

Thai Folk Theatre's Contribution to Wellness Support:

A Case Study of Likay Performance for Hypertension Education

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Abstract

This work demonstrates the employment of Likay, a folk theatre performance, as an educational tool for promoting the awareness of hypertension in elderly Thais. Utilizing interdisciplinary approaches across the academic fields of health science and the performing arts, this project created a Likay production dealing with the topic of hypertension and related medical information. Fifty elderly people from the Ta Ma Prang subdistrict, Kaeng Khoi district of Saraburi province, Thailand, were included in this study. A survey questionnaire was distributed prior to and after the performance to monitor the improvement of understanding as well as the awareness of hypertension by the participants. Results showed that knowledge increased by about 10% as the pre-test score was 64 points, and the post-test score was 74 points out of 100 points. This work is a pioneering education tool for special groups suitable for specific interests which may contribute to the understanding of employing the creative arts and media in community empowerment, particularly for the elderly.

Keywords: Likay, Creative Production, Interdisciplinary Research, Community Empowerment, Arts for Health, Hypertension, Thailand

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Introduction

Likay, a traditional folk theater performance combining entertaining dialogue, singing, and dancing, was identified as a performing art form to realize this research objective. This work aimed at demonstrating and studying how creating a Likay performance could be a useful tool for provoking healthcare knowledge and awareness in elderly people. As the elderly population and community are quite complex and introducing new knowledge as well as stimulating awareness regarding health concerns can be challenging, using and encouraging interest would attract attention and benefit the learning process.

The present study utilized experts of Likay performance and its creators with the help from health care resource persons. Hypertension (high blood pressure) is considered as an importance health problem in older adults (Hedner, 2004:4). The quality of vessel walls as well as the physiological properties of cardiovascular related organs decays with age. Arteries are shown to lose their elasticity and compliance in aged adults, causing higher blood pressure (Oliveros et al., 2019:99). In addition, heart function declines with age causing an insufficient blood supply for the body, which lead to the activation of increased blood pressure. Generally, people with hypertension often ignore their health signs including headaches and dizziness, as these conditions are commonly found in elderly, leading to the development of severe conditions (Rigauud and Forette, 2017:217). Therefore, hypertension is referred to as "the silent killer."

The researcher initiated this creative project with collaboration from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts and Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. The result is a Likay performance that presented information and knowledge related to hypertension awareness, prevention, and treatment. Such content was designed into a performance dialogue and songs and made the information accessible for the elderly community. In brief, this research adopted a creative production research approach that an involved inter-disciplinary study between performing art and health science. It aims to employ a Likay performance as a creative medium to support community development, particularly to educate the elderly on matters related to hypertension prevention and treatment.

Likay is one of the most popular forms of folk theatre since the period of the late King Chulalongkorn (late 19th and early 20th century). It is an intangible cultural heritage that features local wisdom and creativity. Likay performers are required to have talents that can be spontaneously performed under given circumstances; it is a form of performance that involves performers' improvisation in dialogue and songs all the time. It is, therefore, to be considered as a high-skilled performance, for which the performers need to have talents and skills to handle the show. A well celebrated Likay performance is no doubt a performance that can engage the audience and receive an instant complimentary reaction. The moment when performers receive gifts prepared by the audience or fan club is the highlight of the show and is always seen as a specialty of Likay.

Knowledge about community health is an academic trend that many people are interested in. Being healthy is necessary so that people should learn and adapt their lifestyle. According to the proverb "It is the best to have no disease" it means when people get sick, it might be a waste of time, money and opportunity to

work. Thus, people need to stay safe and healthy, eat properly and have a healthy work-life balance in order to enhance the efficacy of living in an urban community safely and healthily. In particular, music has been shown to be beneficial for student performance (Forn, 2009:52 and Saarikallio, 2007:89-99). Music was shown to improve the quality of life for students (Eerola,P.S.;Erola.T, 2014:88) and help control emotions (Foran,L.M, 2009:51;Golbeck and Ellerkamp, 2012:395).

For content about healthcare, nutrition and theories, the researcher analyzed all and then concluded many points to form a base of a Likay show that includes comedy with techniques, mixed forms of performing, a contemporary style for adolescent audiences in the community, so that the performance is interesting and interactive between the actors and the audience. However, some traditional concepts need to be preserved as well. The researcher expects that the Likay Performance for hypertension learning would be useful for people in the Elderly Club in Ta Ma Prang Subdistrict, Kaeng Khoi District, Saraburi Province.

Objectives

The objective of this research is to create a performance that employs Likay as a creative medium to educate the elderly community on medical knowledge and issues related to hypertension. Through this Likay performance, the elderly people who were involved in the project developed a better understanding of hypertension prevention and treatment.

Subjects

The researcher created a Likay performance to foster elderly people on hypertension learning. Subjects involved in this research were the elderly community (aged between 60 to 70 years old) from the Elderly Club at Ta Ma Prang Subdistrict, Kaeng Khoi District in Saraburi province, Thailand. This research was approved by the office of the research ethics review committee for research involving human subjects, the second allied academic group in social sciences, humanities and fine and applied arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand (IRB 030/63) (Date of Approval: 15 April 2020).

Process

The researcher initiated and realized the research using the following steps. (1) The researcher conducted primary and secondary research about hypertension and health issues related to such conditions. (2) While preparing the content of the performance, the researcher invited Prof. Dr. Pithi Chanvorachote from the Department of Pharmacology and Physiology, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chulalongkorn University to provide information related to hypertension learning. (3) The researcher discussed issues related to elderly health management with Prof. Dr. Pithi Chanvorachote and compiled relevant content to be included in the Likay performance. (4) The researcher arranged and composed selected content in dialogue and songs for the Likay performance. The content used for the performance is mostly information concerning problems, prevention, and the treatment of hypertension. (5) The final version of the script was cross-checked by Prof. Dr. Pithi Chanvorachote to ensure the information's relevance and accuracy. (6) The selection of the performance characters was organized with a total of six main characters arranged based on the story of "The Jealousy of the Widowed

Mother," and several rehearsals were organized. The final casting of the performance involved professional artists and students from the Department of Dance, Faculty of Fine Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Both artists' and students' selections are based on their experience and availability to participate in the project under the restrictions of the pandemic. (7) The actual performance was executed and documented in the format of a video and made available on YouTube. (8) The researcher coordinated with Ta Ma Prang's Elderly Club from Saraburi province in order to involve the elderly community in the research. A series of questionnaires was executed before and post-performance. (9) In total, 50 participants (aged between 60 to 70 years old) voluntarily participated in the data collection process. (10) The researcher summarized the findings by analyzing the data collected from the questionnaires. In the meantime, the researcher discussed and reviewed the research processes and suggested further research related to this study.

Research Sample

The researcher selected the Elderly Club from Ta Ma Prang Subdistrict under the Kaeng Khoi District in Saraburi province. This particular club was selected due to its active involvement in community development since 1997. The club has more than 100 members that come from five villages. They are usually very active in participating in culture and community development projects in Saraburi province, especially on activities related to the religious festivals such as Buddhist Maka Bucha Day, Wisaka Bucha Day, Asanha Bucha Day, Buddhist Lent Day and etc. Apart from religious festivals, on the regular basis, the club assembles members for all kinds of community projects such as exercise, planting organic vegetables, and so on. In total, 50 participants of the age of 60 to 70 years old were invited to participate in this research. They were selected by the researcher based on the criteria that they must be able to read and write and complete the questionnaire.

Benefits of the Research

Likay performance research for hypertension learning is an interdisciplinary research project that combines knowledge and practice from performing arts and health sciences. It is a creative project that involves knowledge and expertise from Chulalongkorn University and the Elderly Club in Ta Ma Prang subdistrict to realize a creative approach in educating the elderly about hypertension medical-related issues. Through this project, different levels of knowledge exchange have also been realized. Participants including both professional Likay performers, students, and the elderly participated in this research and were able to take part in an academic activity that improves their knowledge related to healthcare, particularly on hypertension.

Types of Hypertension

According to the Medical Sciences Unit, under the Nation Health Department, hypertension is a medical condition that concerns "blood pressure is the force exerted by circulating blood against the walls of the body's arteries, the major blood vessels in the body." Hypertension occurs when blood pressure is too high. It is diagnosed if, when the systolic blood pressure readings on both days are ≥ 140 mmHg and/or the diastolic blood pressure readings on both days are ≥ 90 mmHg. In general, there are two types of hypertension (Hedner, 2000). It is believed that

essential hypertension is caused by two factors: genetics and environment. The other factors are obesity, stress, smoking, and alcohol drinking. Secondary Hypertension: the secondary type of hypertension is usually caused by other diseases, which need to be treated first, such as pheochromocytoma, chronic kidney disease, renal artery stenosis, coarctation of the aorta, and include illnesses found in those who overuse steroids and are under 45 years old.

In general, factors and risks that are caused by hypertension might be connected to non-modifiable risk factors, which include a family history of hypertension, or being over 65 years with a chronic illness such as diabetes or kidney disease. Another factor is related to the nature of gender. Based on existing medical research, there are more males than females who suffered from hypertension. This is due to females having less estrogen hormone that affects their blood vessel flexibility. However, for the elderly who are aged over 60 years old, both genders are found to have an equal chance of getting hypertension. In short, modifiable risk factors include obesity, high fat consumption, alcohol drinking, consumption of salty foods as well as a lack of exercise and anti-insulin/ diabetes also being factors that will cause hypertension.

Plot

The plot of the performance is centered around the love between a mother and her daughters and the jealousy between her siblings. The character of the mother is an aged woman who consumes lots of spicy and salty food and does not like to exercise. She loves her daughters unequally, the elder daughter from the ex-husband is very health conscious and likes to consume healthy food. On the contrary, the younger daughter is living completely the opposite life to her elder sister. Moreover, the younger sister is secretly in love with the elder sister's boyfriend. Therefore, she is jealous of her sister. Unfortunately, the mother spoils the younger one. One day, the mother is ill and diagnosed with hypertension. Under such circumstances, the elder daughter is concerned and takes care of her. She is then advised to eat healthily and live a healthy lifestyle. Eventually, the mother realizes who is caring for her and rewards her elder daughter with more love and respect.

Process of Creating the Performance

To realize the research objectives, the following preparation was done prior to embarking on the data collection process.

Script

Script preparation began in May 2019 and the final version was ready in September 2019. The artist responsible for script preparation was Pradit Prasatthong (National Artist in Performing Arts Year 2004). He composed a script that involved a storyline, characters, and songs that were able to put forward relevant information about the medical condition of hypertension. Meanwhile, the researcher coordinated script preparation with the National Artist, and eventually, the story of "Look Rak Look Chang" (The Love of Mother and Daughter) was created. The main characters in this play are:

1. Ka-Wao (Thai name): A mother who has a daughter from her former mar-

riage and another daughter from her new marriage. She did not like her elder daughter because she always refuses to listen to her.

2. Ko-Bua: The elder daughter. She is interested in learning new knowledge related to healthcare and living a healthy lifestyle with a healthy diet.
3. Ko-Kaew: A younger sister who is always jealous of her sister.
4. Doctor Kritsana: A community doctor who has a one-sided love for Ko-Bua.
5. Comedian one: A supportive friend of Doctor Kritsana.
6. Comedian two: A supportive friend of Ko-Bua.

After the script was completed, Prof. Dr. Pithi Chanvorachote, who is a healthcare expert, was invited to review and revise the healthcare-related content of the performance to ensure the information provided was academically reliable, especially on topics of food consumption and exercise concerning hypertension.

Casting

During the production stage, the researcher works with Pradit Prasatthong to assign Likay performers to their selected character. As such Mr. Chalomchit Chana-jai, who is an experienced Likay performance with over 10 years of stage experience, played the role of Ka-Wao. Students from the Department of Dance, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University who had passed the course on Likay were selected to play the other supporting characters. However, due to the pandemic restrictions, the performance had to be short and maintain high quality. Consequently, to ensure the quality of the performance and to shorten the time for rehearsal, the main characters of the performance were all given to professional Likay artists. As a result, the main actor, Thiti Chaiyaporn, was given the character of the younger son of Ka-Wao, Nun Yada as the character of the younger Ka-Wao, Nice Petch-Banternng as Doctor Kritsana, and other students as supporting Likay dancers.

Changing Actors and Context

With the researcher as a director and professor, and Pradit Prasatthong as the screenwriter, they consulted with the team of actors to study the scripts thoroughly for about three days. This included a learning process to practice singing and storytelling, to define the characters' personalities, and to visualize and act properly, especially the role of the youngest daughter, Ka-Wao, performed by Thiti Chaiyaporn. This process involved three professional Likay artists. Thus, the way the show was performed was adjusted along with the knowledge about hypertension in order to educate the audience.

Practicing Performing and Singing

When an actor reads a chapter and understands the role shown, the actors and actresses must practice their role so that they can perform the show successfully to achieve the academic goal. The performers must not only learn their own script, but also the others' script in order to understand the mood of the show better. The songs for the show are according to the framework of the research with the core songs of Likay consisting of Tung-Le, Lae, Ranikleng and Lao-Cheang.

All acting practices require singing exercises to be assigned to a vocal key or vo-

cal channel. This must be done accurately and not too high or too low, or it will not create the correct melodies of the music. Singers may also have to go down a rhythm with chimps and tapers directing rhythms, especially singing along. The singer must keep the volume of the vocal channels relevant, which is difficult. Singing in this Likay show is challenging because the singer needs to concentrate on poetry, so they must practice the melody and keep singing at volume. This is throughout the melody, as well as expressing emotions and dance moves, communicating the meaning while performing. Moreover, all performers have to recite the script and rehearse in each scene, focusing on singing, dancing, interpreting the script.

Rehearsal

After each rehearsal, to ensure the accuracy of the role in their scene, during stage performances the Likay performers need to improvise their speech. No matter what problems may arise, they have to solve them spontaneously in order to run the show fluently and smoothly.

Recording

When rehearsals were in the setting, the researcher recorded the performance on a video-CD on 5th June 2020, recording each sub-scene and editing in order to finish the whole performance on VCD.

Performance

The props of this show are important for the performance. The researcher used traditional Likay colors to paint the main scene for the performance, as well as the equipment. Moreover, on the rehearsal day, sound effects were tested to make sure that there would not be any problems on the performance day.

Costumes

Likay costumes are considered to be one of the most important elements for the performance, the researcher highlighting glittering costumes, which are very strong characteristics of Likay performance. It is iconic and therefore must be focused.

Orchestra

Traditionally, Likay orchestra consists of five Pi-Pakt-Mon instruments: (1) Thai Xylophones, (2) Drums, (3) Bronze Bells, (4) Mon-styled Peng Mang, and (5) Mon-styled Pipe. On the production day, a full orchestra was arranged. The performance was then executed with a live musical composition along with the songs and dialogue.

COVID-19 Pandemic Situation

Due to the COVID-19 situation, the whole performance had to be shortened. Such consideration was also due to the consideration of the overall performance time and YouTube accessibility. A YouTube video was then made available for the elderly to be involved in this research. In total, 50 participants who volunteered to

join the research watched the performance, followed by answering a pre-test and post-test questionnaire. The results are listed as follows:

	Pre-test		Post-test	
	correct	incorrect	correct	incorrect
1. Foods to be avoided for people with hypertension	41 (82)	9 (18)	40 (80)	10 (20)
2. Normal blood pressure	40 (80)	10 (20)	50 (100)	-
3. Reliable health resources	25 (50)	25 (50)	12 (24)	38 (76)
4. Which types of desserts/fruits are suitable for a person with hypertension?	47 (94)	3 (6)	50 (100)	-
5. What is an appropriate lifestyle for an elderly person?	48 (96)	2 (4)	49 (98)	1 (2)
6. Which of these does not cause hypertension?	30 (60)	20 (40)	36 (72)	14 (28)
7. Which of the following diseases are more likely to occur in the case of the hypertension?	34 (68)	16 (32)	20 (40.0)	30 (60)
8. What foods should I consume?	38 (76)	12 (24)	48 (96.0)	2 (4)
9. What type of exercise is suitable for the elderly?	49 (98)	1 (2)	50 (100.0)	-
10. Which are the right herbal medicines for the elderly?	39 (78)	11 (22)	43 (86.0)	7 (14)
Overall	391 (78.2)	109 (21.8)	398 (79)	102 (20.4)

Figure 1. Table of the scores from the questionnaire.

Analysis

According to the table, the three highest pre-test scores of hypertension learning were: (1) What type of exercise is suitable for the elderly? (2) Proper behavior benefiting patients with hypertension, and (3) Which types of desserts/fruits are suitable for people with hypertension? The least known part was the reliable health source.

For the post-test, we found an improvement in terms of general knowledge of hypertension and what suitable behaviors are. The analysis results indicated that watching to this created performance could increase the post-test score by 10% as the pre-test score was 64 points, and the post-test score was 74 points out of 100 points.

Test score	Pre-test		Post-test	
	n	%	n	%
8-10 points very good	32	64.0	37	74.0
4-7 points fair	18	36.0	13	26.0
1-3 points low	-	-	-	-
total	50	100	50	100

Figure 2. Table of audience pre and post results. The pretest score is high, 32 people, 64.0%, fair 18 people, 36.0%. The post-test score is high, 37 people, 74.0% and fair 13 people, 26.0%.

Conclusion

By and large, this research employed a Likay performance as a creative approach to educating the elderly community for a better understanding of the medical condition of hypertension. It is interdisciplinary creative research that integrated health sciences and performing arts. To achieve the research objective, the researcher: (1) Orchestrated information about hypertension into the content of a Likay performance. (2) Through the Likay performance, such messages were incorporated into play storylines to educate the elderly people from the selected community from Saraburi province. (3) Due to the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the Likay performance had to be adapted into a much shorter version, and the performance was recorded as a video and made available on YouTube. The video was utilized as a tool to collect data from the elderly, they were instructed to answer a questionnaire before and after watching the performance. Altogether 50 participants took part in the research. Data was collected by the researcher through pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

For the sake of the research, this performance project was a creative output of a working group that involved researchers from health science and performing arts. The researcher would like to express his gratitude and appreciation to (1) Prof. Dr. Pithi Chanvorachote (Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chulalongkorn University) for providing information on the medical condition of hypertension that served as the main content for the performance. (2) Pradit Prasatthong, a National Artist awarded in 2004, (3) Bunsueb Phanprasert – Project Coordinator of the Elderly Club of Tha-Maprang, (4) Four Likay artists - Chalomchit Chanajai, Thiti Chaiyaporn, Nice Petchbanterng, Noon Yada, (5) Students from Department of Dance, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Furthermore, the Likay performance utilized by this research was selected to be broadcast on Thai PBS TV channel, which means that, the performance will be available to a larger local and international audience.

To conclude, this study is interdisciplinary creative performance research that integrated folk culture and performing arts for healthcare education. The researcher successfully disseminated information to the elderly community on the medical condition of hypertension through a Likay performance. Through this creative ap-

proach, the elderly community demonstrated a better understanding of hypertension and health knowledge concerning such conditions. It is fruitful research that can benefit the elderly community and utilize folk culture and performing arts for the community and sustainable development.



Figure 3. Poster of Likay Performance for Hypertension Learning (Source: Researcher).



Figure 4. Likay Performance for Hypertension Learning, on youtube: see https://youtu.be/bbp2P6_LdMk and QR Code for quick viewing.



Figure 5. Likay Performance for Hypertension Learning, on Thai PBS TV channel August 5, 2020. See <https://www.thaipbs.or.th/program/Tuktid/episodes/71477> and QR Code: Likay Performance for Hypertension Learning, on Thai PBS TV channel. August 5, 2020.

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