceptualized as a superior quality or property of a person in terms of either developmental precocity or age-normed excellence or high competence of some sort. On the other hand, *talent* has been conceptualized as domain-specific abilities that are superior compared to age peers but that are trainable and can be developed through experience, education, and external interventions (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2010; Gagné, 2021). To emphasize the developmental feature of talent, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) argued that talent could be “constructed” through the facilitation of a social and cultural system (p.38).

Dai (2010) explained the distinction between *giftedness* and *talent* in terms of a categorical approach that identifies a small group of individuals as “gifted” and the rest by default as “non-gifted,” in contrast to a more domain-specific approach that identifies some individuals as “talented” to some degree in some domains, not others at a particular juncture of development. Thus, every individual has a distinct profile of strengths and weaknesses in a specific domain, and “optimal condition” should be provided to build the strengths (Dai, 2010, p.45). In other words, the term “gifted” tends to be used to describe a qualitative difference that has a more pervasive influence on one’s development than the term “talent”, which is more
circumscribed in its developmental influence, and which can be more easily improved through 
education and training.

Based on the previous arguments, the term talent should be used differently from 
giftedness to mean developmental and trainable properties that are dedicated to specific functions 
or that facilitate excellence in particular domains. However, talent conceptualized this way does 
not exclude inherited factors, just as the term giftedness naturally implicates some level of 
heritability. Gagné (1985, 2004, 2021) argues that talent cannot be developed without natural 
abilities or giftedness. In comparison, Ceci conceptualized talent as an actualization of some 
innate genetic potential (Ceci et al., 2016; Papierno et al., 2005). The present study focuses on 
talent rather than giftedness, with an emphasis on the importance of both nature and nurture, 
personal traits, and person-environmental interactions in honing talent to accomplish excellence 
in a specific domain. Thus, I will use the term talent to describe any potential, aptitude, and 
motivation pertaining to facilitated ballet learning and development throughout the present study.

Talent versus Expertise

For the present study, the term expertise will be additionally used to describe the 
professional level of skills and performance in ballet. However, the expertise also should be 
differentiated from the term talent. Expertise is defined as “consistently superior performance on 
a specified set of representative tasks for a domain” (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996, p.277). The 
term expert is a label given to a person who achieved a superior level of skills and knowledge in 
a specific field. Expertise is a result of maximal adaptation that occurs when a person is engaged 
in task demands for a prolonged period of time (often taking 10 years; Ericsson & Lehman, 
1996). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) argued that expertise should be better understood 
dynamically, as how the person as an expert, with a high level of formal and informal knowledge
and problem-solving abilities, tackle complex, sometimes ill-defined problems in challenging conditions, rather than defined statically, as a set of knowledge and skills. Based on the above definition of expertise, talent cannot be identical to expertise because talent is a developing potential possibly transformed into expertise but not full-fledged at the professional level. In the temporal dimension of talent development, talent manifests itself as a flair, a proclivity for something initially, and then more systematically developed, while expertise implies a more advanced developmental stage where superior performance is accumulated (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). For this reason, Papierno et al. (2005) have explained that “expertise does not necessarily imply talent” (p.322). It takes a long period of training to achieve expertise regardless of when one has a “talent” at the onset; conversely, manifestation of talent at the onset does not guarantee the acquisition of expertise as one may fall short of maximal adaptation (Dai, 2021). In this sense, the present study will use the term talent to refer to the potential of young people and the term expertise to refer to the occupational and professional level of achievement.

**Forms of Talent: Domain, Field, and Effectivity**

The same type of abilities can be differently demonstrated and maximized in different domains. For example, exceptional psychomotor ability is advantageous not only for athletes but also for dancers. Regarding this point, Bloom (1985) explained that talent areas are not purely independent, and some areas can overlap in terms of activities, histories, and required abilities. According to Bloom’s findings, some talented people showed their aptitude in a different domain from where they later succeeded. The participants reported that they had experienced several areas until they eventually found the final one, in a “trial-and-error” process (p. 528). According to a dynamic developmental view, talent development goes through an increasing differentiation, whereby initial nebulous potentials become refined responses to specific environmental
situations, and later integrated toward sophisticated performance over time (Dai, 2017). For example, someone who showed strengths in psychomotor abilities in childhood may develop his/her career to be a gymnast in the athletic domain or to be a ballet dancer in the artistic domain. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) also found that there exist versatile people with exceptional abilities across multiple domains in their study; they showed that over 20% of their sample was nominated as demonstrating high potential in two or more talent domains.

Along with the above arguments, it is necessary to look at what subjects, disciplines, and occupations should be considered the talent domains where exceptional abilities are manifested. In the study by Bloom (1985), he selected four broadly defined talent “areas” and investigated the successful people’s lives in the fields of music and art (e.g., pianists and sculptors), athletics (e.g., swimming and tennis), mathematics and neurology. To refer to the specific professions of the research subjects, Bloom used the term talent field (e.g., pianist or tennis player) under the higher categories of talent areas (e.g., art or science). According to his use, a talent area is a set of multiple talent fields. He used the term areas as a border classification system that includes talent fields, for example, the athletic or psychomotor area includes many athletic fields such as swimming and tennis (see Bloom, 1985, p.7 and p. 529).

Although Bloom initiated talent development studies based on the domain-specific perspective and mentioned the difference between the term talent areas and fields, there was confusion and ambiguities in distinguishing between the two terms. Regarding the terminology, Csikszentmihalyi used the terms domains and fields to clarify different units of specific types in demonstrating the talent (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). He defined domain as cultural symbolic systems, that is, “systems of rules that define certain ranges of performance as meaningful and valuable.” The term field is used as social concepts that are “made up of people and institutions
whose task is to decide whether a certain performance is to be considered valuable or not” (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993, p.23). On the other hand, Gagné (1999a) criticized Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s (1993) distinctions between domain and field based on the social and cultural perspective. Gagné (2021) differentiated domain and field in the similar contexts of differentiating giftedness and talent. According to Gagné, domain corresponds to giftedness, which are natural abilities or aptitudes. However, a field corresponds to a talent domain; thus, talent is systematically developed ability or competencies.

Dai (2017) defined the term domain as “specific categories of object or action; it helps define structures, functions, contexts, and boundaries of a functional entity” (Dai, 2017, p. 173). As the corresponding term to the domain that a category of exceptional abilities manifests, Dai (2017, 2021) used the term effectivity. The term effectivity has been borrowed from bi-ecological psychology to refer to the prototypical basic forms of talent areas in the initial stage. For example, psychomotor, social, technical, expressive, and intellectual functions are five forms of effectivity, which differ from systematically developed talent, referring to “high proficiency in culturally created domains or institutionalized social practice” (Dai, 2021, p.104). In other words, effectivity refers to demonstrated potential in informal settings, whereas talent is always promoted and developed through a culture. The summary of different terminologies discussed above is shown in Table 1 to clarify how the several terms explain how various types, disciplines, and occupations of exceptional abilities exist in talent development.
Table 1

Talent Developmental Theories and Categorized Talent Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Terminologies</th>
<th>Categorizing Talent Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloom (1985)</td>
<td>talent areas, talent fields</td>
<td>Athletic or psychomotor fields (swimmers, tennis players), Aesthetic, musical artistic fields (pianists, sculptors), Cognitive or intellectual fields (mathematics, neurologist), Interpersonal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993)</td>
<td>domains (cultural), fields (social)</td>
<td>Mathematics, Science, Music, Athletics (swimming, baseball, football, soccer, volleyball, basketball, tennis, wrestling), Art (fine art)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gagné (2021)</td>
<td>domain (aptitudes, giftedness), field (competencies, talent)</td>
<td>Academic (language, mathematics, sciences, humanities, arts), Technical (transport, building, crafts, manufacturing, agriculture), Science &amp; Technology (research in natural &amp; social sciences Engineering, statistics), Arts (creative musical, visual, written), Performing (acting, dancing, singing), People services (health, education, community), Management/Sales (commerce, politics, supervision, inspection), Business systems (marketing, accounting, records), Sports &amp; Athletics, Games (cards, chess, board games, eSports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai (2017, 2021)</td>
<td>effectivity (foundational domains, biologically primary forms), talent (high proficiency in the domains and fields, professional domain, biologically secondary, culture-dependent)</td>
<td>Psychomotor, Social, Technical, Expressive, Intellectual effectivities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Talent as a Dynamic Developmental System

The present study assumes that talent development (hereafter TD) occurs along with the general human development principle of interactions between nature and nurture. Specifically, this study takes the dynamic and ecological perspective that a person’s individual innate characteristics and the influence of external environments, which is initially rooted in the ecological perspective on general human development. Ecological psychology (Ceci et al., 2016; Ceci & Hembrooke, 1995) has claimed that TD is the process of actualizing innate potential through the dynamic interaction of the person and multiple environmental factors across the lifespan. Ecology psychology is mainly based on Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theory that has magnified the role of layers of multiple external environments in an individual’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1995a, 1995b; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The focus of the bio-ecological perspective on a human being’s development is the plural and multi-layered environmental layers operating with an individual’s several personal aspects of development in a complex, interactive and reciprocal, changeable and flexible way.

Ecological psychology provides a useful concept to understand talent development, proximal process (PP). PP refers to the real-time reciprocal interaction among the person, tangible and in tangible external environments such as other people, objects, and cultures (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Ceci & Hembrooke, 1995). PP usually serves to develop important adaptive functions, thus are goal-directed and purposive. Bronfenbrenner (1995b) mentioned that the concept of PP was inspired by Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) which knowledgeable adults and peers, and environmental sources function as leverage to maximize a child’s potential. PP is an ecologically occurring transitional process in that environments drive the transformation of a person’s innate characteristics into more
complex behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In the ecological mechanism, PP includes family, educational institutes, culture and society, and change of time, small and large, short-term and long-term situations we have experienced on a daily basis. For example, parents and child activities, peer relationships, learning new skills and knowledge in several areas, and handling complex tasks are included (Bronfenbrenner, 1995a).

In line with the ecological psychology of human development as the theoretical framework, two large-scale projects conducted in the U.S. (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993) provided empirical evidence of talent as a developable, changeable, and trainable property. Although these two projects did not explicitly take ecological psychology, their findings showed that TD is actualized and effectively occurs through the influences of several environmental layers, family, teachers, and daily experiences in ordinary lives in socio-cultural contexts.

Gagné’s (1985, 2004, 2013, 2021) Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) and Dai’s (2017, 2019, 2021) Evolving Complexity Theory (ECT) also have emphasized flexible and developmental perspectives on TD. These two theories broadly overlapped with ecological psychology, emphasizing that TD is not simple and influenced by interactions between the person and multiple aspects of environments. However, DMGT and ECT have different assumptions of conceptualizing how to develop potential into talent. Gagné’s DMGT acknowledges the inherited gifts as one essential component and prerequisite to manifest talent. On the other hand, Dai’s ECT claims that TD is a truly dynamic process and denies the static and one-way effect of a specific component.

In the following subsections, I will discuss how these four major TD models (i.e., Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2017, 2019, 2021; Gagné, 1985, 2004, 2013, 2021) have contributed to understanding ecological perspective on how exceptional abilities develops
based on the interaction with environments. In particular, ECT will be reviewed in more detail as the main theoretical framework of the present study.

**Bloom’s Talent Research Project**

Bloom and his colleagues (1985) conducted a big project about the process of how talented people developed their potential in a specific field and achieved excellence at a high level. The retrospective semi-structured interviews were conducted for the project, and the following generalizations were made: (a) there are three phases of learning across their life over time. (b) it is important to provide appropriate teaching and learning environments according to the stage, and (c) motivations and practice routines are significant for long-term commitment to achieve excellence in the specific field, (d) parents and teachers play critical roles in supporting the TD of their children or students.

One of the most influential findings in Bloom’s project was the generalization of the three phases of TD: early years, middle years, and later years. These phases have been cited in a bulk of relevant studies with respect to how we interpret transitions in TD (e.g., Chua, 2015; van Rossum, 2001). Based on this finding, Bloom (1985) claimed that children are usually motivated by the enjoyment of playful and recreational activities, parents’ and teachers’ monitoring, recognition, approvals, compliments, or incentives in the early years. Task commitment to practice and learning is still not intensive at an early age. From the phase of middle years in their TD, the task commitment is increasing and more concentrated on the specific domain. Relationships with peers sharing the same goals started to affect the quality and quantity of task commitment and motivation as cooperators or competitors. Motivation is also becoming more internalized, intrinsic, and focused on improving the skills and knowledge in the specific field. In the later years, the amount of time and depth of task commitments becomes more intensive
routine. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are enhanced. In this later phase, the external pressures significantly affect motivation because they are exposed to professional situations by preparing and participating in large-scale and public competitions or events.

**Csikszentmihalyi’s Talented Teenager Project**

Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues (1993) conducted a large-scale study with 208 talented teenagers to explore the reasons that many talented teenagers can or cannot achieve excellence at a higher level in the area where they are initially identified as gifted or even drop out. The participants were selected from students who have been nominated as talented students in a specific domain. The authors collected comprehensive data using mixed methods of interviews, questionnaires, and standardized tests.

The study found that there are more complex reasons for making young people motivated or frustrated. That is not because of the one-way influence of specific events or personal issues but because of dynamics of individual competencies, personality, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and quality of the personal experiences at home, school, and other various contexts in their everyday lives. The project provided empirical evidence that an individual’s quality of experiences, personality, or motivation are more significant factors for teenagers to maintain the talent development trajectory, rather than how competent they are in knowledge or skills. According to the findings, the quality of experiences can motivate the talented person to keep moving toward successful achievement. Furthermore, the experiences are meaningful only when including complex structures that combine enjoyment (e.g., flow and intrinsic motivation) and challenge. The complexity of experiences positively affects the motivation to pursue the set goals until the talented teenagers succeed in their respective talent domains later in their adulthood. In the same vein as Bloom’s (1985) findings, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) also emphasized
parents’ support, education provisions, and teachers’ role in helping their children to avoid losing motivation and interest due to boredom or anxiety in the specific talent domain.

**Gagné’s Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)**

Gagné’s (1985, 2004, 2013, 2021) *Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent* (DMGT) has been seen as a pioneering theory that contributed to recognizing the importance of the developmental nature of giftedness and talent (Sternberg et al., 2010). The key point of Gagné’s model is that expertise at the occupational level is achieved through the systematic developmental process among the six components: (a) gifts as outstanding natural abilities, (b) intrapersonal catalysts, (c) environmental catalysts, (d) developmental process, (e) developed talents which refer to the high level of skills in the specific occupational field, and even (f) chance (Gagné, 2004, 2021).

DMGT uses the term *catalysts* to refer to the interactive nature of facilitating or inhibiting the developmental process. Although Gagné mentioned several subtypes of catalysts, he mainly emphasized two types of catalysts: *intrapersonal (I) catalysts* and *environmental (E) catalysts*. Intrapersonal (I) catalysts refer to the talented person’s motivation, regulatory skills, or personality, which correspond to individual (or endogenous) factors, and environmental (E) catalysts refer to social, interpersonal, and educational environments, which correspond to environmental (or exogenous) factors such as parents, teachers, or social-cultural context. Since he published his first model of DMGT in *Gifted Child Quarterly* (Gagné, 1985), he has consistently claimed that talent is developing through the transforming process from giftedness to talent. Under the DMGT, talent should be conceptualized as developed performance or competencies and distinguished from the gift as natural abilities or aptitude (Gagné, 2021).
However, DMGT also emphasizes the essential role of endowed natural abilities (i.e., gifts). DMGT assumes that natural ability is a prerequisite for talent manifestation and that both natural endowment and nurturing environments are equally important in achieving an expert level of occupational and professional achievement. In this basic assumption that natural abilities are an essential component to develop talent, DMGT has limitations to explain the dynamics of the talent development process and still can be considered a static model to understand how young people develop their potential into talent.

**Dai’s Evolving Complexity Theory (ECT)**

While DMGT regards TD as the results of achievement as a foundation of natural abilities, Dai’s (2017, 2019, 2020, 2021) *Evolving Complexity Theory* (ECT) takes a more dynamic developmental process approach that talent is not simply the seed of excellent achievement, nor the static status achieved by the linear causal relationship between individual factors and the environment. Instead, talent development is a complex and evolving process of a talented person’s ongoing adaptive efforts throughout life. The efforts interact with external factors (i.e., home and family, schooling, and cultures) that make their potential (i.e., effectivities) more refined, differentiated, or integrated into a whole. TD is the process of flexibly adapting to the temporal, social, and cultural contexts where the person is situated. Figures 1 and 2 visually show these main ideas of ECT.

A distinct feature of ECT that distinguishes itself from DMGT is its emphasis on dynamic self-organization of talent development as real-time interaction of the person with the task and social environments, which lead to emergent properties (e.g., identity and commitment) that change the nature of talent development at a new level of complexity (e.g., from
characteristic adaptation or CA to maximal adaptation or MA). Figure 3 graphically shows the concepts of CA and MA.

Figure 1

*Three Critical Dimensions of Talent Development in Evolving Complexity Theory*

![Diagram of three critical dimensions](image)

**Figure 2**

*Schematic Representation of Evolving Complexity Theory*

![Diagram](image)


**Figure 3**

*Characteristic and Maximal Adaptations*

![Diagram](image)

Dynamics and complexity are the primary keywords of ECT. This theory explains that the emerging complexity cannot be displaced with the simple summation of components, and the process cannot be simplified as a linear one-to-one relationship but should be understood at a systems level. To symbolize these dynamics inside an individual’s unique talent developmental process, Dai used the metaphor of how snowflakes are formed (Dai, 2021; Dai & Renzulli, 2008). In this sense, Dai criticized Gagné’s (1985) assumption that natural abilities must be a prerequisite for manifesting talent because Gagné’s theory implies uni-directional determinism (from giftedness to talent), while Dai’s theory suggests bi-directional epigenetic probabilistic nature of talent emergence and further evolvement (see Gottlieb, 1998). In ECT, everyone has developmental potential, but their talent potential profiles (i.e., distinct aptitudes and dispositions, strengths, and weaknesses) can differ qualitatively as well as quantitatively (Dai, 2017). How talent evolves, then, depends on a reciprocal process of the developing person and an impinging environment.

According to ECT, talent evolves in three regularities: (a) structural regularity, (b) process regularity, and (c) temporal regularity. Structural regularity explains how a person with particular talent potential characteristically adapts to a structured or unstructured environment, be it home or school, how the person utilizes and organizes opportunities and resources to his or her advantage, and how the person shapes the developmental experience toward increasingly differentiated and integrated personal trajectory (Dai, 2021).

If structural regularities show what develops, process regularities reveal how it develops: In a way similar to Gagné’s I and E catalysts, what drives talent development is cognitive, affective-conative, and social by nature. Characteristic adaptation (CA) and maximal adaptation (MA) reflect the two most powerful regulatory forces driving talent development (see Figure 3).
In CA, the person reveals his or her interests, strengths, and weaknesses and discovers the favorable environment and opportunities to develop their potential. Meanwhile, MA is a more intentional, self-directed, and purposive adaptation process in which educational interventions and socio-cultural resources are harnessed to stretch one’s competence to a new level beyond what CA enables. It is the level of commitment that leads to MA, which creates a new dynamic of person-task interaction driven by technical perfection and a personal vision of excellence and creativity.

If process regularities reveal how it develops, temporal regularities reveal when it develops and how enduring certain proximal processes have to be for significant development changes to a new height of talent, expertise, and creative productivity. Talent potential in a specific area should be externally manifested (e.g., the onset of talent) and CA operates first to reveal in what kind of domains and fields the person’s potential will be manifested given the environmental opportunities and challenges. In terms of process regularity, multiple environmental factors, including family and home, school, community, society, and culture, interactively operate with the individual’s CA and MA process. The dynamic conditions include both positive opportunities and negative or unexpected obstacles, progress, and adversity.

To summarize, all four TD models emphasize the developmental nature of talent as situated in specific social-cultural contexts, mediated and facilitated by both endogenous and exogenous factors. In the main, Bloom (1985) provided the initial mapping of talent trajectories and pathways that have guided later models (e.g., ECT; Dai, 2017). Gagné’s (1985, 2021) DMGT identified the essential components of talent development. Csikszentmihalyi’s model (1993) also stipulates some developmental systems principles that are influential.
However, some differences between these models are also worth mentioning. For instance, DMGT is still a component model, and ECT is a developmental systems model. But more fundamentally, DMGT delineates talent development as a uni-directional process of transforming gifts (natural endowment) into talents (systematically developed competencies), whereas ECT emphasizes talent development as a prolonged process of adaptation with real-time proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), leading to developmental changes that are sometimes cumulative and other times discontinuous (emergent new properties and new dynamics and new levels of complexity). Based on these theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence from the developmental perspective, the following section will specifically discuss ballet talent in terms of aptitude, disposition, motivation, personality, family and home, peer relationships, teachers and educational settings, and socio-cultural contexts.

Talent in Ballet

According to Dai’s ECT (2017, 2019, 2021), there are two bio-ecological indicators of talent potential, aptitude and disposition, that individuals possess and utilize for their talent development. While aptitude represents the capacity or abilities to perform the tasks, disposition is defined as “indicative of an affective-conative tendency to engage in relevant tasks” (Dai, 2021, p.107) and conceptually represents socio-emotional aspects such as personality and motivations. Aptitudes and dispositions are generally important to talent development across domains. However, the types of aptitudes vary depending on what competencies the talent domain demands. For example, it is not enough in ballet to be excellent only in physical movements without the artistic ability to express the meaning of the gestures. In this sense, ballet is a highly complex and integrated type of talent domain requiring combinations of several aptitudes and dispositions, such as athletic abilities, artistically expressive abilities, and
psychological factors (i.e., motivation and passion) and social abilities for dancing in groups (e.g., corps de ballet) (Chua, 2014b; Walker et al., 2010, 2011). For this reason, to discuss talent development in ballet, one needs to comprehensively examine a set of multiple aptitudes and dispositions in interaction with the task environment uniquely pertaining to ballet. In the next section, previous studies on how aptitude, dispositions, and environments beneficially interact and influence talent development in ballet will be reviewed and discussed.

**Aptitude: Psychomotor Abilities for Ballet Talent**

Exceptional psychomotor abilities are related to the behavioral form of “executing and coordinating body movements to accomplish complex physical tasks as in the case of most competitive and extreme sports and complex surgical operations” (Dai, 2017, p. 173). Sports or performing arts such as dance, acting, or even magic performance are exemplary fields in which exceptional psychomotor abilities are demonstrated. Even though ballet is commonly regarded as one of the artistic fields, technical competencies in movements such as posture, jump, turning, and spinning are a primary and essential factor in manifesting ballet talent. Noice and Noice (2006) have firmly stated that the “technical component is absolutely indispensable” (p. 497) in ballet, and it takes approximately ten years to practice physical skills as a basic prerequisite to achieve expertise. As physical competency is the most fundamental qualification for performing ballet, many studies have been conducted in various fields, not only in dance education (e.g., Noice & Noice, 2006; Walker et al., 2010, 2011) but also in medical studies (e.g., Shah, 2021).

**Psychomotor Abilities as Early Signs of Ballet Talent.** The main criteria to identify exceptional physical abilities for dancing movements include body shape, muscle strength, muscle power and jump height, agility or flexibility, balance, proprioception or movement cognition, such as spatial awareness, coordinating and controlling movement, abilities of
encoding, memorizing, and recalling movement accurately, and sense of rhythm (e.g., can move accurately depending on the rhythmic patterns with the beat) (Baum et al., 1996; Hamilton & Robson, 2006; Walker et al., 2010, 2011; Wyon et al., 2006). In the education for talented students in ballet in Korea, physical abilities are evaluated based on posture and movement skills and competencies and physical condition, such as height, flexibility, foot shape, and external hip rotation (Lee, 2013; Won, 2013).

**Trainable or Untrainable Physical Abilities.** For the identification of dance talent, there have been debates as to whether physical conditions are trainable or untrainable through training and coaching. Walker et al. (2011) claimed that physical abilities are trainable; for instance, muscular strength for movements of floorwork or static positions can be increased by dance training. However, the training effect of jumping ability seems to be controversial. Wyon et al. (2006) claimed that fitness training does not significantly improve jumping ability and physical factors of the human body, such as larger thighs and calves, which are significant predictors of high jump. On the other hand, Brown et al. (2007) proved the significant effect of plyometric training devised for improving the jumping ability of college students majoring in ballet or modern dance. Based on previous studies, the trainability of jumping ability should be more carefully considered.

**Maturity and Age Effect.** Age effect is another significant factor in developing ballet talent in terms of physical abilities. Since physical development is along with maturity according to age, physical strength or dexterity can be different, improved, or declined by age. For instance, muscle power and jump height are significantly improved in late adolescence due to maturity (Walker et al., 2011).
Gender Differences. Explosive jumping ability and leg muscle strength and power are more important for male classical ballet dancers because they mainly perform high jumping and intensive pirouettes (i.e., spinning with one leg) (Chua, 2019; Wyon et al., 2006). For female ballet dancers, balancing ability, muscle strength, and external rotation of feet or pelvis are more typically required due to the unique en pointe technique for ballerinas standing on the tip of their toes (Chua, 2019; Shah, 2021). Since the main movement techniques are different according to the performing role, gender differences in psychomotor skills should be considered in ballet talent.

Aptitude: Expressive Abilities for Ballet Talent

Exceptionality in aesthetic expression and creativity is another main competency for talent identification in ballet. Dancing, including classical ballet, is usually categorized as an artistic and symbolistic format for expressing thoughts and emotions. Quality of expressiveness through movement, creativity, and even improvisation is required to make an impressive dancing performance. For this reason, dancers are regarded as artists. Major TD theories also have regarded dance as an artistic area (see Table 1).

Baum et al. (1996) proposed that the following criteria should be applied to identify dance talent for elementary students: displaying pleasure, energy, intensity, full involvement in movements, communicating emotions and feelings by movements, creativity, expressing details, and subtlety in the movements. To borrow the word of an artistic director whom Chua (2019) interviewed in her case study, expressions in ballet are cognitive processes including thinking, understanding, and interpreting the movements, and how to attach emotions and meanings to their movements. Musicality and a precise sense of rhythm are also integral parts of ballet talent (Aujla et al., 2014; Côté-Laurence, 2000). Interpreting the movement and expressing emotions
according to the choreographer’s intention are important factors in improving the quality of ballet movements, especially at the professional and expert levels (Chua, 2019; Noice & Noice, 2006; Walker et al., 2010).

Despite the importance of artistic abilities for aesthetic dancing performance, expressive abilities and creativity are considered secondary factors that cannot be fully functioning without competencies of physical technique as a prerequisite (Chua, 2019; Noice & Noice, 2006). This is because the quality of expression in ballet is evaluated by the dancer’s excellence in strictly following the correctness of movement techniques at the professional level (Morris, 2003). To summarize, although expressive ability and creativity are important at the expertise level, preparedness and competencies in physical movements and techniques are considered more critical signs to manifest ballet talent at an early age.

**Aptitude: Social Abilities**

Learning and practicing ballet for young students usually occurs in group settings (Walker et al., 2010). At the professional level, making a piece of ballet performance is also basically group work based on collaboration among dancers, choreographers, art directors, and other supporting staff. Due to the collaborative feature of ballet, some scholars have claimed that social and interpersonal skills should be importantly considered to identify ballet talent and address the main factors to be encouraged for young students who plan to be professional ballet dancers (Chua, 2019; Walker et al., 2010).

At the same time, visible or invisible competitions are concurrent with the collaboration among ballet dancers. On the road to becoming a ballet dancer, lonely self-training for surviving in competitions and cooperative teamwork coincide. Borrowing Dai’s words, talent development is a “survival game” (Dai, 2019, p.189), and ballet is no exception. Hutchinson et al. (2013)
explained the real-world hierarchies of the survival system in the professional ballet field. According to Hutchinson et al., typical milestones of professional ballet dancers are to be promoted to higher positions within the ballet company or to transfer their affiliation to a more prestigious ballet company. In the hierarchical system, most professional ballet dancers start by becoming members of the *corps de ballet*, and they can be promoted to soloist and principal dancer positions later. For the level of the ballet company, there exists a hierarchy of local, regional, national, and international levels, depending on the reputation or size of the company. As this realistic occupational system of ballet shows, social abilities are advantageous for expert dancers to deal wisely with both collaborations and competitions. In the same vein, improving social skills should be encouraged for promising student ballet dancers to sustain themselves until arriving at an expert level.

*Dispositional Factors in Ballet Talent: Motivation, Commitment, and Opportunity Seeking*

Psychosocial skills dealing with emotions and feelings are also important factors for promising student ballet dancers. In ballet talent development, dispositions such as conscientiousness, optimism, and persistence keep one engaged in learning and training, or make one more adaptive to changing situations, and deal with mental stress, injuries for people in the psychomotor-related domains, and unexpected hardships and difficulties that might hinder the developing process, and even to improve the performance. According to Csikszentmihalyi et al.’s (1993) findings, gifted students in fine arts and athletics tend to have higher spontaneous intrinsic motivation in domain-specific tasks, compared to gifted students in music, math, and science. Strong motivation, task commitment with passion, perseverance, determination, deliberate practice, support seeking, and the experience of flow, all of them can significantly influence students and expert ballet dancers’ performance and endurance (Chua, 2014b, 2015;
Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2013; van Rossum, 2001; Walker et al., 2010, 2011, 2012).

As an integrated domain of art and athletes, ballet dancers usually have domain-specific stressors across mental (e.g., performance anxiety), physical health (e.g., injury, eating disorder), and even relational problems and feeling isolated (McEwen & Young, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2013). In a practical sense, dealing with these multiple aspects of stressors is important for talented people in the ballet field to survive and accomplish a successful career. In the developmental view, the process of a person’s effort to deal with mental and physical difficulties using their aptitude and dispositions can be seen as the MA (Dai, 2017, 2019).

Among the stressors, physical pain and injuries are common risks for dancers (Chua, 2014b; McEwen & Young, 2011; Noh et al., 2003; Noh & Morris, 2004; Ramkumar et al., 2016). An expert ballet dancer who participated in a case study said, “I’ve been lucky enough to stay healthy” (Chua, 2014b, p. 257). Physical stressors for ballet dancers can bring negative emotions such as loss, shame, and anxiety (McEwen & Young, 2011). Dispositional factors and coping strategies that help manage negative feelings and emotions are known as even more effective in dealing with physical stressors such as injuries. For example, Noh and Morris (2004) found that improving coping skills to deal with pressure or adversity is associated with reduced injuries. In this sense, Baum et al. (1996) claimed that motivational factors, specifically the ability to focus and persevere, should be considered when identifying potential talent in dance for elementary students. In the real-world educational context, high motivation or task commitment has been used as mandatory identification criteria to select gifted students in ballet in South Korea (Lee, 2013; Won, 2013).
Environmental Factors that Influence Talent Development in Ballet

All external factors, including family, peers, teachers, home, school, and society and culture the talented person belongs to, are indispensable in the discussion of developmental processes not only in talent development but also in human development in general. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) used the term *opportunity structure* to refer to the environments to scaffold an individual’s talent and fostering the opportunity structure in the immediate interactive setting (e.g., typically home and family) is significantly related to discovering talent potential, and providing support on time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Papierno et al., 2005). In this section, I will review the relevant studies of environmental factors that influence ballet talent in terms of family and home, peer relationships, teachers and educational settings, and socio-cultural context.

Parents and Home Environment

In a qualitative study by Nelson (2001), the term, *stage mothers*, was used to describe the mothers who dedicated themselves to their children’s ballet training. Hamera (2007) also used this term to describe a group of mothers of children training at a ballet studio in California. Hamera has described the *stage parents* in ballet as “generally mothers, who have professional ballet ambitions for their girls whether their daughters share these ambitions, or share them with the same intensity, or not” (p.87). As this example of stage parent shows, the talented child-parent’s relationships are so immediate, direct, close, and connected that the parents’ ambitions and purpose are projected to the child’s talent development trajectory. It is widely known that parents’ own educational or occupational background, hobbies, or leisure can implicitly build positive environments for stimulating their child’s exceptional potential, and providing playful
experiences and opportunities as an early-stage mentor are critical factors in talent development (Bloom, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Parent’s role for talented children in the ballet field is important in all-round aspects: discovering, recognizing, and unfolding the child’s potential and taking care of their child comprehensively in terms of emotional and motivational, functional, and material support (Aujla et al., 2014; Chua, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Walker et al., 2011). For younger students, the parental effect is more powerful and comprehensive to have appropriate learning opportunities and keep them motivated (Bloom, 1985). For emotional and motivational support, parents are guiding their young children to choose a career in ballet and not to lose motivation and confidence to achieve it (Aujla et al., 2014; Chua, 2015). Realistically, parents dedicate their time to giving a ride their young children to ballet training and participating in relevant events (Aujla et al., 2014). They support their children to get ballet education and training by paying tuition, tutoring, room and board, and even stage costumes (Chua, 2015; Hamera, 2007; Sanchez et al., 2013), even though ballet is a usually high-cost field to educate.

However, as Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) have pointed out, not all parental and home environments are supportive. Complexity exists in the interaction between talented individuals and home environments. There are cases in which parents do not or cannot afford to provide money or time, or some parents have a negative perspective on doing ballet as a professional job (Sanchez et al., 2013). Thus, parents and home environments should be considered based on the complexities and diversity.

**Peer Relationships: Cooperation and Competition**

Friendship, fellowship, and competition coexist in the peer relationship for young and promising student dancers (Aujla et al., 2014; Chua, 2015). Bloom (1985) claimed that peer
relationships started to significantly influence a student's talent development from the second phase of middle years in general, and this finding is also applicable to the dance field (van Rossum, 2001). Once a person starts intense ballet training or enters a specialized dance school, the person begins to spend most of the time with their peers, learning and training together with the same goal of being a ballet dancer. Specifically, peer relationships among teenagers significantly affect motivation and task commitment (Aujla et al., 2014; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Patrick et al., 1999). Positive friendship and collaboration can be beneficial and supportive to their dance career (Chua, 2014b; Sanchez et al., 2013), or poor quality of peer relationships can cause drop out of dance schooling (Walker et al., 2012). For promising ballet students, peer relationship is an important dimension in their talent development in terms of not only cooperation but also limited social networking and competition (Chua, 2014b; Hutchinson et al., 2013) as McEwen and Young (2011) described that professional ballet dancers’ world is “ultra-competitive atmosphere” (p. 156).

*Teachers and Learning Experiences*

Teachers are the gatekeepers who discover young students’ talent potential and introduce them to the field, and at the same time, serve as mentors for them (Chua, 2014b, 2016). These roles of teachers are important because classical ballet is hard to learn by self-taught, and the skill acquisition requires accurate descriptions and explanations about the body movements and skills needed (Chua, 2014b; Ureña, 2004). It is well known that ballet training is highly intensive due to the nature of ballet movements and techniques that require perfectionism physically and aesthetically. Due to the rigorous and perfectionist nature of ballet training, the teaching styles in this field are typically characterized by authoritarian, critical, and demanding attitudes (McEwen & Young, 2011; Ureña, 2004; van Rossum, 2004) and are less tolerant of mistakes (Aujla et al.,
It is important that teachers supervise the practice and training so that students do not develop “bad habits” (Ureña, 2004, p. 59). Other than explicit skills and knowledge, tacit knowledge about practice and the culture of how to deal with auditions, competitions, and performance, should be conveyed by experts (Chua, 2014b). Hutchinson et al. (2013) also argued that ballet is a field where expert adults’ instruction is necessary due to its technical complexity and precision.

In addition to instructing skills and knowledge, ballet teachers influence students’ motivation, self-efficacy, feelings, and emotions. Teachers provide social support by encouraging students’ motivation and improving self-efficacy and confidence (Aujla et al., 2014; Chua, 2016; Ureña, 2004; van Rossum, 2004). Teachers’ roles are not limited to the individual level of improving skills or motivation. It is also important for them to create a learning climate for two major values: cooperation and competition for groups of ballet students (Aujla et al., 2014; van Rossum, 2004). McEwen and Young (2011) described that expert instructors can even “make or break” a student ballet dancer’s promising career (p. 160). This remark explains why the teacher-student relationship in the ballet field is a close, intense, and significant one, and why there exist tensions between praise and punishment, support and conflict with the relationship.

**Social and Cultural Factors**

Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) defined talent as a *social construction*. One precondition for environments to encourage talent development is that the domains and fields should be introduced as part of the *real world* where the individual is living everyday life first. Recognizing the meaning and value of the talent domain, institutional and educational settings for the relevant fields should be established in society in order to attract many talented people, allow them to seek and pick a niche in ballet, and provide the opportunity to develop their unique
skill set in ballet. In this sense, Dai (2017) emphasized the important role of culture as the broad foundation to provide tools and opportunities for all children to develop their talent.

Cross-cultural studies of talented students in ballet empirically showed that socio-cultural context is another significant layer of talent development (Chua, 2014b; Hutchinson et al., 2013). These studies found that there are differences in multiple environmental systems depending on the culture: history, social value, educational policy for ballet education in the specific culture, types of educational settings, the purpose of ballet education, mobility to access ballet education, and types of family support. Hutchinson et al. (2013) compared Russia, Mexico, and American ballet dancers. According to their findings, while American and Mexican ballet dancers in the study showed the tendency to start their ballet career in the local ballet school and then move to more advanced, prestigious ballet institutions around the age of 15, Russian dancers tend to leave their families at a relatively younger age, around 12, to go to elite ballet schools. In terms of environmental support, while family functions as the main social and economic resource for Mexican and American dancers, Russian dancers are educated by government grants and subsidies.

Since ballet is rooted in Western culture, history, and social values, the educational environments for ballet education can be considered to have developed within Eurocentric socio-cultural contexts. Due to the historical and cultural context of ballet talent, there is a lack of in-depth research on ballet education, particularly focused on giftedness and talent development. As one case study about the ballet gifted education in non-Eurocentric and non-Western culture, Chua (2014b) introduced a Singaporean case study of a gifted education program in ballet. However, the case in Singapore was to support talented students in ballet to study abroad rather than the indigenous educational system or culture in Singapore. In her study, Chua (2014b)
mentioned that Singapore has a relatively short history of ballet as a field with a limited number of ballet companies. She raised questions about whether Singapore culture would be a supportive environment for ballet dancers due to the cultural value of emphasizing academic rather than artistic talent (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011).

In this vein, the history of ballet and the cultural context of ballet education in Korea need to be examined because this study aims to explore the ballet talent development of Korean students. The first time ballet was introduced to Korea as one type of dance was in 1928 (Hong, 2020), which means that ballet has been socially constructed and recognized as one talent domain since then. In terms of the modern educational school system, high schools specialized in ballet education started with Seoul Arts High School in 1957, and the first higher education institute for teaching ballet began with the establishment of the Department of Dance in Ewha Womans [sic] University in 1963 (Hong, 2020). One complicated issue in ballet education is whether to deal with ballet curriculum as an art or physical education. This debate is attributed to the policy-wise categorization of school subjects, which states that dance education for all students is not treated as an independent curriculum in the general K-12 education curriculum (Chun & Chung, 2020; Hong, 2020). Systematic dance education for ballet as an independent field is currently being conducted only in specialized middle or high art schools or at the collegiate level. In the scope of gifted education in Korea, ballet talent is identified and educated under dance giftedness and talent as the independent domain of giftedness (Lee, 2013; Won, 2013). National gifted education policy and government institutes have a central role for artistically gifted students in the current Korean educational context (Cho & Suh, 2016; Lee et al., 2016). Nonetheless, in the real world, the opportunity and social support in the public sector are still limited to support ballet-gifted students from low economic resources, and becoming a
ballet dancer is still a high-cost career pathway. In the present study, these cultural and historical factors will be considered as we explore how to discover and encourage ballet talent for young students.

To summarize, previous studies and comprehensive literature review showed that multiple factors should be investigated and discussed, encompassing individual aptitude and competencies, dispositional factors, parents and home, teachers and education, and social and cultural background related to their talent development paths and trajectories in order to discuss talent development in ballet as a dynamic process of a person’s life. Based on this assumption, this study will explore how talented young students in ballet discover and realize their potential, keep moving toward a higher level, deal with hardship, and survive in the ballet field in Korean culture.
Chapter III: Methodology

This study aims to find reasonable explanations for the six research questions raised in Chapter I as a way to investigate how an artistically talented person dynamically interacts with multiple layers of environments to shape a unique talent development (TD) trajectory and what similarities and differences of these trajectories are among the people who pursue the excellences in the same domain. The six questions are stated as follows: (a) What kinds of profiles do talented students in ballet commonly have in terms of characteristic aptitude and disposition for ballet talent potential? (b) How have the students sustained rigorous training and psychosocial pressure at different junctures in their ballet talent development? (c) What roles do family and home environments play in building the momentum of individual talent development in ballet? (d) What roles do educational experiences, including schooling or coaching, play in the talent development in ballet and at what developmental phases? (e) How do peer relationships play a role in their talent development in ballet, and how the peer relationships interact with other contextual factors? (f) How do socio-cultural factors play a role in individual talent development in ballet, and in what way or when do they become crucial?

These six questions have been established to find empirical evidence of dynamics and complexity occurring in the interactions, processes, and changes of an individual’s TD trajectory. The interactions between a person and multiple layers of environments are unique and changeable according to temporal and socio-cultural factors within the person’s life. Therefore, it is hard to be reduced to simple sets of rules and principles. Due to the complex and variable nature of TD, the present study needs to look deeply into each participant’s whole life rather than disassemble the life into pieces of variables, as dictated by a more systems approach (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2019, 2021). Also, since the research questions of the present
study address not only the uniqueness of individuals but also shared aspects of TD within a specific domain, the method should be helpful in discovering the uniqueness and commonness concurrently. Based on these focal points, the present study used qualitative phenomenological research based on retrospective semi-structured interviews to investigate the lives of each participant in a holistic manner rather than quantitative analyses that average the observations out and quantify the trends.

**Qualitative Research Design**

The learning and developmental experiences in a specific talent domain vary, depending on the person’s endogenous and exogenous properties in complex interaction. Thus, quantitative research sometimes adopts a nomothetic assumption by assuming everyone is operating by the same set of rules and thus fails to develop a sympathetic understanding of the individual’s authentic lived experiences as part of a person-specific TD trajectory. On the other hand, the qualitative research design takes an idiographic approach of trying to capture the unique pattern of how people construct their life experiences and become the persons they are and provide richer information about phenomena in our unsegmented ongoing lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; van Manen, 1990). Only after we build these individuals’ life trajectories can we aggregate them to gain insights into commonalities and differences in developmental patterns. This study used phenomenology qualitative study as a person-centered methodological approach that analyzes person-specific cases. This methodology is especially advantageous in talent development research, focusing on individual and environmental dynamics and interactions (Dai, 2019; Magnusson, 2001).

It is not enough to simply use the traditional psychometric scoring system of the segmented factors of body movements to understand the integrated talent with physical
movements and artistic expressions in ballet talent. Instead, seeing and reflecting on the dancers’ experiences may allow us to find how they have trained and improved their skills, how they have encountered and dealt with opportunities and challenges, and what meaning they have put in every moment of the developmental process in a way to construct their identity as ballet dancers. Regarding the evaluation and identification of talent, ballet fundamentally relies on intuitive and qualitative appraisals since the aesthetic and expressive aspects of excellence in ballet cannot be accurately quantified and measured. The behaviors and situations in the performances should be narrated and described by the ballet dancers themselves as the agents of the experiences. Therefore, a reflective qualitative approach provides more accurate and in-depth information about the subject’s developmental trajectory in ballet. For these reasons, the present study used qualitative phenomenological research to investigate the participants’ ballet-related experiences.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenological research was used to understand the main phenomena of the present study among various types of qualitative research approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the following five approaches are the most common types of qualitative research in human sciences: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, and case study research. Among the five approaches, I decided to use the phenomenological approach to deal with the six research questions because the present study should simultaneously address the individual’s life and the meaning of shared and unique experiences of ballet-talented young people. The purposes and questions of the present study do not focus on exploring an individual level of life history (e.g., narrative research) nor diagnosing the specific cases (e.g., case study). Although the present study emphasizes the socio-cultural influences on TD, finding culturally
specific patterns (e.g., ethnography) is not a focal point of the present study. Since the present study is based on existing TD theories (i.e., ECT and ecological psychology), it does not take the grounded theory research approach. As a result of comparing the purposes and types of inquiries in each of the five approaches in qualitative research, I selected phenomenological research as the most suitable approach for the current study.

Phenomenological research is the most appropriate for discovering the commonalities and investigating the essence of the participants’ shared experiences (Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dancing requires embodied muscle knowledge and movement skills. Acquiring knowledge and skills and executing the dance movements on stage are all *lived experiences* by letting the person be the main interpreter of his or her life in specific situations, times, and contexts. The experiences of the participants while learning and training in ballet and growing up as dancers imply several common developmental *phenomena*, which will be the main analytic units of the present study.

**Philosophical Framework of Phenomenology.** Qualitative research should be based on a philosophical conceptual framework to interpret phenomena and experiences as a comprehensive dataset (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2020). The present study, in particular, takes hermeneutic phenomenology as a philosophical framework to analyze and interpret the data. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researchers’ thoughts and theoretical framework are critical to understanding and interpreting the participants’ lived experiences, such as taking interpretive *lenses* between the position of the researcher and the subjects of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020).

Phenomenological research, as one qualitative methodology, originated from *phenomenology* as a philosophy. Hence, the roots of this approach should be discussed first
because differences in viewing the phenomena have influenced different methodological approaches in psychology and education research. Phenomenology is originally a stream of philosophical thoughts founded by Edmund Husserl and expanded by Martin Heidegger and Han-Georg Gadamer (Neubauer et al., 2019; Peoples, 2020). Other people besides the two people mentioned above also develop several different streams in phenomenology philosophy, such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. However, in the fields of psychology or education research, the following two philosophical streams have a large influence on the methodological approach: (a) Husserl’s transcendental or descriptive phenomenology and (b) Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology (Peoples, 2020).

The main differences between transcendental or descriptive phenomenological research and hermeneutic phenomenology are in the strictness of structure and the role of the researcher. For example, Husserlian transcendental phenomenology is more structured; however, hermeneutic phenomenology can be applied with less structure to pedagogical research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990). Regarding the researcher’s role, transcendental phenomenology requires researchers to maintain an objective stance in understanding the participants’ experiences as observers. In contrast, Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology claims that it is difficult for the researcher to observe the phenomena objectively, and the interpretation occurs through the researchers’ theoretical lenses (Peoples, 2020). In this sense, hermeneutic phenomenological research is more appropriate to the present study since the present study is based on the theoretical lenses of TD theories (i.e., Evolving Complexity Theory, ecological psychology) in analyzing phenomena. For these reasons, I opt to apply the hermeneutic phenomenological approach that accepts the researcher’s interpretive lenses to the phenomena.
Sample Selection Criteria and Recruiting

Context of the Target Population

According to Educational Statistics of South Korea (Ministry of Education & Korean Educational Development Institute, 2021), approximately 50 college-level higher education institutes are currently operating dance departments. It is estimated that about 4,700 students enroll in dance schools specializing in ballet, contemporary dance, Korean traditional dance, and other dance genres. To select the universities with a ballet major, I reviewed the websites of the 52 schools that have dance departments in South Korea. As a result, it was found that 25 universities have a ballet major under the dance department. Geographically, 15 universities featuring ballet majors are located in metropolitan areas, including Seoul, the capital of South Korea, and Gyeonggi-do, one of the largest provinces adjacent to Seoul. Out of 25, the remaining ten universities are spreading across nine cities in South Korea. Among the schools, only a small number of universities are known for their top-ranked ballet programs in terms of students’ and alumni’s achievement, school history, and overall reputation. In South Korea, the prestigious universities are usually located in Seoul and the capital areas. Some Korean students attend renowned international ballet schools abroad, such as in Russia, Europe (e.g., Monaco, Germany, Belgium), or the U.S. and Canada. When students studying abroad outside South Korea are considered the Korean ballet population, significantly more students are seriously pursuing ballet careers.

Sampling Strategy

Due to the nature of the qualitative study, this study took a nonprobability sampling approach. Specifically, purposeful sampling was applied. According to Merriam and Tisdell
(2015), “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p.96). To recruit participants, this study used purposeful sampling in that I contacted the faculty members affiliated with the selected ten universities and asked for recommendations of the qualified students and parents of participants based on the given selection criteria.

Selection Criteria and Descriptions of Targeted Participants

For the present study, undergraduate students and their parents were recruited to interview the students about their experiences in talent developmental trajectory from childhood to the present. For the selectivity of talented students in ballet, the present study selected ten universities with prestigious ballet majors to guarantee their potential and exceptionality if the students received admission to the program. The ten universities were selected based on the reputations and recommendations from the ballet instructors and students attended the unstructured preliminary interview and the pilot studies. Regarding the gender ratio of participants, the present study included both female and male students, even though ballet is traditionally a female-dominated field (Hamera, 2007). In South Korea, college-level ballet programs typically have an enrollment ratio where females constitute over 80% of the total students attending dance schools (Ministry of Education & Korean Educational Development Institute, 2021). Due to the nature of ballet majors as a female-dominated field, this study assumed that female students would be recruited more than male students.

Students. Undergraduate students attending top-ranked ballet programs in ten universities in South Korea were recruited. The selected ten universities were Chung-Ang University, Ewha Womans [sic] University, Hanyang University, Kookmin University, Korea National University of Arts, Kyung Hee University, Sejong University, Sookmyung Women’s
University, Sungkyunkwan University, Sungshin Women’s University, in alphabetical order. Participants’ affiliations were limited to the above ten universities located in South Korea because one of the main research questions of the present study is to investigate culture-specific environmental influences on the characteristics of talent developmental trajectories. To ensure the excellence and competence of ballet skills, students were recommended by faculty in ten schools with top-ranked ballet programs. I contacted professors and instructors teaching and mentoring the students in the selected ten universities by email or social networking service account that is publicly opened first. The contact with the faculty members and recruitment were conducted from May 2022 after the IRB committee approved this project.

**Parents.** Students’ parents or caregivers were recruited as interview dyads and informants to provide information about the student’s childhood. Since ballet talent is usually discovered and developed at a very young age, students interested in this field often begin their professional training in kindergarten or elementary school (Hutchinson et al., 2013; Ureña, 2004). Given this tendency, the students’ own recollection of their initial phase of starting ballet by the students themselves may not be accurate. Parents can provide more accurate information about how their children’s talent potentials were recognized at an early age, as there is a possibility that the college student may not remember or may be ambiguous in recalling episodes of displaying subtle indications of their potential in ballet talent or training in their early childhood. The eligibility of parent participants was not limited to parents considering diverse family types. Grandparents or caregivers were broadly considered as long as the person had cared for the students in their everyday routine and supported them in learning and training ballet since childhood.
Recruiting Participants

The informed consent statements, all interview protocols, and research procedures were reviewed by a local education expert in Korea who holds a Ph.D. in education and is affiliated with the Korean Educational Development Institute to ensure that this study design and recruitment plan would not be harmful to the local Korean context. The research plan with the required documents related to the ethical considerations in human subject research was thoroughly prepared and reviewed in advance. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University at Albany, State University of New York, approved this dissertation study on May 6, 2022. After all the above processes, the recruitment of participants was undertaken.

The initial recruitment process continued from May 2022 to February 2023 until I had collected interviews with at least 20 student participants. As of February 15, 20 students participated, but the parents of five students declined to participate. The recruitment period was extended until the end of August 2023 in order to gather as rich descriptions as possible of the experiences of the talented students in ballet.

As the first step of recruiting, I emailed faculty members in the ten universities through email information posted on their official websites, with the attached recruitment letter. Since most ballet majors in the targeted universities operate as sub-majors under an integrated program that includes traditional Korean dance and modern dance, only one or two faculty members per school or instructors are listed on the website. In the case of no responses for the first email, I contacted them with a few more rounds of repeated emails, phone calls, or messenger applications through personal networking. As a result, faculty members at the five universities responded and agreed to recommend eligible students. Of the five schools, one is a national art
conservatory that offers only art majors, and the other four are private comprehensive universities that offer multiple majors.

The recommendation process followed two tracks: (1) direct faculty recommendation and (2) indirect recommendation based on the faculty member’s networking or snowball sampling from student to student under the faculty member’s permission. For example, some faculty members introduced me to other faculty members who could easily contact eligible undergraduate students and parents, such as teaching assistants or student representatives. Financial incentives were provided for the participants who completed the interviews. The participant incentives and related processing costs for this dissertation project were funded by the University at Albany Dissertation Research Fellowship Award, 2023-2024.

Participants

In the recruiting process, initially, 22 students were recommended by the faculty members, and they willingly expressed their interest in participating in this study. However, during the process of obtaining informed consent with a detailed interview protocol, two students and five parents ultimately decided not to participate. Finally, a total of 15 pairs of 20 students and 14 mothers participated in the full data collection, which included background information questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Out of the 15 pairs, two students were siblings, and their mother interviewed about her two daughters’ childhood and learning experiences in one interview.

There is no absolute rule for sample size in research using phenomenological methods, but it is recommended that researchers collect data to the point of saturation or redundancy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 101). The point of saturation is when new or unique insights can no longer be drawn from the same experiences of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Peoples
(2020) has recommended eight to 15 participants for phenomenological research. Terry and Hayfield (2021) mentioned that six to 10 participants might be sufficient when conducting interviews and thematic analysis if the data is thick enough to identify the pattern of meanings. As an example of an empirical qualitative study that used a relatively large sample size with a research design similar to the current study, Hayfield et al. (2019) collected interviews from 23 participants. Referring to the relevant literature (Hayfield et al., 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Peoples, 2020; Terry & Hayfield, 2021), the minimum sample size for the present study was set at 20 students to ensure a saturation point of common lived experiences. As the present study collected interviews from pairs of students and parents, the final target number of participants was initially set at 40, including 20 students and 20 parents.

**Instruments**

According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological research is to “borrow other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences” (p. 62), and collecting data corresponds to gathering their experiences. Conducting in-depth interviews with multiple people is the most common method to gather the experiences of participants in phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990). Based on this perspective, the present study used in-depth retrospective semi-structured interviews as the main method to gather a narrative format of participants’ experiences.

**Retrospective Questions About Participants’ Past Experience**

The interview questions of the present study were designed based on a retrospective approach. According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological reflection is “not introspective but retrospective” (p. 10) because the researcher reflects the temporal experiences the participants
already lived once. In previous research on the environmental factors influencing exceptional abilities, the retrospective approach has been frequently used to collect the childhood experiences of gifted and talented people or experts (e.g., Côté et al., 2005; Dai et al., 2015; Jen & Moon, 2015; Law et al., 2007; Sosniak, 2006). As a seminal research project, the Development of Talent Research Project by Benjamin Bloom (1985), the retrospective semi-structured interview method contributed to finding how to recognize young children’s talent potential in childhood and what factors influenced their TD. Similarly, the purpose of the present study is to collect rich data on talent development trajectory from an early age. Based on the considerations and reviews of the previous studies and the essential benefits of these types of interviews, I chose the retrospective semi-structured interviews.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are more structured than informal and unstructured interviews, but more flexible than highly structured ones. Semi-structured interviews do not fix the wording or order of questions. The interviewer can explore new leads and ask follow-up questions flexibly according to each participant’s unique experience (Ahlin, 2019; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; McGrath et al., 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Semi-structured interviews have the strength of gathering more specific information about the research aims by allowing for leading the interviewing situations and questions in a more flexible manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

For the present study, the protocol to guide the semi-structured interviews was previously designed with guiding scripts so that the interviewer could effectively facilitate the interviewees’ responses (see Appendices B1 and D1). All questions were basically in an open-ended format to allow flexibility for each participant’s unique life experiences. The interview protocol addressed
the participants’ experiences from childhood to their current college lives, focusing on ballet training and performances, individual life events, relationships with family, teachers, and peers, and their perceptions of specializing in ballet in the Korean socio-cultural context.

**Development of Interview Protocols**

Even with semi-structured interviews, which allow for flexibility in question wordings or sequences, it is still important to prepare and use a guiding script for thematically structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Moreover, developing main guided questions and planning the interview protocol should be systematically prepared in order to effectively obtain valid data according to the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). For this purpose, the present study was preceded by devising and developing the focal guided questions and the interview protocol. In developing the in-depth interview protocol for this study, the following aspects were considered: (a) a retrospective approach, (b) a semi-structured format, and (c) preliminary research to understand the cultural context of the target participants. These considerations were incorporated into the development process as follows.

First, the candidate questions for the background information questionnaire and in-depth interviews were newly devised according to the research questions and potential themes based on the extensive literature review. The questions were initially developed in both English and Korean, as the PI of the present study is bilingual in both languages. Second, to validate the initial questions, the preliminary unstructured interviews with a local ballet instructor in South Korea to find more culturally appropriate context and information to revise the candidate questions. Third, the revised questions and background information questionnaire were additionally reviewed by another local ballet instructor to ensure greater credibility. Fourth, pilot studies were conducted with two college students who met the same eligibility criteria as the
participants in this study. Fifth, the final revised protocol was prepared in both English and Korean after the back-translation between the two languages.

**Developing and Validating Interview Protocol**

**Preliminary Study.** Unstructured exploratory interviews are useful for gaining sufficient knowledge of current phenomena and formulating interview questions in the preliminary or early stages of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For this purpose, an unstructured interview was informally conducted to explore the current situation and issues of ballet education in micro-level contexts in South Korea and gather practical information to generate culturally appropriate specific questions.

The unstructured interviews were conducted with a ballet instructor who runs her own private dance studio in South Korea. She danced ballet at a prestigious art-specialized middle school in Seoul and switched to a modern dance major after arts-specialized high school. She also graduated with a dance major from one of the ten universities selected for the present project. Her educational history met the criteria of the targeted population of the present study.

The interview was a conversation-like format without pre-arranged questions with the instructor for 75 minutes via Zoom on June 15, 2021. In the interview, the instructor provided the current phenomena regarding ballet education in Korean contexts, such as when and how young children usually start ballet, what types of support Korean parents usually provide for their ballet-talented children, how teachers usually discover the ballet talent potential, how students majoring in ballet and contemporary dance prepare the college exam, and examples of career the ballet major college students choose after graduation. Based on the preliminary unstructured exploratory interview, the English version of the initial interview protocol and the focal guided questions for the semi-structured interviews were formulated. The initial questions
were translated and back-translated with another bilingual Korean-English doctoral student majoring in Educational Psychology. Another Korean ballet instructor additionally reviewed the translated questions in Korean to ensure that the Korean wording of the questions was culturally acceptable and easy for potential participants to understand within the context of the ballet domain and the local Korean cultural context.

**Pilot Study.** The next step was to conduct a pilot study to improve the validity of the instruments and the practicality of the planned procedure, such as estimating the time duration for each interview. Even with semi-structured interviews in qualitative methodology, it is recommended to conduct pilot studies. Piloting the planned interview protocol with participants is useful for pre-evaluating the feasibility and practicality in terms of how the designed interview protocol (e.g., interview schedule and focal guided questions) would work in reality, especially in terms of time durations of the semi-structured interview (Kim, 2011; van Teijlingen & Hundly, 2001), clarity of the questions for participants, and evaluating the process would be appropriate to motivate potential participants at attending the study before conducting the main study (Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010; Malmqvist et al., 2019).

The pilot study was necessary for the present study to check possible technical issues in communicating via Zoom in advance and to prepare contingency plans. It also aimed to pre-evaluate whether there would be any harm or difficulties for potential participants in reading and understanding the informed consent, demographic and background questionnaires, and every expected situation in the interview sessions.

To validate the interview protocol through a pilot study, I recruited two students and one parent who were equivalently qualified in the selection criteria of the targeted population based on a ballet instructor’s recommendation. The pilot interviews were conducted over Zoom from
March 4 to 22, 2022. The participants in the pilot study were excluded from the main sample group due to the possibility of losing the liveliness of their responses and their personal interest in this study by repeating the process (Ismail et al., 2018).

As a result of the pilot study, the approximate time duration for each process was estimated to be three hours for students and 90 minutes for parents to complete the questionnaire and interview. Words or expressions in the relevant documents (i.e., consents or questions) were revised according to the pilot studies. The stability of the Zoom interviews was also confirmed. However, I thoroughly prepared the possible devices and equipment to deal with online connectivity issues, such as extra connecting devices such as a tablet computer or smartphone, as a contingency plan.

**Retrospective In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviewing**

Through the validation procedure to develop the final instruments for this study, the final versions of (a) a demographic and background information questionnaire and (b) an interview protocol including focal questions were devised (see Appendices A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, D1, and D2). First, the background information questionnaire was provided to the participants to complete before the main interview protocol (see Appendices A1, A2, C1, and C2). Second, the main interview was conducted according to the guided focal interview questions (see Appendices B1, B2, D1, and D2).

The first research question asked about the experiences of how their potential was recognized and what kinds of abilities represent aptitude and disposition that predicted a high level of performance in ballet in childhood and adolescence. In addition, the experiences about commitment and engagement for the ballet were included in the questions to see the participants’ ballet-specific motivation. The second research question asked about experiences in challenging
and difficult situations that aroused psychological pressure or negative emotions while doing the training and competitions that are unavoidable for student ballet dancers. The third research question was about family and home environments, and relevant sub-questions were asked to both students and parents. The sub-questions were devised to collect information about the several types of family supports (e.g., time and effort, financial, emotional, or other aspects), parental or familial backgrounds that might influence the student’s ballet-related interest, implicit or explicit knowledge, and experiences, possible inherited factors such as physical traits, habits or routines, or overall life and educational perspectives. The fourth research question addressed the experiences of learning and training in the ballet studio, school, or any types of institutions that the participants have attended, and their relationships with coaches, teachers, or instructors. The fifth research question addressed how peer relationships affect their TD, and the sub-questions asked about cooperation and tensions with peers in learning ballet. The sixth research question focused on experiences that made the participants contemplate the limitations and benefits of doing ballet in the Korean cultural context. The script for guiding interviews included how the educational system, policies, and infrastructure supported the development of ballet expertise have worked to support developing ballet expertise, either directly or indirectly, for the participants (see Appendix B1). Since the interviews were conducted across the years 2022 and 2023, while the pandemic was still ongoing, questions about their ballet-related experiences during the pandemic were asked to explore the temporal aspect of the social context.
Data Collection

Background Information Questionnaire

All parents and students completed a written format of the demographic and background information questionnaire before the oral interview. The questionnaire was developed for use in separate interviews with parents and students, according to the different specific purposes of each interview. The questionnaire for the student is shown in Appendix A1, and the one for the parents is shown in Appendix C1. The items in the questionnaire were devised to collect basic demographic information about the participants and also for the purpose of triangulation. It also practically helped the researcher guide the protocol smoothly and effectively, based on the rich information about the participants during the interviews.

In-Depth Interviews

All interview schedules were arranged and conducted fully online via Zoom, as the COVID-19 travel restrictions from the U.S. and South Korea were still in effect at the time of the data collection. To schedule the interview dates and times, sign-up sheets were provided to the participants in the order in which they agreed to participate, allowing them to choose their preferred date. The first interview began on July 17, 2022, with the first recruited student, and the collection of interviews with 34 individuals was completed on February 15, 2023, with the last interview with the 20th recruited student.

As pre-checked in the pilot study, it took approximately three hours for an interview with the student and 90 minutes for an interview with a parent, including the duration to complete the background information questionnaire. To accommodate participants’ unexpected situations or fatigues, a break time and splitting interview schedules were allowed to choose if they needed it.
I prioritized participants’ preferences, safety, and well-being in terms of ethics in research and sincerely explained it to each participant in every interview.

All interviews were conducted in Korean, and all documents in the data collection were translated from English to Korean for the participants’ convenience. In every interview, the informed consent was double confirmed in written form, and the interviewer read the content aloud before beginning the interview. Although the participants had the option to choose between interview recording or note-taking by hand, all interviewees gave permission to record the interview using the Zoom recording function.

Additional Materials to Prove the Student’s Achievement

In the phenomenological methodology, multiple sources of information about the participants’ experiences can be used in addition to interview data, such as any records of behavior observation, biography, diaries, journals, logs, literary sources (e.g., poetry or novels), and even multiple types of art objects could be the additional data (van Manen, 1990). The additional data complements the interview data to make it richer, thicker, and more credible in terms of triangulation of qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260; Denzin, 2012; Guba, 1981; Leung, 2015).

Considering the benefits of additional data, the present study asked participants to provide any materials that can demonstrate their milestones in ballet performance and achievement (e.g., awards, personal training journals, photos, videos, pamphlets, or brochures of the ballet work in which they were cast) as optional data. All student participants had additional materials to prove their ballet achievement. Types of collected materials were the photos and audiovisual materials that recorded their ballet performances on the stage: the official ballet posters and pamphlets that showed their faces and names, or casting roles, recordings of
competition performances, photographs of performing moments on the stage, YouTube videos of their performances.

**Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Study**

Since the subjectivity of qualitative study is an unavoidable limitation, it is important to evaluate trustworthiness to verify the collected information and reflections by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Judging the trustworthiness of a qualitative study has a similar purpose to evaluating validity and reliability in the quantitative methods. Guba and Lincoln (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) raised credibility issues in qualitative analyses, as people often perceive qualitative methodologies as less scientific than quantitative methodologies, particularly in terms of rigor in validity and reliability. To ensure the validity and reliability of research with naturalistic inquiries, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using terminologies that represent the trustworthiness of qualitative studies as (a) credibility (internal validity), (b) transferability (external validity), (c) dependability (reliability) and (d) confirmability (objectivity) in qualitative studies (corresponding terms in the qualitative study are presented in parentheses). They suggested using prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing or peer review, triangulation, collecting referential adequacy materials, and member checks for credibility. Furthermore, they recommended collecting thick descriptive data and using theoretical and purposive sampling for transferability, and an audit trail for dependability and confirmability in terms of trustworthiness.

According to the above recommendations, the present study used multiple validating strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research. Specifically, peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checks were used for credibility, corresponding to internal validity in the quantitative approach. First, thick descriptive
data were produced through in-depth interviews to ensure transferability, corresponding to the external validity of the quantitative study. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word into written format. Detailed descriptions of the interview situations, such as the participant’s hesitation or laughing, were also included in the transcripts to develop the thick descriptions. To ensure dependability, corresponding to the reliability of the quantitative study, the audit trail was conducted with a peer researcher with experience in qualitative studies in the social science field. The audit trail was also helpful in assuring confirmability and increasing objectivity in the qualitative studies.

Since all participants used only Korean as the language for the interview, the translation and back-translation processes were necessary to ensure the credibility and transferability of the interview protocol and additional data collection process. Not only were the interview results translated, but also all the instruments and documents (i.e., interview protocol and demographic background questionnaire, informed consent, receipt of participation incentives) underwent a thorough translation process, including back-translations, in advance. Since the three graduate students attended the peer debriefing, review, and audit trail to validate the trustworthiness of this study, the above validating processes were partially conducted simultaneously with the translation process. In the final step of peer debriefing, a native English speaker reviewed the extracted interview descriptions to ensure that the meaning of the translated interviews can be naturally conveyed to English language readers. The reviewer was a graduate student majoring in educational psychology, with a background in specializing in ballet.

**Credibility: Triangulation, Member-Checking, Peer Debriefing**

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is a strategy to assess the internal validity of a qualitative study by corroborating evidence of the researcher’s reflection with multiple information sources,
different investigators, or different theories or methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260; Denzin, 2012; Guba, 1981; Leung, 2015). Many qualitative studies use triangulation in terms of the multiplicity of information sources and analyzing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the present study, the triangulation aspect of qualitative research was systematically considered from the early stage of the research design. First, in terms of multiple sources of information, this study collected the students’ ballet experiences from the students themselves and their parents as well. This parent-student dyad interview setting cross-checked the students’ possibly faint and vague childhood memories of starting ballet education and other experiences. Second, in terms of multiple methods of data collection, the present study conducted the written format of a background information questionnaire before the in-depth interview to validate the interviewee’s retrospective narratives, mainly focusing on their school lives and achievements. Additional materials, such as videos or pamphlets, were optionally collected for the aspects of multiple methods for triangulation. Third, in terms of multiple methods of data analyses, the present study used simple numeric calculations about the background information of participants (e.g., mean age, average age of starting ballet, average practice hours of ballet, etc.) in a quantitative way, in addition to the thematic analysis based on the thick descriptions of in-depth interviews.

**Member-checking.** Member-checking or member check is a strategy for assessing the credibility of a qualitative study by seeking the participants’ reviews and feedback on the collected data, analysis categories, or researcher’s interpretative reflections (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized member checking as the most important and “crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p.314) and “going to the heart of the credibility criterion” (Guba, 1981, p.85).
However, giving too rich and detailed descriptions to the participants could make them confused and feel negative emotions by unintentionally leading to self-reflection of less organized verbal expressions related mistakes, unnecessary repetitions, hesitation, or even filler words spontaneously occurred on-site at the time (Candela, 2019; Carlson, 2010). Due to these unintended realistic threats of member checking, it can be allowed to provide an organized transcript with preliminary analyses of categorizing the narratives by rough themes (i.e., cleansed data) to the participants instead of full transcripts (i.e., raw data) for member-checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the present study, member-checking was the most thoroughly and strictly conducted. I clearly described the member check process in the informed consent, and the descriptions were orally explained again. The participants received organized member checking documents that included the organized and summarized interview results by the research questions and thematic analysis subcategories; relevant direct quotations came from the word-by-word transcribed interview contents. Depending on the participants’ preferences, the member-checking documents were sent by email or KakaoTalk. The sent documents included preliminary versions of summaries and direct quotations coded by each research question and subcategories of thematic analysis.

The criteria of the member check for this study included checking that the interviewee’s narratives on the experiences were accurately delivered to the researcher, the data were accurately categorized in the appropriate analysis categories based on the interview protocol, and typos in transcribing ballet jargons, names of person, place, awards, and other words or expression about important information. The documentation templates for member checking are presented in Appendices F1, F2, G1, and G2. The preliminary categorized themes for member
checks were written in Korean and provided to the participants. According to the individual interviewee’s personal unique experiences, some themes were added, removed, or revised during the preliminary categorization of the interview results. For example, in the case of a participant who did not attend the art-specialized middle school, the relevant theme was naturally removed from the member-checking items.

**Peer Debriefing.** Guba (1981) claimed that the researchers studying naturalistic inquiries should “regularly detach from the site” (p. 85) to communicate with peer colleagues to judge their work. Peer debriefing is useful to assess how accurately the methods and analyzing reflections were conducted (Guba, 1981) and also provides confirmability of the researcher’s subjective reflections as a similar function to assessing interrater reliability in the quantitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, peer debriefing sessions were conducted intensively simultaneously with the translating process when analyzing the results. Peer debriefing occurred with two main peer reviewers. Both reviewers were doctoral students with experience in qualitative studies. One was a doctoral student majoring in educational psychology, and the other was a doctoral candidate majoring in communication studies with a degree and career as a professional Korean-English translator. The interviewee’s names and private information were strictly anonymized before being presented to the reviewers with ethical considerations. Peer reviewers mainly checked that (a) the transcriptions accurately and thoroughly transferred the interview results in a thick manner of describing and (b) that the categorized themes were appropriately drawn from the detailed transcriptions. Also, one main reviewer mainly helped (c) the back-translating of the key themes and relevant parts of transcriptions. While doing fine-tuning translations, reviewing the
PI researcher’s interpretations and reflections spontaneously occurred with peer doctoral students working on both translating and judging the reflections of the researcher.

**Transferability: Thick Description**

The term “thick description” was initially named by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*. As a traditional analytical method widely used in the field of anthropology, thick description is typically recommended for use in ethnography or narrative studies that delve into the cultural aspects that anthropologists often explore in their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Guba (1981) suggested using thick descriptions devised by Geertz in all naturalistic research to enhance the credibility of qualitative data, specifically in terms of generalizability. In essence, detailed and comprehensive descriptions can illustrate the similarity between the context that the participants experienced in a particular qualitative study and other plausible similar contexts. The phenomenological approach in qualitative research is to fundamentally address an inductive inquiry that explores participants’ naturalistic experiences. Given the inherent comprehensiveness and complexity of the participants’ experiences, it is essential to provide detailed descriptions of the contextual aspects to enhance the readers’ comprehension of the unexperienced contexts. For this reason, thick description is a widely utilized method to transfer the context to the readers in qualitative research (Guba, 1981). It aims to effectively convey contextual information to the readers and ensure the transferability of the collected data between the researcher and the readers by providing rich, detailed, comprehensive information.

In alignment with the recommendations for data transferability, I applied thick descriptions when describing the interview circumstances in as much detail as possible. The transcripts encompassed capturing not only the verbal expressions but also the interviewees’
laughter, hesitations, and any remarks related to their behaviors and emotions during the interviews. The thick description was adopted to better understand the implicit meanings of verbalizing their experiences and to capture the complexity and feelings that may not be entirely conveyed through spoken words alone.

**Dependability: Audit Trail**

Audit trail is a strategy to assess the dependability of instruments and the confirmability of the reflections of researchers (Guba, 1981). Audit trails in qualitative research examine both the process and the product of the research, and the auditor should come from outside of the research to maintain objectivity in tracking all the processes, materials, and results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, audit trails were conducted from the initial stage of the research design to evaluate the validity of the instruments and the research process. The research design, interview protocol, and all details of instruments were thoroughly reviewed by experts in multiple fields, including ballet, qualitative methodology, educational psychology, and adjacent academic fields (e.g., ballet instructors, a sociologist specialized in qualitative studies, and doctoral students with experience in qualitative study design in the field of educational psychology). In terms of confirmability, the reflections of the interview descriptions and other collected data were examined and thoroughly reviewed by two graduate students who also worked on translating and peer reviews. The two auditors were qualified as external individuals for the research because this study was solely and independently conducted by the PI researcher alone. Participants’ personal information was thoroughly protected, even during the auditing process, by anonymizing the names and affiliations.
Credibility and Dependability: Translation-Back Translation

Since the interviews were conducted in Korean, the participants’ native language, not English, there is a potential risk in the reliability and originality of the results due to translating the interview contents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Squires, 2009; van Nes et al., 2010). Translation issues become complicated when the first language discrepancy occurs in the initial stages of research, such as data collection and transcription of the gathered information (van Nes et al., 2010). The act of translating does not simply involve replacing words from one language to another language, which involves the risk of transformation of research findings (van Nes et al., 2010). Fortunately, the potential for translation bias is less critical for the present study because the main researcher and participants used the same native language, Korean. To reduce translation bias, the data was translated after all types of information (i.e., interviews and other documents) were collected, and the findings were then thematized during data analysis.

To minimize potential translation bias in providing quotations of participants’ statements and interpreted results, a *back-translation* strategy was additionally conducted to corroborate the reliability of the translated information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Back-translation has a long history as a useful method to validate the translated contents in cross-cultural studies (e.g., Brislin, 1970; Chapman & Carter, 1979; Chen & Boore, 2010; Sechrest et al., 1972). In the back-translation procedure, the original language is translated into the second language by one translator first, and the translated results are then translated back into the original language by another translator in the next step (Chapman & Carter, 1979). The advantage of back-translation is to ensure the equivalence of main concepts between two different languages (Brislin, 1970; Sechrest et al., 1972) and to increase the quality of translation (Brislin, 1970; Chen & Boore, 2010). However, it is not necessary to conduct translation and back-translation of all
transcriptions and raw data in order to save time and costs when processing and analyzing data (Chen & Boore, 2010). Since interpretation bias could occur during the translation of the research findings (van Nes et al., 2010), the present study implemented a translation and back-translation process only for the analyzed results.

First, all communications with participants, including recruiting participants and doing interviews, were proceeded in Korean. The recorded conversations by interviews were first transcribed verbatim in Korean to be thematized and analyzed. After analyzing the participants’ experiences and other information, the results and the essentially quoted transcriptions, were translated into English to present the results. The procedures of translation and back-translation of the present study are shown in Table 2.

Additionally, a back-translation process was conducted with a native Korean speaker who can also fluently speak and write in English to ensure the validity of the research (van Nes et al., 2010). In terms of the qualifications of translators, Bracken and Barona (1991) emphasized that the translator should be knowledgeable in two different languages and have a deep understanding of the contents being translated. Including the PI, a total of four English and Korean bilingual speakers attended the translation and back-translation processes. The three bilingual speakers were selected based on the following qualification criteria: (a) having fluent language skills in both Korean and English (preferably at a professional level), (b) having research experience in qualitative studies or equivalent educational or research training at the graduate school level, and (c) having completed CITI training as UAlbany members with consideration of research ethics. Out of the three, one reviewer was a professional Korean-English translator and a doctoral candidate with experience in qualitative studies.
Table 2

Translation and Back-Translation Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation and back-translation of consent for participants</td>
<td>English to Korean (Translation) by the PI of the present study (Myself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korean to English (Back-translation) by a translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting interviews in Korean and transcribing the questions and answers in Korean</td>
<td>Spoken and written in Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematize the collected data in Korean</td>
<td>Written in Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the transcriptions in Korean</td>
<td>Written in Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzed the main themes in Korean</td>
<td>Korean to English (Translation) by the PI of the present study (Myself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translate the findings from Korean into English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translate the essential quotations of interview answers corresponding to the main themes and findings from Korean into English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back-translate the findings and essential quotations from English into Korean</td>
<td>English to Korean (Back-Translation) by a translator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Management and Organization Tools

Transcribing

As the first step of transcription, all verbatims of interview audio recordings were automatically transcribed into MS Word files using two software programs, CLOVA Note v1.9.6 (NAVER Corp., 2023) and daglo v5.9.0. (ActionPower, 2023). These two types of transcribing program software were selected to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions for the Korean language because the two were devised by Korean companies and optimized for the Korean language. Additionally, I reviewed and edited the first transcribed files manually by listening to the audio
recordings repeatedly, with the purpose of (a) ensuring the accuracy of the transcribing and (b) corroborating the information by adding non-verbal expressions, such as signals of hesitation (e.g., pauses or filler words), laughs, subtle patterns of speaking or behaviors, and details of the interview situations (e.g., an unexpectedly appeared pet dog), to gather as much information as possible about the participants and their environments.

**Data Organization**

Interview transcriptions and all other textual data were initially processed and analyzed manually, utilizing Microsoft Word and Excel. The transcriptions were categorized based on the six topics based on the main research questions according to the semi-structured guided questions. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents as the most basic foundational task for building a raw dataset. The written information collected through background information questionnaires was organized and coded in Excel spreadsheets using table formatting. The following steps were conducted to draw the final main themes to represent the essence of the participants’ shared experiences.

First, an individual student participant folder was created for each participant, containing full transcriptions of both the student and parent (if applicable), their responses to the background questionnaire, and optional data such as performance videos. These full transcriptions included all verbal and nonverbal communications, and all articulation that the researcher used to facilitate the interview. These were used as the raw dataset and repeatedly reviewed for all analysis processes.

Second, following practical guidelines for analyzing interview data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Roulston, 2014), I created individual Word documents with the cleansed qualitative data set by eliminating repetitive statements and minimizing the descriptions of non-verbal
expressions present in the original raw transcriptions. This process of cleansing and organizing the interview data had two purposes: (a) to create member-checking documents, and (b) to do preliminary work to find the essence of the meanings underlying the participants’ experiences. The reorganized documents were shared with the participants for their review for member checking to validate the data used in the analysis.

Lastly, the transcriptions were reviewed again using the computer software NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018). NVivo 12 was used for the auxiliary purpose of reviewing the final themes and relevant excerpts translated into English, following the perspective of phenomenological research, which places more emphasis on the researcher’s reflection. Also, due to compatibility issues with foreign language processing (i.e., Korean) in the software, it was only used for the limited purpose of checking the data organized and analyzed by Excel spreadsheets. In the history of qualitative research, scholars have been debating whether it is appropriate to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS or QDAS) (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sohn, 2017). Especially in phenomenological research, the use of computer programs to decode the participants’ experiences and their meanings is a controversial issue (Schuhmann, 2011; Sohn, 2017; van Manen, 2017). One of the leading scholars in phenomenological research on pedagogy, van Manen, has criticized the use of computer-based qualitative data analysis software, claiming that using the terminology data itself is inappropriate for phenomenological research. He stated it as follows: “The serious student of phenomenology should be cautious and shy away from simplistic schemes, superficial programs, step-by-step procedures, and cookery book recipes that certainly will not result in meaningful insights” (van Manen, 2017, p.779). Based on the review of the qualitative method literature, experienced qualitative researchers generally argue that the use of computer software is not a required or
primary method for interpreting the given information in empirical studies (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2017). It should be limited to auxiliary and supplementary purposes in analyzing the data collected from a naturalistic inquiry approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Nonetheless, utilizing CAQDAS has functional advantages in managing messy and vast texts, images, audio, videos, and other inconsistent formats of qualitative research data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gibbs, 2014; Sohn, 2017). CAQDAS provides convenience for managing information to be analyzed, as long as the researcher can manipulate it carefully to avoid hindering insights that allow for a deeper understanding of the essence of the participants’ experiences (Sohn, 2017). Considering both perspectives on the use of CAQDAS, I valued the perspective that natural and thick transcriptions served as the benchmark and essential standards of the interpretation process. It is a basic rule that thick description is vital to establish the validity of interpreted qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1981; van Manen, 2017).

In this sense, in addition to using Microsoft Word to transcribe the full interviews, Excel spreadsheets were primarily utilized for organizing the interview results, coding the meaning units with extracted statements, and categorizing the subthemes and final themes (see Figure 4 for a coding example in Excel spreadsheets). NVivo 12 was used to confirm the coded and categorized meaning units with the limited purpose of reviewing the data in a more systematic manner (see Figure 5 for a coding example in NVivo 12).
Data Analysis for Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research

Data analysis in phenomenological research involves **discovering** the essence and meaning of participants’ experiences, and **explaining** the phenomena embedded in those
experiences (Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990). This phenomenological approach is distinctive from the typical concept of analyzing data in quantitative research, which aims to break down the whole phenomenon into smaller pieces (Peoples, 2020). Meanwhile, compared to other qualitative research designs, such as narrative studies, phenomenological research analyzes the gathered data using relatively structured and sequential methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Based on the features of a phenomenological study, the present study mainly used two strategies to analyze approximately 70 hours of interviews and additional information. First, data analysis was conducted based on hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gadamer, 1975, 1988; Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990) as the analytical philosophical framework to interpret the participants’ experience. Additionally, the reflexive thematic analysis (TA) method developed by Braun and Clarke (2022) was used to thematize the main findings in the analysis. First, the interviews were organized and categorized according to the analysis steps for the hermeneutic phenomenological study suggested by Peoples (2020). This method is based on van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological reflection process (1990) to review and extract the meaningful units of participants’ common experiences. The hermeneutic phenomenological reflection process aims to thematize the lived experiences of the participants. This method is known as a less structured analytic approach than other phenomenological analyzing methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to van Manen (1990), the theme is the “structures of experience” (p. 79) and the “form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand” (p. 87). These themes are the main unit for understanding the participants’ lives and the essence of their experiences.

To organize the reflection process step by step according to the recommendation of Peoples (2020), firstly, all wordings from the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed,
including filler words. Secondly, I read the transcribed verbatim several times enough to grasp a sense of the themes. The additional materials, including each participant’s experiences and milestones in learning ballet, were mapped into the relevant descriptions of experiences obtained by interviews. Third, the descriptions of participants’ experiences were thematized to reduce the units of analysis by *isolating* the thematic statements from the raw descriptions (van Manen, 1990). Fourth, the major themes that each participant described were integrated to thematize the common essential meaning of their experiences. Strategies from Braun and Clarke’s (2022) reflexive TA were utilized from the second to fourth steps of the analysis to more systematically analyze the large amount of conversational qualitative text data: (1) dataset familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) initial theme generation, (4) theme development and review, (5) theme refining, defining and naming, and (6) writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 6).

In the reflexive and iterative cycles of analyzing the interview data using the TA, the hermeneutic circle conceptualized by Gadamer (1975, 1988) was intentionally embedded in interpreting the transcribed texts. The hermeneutic circle represents the “circle of understanding” of the given text in a comprehensive way, reflecting both subjectivity and objectivity (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68). When taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to analyzing textual data, it is recommended to ground the hermeneutic circle inside the researcher’s reflection. This iterative interpretive process helps to avoid *foresight* and biases that the researcher may unconsciously hold (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Suddick et al., 2020; Peoples, 2020). This study intentionally and implicitly applied the hermeneutic circle from the second to fourth phases (i.e., data coding, initial theme generation, and theme development review). Table 3 displays the sequence and summary of the analytical process of the present study.
Table 3

The Sequence of the Thematic Analysis with the Hermeneutic Circle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Six Phases of TA (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2022)</th>
<th>File Format</th>
<th>Data Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dataset formulation</td>
<td>Phase 1: Dataset Familiarization (Immersion in the data)</td>
<td>Microsoft Word</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribing interview results verbatim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read and re-read the transcripts (Repeating)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotating analytic ideas (Repeating)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating all data as individual units for each participant, including interview verbatim of the student and parent, demographic information (background questionnaire), and optional additional data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Data coding</td>
<td>Phase 2: Data coding</td>
<td>Microsoft Word</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Categorization according to research questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data cleansing, preliminary categorization, and coding, Member-checking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating the data</td>
<td>Confirmed information by member-checking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3: Initial theme generation - Clustering codes, developing potential, and candidate themes</td>
<td>Phase 3: Initial theme generation - Clustering codes, developing potential, and candidate themes</td>
<td>Microsoft Excel spreadsheet: Reviewing codes and candidate themes</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Development (1)</td>
<td>Microsoft Word: Initial writing started</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorting the data by research questions, Finding the common themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence</td>
<td>Six Phases of TA (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2022)</td>
<td>File Format</td>
<td>Data Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Development</td>
<td>Second review of the coding and initial themes</td>
<td>Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes</td>
<td>Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, NVivo Confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Development</td>
<td>Repeating the review process and fine-tuning of analysis</td>
<td>Phase 5: Theme refining, defining, and naming of themes</td>
<td>Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, Microsoft Word, NVivo Confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalizing</td>
<td>Comprehensively reviewed with full transcripts (raw data), initial thematizing data, and all the gathered information, repeatedly and thoroughly.</td>
<td>Phase 6: Writing up (including Translating)</td>
<td>Microsoft Word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. TA phases do not need to be linear or segmental (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Some phases were overlapped and recursive back and forth.*
Interpretation based on TD Theories

In the last interpretation stage, the main themes that were finally identified were interpreted based on talent development (TD) theories from developmental and ecological perspectives. In the interpretation and discussion sections, the final set of themes and relevant descriptions were interpreted based on the theoretical framework along with the main theoretical framework (i.e., ECT) and other major TD theories (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Gagné, 1985, 2004, 2013, 2021; Dai, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2021). For example, themes about parental support in the initial phase of starting ballet were interpreted based on Bloom’s findings of the early years of talent development (1985) and the foundational stage of ECT (Dai, 2017) to address the third research question on family and home environments. For another example, themes about students’ effort to seek opportunities for training ballet were interpreted based on characteristic adaptation (CA) and maximal adaptation (MA) that ECT proposed, according to how obviously revealing self-organization or self-directedness. In this way, the major TD theories provided interpretive frameworks to discover the essence of meaning based on common experiences among participants. Key terms and concepts of ECT (Dai, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2021) were used as a core leading interpretive framework for this study, considering the research purpose and design of the present study. Interpretations were conducted under the theoretical framework that talent development is dynamic and changeable over time in the lifelong developmental process. Other TD theories were applied to provide richer and in-depth theoretical backups to the empirical data in a complementary way.
The Researcher’s Role in Phenomenological Reflection

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is the most important part because the researcher’s perspective is a lens through which to observe and interpret the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990). Since the main researcher’s personal beliefs and values cannot be completely separated from observation and interpretation in understanding the participants’ experience, the distance between the researcher and the researched subjects should be constantly reflected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, it was important to reflect on the experiences of the participants while maintaining distance, keeping in mind the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology and the rigor of objectivity in research.

In qualitative research, it is also necessary for the researcher to step closely into the lives of the participants in order to uncover implicit, unspoken, yet perceptible phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present study, as the researcher, I shared the same ethnicity, cultural background, and language with the participants. The cultural identity and background of the researcher helped maintain an appropriate level of closeness between the researcher and the participants. It was also advantageous for capturing detailed but implicit information that might be hidden in the nonverbal information provided by the participants in the interviews in a sensitive and in-depth manner.
Chapter IV: Results

The collected information about the experiences of 20 students and 14 parents was categorized and analyzed in line with the six central research questions. Thematic analysis (TA) by Braun and Clarke (2022) was applied to organize the verbatim statements and main themes. According to the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis, I followed: (1) dataset familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) initial theme generation, (4) theme development and review, (5) theme refining, defining and naming, and (6) writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 6).

In the qualitative approach, the researcher’s reflection is instrumental and essential in research rather than avoidable (Nowell et al., 2017). However, it must be accompanied by a consistent and iterative self-inquiry and self-reflective process about the knowledge the researcher produces (Berger, 2015) to deal with subjectivity issues in qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2022) defined the method of thematic analysis as a term called reflexive thematic analysis (TA). In this study, the interview data were analyzed using the reflexive TA under the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. Simple descriptive statistics were presented to effectively provide demographic and background information about the participants’ educational trajectories. Under each of the six research questions, six themes and two or four subthemes under each theme were derived from the transcripts. For clarity, the themes were organized independently under each research question, but some themes overlapped across the multiple research questions.

To restate the six research questions: (a) What kinds of profiles do talented students in ballet commonly have in terms of characteristic aptitude and disposition for ballet talent potential? (b) How have the students sustained rigorous training and psychosocial pressure at different junctures in their ballet talent development? (c) What roles do family and home
environments play in building the momentum of individual talent development in ballet? (d)
What roles do educational experiences, including schooling or coaching, play in talent
development in ballet, and at what developmental phases? (e) How do peer relationships play a role in their talent development in ballet, and how do they interact with other contextual factors? (f) How do socio-cultural factors play a role in individual talent development in ballet, and in what way or when do they become crucial?

**Background Information: Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

Through the written background questionnaire, I gathered the students’ demographic information about the participants before the in-depth interview. Age, gender, educational history regarding ballet, awards, achievement history, personal interests such as hobbies, and future career plans. Parents also completed the short background questionnaire in a similar format, with questions about their age, gender, educational attainment, and occupation. Descriptive statistics of age, gender, educational or occupational status of participants are presented in Table 4 (students) and Table 5 (parents). Other information was mapped to the in-depth interviews for triangulation and comprehensively analyzed with thick descriptions.

As Table 4 shows, two male students and 18 female students participated in the present study \( (N_{\text{students}} = 20) \). The mean age of student participants was 19.80 \( (SD = 1.20, \text{ range: 18-22}) \), and the median age was 20. Half of the students were freshmen and sophomores, including seven freshmen, eight sophomores, two juniors, and three seniors.

All 14 parent participants were the students’ mothers \( (N_{\text{mothers}} = 14) \). The mean age of parent participants was 50.43 \( (SD = 2.14, \text{ range: 47-53}) \), and the median age was 50.5. As the participants’ schools are located in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, 19 student participants were living in Seoul for their college education, and one student was living in her hometown city.
while commuting a long distance to Seoul for school. Out of 14 parents, 10 mothers were living with their child participants, and 4 mothers (S5, S9, S14, S15) were living separately in the students’ hometowns in South Korea. In terms of ethnicity and nationality, all participants were Koreans.

To protect the anonymity of the student participants, their names are coded using ‘S’ to denote ‘Student,’ followed by a randomly assigned number. The numbers from S1 to S15 were assigned to the students who participated with their parents. For five students who did not participate with their parents, ID numbers in the 20s were assigned to distinguish them from the group of students who participated with their parents. These numbers are S21, S22, S23, S24, S25 (See Table 4). The same logic used for encoding students’ names applies to parents’ names. Parents’ names are coded using ‘P’ to denote ‘Parent,’ followed by a randomly assigned number. To maintain consistency with the students’ identification numbers, ‘P2’ has intentionally been omitted. Similarly, the universities the students are attending were coded as ‘U1’, ‘U2’, ‘U3’, ‘U4’, and ‘U5’ to ensure privacy. ‘U’ denotes ‘University,’ and the numbers were assigned with the code ‘U.’
Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>College (IDs)</th>
<th>College Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>U3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S20*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S21*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S22*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S23*</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S24*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S25*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>U5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N_{students} = 20. Age was reported as of the interview dates.

0 = Prospective freshman (college admission confirmed) at the point of interviewing,

1 = Freshmen, 2 = Sophomore, 3 = Junior, 4 = Senior.

Students’ IDs who participated alone without their parents were coded as the 20s.
Table 5

Demographic Characteristics of Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship with the Students</th>
<th>Mother’s Current Occupation</th>
<th>Father’s Current Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Mother of S1 and S2</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mother of S3</td>
<td>Business owner (Construction industry)</td>
<td>Business owner (Construction industry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Mother of S4</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Mother of S5</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Office worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Mother of S6</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mother of S7</td>
<td>Architecting and Interior Designer / Pastor</td>
<td>Transportation Service Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mother of S8</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Mother of S9</td>
<td>Real estate Business owner (former daycare center director)</td>
<td>Electricity industry Business owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mother of S10</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Professional&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mother of S11</td>
<td>Certified Real Estate Agent (former math tutor)</td>
<td>Office worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Mother of S12</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Aviator (Flight pilot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mother of S13</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Business owner in landscape architecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Mother of S14</td>
<td>Daycare center teacher</td>
<td>Educational administration official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Mother of S15</td>
<td>Preschool teacher</td>
<td>Vice Principal of elementary school (specialized in fine art education)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N<sub>mothers</sub> = 14. Age was reported as of the interview dates.

Five parents (P16, P17, P18, P19, and P20) declined to participate in the parents’ interviews. P1 is the mother of S1 and S2, and ‘P2’ has intentionally been omitted to maintain consistent matching numbers between student’s IDs and parents’ ID.

<sup>a</sup> The parent participant (P10) did not want to specify the job, instead saying P10’s father’s job was “some kind of professional”
Six Emerging Themes

Themes based on common patterns of the participants’ experiences emerged and were defined as the results of coding extensive interview transcripts of 20 students and 14 mothers. Additionally, for triangulation of the data, the transcribed interviews with thick descriptions were mapped and checked using background questionnaires and optional video materials the students provided. The themes are developed and identified to interpret the essence of common lived experiences. Thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used as the main method and effective analyzing tool to find the common patterns from the thick and rich interview data of participants’ verbalized anecdotes mixed with behaviors, thoughts, perceptions, and emotions.

Through this analysis process, I identified the following six themes corresponding to the six research questions to present the long-term and dynamic development of talent development (TD) in ballet. Each theme was derived from the most common shared experiences among the participants, including students and their mothers. The first theme was named Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet. The second theme was Close Connections Between Physical and Mental Stress. The third theme was Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort, Care, and Money. The fourth theme was Effective School Curriculum and Competent Teachers. The fifth theme, Ballet Peers: Mixed Feelings of Rivalry and Camaraderie, was revealed from the participants’ peer relationship experiences. The last theme, Culture Shapes Specific Norms and Priorities in TD, was formulated to represent the impact of social systems and culture on talent development in the field of ballet. Those final six themes are visualized in Figure 6.
Figure 6

Final Six Themes

Long-term and Dynamic Talent Development in Ballet

[Theme 1] Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet

[Theme 2] Close Connections Between Physical and Mental Stress

[Theme 3] Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort, Care, and Money

[Theme 4] Effective School Curriculum and Competent Teachers


[Theme 6] Culture Shapes Specific Norms and Priorities in TD

Theme One. Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet

Regarding the first research question about common profiles of ballet talent in terms of aptitude and disposition for potential and demonstration, participants reported diverse and
multifaceted combinations of physical conditions, aesthetic sensitivity, strong passion and motivation to dedicate intense training, and individual personality, as the important factors to represent ballet talent. As it is hard for student participants to recall detailed experiences about their early childhood related to how their potential was discovered and started in ballet, participants’ interviews about their children’s early childhood were mapped with students’ interviews. This mapping also contributed to increasing the credibility of the interview data in terms of triangulation.

This first theme was formulated by integrating four subthemes regarding aptitude and dispositional factors as the common characteristics of the student participant demonstrated in the trajectories before and after they decided to specialize in ballet to move to professional ballet training beyond the hobby ballet level. However, the profiles with combinations of specific traits that drew the excellence in ballet performance were individually unique, and those were not simply categorized. For this reason, the first theme was Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet to represent the key findings that the limitation of inherited physical conditions, such as the shape of feet or pelvis for perfect turn-out\(^1\) position, can be compensated for with their consistent efforts. Four subthemes representing each aspect of the first theme were named: (a) Ballet Body First, but not Absolute, (b) Acquisition of Ballet Techniques and Movements: Innate but Trainable (c) Artistic Expressions: Innate but Trainable, (d) Inclination to Physical Activities, Especially Ballet-specific Motivation. The first theme and four subthemes are visualized in Figure 7.

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\(^1\) I brought the definition of turn-out position in ballet from Warren and Cook’s (1989) glossary to explain it. Turn-out is the “rotation of the legs outward from the hip joints so that the kneecaps and toes point outward from the center of the body. All traditional movements in classical ballet are performed turned out (Warren & Cook, 1989, p.381).
Figure 7

First Theme: Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet

Subtheme 1-1. Ballet Body First, but not Absolute

The first subtheme was discovered from 15 students’ experiences that their natural aptitude for ballet-preferable physical conditions was recognizable and discovered by teachers and parents at an early age or not long after beginning ballet (S2, S3, S5, S6, S7, S8, S11, S12, S13, S14, S21, S22, S23, S24, and S25). In the cases of ten students who participated in the interviews with their mothers, the mothers’ interviews corroborated their early childhood experiences they did not recall (P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P11, P12, P13, P14). All student participants had similar experiences in which naturally gifted physicality was regarded as the most important in the ballet aptitude, such as high arched feet shape, pelvic flexibility, and rotator muscle strength for a perfect turn-out position as the most essential poses in ballet, agility and general body flexibility, lean body shapes, long and lean arms and legs and leg-to-torso ratio, which are as important as outstanding technique performance in the ballet world.
Preferable physical conditions were mainly related to the participants’ experiences when they decided to begin majoring in ballet at an early age. Out of 20 participants, 12 participants directly stated that they inherited some of the “ballet body conditions,” which was the first and critical sign showing ballet talent potential over artistic expressiveness or performing movements. Specifically, high-arched feet, pelvic rotation, leg-to-torso ratio, lean body shape, and attractive appearance were the common traits to draw the attention of the ballet instructors as gatekeepers and led the participants to specialize in ballet (S2, S3, S5, S6, S7, S13, S14, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25). P13, the mother of S13 shared an anecdote about how S13’s gifted body types were significant for her to start ballet major.

“My daughter had been slender since her childhood, and ballet teachers said that her high arches of feet were naturally advantageous at doing ballet. It seemed like she had natural flexibility. One day, the director of the ballet studio recommended that my daughter major in ballet in her 4th grade. Usually, kids start their ballet major in 5th grade at the studio, but she recommended my daughter to start in 4th grade. But, I had never thought about letting her major in ballet. I just thought ballet was a good hobby and exercise. So, I reached out to another ballet instructor in Seoul, using my networking, and asked the teacher to see if my daughter has the potential to do a ballet major. And she said that it would be such a waste if she did not major in ballet with her gifted physical condition” (P13, the mother of S13).

S5 and S7 had similar anecdotes about how the physical advantages their children had naturally caught the attention of others at unexpected times and places. P5 and his son S5 said that an acquaintance at church discovered his physical giftedness in his high-arched feet, the flexibility of the ankles, and the overall flexibility of the body, which were beneficial body types for doing ballet and excellent movement skills when he was dancing on stage at a church event.
P7 recalled an anecdote about her daughter S7’s potential unexpectedly, which caught the attention of a famous ballet dancer and director at a ballet show.

“One day, a member of my church who was sending her child to a private ballet studio saw S5’s dance in the church event and she talked about my son to her child’s ballet instructor, saying “there is a very talented boy in our church. I will introduce him to you,” on her side first before discussing it with me. …When my son decided to major in ballet professionally, I had been watching my son since he was younger, and I thought ‘it was coming’ that he should dance. I thought it would be okay for him to give it a try, I didn’t really think deeply about it back then. I just let him try because he enjoyed it” (P5, the mother of S5).

P7, the mother of S7, shared one anecdote about a famous Korean male ballet dancer who recognized her daughter S7’s ballet potential at a glance.

“When S7 was very young, we went to see a ballet performance by Lee Won-Guk Ballet Company, and when the director Lee saw my daughter, he called my daughter, “Oh! Ballerina!” just by seeing her appearance at a glance. So, I said to him that my daughter was not doing ballet yet. Then he said to me that if she does ballet in the future, tell her to work hard” (P7, the mother of S7).

On the other hand, one student mentioned that one significant advantage of one body feature, such as height, can be a superior factor to other ballet skills. For example, S5 talked about how he was worried his height of about 172cm, which is about 5.7 feet, might not be tall enough “to get the role of a prince,” which is usually the main character in the ballet works when he would be a professional ballet dancer.
“Height can’t be ignored for male dancers because if a dancer is tall, it looks superior on stage, so, we say that the taller you are, the better you are on the stage. … On the other hand, if you’re small, for male ballet dancers with relatively short height, it is hard to get roles as a main character. We cannot say that height is an absolute must for getting roles, but to some extent?” (S5).

The below extracted transcript by S24 best illustrates the significance of gifted ballet body types over other aptitudes. Her verbatim showed that she viewed ballet techniques as trainable and improvable by scientific training strategies based on scientific principles of movements. On the other hand, she said that “natural-born talent is everything in ballet,” which represents her thoughts that an ideal ballet body is rarely attainable without natural inheritance.

“Unfortunately, in the ballet world, it is inevitably very important to be born with (ideal body types). We cannot change the size of our heads even if we put in the effort, and we cannot get taller anymore. The only one we can change with our effort is losing weight. Appropriately looking good height and having long arms and legs, these things can rarely change by effort. For example, a sense of rhythm can be achievable by hard training to some extent, but natural-born talent is everything in ballet” (S24).

However, some students shared their experiences about how their advantageous physical traits, such as lean body, relatively tall height, or flexibility they had in childhood, turned into disadvantages or obstacles later in adolescence or adulthood (S4, S10, and S23). Although the physical changes of puberty are natural developmental phenomena for human beings, some participants reported that these changes were one of the most significant difficulties for them in maintaining their competencies in ballet performance. S4 reported that she had the most challenging time due to her puberty and sudden weight gain in middle school. She described that
her body became “bigger and sluggish” due to the unexpected weight gain, and she was panicked and frustrated with the sudden changes in her body. Although she was able to accept the natural body change and endure the hard time of controlling her diet and exercise to “get back” to the lean ballet body, she recalled the experience as the most difficult time for her. For S10, her taller height than her peers in childhood had turned to no more merit in her adolescence because she did not grow after middle school hood. S23 reported that her inherited flexibility that was initially advantageous for beginning ballet became less flexible as she went through puberty.

The cases of three students showed that certain innate ballet body conditions can be turned into disadvantages through puberty and natural physical development. These experiences showed that physical traits are not an absolute or unchangeable condition maintained until adulthood, even in the talent areas that require exceptional physical abilities.

Subtheme 1-2. Acquisition of Ballet Techniques and Movements: Innate but Trainable

Based on the students’ self-perceived aptitude for ballet and their parents’ statements, it was found that they believed that ballet techniques are highly attainable through effective training methods. Half of the student participants have positive experiences that their ballet techniques have improved through specialized training and daily deliberate practice (S4, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S13, S15, S24, S25).

Participants agreed that some dancers might have an obviously natural ability to perform particular movements, such as jumps or turns. However, a majority of participants had positive experiences in achieving dramatic improvement in performing ballet techniques by learning “how to use my body properly” (S9 and S15), and they perceived that performing techniques are movement skills they can change, obtain, and improve according to the time and effort.

Regarding this, S24 said,
“Ballet is very scientific. So, if the timing and coordination are perfectly combined, even if a jump is not high enough, it can be looking good. … I was not good at performing jumps before, but I practiced it every day in the class, and I felt my jump improved a lot” (S24).

On the other hand, some participants shared their “don’t know why, but techniques came out well without extra effort” experiences in the ballet classes (S5 and S14) regarding the acquisition of ballet movements and sequences. S5 and S14 shared similar experiences in that they learned the movements quickly and excelled compared to other ballet kids when they were just about to start learning ballet first. However, they said that they did not recognize their exceptionality until they realized that other ballet kids were not like them in terms of the speed and proficiency of their performances. S5 stated, “When I was in group lesson class, I often felt that ballet movement techniques came easily to me, and I learned them quickly, which were difficult for other kids.” Similarly, S14 said that she did not know by herself as to why she was winning first-place or big prizes in the large-scale competitions in her childhood and early adolescence.

“I’ve heard a lot of people say that I’m a little quick to memorize the (music and movements) combinations, and I’m also good at understanding beats and rhythm when dancing. I’ve heard a lot of people say that I don’t gain weight easily, and my arms and legs are a little long compared to my height, resembling my dad. But I just don’t know why I am doing well and what I am so gifted like people are saying, because I’d been living like this all my life, but everyone else was saying that (I was gifted) …. It was not like I was really trying hard or putting effort that much, but when I went to the competitions in Seoul, Gwangju, and Jeonju (cities bigger than the city where S14 lived in Korea), I always got the first-place prize…” (S14).
S21’s experience showed a unique case in which her innate sense of rhythm and musicality amplified her outstanding ability to learn the movements and combinations with music quickly and easily. She stated, “I thought other kids were the same as me, but I realized that I was the only one.” S21 said that she has a “natural internal meter” for understanding small pieces of the beat corresponding to specific movements. She said that no one taught her this, but she was able to naturally recognize pieces of rhythm and match the rhythm to the movements, which helped her to learn movements and combinations very quickly and accurately from a very early age. She said that she was rather surprised that other people did not use the same way as she did.

“I was pretty good at memorizing dance movements and the combinations with music. Also, I am kind of obsessive about memorizing the combination (of movement and music) myself…. I always memorized the combinations with a sense of beats by myself, but I was surprised later that a lot of my friends didn’t do that! I’ve heard that other kids memorized the combination by melody, but I memorize it with beat, beat, beat, beat” (S21).

Subtheme 1-3. Artistic Expressions: Innate but Trainable

Seven students reported that they had experienced that their instructors had directly criticized them for a lack of facial expressiveness in playing a character of ballet work (S6, S7, S9, S13, S14, S15, S23). Other 13 students reported that their ability to understand the characters and artistic expression are less difficult or stressful factors for them compared to other important aspects, such as body shape or ballet techniques. Specifically, 11 students reported that their artistic ability was one of the strengths that beautifully express the emotions of the ballet work.
character through their face and body movements (e.g., *port de bra*) (S1, S4, S5, S8, S10, S11, S12, S21, S22, S24, S25).

Overall, participants mentioned that artistic expression in their dancing was less critical at the learning stage of student or trainee dancers, compared to other advantageous factors in physical features or the ability to perform techniques. Participants perceived that artistic ability is becoming important at the professional level when performing characters in ballet shows on the stage. Participants said artistry can be trainable and improvable by practice and extra effort to understand the ballet work and characters. For example, S10 reported that her strength is her natural facial expressions, which deliver well on the stage now. However, she said that this was the result of her hard work. She talked about why she intentionally and deliberately developed her facial expressions to enhance her attractiveness while dancing.

“When I was younger, my nickname was *Ice Princess* because I was kind of blunt and not very expressive, and I didn’t smile that much. But as I grew up, I thought, “let’s do what I’m good at”, because it is not possible to change my body shape or inherited physical limitation, instead, I thought what I can change by myself now is the ability to express emotions. I thought that would be a great weapon for me, depending on my effort. Also, I got more and more excited about expressing myself in a character on stage, so I practiced a lot, focusing on this” (S10).

In the case of S11, in the questions regarding the participant’s forte in ballet, she confidently selected *port de bra* as her current strength in ballet performance. However, she said it resulted from her intensive and consistent training, which had focused on expressing upper body movement more elegantly. According to S11, at first, she did not expect the dramatically

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2 *Port de bra* is “movements or positions of the arms” in ballet (Warren & Cook, 1989, p.380). This ballet technique is to use arms to express elegance and beauty of the motions.
improved *port de bra* even though she focused on the intensive training. However, as the statements below showed, she was surprised when others praised her for this.

“When I was younger, I was really good at jumping and turning, and I thought that’s what ballet was all about. But artistry was not my strength. I personally believe that the artistic aesthetic comes from the *port de bra*, but I was really, really bad at it. I was like a robot doing the *port de bra* back then. So, I practiced a lot to make my *port de bra* smooth and beautiful, so that the aesthetic would come out of the movement.... One day, I was practicing only my arm movements to make my *port de bra* perfect and elegant until the music ended. And I was really surprised by myself when other people praised me by saying ‘you are really good at using your arms!’” (S11).

**Subtheme 1-4. Inclination to Physical Activities, Especially Ballet-specific Motivation**

All participants reported that they had learned various types of dance and sports other than ballet since their early childhood. Among them, 12 students reported that they had shown apparent inclinations to enjoy physical activities since they were very young (S4, S5, S6, S7, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S22, S24, S25). Types of the activities the participants learned included other dance genres, such as Korean traditional dance, modern dance, belly dance, K-pop or worship dance, hip-hop dance, tap dance, and sports, such as taekwondo, swimming, figure or speed skating, acrobatics, track and field, or general physical education in the youth sports club. Regarding the tendency to physically active movements of the participants, mothers of S6 and S12 recalled their children’s childhood as below.

“S6 was very distracted and very active. When she was young, she was like, you know, she can’t sit still even for a second. She liked climbing up on a couch or high places and falling down, and
she loved doing something like that. She climbed up doorframes like boys, and kept running around” (P6).

“S12 really liked physical activities and stuff like that, so when she was very young, she was a kid who really liked to run around when I sent her to the Gymboree program (Play and Music classes for young kids)” (P12).

The common tendency to be active among the participants was more evidently revealed when contrasting their experiences of learning piano. Except for two students (S21 and S25), 18 students reported that they had learned piano. Out of the 18 students, five students reported that they had obviously felt bored while playing piano because it is a type of sedentary performance (S3, S4, S6, S12, S13). Specifically, three students commonly described their piano experiences as “piano was boring because I couldn’t move my body and it was a sedentary activity” (S4, S6, S15). The statements below, the interviews with S2 and the mother of S12 showed this tendency.

“I remember I started piano around the same time when I started learning ballet. What I remember is that I played the piano until the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades in elementary school, but in the case of learning piano, it didn’t fit well with me, so I couldn’t keep my body still. It was so boring to sit down and keep hitting (the piano keys) with both hands, so I quit piano” (S4).

“I thought my daughter (S12) had a perfect pitch at first. So, I sent her to learn piano first. But I could say that her body was a bit light? She couldn’t sit for a long time” (P12).

In contrast, some students reported their versatility in multiple areas, such as piano (S1, S5, and S14), running (S5 and S11), or academic subjects (S2, S10, and S11). However, all participants expressed in common that they were “drawn” to ballet as the most competent,
engaged, and motivated area. The statement of S2 very well showed their ballet-specific inclination.

“I’m not very athletic (laughs). But I have been able to perform ballet and Korean traditional dance quite well, but I can’t do everything else. I think if you ask my mom, she would probably admit it. When I have to run, I don’t even have a basic sense of motor skills… I don’t know, but overall, I’m not good at all (other sports). I still can’t do the double-unders in jump rope or anything like that. I don’t think I have the sense of motor skills except for dancing” (S2).

S5 and S11 shared the common experience of being youth athletes on the track and field team in elementary school. They reported that they liked both ballet and running. However, they said that the achievements in ballet competitions were always better and more excellent than the scores and awards in the running competitions. They commonly perceived these experiences of better performance in ballet as making them prefer ballet to running.

“I really don’t like ball games at all. … But I do like sweating and running like that so much. I was on the track and field team in elementary school. (Kyung Hyun: What made you choose ballet over track and field?) I was really interested in the arts so much as I talked to you before. My dad majored in physical education in college, and my mom was very interested in the arts, and my sister majored in flute, and I liked dancing, so I thought about ‘what it would be like to dance’ (when I was in elementary school). And I wasn’t very good at athletics in track and field” (S5).

“I had been doing ballet, and track and field both, and I had been attending both ballet and field competitions. But I just thought ballet was more fun. And I got better awards (in ballet competitions). Running was also fun, so when I was in elementary school, I kept doing both together” (S11).
In particular, S4, S6, S8, and S10 showed an extraordinarily strong ballet-specific motivation, compared to other areas. Although the specific reasons varied individually, it was common for these students to have initially experienced negative concerns or even pushback from their teachers or parents about majoring in ballet. However, they also commonly had successful experiences in proving their excellence through hard training practice and drawing positive evaluations from parents and teachers by themselves.

For example, S4 said that she had a strong interest in ballet from the age of two or three when she learned ballet for the first time. She said that there was a lot of negative feedback from her ballet instructor about her body shape and flat feet, which is not ideal in ballet. However, she said that the negative feedback rather stimulated her strong motivation to overcome their concerns.

S8 and S10 had negative experiences of negative concerns from ballet teachers due to the reason that their feet shape was not arched enough (both S8 and S10), lack of flexibility (S10), and lack of proficiency in ballet techniques (S8 and S10), in their early teens when they started to major in ballet in the art-specialized middle school. However, S8 and S10 said that the negative concerns and reputation never discouraged their motivation for ballet, and they just practiced and practiced.

In particular, because S10 showed talent in math, her parents wanted her to quit ballet, which she was not good at. Instead, her parents insisted that she transfer to a general public school to “study” academic subjects, including math. However, her specifically strong motivation to specialize in ballet led her to eagerly pursue a major in ballet, despite not being as excellent at it as she was at math. Both S8 and S10 said that after three or more years of
continuous effort at the middle school level in the art school, their teachers were finally recognized for their ballet performances later in their high school level.

In the case of S6, her mother initially hesitated to support her giftedness and talent in ballet due to her family’s financial issues, even though she was highly gifted in her ideal body type and charismatic stage performance. According to the interview with her mother, P6, her daughter S6 had consistently expressed her strong interest in doing ballet from a very early age. On the other hand, P6 reported that she was not sure if she could financially support her daughter, S6, for majoring in ballet because it is obvious that professional training in ballet demands a lot of money, time, and energy from parents, even though her daughter was gifted and talented. For this reason, P6 had intentionally pretended not to recognize S6’s talent and motivation for ballet. However, at last, S6 brought a flyer from a local ballet studio home by herself and strongly asked her mother to enroll in the class, and P6 finally decided to let her major in ballet.

Theme Two. Close Connections between Physical and Mental Stress

Regarding the second research question about how the participants sustain rigorous training and psychosocial pressures in their ballet talent development, it was found that the psychosocial difficulties the participants underwent were directly or indirectly related to their physical difficulties, such as injuries, a highly restricted diet, or eating disorders. The interview results showed that the participants’ psychological stressors are based on the physical symptoms due to extremely hard training and restricted diet that has become a daily routine for them. Nevertheless, most of the participants reported that the painful learning and training experiences as “take-for-granted” or a “badge of honor” for “every” ballet dancer. This second theme was formulated through two subthemes: (a) Body and Mental Pains are Tangled, and (b) Taken-for-
granted Pain and Individualized Coping Strategies, which focused on what the most significant challenges were for the participants and how they had dealt with these challenges at the different stages in their talent development trajectories. Figure 8 shows the second theme and two subthemes.

**Figure 8**

*Second Theme: Close Connections between Physical and Mental Stress*

![Diagram](image)

**Subtheme 2-1. Body and Mental Pains are Tangled**

Out of 20 students, 13 students reported that they had experienced serious injuries, such as bone fractures or muscle rupture (S1, S3, S5, S8, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S21, S22, S23, S24). Among them, eight students identified the psychological stressors due to the injuries as the most challenging and hindering factor in their ballet career because they had felt more anxious or lagging behind when they had no choice but “to rest” due to the serious injuries (S1, S3, S8, S12,
S13, S22, S23, S24). For example, S24 explained that she could say that a diet to restrict food consumption would be “controllable” pain, whereas the injuries were “uncontrollable” pain because she had to endure not only the physical pain but also the psychological stress of feeling that she might fall behind.

“I didn’t hurt my ankle in the ballet class, but my feet got too weak because of the long ballet practice, and my feet were broken just going down the stairs. So, I couldn’t walk for about three weeks and had a cast on. Actually, taking a long break is so risky and stressful for ballet dancers. Dieting is also difficult, but if I can control how to go on a diet, I can find several alternative ways. But with injuries, I have to deal with all the pain (mental and physical) on my own. The rehabilitation and recovery are all on my own. When I sat and watched other friends doing ballet, I felt more fascinated by dancing and wanted to dance more. I felt more strongly that I wanted to run and jump” (S24).

In particular, four students (S1, S3, S21, and S23) had severe injuries or diseases that made it difficult for them to continue dancing ballet. Due to these physical symptoms and challenges, they reported seriously considering giving up their future career plan to be a professional ballet dancer and instead pursuing dance instructors or other careers. S1 and S3 said that they were seriously thinking of giving up their long-lasting dream of becoming a professional ballet dancer and seeking a different career path because of their injuries. S21 said that she gave up being a professional ballet dancer because she cannot wear pointe shoes for long due to her disease, which grows bones in her feet. S23 said that she experienced both injuries in her pelvis and a disease called accessory navicular that caused an extra bone to grow in the arch of the foot, which made her quit ballet for a while for the surgery and recovery. She shared the mentally and emotionally difficult experience due to the injuries and disease. She described it as much more mentally stressful rather than physically painful.
“As I was attending an art-specialized middle school, we had a lot of ballet classes. However, I couldn’t skip the ballet class, even though I could not dance due to my injuries, because ballet classes were the regular required courses in art school. So, I just had to sit in the backside of the classroom and watch my friends dance for four or five hours. It was stressful to repeat explaining my injuries and why I couldn’t join the classes to different teachers whenever I couldn’t attend the classes” (S23).

**Subtheme 2-2. Taken-for-granted Pain and Individualized Coping Strategies**

All participants said they perceive muscle pain as too common to complain about, a daily experience. In particular, some female students said that falling out their toenails is also a “common passage” because of their daily hard training and wearing pointe shoes for a long time. S24 was so calm when she talked about the falling-out-toenails experience as one common experience, and everyone gets used to it.

“It is something that every ballet peer had to go through when they were a kid. If you go through a lot of things like falling off of toenails, and repeating it a lot, you get calluses, and it does not hurt anymore. My toenails don’t grow long anymore. … Did I say this too light-heartedly? (laugh)” (S24).

Two mothers, P7 and P9, recalled a conversation with their daughters in which they felt rather happy even though their toenails were off after their intensive ballet training. Mothers commonly stated that they were surprised that their children perceived the physical pain as a “badge of honor” for their hard work. The anecdote of P9 below clearly shows the perception.

“I felt so bad for my daughter (when she was preparing for college entrance exams), so I’d ask her if she was really okay, then, she always said “I am fine, I am good.” When her toenails
almost were falling off, she said to me, “Mom, my toenails were falling off, but why am I so happy now?” I felt so bad, but at the same time I was grateful to my kid for trying so hard. I couldn’t say anything to her” (P9, the mother of S9).

As shown above, the participants understood that injury and physical pain were too common to regard as a usual passage that they had to go through to move forward to the next step in their talent and career trajectory in the ballet world. Participants perceived physical pain as a natural part of their career as ballet dancers. Regarding this, many students reported that they had been developing individual strategies to prevent injuries and pain as they moved on to higher and more specialized levels of education (e.g., art-specialized high school, or college). Ten participants reported that their ballet instructor guided them to practice the warmup when they were younger in childhood or adolescence. However, as they grew up, they developed their own “customized” warmup routine that focused on compensating their own vulnerable parts (S4, S5, S9, S11, S12, S13, S15, S22, S24, S25). The statement of S11 showed well how the students developed their own routines as unique strategies to deal with the difficulties and obstacles of injuries and to improve their ballet competencies.

“I usually go to the ballet class at least one hour early to warm up first. The other day, I was thinking about myself and my own warmup routine because I suddenly thought of this, ‘Did I use to do a lot of things to warm up like this before?’ Originally, I just stretched my legs, but I was really bad at leaning forward because my hamstrings are short, so I added the hamstring stretches at a certain point. I also added band exercises to strengthen my feet and ankles because I have really thin ankles and the arch of my feet was not good. And I feel like my routine is kind of set now. And I also do ab planks and shoulder exercises with the band. I also added hip exercises to reduce my back pain” (S11).
Theme Three. Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort, Care, and Money

Regarding the roles of family and home environments in supporting the individual’s talent development in ballet, the third theme was formulated based on three subthemes: (a) Family Values on Arts and Sports, (B) Manager Mom and Educational Mobility, and (C) Talent Development Costs a Lot. The third theme and three subthemes are visualized in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Third Theme: Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort, Care, and Money

Subtheme 3-1. Family Values on Arts and Sports

All student participants reported being raised in family environments that valued arts and sports education. They also commonly reported that their parents had a parenting philosophy of accepting and supporting what their child wants to be and loves to learn. Summarizing the educational background of the participant’s parents, none of the students had parents or family members who specialized in ballet. However, eight students had family members who majored in arts and sports. S5 and S11 reported that their fathers majored in physical education in college.
Three students, S8, S10, and S22, reported that at least one of their parents majored in music (piano, violin, classical vocal music) or fine arts (crafting art). S5, S8, S9, S11, and S25 said that their siblings also have majored in the fields of the arts. S13 had a relative who majored in Korean traditional dance. In the case of S5 and S12, their mothers, P5 and P12, reported that they had an advanced level of interest and performance abilities in music (piano and Korean traditional instruments), even for hobby purposes.

Some students reported that they were frequently and naturally exposed to music or dance at home, school, or church from an early age (S5, S6, S9, S12, and S13). For example, S5’s father majored in physical education in college, and his mother played piano at a highly advanced level, even though it was only a hobby. In particular, S5’s mother loves music, and he was raised in a family environment full of music. S6 said that she had many chances to be involved in musical and dance performances at church because she and her mother have actively participated in church events. S13 had a maternal relative who was designated as a human cultural heritage in the Korean traditional dance, and her mother, P13, said that she initially wanted her daughter, S13, to major in Korean traditional dance. Similarly, P12 was a big fan of Korean traditional music and had been playing a traditional instrument at a highly advanced level, although it was her hobby. Because of P12’s hobby, S12 grew up in a family environment where she had the opportunity to be exposed to music, dance, and various types of performing arts. Based on the background information and interview results, the common experiences of several participants were discovered that they grew up with spontaneous exposure to arts and sports and awareness of artists as a profession under the family value of arts and sports, although no family members were directly involved in ballet. S9 was naturally exposed to various arts education programs, including ballet, in the daycare center her mother owned and ran when she
was young. The interviews with P9, S9’s mother, represented how the parents’ positive values of art education and natural exposure to the arts led them to discover their interests and aptitudes.

“I majored in early childhood education and ran a daycare center for caring for about 100 children. When I was running it, I thought that the most important thing for children was to let them express themselves through the arts. I taught them music, dance, storytelling, drawing, fine arts, and several arts education programs because I thought that the arts education would help the children’s thinking skills, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and so on, and it would help them do great in school. My daughter, S9, was one of them, and her sense of rhythm was so good when she was dancing while listening to music. I exposed her to a lot of music because I thought if she liked it, this might be the future path she had to follow. She just experienced it naturally. I never forced her to study. I just exposed her to everything if she wanted to. … I saw her happiest moments when she was listening to music and dancing, which made her the happiest. So, I thought I have to guide my daughter to the things that make her happy when she does that” (P9, the mother of S9).

Subtheme 3-2. Manager Mom and Educational Mobility

All but S14 and S25 reported that their hardship in learning and training ballet was closely related to their mother’s all-round support not only for their education but also in life management, including commuting and traveling, after-school activities, food, medical care or rehabilitation, and even parents’ gathering or parents’ supporting activities in the art school events, across all areas related to their learning and training ballet. Many students stated that even their entire family members supported them by restricting family gatherings or traveling so as not to bother their ballet schedules of classes and personal training. Their mothers restated this common experience as well. The participants’ common experiences about their mother’s all-around full support were more evidently shown in the interviews with mothers. P1 and P4 said
that they had to cook every meal separately for their ballet kids for their weight control. All 14 mothers who participated in the interview agreed that not only the students but also their mothers never had a day off from managing schedules and caring for their ballet child before going to college. Regarding a part of the daily caring routines, P1, the mother of S1 and S2, recalled the following:

“Even after dropping kids off at school, I got busy again. I had to order costumes and props, prepared their pointe shoes or leotards, and sometimes I had to select music for helping my daughters’ competition stages” (P1, the mother of S1 and S2).

Some students who did not live in Seoul reported that traveling long distances and staying overnight to get lessons from better teachers in Seoul was another task that mothers had to take care of their ballet children (S3, S5, S6, S9, S11, S14, and S15). For example, in the case of S3, her mother drove her from her hometown, about 100 kilometers away, to the art school in Seoul every day. Her mother, P3, said that this long-distance driving was often necessary to take care of young S3, even after S3 moved to a place near the school.

Some students reported that they moved near their art school to save time and energy when commuting to the school. S1, S2, S4, S13, and S15 were the cases in which they moved to Seoul only with their mother, leaving their father in their hometown for work. S3 was a case of living alone near the art school in Seoul, and her mother was commuted to take care of her. This mobility for educational purposes also occurred even for some students living in the Seoul area (S4 and S10). They said that the whole family moved near the art school to save their ballet kids time and energy by keeping the commuting distance as short as possible.
**Subtheme 3-3. Talent Development Costs a Lot**

In ballet education, financial support from parents or family is essential for their children to continue learning ballet with a competent teacher, in a safe place, and in a quality educational environment. Due to the nature of the training system, ballet requires intensive private or small group lessons with expensive private tuition fees. It can get more expensive the better teacher they want to learn from. Having a place to practice with proper facilities is also important in ballet, which is another cost of doing ballet. In order to avoid injuries, it is almost necessary to have a good quality dance floor in the place of learning. For these reasons, parental financial support covers tuition fees and other relevant costs such as renting practice spaces, buying costumes, pointe shoes, and travel money to attend competitions and ballet stages. For example, S24 mentioned that one of the things she was most grateful for from her parents was that they paid all of her travel expenses to attend international competitions and stages. S7’s mother, P7, described how ballet training costs a lot.

“I have heard people say that if your child decides to major in ballet, the money will go out from the parents’ pockets, like pulling tissues out of a Kleenex, which means that it will cost a lot. It might be beyond our expectations. When my daughter wanted to major in ballet first, I was hesitant to let her start to major in ballet because that was the time when my business was in a bad situation, unfortunately. I was struggling financially to run my business, and I was not sure if I could pay for the ballet lesson fee. However, S7’s ballet teacher said, “Let me teach S7, it’s okay that you pay it later,” so I actually saved all that money and gave it back to the teacher later” (P7, the mother of S7).

**Theme Four. Effective School Curriculum and Competent Teachers**

Regarding the fourth research question about the roles of educational experiences in talent development in ballet and educational phases, the fourth theme was formulated with three
subthemes: (a) **Systematized Gifted Education: Art-Specialized Schools in Seoul**, and (b) **Significant Teacher’s Role: Individualized Private Lesson in Local Cities**, and (C) **Excessive Competitions and Negative Influence of Schools and Teachers** (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10**

*Fourth Theme: Effective School Curriculum and Competent Teachers*

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**Subtheme 4-1. Systematized Gifted Education: Art-specialized Schools in Seoul**

Except for one student, 19 participants reported attending art-specialized middle schools, high schools, or both. South Korea has a 6-3-3 education system from elementary to high school (Ministry of Education & Korea Education and Research Information Service, 2023), and art-specialized schools follow the same school year system of three years of middle school and three years of high school. In particular, three art middle schools—Kaywon Middle School of Arts, Sunhwa Arts Middle School, and Yewon School (listed in alphabetical order)—located in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do in the metropolitan area (hereinafter Seoul area) are renowned for their high-quality ballet education system. Every year, the three schools select only a small group of
students for their ballet major program. The information in Table 6 regarding the number of enrolled students in the three art-specialized middle schools show how competitive it is to be admitted to these prestigious ballet programs.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Kaywon Middle School of Arts (Gyeonggi-do)</th>
<th>Sunhwa Arts Middle School (Seoul)</th>
<th>Yewon School (Seoul)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The information was retrieved on March 5, 2024, from the official websites of each school.

The sources of information are all in Korean language.

a The information was retrieved from the official website of the school at
https://kaywon.goesn.kr/kaywon/cm/cntnts/cntntsView.do?mi=22564&cntntsId=4208

b The information was retrieved from the official website of the school at
https://sunhwaarts.sen.ms.kr/137335/subMenu.do

c The information was retrieved from the official website of the school at
https://yewon.sen.ms.kr/139412/subMenu.do

According to some students and parents who participated in the present study, entering one of these prestigious art-specialized middle schools can lead to six years of high-quality ballet training from middle school to high school courses. Except for the three schools, there are only high school-level ballet majors in the art-specialized schools, usually located outside the Seoul area. Thirteen students (S1, S2, S3, S4, S8, S10, S12, S13, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25) reported
that they began their art-specialized schooling from middle school years (equivalent to 7th to 9th grade in the U.S.) in the Seoul area. One student (S6) attended one of the three schools in the Seoul area by transferring in her first year of high school. One student (S23) only graduated from an art-specialized middle school in Seoul because she could not help but give up continuing her ballet education at the art-specialized high school. Six students attended a 3-year art-specialized high school (equivalent to 10th to 12th grade in the U.S.) located in other local cities outside the Seoul area. As an exception, S7 attended an alternative private school from the 4th grade through the first semester of the 2nd year of high school (10th grade in the U.S.). Later, she started being home-schooled at the high school level to concentrate on ballet training with her private tutors at a ballet studio.

Since only a small number of students are selected per year for the prestigious art school program, 13 participants reported that they had been preparing for the entrance exams for a few months to up to two years. The 13 students who attended one of the three prestigious art schools in Seoul area commonly expressed satisfaction or even pride in belonging to the high quality of the ballet curriculum and training system offered by the school. According to the participants’ interviews, these three art schools applied a rigorous ballet education system called the Vaganova method, which originated in the Russian ballet style. Participants said that this ballet teaching method allows them to learn ballet in highly structured programs so that students can effectively learn ballet in a systematic way. The participants explained that one advantage of this highly structured teaching program in art schools is to prevent students from “getting used to a certain wrong individual habit” that hinders correct and neat ballet techniques. Therefore, the 13 students said that they learned from different teachers once a year whenever they changed grades.
according to the school policy. Interviews with S3 showed the positive learning experiences of the rigorous teaching methods in art school, as shown below.

“I had a tough time learning ballet in the rigorous program at the art school, but I think I learned the basics really well, like how to use my body properly to dance ballet, and how to perform neatly without any bad habits” (S3).

Moreover, most of them expressed their high pride and satisfaction in their art school education itself as an alumnus of the prestigious school. They commonly said that the school program made them to learn ballet “properly in an effective and systematic way” with high quality and intensive teaching methods.

Subtheme 4-2. Significant Teacher’s Role: Individualized Private Lesson in Local Cities

Five students reported attending local art-specialized high schools outside the Seoul area. They commonly said that they chose to take private lessons after school because local art high schools did not provide high-quality after-school programs for their practice, nor did they have competent instructors (S5, S9, S11, S14, S15). They described their major institutional environments for learning and training ballet as the “Hagwon system,” a unique term that refers to private educational institutes in Korean educational culture.

These five students participated in this study with their mothers, and the mothers also stated that the local art schools did not provide sufficient ballet-specific learning environments in various aspects, such as the expertise of ballet teachers, specialized training programs, or even studio facilities. For example, S5 shared an anecdote that there was no piano in his school to play ballet music, which is almost essential for ballet work and practice. S14 said that there were only three students in her class, including her, who majored in ballet, and the school did not hire a
regular teacher specializing in ballet for a few students. Because of this lack of resources in terms of human and facilities, the five students said they had no choice but to find private teachers in Hagwon (i.e., a private teacher-owned ballet studio).

On the other hand, S9 and S15 shared a positive experience that this Hagwon system provided them with a customized and individualized teaching method. Two students agreed that the private lessons were beneficial and advantageous for them to dramatically improve their ballet technique compared to the art school program. S9 and S15 commonly said that they “realized how to use my body properly when dancing ballet” after taking individualized lessons from their private teachers. They said that the teachers were their role models and the significant people who made them open their eyes to “what ballet is.” They said that the opportunity to study with their private teachers motivated them to pursue their goal of attending a famous college with a highly regarded dance program in Seoul. The goal motivated them to endure and concentrate more on the hard training process. They commonly said, “I thought I was just competing with the Seoul ballet kids in the prestigious art schools,” The following transcripts present their experiences and thoughts well.

“My (private) teacher definitely understood my body well, and it was obviously different from other teachers I had been taught before. Every student has different body muscles and characteristics, and my teacher understood my body correctly first and gave me a customized teaching method for it. … I could improve my skills and performance a lot according to her tailored teaching method only for me” (S9).

“My former dance instructor recommended that I learn ballet with another teacher in Seoul if I am going to learn ballet properly and professionally… I learned from scratch basic positions and techniques from the new teacher in Seoul… I only had two-hour lessons once a week on weekends and summer vacation. But after three months, I realized that my leg shape had
changed positively. … I realized that it was because the teacher taught me how to use my muscles properly from scratch, so my leg shape had changed (dramatically)” (S15).

**Subtheme 4-3. Excessive Competitions and Negative Influence of Schools and Teachers**

Six students reported their negative experiences with school teachers and other faculty in the art-specialized school (S4, S6, S11, S15, S21, S25). Their negative experiences were related to the ballet teachers’ overt favoritism, comparisons of students, and the negative language in the interactions in the classroom, which left lasting negative experiences on the participants. S4 described her experience with a middle school teacher who overtly and negatively compared her to other students in a different class. According to her, her art-specialized middle school had two classes that divided the students into a “ballet competition prep class (Class A)” and a “non-prep class (Class B).” She recalled the negative feelings and emotions due to the negative language of her ballet teacher, who kept comparing her and other classmates in the Class B to the Class A students.

“(When I was in the 2nd year of art-specialized middle school), I was initially placed in the Class A, but I gave up participating in ballet competitions in the year and moved to the Class B. However, the teacher (negatively and aggressively) compared me and other classmates too much with the Class A students. It was really too much... I was stressed out by the teacher. I was not worried that my movements may not perform well at that time, rather, I was scared of the teacher’s language itself. I was just scared of “what she (the teacher) would say to me today.” ... Looking back on it now, I still don’t know if it was really necessary to say that way to us. We were just young kids back then” (S4).
Theme Five. Ballet Peers: Mixed Feelings of Rivalry and Camaraderie

Regarding the fifth research question about the roles and patterns of peer relationships among student ballet dancers, the fifth theme was formulated with two subthemes: (a) Mutual Growth with Stimulation, Not Friendship, but Camaraderie, and (b) Excessive Competitiveness, Envy and Jealousy (see Figure 11). All 20 student participants described their experiences in ballet peer relationships in both positive and negative ways. Although some participants reported having close non-ballet friends, most of them said that the range of peer relationships was narrow and limited within the art-specialized school or in the same ballet studio. It was a rare chance to meet friends outside the ballet field because they had been practicing ballet most of the time since they were very young, usually since elementary school. Twelve students who spent their six years of teens in the art-specialized middle and high school said that they had no chance to make other friends outside the arts major after graduating from elementary school. For these reasons, most participants reported that their non-ballet peers also majored in arts-related fields, such as other dances (e.g., modern dance or Korean traditional dance major) or other artistic disciplines, such as music or fine arts, because they attended together in the same art-specialized school. Therefore, this study found the meaning of the following common experiences in their relationships with their ballet peers only.
Figure 11

*Fifth Theme: Ballet Peers: Mixed Feelings of Rivalry and Camaraderie*

![Diagram]

**Subtheme 5-1. Mutual Growth with Stimulation: Not Friendship, but Camaraderie**

According to the students’ interviews, ballet classes are usually group lessons, and ballet shows basically require group dances, which should be perfectly in sync. Due to the nature of ballet, cooperative situations are everywhere for them. At the same time, all participants reported visible and invisible competitions and negative patterns of interpersonal relationships in their daily lives, not only in the ballet performance but also in their academic achievements. S4 and S6 described the characteristics of the interpersonal relationship among ballet peers as a “business partnership” with mutual benefit and common goals rather than “unconditional friendship.” The statement of S6 clearly showed the nature of their ballet peer relationship.

“Except for a few kids, we were almost business partnerships... so even when we try to bond, it doesn’t work out. I think it’s better to prepare for a show together, and even if we did not like each other or we were not really close friends, we had to dance together for the show, because we had to perform on the stage” (S6).
Nevertheless, all student participants expressed mixed feelings and ambivalence about the relationships between “work partnership with competitiveness” and “camaraderie.” Students talked about their experiences and said that only their ballet peers could “deeply” understand each other’s challenges and struggles. S1, S4, and S23 stated their mixed feelings about their ballet peer relationship as below.

“Even though we are close friends, we can’t help but compete with each other. We had no choice but to compete with each other, which makes us feel bad for each other” (S1).

“We spent all the time doing ballet training together, so we simultaneously get to know each other even if we don’t fit each other. (Regardless of whether the relationship is good or bad,) just by being close together (due to the group training schedule), we can’t help but get to know each other. … So, it was difficult to say things like ‘I’m struggling’ because we are all on the same path, and aiming for the same goal, and we are all struggling. It felt like saying “I am struggling,” to another kid who is also struggling. Because it’s not just me, it’s the same for other kids. So, there wasn’t much personal conversation, just we were just like talking about “what time does the class start today?” or “what is the combination we have to practice today?” (S4).

“In my college life in the dance major, we were able to be closer because there are many things to prepare for by working together, each other, because it’s the nature of the dance major. We have to work together and develop a camaraderie; I think that majoring in ballet actually helped me form good interpersonal relationships in my adult life” (S23).

**Subtheme 5-2. Excessive Competitiveness, Envy and Jealousy**

On the other hand, many students shared negative experiences with their ballet peers due to the competitive culture within the art-specialized school (S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S21, S25). The students said that there was always competition in the classroom among
each other because it was an art school system where a small number of students were supposed
to be on a line from 1st to 20th place, even though they were all excellent. S12’s mother, P12,
commented on the overly competitive peer culture at the art school by saying, “They say their
dance reflects their personality and character, but I can’t believe how such a selfish group of
people can dance beautifully.” She talked about her experience with “selfish” behaviors among
art-specialized school students including her daughter due to the competitive school
environments, as follows.

“The selected kids are all excellent and talented, but only 20 or so students with the same goals
are gathered in the same classroom. They were all good and talented, and my daughter was one
of them there. She was always complimented by others before going there, but all the other kids
were the same, all just as talented as my girl. So, she had been through all kinds of hardships in
peer relationships (with her competitive peers), and I thought at some point she had become
selfish as well. ... I’ve heard dance teachers and professors say that a person’s personality and
character come out in their dancing, but I also thought about how they (the art school students)
could dance so beautifully in such a selfish group. But I thought it was a learning process for my
daughter’s life.... After she entered college and met people from other majors, I think my
daughter is growing up a little and changing to be more emotional and empathetic” (P12, the
mother of P12).

Envy and jealousy towards the outstanding students were also part of the negative
relationship. Five students (S5, S8, S11, S13, S25) recalled the hostile behavior of their ballet
peers toward the participants with envy and jealousy of their outstanding performance. In
particular, S8 and S13 had a common negative experience with their ballet peers when they
transferred to their arts specialty middle school. Both said that they were not very good at doing
ballet at first and that they had a different “starting line” from other students in the art-
specialized school because they transferred from other public schools and joined the class in the

120
middle of the semester. However, their ballet performance improved later when they went to high school, and they became first in their entire cohort. As they blossomed in their ballet technique and their grades improved, they reported that their peers showed overtly or covertly aggressive behaviors toward them out of envy and jealousy. For example, P13, the mother of S13, shared an anecdote about other classmates bullying her daughter because other students were jealous of S13’s excellence.

“It wasn’t like that in (art) middle school hood, but then when I got to (art) high school, there were a lot of people who were jealous of me because I was getting better grades (than when I was in art middle school), and their (intimidating) behaviors were really overt. Instead, the teachers were more supportive, but that made it worse. ...I think I had really bad experiences in high school with jealousy and stuff like that from my classmates. ... (Not only the classmates but also), even seniors who were jealous of me because I was doing a little bit better than them. ... some seniors were saying like, ‘I just don’t like you for no reason’” (S13).

“There were only 12 or 13 kids in a class, and they had to be together for three years straight, and my daughter struggled a lot in her first and second years in high school because there was jealousy of her because she was always in the first place in her performance. One day, she called me crying and saying over the phone, “Mom, I want to quit ballet” because of the bullying behaviors from other kids. It broke my heart” (P13, the mother of S13).

**Theme Six. Culture Shapes Specific Norms and Priorities in TD**

Regarding the sixth research question about how socio-cultural factors play a role in individual talent development in ballet, and how or when they become crucial, the sixth theme was formulated by the three subthemes from the participants’ common experiences related to their critical points or decision-making in their learning development process in specializing in ballet (see Figure 12). Based on the common experiences of all participants, the two subthemes,
(a) Prioritizing College Education Over Ballet Company, and (b) Turning Crisis into Opportunity: The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic, were formulated first. Additionally, the third subtheme of the sixth theme, (c) Mandatory Military Service Duty for Ballerinos, was identified as a gender-specific common experience.

Figure 12

Sixth Theme: Culture Shapes Specific Norms and Priorities in TD

Subtheme 6-1. Prioritizing College Education Over Ballet Company

All interviewees reported that graduating college with a prestigious ballet major program should be a priority or must-stage before applying for the professional ballet dancer position. Fifteen participants (S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S22, S24, S25) who are planning to be professional ballet dancers reported that they believed that the best time to be a professional dancer is after graduating from the four-year college courses.

As for the reason for prioritizing college, many students thought that it was too natural to go to college in the Korean education system, even for ballet dancers. They said that they had
never considered joining a ballet company instead of college. In one case, S12 had the experience of turning down the offer of an apprenticeship position with a scholarship from the Finnish National Opera and Ballet when she was in an art-specialized high school. She said that her high school teacher advised her that “it is better to go to college in Korea for your future career” rather than to become a professional dancer without a college degree. S22 had studied abroad at the Dutch National Ballet Academy, but decided to return to Korea and chose to attend college in Korea. The following extracted interviews with S22 and S24 show the above common perception about college education for ballet dancers.

“I think it’s better to learn ballet in Korea, considering the life after retiring from a ballet dancer’s career, and there are many more jobs available to choose from here (in Korea)” (S22).

“If I work in Korea, I feel like a college degree is a requirement that I can’t really avoid. Well, unless I’m going to dance and work for the rest of my life (in case I can’t dance anymore), a college degree is almost like a necessity...I think everyone’s final goal is to get into and graduate from a college in Korea unless you’re saying that you’re going to go abroad and never come back to Korea” (S4).

Subtheme 6-2. Turning Crisis into Opportunity: The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Crisis. In ballet, appropriate facilities, such as a dancing floor, mirrors, and barres, are essential for practicing the movements. However, during the pandemic, the use of dance studios for group lessons was highly regulated and even restricted. All participants reported that they could not practice their routine in the appropriate spaces, especially in the school facilities as usual. As a result, all 20 students shared similar experiences in which their learning and training routines were disrupted. Dancing while wearing masks was one of the barriers they had to endure
during the pandemic. Breathing properly is undoubtedly essential to performing ballet, but all students talked about how challenging it was to breathe properly while dancing with a mask on. Six students (S7, S8, S12, S22, S24, and S25) reported that the ballet shows were canceled, so the students had less experience performing on the stage in front of a public audience. S13 and S21 reported that practicing ballet with masks for a few years during the pandemic also negatively impacted their facial expressiveness. S3 and S22 had similar experiences in that the pandemic was why they dropped out of studying abroad in European countries and decided to attend college in Korea.

**Opportunities.** On the other hand, some students reported that the pandemic period was their chance to focus on individual one-on-one lessons with their private ballet instructor. Unlike students who attended art-specialized schools in Seoul and metropolitan areas in Korea, where private ballet lessons outside of school are prohibited, students who attended other local art-specialized schools were free to take private lessons during the pandemic period. Specifically, two students, S9 and S15, who attended local art-specialized schools in non-metropolitan areas or Seoul, said that going online in the school due to the pandemic gave them more time to have one-on-one intensive lessons with their private ballet instructors. The following verbatims of S9 and S15 illustrate how they utilized the pandemic crisis as a productive time to improve their performance.

“I had more time to practice with my private lesson instructor in Seoul after the pandemic, and I was able to go to Seoul more often, which gave me more time to grow and improve my ballet. Whenever I heard that classes were canceled because someone got COVID positive, I thought, ‘oh, I’ll have more time to go to get lessons in Seoul.’ It was actually better for me that the school classes were canceled” (S9).
“I thought it was more of an opportunity because other kids in an art-specialized high school in Seoul were not allowed to have private lessons outside of school (due to the school policy), so if their school was closed, they wouldn’t be able to have lessons. But I was able to go to private lessons even if the school was closed (because my art-specialized school in a non-metropolitan area permitted private lessons), and there were many more kids who were not able to practice than those who could. So I thought, ‘let’s take this (pandemic lockdown) as an opportunity to get practice more in Seoul….I saw this crisis as an opportunity. I thought, it was time to practice more. The school classes were fully online and even asynchronous recorded classes, so I took more private lessons in Seoul during that time, so I was able to focus more on my ballet practice’” (S15).

Subtheme 6-3. Mandatory Military Service Duty for Ballerinos

Two male student participants (S5 and S25) shared a Korean cultural-specific issue in their career plan as ballet dancers, which is about at least 18 months of mandatory military service for all men over the age of 18 in South Korea. Mandatory military service is a big issue, especially for male ballet dancers with Korean nationality. Even though military service is a civic duty, it can be a stressful task for male ballet dancers because it means that they are forced to stop their normal routines and career-related opportunities as dancers. For example, their daily training routine is interrupted, and potentially important opportunities to dance on the stage are extremely restricted. The only way to complete their military duty while maintaining their ballet career outside the military camp is to be selected for the Art and Sports Personnel under the Military Service Law (Ministry of Government Legislation, n.d.). However, only a few qualified people can be selected for the position if they win the first or, in rare cases, the second prize. Technically speaking, working as an Arts and Sports Personnel positions does not mean exemption from military duty because it is also another form of military duty. However, the
interviewed male students expressed the position as “exemption” because the positions allow the selected people to live outside the military camp, and they are exempted from group military training they must do while living inside the camp. Therefore, I used the verbatim “exemption” as it is in the extracted transcript here that the interviewees used in the conversation. 

S5 and S25 expressed the common concerns that military service would negatively affect their daily practice and maintaining ballet bodies they had shaped through long-term intensive training. Additionally, they did not want their learning and developing experiences in the college program disrupted during their military service. S5 expressed his concerns about the interruptions of his ballet learning and training because of military duty, as below.

“I’m learning a lot at university now, and I feel that it shouldn’t be interrupted (by military service) because I’m developing and growing now, so I’m thinking about it (doing military service) after I graduate from university, but I have a lot of worries. …. (Kyung Hyun: If you would start military service, you’re worried about getting your body stiff or something?) Yes, that’s the biggest thing, because I can’t practice ballet every day (in the military camp)” (S5).

Although two male student participants shared similar concerns, each student reported different plans for dealing with the duty. S5 said that he had almost decided to join the general soldier position after graduating from college. On the other hand, at the time of the interview, S25 had been actively applying to major competitions both nationally and internationally to obtain the Arts and Sports personnel position. Since there are significant restrictions for young Korean men to stay abroad without completing military service, S25 reported that resolving the service before his graduation was one of the most critical issues for S25 because he was aiming to join an overseas ballet company. The below verbatim show the different coping strategies in detail.
“It might be okay to try the big international competitions for the military exemption, but now the possibility (to win the first prize to be qualified for the exemption) doesn’t seem so high. Moreover, I’m a Korean man, and going to the military is part of my life and responsibility, and I think it’s okay just to go and come back (to my ballet career). So, I don’t really want to risk my life obsessing over the competitions for exemption” (S5).

“I have a plan (to participate in the big competitions to obtain the qualification of an exemption from military service), but I’m not sure if it has to be realized. I’m thinking about trying this year’s competition, so I’m preparing for it. (Kyung Hyun: If it goes well, is it okay not to go to the military service?) Yes. (Kyung Hyun: So, what kind of competitions are qualified to apply for the exemption? How big are the competitions?) I am participating in a competition called YAGP (Youth America Grand Prix) in the United States. I have already passed the preliminary rounds. If it doesn’t work out, if I don’t win first prize there, my next plan is to win first prize at the Korea International Ballet Competition or the Seoul International Dance Competition. (Kyung Hyun: Do they only give exemptions to first-place winners?) And the second prize” (S25).

**Summary of Findings**

The present study analyzed the interview verbatim, background information, and other sources from 20 college students and 14 mothers using reflexive thematic analysis from a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Based on the analysis, 17 subthemes emerged, and six themes were formed. The six themes provided empirical evidence that shows multiple aspects and layers involved in the long-term talent development trajectories from early childhood to adulthood of the gifted and talented people in ballet. Six themes, 17 subthemes, and significant interview statements are organized in Table 7. All of the extracted interview transcripts presented above are organized in Appendix H.
### Table 7

**Final Six Themes and Seventeen Subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet</td>
<td>(a) Ballet Body First, but not Absolute</td>
<td>“Height can’t be ignored for male dancers because if the dancer is tall, it looks superior on stage, so, we say that the taller you are, the better you are on the stage. … On the other hand, if you’re small, male ballet dancers with relatively short height are hard to get roles of the main character. We cannot say that height is absolute for getting roles, but to some extent?” (S5).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>“Unfortunately, in the ballet world, it is inevitably very important to be born with (ideal body types). We cannot change the size of our heads even if we put in the effort, and we cannot get taller anymore. The only one we can change with our effort is losing weight. Appropriately looking good height and having long arms and legs, these things can rarely change by effort. For example, a sense of rhythms can be achievable by hard training to some extent, but being innate is everything in the ballet” (S24).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Acquisition of Ballet Techniques and Movements: Innate but Trainable</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Ballet is very scientific, so if the timing and coordination are perfectly combined, even if the jump is not high enough, it can be looking good. … I was not good at performing jumps before, but I practiced it every day in the class, and I felt my jump improved a lot” (S24).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Artistic Expressions: Innate but Trainable</td>
<td></td>
<td>“When I was younger, my nickname was Ice Princess because I was kind of blunt and not very emotionally expressive, and I didn’t smile that much. But as I grew up, I thought, ‘let’s do what I’m good at’, because it is impossible to change my body shape or inherited physical limitations, instead, I thought what I can change by myself, and it is the ability to express emotions. I thought that would be a great weapon for me, depending on my effort. Also, I got more and more excited about expressing myself in character on stage, so I practiced a lot, focusing on this” (S10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Subthemes</td>
<td>Significant Statements</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Inclination to Physical Activities</td>
<td>Especially Ballet-specific Motivation</td>
<td>“S6 was very distracted and very active. When she was young, she was like, you know, she can’t sit still even for a second. She liked climbing up on a couch or high places and falling down, and she loved doing something like that. She climbed up doorframes like boys, and kept running around.” (P6)</td>
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<td>“I’m not very athletic (laughs). But I have been able to perform ballet and Korean traditional dance quite well, but I can’t do everything else. I think if you ask my mom, she would probably admit it. When I have to run, I don’t even have a basic sense of motor skills… I don’t know, but overall, I’m not good at all (other sports). I still can’t do the double-unders in jump rope or anything like that. I don’t think I have the sense of motor skills except for dancing” (S2).</td>
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<td>Close Connections Between Physical and</td>
<td>(a) Body and Mental Pains are Tangled</td>
<td>“I didn’t hurt my ankle in the ballet class, but my feet got too weak because of the long ballet practice, and my feet were broken just going down the stairs. So, I couldn’t walk for about three weeks and had a cast on. Actually, taking a long break is so risky and stressful for ballet dancers. Dieting is also difficult, but if I can control how to go on a diet, I can find several alternative ways. But with injuries, I have to deal with all the pain (mental and physical) on my own. The rehabilitation and recovery are all on my own. When I sat and watched other friends doing ballet, I felt more fascinated by dancing and wanted to dance more. I felt more strongly that I wanted to run and jump” (S24).</td>
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<td>Mental Stress</td>
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<td>“It is something that every ballet peer had to go through when they were a kid. If you go through a lot of things like falling off of toenails, and repeating it a lot, you get calluses, and it does not hurt anymore. My toenails don’t grow long anymore. … Did I say this too brightly? (laugh)” (S24).</td>
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<td>(b) Taken-for-granted Pain and Individualized Coping Strategies</td>
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<td>Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort,</td>
<td>(a) Family Values on Arts and Sports</td>
<td>“I exposed her to a lot of music because I thought if she liked it, this might be the future path she had to follow. She just experienced it naturally. I never forced her to study. I just exposed her to everything if she wanted to. … I saw her happiest moments when she was listening to music and dancing, which made her the happiest. So, I thought I have to</td>
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<td>Care, and Money</td>
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<td>Themes</td>
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<td>(b) Manager Mom and Educational Mobility</td>
<td>(a) Significant Teacher’s Role: Individualized Private Lesson in Local Cities</td>
<td>“My (private) teacher definitely understood my body well, and it was obviously different from other teachers I had been taught before. Every student has different body muscles and characteristics, and my teacher understood my body correctly first and gave me a customized teaching method for it. … I could improve my skills and performance a lot according to her tailored teaching method only for me” (S9).</td>
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<td>(c) Talent Development Costs a Lot</td>
<td>(a) Systematized Gifted Education: Art-specialized Schools in Seoul</td>
<td>“I had a tough time learning ballet in the rigorous program in the art school, but I think I learned the basics really well, like how to use my body properly to dance ballet, and how to perform neatly without any bad habits” (S3).</td>
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<td>Effective School Curriculum or Competent Teachers</td>
<td>(b) Excessive Competitions and Negative Influence of Schools and Teachers</td>
<td>“(When I was in the 2nd year of art-specialized middle school), I was initially placed in the <em>Class A</em>, but I gave up participating in ballet competitions in the year and moved to the <em>Class B</em>. However, the teacher (negatively and aggressively) compared me and other classmates too much with the <em>Class A</em> students. It was really too much... I was stressed out by the teacher. I was not worried that my movements may not perform well at that time, rather, I was scared of the teacher’s language itself. I was just scared of “what she (the teacher) would say to me...”</td>
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Guide my daughter to the things that make her happy when she does that” (P9, the mother of S9).

“Even after dropping kids off at school, I got busy again. I had to order costumes and props, prepared their pointe shoes or leotards, and sometimes I had to select music for helping my daughters’ competition stages” (P1, the mother of S1 and S2).

“I have heard people say that if we decide for our child to major in ballet, the money will go out from the parents’ pockets, like pulling tissues out of a Kleenex, which means that it will cost a lot. It might be beyond our expectations. When my daughter wanted to major in ballet first, I was reluctant to let her start to major in ballet because that was the time when my business was in a bad situation, unfortunately. I was struggling financially to run my business, and I was not sure if I could pay for the ballet lesson fee. However, S7’s ballet teacher said, “Let me teach S7, it's okay that you pay it later,” so I actually saved all that money and gave it back to the teacher later” (P7, the mother of S7).
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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Ballet Peers: Mixed Feelings of Rivalry and Camaraderie</td>
<td>(a) Mutual Growth with Stimulation: Not Friendship, But Camaraderie</td>
<td>“... Looking back on it now, I still don’t know if it was really necessary to say that way to us. We were just young kids back then” (S4). “We spent all the time doing ballet training together, so we simultaneously get to know each other even if we don’t fit each other. (Regardless of whether the relationship is good or bad,) just by being close together (due to the group training schedule), we can’t help but get to know each other. … So, it was difficult to say things like ‘I’m struggling’ because we are all on the same path, and aiming for the same goal, and we are all struggling. It felt like saying “I am struggling,” to other kid who is also struggling. Because it’s not just me, it’s the same for other kids. So, there wasn’t much personal conversation, just we were just like talking about “what time does the class start today?” or “what is the combination we have to practice today?” (S4).</td>
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<td>(b) Excessive Competitiveness, Envy and Jealousy</td>
<td>“The selected kids are all excellent and talented, but only 20 or so students with the same goals are gathered in the same classroom. They were all good and talented, and my daughter was one of them there. She was always complimented by others before going there, but all the other kids were the same, all just as talented as my girl. So, she had been through all kinds of hardships in peer relationships (with her competitive peers), and I thought at some point she had become selfish as well” (P12, the mother of P12).</td>
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<td>Culture Shapes Specific Norms and Priorities in TD</td>
<td>(a) Prioritizing College Education Over Ballet Company</td>
<td>“If I’m working in Korea, I feel like a college degree is a requirement that I can’t really avoid. Well, unless I’m going to dance and work for the rest of my life (in case I can’t dance anymore), a college degree is almost like a necessity...I think everyone’s final goal is to get into and graduate from college in Korea unless you’re saying that you’re going to go abroad and never come back to Korea” (S4).</td>
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<td>(b) Turning Crisis into Opportunity: The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic</td>
<td>“I thought it was more of an opportunity because other kids in an art-specialized high school in Seoul were not allowed to have private lessons outside of school (due to the school policy), so if their school was closed, they wouldn’t be able to have lessons. But I was able to go to private lessons even if the school was closed (because my art-specialized school in a non-metropolitan area permitted private lessons), and there were...”</td>
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<td>(c) <strong>Mandatory Military Service Duty for Ballerinos</strong></td>
<td>many more kids who were not able to practice than those who could. So I thought, ‘let’s take this (pandemic lockdown) as an opportunity to get practice more in Seoul….I saw this crisis as an opportunity. I thought, it was time to practice more. The school classes were fully online and even asynchronous recorded classes, so I took more private lessons in Seoul during that time, so I was able to focus more on my ballet practice” (S15).</td>
<td>“I’m learning a lot at university now, and I feel that it shouldn’t be interrupted (by military service) because I’m developing and growing now, so I’m thinking about it (doing military service) after I graduate from university, but I have a lot of worries…. (Kyung Hyun: If you would start military service, you’re worried about getting your body stiff or something?) Yes, that’s the biggest thing, because I can’t practice ballet every day (in the military camp)” (S5).</td>
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Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings for the six research questions by connecting them to the existing theories of human development, gifted and talented development, and the findings from previous relevant empirical studies. This study investigated the experiences of talented students in ballet in South Korea based on the six research questions. As a result, six themes emerged according to the research questions. The findings were mainly interpreted based on talent development theories that emphasize the dynamics and changeability of talent potential over time and its interactions with environments (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2021; Gagné, 1985, 2004, 2013, 2021). As an umbrella theoretical framework for interpreting the results, the bio-ecological perspective on general human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995) was applied across the talent development theories in order to illuminate the complexity, dynamics, and developmental changes in the lifelong ballet talent development of the participants. In particular, certain key concepts of the Evolving Complexity Theory (ECT) (Dai, 2017, 2021) were dominantly utilized for interpretation because the core ideas of ECT actively take a bio-ecological perspective on talent development. Compared to other talent development theories, ECT is advantageous in explaining intertwined talent development trajectories alongside general human development. Also, it emphasizes the bi- or multi-directionality of the interaction between nature and nurture by believing in every child’s potential and individual profiling, as well as recognizing the complexity and possibility of nurturing talent through the individual’s efforts and strategies. For these reasons, ECT was applied as the main theoretical framework to interpret the meaning of the common experiences of participants.
Summary of the Study

This study was designed to comprehensively explore the talent developmental paths of gifted and talented students in ballet across multiple layers of their lives. According to the purpose of the study, this project collected interview data related to the participants’ experiences in learning ballet for almost 20 years, from their early childhood to their current early adulthood. The research questions addressed not only personal factors, such as aptitude and disposition in ballet, but also environmental factors, including the multiple layers of the system surrounding the individual in human development from a bioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Ceci et al., 2016). The key topics of the six research questions are (a) the participants’ individual competent aptitudes and dispositional traits, such as innate ballet-preferable body shape and strong ballet-specific motivation, (b) the adversities they undergo in the path of long-term talent development, and (c) the roles of family and home, (d) peer relationships, (e) educational institutions and teachers, and (d) socio-cultural systems.

Every child may have talent in a particular area; however, only a small number of people can survive in that area at a high level of expertise in adulthood from a lifelong perspective of human talent development. Talent and expertise development in ballet also has the “funnel” nature, allowing only a small number of students to pass through the gate into the professional ballet world. Considering the characteristics of career developmental patterns in the ballet world from the early onset of talent potential until expertise in the professionals, the present study investigated the experiences of Korean college students who demonstrated their giftedness and talent as evidenced by their admission to top ballet schools in South Korea.

Retrospective in-depth interviews were conducted to inquire extensively about the talented students’ lives from childhood to the present, from their late teens to early twenties. In
addition to the interviews with 20 college students, their mothers were also interviewed to ask about the students’ childhood, as their memories at an early age may be vague or inaccurate. Interviewing the 14 mothers of the students increased the credibility of the interview results in this qualitative study, equivalent to the validity in quantitative studies. The multiple types of data that included in-depth interviews, background information, and other visual materials that show the exceptional achievement of the participants in ballet (e.g., videos, photos, and pamphlets).

After the interviews, the member-checking process was thoroughly conducted by sending organized interview transcripts and preliminary coding of the results to the participants so as not to misdescribe or misinterpret the intent of the participants’ statements in the interviews and other materials. In addition to this rigorous member-checking process, thick descriptions based on full transcription of all verbatims, peer reviews, and audit trails were used to increase the credibility of the data.

According to the guide for phenomenological methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020), hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was applied to analyze the participants’ lived experiences to derive the meaning of the experiences within the theoretical framework of human development and talent development theories focused on ecological perspective (Bloom, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2021; Gagné, 1985, 2004, 2013, 2021). I applied reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) to effectively categorize and find the meaning units and themes from the extensive interview data of about 70 hours, which includes about 53 hours with 20 students and 17 hours of interviews with 14 mothers.

As a result, six themes emerged. The first theme, the jagged profile of individual TD in ballet, showed that talent is not a single entity, and it can be observed as jagged profiles of
different combinations of factors that consist of the concept of ballet talent. The second theme, the close connections between physical and mental stress, showed that participants commonly agreed that they experience their mental stressors mainly came from their pain and stress from their physical difficulties, such as injuries and pains due to the consistent hard training. However, the participants also showed that they devised and practiced coping strategies to deal with the stressors in their learning trajectories, pursue their career in ballet consistently, and keep moving toward the professional level of ballet career. The third theme, the wraparound parental support: time, effort, care, and money, showed how significant the supporting role of their parents and family is. Specifically, their mother’s role was almost sacrifices of their private times to put all-around support to their ballet kids, not only for the learning and training but also all aspects of life management, including dietary and medical care, traveling, and social networking with ballet teachers and other parents. The fourth theme, the effective school curriculum and competent teachers showed how significant the roles of the systematic and effective educational system and teachers are in bringing out not only the talented ballet kids’ obviously demonstrated abilities but also untapped hidden abilities. In this theme, the result also showed how negative the teacher’s language and behaviors could affect the participants’ motivation. The fifth theme, the ballet peers: mixed feelings of rivalry and camaraderie, showed that the participants experience the types and characteristics of interpersonal relationships found in the professional world of adults, even at an early age. Unlike the typical peer relationship based on friendship that other teenagers experience, the ballet kids experienced camaraderie or work partnerships with their ballet peers to share the same performance goals on stage. Also, seriously negative and aggressive patterns of peer relationships were reported due to the overly competitive learning environments. In the last sixth theme, the culture shapes specific norms and priorities in TD. The culturally specific
phenomenon was found in that the specific social and cultural systems in Korea generate new norms and prioritized career trajectories for ballet dancers. The six themes showed that social and cultural systems can lead to different talent developmental paths for individuals even in the same field. In the present study, Korean student ballet dancers commonly showed the experiences that they prioritized college education over a professional career as the required stage. Also, mandatory military service was a Korean culturally specific developmental task for male ballet dancers.

**Connecting Findings to Theories and Previous Studies**

In this section, I connected the findings based on the six themes to the existing theories of giftedness and talent development, and human development. I also compared the experiences of my Korean participants with similar cases from other cultures based on previous relevant empirical studies.

**Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet**

Regarding the first research question, the findings from the first theme supported that giftedness and talent are not a concept of a single entity of human ability but *jagged* individualized profiles with various aspects of aptitudes and dispositions (Dai, 2020; Rose, 2015). In terms of aptitudes in ballet talent, participants began to specialize in ballet with at least one potential strength that is advantageous for competent ballet dancers, which showed that the concept of *effectivity* suggested by Dai (2017, 2021), as a biological primary form of aptitude that suits a specific talent area.

However, the degree or aspect of the *effectivities* at an early age varied across talented individuals. Some students were identified as talented for their inherited ideal combination of
physical traits, such as lean body type, high arch of feet, and *appropriately-looking-good-on-stage* height. However, some students had only one or two ideal body traits, and they started the ballet even with the awareness that they did not have the advantage. Some students had excellent physical conditions but less proficiency in ballet technique, and vice versa. These cases more clearly support the concept of talent as profiling and combinations of different aspects that demonstrate exceptional performances in a specific human ability area.

Also, this phenomenon supports the concept of talent as being trainable rather than fixed (Dai, 2017, 2020, 2021; Rose, 2015). In this study, all 20 participants agreed that performing techniques can be developed by effective training strategies, and artistic expressions can be the trainable and improvable areas. They commonly shared their experiences that long-term, intensive, structured, and systematic ballet education improved the techniques and aesthetic aspects. While the participants shared common experiences in their deliberate practice to improve their performance, they also had different speeds of acquisition and specific training routines and strategies individually. Participants in this study had diverse profiles with a mix of common and individual unique factors, highlighting the need for a more flexible view of talent development and the significant role of education.

The present study also found that innate physical advantages, initially perceived as giftedness or talent in a child, could turn into disadvantages as the child goes through frustration caused by sudden changes in their bodies, even though this is a naturally occurring human development. For some students, puberty was a significant hindrance that influenced them to “keep maintaining” their ballet-preferable body shape. Their experiences imply that the effectivity they biologically inherited is also changeable according to their growth due to the general physical development of human beings, both positively and negatively. This finding
supported the shared experience of an outstanding ballet dancer, such as Misty Copeland, the genius ABT ballet dancer. She also recalled being stressed when her lean body was changed by gaining weight when she was naturally growing up. She felt much pressure during the period, directly and indirectly, due to her curved body, as a dilemma arose that the naturally developed body shape was a distracting weakness for being a professional ballet dancer in this field (Copeland, 2016).

However, dispositional factors such as a solid and ballet-specific interest, long-term and intensive commitment to training, and opportunity seeking for better education were commonly found in all 20 participants’ experiences. The finding that participants in this study showed a substantial degree of task commitment and long-term practice routine to master techniques, beautiful and graceful facial and body expressions, and better performance on stage represented the evidence of motivation. Specifically, the regular but intensive daily training routine they had kept from early into adulthood can be seen as evidence of deliberate practice based on common dispositional factors, including perseverance, endurance, and long-term dedication. This experience of Korean college students in the present study provides more evidence of the importance of strong motivation and perseverance in talent development in ballet or dance to support the findings of several relevant empirical studies in different cultures and populations (e.g., Chua, 2014b; Garces-Bacsal et al., 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2013; van Rossum, 2001; Walker et al., 2010, 2011, 2012).

The jagged pattern of talent of the students in ballet has provided empirical evidence of characteristic adaptation (CA) in ECT (Dai, 2017, 2021) that the participants’ talent potential includes not only their strengths but also their weakness but combinations among the several factors made their ballet talent to be discovered and developed to the level of semi-professional
as a student dancer. Connecting to the ECT, the finding from the present study shows that structural regularities about what develops in talent are not limited to the strengths. Still, the object of developing talent is a more complex profile mixed with strengths and weaknesses. In the cases of the participants, if they had only a few strengths in doing ballet, such as the cognitive ability to understand ballet technique quickly, their talent can be discovered and developed by improving their weaknesses, even if their low-arched feet, less flexible rotation muscles, or awkward facial expression made them frustrated. In particular, ballet technique and artistic sense were considered trainable factors by effective training and educational process.

**Close Connections Between Physical and Mental Stress**

This finding from the second theme showed evidence that success and pain go together in achieving expertise in the later phase of talent development in adolescence and early adulthood. Their ballet body or physically advanced abilities were one aspect of their giftedness in the early stage of their life. However, their giftedness and talent in ballet led them to experience take-it-granted pains and injuries that every ballet dancer must undergo in the talent development trajectories.

The close association between injuries and mental stress that the injuries cause could seriously jeopardize their career in the previous studies on talent development in ballet (e.g., Chua, 2014b; McEwen & Young, 2011; Noh et al., 2003; Noh & Morris, 2004; Ramkumar et al., 2016; Sanchez et al., 2013). This finding is meaningful because it illustrates the domain-specificity of adversities and difficulties in talent development trajectories depending on the talent domain. As the experiences of four participants who decided to be professional ballet dancers due to their injuries or diseases showed, maintaining their physical condition is a
significant factor, as “not getting seriously sick or hurt” is as essential as their inherited ballet body or physical condition.

The second finding closely overlapped with the first finding on the strong motivation and interest in ballet the participants commonly mentioned. From the talent development theory perspective, the present study provided further empirical evidence that supports the significance of strong motivation and effective coping strategies, which have long been discussed in talent development theories (e.g., Baum et al., 1996; Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021; Dai & Sternberg, 2004; Dai et al., 2015; Gagné, 1985, 2004, 2013, 2021; Renzulli, 1978; Renzulli & Delcourt, 1986). The participants’ experience showed the validity of evaluating strong motivation and task commitment as one criterion for selecting students for ballet gifted education in South Korea (Lee, 2013; Won, 2013).

The findings also support the concept of maximal adaptation (MA) by the ECT (Dai, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021) that the exceptional aptitude discovered onset point does not linearly predict success later throughout the long-term development trajectories, and the talented people should deal with the dynamics and complexity in the long-term learning and training process. In the present study, participants’ individualized training routine to prevent or rehabilitate their injuries can be interpreted as an intentional, self-directed, and purposive adapting process in MA in talent development.

**Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort, Care, and Money**

Regarding the third research question about the role of parents, family, and home environment on talent development, the present study also found that parental support is critical to the students pursuing talent development. The participants experienced that their mother was always with them to support them in all aspects of their lives. The experience of Korean students
who majored in ballet from a very early age showed a similar phenomenon to the ballet gifted kids’ lives in different cultures, such as the UK (Aujla et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2011) or the U.S. and Finland (Chua, 2014b).

Bloom (1985) stated that comprehensive parental support is essential to keep gifted children motivated to learn and grow with a long-term goal. The importance of the supportive role of parents is critical in general human development, not limited to talent development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The result of the present study also provides empirical evidence of the positive parental role. Significantly, the mother’s support was almost sacrificed rather than supported. The “ballet moms” lives were full of managing their children’s schedules, riding, and preparing food, medicine, costumes, and props. The mothers’ support included networking with other ballet moms and gathering information about good instructors, better ballet schools, and medical services to care for chronic muscle pain or injuries. Their support was wraparound and all-encompassing in managing and caring for their ballet kids. This “manager mom” phenomenon found in the present study shows a similar type of parental support for their ballet children that Hamera (2007) introduced in her ethnographic study of ballet mothers in a California ballet studio who share the goals, accomplishments, and even the intensity of hard training with their ballet children.

As an interesting finding, the present study participants commonly mentioned that the positive family value of a career in arts and sports is one important environmental factor in developing talent in the arts, such as ballet. All students reported that their parents respected their decision to major in ballet. Also, from the interview with mothers, they all said they wanted to help their kids find what they want to do and let them do what they like with trust and support. Similar to Garces-Bacsal et al.’s (2011) study on artistically talented students in Singapore, there
is an underlying stereotype in Korean culture that views careers as artists as not preferable due to the instability of job status and income, despite their professional skills and tremendous efforts. It is relatively common for parents to favor their children pursuing socially and financially promising and rewarding careers, which is particularly prevalent in Asian parenting culture (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Yamashita et al., 1999). In a systematic review study by Akosah-Twumasi and colleagues (2018) on factors influencing career decisions among young people, the authors found that Korean students and parents tend to prioritize occupations that offer financial and social benefits based on market trends (Choi & Kim, 2013) or occupational prestige that is highly regarded in the given culture (Yamashita et al., 1999) compared to other cultures, such as Japan or the U.S. When considering the realistic situation in the school context in Korea, arts and sports, including ballet, have been less valued than majoring in academic subjects, such as STEM fields, business, economics, or other fields that offer a higher income with relatively stable positions. Nevertheless, the narratives of the participants in this study showed that they prioritized their ballet-specific task excellence and strong motivation over market forces in terms of job prospects or income. Even in the culturally negative stereotype of ballet as a career in Korean culture, the participants in this study commonly said that their parents were supportive and encouraged their career aspirations and practical plans to be professional artists. Considering the cultural characteristics that emphasize family cohesion and family values in an individual’s career choices (Kim et al., 2016), the nontraditional experiences of the participants in the present study suggest that parents’ supportive and respectful attitude toward their children’s autonomous career decisions as ballet dancers are meaningful. This supportive parenting can be seen as providing strong emotional support for their artistically and physically gifted children who
choose a career in the arts based on intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic rewards such as money or social prestige.

The parents’ value of respecting the children’s interest in ballet is also directly and indirectly shown in the financial support. Ballet is an “expensive talent” that requires a lot of educational expense, and the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents may be critical to supporting their children’s learning. Family financial hardship is a common major socio-cultural barrier to the discovery of potential and the development of a gifted child (Dixson, 2020; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2023). Ballet is a representative domain where financial support is critical. Although the causal relationship between parents’ SES and students’ achievement in ballet, all student participants said their parents never said or expressed a negative attitude toward paying the large expenses for their ballet education. This shared experience was confirmed in the interview with their mother. Some mothers said that even though paying the lesson fee or traveling fee to attend international competitions made them feel burdened, they never expressed the financially tricky situation in front of their kids. The parents said they spent a significant portion of their income or sometimes took on loans to pay the relevant fees for their children to continue to learn ballet. These behaviors may imply the parenting value of respecting children’s talents and dreams. Without the parenting perspective that respects careers, their children show strong interests and aptitude, and the wraparound and unconditional support may be challenging to provide. The present study shows the importance of parenting philosophy in prioritizing what a talented kid wants to be, wants to do, and wants to pursue.

**Effective School Curriculum and Competent Teacher**

The findings from the fourth theme provided empirical evidence to emphasize the role of education and the teacher’s role in artistically talented students in ballet. All the participants
commonly underlined the importance of learning ballet in a “proper” way to understand and use their body and “what the ballet is.” They described the learning experiences as that they finally were able to say “I am specialized in ballet” only when beginning their learning in the highly structured curriculum of art-specialized schools or with a professional teacher who provided the individualized training strategies. The learning stage was separated from “hobby ballet” with the level of enjoying the movements with music. This shared experience can be connected to the traits of middle years in talent development by Bloom’s (1985) study that this stage is for talented students to learn from the more professional level of teachers, instructors, or coaches and the quality and depth of the training turned narrower and more specialized.

Also, these represent the occurrence of process and temporal regularities of ECT (Dai, 2017, 2021). The present study provided an example of how process regularities operate in talent development in ballet for artistically and physically gifted children. Once their talent potential was discovered and the structural regularities operated to make their characteristic adaptation occurred by beginning their ballet-specialized training and learning in childhood, the process regularities occurred in the stage of art-specialized schooling or higher level of professional training with a private teacher. The participants’ experiences of more professionalized and intensive learning experiences in art schools or with private teachers and the changes in their understanding and growth in performing ballet represented the concept of temporal regularities that drove them to challenge higher levels of skills and knowledge.

The mobility that all participants had actively traveled or moved to other cities or locations for better learning typically showed real-world examples of the dynamics of process regularities and temporal regularities. Their educational purpose mobility can be interpreted as an example of process regularities in the dynamic interactions among multiple environmental
factors. The dynamics exist in the support from parents and family (i.e., moving together or supporting their child’s traveling), the role of educational institutes or teachers (i.e., a ballet-specific advanced curriculum of art-specialized schools, and highly professional and competent ballet teachers), and the socio-cultural systems and prevalent parenting style in Korean culture (i.e., the situation that the prestigious art-specialized high schools are concentrated in the Seoul area, and parenting philosophy highly value on children’s education in Korean culture).

*Ballet Peers: Mixed Feelings of Rivalry and Camaraderie*

The finding from the fifth theme provided the empirical evidence to support not only the classic talent development theories by Bloom (1985) and Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) and previous studies on student ballet dancers and artistically gifted students (e.g., Aujla et al., 2014; Chua, 2014b, 2015; Patrick et al., 1999; Sanchez et al., 2013; van Rossum, 2001; Walker et al., 2012). The fifth theme is closely related to the fourth theme on the lives of most participants in the art-specialized schools where they spent most of their adolescence. The participants commonly had a limited scope of peer relationships because they spent most of their time in ballet training from a very young age, usually ten or so in elementary schoolhood. They did not have enough time and opportunity to build peer relationships in childhood and adolescence. According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) bioecological model of human development, the effect of the peer group is significant to a child’s development in various aspects, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects as a microsystem. In the present study, the art-specialized school environment can be interpreted as a microsystem surrounding the participants. Their interpersonal relationships, including peers, were naturally formed with classmates who did ballet together, and these environments influenced the scope, type, and even quality of the individual participant’s interpersonal relationships.
The peer relationship that student participants experienced showed a similar phenomenon that Bloom (1985) generalized about the peer relationship of “becoming friends as well as competitors sharing the same goal” in the middle years of talent development (p. 522). As Bloom stated, the participants of this study self-defined their peer relationships as comraderies, sharing the same goal to enter a top ballet school or to be a professional ballet dancer. The participants also perceived that the collaboration and mutual stimulation with their ballet peers to keep motivated each other in the daily hard training were beneficial, as the previous studies found (Aujla et al., 2014; Chua, 2014b; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Patrick et al., 1999; Sanchez et al., 2013). However, the participants explained that their camaraderie relationship is different from a friendship that can be honest and open-minded to each other, and some students described the core of the relationship as a work partnership. Even a participant reported that she was seriously thinking of quitting ballet, and this case that showed the negative effect of poor peer relationships was found in Walker et al.’s (2012) UK students talented in ballet as well.

An interesting finding of the present study was that some students had the experience of transforming from “small fish in a big pond” when they first entered the art-specialized school with less competent ballet performance to “big fish in a small pond” later as a result of their hard training, as late bloomers. However, the participants reported consistently negative peer relationships with their ballet classmates because the reactive aggressive behaviors that their peers put down the participants’ poor ballet techniques when they were small fish turned into proactive, aggressive behaviors to negatively express their jealousy of the participants’ dramatically improved performance when they became a big fish. This result showed the possibility that the Big-Fish-Little-Pond (BFLP) effect (Marsh, 1987; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Marsh & Parker, 1984) is also a changeable phenomenon depending on the dynamics of talent...
developmental process among the aptitude, strong and solid task commitment and motivation, effective learning strategies, and consistently dedicated to training and learning in ballet. The present study showed a new finding that small fish could be “bigger” in the same pond regarding their ability, but the negative pattern of peer relationships did not change. The aggressive behaviors of their peers can exist toward “different-sized fish in a little pond (DFLP),” regardless of whether the fish is big or small. Although self-esteem or self-efficacy was not measured in the present study, S8 and S13’s challenging experiences as being DFLP imply how harmful the excessive competition and comparison among talented kids are to build healthy self-concepts for talented young students and keep them motivated to develop the talent field.

However, it was also found that some students were highly satisfied with the selective art-specialized school education with other “big-fish” peers, as the 13 participants graduated from one of the three prestigious art-specialized schools in Seoul. The emotional and motivational satisfaction reported by the 13 participants as members of the selective program can be an example of the “self-enhancing effect” of BFLP, as mentioned by Dai (2004, p. 267), contrasting the negative effect of BFLP on self-concept claimed by Marsh and Hau (2003). Also, the camaraderie described by the participants in the present study, which is neither a positive nor a negative type of social relationship among ballet peers in the selective school, represents another form of social relationship. The present study discovered a common phenomenon in which multiple types of the BFLP effect are present among the talented ballet students who attended one of the three prestigious art-specialized schools in the Seoul area in Korea. The findings of the present study provide empirical evidence that peer pressure among talented students in a selective program should be discussed within a broader concept of social comparison, in which the individual learners are able to regulate the social stressors depending
on their motivation and social cognition, and the active learner’s perceptions of the peer pressure may differ from the specific socio-cultural contexts (Dai, 2004; Dai & Rinn, 2008). It should consider both negative and positive aspects of competitive learning environments, as well as individual preferences, such as talented students’ development of social abilities and coping strategies in the inevitable competitive relationships between outstanding peers in the same field.

The second and fourth themes overlapped and need to be discussed, given that negative peer relationships have affected the participants to the extent that they had thought about quitting ballet. The negative ballet peer culture in art-specific schools can be interpreted as the young student dancers experiencing a miniature version of the professional world of adult ballet dancers “too early,” which is full of competition and work partnership rather than unconditional friendship. Even though they also felt a sense of camaraderie in sharing the same goals, there are concerns about missing out on the critical period of childhood and adolescence to build trust and foster positive self-esteem through selfless and unconditional friendship. The negative experiences of some participants in the present study about excessive competition in gifted institutions and the intimidating peer culture that can make them feel like giving up on their ballet career imply the necessity of appropriate intervention from teachers and parents to create safe learning environments. Creating a safe and less stressful educational culture that encourages students to trust and respect each other even in a competitive atmosphere will be as important as providing an effective and systematic training system.

Role of Culture and Social System in Talent Development

Related to the sixth research question, the present study found that changes in the macrosystem influence an individual’s developmental process (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The sixth theme of the present study provided evidence that cultural beliefs and
different patterns and types of learning opportunities, depending on the culture and social system, influence a person’s talent development at the individual level (Chua, 2014b; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Dai, 2017; Hutchison et al., 2013). The participants in the present study showed cultural-specific talent developmental goals and developmental patterns, such as prioritizing college over early entry to the professional ballet company and male dancers’ mandatory military service as a cultural and historic-specific developmental task. Specifically, the phenomenon of prioritizing college can be discussed with the third theme about parental and family support. The participants’ experience preparing for the college exam showed the concentrated parental support during their middle and high school lives before entering the colleges operating top ballet programs. The present study showed a unique cultural phenomenon in ballet education that was not found in the previous studies in other countries, such as Russia, Mexico, and the U.S. (Hutchinson et al., 2013) or Finland and Singapore (Chua, 2014b).

The interviews with the two male students about their thoughts and behaviors on mandatory military service imply that a person’s inherited traits, such as gender, can influence their unique talent development trajectory, which is shaped by interactions with their culture and social system. Although the compulsory military service system is also operated in some other countries such as Israel, Brazil, Austria, Switzerland, etc. (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.), the specific operating policies and rules may vary between these countries, along with the citizens’ perceptions and behaviors within the given social systems. Therefore, the interplaying patterns between the individual and the socio-cultural environment occur within specific geographical contexts. In this sense, the experience of the two participants should be seen as a culturally specific phenomenon in South Korea.
As an example of the influence of historical events, the participants’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic showed a unique phenomenon related to their ballet learning. Some students took advantage of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic situation to use their time to focus on ballet training instead of attending in-person classes at school. These experiences commonly imply the significant role of cultural and social systems and historical events in shaping talented individuals’ professional development experiences. The participants’ behaviors showed that unexpected social changes may also influence the shaping of specific norms and priorities, impacting how flexibly the individual reacts and adjusts to a new situation.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This section discusses the limitations of the present study and the suggestions and plans for future research. As the first limitation, this study does not provide the causal relationships between past experiences and current achievements or challenges because this is designed as a phenomenological study with qualitative research methodology. In the future following studies, it will be meaningful to verify the relationships among the factors that may influence their later career outcomes using psychometric instruments for future research. This topic will be continuously investigated as part of a series of large-scale research projects on the development of giftedness, talent, career, and expertise in performing arts. The following research will be actively considered to apply mixed methods by combining psychometrics and visual analysis to measure the participants’ aptitudes and their unobservable psychological factors, including positive (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience, eudaimonic well-being, etc.) and negative (e.g., depressive emotions) aspects more accurately. As the participants illuminated in the present study, there is a need to devise assessment methods that systematically and objectively measure ballet-specific or arts-domain-specific motivation and task commitment. Negative effects of
excessive competition and aggressive peer relationships (e.g., bullying) should also be more deeply investigated to understand the highly artistically and physically gifted students. For the following projects, interdisciplinary collaborative work with professional dancers and performing arts experts will be considered.

Second, this study did not discuss one unique case of S7 who attended alternative schooling and homeschooling regarding the effect of education and teachers. For the fourth research question about the role of education, I mainly focused on finding shared experiences that more students commonly reported. Public school systems cannot capture the diverse pathways of individuals to find unique ways to develop their talent. Inside the system, someone pursuing another learning opportunity outside school could be categorized as just a “dropout.” However, some students can find a way to keep developing their potential and career by creating their own learning environments outside the school system, as Barron’s (2006) study showed similar cases of Bermuda students. For example, studying abroad, alternative schools, and homeschooling can be seen as new systems of education actively organized by individuals. Specifically, in the arts field, public education in the traditional school system may not be able to provide the appropriate quality learning experiences for artistically and physically gifted students, such as the participants of the present study. Future research will investigate more diverse types of educational environments and the interaction with talented individuals in ballet and other performing arts.

As the third limitation of the present study, the phenomena the present research found are limited to generalizing the pattern of talent developmental process in ballet or other performing art fields. For example, only two male students participated in this study due to the female-dominated nature of the ballet, and it was not sufficient to generalize the male students’
experience in learning ballet. A future study will investigate the specific learning experiences of male ballet dancers and compare their talent and career developmental trajectories with those of female dancers. For example, *Nashville Ballet Young Men’s Scholarship Program* (Stumpfl, 2022; Nashville Ballet, n.d.) provides ballet education for boys aged from eight to 18 for free tuition would be a good example to reach out to look into the gender-related factors in giftedness and talent development in ballet. In terms of race, ethnicity, and culture, this study only collected the experiences of the Korean population consisting of a single race and ethnicity. Future research will conduct cross-cultural studies on young ballet dancers with diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, such as the United States, European countries, or other Asian countries.

Lastly, the present study will be extended to the future large-scale project to explore the experiences of professional dancers who have already proven themselves in competitive ballet companies as the next career stage of the participants in this study. Although the present study covered a long period of the participants’ experience from early childhood to early adulthood, the higher level of career achievement of the professional ballet dancers could provide more information and insights about the expertise and the level of *beyond expertise* to demonstrate more flexible and practical tacit knowledge, wisdom, and creativity (Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005) in their ballet dancer career.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the present study explored the multiple layers of talent development of talented college students in ballet in Korean socio-cultural context, including individual characteristics, psychological factors to endure the hard training and learning process, home and family supports, the roles of educational institutions, teachers, and resources, interpersonal
relationships with ballet peers who shared the same aspirations and goals, the influence of social system and cultural-specific context, and the dynamics of the interactions among these several factors and environments. This study found six themes through the thick and rich interview data with 34 participants and additional information.

As the key findings, the present study discovered that talent in ballet should be defined as a jagged profile that includes inherited strength and improved weakness by deliberate and effective learning and training, as well as domain-specific interest and motivation. To improve the weakness, the significant roles of systematic and effective curriculum and resources focusing on ballet-specific education and individualized teaching and training strategies of competent teachers. In terms of psychological assets to endure the long-term hard training of mastering ballet and excessively competitive environments, the present study found that their body and the physical challenges such as injuries and puberty were closely related to mental stresses and the most significant obstacles that negatively influence the student ballet dancers to keep motivated and dedicate to their learning trajectories. Their body was the most essential instrument to demonstrate their talent in ballet, but the body was the most significant stressor for them at the same time. However, talented participants showed resilience and motivation and actively sought and devised coping strategies to deal with the obstacles. In terms of familial factors, the present study found that the all-around full support of their parents and families allowed them to focus on mastering and developing their ballet performance in safe and comfortable environments. Lastly, the present study provided an example of how social and cultural systems and historical events could alter the developmental paths of an individual and even create new standards of achievement, provide unexpected opportunities, or impose unique developmental tasks that other populations in different societies and cultures rarely consider. Especially, findings of the present
study can be mapped to the theoretical background of ECT (Dai, 2017, 2021). Table 8 and Figure 13 shows how to connect the findings and the major theoretical concepts of ECT.

Most importantly, the present study found that talent is not a single identity, and the factors surrounding the talented individual do not occur separately but rather dynamically interact and influence change as the person grows from childhood to adulthood, which overlaps with the general human development. The findings of the present study do not mean that all the positive and perfect environments must be supported for talent development. It implies that an individual child’s potential, which may seem small or invisible first, could lead to greater achievement depending on the roles of education and the person’s effort to seek and cope strategies to deal with the various adversities and unexpected challenges in the complex lives of human beings. It also points to the importance of embracing the unpredictability and complexity of our lives and the value of resilience and plasticity, rather than simply viewing the life challenges as obstacles.

Although future research needs to be conducted to support the findings of the present study with more diverse populations, it clearly shows that predicting someone’s future achievements based on a few dominant traits can be shortsighted when discussing talent and expertise development from a life-long perspective. Our children are much more robust, much more adaptable, and have the potential to turn weaknesses into strengths than we expected. Educational support for every student with their own talent should consider the dynamics and the possibilities of the complexity. Talent development is a process in which complexity emerges as a snowdrop transforms into snowflakes of different shapes (Dai & Renzulli, 2008).
Table 8

Mapping ECT and Findings of the Present Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECT concepts (Dai, 2017, 2021)</th>
<th>Findings of The Present Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECT Stages</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Foundational Stage (Aptitude/Disposition Manifestation) | • Natural exposure to ballet education as hobbies or exercise by parents  
• Early signs of ballet talent potential (e.g., inclination to enjoy physical activities, ballet-preferable physical condition, musicality and sense of rhythm, interest, and motivation)  
• Talent recognized and discovered by parents, teachers, and neighbors  
• Started developing individualized jagged profiles of ballet talent with multiple combinations of aptitudes and dispositions |
| Transitional Stage (Characteristic Adaptation) | • Emergent ballet-specific interest and motivation and decided to “major in” ballet  
• Start ballet-specialized learning and training as goal-directed and purposive learning  
• Opportunity-seeking is actively occurring |
| Crystallizing Stage (Identify Formation) | • Intensive and semi-professional level of education in art-specialized schools or private lessons  
• New level of complexity emerged, not only as the opportunities (high-quality intensive learning, early productivity) but also as the challenges (physical and mental stressors, negative ballet peer relationship under excessive competitions) |
| Advanced Stage (Maximal Adaptation/Achieving expertise) | • Developing individual jagged profiles and getting close to achieving expertise by long time dedication  
• Developing individualized coping strategies development, daily routines  
• Developing personal philosophies and perspectives on the career |
| Push Environmental Press (Opportunities & Challenges) | • Cultural value of prioritizing college education over professional ballet company  
• The COVID-19 pandemic  
• Military services for male students  
• Competitions in the art-specialized schooling contexts  
• Competent teacher’s roles and well-developed specialized educational system  
• Negative influence of schools and teachers in excessively competitive learning environments |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECT concepts (Dai, 2017, 2021)</th>
<th>Findings of The Present Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationship, mixed with rivalry (conflict) and camaraderie (mutual growth)</td>
<td>• Family/Parental value on respecting the artist’s career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustain Socio-Cultural Mediation (Resources, Tools, &amp; Values)</td>
<td>• Systemized schooling system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community-based ballet education opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Culturally positive value on the field of ballet as an art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 13**

*Mapping the Findings of This Study to ECT Concepts*
This study is expected to contribute to the fields of gifted and talent development and education research in the following five ways. First, this study can contribute to solidifying the idea of human talent as a more flexible and developmental conceptualization of human talent. The results provided rich evidence that human talent development does not follow a linear and fixed direction and path. Rather, it can be changeable and trainable according to systematic and intensive educational interventions. This meaningful message in this study can help establish a more flexible and long-term perspective that recognizes the value of “late bloomers,” moving away from the traditional framework of giftedness and talent education that has focused on early identification and selective education.

Second, this study can contribute to changing the perspective on gifted and talented children from the traditional view of them as passive recipients of selective gifted programs to active agents of their daily lives, pursuing overall well-being and general healthy human development in a broader dimension. Early specialized training focusing on advanced skills and knowledge is important in providing high-quality education for gifted and talented students. However, the results of the present study showed that it may also be important to consider general human development phenomena, such as puberty or friendship development, along with early specialized training. In particular, the reality of the “foreclosure” of friendship development that the participants experienced in their art-specialized schooling, due to the overly competitive classroom, raises many questions for educators and researchers about whether we are on the right track in supporting the healthy social and emotional development of our children. This issue raises more extensive questions and tasks for us to seriously consider the healthy development of interpersonal relationships within the current selective programs.
Third, this study can contribute to drawing attention to the existence of domain-specific barriers to talent development. This study found that injuries and physical pain are unavoidable factors in honing ballet techniques; however, ironically, these are also the most critical and frustrating aspects. This phenomenon will be commonly observed in the fields of sports and performing arts that require physical abilities as well. This study is significant in suggesting that domain-specific barriers and adversities of artistically and physically talented students should be delicately addressed in the field of gifted and talent development research, as importantly as domain-specific abilities, motivation, and evaluations.

Fourth, this research can contribute to broadening the scope of perspective on ballet education, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. As this study introduced the socio-cultural context of ballet education in South Korea, the findings from this study empirically support re-evaluating the dynamics of cultural diversity within ballet education on a global scale. For example, the educational mobility for a better opportunity experienced by the participants in this study implies the feasible possibility of career mobility in their near future as they pursue professional job positions in the internationally acclaimed ballet company. This phenomenon can provide insights into the practical issues of racial and cultural diversity that can be found in occupational situations worldwide. Although ballet has its origins in Eurocentric culture, it has evolved into a global art form, with ballet companies now including dancers from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. In an era where diversity is recognized as a pivotal issue in education worldwide, this study is meaningful in advocating for the importance of creating culturally diverse educational environments sensitive to the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of highly talented and motivated young populations. The implications of this study can lead to a deeper focus on other related issues within the diversity of gifted education, such as underrepresented
students from immigrant backgrounds, marginalized geographic areas, and language barriers, such as lack of English proficiency.

Lastly, this study can contribute to redirecting attention to ballet education, which has been relatively marginalized in the field of artistic and physical talent research. The rich and comprehensive information about the long-term training experiences of the participants will help raise awareness and interest among various stakeholders in the education field and devise effective and practical supporting strategies for young future artists. About 40 years ago, Tannenbaum (1983) categorized artistic talent in music, dance, or theater as *surplus* talents. He mentioned that the term *surplus* does not mean that the arts are superfluous or unnecessary, but rather that there is no need to produce a large number of artists in proportion to the need of society. He explained that great artists, such as Bach or Monet, are “cultural assets,” but our societies do not necessarily need an abundance of artists with the purpose of “preserving life itself” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 58). According to his claims, although artistic talent contributes to the beauty of life, it cannot solve the human survival issues that politics, medicine, or economics could address. However, if Tannenbaum had recognized the economic power, size, and public impact of today’s cultural industries in the fields of music, dance, film, and general performing arts, he might have revised his naming of “surplus” for artistic talents. Nowadays, artistic talent can be considered as an economic asset, in addition to a cultural asset in the phenomenon that cultural industries cooperated with computer and Internet technology and ramifications of the media business. In the current era when artificial intelligence (AI) is making waves in the arts, artistic talent is no longer a surplus area but an essential industry sector that addresses the dilemma between human’s own abilities and the endless extensibility of the AI.
The prioritization of college degrees and concerns about the unstable job status of artists the participants reported in this study may paradoxically contribute to the new direction of talent development and related career design for artistically gifted students in education. From an ecological perspective, education should never be separated from socioeconomic changes and trends as this study also showed. The implications of the present study highlight the importance of designing educational environments for young students, based on considering the impact and changes of arts-related cultural industries on their future.

Practical Suggestions

Based on the findings and implications of this study, there are practical suggestions for parents, teachers, and other stakeholders, including policymakers in the educational field. First, it is necessary to provide art-education-tailored intervention programs in addition to the current school counseling system to create a safe and healthy educational environment for artistically gifted students. The present study found a unique peer relationship based on a highly competitive training system in art-specialized schools that may lead to selfish and aggressive behaviors due to excessive rivalry in the classroom. Considering the funnel-shaped trajectory of a ballet career, in which only a few people can survive as professional dancers at the top level, excessive competition may be unavoidable in the occupation. However, talent development education for young students is not the same as occupational or vocational education. For young people, it is essential to teach them how to create and foster a peer culture that promotes mutual respect and builds friendships based on trust and cooperation, as an essential developmental task during adolescence. With a more developmental approach, art-specialized schools should prioritize healthy social and emotional development and their well-being alongside achievement-focused training systems.
Second, domain-specific career education with practical guidance should be developed and made available to young students (e.g., ballet-specific career programs or dance-specific career programs). The present study found that physical pain and injury were significant disruptions for talented ballet students and were related to their mental health. In addition, the participants in this study were highly motivated, specifically in ballet. Given the embodied stressors and high motivation specific to ballet that the participants commonly reported, it would be mentally and motivationally challenging for them to give up a career as a ballet dancer due to unexpected physical obstacles. In this sense, specialized domain-specific career development support is needed for students of various ages, from childhood to early adulthood, within school contexts. Programs should include information about alternatives for when individuals leave ballet and explore multiple options for their long-term career paths. For example, the Dancers’ Career Development Center (DCD Center), located in Korea, began providing information and support to dancers facing career adversities and seeking alternative career paths. The DCD center has been providing job information for dancers, programs to prevent injury or to help with rehabilitation, and advice and counseling on career transition and career extension by connecting with fields like public health (Dancers’ Career Development Center, n.d.). To support more sustainable talent development in the long term, it is recommended that more career support systems be developed and connected to art-specialized education in schools.

Lastly, there is a need for systematic and financial support for gifted and talented students in the arts and sports fields. As the present study found and discussed, parental and family support is essential in encouraging the long-term training process in ballet. Moreover, the financial burdens, such as expensive lesson fees and costumes, were the most challenging aspects for the parents, even causing them to be reluctant to support their children’s talent
development. This issue is closely related to providing opportunities for children from low-income families to discover and develop their ballet talent, which is financially difficult to access. Educational policymakers and administrators should especially consider securing the budget for art education, as well as engaging in active fundraising and donation activities, to reach out to underrepresented students affected by economic limitations.
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Appendix A1

Demographic and Background Information Questions for Students (English)

Study Title: Phenomenological Study of Talented Young People in Ballet in South Korea

Before the interview, please tell me about your demographic and background information regarding ballet training and education. Please read carefully and answer all the questions if possible.

1. **Age and the birth year** (e.g., 20 years-old, born in 2001)
   ____ years-old, born in _____

2. **Gender:**

3. **School Information**
   School:
   Major (including Minor, if applicable):
   Year:

4. **When did you start ballet for the first time? (Age or Grade/Institutions/Purposes)**

   Example: I started ballet when I was [Age/Grade: 1st grade], in a/an [Institution: community center] as [Purpose: hobby and exercise]).

   I started ballet when I was [Age/Grade: ], in a/an [Institution: ] as [Purpose: ].

5. **Please specify the period (age or grade) and types of programs you had learned ballet (e.g., extra-curriculum, community center or public sports facilities, private studio, tutoring, etc.) in the following stages.**
   If it is hard to recall old experiences in your early childhood, please specify “I do not remember.”
   If you have not learned ballet in the relevant stage, simply specify “N/A”

   For example:
   Preschool or kindergarten: age of 6, community center
   Elementary school: Attending private studio near home from 2nd to 5th grades, tutoring in 6th grade
   Middle school for the arts: Extra-curriculum my school provided from 1st to 3rd grades
6. Please specify when you started a preparation for art schools with a ballet major and where you attended in the following stages.

For example:
I started to prepare for middle school for the arts in my 5th grade in March (or 1st semester) and went to XX middle school for the arts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Age or Grade / Type of Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool or kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>school for the arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>school for the arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify other institutions (if none of the above apply)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** If none of the above cases apply to your school history, please specify your cases here.

7. How long have you been doing ballet since you started ballet for any purpose? It is okay to be approximate, please specify the years. If you had quit the ballet once before and came back again, please provide the period as well.

8. How many hours per a week, on average, are you spending for ballet a week in the following each phase?
If it is hard to recall old experiences in your early childhood, please specify “I do not remember.”
If the stage is not applicable for your ballet training or learning, simply specify “N/A.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Stage</th>
<th>Hours/Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool or kindergarten</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school (Arts or General)</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school (Arts or General)</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other educational institutes or period (if applicable, feel free to write here):</td>
<td>___</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. Please specify the classes you have taken for required coursework in your ballet major, as many as possible (e.g., Ballet Technique I-VIII, Pas de deux, History of Dance, Human anatomy, etc.).

10. Please specify scholarships or awards regarding ballet since you started specializing in ballet, up to 10 most important things.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When (Year or Grade)</th>
<th>Scholarships or Awards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2017 (or 10th grade)</td>
<td>XX Scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 2018 (or 11th grade)</td>
<td>XX Competition, Award for 2nd place</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>When (Year or Grade)</th>
<th>Scholarships or Awards</th>
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11. Please specify if you have any hobbies, leisure, or sports for fun other than doing ballet.
12. Please briefly describe your plan after graduation (e.g., professional ballet dancer, ballet teacher, graduate school).

This is the end of demographic and background information questions.
For the next step, the interview schedule will be arranged according to your convenient time and date.

[Optional] I would like to ask if you could additionally provide me with any photos, videos, or brochures related to your ballet practice, training, stage performances, or training journals when we have the interview. Since this is an optional request, feel free to let me know if you do not have those or do not want to provide them.

Thank you for your participation.
I hope to see you at the interview.

Sincerely,
Kyung Hyun Park
Appendix A2

Demographic and Background Information Questions for Students (Korean)

학생용 인구학 및 배경 정보 질문지

연구명: 발레 재능이 있는 한국 청년들에 대한 현상학적 연구 (Phenomenological Study of Talented Young People in Ballet in South Korea)

인터뷰에 앞서, 귀하의 인구학 및 발레 교육 관련 배경 정보에 대해 여쭤보고자 합니다. 천천히 꼼꼼하게 읽어보신 후, 가능하면 모든 문항에 대해 빠짐없이 답해주시기를 부탁드립니다.

1. 만 연령과 태어난 연도 (작성 예: 만 20 세, 2001 년생)
   만 ___ 세, ___ 년생

2. 성별:

3. 재학 중인 학교 정보
   학교명:
   학과명 및 전공 (부전공이 있는 경우 부전공도 알려주세요):
   학년:

4. 가장 처음 발레를 시작한 시기가 언제인가요? (연령 또는 학년/기관/목적)

5. 다음의 연령단계에서 발레를 배웠던 시기 (나이 또는 학년) 와 기관 및 프로그램 유형 (예: 학교에서 제공하는 방과 후 프로그램/지역 문화센터 또는 공공 체육시설/학원/개인과외/기타 서술)에 대해 알려주세요. 어린 시절에 대해 기억이 잘 나지 않는 경우, “잘 기억나지 않음” 이라고 표시해주시고, 해당 시기에 배운 적이 없다면 “배운 적 없음” 이라고 표시해 주시면 됩니다.
   작성 예:
   어린이집 또는 유치원: 6 살, 지역문화센터
초등학교: 2 학년부터 5 학년까지 집 근처 학원, 6 학년 개인 과외
예중: 1-3 학년 내내 교내 방과후 프로그램

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>단계</th>
<th>연령 또는 학년 / 기관 및 프로그램 유형</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>어린이집 또는 유치원</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>초등학교</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>중</td>
<td>예중</td>
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<td></td>
<td>일반중</td>
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<tr>
<td>고</td>
<td>예고</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>일반고</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>기타 교육기관 (위에 해당사항이 없는 경우, 별도로 기재해 주세요.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. 예중/예고/대학 등 각 단계별로 발레를 전공하기로 결정하고 입시 준비를 시작한 시기와 진학한 학교에 대해 알려주세요.

작성 예: 예중 초 6 학년 3 월경 (또는 1 학기) 부터 준비 시작, 그 결과 XX 예중에 진학

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>단계</th>
<th>준비 시작 시기 및 진학 결과</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>초등학교</td>
<td>_____ 학년 _____ 월경(또는 학기) 부터 예중 입시 준비 시작, 그 결과 _____ (학교명)에 진학</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>중</td>
<td>_____ 학년 _____ 월경(또는 학기) 부터 예고 입시 준비 시작, 그 결과 _____ (학교명)에 진학</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>일반중</td>
<td>_____ 학년 _____ 월경(또는 학기) 부터 예고 입시 준비 시작, 그 결과 _____ (학교명)에 진학</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>고</td>
<td>_____ 학년 _____ 월경(또는 학기) 부터 대학 입시 준비 시작, 그 결과 _____ (학교명)에 진학</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>일반고</td>
<td>_____ 학년 _____ 월경 (또는 학기) 부터 대학 입시 준비 시작, 그 결과 _____ (학교명)에 진학</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** 귀하의 경우가 위에서 제시한 보기 중 어느 것에도 해당되지 않는다면 별도로 서술해 주세요.
7. 발레를 처음 접한 시기부터 지금까지 얼마나 오랫동안 발레를 해 왔나요? 대략적으로 몇 년 정도인지 알려주세요. 만약 중간에 그만두었다가 다시 시작한 경험이 있다면 그 기간에 대해서도 알려주세요.

8. 다음의 각 단계에서 일주일 기준으로, 발레 연습에 평균 몇 시간 정도 투자해 왔나요? 어린 시절에 대해 기억이 잘 나지 않는 경우, "잘 기억나지 않음"이라고 표시해주시면 됩니다. 또한 해당 기기에 발레를 배우거나 연습하지 않았다면 "배우지 않았음"으로 표시해 주시면 됩니다.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>어린이집 또는 유치원</th>
<th>___ 시간 / 1 주일</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>초등학교</td>
<td>___ 시간 / 1 주일</td>
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<tr>
<td>중학교 (예중 또는 일반중)</td>
<td>___ 시간 / 1 주일</td>
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<td>고등학교 (예고 또는 일반고)</td>
<td>___ 시간 / 1 주일</td>
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<td>대학교</td>
<td>___ 시간 / 1 주일</td>
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<td>기타 시기 및 기관(자유롭게 기재해 주세요):</td>
<td>___ 시간 / 1 주일</td>
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9. 전공 실기 및 이론 수업을 포함해서 현재 대학에서 수강해 온 발레 관련 과목에 대해 기억나는 대로 최대한 많이 알려주세요. (예: 발레 1-8, 파드, 무용의 역사, 해부학 등)

10. 발레를 본격적으로 시작한 이후, 현재까지 받은 장학금이나 수상경력이 있다면 영향력 있는 것 위주로 최대 10개까지 알려주세요.

작성 예:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>수상 시기</th>
<th>장학금 또는 수상내역</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2017 년(또는 고등학교 1학년)</td>
<td>XX 장학금</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 2018 년(또는 고등학교 2학년)</td>
<td>XX 콩쿠르 은상</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>수상 시기</td>
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<tr>
<td>(연도 또는 학년)</td>
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<tr>
<td>장학금 또는 수상내역</td>
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11. 발레 외에 다른 취미, 휴저활동, 또는 즐기는 운동 등이 있다면 알려주세요.

12. 졸업 후 관심있는 진로 방향이 있다면 간략하게 설명해 주세요. (예: 무용단 입단, 교직, 대학원 진학 등)

이상 인구학 및 배경 정보에 대한 질문은 마무리되었습니다.
이후 원하시는 시간과 날짜에 맞춰 인터뷰 스케줄이 진행될 예정입니다.

[선택사항] 인터뷰 시 혹은 발레 연습 및 공연 과정이 담긴 영상, 사진, 팜플렛 등의 자료 또는 연습일지 등을 추가로 제공해 주실 수 있으면 부탁드립니다. 이는 선택 사항이므로 관련 자료를 가지고 계시지 않거나 원치 않으시면 말씀해 주십시오.

본 질문지를 작성해 주셔서 정말 감사합니다.
그럼 인터뷰 때 뵐겠습니다.

박경현 드림
## Appendix B1

### Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Students (English)

#### Greetings and Introduction

Hello, nice to see you and thank you for participating in the interview.
All questions in this interview are open-ended. Please feel free to share your experiences.

#### RQ1. What kinds of profiles do talented students in ballet commonly have in terms of characteristic aptitude and disposition for ballet talent potential?

1. When you were young, have you learned any activities other than ballet, such as different types of dances, sports, or anything else other than ballet? If you have, can you tell me what you learned and how much you liked it?

(For female students) Can you tell me about your first experience when you wore pointe shoes?
(For male students) I believe you would have any critical point that you moved forward to the next advanced level in learning ballet, something corresponding to wearing pointe shoes for girls. Can you tell me about the experience?

Can you tell me about moments when you realized that you were really talented in ballet? For example, tell me about any experiences when you realized, “I am really good at this.”

Can you tell me about moments you realized about your passion and motivation to do ballet? For example, tell me about any experiences when you realized, “I really love to do ballet and want to do this.”

Can you tell me about your strengths and weaknesses in doing ballet in terms of physical abilities, ballet techniques, and artistic expression, respectively?

- Have there been any changes in your strengths/weaknesses so far while doing ballet?
- If yes, can you tell me the reason?

Do you have your own routines of practice and training ballet?

- If yes, can you elaborate in detail in terms of method, sequence, time, place, and break time?

Do you have your own strategies that improve your ballet skills in terms of ballet techniques or artistic expression (e.g., stretching, warm-up exercise, acting practice, watching ballet performance, etc.)?

Can you tell me about your experiences at your first time of ballet competition (conquer)?
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Details</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 8  • Can you elaborate on the experience in detail regarding how you prepared it and what you experienced at the competition?  
   • What was the most impressive competition so far and what is the reason? | Can you tell me about your experiences at your first-time ballet performance on the stage?  
   • Can you elaborate on the experience in detail regarding your role on the stage, your preparation process, and other experiences related to the performance?  
   • What was the most impressive stage so far and what is the reason? |
| (Based on the demographic and background information) Can you talk about your future plan after graduation?  
   • When and how did you make the plan? Are there any specific anecdotes when you selected for the plan?  
   • Is there any significant person or event that influenced your decision? | RQ2. How have the students sustained rigorous training and psychosocial pressure at different junctures in their ballet talent development? |
| Can you tell me about one of the most challenging experiences while doing ballet so far?  
   (e.g., diet, practice and training, stage performance, competitions, school life, interpersonal relationships with family, friends, teachers and so on) | Can you tell me about one of the most challenging experiences for you in the physical and health aspects? (e.g., physical or health conditions, stamina, diet, injuries, etc.)  
   • Can you tell me how you have been dealing with the situations?  
   • Have there been any changes in the types of challenging things and how to deal with the things over time? If yes, can you tell me more details? |
| Can you tell me about one of the most challenging things for you regarding artistic expression or acting?  
   • Can you tell me how you have been dealing with the situations?  
   • Have there been any changes in the types of challenging things and how to deal with the things over time? If yes, can you tell me more details? | Can you tell me about one of the most challenging things for you regarding your mental stress and psychological pressure?  
   • Can you tell me how you have been dealing with the situations?  
   • Have there been any changes in the types of challenging things and how to deal with the things over time? If yes, can you tell me more details? |
| Have you ever thought about quitting ballet?  
   • If no, let’s move on to the next question.  
   • If yes, can you tell me about the experience?  
   • Can you tell me how you overcame it and started doing ballet again? | |

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### RQ 3. What roles do family and home environments play in building the momentum of individual talent development in ballet?

1. (If applicable) Can you tell me about other family members who have majored in ballet?

2. (If there is no relevant family member who majored in ballet, the below questions are asked)

   - Is there anyone else interested in ballet, for example, a ballet fan or someone who has learned ballet as a hobby?
     - Is there anyone in your family member who has a high level of physical abilities or artistic expression, like you?

3. Have you ever lived alone for ballet education, far away from your family and hometown?

4. Or have you moved to a new city or abroad with your family to learn ballet? (e.g., to learn with a famous ballet instructor, or for school)
   - If yes, can you tell me about the experience?

5. Can you share any anecdotes and stories you experienced about parenting support for your ballet training and education in terms of

   (a) time and efforts (e.g., giving a ride, help to manage practice schedule of training or stage performance, etc.)
   (b) financial support
   (c) emotional support
   (d) any other aspects?
     - As you have grown up, have there been any changes over time in support from your parents for your ballet? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

6. Have you had any difficulties in your relationship with your family members because you have been doing ballet? On the contrary, are there any experiences that improve your family relationship by majoring in ballet?
   - If yes, can you tell me more about what experiences made you think that?
   - As you have grown up, have there been any changes in the family relationship over time due to your majoring in ballet? If yes, can you tell me about more details on how and why?

### RQ 4. What roles do educational experiences, including schooling or coaching, play in the talent development in ballet and at what developmental phases?

1. Can you tell me about the teacher who taught ballet for the first time?
   - Did the first teacher discover your talent and recommend majoring in ballet?
   - If not, who did discover your ballet talent and recommended majoring in ballet for you for the first time?

2. How many ballet teachers have you met so far?
   - Can you tell me more about the teachers you have met so far?
• Have there been any changes over time in the teaching styles and methods of the teachers? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

Can you tell me about the best ballet teacher(s) for you and the reason?

Can you tell me about the worst teacher(s) for you and the reason?

Can you tell me about your experiences in preparing for the entrance exam at each school level?
• Tell me more details about how you prepared for the exams and auditions for art middle school, art high school, and college, respectively.
• Tell me about the challenging moments and difficulties you experience while preparing each school transitional point?

Can you tell me how you learned and trained ballet in schools or other educational institutions at each school level?
• Can you tell me more details if there were differences between weekdays/weekends or semester/summer or winter breaks? If yes, can you tell me more information about the differences?
• As the school year goes up, have there been any changes in the school programs or schedules for learning and training ballet? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

In the schools or other institutes, you have experienced so far, can you tell me about the best schools or institutes with the high-quality training environments? (for example, floors, shape, and space of studio, programs, schedules) On the contrary, can you tell me about the low-quality training environments?

RQ 5. How do peer relationships play a role in their talent development in ballet, and how they interact with other contextual factors?

Can you tell me about any experience of when you felt competitive or tense with your ballet peers?
• Was the experience positive or negative? Can you tell me more details on the experiences?
• As the school year goes up, have there been any changes in the competitive or tense relationships? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

Can you tell me about any experience of when you felt cooperative, bonding or empathy with your ballet peers?
• Was the experience positive or negative? Can you tell me more details on the experiences?
• As the school year goes up, have there been any changes in the cooperative, bonding, or empathetic relationships? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

Can you tell me any experience you felt cooperative or competitive in school senior-junior relationships?

- Was the experience positive or negative? Can you tell me more details on the experiences?
- As the school year goes up, have there been any changes in the senior-junior relationships? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

Can you tell me how you have time with your friends who are not majoring in ballet?

- Are there any differences from ballet peers in the relationships? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

RQ 6. How do socio-cultural factors play a role in individual talent development in ballet, and in what way or when do they become crucial?

Do you have any experience studying abroad for ballet, or have you ever thought about it?

- If no, let’s move on to the next question.
- If yes, can you tell me about the experience?
- Can you tell me what made you decide to go to your current college in Korea instead of going abroad?

Based on your personal experiences, can you tell me your thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of ballet education and culture in Korea?

Based on your personal experiences, can you tell me what has changed in doing ballet due to the COVID19 pandemic situation?

Wrap-up and Closing

Before we wrap up, feel free to add and share anything else about your ballet experience.

Let’s wrap up the interview. Thank you so much for your time and participation.
# Appendix B2

### Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Students (Korean)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>인사 및 도입</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>안녕하세요. 만나 베품 되어 반갑습니다. 그리고 인터뷰에 응해주시서 감사합니다. 본 인터뷰 질문은 모두 개방형 질문으로 여러분의 개인적 경험을 중심으로 편하게 말씀해 주시면 됩니다.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>연구문제 1. 발레를 하는 학생들은 능력이나 적성 면에서 공통적으로 어떤 재능 프로 파일을 가지고 있는가?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>어렸을 때 발레 외에 다른 종류의 춤이나 운동, 미술 등 다른 활동을 배운 적 있나요? 있었다면 어떤 것이 있었고, 얼마나 좋아했는지 얘기해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(여학생인 경우) 토슈즈를 처음 신었던 때의 경험에 대해 말씀해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(남학생인 경우)  여학생들이 토슈즈를 신는 것처럼, 발레를 배우는 데 있어 중요한 단계로 넘어갔던 시기가 있었을 텐데요. 그 경험에 대해 말씀해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>스스로도 자신이 정말 발레에 재능이 있다고 느꼈던 순간들에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요? 예를 들어 “내가 정말 발레를 잘하는 구나” 라는 생각이 들었던 경험에 대해 들려주세요.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>본인이 발레를 하고자 하는 동기와 열정이 강하다는 것을 스스로 깨달은 순간들에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>발레를 위한 신체조건, 테크닉, 예술성 측면에서 각각 자신의 장점과 단점에 대해 말씀해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>지금까지 발레를 해 오는 과정에서 그 장점과 단점에 있어 변화가 있나요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>만약 그렇다면, 그 이유에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>본인만의 연습 및 훈련 루틴이 있나요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>있다면, 방법, 순서, 시간과 장소, 휴식 방법 등에 대해 자세하게 설명해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>이 루틴은 언제부터 어떻게 시작하게 되었나요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>테크닉과 예술성에 있어서 스스로의 실력을 높이기 위해 하는 자신만의 특별한 방법이 있나요? (예: 스트레칭이나 위밍업 동작, 연기 연습, 발레 공연 감상)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>첫 발레 콩쿠르 때 경험에 대해서 얘기해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>어떻게 준비했고, 어떤 경험을 했는지 자세히 얘기해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>지금까지 참여했던 콩쿠르 중에 가장 기억에 남는 콩쿠르는 무엇이었고, 그 이유에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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첫 공연 무대에 대해서 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 어떤 역할이었는지, 준비과정은 어땠는지, 그리고 관련해서 어떤 경험을 했는지 자세히 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 지금까지 참여했던 공연 중에 가장 기억에 남는 공연은 무엇이었고, 그 이유에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?

(인구학적 정보 및 배경 질문지 대담 기반) 졸업 후 장래 계획에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 언제 어떻게 그 계획을 세우게 됐나요? 그 계획을 세우게 됐을 때 경험했던 구체적인 일화 같은 것이 있나요?
- 그 계획에 영향을 준 결정적인 사람이나 사건이 있었나요?

연구문제 2. 발레를 배우는 과정에서 겪게 되는 혹독한 훈련과 심리적 압박감을 어떻게 견디는가?
지금까지 발레를 하면서 가장 힘들었던 점이 있다면 무엇인가요? (예: 다이어트, 연습, 공연, 공부, 학교 생활, 친구관계, 선생님과의 관계, 가족 관계 등등)

발레를 하면서 신체적으로 가장 힘들었던 점이 있다면 무엇인가요? (예: 신체조건 및 건강 상태, 체력, 다이어트, 부상 등)
- 그런 어려움을 어떻게 해소하고 대처해 오셨나요?
- 시간이 지남에 따라 신체적 어려움의 유형이나 이유, 그리고 그것을 해소하는 방법 등에 있어 달라진 점이 있나요? 있다면 자세히 얘기해 주시겠어요?

발레를 해 오면서, 예술성이나 연기력과 관련해서 가장 힘들고 어려웠던 점이 있나요?
- 그런 어려움을 어떻게 해소하고 대처해 오셨나요?
- 시간이 지남에 따라 예술성 및 연기력을 기르는 데 어려움을 느끼는 이유나 유형이 있나요, 그리고 그것을 해소하는 방법 등에 있어 달라진 점이 있나요? 있다면 자세히 얘기해 주시겠어요?

발레를 해 오면서, 심리적 측면에서 가장 힘들고 어려웠던 점이 있다면 무엇인가요?
- 그런 어려움을 어떻게 해소하고 대처해 오셨나요?
- 시간이 지남에 따라 심리적 측면에서의 어려움을 느끼는 이유나 유형, 그리고 그것을 해소하는 방법 등에 있어 달라진 점이 있나요? 있다면 자세히 얘기해 주시겠어요?

발레를 그만둘까 생각해 본 적이 있나요?
- 없었다면 다음 질문으로 넘어가겠습니다.
- 있었다면, 그 때의 경험에 대해서 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 그 시기를 어떻게 극복하고 다시 시작하게 되었는지 얘기해 주시겠어요?

연구문제 3. 발레 재능을 개발하는 과정에서 가족과 가정환경의 역할은 무엇인가?
(해당되는 경우) 발레를 전공하신 다른 가족분에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?
1 (해당사항이 없는 경우, 다음의 질문으로 넘어갑니다.)

- 취미나 홍미를 갖고 있는 분들은 계시나요? (예: 발레 팬이시거나 취미로 배우신 분)
- 가족 및 친척 중에 본인처럼 신체적 능력이나 예술성이 뛰어나신 분이 계신가요?

발레를 위해 집과 가족을 멀리 떠나 혼자 지내 본적이 있나요? 또는 발레를 위해 가족과 함께 다른 지역이나 해외로 이사를 갔던 적은 나요? (예: 좋은 발레 선생님이 계신 곳 근처로 이사하거나, 학교 진학을 위해 이사한 경우 등)

지급까지 부모님께서 본인이 발레를 전공하는 데 있어서 다양한 지원과 지지를 해 주셨던 분이 있나요? 그 중에서 특히 적극적이고 가족과 관련하여 가장 기억에 남는 일화가 있다면 말씀해 주실 수 있나요?

- (가) 시간과 노력 (예: 동학교, 동화원,연습/공연 스케줄 관리 등),
- (나) 경제적 지원,
- (다) 정서적 지원,
- (라) 기타 등

- 성장함에 따라 부모님께서 지원해 주시는 방법이 바뀌었다면 어떻게 바뀌었는지 자세히 설명해 주실 수 있나요?

발레를 하는 것이 어떤 부모님 또는 형제자매 등 가족과의 관계에서 혼들고 어려웠던 부분이 있나요? 반대로 발레를 함으로써 가족이 더욱 독립해지고 관계가 좋아졌던 부분이 있나요?

- 그런 부분이 있으면, 어떤 경험에 대해 그렇게 생각했는지 좀 더 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 성장함에 따라 발레를 하는 것과 관련해서 가족간의 관계가 변화된 부분이 있다면, 어떻게 바뀌었고 왜 그런지 등 자세히 설명해 주실 수 있나요?

연구문제 4. 학교교육과 코칭 등은 모두 포함한 교육 경험이 어떤 단계로 이루어지며, 각 발달 단계에서 어떤 역할을 하는가?

제일 처음 발레를 가르쳐주었던 선생님이에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?

1 (예: 그 선생님이 발레를 전공해 보라고 추천을 하셨나요?
- 아니면 누가 제일 먼저 재능을 발견하고 해보라고 하셨나요?

지금까지 얼마나 많은 선생님들을 만나 보셨나요?

2 (예: 배우는 선생님이 바뀌었던 경험에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 학년이 올라가고 점차 성장함에 따라 선생님 유형과 지도 방법이 달라지면서 어떤 것이 있었는지 얘기해 주시겠어요?)

지금까지 본인이 발레를 하는 데 싫었던 선생님(들)은 어떤 분(들)이셨는지, 그리고 그 이유에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?

그 선생님(들) 중에 좋았던 선생님(들)은 어떤 분(들)이셨는지, 그리고 그 이유에 대해서도 얘기해 주시겠어요?
각 학교 단계별로 입시를 준비했던 경험이 대해 말씀해 주시겠어요?
5
- 예초, 예고, 대학 등 단계별로 어떻게 입시를 준비했는지 자세하게 얘기해 주세요.
- 각 단계별로 준비하면서 힘들고 어려웠던 점에 대해서 얘기해 주세요.

각 학교 단계별로 학교나 다른 교육기관에서 발레를 어떻게 훈련했는지 말씀해 주세요. (초등/중/고/대학별로 각각)
6
- 발레 연습을 하는데 있어서 평일과 주말, 학기 중과 방학 등에 따라 차이가 있었나요? 있었다면 어떻게 달랐는지 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 학년이 올라가면서 발레 훈련 및 교육과 관련된 학교 프로그램이나 스케줄이 달라지나요? 만약 그랬다면 어떻게 왜 달라졌는지 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?

지금까지 경험했던 학교나 기타 교육기관 중에서, 발레를 하기에 점근한 환경을 제공했던 교육기관이 있다면 그 곳에 대해 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요? (예: 연습실 바닥, 공간과 형태, 프로그램, 스케줄 등)
7
- 반대로 점 낮은 환경을 제공했던 교육기관에 대해서도 얘기해 주시겠어요?

연구문제 5. 친구관계는 발레를 하는 데 어떤 역할을 하며, 다른 환경적 요소와 어떻게 상호작용하는가?

발레를 같이 하는 친구들과 경쟁심이나 간절감 등을 느꼈던 경험이 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요? 그 경험을 이후에 발레를 하는 데 어떤 영향을 주었나요?
1
- 그 경험은 긍정적인 것이었나요, 부정적인 것이었나요? 그 경험에 대해 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 학년이 올라가면서 그런 관계에서 달라지는 부분이 있었나요? 만약 그랬다면 어떻게 왜 달라졌는지 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?

발레를 같이 하는 친구들과 협동심, 유대감, 또는 공감 등을 느꼈던 경험이 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?
2
- 그 경험은 긍정적인 것이었나요, 부정적인 것이었나요? 그 경험에 대해 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 학년이 올라가면서 그런 관계에서 달라지는 부분이 있었나요? 만약 그랬다면 어떻게 왜 달라졌는지 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?

선취배 간에 경쟁 또는 협력 등과 관련된 경험이 있다면 얘기해 주시겠어요?
3
- 그 경험은 긍정적인 것이었나요, 부정적인 것이었나요? 그 경험에 대해 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?
- 학년이 올라가면서 이 관계에서 달라지는 부분이 있었나요? 만약 그랬다면 어떻게 왜 달라졌는지 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?

발레를 전공하지 않는 친구들과는 어떻게 지내는지 얘기해 주시겠어요?
4
- 발레를 같이 전공하는 친구들과의 관계와 다른 점이 있다면 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?
• 학년이 올라가면서 이 관계에서 달라지는 부분이 있었나요? 만약 그랬다면 어떻게 왜 달라졌는지 자세하게 얘기해 주시겠어요?

연구문제 6. 사회문화적 요인은 개인의 발레 재능 발달에서 어떤 역할을 하며, 언제 어떤 식으로 중요하게 작용하는가?

발레를 공부를 위해 해외 유학을 가봤거나, 가려고 고민한 적이 있나요?
1 • 없었다면, 다음 질문으로 넘어가겠습니다.
   • 있다면, 그 경험에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요?
   • 해외 유학 대신 한국대학에서 발레를 전공하기로 결심한 이유가 있다면 무엇인지 얘기해 주시겠어요?

본인의 경험에 비추어 볼 때, 한국 발레 교육 제도와 문화의 장점과 단점이 각각 무엇이라고 생각하시는가요?
2 • 무엇이라고 생각하시는가요?

 본인의 경험에 비추어 볼 때, 코로나 19로 인해 발레를 하는 데 달라진 점이라면 어떤 것이 있는지 얘기해 주시겠어요?
3 • 어떤 것이 있는지 얘기해 주시겠어요?

정리 및 마무리

마지막으로 인터뷰를 끝내기 전에 더 얘기해 주고 싶은 게 있다면 자유롭게 얘기해주세요.

그럼, 이상 인터뷰를 마치겠습니다.
긴 시간 참여해 주셔서 정말 감사합니다.
Appendix C1

Demographic and Background Information Questionnaire for Parents (English)

Study Title: Phenomenological Study of Talented Young People in Ballet in South Korea

Before the interview, please tell me about your demographic and background information. Please read carefully and answer all the questions if possible.

1. What is your relationship with the student?
   Mother/Father/Others, please specify (e.g., grandparents, relatives, or guardians):

2. Age and the birth year (e.g., 48 years-old, born in 1974)
   _____ years-old, born in _____

3. Educational attainment (Highest degree):
   Mother: _______
   Father: _______
   Others (if applicable), please specify: __________

4. Occupations:
   Mother: _______
   Father: _______
   Others (if applicable), please specify: __________

5. Is there anyone who majored in ballet, including yourself and other family members (e.g., siblings and relatives)?

This is the end of the questions about demographic and background information.
For the next step, the interview schedule will be arranged according to your convenient time and date.

Thank you for your participation.
I hope to see you at the interview.

Sincerely,
Kyung Hyun Park
Appendix C2

Demographic and Background Information Questionnaire for Parents (Korean)

부모용 인구학 및 배경 정보 질문지

연구명: 발레 재능이 있는 한국 청년들에 대한 현상학적 연구 (Phenomenological Study of Talented Young People in Ballet in South Korea)

인터뷰에 앞서, 귀하의 배경 정보에 대해 답해주셔를 부탁드립니다. 천천히 꼼꼼하게 읽어보신 후, 가능하면 모든 문항에 대해 빠짐없이 답해주셔를 부탁드립니다.

1. 자녀분과의 관계가 어떻게 되시나요?
   어머니/아버지/기타(예: 조부모, 친척, 또는 후견인)

2. 만 연령과 태어난 연도 (작성 예: 만 48 세, 1974 년생)
   만 ____ 세, _____ 년생

3. 교육수준(최종학력)
   어머니: _______
   아버지: _______
   기타인 경우, 간단하게 설명해주세요 (해당되는 경우에 한해): ________

4. 직업
   어머니: _______
   아버지: _______
   기타인 경우, 간단하게 설명해주세요 (해당되는 경우에 한해): ________

5. 부모님을 포함해서 다른 가족 분들 (형제자매 및 친척 등) 중에 발레를 전공했던 분이 계신가요?

이상 인구학 및 배경 정보에 대한 질문은 마무리되었습니다.
이후 원하시는 시간과 날짜에 맞춰 인터뷰 스케줄이 진행될 예정입니다.
본 질문지를 작성해주셔서 감사합니다.
그럼 인터뷰 때 볼겠습니다.

박경현 드림
# Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Parents (English)

## Greetings and Introduction

Hello, nice to see you and thank you for participating in the interview. All questions in this interview are open-ended. Please feel free to share your experiences.

## Interview

1. (If applicable) Can you tell me about other family members who have majored in ballet? (If there is no relevant family member who majored in ballet, the below questions are asked)
   - Is there anyone else interested in ballet, for example, a ballet fan or someone who has learned ballet as a hobby?
   - Is there anyone in your family member who has a high level of physical abilities or artistic expression, like your child?

2. Can you tell me about the first time you recognized and discovered your child’s ballet talent?
   - Can you tell me about when and how you recognized and discovered the talent?
   - Who is the first person who recommended your child to learn ballet as a major?
   - Do you have any experience you realized that your child really seems to like ballet so much and enjoys doing it?

3. Can you share any anecdotes you experienced while supporting your child’s ballet training and education in terms of
   (a) time and efforts (e.g., giving a ride, help to manage practice schedule of practice or stage performance, etc.)
   (b) financial support
   (c) emotional support
   (d) any other aspects?
   - As your child has grown up, have there been any changes over time in support for your child’s ballet education? If yes, can you tell me more details on how and why?

4. Can you talk about any experiences you were proud of your child in doing ballet? Conversely, can you also talk about any moment you felt sad because your child had a hard time to practice and learn ballet?

5. How do you usually get information about ballet education for your child, such as teacher, studio or school, auditions, or others, and how do you use it?

## Wrap-up and Closing

Before we wrap up, feel free to add and share anything else about your parenting experiences for
your child’s ballet education?

Let’s wrap up the interview. Thank you so much for your time and participation.
Appendix D2

Semi-structured Interview Protocol for Parents (Korean)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>인사 및 도입</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>안녕하세요. 만나 봐게 되어 반갑습니다. 그리고 인터뷰에 응해주셔서 감사합니다. 본 인터뷰 질문은 모두 개방형 질문으로 여러분의 개인적 경험을 중심으로 편하게 말씀해 주시면 됩니다.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>인터뷰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. (해당되는 경우) 발레를 전공하신 다른 가족분에 대해 얘기해 주시겠어요? (해당사항이 없는 경우, 다음의 질문으로 넘어갑니다.)
  - 취미나 흥미를 갖고 있는 분들은 계신가요? (예: 발레 팬이시거나 취미로 배우신 분)
  - 가족 및 친척 중에 자녀분처럼 신체적 능력이나 예술성이 뛰어나신 분이 계신가요?
| 2. 자녀 분의 재능을 처음 알아채고 발견했을 때에 대해 말씀해 주세요.
  - 그때가 언제이고 어떻게 발견하게 되셨나요?
  - 자녀분에게 발레를 전공으로 해 보라고 처음 추천하셨던 분은 누구인가요?
  - 자녀분이 정말 발레를 좋아하고 자발적으로 하고 싶어한다는 것을 발견하고 알게 되었던 경험이 있다면 얘기해 주세요.
| 3. 지금까지 자녀분이 발레를 전공할 수 있도록 지원해 주시면서, 특히 다음 주제와 관련하여 가장 기억에 남는 일화가 있다면 말씀해 주실 수 있나요?
  - (가) 시간과 노력 (예: 등하교, 등하원, 연습 또는 공연 스케줄 관리 등)
  - (나) 경제적 지원
  - (다) 정신적 지원
  - (라) 기타
    - 자녀분이 성장하고 학년이 올라감에 따라 지원해 주시는 방법이 바뀌었다면 어떻게 바뀌었고, 왜 그런지 등 자세히 얘기해 줄 수 있나요?
| 4. 자녀분이 발레를 전공하면서 가장 자랑스러웠던 순간들이었다면 얘기해 주시겠어요? 반대로 가장 안쓰러웠던 순간들에 대해서도 얘기해 주시겠어요?
| 5. 자녀분의 발레 교육에 관련된 정보 (예: 선생님, 학교 및 학원, 콩쿠르 등)는 보통 어떤 경로로 얻으시며, 또 어떻게 활용하시는지요?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>정리 및 마무리</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>마지막으로 인터뷰를 끝내기 전에 자녀의 발레 교육과 관련해서 더 얘기하고 싶으신 부분이 있다면 꼭 그렇게 말씀해 주세요.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>그럼, 이상 인터뷰를 마치겠습니다. 참여해주셔서 감사합니다.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix E

### Semi-structured Interview Results Organizing Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student # (Parent #)</td>
<td>Principal Investigator (Kyung Hyun Park)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>MM/DD/YY HH:MM am/pm, Korea</td>
<td>MM/DD/YY HH:MM am/pm, Albany, NY, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Home (Zoom meeting)</td>
<td>Home (Zoom meeting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total meeting duration</td>
<td>XX minutes XX seconds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>1. Scheduling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Informed Consent (English &amp; Korean versions both)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Background Questions (including how to fill in)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview duration</td>
<td>4. Greeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Informed Consent (Participation, Audio recording confirm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Audio recording confirm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Extra/Additional materials (e.g., journals, photo, videos)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Main Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap-up &amp; Follow-up</td>
<td>7. Sending e-Gift card &amp; Receipt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. ** Explaining about additional material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. *** Explaining about member-checking process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F1

Template of Member-Checking for Student (English)

Member Check
Student Name (University Name) Interview:
Preliminary Categorizing Items and Content for Analysis

Research Question 1. Ballet-related abilities and aptitudes, practice and training methods, competitions, performance-related experiences, a future plan

[Activities or learnings before or after majoring in ballet]

[How to begin to learn ballet]

[How to discover a ballet talent and how to decide majoring in ballet]

[First time wearing pointe shoes]

[Motivation and passion related to ballet]

[Physical condition: Strengths and weaknesses and related efforts]

[Technical strengths and weaknesses and related efforts]

[Artistic expressive strengths and weaknesses and related efforts]

[Practice and training routine]

[Other ballet-related ways to improve their skills. - Role models, etc.]

[Experiences of attending ballet competitions]

[Experience of First ballet competition]

[The most memorable ballet competitions]

[Experience of the stage performance]

[Experience of First ballet stage performance]

[The most memorable ballet stage performance]

[Difference between the competitions and the stage performance]
Research Question 2. Experience enduring rigorous training and psychological pressure while learning ballet

[Difficult moments while majoring ballet and how to overcome it]
[Physically difficult moments and how to solve/overcome them]
[Difficulties related to artistic expression and acting skills, and how to solve/overcome them]
[The psychological difficulties and how to solve/overcome them]

Research Question 3. The Role of Family and Familial Environment in learning trajectories of ballet major

[Family members previously majoring in ballet]
[Experience moving to other place with family or living alone for majoring ballet]
[Parents' support and assistance - Time and effort aspects and related changes]
[Parents' support and assistance - Financial aspects and related changes]
[Parents' support and assistance - Emotional aspects and related changes]
[Parents' support and assistance - Other aspects and related changes]
[Overall changes related to parents' support and assistance]
[Changes in family relationships due to majoring ballet]

Research Question 4. Ballet-related school education and related education experience

[Teacher who taught ballet for the first time and the teacher who taught ballet so far]
[The best teacher you most liked and the worst teacher you most hated]
[Preparation experience for entrance exams at each transitional point]
  [Elementary years to prepare for the art-specialized middle school entrance exam]
  [Middle school years to prepare for the art-specialized high school entrance exam]
  [High school years to prepare for the college entrance exam]
[School life at each educational stage]
[Environment and facilities of educational institutions you attended]

**Question 5. Peer relationships**

[Relationship with Ballet majoring peers (same cohort)- Competition or Collaboration]
[Relationship with Ballet majoring peers. (senior and senior) - Competitor or collaboration]
[Relationship with peers not majoring in ballet]
[Differences and Changes in Relationships with ballet peers and other peers not majoring ballet]

**Question 6. Socio-Cultural. Factors**

[Experiences or consideration with Studying abroad or working abroad outside Korea]
[Strengths and Weaknesses of Korean Ballet education system and culture]
[Changes and relevant experiences due to Covid 19]

**Other - Any additional points you want to add**

The above is the interview contents I would like to use for my analysis. Please review it, and if there are anything you would like to modify, add, or remove, please feel free to let me know. If there are no changed needed, simply replay that there are none. Thank you so much ☺
Appendix F2

Template of Member-Checking for Student (Korean)

Member Check

학생이름 (대학) 인터뷰:

분석에 사용할 주요 인터뷰 항목 및 내용

연구질문 1. 발레관련 능력과 적성, 연습 및 훈련방법, 콩쿠르, 공연관련 경험, 장래계획

- [발레 전공 이전 혹은 이외에 배웠던 활동 및 학습]
- [발레를 배우게 된 계기]
- [발레 재능 발견 및 발레 전공을 시작하게 된 계기]
- [처음 토프슈즈(포인테 슈즈)를 신었던 경험]
- [발레 관련 동기와 열정]
- [신체조건 장단점 및 관련 노력 방법]
- [테크닉 장단점 및 관련 노력 방법]
- [예술성 장단점 및 관련 노력 방법]
- [연습 및 훈련 루틴]
- [기타 발레 관련 기량 향상을 위한 노력 방법]: 롤모델 등

[콩쿨 경험]

[첫 콩쿨]
[기억에 남는 콩쿨]

[공연 경험]

[첫 공연]
[기억에 남는 공연]

[콩쿨과 공연 차이]
연구질문 2. 발레를 배우면서 겪은 혹독한 훈련과 심리적 압박감을 겪던 경험이다
- 가장 힘들었던 점 및 해소/극복방법
- 신체적으로 힘들었던 점 및 해소/극복방법
- 예술성 및 연기력 관련 힘들었던 점 및 해소/극복방법
- 심리적 측면에서 힘들었던 점 및 해소/극복방법
- 발레를 그만두고 싶었던 경험 및 해소/극복방법

연구질문 3. 발레 전공 과정에서 가족과 가정환경의 역할
- 발레를 전공한 가족
- 발레전공을 위해 이사하거나 혼자 지낸 경험이다
- 부모님의 지원과 지지-시간과 노력 측면 및 관련 변화
- 부모님의 지원과 지지-경제적 측면 및 관련 변화
- 부모님의 지원과 지지-정서적 측면 및 관련 변화
- 부모님의 지원과 지지-기타 측면 및 관련 변화
- 발레 전공 관련 가족간의 관계 관련 변화

연구질문 4. 발레 관련 학교 교육 및 관련 교육 경험
- 처음 발레를 배웠던 선생님 및 그 동안 배워 온 선생님
- 좋아했던 선생님과 싫었던 선생님
- 각 단계별 입시 준비 경험
  [초등학교 – 예중 입시]
  [중학교 – 예고 입시]
[고등학교 – 대학 입시]
- [각 단계별 학교생활]
- [교육기관의 환경과 시설]

연구질문 5. 친구관계
- [발레전공 친구들과의 관계 – 경쟁 또는 협력]
- [발레전공 선후배관계 – 경쟁 또는 협력]
- [발레 비전공 친구들과의 관계]
- [전공/비전공 친구들과의 관계의 차이 및 변화]

연구질문 6. 사회문화적 요인
- [해외유학 및 해외진출 고려 경험]
- [한국 발레 교육제도 및 문화의 장/단점]
- [코로나 19로 인한 변화 및 경험이]

기타 추가하고 싶은 부분

이상은 제가 분석에 활용하고 싶은 인터뷰 내용입니다.
한 번 검토해주시고 수정, 추가 및 삭제하고 싶은 부분이 있으면 편하게 말씀해 주세요.
고칠 부분이 없으면 없다고 회신해 주시면 됩니다.
감사합니다 😊
Appendix G1

Template of Member-Checking for Parents (English)

Member Check

Mother of Student Name (University Name) Interview:

Preliminary Categorizing Items and Content for Analysis


[Family Background Related to Ballet or Art-Related Majors or Hobbies]
[Family History of Exceptional Physical Abilities and Artistic Talent]

Question 2. Discovering Your Child’s Talent (Including Talent, Motivation, And Passion)

[The First Time When You Discovered Your Child’s Talent in Ballet]
[The Person Who Recommended to Learn Ballet as A Major to Your Child]
[How To Get to Know Ballet and To Learn Ballet as A Major]
[Experiences You Realized Your Child’s Motivation and Passion for Ballet]

Question 3. Experiences Related to Your Child’s Ballet Education (Time and Effort/ Financial/Emotional/ Other Types Of Supports)

[Support And Assistance - Time and Effort]
[Support And Assistance - Financial]
[Support And Assistance - Emotional]
[Support And Assistance - Other]
[Changes In Supporting Your Child’s Ballet Learning According to Your Child’s Growth]
Question 4. The Proudest and Saddest Moments During Your Child’s Ballet Learning

[Moments You Feel Sad]

[Proudest Moment]

Question 5. Experiences In Obtaining and Utilizing Information Related To Your Child’s Ballet Education

[Other - Expectations and Hopes for Your Child’s Future Career]

The above is the interview contents I would like to use for my analysis. Please review it, and if there are anything you would like to modify, add, or remove, please feel free to let me know. If there are no changed needed, simply replay that there are none. Thank you so much ☺
Appendix G2

Template of Member-Checking for Parents (Korean)

Member Check

학생이름(대학) 어머니 인터뷰:
분석에 사용할 주요 인터뷰 항목 및 내용

질문 1. 발레전공, 신체/예술적 재능, 곤기와 관련된 가족환경
- [발레 또는 예체능 전공 또는 취미 관련 가족사항]
- [신체적 능력 및 예술성이 뛰어난 가족사항]

질문 2. 자녀의 재능을 발견한 과정 (재능과 동기/열정 포함)
- [자녀의 재능을 처음 발견한 시점]
- [자녀에게 발레 전공을 추천한 사람]
- [발레를 접하고 전공하게 된 과정]
- [자녀의 발레 대한 동기와 열정을 알게 된 경험]

질문 3. 자녀의 발레교육관련 경험이 (시간 및 노력/경제적/정서적/기타 지원)
- [지원과 지지- 시간과 노력]
- [지원과 지지- 경제적]
- [지원과 지지- 정서적]
- [지원과 지지- 기타]
- [자녀가 성장과 이에 따른 지원방식의 변화]
질문 4. 자녀의 발레전공 과정 중 자랑스러웠던 순간/ 안쓰러웠던 순간
   - [안쓰러웠던 순간]
   - [자랑스러운 순간]

질문 5. 자녀의 발레 교육 관련 정보 획득 및 활용 경험

[기타 - 자녀의 향후 진로에 대한 기대 및 바람]

이상은 제가 분석에 활용하고 싶은 인터뷰 내용입니다.
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Appendix H

Extracted Interview Transcripts in the Findings

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<td>Jagged Profile of Individual TD in Ballet</td>
<td>(a) Ballet Body First, but not Absolute</td>
<td>“My daughter had been slender since her childhood, and ballet teachers said that her high arches of feet were naturally advantageous at doing ballet. It seemed like she had a natural flexibility. One day, the director of the ballet studio recommended her to professionally major in ballet in her 4th grade. Usually, the kids start their ballet major in 5th grade in the studio, but she recommended my daughter to start 4th grade. But, I had never thought about letting her majoring in ballet, I just thought ballet is a good hobby and exercise. So, I reached out to another ballet instructor in Seoul, using my networking, and asked the ballet teacher in Seoul to see at my daughter’s possibility to be okay with majoring in ballet. And she said that it could be such a waste if she would not major in ballet with her gifted physical condition” (P13, the mother of S13).</td>
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really think deeply on it back then. I just let him to try because he enjoyed it” (P5, the mother of S5).

“When S7 was very young, we went to see a ballet performance by Lee Won-Guk Ballet Company, and when the director Lee saw my daughter, he called my daughter, ‘Oh! Ballerina!” just by seeing her appearance at a glance. So, I said to him that my daughter is not doing ballet yet. Then he said that if she does ballet in the future, tell her to work hard” (P7, the mother of S7)

“Height can’t be ignored for male dancers because if the dancer is tall, it looks like superior on stage, so, we say that the taller you are, the better you are on the stage. … On the other hand, if you’re small, male ballet dancers with relatively short height are hard to get roles of the main character. We cannot say that height is absolute for getting roles, but to some extent?” (S5).

“Unfortunately, in the ballet world, it is inevitably very important to be born with (ideal body types). We cannot change the size of our heads even if we put in the effort, and we cannot get taller anymore. The only one we can change with our effort is losing weight. Appropriately looking good height and having long arms and legs, these things can rarely change by effort. For example, a sense of rhythms can be achievable by hard training to some extent, but being innate is everything in the ballet” (S24).
(b) Acquisition of Ballet Techniques and Movements: Innate but Trainable

“Ballet is very scientific, so if the timing and coordination are perfectly combined, even if the jump is not high enough, it can be looking good. … I was not good at performing jumps before, but I practiced it every day in the class, and I felt my jump improved a lot” (S24).

“I’ve heard a lot of people say that I’m a little quick to memorize the (music and movements) combinations, and I’m also good at understanding beats and rhythm when dancing. I’ve heard a lot of people say that I don’t gain weight easily, and my arms and legs are a little long compared to my height, resembling my dad. But I just don’t know why I am doing well and what I am so gifted like people are saying, because I’d been living like this all my life, but everyone else was saying that (I was gifted) …. It was not like I was really trying hard or putting effort that much, but when I went to the competitions in Seoul, Gwangju, Jeonju (cities bigger than the city where S14 lived in Korea), I always got the first-place prize…” (S14).

“I was pretty good at memorizing dance movements and the combinations with music. Also, I am kind of obsessive about memorizing the combination (of movement and music) myself…. I always memorized the combinations with a sense of beats by myself, but I was surprised later that a lot of my friends didn’t do that! I’ve heard that other kids memorized the combination by melody, but I memorize it with beat, beat, beat, beat” (S21).

(c) Artistic Expressions: Innate but Trainable

“When I was younger, my nickname was Ice Princess because I was kind of blunt and not very emotionally expressive, and I didn’t smile that much. But as I grew up, I...
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<td>(d) Inclination to Physical Activities, Especially Ballet-specific Motivation</td>
<td>“S6 was very distracted and very active. When she was young, she was like, you know, she can’t sit still even for a second. She liked climbing up on a couch or high places and falling down, and she loved doing something like that. She climbed up doorframes like boys, and kept running around.” (P6)</td>
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<td>“S12 really liked physical activities and stuff like that, so when she was very young, she was a kid who really liked to...” (S10).</td>
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When I was younger, I was really good at jumping and turning, and I thought that’s what ballet was all about. But artistry was not my strength. I personally believe that the artistic aesthetic comes out in the port de bra, but I was really, really bad at it. I was like a robot doing the port de bra back then. So, I practiced a lot to make my port de bra smooth and beautiful, so that the aesthetic would come out of the movement.... One day, I was practicing only my arm movements to make my port de bra perfect and elegant until the music ended. And I was really surprised by myself when other people praised me by saying ‘you are really good at using your arms’” (S11).
“run around when I sent her to the Gymboree program (Play and Music classes for young kids)” (P12)

“I remember I started piano around the same time when I started learning ballet. What I remember is that I played the piano until the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades in elementary school, but in the case of learning piano, it didn’t fit well with me, so I couldn’t keep my body still. It was so boring to sit down and keep hitting (the piano keys) with both hands, so I quit piano.” (S4)

“I thought my daughter (S12) had an absolute pitch at first. So, I sent her to learn piano first. But I could say that her body was a bit light? She couldn’t sit for a long time. (P12)”  

“I’m not very athletic (laughs). But I have been able to perform ballet and Korean traditional dance quite well, but I can’t do everything else. I think if you ask my mom, she would probably admit it. When I have to run, I don’t even have a basic sense of motor skills… I don’t know, but overall, I’m not good at all (other sports). I still can’t do the double-unders in jump rope or anything like that. I don’t think I have the sense of motor skills except for dancing” (S2).

“I really don’t like ball games at all. … But I do like sweating and running like that so much. I was on the track and field team in elementary school. (Kyung Hyun: What made you choose ballet over track and field?) I was really interested in the arts so much as I talked to you before. My dad majored in physical education in college, and my mom was very interested in the arts, and my sister majored in
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| Close Connections Between Physical and Mental Stress | (a) Body and Mental Pains are Tangled          | “I didn’t hurt my ankle in the ballet class, but my feet got too weak because of the long ballet practice, and my feet were broken just going down the stairs. So, I couldn’t walk for about three weeks and had a cast on. Actually, taking a long break is so risky and stressful for ballet dancers. Dieting is also difficult, but if I can control how to go on a diet, I can find several alternative ways. But with injuries, I have to deal with all the pain (mental and physical) on my own. The rehabilitation and recovery are all on my own. When I sat and watched other friends doing ballet, I felt more fascinated by dancing and wanted to dance more. I felt more strongly that I wanted to run and jump” (S24).  
“As I was attending an art-specialized middle school, we had a lot of ballet classes. However, I couldn’t skip the ballet class, even though I could not dance due to my injuries, because ballet classes were the regular required courses in art school. So, I just had to sit in the backside of the classroom and watch my friends dance for four or five hours. It was stressful to repeat explaining my injuries and why I couldn’t join the classes to different teachers whenever I couldn’t attend the classes” (S23). |
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<td>(b) Taken-for-granted Pain and Individualized Coping Strategies</td>
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<td>“It is something that every ballet peer had to go through when they were a kid. If you go through a lot of things like falling off your toenails, and repeat it a lot, you get calluses, and it does not hurt anymore. My toenails don’t grow long anymore. … Did I say this too brightly? (laugh)” (S24).</td>
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<td>“I felt so bad for my daughter (when she was preparing for college entrance exams), so I’d ask her if she was really okay, then, she always said “I am fine, I am good.” When her toenails almost were falling off, she said to me, “Mom, my toenails were falling off, but why am I so happy now?” I felt so bad, but at the same time I was grateful to my kid for trying so hard. I couldn’t say anything to her” (P9, the mother of S9).</td>
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<td>“I usually go to the ballet class at least one hour earlier to warm up first. The other day, I was thinking about myself and my own warmup routine because I suddenly thought of this, ‘Did I used to do a lot of things to warm up like this before?’ Originally, I just stretched my legs, but I was really bad at leaning forward because my hamstrings are short, so I added the hamstring stretches at a certain point. I also added band exercises to strengthen my feet and ankles because I have really thin ankles and the arch of my feet was not good. And I feel like my routine is kind of set now. And I also do ab planks and shoulder exercises with the band. I also added hip exercises to reduce my back pain” (S11).</td>
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Wraparound Parental Support: Time, Effort, Care, and Money (a) Family Values on Arts and Sports |                                                                           | “I majored in early childhood education and ran a daycare center for caring for about 100 children. When I was running it, I thought that the most important thing for...” |
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<td>children was to let them express themselves through the arts. I taught them music, dance, storytelling, drawing, fine arts, and several arts education programs because I thought that the arts education would help the children’s thinking skills, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and so on, and it would help them do great in school. My daughter, S9, was one of them, and her sense of rhythm was so good when she was dancing while listening to music. I exposed her to a lot of music because I thought if she liked it, this might be the future path she had to follow. She just experienced it naturally. I never forced her to study. I just exposed her to everything if she wanted to. … I saw her happiest moments when she was listening to music and dancing, which made her the happiest. So, I thought I have to guide my daughter to the things that make her happy when she does that” (P9, the mother of S9).</td>
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<td>(b) Manager Mom and Educational Mobility</td>
<td>“Even after dropping kids off at school, I got busy again. I had to order costume and props, prepared their pointe shoes or leotards, and sometimes I had to select music for helping my daughters’ competition stages” (P1, the mother of S1 and S2).</td>
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|        | (c) Talent Development Costs a Lot | “I have heard people say that if we decide for our child to major in ballet, the money will go out from the parents’ pockets, like pulling tissues out of a Kleenex, which means that it will cost a lot. It might be beyond our expectations. When my daughter wanted to major in ballet first, I was reluctant to let her start to major in ballet because that’s the time when my business was in a bad situation, unfortunately. I was struggling financially to run my business, and I was not sure if I could pay for the ballet lesson fee. However, S7’s ballet teacher said, “Let me teach
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<td>Effective School Curriculum or Competent Teachers</td>
<td>(a) Systematized Gifted Education: Art-specialized Schools in Seoul</td>
<td>“S7, it’s okay that you pay it later,” so I actually saved all that money and gave it back to the teacher later” (P7, the mother of S7). “I had a tough time learning ballet in the rigorous program in the art school, but I think I learned the basics really well, like how to use my body properly to dance ballet, and how to perform neatly without any bad habits” (S3). “My former dance instructor recommended that I learn ballet with another teacher in Seoul if I am going to learn ballet properly and professionally… I learned from scratch basic positions and techniques from the new teacher in Seoul…I only had two-hour lessons once a week on weekends and summer vacation. But after three months, I realized that my leg shape had changed positively. … I realized that it was because the teacher taught me how to use my muscles properly from scratch, so my leg shape had changed (dramatically)” (S15).</td>
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<td>(b) Significant Teacher’s Role: Individualized Private Lesson in Local Cities</td>
<td>“My (private) teacher definitely understood my body well, and it was obviously different from other teachers I had been taught before. Every student has different body muscles and characteristics, and my teacher understood my body correctly first and gave me a customized teaching method for it. … I could improve my skills and performance a lot according to her tailored teaching method only for me” (S9). “(When I was in the 2nd year of art-specialized middle school), I was initially placed in the Class A, but I gave up participating in ballet competitions in the year and moved to...”</td>
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<td>Ballet Peers: Mixed Feelings of Rivalry and Camaraderie</td>
<td>(a) Mutual Growth with Stimulation: Not Friendship, but Camaraderie</td>
<td>the <em>Class B</em>. However, the teacher (negatively and aggressively) compared me and other classmates too much with the <em>Class A</em> students. It was really too much... I was stressed out by the teacher. I was not worried that my movements may not perform well at that time, rather, I was scared of the teacher’s language itself. I was just scared of “what she (the teacher) would say to me today.” ... Looking back on it now, I still don’t know if it was really necessary to say that way to us. We were just young kids back then” (S4).</td>
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<td>“Except for a few kids, we were almost business partnerships… so even when we try to bond, it doesn’t work out. I think it’s better to prepare for a show together, and even if we did not like each other or we were not really close friends, we had to dance together for the show, because we had to perform on the stage” (S6).</td>
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<td>“Even though we are close friends, we can’t help but compete with each other. We had no choice but to compete with each other, which makes us feel bad for each other” (S1).</td>
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<td>“We spent all the time doing ballet training together, so we simultaneously get to know each other even if we don’t fit each other. (Regardless of whether the relationship is good or bad,) just by being close together (due to the group training schedule), we can’t help but get to know each other. … So, it was difficult to say things like ‘I’m struggling’ because we are all on the same path, and aiming for the same goal, and we are all struggling. It felt like saying “I am struggling,” to other kid who is also struggling. Because it’s...”</td>
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not just me, it’s the same for other kids. So, there wasn’t much personal conversation, just we were just like talking about “what time does the class start today?” or “what is the combination we have to practice today?” (S4).
“In my college life in the dance major, we were able to be closer because there are many things to prepare for by working together, each other, because it’s the nature of the dance major. We have to work together and develop a camaraderie; I think that majoring in ballet actually helped me form good interpersonal relationships in my adult life” (S23).
(b) Excessive Competitiveness, Envy and Jealousy
“The selected kids are all excellent and talented, but only 20 or so students with the same goals are gathered in the same classroom. They were all good and talented, and my daughter was one of them there. She was always complimented by others before going there, but all the other kids were the same, all just as talented as my girl. So, she had been through all kinds of hardships in peer relationships (with her competitive peers), and I thought at some point she had become selfish as well. ... I’ve heard dance teachers and professors say that a person’s personality and character come out in their dancing, but I also thought about how they (the art school students) could dance so beautifully in such a selfish group. But I thought it was a learning process for my daughter’s life.... After she entered college and met people from other majors, I think my daughter is growing up a little and changing to be more emotional and empathetic” (P12).
“It wasn’t like that in (art) middle school hood, but then when I got to (art) high school, there were a lot of people
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<td>who were jealous of me because I was getting better grades (than when I was in art middle school), and their (intimidating) behaviors were really overt. Instead, the teachers were more supportive, but that made it worse. ...I think I had really bad experiences in high school with jealousy and stuff like that from my classmates. ... (Not only the classmates but also), even seniors who were jealous of me because I was doing a little bit better than them. ... some seniors were saying like, ‘I just don’t like you for no reason.’” (S13)</td>
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<td>Culture Shapes Specific Norms and Priorities in TD</td>
<td>(a) Prioritizing College Education Over Ballet Company</td>
<td>“There were only 12 or 13 kids in a class, and they had to be together for three years straight, and my daughter struggled a lot in her first and second years in high school because there was jealousy of her because she was always in the first place in her performance. One day, she called me crying and saying over the phone, “Mom, I want to quit ballet” because of the bullying behaviors from other kids. It broke my heart” (P13).</td>
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<td>“I think it’s better to learn ballet in Korea, considering the life after retiring from a ballet dancer’s career, and there are many more jobs available to choose from here (in Korea)” (S22).</td>
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<td>“If I’m working in Korea, I feel like a college degree is a requirement that I can’t really avoid. Well, unless I’m going to dance and work for the rest of my life (in case I can’t dance anymore), a college degree is almost like a necessity...I think everyone’s final goal is to get into and graduate from college in Korea unless you’re saying that...”</td>
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<td>(b) Turning Crisis into Opportunity: The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic</td>
<td>you’re going to go abroad and never come back to Korea” (S4).</td>
<td>“I had more time to practice with my private lesson instructor in Seoul after the pandemic, and I was able to go to Seoul more often, which gave me more time to grow and improve my ballet. Whenever I heard that classes were canceled because someone got COVID positive, I thought, ‘oh, I’ll have more time to go to get lessons in Seoul.’ It was actually better for me that the school classes were canceled” (S9). “I thought it was more of an opportunity because other kids in an art-specialized high school in Seoul were not allowed to have private lessons outside of school (due to the school policy), so if their school was closed, they wouldn’t be able to have lessons. But I was able to go to private lessons even if the school was closed (because my art-specialized school in a non-metropolitan area permitted private lessons), and there were many more kids who were not able to practice than those who could. So I thought, ‘let’s take this (pandemic lockdown) as an opportunity to get practice more in Seoul….I saw this crisis as an opportunity. I thought, it was time to practice more. The school classes were fully online and even asynchronous recorded classes, so I took more private lessons in Seoul during that time, so I was able to focus more on my ballet practice” (S15).</td>
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<td>(c) Mandatory Military Service Duty for Ballerinos</td>
<td>“I’m learning a lot at university now, and I feel that it shouldn’t be interrupted (by military service) because I’m developing and growing now, so I’m thinking about it (doing military service) after I graduate from university, but I have a lot of worries. …. (Kyung Hyun: If you would start</td>
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<td>military service, you’re worried about getting your body stiff or something?) Yes, that’s the biggest thing, because I can’t practice ballet every day (in the military camp)” (S5).</td>
<td>“It might be okay to try the big international competitions for the military exemption, but now the possibility (to win the first prize to be qualified for the exemption) doesn’t seem so high. Moreover, I’m a Korean man, and going to the military is part of my life and responsibility, and I think it’s okay just to go and come back (to my ballet career). So, I don’t really want to risk my life obsessing over the competitions for exemption” (S5).</td>
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<td>“I have a plan (to participate in the big competitions to obtain the qualification of an exemption from military service), but I’m not sure if it has to be realized. I’m thinking about trying this year’s competition, so I’m preparing for it. (Kyung Hyun: If it goes well, is it okay not to go to the military service?) Yes. (Kyung Hyun: So, what kind of competitions are qualified to apply for the exemption? How big are the competitions?) I am participating in a competition called YAGP (Youth America Grand Prix) in the United States. I have already passed the preliminary rounds. If it doesn’t work out, if I don't win first prize there, my next plan is to win first prize at the Korea International Ballet Competition or the Seoul International Dance Competition. (Kyung Hyun: Do they only give exemptions to first-place winners?) And the second prize” (S25).</td>
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