

ELELE O: AN AGE LONG NKWA UMUAGBOGHO DANCE OF IDAW RIVER GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL, ENUGU

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Introduction

The ultimate purpose of music performance is for enjoyment of the individual and society. Music activities among Nigerians and the Igbos in particular are not restricted to adults alone, instead all members of society in tradition have access to musical activities right from childhood. Songs and dances are used for many various reasons in Nigeria which also found its way into the school system. All cultural, traditional, social, religious, educational and recreational activities in most African societies are graced by music. Music is an integral part of the lives of a Nigerian child. Little wonder music is included in the curriculum and the extracurricular activities of the school system. African music carries information needed about and events of a community. It traces the past; consolidates the present and forecasts the future. (Ibekwe, 2013). Agu (1990) reveals that history of a tribe is learnt through their songs.

Idaw Rivers Girls Secondary School Enugu is a school that placed cultural dance in a premium position because the dance helps in relaxing the nerves after a long day of studying and also in entertaining guest that visits the school. Idaw River Girls Secondary School Enugu (IRGSS) is a public junior and senior secondary school established in 1977, the school is located at Achina street ward 6 Idaw River Layout East in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State. The school is an all girls' school. Actually in the heart of Enugu situated on the

Idaw River hill. The school has about 1560 learners served by about 32 teachers with some corps members, N-power teachers and teaching practice students. It has 17 classrooms, a football field; it also has 16 toilets with improved sanitation, laboratories, library, a multi-purpose hall and a school canteen. The School motto is Discipline, Industrious and Knowledge.

The dance has been an age long cultural dance of Idaw River Girls Secondary School passed from one generation or set of students to another orally. Recruitment and training of dancers are done by observation, participation and ability to dance. The pioneer dancers are not well known only a few of them whose names ring bell which include Ginika Ibekwe (Lead instrumentalist), Chinonye Egbuchunam (Lead dancer), Chidinma Kalu (dancer) and Uche Nwonuma (dancer). The hierarchical organization of the group is from school Principal, cultural dance mistress, president, vice president, provost and other members. The dance has been in the school for over twenty (20) years.



Plate 1: Old Dancers of the Group

The Problem

The Elele O dance is an age long cultural dance of Idaw River Girls Secondary School and has been used for over twenty (20) years to entertain guests in and outside the school. There is no known proper documentation of the activities of this dance group, the pioneer dancers have graduated long ago and since it is learnt orally, some of the dance steps have been removed and replaced with new ones. If this situation continues, we are likely going to see a future where the original Elele O cultural dance would not be in existence.

Significance

This study is intended to fill the existing vacuum on analysis and documentation of the school dance group. The study will also provide materials for prospective researchers that will want to learn about the dance in future.

Aim/Objectives

The aim of this study is to document the Elele o dance of Idaw River Girls' Secondary School, Enugu. The researchers' of this study include to look into the organization of Elele O dance group, the mode of recruitment, training process, instrumentation, analyze the dance and to find out the impact of the dance on the moral and social life of the students as this will serve as documentation of the cultural dance group for future researchers.

Research Questions

- The following questions were formulated by the researchers to guide the work
- a. What is the historical background of Elele o nkwaumuagbogho dance?
 - b. What is the origin and organization of Elele o?
 - c. What is the method of recruitment of new member, the training and rehearsal period?
 - d. How is the costume and makeup of the group done?
 - e. What are the instruments used by the group and how is the performance.
 - f. What are the challenges facing the dance group.

Scope

The study was centered on Elele O cultural dance of Idaw River Girls Secondary School Enugu. This research was conducted in Idaw River Girls' Secondary School Enugu.

Limitations

The school graduates students every year and teachers are transferred often. To get some information on the past events and performances of the group was a challenge.

Concept of Dance Music

Dance music is the most captivating and most widely practiced of the entire music genre; it includes instrumental accompaniment, vocal and combination of vocal and instrumental accompaniments. In dance, instruments provide rhythm (Okpala 2016). Igbos dance not merely for joy or grief but there is dance for everything. These dances represent Igbo beauty and courage. When dancers are dancing they are telling the story which can be read through the moves. Okpala (2015) opined that among the various traditional music practiced in Igbo culture, dance is the most captivating. According to Adekola (2016), Traditional music is one of the major means through which Nigerian cultural values are maintained, retained and disseminated. According to Oxford Living Dictionary (2018) Dance means to move rhythmically to music, typically following a set sequence of step. It can also be seen as a series of steps and movement that match the speed and rhythm of a piece of music. Wikipedia.org (2018) defined dance as a performing art form consisting of purposefully selected sequences of human movement. And this is an integral part of the life of Igbo people. Music in Igbo land is a medium of cultural transmission. Sondra (1987) added that;

this movement has aesthetic and symbolic value and is acknowledged as dance by performers and observers with a particular culture. It can be recognized, categorized and described by its choreography, by its repertoire of movement or by its historical period or place of origin (p.49).

Historical Background of Nkwa Umuagbogho Dance

According to Onwuka (2012), "every cultural dance has a traceable source or point from where it started. It could be copying or blending of prevalent dance

pattern from another community (culture) or adopting its entirety.” (p. 17). Nkwaumuagbogho is an old dance as it was first used years ago when young ladies ready to get married danced to attract possible matches. These women dance with their chest and waist. This serves as a reminder that they should abstain from sexual relationship before marriage and concentrate on preparing for family life in different ways rather than suffering from ill flesh desire. The dance is an interesting one as ladies prepare for a long time before appearance. This dance started in the 1960s in Afikpo, a local government area in the present day Ebonyi state. The dancers must be single ladies. A girl child from 3 years and above can participate or join the dance. The dance steps/movements are transferred from generation to generation orally. According to Okpala (2016) every country in Africa has a duty to record her history. There is no documentation of the pioneer dancers, but it is on record that Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Great Zik of Africa married his wife Uchenna Azikiwe after he saw her perform with the nkwaumuagbogho dance group. This nkwaumuagbogho dance is one of the 7 tunes played during wrestling in Afikpo at which the ladies come to the arena to dance.



Plate 2: Nkwaumuagbogho Dance of Afikpo Ebonyi State

About the Group

Okpala (2015) observed that the organization and performance of dance music vary based on community's orientation and value. Music features in every function of school system starting from the national anthem, school anthem, welcome songs, farewell songs, entertainment songs and dance(western and cultural). Idaw River Girls' Secondary School Enugu value music and so introduced the cultural dance to the school.



Plate 3: One of the Researchers in an Interview Session with Mrs. Nnamani (right) the School's Cultural Dance Mistress

An interview with cultural dance mistress Mrs. Nnamani revealed that the dance was brought to the school in the late 1980's by Mrs. Obi (Rtd) the then cultural dance mistress. *Elele o* is an all-girls' dance group because IRGSS is an all girls' school. The dance was borrowed from the Afikpo nkwaumuagbogho dance with a combination of some Enugu dance steps. The name *Elele o* was gotten from the yodeling of the lead dancer who keeps shouting *eleleeeeeeeeeee o, lele o, lele o, eleleeeeeeeee o* whenever the tempo of the music gets faster, which automatically increases its volume as well; and the students in turn resorted to calling the nkwaumuagbogho dance *Elele o*.

Presently the organization of group hierarchy is from the Principal, Cultural Dance Mistress, President, and Vice President, Provost then other members. The group president reports to the cultural dance mistress who in turn reports to the principal. The group members raise money whenever there is need for sponsoring of the group.

Recruitment and Training of New Members

A criterion for recruitment of new members is that they must be students of IRGSS Enugu. New members that wish to join the group are exposed to the dance to assess if they have dancing skills and will be able to master the steps. When this is done, the ones that show dancing skills are picked. The ones that have the potentials of dancing are also picked and placed on standby they can either play instruments and sometimes are allowed to dance. A picked new member is then advised to register with some money which is paid once and then she will start training. A new member is expected to train for at least a term which is about three (3) months before she can perform with the group. Some new members can stay up to a year before performing; depending on the rate at which she learns. Some start performing before the end of the three (3) months' probation. The leader of the group (the President) usually trains the new members.



Plate 4: Costume of the Group

Initially the costume of the group used to be yellow satin sleeveless top over a tie and dye short skirt with *jigida* (waist bead) and a yellow head tie. Presently the costume is a yellow sleeveless top over a Nigeria wax wrapper (*mkpuru oka*) embellished with a shiny scarf tied round the waist with a yellow head tie. The colour of this costume does not really represent anything but just their choice. The lead dancer's costume is white top over *mkpuru oka* Nigerian wax (*abada*) with crown, making the lead dancer look different. The dancer's faces are decorated with white powder and eye pencil while their legs decorated with native chalk (*nzu*) and in their hands are cow tail



Plate 5: Some of the dancers

Musical Instruments of the Group

Nwobu (2016) stated that music performance in Igbo culture involves the use of musical instrument in most cases. Instruments are major parts of any dance performance. Groups choose instruments that appeal to them according to their type of performance. *Elele o* is a school dance group and so their instruments were bought and not made by the group. Their instruments are a combination of membranophone and idiophone which includes *igba* (membrane drum), *ekwe* (slit wooden drum), *oja* (flute), *ichaka* (calabash rattle), *ogene* (metal gong). These instruments are rhythmic instruments. The lead instrument is *igba*.



Plate 6: Igba (the Lead Instrument of the Group).

Analysis of Elele o Performance Structure

The Elele o nkwaumuagbogho dancers are well trained before first appearance. The dance is a mixture of slow and energetic steps/ movements. The group has 6 categories of dance movements which are usually taken in (6, 8) time, depending on the lead instrumentalist's directive.



Figure 1: Basic Rhythm of Elele o

Elele o dance is guided by the instrumentalists. The first and second movements which include the entrance and first dance moves are slow and graceful as the dancers and the instrumentalists enter the school hall or the arena with their entrance dance. The lead dancer will shout *e/e/eeeeeeeeeee o* and then they form lines with the graceful movement of the chest and the waist turning to the east, west, south and north (x 4 times).



Plate 7: Introduction and first formation

The lead instrumentalist then introduces the third dance movement which is usually in a moderate tempo. The dancers run moderately facing the east, west, south and north (4 times) as the audience keeps shouting “*o gini n’obodo a!*” meaning what is happening in this village after which they will bend down to dance the *achikolo* (Enugu dance) round till the lead instrumentalist signals them to go back to the graceful movement of chest and waist while relaxing and waiting for the fourth movement to be introduced. The lead dancer will again shout *lele o lele o lele o eleleeeeeeeeeeeee o*. The tempo increases as the music progresses.



Plate 8: *O gini n’Obodo a* (What is Happening in this Village)

The dancers proceed to the guitarlike movement, in which they position their hands as if they are playing the guitar, then turn round 2 times and then bend to dance the *achikolo* (Enugu dance) again.

In the fifth movement, the dancers move as if they are leaping three steps forward and then turn facing the east, west, south and north before doing the *achikolo*



Plate 9: Fifth Movement

Then come the sixth dance movement is most times the most exciting part of the dance when they dance different styles of *achikolo* that is each dancer display their personal style and creative skills while the instrumentalists intensify the rhythm of the music as the tempo of the music increase bringing the dance to the climax. When every dancer had displayed their individual style, they dance graciously out of the stage.



Plate 10: Climax (Different Types of Achikolo)

Elele O in Moral and Social life of the School Community

Education: Music/dance perform significant role in disseminating vital information about good morals especially to the young girls. Abegunde (2015) opined that music is undoubtedly distinguished as one of the creative arts of indigenous African societies by which people express their culture and belief system through sound. The dance involves the rhythmical movement of the chest and waist, which encourages the young ladies on “abstinence from sexual activities before marriage.” (Omolaye, 2016:342). This is with a view to educating and sensitizing the maidens on the benefit of chaste.

Communication: In the olden days, the male folks use this dance as an avenue to look out for maiden of their choice and make friends with them. Recently the dance is exposed to new students on their orientation day so as to arouse the interest of the students that want to join the dance group in order to showcase their talents.

Entertainment: Elele O dance is performed as a form of entertainment by the young ladies with supple bodies. The dance refreshes, relaxes and pleases the audience. Agu (2006) observed music as an aesthetic art of combining or putting together sound that are pleasant to the ear. Elele o nkwaumuagbogho dance is a sight to behold; it is a seductive dance as dancers flirtatiously flaunt their bodies in a seductive manner. It entertains the student, teachers, parents and guests of the school. According to the group president Miss Onovoani Ifunanya, the group entertains the school during orientation of new students, graduation of SS3 students, inter house sports/ inter school sports. During corps members passing out party or any event they are invited for.

Challenges Facing the Group

From the study, some findings emerged. At present, the group has some challenges facing them most of which dwell mainly on lack of fund. Since the school is Government owned, the process of accessing fund is really long. The following are some of their challenges:

- **Lack of instruments**

The school’s local musical instruments are old and many are spoilt. They are just managing with the spoilt ones to sustain the group.

- **Lack of proper costume**

The group has need for new costume because the old actual costume is worn out and abandoned long ago.

- **Lack of proper documentation**

There is no proper documentation of the activities of the dance group even photograph were difficult to come by let alone video recordings which bring worry on how to preserve this cultural heritage.

- **Lack of properly trained and experienced instructors**

There are no properly trained/experienced instructors as the pioneer cultural dance mistress is retired and pioneer dancers graduated so some of the dance steps which are being transferred from generation to generation orally are being forgotten and replaced by new ones.

- **Lack of exposure**

The group does not have enough exposure so as to go out and meet other dancers to learn more techniques.

- **New introduction to the dance.**

Because of lack of instruments, the dancers in the bid to meet up danced to a recorded music which is not part of the original dance and so there are new introductions to the dance as they dance to songs like Pammy udu bunch, Nkwawite, Ikorodo, adulterating the original Elele o dance. According to Akas (2014) the major concern of indigenous dance history is to acknowledge the changes that have occurred with time. All the above challenges are what the group is facing which deter the group from reaching the height they are supposed to have reached.

Conclusion

According to Okafor (2005), music is a humanly organized sound. The Elele o dance provides the dancers an avenue for uninhibited self-expression of their God's given talent and beauty. It has been an age long cultural dance of Idaw River Girls' Secondary School Enugu. The dance is being passed from one set or generation of students to another orally. It can be learnt by observation and participation. Mrs. Peace Ngozi Okoro (old student of IRGSS) said that the

challenges faced by this group need urgent attention for the school cultural group to be sustained. An interview with an old student of IRGSS Enugu, Tochi Chigbo (library prefect 1998) reveals that the dance group could not buy instruments used by the group again because the Government ruled out PTA and any other avenue that the students will be asked to contribute money apart from their school fees. This made the school to depend solely on Government for the funding of the school. Mrs. Peace Okoro also mentioned that the dance used to be a source of joy to most students as they always look forward to whenever the dancers bring the drums out to sun it first before each rehearsal.

Recommendations

Looking at the challenges faced by the dance group, the researchers made the following recommendations.

- The principal should apply for fund from the government to purchase instruments and costumes needed by the cultural group to equip them to perform much better.
- Dance instructors (may be the old girls that danced previously in the group) should be employed to train new members when there is need in order to retain the original Eleleo Nkwaumuagbogho dance so that it will not be forgotten.
- Outings or competitions should be organized for all the school cultural dance groups in Enugu south or the whole of Enugu state so that these dancers will go out and interact with other dancers from other schools or regions to learn new things from them.
- The use of recorded song or music should be discouraged so that the dance group will be as original as they can be.
- There should be proper recording of the performance of the group so that it can be played to the new members during training/rehearsals thereby preserving the original dance movements.

Interviews

Oral interview of Mrs. Nnamani, the cultural dance mistress of Eleleo dance group currently known as the Cultural Dance Club (CDC). Interview held in the school general staff room on Monday 19th March 2018 at about 12:30 – 1:00pm and Friday 23th March 2018 10:00am to 10:20am.

Oral interview of two members of the dance group on Monday 19th March 2018 at about 11:40am 12:20pm at the SS 3F classroom Miss Onovoani Ifunanya – Group President. Miss Umeagbai Ogechi Constance C. – Group Vice President. Oral interview of the President, Miss Onovoani Ifunanya on Friday 23rd March 2018 11:00am. to 11:30am.

Oral interview of Tochi Chigbo (old student) former library prefect (1998) on Thursday 12th April 2018 at her office

Oral interview of Peace Ngozi Okoro, an old student of the school on Tuesday 10th April 2018 at her office.

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