

## Development of Nora Dance Curriculum for the Youth

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### Abstract

Development of the Nora dance curriculum for the youth is participatory action research aimed to analyze and synthesize a body of knowledge concerning Nora performing art from national artists, local artists, academics and experts in art, culture and Nora performance, and to establish a standard curriculum for Nora dance training so that it serves as a model for a sustainable practice of Nora performing arts for the youth. The results suggest that the Nora dance curriculum for the youth's goal is to promote understanding and skills of Nora dance among the youth and other people in society, which will pave the way for sustainable preservation of this national identity. The curriculum offers a total of 39 training hours over the period of five days and is divided into four major parts, including Part 1: taking four training hours featuring academic knowledge on history and components of Nora dance and Part 2: taking 35 training hours highlighting practice-intensive sessions featuring body organization in Nora dance, technical terms for Nora dance, basic Nora dance choreography, and a Nora dance skills presentation. The curriculum has been thoroughly evaluated by five experts and evaluation results yielded an average score of 4.8 out of 5.

**Keywords:** Nora dance, Southern performance, Nora, Local performance curriculum, cultural heritage

### Introduction

“Cultural heritage” denotes practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills accompanied by tool, objects, inventions and cultural areas (Intangible Cultural Heritage, n. d.) which are accepted by communities, people or individuals as their own cultural heritage. It is respected as a legacy passed down from one generation to another and also an important masterpiece brought to life and constantly developed by the community in response to its environment and purposes. Cultural heritage establishes self-pride and a sense of ownership of creative values of the cultural heritage of one's community or individuals.

In Thailand, the Department of Cultural Promotion within the Ministry of Culture has gradually started the process of becoming an associate member of the convention since announcement of the first registration of the National Cultural Heritage in 2009 (Wisudthiluck, 2017). Performing Arts are one field of the six categories of cultural heritage (Ministry of Culture, 2007) (Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2007, p.6) and are defined as an expression of feelings, emotions and various stories through performers functioning as a medium communicating through voices i.e., singing, or playing music, and physical movements such as *Rum* (slow dance), performing a puppet show, dancing, acting etc. One of the well-recognized and popular southern performances possessing outstanding identities is Nora dance, a performing art formidably portraying the south's identity and ideology.

Nora or Manora (spelled either "Manora" or "Manorah") has long been the south's highly popular traditional play inherited through generations. It is a play incorporating diverse but well-balanced components of verse singing and dancing. Some parts are performed according to specific occasions while others are performed for ritualistic purposes (Pongpiboon, 1988, p. 184). Nora is a performing art with great aesthetic appeal portraying liveliness, accompanied by an integration of verse songs sung in a southern dialect. The performance also incorporates upbeat music and the performers are dressed in costumes intricately tailored in alignment with deeply-seated beliefs and rituals of the southern community. Those of Nora descent will gather to perform rituals such as paying homage to *Khru Mor Nora* (past Nora masters) or ancestors, or warding off evil.

Nora rituals are used as a link connecting the communities with their ancestors and also play a vital role in producing new generations of Nora dance performers. In addition, the rituals are also performed to cure illnesses or other abnormalities inflicted upon community members and perceived as a blessing for those participating in the ritual. In 2019, the Department of Cultural Promotion registered Nora dance under the name "Nora, Dance Drama in Southern Thailand" with UNESCO as a representation of the intangible cultural heritage of humankind.

Preserving cultural heritage and knowledge of the Nora performing arts as well as promoting dissemination of knowledge concerning it from generation to generation is of high significance and as a result necessitates a formulation of standard practices. Owing to this rationale, this Nora dance curriculum for the youth has been conceived in order to promote such an ultimate goal.

## Objectives

1. To analyze and synthesize the knowledge of Nora performing arts from national artists, local artists, academics and experts in art and culture related to Nora performing arts.
2. To formulate a quality standard for the Nora training curriculum to be utilized as a model for practice of a Nora dance performance among the youth, people in general society, and educational personnel.
3. To preserve and promote dissemination of the Nora performing arts constituting a sense of pride in this national and local cultural heritage for the future.

## Research methodology

This study was conducted using participatory action research design incorporating the analysis process using content analysis and insights brainstormed by academics, experts, local artists and scholars. The three experts who helped design this curriculum are as follows:

1. Mr. Thummanit Nikomrat
2. Mr. Supat Narksen
3. Mr. Nattapon Wannaun

The five evaluators of the curriculum are:

1. Mr. Saroj Nakavirot
2. Mr. Chatchai Sukrakanchana
3. Mr. Kuan Tuanyok
4. Mr. Jin Chimpong
5. Mrs. Pensri Muenpanchu

## Research scope

The study was conducted over a period from January to September 2020 and included content about Nora dance training for the youth aged 15-19.

## Results/Findings

Results of the study about the Nora curriculum for the youth were derived from in-depth analysis and synthesis of the knowledge from experts and then the results were applied in the curriculum design. Specifically, Mr. Thummanit Nikomrat used his skills and expertise in designing *Rum Prasom Ta* (Mixed poses), Mr. Supat Narksen designed *Rum Ta Khru* (12 poses) and Mr. Nattapon Wannaun focused on body organization for Nora dance and technical terms for a Nora performance. All of these aspects of Nora performance knowledge contributed to the development of the Nora performance training curriculum as detailed below.

Results of the Nora curriculum for the youth suggested as follows:

### 1. Language of instruction

The language used is Thai, more specifically a southern dialect because of its intelligibility to the locals and effectiveness in creating a sense of closeness between the trainers and participants.

### 2. Qualifications

- 2.1. Youth aged 9-15 years
- 2.2. Interest in Nora performing arts (basic skills are not required)
- 2.3. Determination and consistency with the training schedule
- 2.4. Participation in the training as required by the curriculum

### 3. Philosophy and importance of the curriculum

Promote understanding and knowledge about Nora among the youth and people in society to cultivate skills and uphold sustainability of the national identity.

### 4. Objective of the curriculum

4.1. To preserve and promote dissemination of Nora performing arts to further establish pride and value of this cultural heritage.

4.2. To heighten appreciation of Thai cultural identity, unique traits of Thai culture, and respect for all human dignity.

### 5. Structure of the Curriculum

**Period of training: 39 hours (5 days)**

**Table 1** Details of the subjects featured

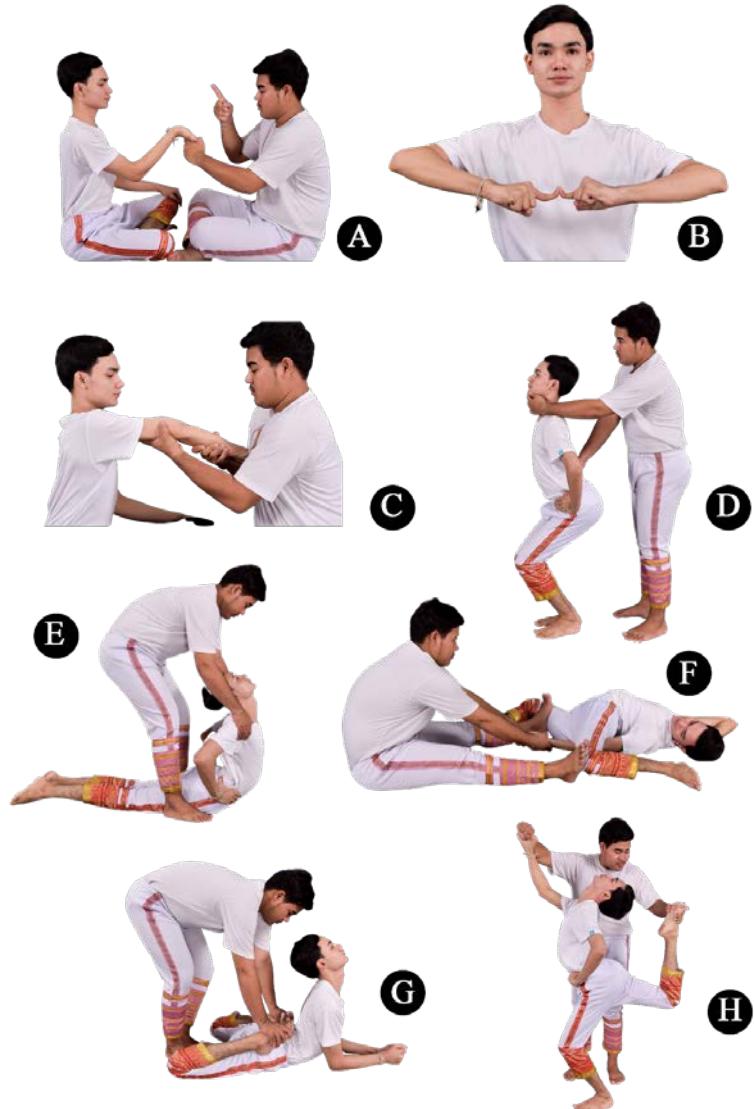
Subject	Detail	Theory
General subjects	- Art of Nora performance - Demonstration of Nora performing arts	3 hours 1 hour <b>4 hours</b>
<b>Specific Subject</b>	<b>Mandatory Nora dance</b>	<b>Practice</b>
	- Body organization for Nora dance - Technical terms for a Nora performance - Basic Nora dance choreography - Nora dance in <i>Rum Ta Khru</i> (12 poses) - Nora in <i>Rum Prasom Ta</i> (Mixed poses) - Strategies for Nora dance - Choreography management for Nora performance - Presentation: Nora dance skills	2 hours 30 minutes 2 hours 2 hours 1 hours 9 hours 3 hours 6 hours 30 minutes 1 hours <b>27 hours</b>
	<b>Total hours for theory and practice</b>	<b>31 hours</b>
	Lesson conclusion and recreation	8 hours
	<b>Total hours for full curriculum</b>	<b>39 hours</b>

Details of the content featured in the curriculum are as illustrated below:

*The general subject, Art of Nora Performance (3 hours):* This subject focuses on general information about Nora and aims at cultivating three dimensions of knowledge about Nora dance. The first part emphasizes the youths' understanding of Nora performance. The second part focuses on the cultural significance of Nora. The third part focuses on the history of Nora originating in the southern region as well as a variety of Nora performance groups adopting distinctive practices, beliefs and rituals associated with Nora dance.

*Demonstration of Nora performing arts (1 hour):* This part features 12 Nora dance poses demonstrated by a renowned Nora master so that participants are capable of visualizing the overall making of a Nora performance. This part aims to generate interest, stimulate participants to enthusiastically partake in the training, and grow a sense of pride in Nora, Thailand's local and national cultural heritage.

*Body organization for Nora Dance (2:30 hours):* Body organization denotes an ability to artistically bend one's body to create aesthetic patterns in compliance with each performer's characteristics including: 1. Hand bending, 2. Finger bending, 3. Arm bending, 4. Face upward-turning, 5. Chest bending, 6. Body bending, 7. Leg bending, and 8. Knee bending as demonstrated in Figure 1 below (Nicomrath, 2020, pp. 49-53).



**Figure 1** (A) Arm bending (B) Finger bending (C) Arm bending (D) Face upward-turning (E) Chest bending (F) Body bending (G) Leg bending (H) Knee bending

*Technical terms for a Nora Performance (2 hours):* It is imperative that participants learn Nora dance's technical terms including: 1. *Long Chark*, 2. *Kao Kwai*, 3. *Tong Rong*, 4. *Klao Meau*, 5. *Nad*, 6. *Sod Soi*, 7. *Kep Tao*, 8. *Kep Tean Tia*, and 9. *Ruam Meau* as illustrated in Figure 2 below (Nicomrath, 2020, pp. 54-59).



**Figure 2** (A) *Long Chark* (Side Knee bending with lotus hand gesture) (B) *Kao Kwai* (buffalo's horns) (C) *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding pose) (D) *Klao Meau* (Downward pleated fingers) (E) *Nad* (Arm swing) (F) *Sod Soi* (arm swinging) (G) *Kep Tao* (Sideward feet with buffalo's horn arms) (H) *Kep Tean Tia* (Blooming lotus shaped arms in a squatting position) (I) *Ruam Meau* (hand joining)

*Basic Nora dance choreography (2 hours)*

*Rum Ta Khru* (12 poses) (1 hour): First, the importance and choreography of *Rum Ta Khru* is taught. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is accompanied solely by music with no lyrics. *Rum Ta Khru* can be alternatively referred to as *Rum Pleng Khru* (12 poses), *Rum Ta Sibsong* (12 poses), or *Rum Sibsong Ta* (12 poses), and is believed to be the most significant aspect. The choreography characteristically registers absolute stillness, grace and intense concentration. Each angle of the movements needs to perfectly harmonize with not only the poses themselves but also the orchestrated music. Therefore, *Rum Ta Khru* is most frequently practiced at several important events and rituals. For example, it can be seen in rituals such as *Rum Tawai Khru* (Nora master worship dance), *Rum Na San* (Holy spirit worship dance), *Nora Rong Khru* (Nora ritual dance) ritual and also in the *Kae Mei* (vow breaking) ritual, or included in other homage-paying ceremonies. Without *Rum Ta Khru*, that particular ritual is considered incomplete (Narksen, 2019). Figure 3 below illustrate *Rum Ta Khru* (Nicomrath, 2020, p. 66).



**Figure 3** (A) *Pranom Meau* (prostrating), (B) *Jeeb Kang Sai* (left-sided pleated fingers), (C) *Jeeb Kang Kwa* (right-sided pleat fingers), (D) *Jeeb Ping Eo Sai* (Left-sided waist-leveled pleated fingers), (E) *Jeeb Ping Eo Kwa* (Right-sided waist-leveled pleated fingers), (F) *Jeeb Klang Sai* (left-sided back pleated fingers), (G) *Jeeb Klang Kwa* (Right-sided back pleated fingers), (H) *Jeeb Ping Ba Sai* (Left-sided shoulder-leveled pleated fingers), (I) *Jeeb Ping Ba Kwa* (Right-sided shoulder-leveled pleat fingers), (J) *Jeeb Samer Na Sai* (Face-front pleated fingers), (K) *Jeeb Samer Na Kwa* (Left- sided face- front pleated fingers1), (L) *Kao Kwai* (buffalo's horns)

*Nora Dance in Rum Prasom Ta (mixed poses dance) (9 hours):* The name itself suggests its nature of an aesthetic integration of poses from different types of Nora dance in a way that executes smooth, uninterrupted and balanced movements. For example, scene-leaving poses and poses from *Rum Pleng Ko*, *Rum Pleng Nad* and *Rum Ta Khru* are blended to create one single choreography for each round of performances (Nicomrath, 2020, p. 59).

*Strategies for Nora Dance (3 hours):* Nora performers aiming for an effective, impressive and soothing dance for the audience need to be knowledgeable about fundamental components of the dance in order to execute the art in its best form by following strategies suggested below:

1. Performers must continuously train in order to precisely memorize the poses.
2. Performers must be of decent physical fitness and able to exercise their physical strength while doing the poses in order to maintain smooth movements.
3. Performers must arch their chests forward, turn their faces upward and bend their knees while doing different poses.
4. Performers should express genuine happiness through facial expressions and gazes.
5. Performers need to understand the rhythms and precision of each pose in order to ensure its accommodation to the music.
6. Performers need to keep their breathing paces consistent with the poses to reduce tiredness.
7. Performers must understand the importance of each dance pose and how to communicate and develop it, such as practicing gentle but firm sitting and walking postures.

*Choreography management for Nora performance (6:30 hours):*

Choreography for *Rum Prasom Ta* is a combination of scene-leaving poses and poses from *Rum Pleng Ko*, *Rum Pleng Nad* and *Rum Ta Khru*. Some poses from *Rum Ta Khru* are selected as deemed appropriate for the occasion, time and age of students. Performers will be dancing in a circle formation to the music of *Rum Ta Khru*'s rhythm, which is easily followed by those having just achieved the basic skills and being able to clearly catch the orchestra-played music coming from each instrument. That is because the music's rhythms are consistent and only confined to *Rum Ta Khru*'s rhythms throughout the entire dance.

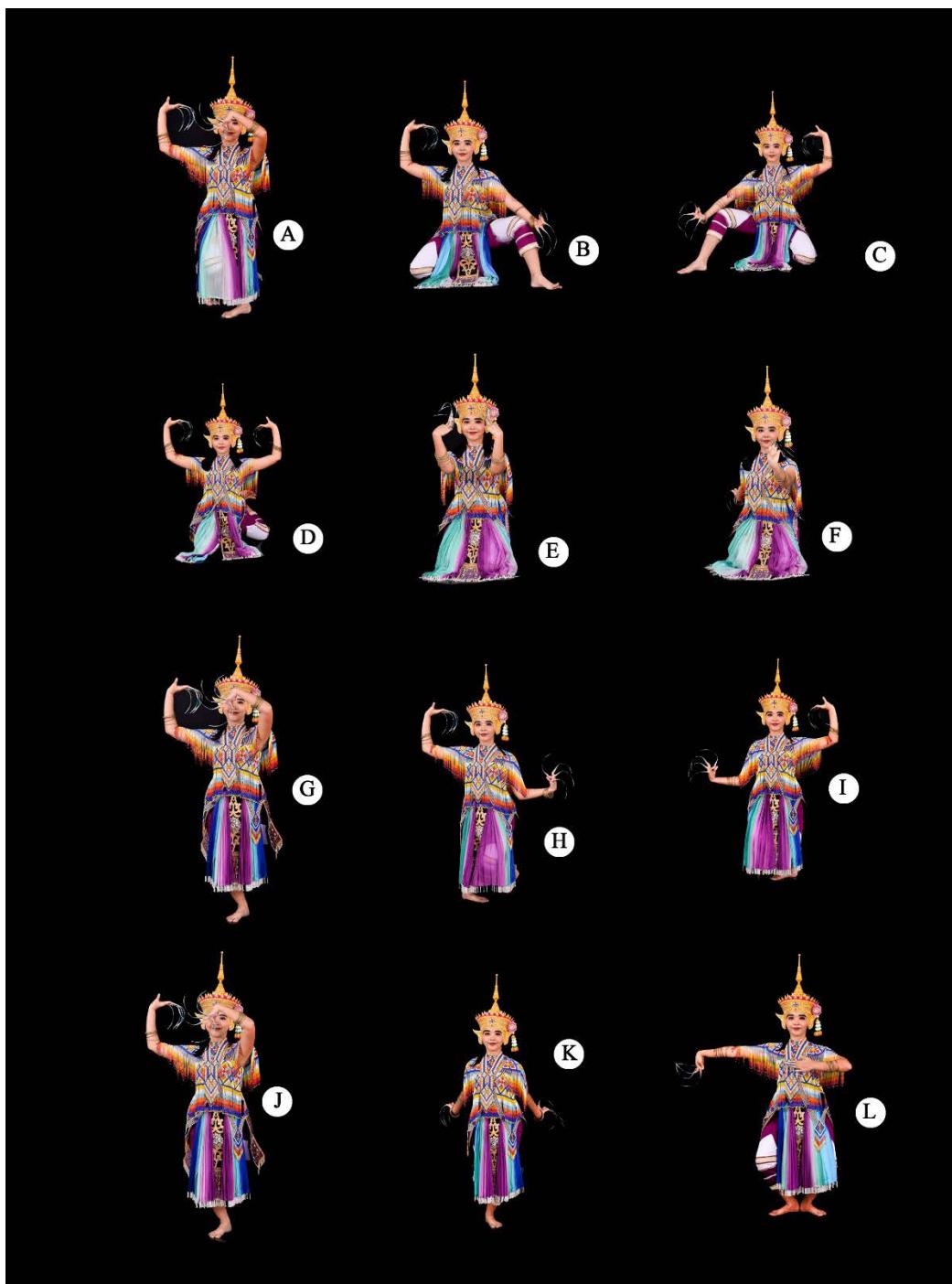
*Rum Prasom Ta* incorporates dance poses as described below:

**Step 1** *Rum Ok* (scene-entering) includes: 1. *Wai Pose*, 2. *Kum Nub*, 3. *Ruab Meau*, and 4. *Tong Rong* as shown in Figure 4 below (Nicomrath, 2020, p. 68).



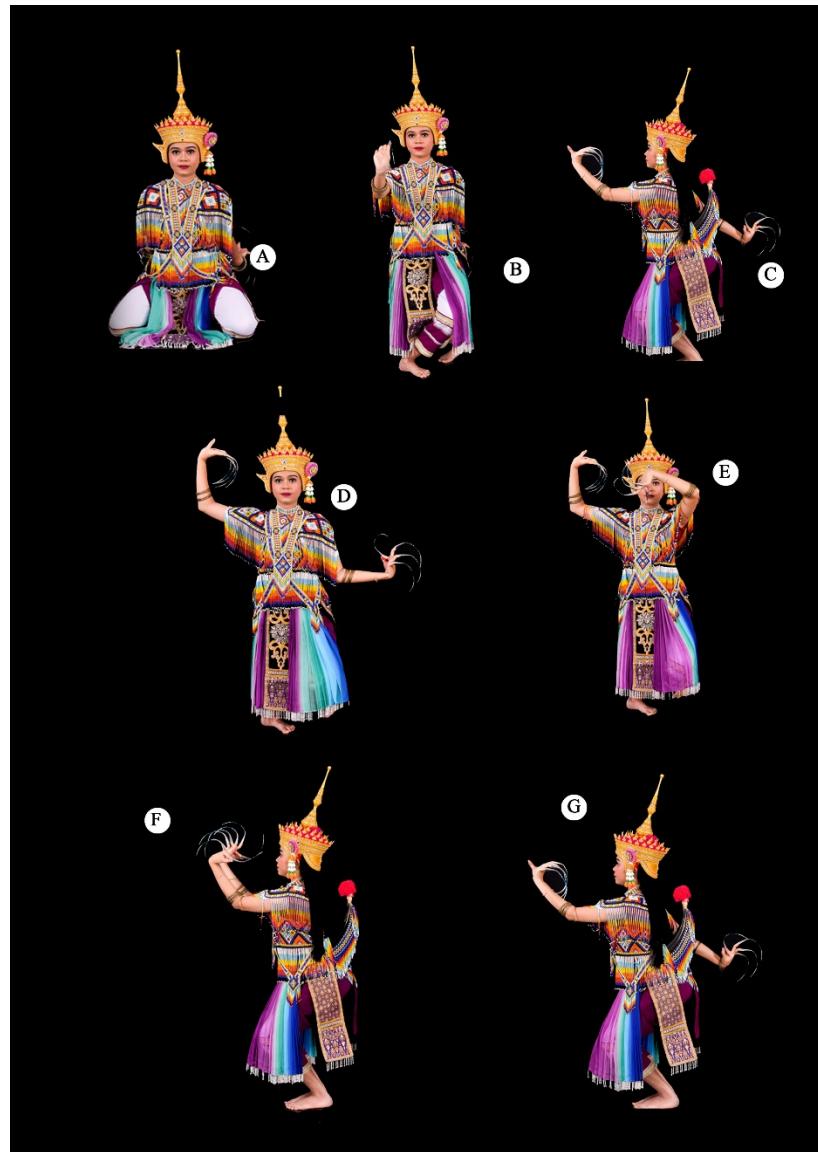
**Figure 4** (A) *Ta Wai* (prostrating pose) (B) *Kum Nub* (curtsying pose) (C) *Ruam Meau* (hand joining) (D) *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding pose)

**Step 2** *Rum Pleng Ko* (Rhythm dance) consists of 1. *Sod Soi* (arm swinging), 2. *Sadaung Yaung Kang Sai* (left-sided leg stretching), 3. *Sadaung Yaung Kang Kwa* (right-sided leg stretching), 4. Applied *Kao Kwai Keenon Noi* (upward buffalo horn arm curve), 5. *Ruam Meau* (hand joining), 5. *Ruam Meau* (hand joining), 6. *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding), 7. *Sod Soi* (arm swinging), 8. *Jeeb Kang Sai Kao Kwai* (Kao Kwai's left-sided pleated fingers), 9. *Jeeb Kang Kwa Kao Kwai* (Kao Kwai's right-sided pleated fingers), 10. *Sod So i* (arm swinging), 11. *Bua Ban*, (blooming lotus), and 12. *Klao Meau* (Downward pleated fingers) as shown in Figure 5 below (Nicomrath, 2020, pp. 69-73).



**Figure 5** (A) *Sod Soi* (arm swinging) (B) *Sadaung Yaung Kang Sai* (left-sided leg stretching) (C) *Sadaung Yaung Kang Kwa* (right-sided leg stretching) (D) *Applied Kao Kwai Keenon Noi* (upward buffalo horn arm curve) (E) *Ruam Meau* (hand joining) (F) *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding) (G) *Sod Soi* (arm swinging) (H) *Jeeb Kang Sai Kao Kwai* (Kao Kwai's left-sided pleated fingers) (I) *Jeeb Kang Kwa Kao Kwai* (Kao Kwai's right-sided pleated fingers) (J) *Sod Soi* (arm swinging) (K) *Bua Ban* (blooming lotus) (L) *Klaow Meau* (Downward pleated fingers)

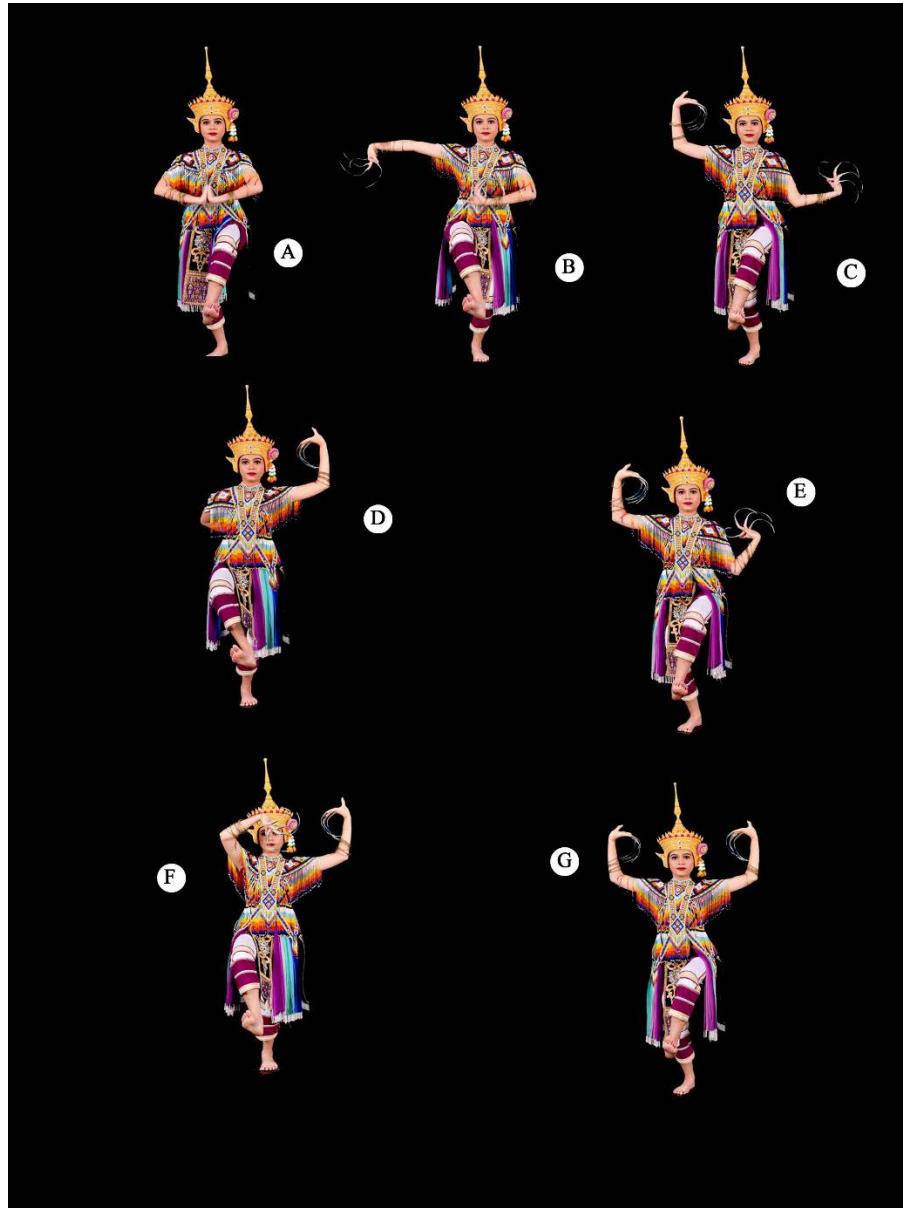
**Step 3:** *Rum Ta Nad* consisting of 1. *Nung Nad* (Tong Rong's hand gesture), 2. *Yeaun Nad* (Tong Rong's hand gesture), 3. *Dern Nad* (Tong Rong's hand gesture), 4. *Dern Nad* (Kao Kwai's sided-pleated fingers), 5. *Dern Nad* (Kao Kwai's front-pleated fingers), 6. *Ruam Meau* (hand joining), and 7. *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding) as shown in Figure 6 below. (Nicomrath, 2020, pp. 74-78)



**Figure 6** (A) *Nung Nad* (Tong Rong's hand gesture), (B) *Yeaun Nad* (Tong Rong's hand gesture), (C) *Dern Nad* (Tong Rong's arm swinging), (D) *Dern Nad* (Kao Kwai's sided-pleated fingers), (E) *Dern Nad* (Kao Kwai's front-pleated fingers), (F) *Ruam Meau* (hand joining), (I) *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding)

**Step 4:** *Rum Ta Khru* poses consisting of 1. *Pranom Meau* (prostrating pose), 2. *Jeeb Kang Kwa* (Right-sided pleated fingers), 3. *Jeeb Kang-kwa Radub Sa-ew* (Left- sided pleated

fingers at a waist level), 4. *Jeeb Lung* (Back pleated fingers), 5. *Jeeb Tiem Ba* (Shoulder-leveled pleated fingers), 6. *Jeeb Samer Na* (Face-front pleated fingers), and 7. *Kao Kwai* (Buffalo's horned arms) as shown in Figure 7 below (Nicomrath, 2020, pp. 77-78).



**Figure 7** (A) *Pranom Meau* (Prostrating pose) (B) *Jeeb Kang Kwa* (Right-sided pleated fingers) (C) *Jeeb Kang-kwa Radub Sa-ew* (Left-sided pleated fingers at a waist level) (D) *Jeeb Lung* (Back pleated fingers) (E) *Jeeb Tiem Ba* (Shoulder-leveled pleat fingers) (F) *Jeeb Samer Na* (Face-front pleated fingers) (G) *Kao Kwai* (Buffalo's horned arms)

**Step 5:** *Koa Chark* (Scene-entering) poses consisting of 1. *Ruam Meau* (Hand joining) and 2. *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding) as illustrated in Figure 8 below (Nicomrath, 2020, p. 78).



**Figure 8** (A) *Ruam Meau* (Hand joining) (B) *Tong Rong* (Hall gliding)

*Lesson conclusion and recreation (8 hours):* This section allows for a detailed and specific review of what has been learned during the day and helps bring into focus any need for additional practice. The practice is designed to have a lighter and more relaxing atmosphere so that the participants acquire both knowledge and practical skills in a stress-free learning environment.

*Presentation of Nora dance (1 hour):* Nora dance demonstrations are performed by Nora masters who are experts in Nora training in order to exhibit identities of the dance, singing, *Ok Pran* (hunter appearing) and performing of Nora dance music which will be played in the trainings throughout the curriculum.

### Evaluation of Nora training participants

Consisting of 2 parts as detailed below:

1. Participants are required to attend no less than 80 percent of the training or no less than 24 hours.
2. Participants pass no less than 80 percent in both theory and practice tests
  - 2.1) Theory test 10 points
  - 2.2) Practice test 90 points

**Table 2:** Detail of participant evaluation

No.	Detail	Score
1	Meaning and history of Nora dance	10 points
2	Choreography of <i>Rum Ta Khru</i>	30 points
3	Choreography of <i>Rum Prasom Ta</i>	60 points
<b>Total</b>		<b>100 points</b>

The developed curriculum of Nora dance for the youth will be examined by five following experts:

1. Mr. Saroj Nakavirot
2. Mr. Chatchai Sukrakanchana
3. Mr. Kuan Tuanyok
4. Mr. Jin Chimpong
5. Mrs. Pensri Muenpanchu

The curriculum's suitability is assessed in these eight areas: 1) Curriculum's name, 2) Objectives, 3) Structures, 4) Training management system, 5) Appropriateness of content covering Nora performance, 6) Qualifications of the training participants, 7) Period of the training, and 8) Evaluation (scoring higher than 80 percent to pass the training as shown in Table 2).

**Table 3** Evaluation Results of Appropriateness of the Nora Dance Curriculum for the Youth

No	Detail	Experts' rating					Mean
		Exp.1	Exp.2	Exp.3	Exp.4	Exp.5	
1	Curriculum's name	5	5	5	5	4	4.8
2	Objectives	5	5	5	5	4	4.8
3	Structures	4	5	5	5	5	4.8
4	Training management system	3	5	5	5	4	4.4
5	Appropriateness of content covering Nora performance	4	5	5	5	4	4.6
6	Qualifications of the training participants (Youth aged 9-15)	4	5	5	4	5	4.6
7	Period of the training (5 days/ 39 hours)	3	5	5	4	5	4.4
8	Evaluation (scoring higher than 80 percent to pass the training)	3	5	5	5	4	4.4

5 = most appropriate 4= very appropriate 3= moderately appropriate 2= barely appropriate and 1 = not appropriate

Evaluation results of Appropriateness of the Nora Dance for the Youth curriculum suggested that appropriateness in terms of the curriculum's name, objectives of the curriculum and structure of the curriculum scored 4.8, closely followed by the content about Nora performance and qualifications of the training participants (youth aged 9 to 15) scoring 4.6.

## Discussions

For the first objective which aimed to analyze and synthesize knowledge of Nora performing arts from national artists, local artists, academics and experts specializing in art and culture and Nora performance, it was found that the body of knowledge of Nora performance has been passed down through cultural beliefs, traditions, and rituals. This is one crucial step in continuing the Nora performing arts, but there have unfortunately been few inheritors of the traditions as well as declining popularity in the general society. Then, for the second objective which aimed to establish a standard for a Nora training curriculum to serve as a model for the training of Nora performance among the youth, people in general, and educational personnel, the researcher found that a comprehensive curriculum must be comprised of knowledge about Nora in four key areas – dancing, singing, music and *Phran Nora* (a hunter figure in Nora dance) Such curriculum will significantly assist in having the youth be equipped with diverse Nora performing arts skills. Finally, the third objective which aimed to conserve and disseminate Nora performing arts in a way leading to a sense of pride and value in the national and local cultural wisdom, it was found that teaching people to develop a sense of pride and value in their cultural wisdom had to be started in their adolescent years through learning and creating deeper understanding of many aspects of the Nora performing arts. This will build and foster awareness that can help in paving a way for sustainable art and culture preservation.

The curriculum of Nora performing arts for the youth is tailored to suit youth aged 15-19 years old. The curriculum aims at enabling their learning and understanding as well as properly practicing Nora performing arts within the 39-hour training period extended over five days. The training is divided into two parts, the first of which features theories including history of Nora dance and also other components of Nora to deepen youths' knowledge and understanding in the basics of Nora dance within two hours. The second part highlights practice-based learning, focusing on skills required in Nora dance ranging from the most basic including body preparation, namely body organization and acquiring technical terms used in Nora dance to facilitate understanding and quick concept grasping. The crux and core of this training is the practice of Nora dance skills. In the curriculum, 12 poses are included in *Rum Ta Khru*, which are the basic poses for Nora dance (Narksen, 2019). Twelve poses of *Ta Khru* according to Nora Master Thummanit (Thummanit Nikomrat) are incorporated as the practice poses in the training. There is also *Rum Prasom Ta* (assorted poses) and *Rum Pleng Ko* (Rhythm dance) included to further the youths' understanding and skills in diverse Nora dance poses. Beyond the practical training, casual activities for recreation are also included to create a relaxing atmosphere and strengthen relationships among the young participants. The final part is a skills presentation which presents dance poses which have been practiced and polished.

## Suggestions

For further improvement, the scope of a Nora dance curriculum should extend to specifically accommodate diverse groups of people in society such as a Nora dance curriculum for the elderly or a Nora dance curriculum for people in general society. This is to promote

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sustainability of Nora performing arts within all community groups in Thailand's southern region.

### **Conclusions**

In 2019, the Department of Cultural Promotion proposed Nora dance under the name "Nora, Dance Drama in Southern Thailand" to be registered as a tangible cultural heritage with UNESCO. This enormously acknowledges and emphasizes how significant this cultural heritage is for Thailand. Nora dance has long been considered a performing art whose practices are seamlessly intertwined with the south's local ways of life. Additionally, it is a combination of traditional beliefs and performance that is being upheld in present-day society where dramatic social and behavioral changes continuously occur. Unfortunately, these inevitable evolvements somehow gradually eclipse local performances or traditions which are in fact a tool communicating that particular community's identity. Additionally, most of the celebrated Nora scholars have come to old age and the duty of passing the valuable knowledge and skills on to their offspring has happened less and less, resulting in Nora dance losing its long-cultivated role in society.

All in all, the most sustainable way to preserve and promote this southern performing art is to instill the knowledge in later generations starting at a young age since learning helps cultivate youths' awareness in Nora's value as well as a sense of pride in their identity-rooted selves.

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