

INDIGENOUS LEARNING TECHNIQUES OF AGBALANI DANCE MUSIC OF OKPANAM IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Investigation of human learning has given rise to theories about how people learn and how learning is best achieved. Learning has generally been defined as growth, development and experience. It is acquiring new, or modifying existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information. Progress over time tends to follow learning curves. Learning is not compulsory; it is contextual. It does not happen at once, but builds upon and is shaped by what we already know. Learning may be viewed as a process, rather than a collection of factual and procedural knowledge. The development of any society takes its root from the acquisition of skill by the individual members of that society. To this Onwuekwe (2007) writes:

In order to approach this structure of music effectively, the teacher utilizes two other bases: society and the learner. In considering society, he studies its evaluation of music, its musical goals, and the changing condition of music in Nigerian society. In considering the learner, he knows the developmental characteristics of children, the ways children learn, and the stages of cognitive development. Music programmes are designed to meet the needs of children and the society. (p. 21)

Learning theories have provided clear perceptions about learning processes irrespective of school subject. Aristotle's opinion in Howie (1968) writes that learning is both deductive and inductive, meaning that what is responsible for a relatively permanent change in the behavioral patterns of the learner depends on the integration of the endowment nature and nurture. Kimbe (2009) also admits that

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learning is a relatively permanent change; but adds that this change is reflected in the behavioral potentiality that occurs as a result of reinforced practice. Learning, therefore imparts on the learner some apparent, identifiable, and measurable behaviors resulting from exposure to the learning experiences. In line with the above view, Mbanugo (2006) explains that learning has generally been defined as growth, development and experience. Learning is based on experience, learning produces changes in the organism and the changes produced are relatively permanent. Human learning may occur as part of education, personal development, schooling or training. It may be goal-oriented and may be aided by motivation.

Looking at music and learning, you discover that music is an indispensable art in human existence. It is a symbolic expression of social and cultural organization, which reflects the values, the past and the present. It represents the ways of life of the human beings who create it. Music is a pleasant cultural pursuit and a socializing force, an essential part of a Child's growth and development. It is a vital tool for learning and is known to play a vital role in the life of the Africa from the cradle to the grave. Music has lots of different definitions, some more poetic than practical. For example, William Shakespeare called music 'food of love', George Bernard called music the 'brandy of the damned', and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz called music 'something mathematics'. In her discussion on the relationship between music and dance, Okpararuekwe (2013) writes:

Dance and music, like brother and sister, belong to the same family. They are both based on rhythm and movement in time. People rarely dance without music. If they do not have musical instruments to play, they sing, clap their hands or stamp their feet instead. Man has always felt the need to express himself through movement therefore, he involves himself in learning. Music and Dance are active medium through which learning takes place. (p.4)

In African context, they are means of storytelling, which in the process, educates and entertains. African music has traditionally played an essential role in the culture of the tribes. Much more than entertainment, music communicates emotions, educates, celebrates rite of passage, and helps strengthen the bonds between members of the tribe as a whole. Most villages had a "dance master" who taught the members of the tribe from a very young age how to perform the various dances

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and learn the music that accompanies the dance. Before any music or dance is performed, it must undergo a process of learning for an educative instruction to be passed on. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines dance as:

An art form that generally refers to movement of the body, usually rhythmic and to music, used as a form of expression, social interaction or presented in a spiritual or performance setting. Dance may also be regarded as a form of non-verbal communication between humans, and also performed by other animals like bee.

Music in African context is a different thing all together. Centuries ago, Africans dance to create awareness, to pass on information and to transfer their cultural heritage and values from generation to generation. Ancient Europeans' observation of African music and dance behaviour did not consider African dance to be dance. Dance in Africa is beyond the ordinary, it is strictly based on instructions, traditions and information. It is very dynamic, rich and of magnetic phenomenon. In the olden days, it was a channel of educating the community on issues based on their marriage, children's attitudes towards their parents, how one should take care of another person's child, that the community owns the child, how to wage wars and on every aspect of life. Music like dance cuts across every core value of man's tradition and also maintains most of its qualities till date. Music educates, entertains, and it is self-rejuvenating. Music, like dance, is a medium through which the people are educated on their core or cultural values, way of life and, people are being updated with the latest information in their community through the song texts that accompany the dance. For instance if one of the members of the community does something, the vocalist in the process of soloing will use the incidence to tell the whole community what the person did and also ask the community whether it is good or bad.

Music has been found to be a utilitarian art in the life of man. There is no single event that draws people together that does not include musical involvement, which helps create an atmosphere of unity and love. Music is related to the people who make and use it. Each group or tribe practices their own variants of music because the culture of the people varies to some degree; therefore, the music is reflective of culture.

Music is one of the major ways by which people relate to each other. Ibekwe (2009) writes that “Music is an ageless tradition which cuts across all generations. Its longevity is sustained by its unqualified relevance to the life of the people” (p.182). According to her, music in its broadest sense covers three main areas: vocal, instrumental, and movement of the body, all working towards achieving one goal which is communication or more precisely, expression of human behaviour. Music is an international language, pleasing to all classes. It is appealing, inspirational and soothing. It is a form of mental nourishment provided by the music artiste. In every song, there is a message or a certain feeling which the musician is trying to share. Music can ignite rebellion, inspiration, joy, peace or sadness but the point is that it leaves an impact in whichever form it comes. This impact can impair or better a society. Our world is a fast improving one; hence its inhabitants ought to be conscious of its dynamic nature, its negative and positive effects and the value and function of music as a tool for positive change. Upholding the above view, Ebo (2009) writes:

Music carries messages, signals, and awareness creating information communicated to the audience with the help of various musical instruments. There is always some sensation or emotion stimulating attribute of music, which its listener reacts to. Thus to an extent, music has communicative and didactic values, to agitate, to please, to energize and also to conscientize ardent listener. The interest in music depends naturally on the social setting, exposure, age, society of its listener. (p. 106)

As time goes on, our music is daily influenced by the society and its problems. Some songs merely cry out in pain of oppression, while others curse any and every being for their misfortune. Some songs proffer solution while others complain of present situation. Several countries use music to express their socio-political disposition, grievances, joy, peace and pride. Music therefore is a unifying force that brings the spirit, soul, and mind together to position it to a particular information through learning. Agbalani music of Okpanam is an educative, social and a prestigious music of the Okpanam people. Its collaborative learning techniques are so unique that it instills in the learner good skills and opens him/her creative ability.

Geographical Location and Climate

Okpanam, previously known as Okpalani, is an ancient town of about 16,000 inhabitants. It is usually cooler at night due to the high altitude of the town. Rainfall is heavy, often leading to severe erosions. The comfortable cool dispositions of the nights are potentiated by lack of mosquitoes in the town.

On the other hand, Federal College of Education Zaria is an ancient College of Education in Nigeria located at Kongo in Tudunwada Zaria Local Government Area, Kaduna State. It is mostly cooler at night and early hours of the morning and very hot during the day time due to its location amidst empty hectares of land. The two main locations where the researcher carried out the work are:

- Okpanam in Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State
- Federal College of Education Zaria, Kaduna State

Occupation and Trade

Due to the natural endowment and fertility of the Okpanam land, the main occupation of Okpanam people is farming; most of the families in Okpanam are farmers both the children and adults. Their occupation can also be classified into the following categories-farming, trading, palm wine tapping, carpentry work etc. Their farm products are mainly yam, maize, cassava, okro, melon, tomatoes, pepper and vegetables. Although the system of their farming is not totally mechanized, yet commercialization of those farm products are highly encouraged, and that is why on any given market day, traders and buyers from neighboring towns and from other states like Anambra State come to Okpanam in search of the large farm products available in the open market.

Trading is another important occupation of the people. Their market day is every four days and that is the popular “Oye” market day when farmers have their full resting day, visit friends, chat and drink palm wine. Trading is very common among the women folk, because while their husbands are busy with farm work, they help to sell the farm products not only on “Oye” days, but on every other market days in other surrounding towns like “Afor” market day in Ogwashi-uku, “Eke” market day in Ibusa, “Nkwo” market day in Ubulu-uku.

These two spheres of occupation greatly influence the people of Okpanam by enhancing their standard of living and can be considered as their major sources of

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sustenance and livelihood. In other words, farming and trading are inseparably tied to the culture of the people. At present, people of Okpanam at home and in diaspora engage themselves in any kind of trade that is profiting like sowing, carpentry work, Electronic business, motor parts business etc.

The Origin of Agbalani Dance Music

Agbalani music of Okpanam is an educative, social and a prestigious music of the Okpanam people. It is a music that the dance is meant for the strong and mighty men and women in the community. The people that dance Agbalani music believe that it is a dance for the rich and wealthy. The rich and wealthy here does not mean those with physical cash or luxury but those that are healthy, able to do, well known in the community. Agbalani music is meant for a specific age group that ranges from 30 years and above.

The word “*Agbala*” in Okpanam portrays or means an adult. The men and women that dance Agbalani music believe that it keeps their spirit, soul and body healthy and strong. It is also believed that people that dance Agbalani music do not suffer from most of the sickness that comes with old age like Arthritis, high blood pressure, heart attack and bone disease etc. Dancing Agbalani music keeps the dancers healthy and strong and also frees them from emotional attacks. The *Nna-egwu* of Agbalani dancing troop by name Mr. Uche Ibeakor , a farmer at his late 40’s said; among them in the troop are widows, widowers and the barren. Whenever they gather to dance Agbalani music, the music always gives them peace and relaxation. As he said, Agbalani music has been a source of joy to those that dance it. The youths and children enjoy watching Agbalani music in any occasion when the troop of Agbalani dancers are performing but this would not in any way give them the right to join the troop because of the age limit. Another name for Agbalani music in Okpanam is “*Idigbani*” but instead the people of Okpanam always call it Agbalani music (*Egwu Agbalani*).

In conclusion, the *Nna egwu* of the group by name Mrs. Eunice Nduka, a teacher at her late 50’s said that the origin of Agbalani dance music cannot really be traced. Every member of the community grew meeting Agbalani music in existence. In general, the benefit of engaging in dancing Agbalani music cannot be over emphasized due to its numerous techniques. The techniques ensure the

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dancers' longevity, prevent injuries, build strength and flexibility, and refine movement quality. Agbalani dance techniques are always composed of a series of exercises that begins with the foot and then extends to every part of the body. Every movement begins and ends with a bent hip position. This technique can prevent both acute and chronic injury. Performing these exercises regularly and consistently continues to condition muscles and muscle memory and dancers learn that there is always room for improvement. Agbalani dance collaborative technique and its dance moves are based on repetition that develops in the dancer's keen body awareness. According to one member of the group by name Mrs Nkechi Ibusa, Agbalani is the dance – music of their fore fathers.

Membership and Registration Process

Membership into the Agbalani music group is only for the indigenes of Okpanam and only for men and woman who have reached the age of 30 years and above. Once an indigene of the community reaches this age, whether he or she is based in the village or not and want to join Agbalani dance troop he or she must follow the due process. This process involves visiting the house of the *Nne-egwu* by name Mrs. Eunice Nduka, who gives the individual the list of what to buy in order to call the Agbalani troop for emergency meeting. It's not allowed for such an individual to be in any of the Agbalani group meetings without prior notice or indication of interest through the *Nne-egwu* of the group. *Nne-egwu* then gives such an individual the list of things to buy. This list contains (2) cartoons of malt, (1) Big bottle of hot drink, (1) crate of Guilder, (1) crate of star and (1) crate of small or big stout with one litre or bowl of cola nut. These is the list of things the individual needs to buy before the *Nne-egwu* will convene a meeting. At the meeting arena which is at the patron's house, *Nne-egwu* submits the items to the group on behalf of the new member. As this is done, proper induction will be carried out in this manner: *Nne-egwu* asks the provost to bring the individual inside the house so that every member of the troop will see him or her. And when the fellow appears before the members, the *Nne-egwu* will welcome the fellow and ask him/her some few relevant questions, which include the age, family background and base. After the *Nne-egwu* is done with these questions, he then makes it open that the members of the troop should ask the new member any question they want to ask him/her. After the new member must have answered all these questions, the members of the troop then begin to introduce themselves to the new member starting with the *Nne-egwu* to the last person in the

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troop. They say their names, occupation, family background (the village they come from precisely) and where they based (whether in the village or at the city). When the introduction is going on, they are already taking the drink and the cola nut. The initiation begins automatically because once the group accepts and partakes of the refreshment you brought to them, that means you are already accepted. After all this is done, they start blessing the new member with a song that says they are all one as he/she is already part of them and that his/her joining the group will bring him/her goodness and happiness. At the end of the initiation, the Nna-Egwu asks the group members to pray for the individual after which he then concludes the prayer. The new member now becomes a bona-fide member of the group and has every right as the other members to come to rehearsals and practise with them; and also learn how to dance and how to play their musical instruments. The new member is then featured in their performances within or outside the village. The constitution which includes the rules and regulations, date and time of meetings and the rehearsal schedules will be given to the new member.

Organizational Structure of Agbalani Group

For any organization to prosper and remain vibrant there must be a set of rules and regulations guiding it. According to a member of the group, it is of utmost importance that a member of Agbalani music group is an indigene of Okpanam. He/she must be a man or woman of respectable character, not known to be a thief, untrustworthy, or a traitor. All members must be law abiding and must respect the customs of the land. If any member breaks the law he or she is penalized by suspension or paying fine of some amount of money. Agbalani dance troop does not encourage bad behaviours and for that reason, the members of the group are strictly on the lookout for indecent behaviours among their members. Members of both sexes sing, dance, and rehearse together. There is a fixed meeting place, day and time for the practice, which is at the *Nna-egwu* [father of the dance] residence by name Mr. Uche Ibeakor on every Sunday of the week, from 2pm to 6pm. The musical instruments are also kept at the Nna-egwu's house. Nne-egwu who is by name Mrs. Eunice Nduka is the person to be consulted first on important matters or arrangement for performance. All the money collected for performance are kept in the groups account which they use for replacing their old instruments, change their costume, support the wedding, thanksgiving and funeral of any of their members and also to entertain themselves when the need arises. During the performance,

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there is no specific number of dancers or instrumentalists that are required. The available members go for the performance. Agbalani music making is very often collective, involving organized collaboration in which performers contribute not identical, but complementary, constituents. Besides polyrhythmic and polymetric procedures, melodic phrases are frequently offset against one another, with different starting and ending points, either in an antiphonal “call-and-response” relationship or in an overlapping relationship that yields polyphony.

Methods/Techniques of Teaching and Learning Agbalani Dance Music

The *Nne-egwu* said that music in Okpanam is a means of telling stories; it is educating, entertaining and self-rejuvenating. It is a medium through which the communities are being educated on their core or cultural values, way of life and are also being updated by the latest information in the society.

Agbalani music is an educative music that has a song text that is full of proverbs. These song texts and the proverbs teach the children, youths, single ladies and guys, married women and men, the widows and widowers, the barren and the less privileged, the rich, the poor and the deformed, the young and the old how to live life and appreciate every good God has given them. Agbalani teaches that whatever good we do today must continue because it started from origin. A phrase of one of the song text in Agbalani music sings:

Vernacular - *Onye eji ne iwe mmadu bibie enue.*

English - That one shouldn't kill his brother because of anger.

According to the *Nne-egwu* of the troop, “there are various techniques used in teaching and learning Agbalani music”.

These techniques/methods include:

Imitation Technique: Imitation is a part of learning to dance. You just learn to move in a particular way from copying your teacher. Here the teacher sings or dances a phrase and asks the learners to do exactly what they see him/her do. This method involves copying and pasting. In this technique, it's not what you say in a dance rehearsal that makes the difference, it's even more important to talk less, dance more. New entrants do not learn to dance by standing and listening to

someone talk. Same as they do not learn to discuss or explore ideas with a group by sitting and listening to some lecture. So expressing ideas simply and concisely is as important as how you move your body when you're teaching. Imitation in a pedagogic context is in two ways. On the one hand, it's not ideal (discover your own self!), but on the other, that's how we learn – we learn to talk by copying, we learn to write by emulating our favourite authors, we learn to sing by singing along with records or friends. And having a hero to admire and strive to be like gives you a goal; it gives your work purpose and structure. 'Just being yourself' is a hard thing to do when you haven't figured out how you move. Learning to imitate someone exactly makes you experiment with movement and really figure out what you're doing and how they're doing it. Imitation technique helps you figure out your limitations and strength. And pushing yourself to realise the teacher's high standard will help you improve. Most importantly for an armature at the moment, imitating your teacher helps you to master the basis of all fundamentals of dance, from holding your body correctly while performing, to executing skills properly in a routine. Imitation technique extends across all areas of dance, regardless of the style. Imitation technique gives the learner a foundation to every other aspect of the dance. It helps the learner acquire the needed skills in these areas.

Body Alignment: Sometimes dancers get caught up in the performance stage and forget to hold themselves correctly when dancing. The *Nne-Egwu* said that, whether your dancers are beginners or more advanced, it's important to go back over the basics of body alignment. Have them stand with their feet relaxed, hands by their sides, and go from the top down of how they should be holding their bodies:

- Lifted chin, elongated neck, eyes off the floor
- Shoulders pressed naturally down and back
- Rib cage closed and waist bent properly, as if there was a safety pin holding it together
- Stomach muscles engaged
- Hips held even and levelled
- Knees relaxed, not locked
- Feet well placed on the floor not turned out (remind them that their turnout comes from their hips, with their knees in a line over their toes)

Turns:

- Begin with their balance, making sure they have an even weight distribution between both legs.
- Have them practice moving from the balance to the turn position without the actual rotation to practice finding their center of balance (remind your dancers that if they will execute proper body alignment they will find their center for turns)
- Practice flexibility by switching over with a partner doing chain turns, which are turns that link together by simply moving up and down.
- Work on control by having them walk across the floor starting on the right foot 1-2-3, balance on 4, down to their right knee 5-6-7 and 8 (this will teach them to have control and to remain confident after switching)
- practice turns on the floor, whether singles, doubles, triples, etc. watching for shoulders that go up, arms that wind up before the turn, dancers who do not remain on the balance of their foot for the duration of the turn, and hips that are uneven.

Jumps and leaps:

- Constantly remind your dancers to be conscious of landing the second they leave the ground.
- Encourage your dancers to use their legs instead of their arms to gain height on any jump/leap. Push off both feet to go up and the dancers will “fly.” Make sure to land on foot out of any aerial movement to avoid injuries.
- With toe touches or leaps in seconds, make sure their hips are levelled and their bottoms are well positioned.
- Watch their eyes, have them try lifting their chins, to gain even more height

Once your learners master the basics, your dancers are ready to challenge themselves with more advanced skills and technical elements. Dance is like building blocks, after one skill is mastered, your dancers will be ready for the next. Practice and repetition are the keys to success in this technique. If you are worried about encountering difficulty, remember that difficulty in a routine is not necessarily measured by the level of the skill performed, but rather the proper execution of it.



Plate One: *Imitation method*

At the performance stage, some members of Agbalani Dancers open the dance stage with imitation technique. The dance leader, standing in front of them, begins to chant in this manner:

Okpanam Dialect	English Translation
<p><i>“Eheeh izunonye uno eh, izu onye uno egbunamueeh. Izu onyeunoeh izu onyeuno izu onyeuno egbune muo. Odika egbu onye odika egbu onye ima na chiyalulaolu, onye ya na chi ya dimma eeh Ojeko be ogbu ebune ga agwo gini.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Betrayer or backbiters from my family please do not kill me. Do not hurt a man that is in good terms with his God. Someone that is in good terms with his God, what is he going to native doctor’s house to cure.”</i></p>

After this, she tells other member of the group “ka anyi chee egwua, ka ndi otu anyi wea puta” which means “do exactly what I am doing before other members of our group comes up stage”. This is how the Agbalani group normally does in every marriage ceremony they are invited. As the instrumentalists are playing at the background, some of their members will dance up to the stage and introduce the group before the other members will now join up by dancing out in a single file.



Plate Two: *Members of Agbalani group dancing up the stage*

Observation Technique: Here, the teacher asks the learners to watch her do the whole dance. This method involves strict observation where by the learner is ardently focusing on what the teacher is doing in order to register exactly what he/she observed. In this technique, the teacher gives the learners the keys for improving acquired skill. They include:

1. Flexibility: This is an important component in dance. The elasticity of a dancer's muscles allows the legs to extend fully, especially when a wide range of motion is involved. Flexibility is maximized by maintaining a stretch position for at least 10 seconds and ideally for 20 seconds or longer. Make sure to engage every part of your body thoroughly in a particular step before any attempt to change step.

2. Relaxation: Before dancing, dancers must release their bodies into the air. This permits the energy to move straight up off the ground, making the dancer gain more strength.

3. Confidence: Always keep in mind that the energy comes from your confidence itself rather than the preparation. In order to explode in the skills, the preparation taken before the actual dance must be a conservation of energy.

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Imagine that your body is a metal spring. Before the spring can extend its coils and jump into the air, all the spirals must be compressed and contracted together. This same analogy applies to the preparation where the dancer must build up momentum, rather than using it, before the actual performance.

4. Impression: Give the illusion that you are higher by lifting your head/chin and arms during your performance. This is a simple tip, yet it is often taken for granted. During the dance, the simple focus should change from a casual position to a raised position to give the audience the impression that you are perfect at the skills you are displaying.



Plate Three: *Observation Method*

Nne-egwu said, teaching according to her understanding is “*ikuzilu mmadu ife ka owe muta*” meaning that teaching is the act of passing knowledge to the learner in order for him or her to gain knowledge. She said that the learners have to fix their eyes on her as she teaches them all that they needed to know without any form of distraction from any member. This will help them save time and come out of the rehearsal ground with result.

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Discovery Technique: The discovery technique is a method of teaching group dance in which learners are not directly presented with a specific structure or rule. Instead, learners are given content in which the target structure is used. Learners then discover the right skills or figure out the pattern for themselves. The teacher's role is to guide learners to their own discovery, not to give learners the information on the patterns. Discovery method has to do with the learner doing exactly what she discovered during the teaching process. It involves personal participation aspect of what the learner learnt. Here, learners reproduce exactly what they learnt. They are left to display what they have discovered so far.



Plate Four: *Discovery Technique*

The *Nnegwu* said that there is need for the teacher to know the ability of the learner. This will help the teacher know other areas that need to be looked into in order to assist the learner. To this, Nye & Nye (1970) noted that teachers must know the learners. When teachers do not know and understand children, they fail to find ways to bridge the gap between the child and the subject content. The problem of the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter but failing to know and understand the learner is a very old one. It has affected all levels of learning.

Improvisation Technique: The teacher asks the learners to do better than what they learnt so far. Here the learner is free to express him/herself. The teacher gives

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this room in order to see what the learners can do. The technique encourages self-discovery, where the learner opens himself to inner self and begins to generate ideas from within. Improvisation can be thought of as an “on the spot” or “off the cuff” spontaneous movement of sudden inventiveness that can just come to mind, body and spirit as an inspiration. Improvisation includes learning to use ones intuition, as well as learning a technical understanding of the necessary skills and concerns within the domain in which one is improvising.



Plate Five: *Improvisation Technique*

At the performance stage, during an occasion, the *Nne-egwu* of the group will call out members of the group to dance in twos or threes displaying the “Improvisation technique”. This helps to spice up their performance and also gives room for individual dancers to explore their creative ability. According to the *Nne-egwu* of the group, Improvisation technique opens up the hidden ability in the individuals. She said that there are some times they go for performance and come back with different styles from each member. They discover this during the rehearsal when many of them will say they have a new style to teach and when asked where they got the style from, the person will say that she just got it during the last performance they went for. Improvisation technique can be likening to inquiry methods in music education of the child. Nye & Nye (1970) said:

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Learning takes place best when children are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. For the younger learner, music should be the discovery of musical sound – what it is like, what produces it, how he might respond to it, how it is organized, and how he might manipulate it. On his level, he is a researcher (young musicologist), writer of music (composer), a listener (analyst and critic), and a performer of music (p.12).

Directive Method: The learners listen carefully as the leader tells them what to do. For instance, if they are learning a particular dance step, the teacher will be telling them what to do. The teacher will tell them the moves and the next that follows. Example: go left, left left, left and right, right, right, and right. The teacher will keep telling them this until it registers in their mind before they will then take the next move.

At the performance arena during the actual performance, *Nne-Egwu* of the group begins to call out the members of the group to come out and dance. At this time, she tells them what to do and the steps to take. With a shout, the *Nne-Egwu* calls in this manner “*ndi Agbalani ngwa na oru goo... ukwu na ana*” meaning Agbalani members lets go it’s already time... bend your waist. As she makes this call, every member begins to put their waist down in a dancing mood. This they do throughout the section “directive technique”. She keeps telling them what to do at any point in time.

According to the *Nne-Egwu* of the group, she said that for every one member to participate effectively in this method, the individual has to be active else she will be left behind. She also points out that participation is crucial to giving meaning to Agbalani music. Agbalani music is a very close form of participation or cooperation in which the resulting sound is the proof that the participation is working. Everything starts from the feeling of the people in cooperation, resulting in musical sound within the bounce of the style being played. With these methods or techniques of teaching Agbalani music mentioned above, it was therefore observed that the main style of learning Agbalani music is by Strict Observation and Active Participation.

The Structural Pattern of the Songs and Performance Style

According to the *Nna egwu* of the group, Agbalani dance group applies repetition on the whole song and dance performance. Sometimes the soloist sings through the whole song before the response comes in from the backup singers. Some major captivating steps are repeated over and over again. At some point or towards the end of the performance improvisation is allowed, that is members of the group are allowed to have free styles in dancing different steps or making different moves of their choice. Agu (1999: 50) listed some advantages of repetition in African music:

- The repeated texts not only emphasize the words, it helps in registering in the mind of the listeners.
- The process offers soloist sufficient time to improvise and extemporize properly. In so doing the instrumentalists are also offered enough opportunity for melodic variations in their playing and dancers enter the realm of out pouring of their inner self through creativity.
- It offers the dancers enough time to express their inner feelings through dancing.
- It helps to lengthen the short moves, steps, and songs, thereby avoiding very brief performances and undesired endings
- The Repetition technique helps to create variety in performances, thereby arousing more interest and expectations from audience.

Performance Procedures

Agabalani group is ever ready to perform in any occasion if invited. When it is time for the performance, the *Nna-egwu* and the instrumentalists, mainly the men in the group, pick up their instruments. Sometimes the *Nne-egwu* and some of the women dancers play the instruments. This is done when the turn-up of the group members is not much. Before the instrument starts with a rhythmic pattern, the voice of the *Nne-egwu* comes in with a call introducing the Agbalani music. After the call from the *Nne-egwu*, the members of the troop respond in singing following the same pattern. *Nne-egwu* then recites some proverbs about the dance and about life thus:

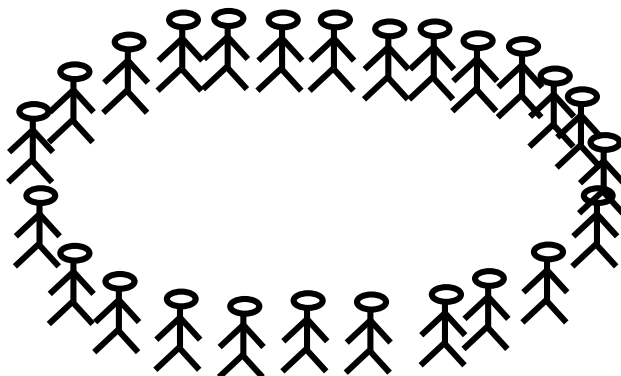
“Eheeh izunonye uno eh izu onye uno egbunamueeh. Izu onyeunoeh izu onyeuno izu onyeuno egbune muo. Odika egbu onye odika egbu onye ima na chiyalulaolu, onye ya na chi ya dimma eeh. Ojeko be ogbu ebune ga agwo gini.”

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When she is through with the recitation of the proverbs, the members accompany it with a rhythmic clap and during that clap, one of the dancers stands up and parades the dance with her body and this is called *immacha-egwu* in Okpanam language. The *Immacha-egwu* includes jumps and turns with well-placed and flexible body alignment. Lifted chin, elongated neck, eyes off the floor. Shoulders pressed naturally down and back. Stomach muscles engaged, hips held even and knees relaxed, not locked.

As soon as she is through with this all the members' shout and scream with a loud voice in laughter and joy as the dancer (*onye mmacha-egwu*) goes to sit down. As soon as she is sited, the *Nne-egwu* picks up another danceable song as the members respond with joy in the spirit of oneness, ready to dance. After a few minutes of playing and introducing the song, a dancer stands up and starts dancing into the performance arena as the instrumentalists continue to play heavily. When she is through with dancing a particular phrase, she comes back and another dancer stands up and continues from where she stops. This does not mean they only dance one after another but it is one of the formations they use in dancing. Sometimes they can be two, three, and four or even more than these numbers dancing in the middle. This is the second formation while the third formation is when it gets to a point where everyone (both the dancers and the instrumentalists) stand up to dance. As they are dancing, the *Nne-egwu* will be changing songs and when it gets to a point, there will be a change in beat. When they have danced for some time, they now sit and another singer picks up another song and begins to sing. Everyone is entitled to sing or even take a solo when the need arises. When the dance is on, every parts of the body is involved.

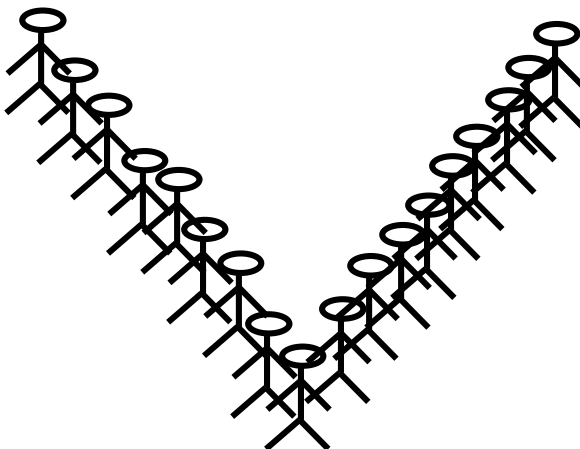
The dancing formation of the Agbalani dancers varies; sometimes it will be in a circle formation, the square formations, L formation, T formation, double line formation and blocking formation. These various moves and formations are all controlled by the trained vocalist and instrumentalists.



The Circle Formation

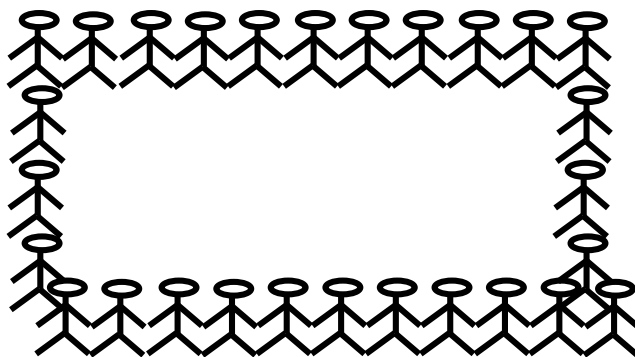
Circle formation is a style of dance formation done in a circle or semicircle to musical accompaniment, such as rhythm instruments and singing. Dancing in a circle is an ancient tradition common in Okpanam culture for marking special occasions, rituals, strengthening community and encouraging togetherness. It is under the circle formation that dancers are called out to dance individually, in twos or in threes. The dance can also be enjoyed as an uplifting group experience or as part of a meditation. Circle dances are choreographed to many different styles of music and rhythms.

Unlike line dancing, circle dancers are in physical contact with each other; the connection is made by hand-to-hand, finger-to-finger or hands-on-shoulders. It is a type of dance where anyone can join in without the need of partners. Generally, the participants follow a leader around the dance floor while holding the hand of the dancers beside them. The dance can be gentle or energetic.



The V-Formation

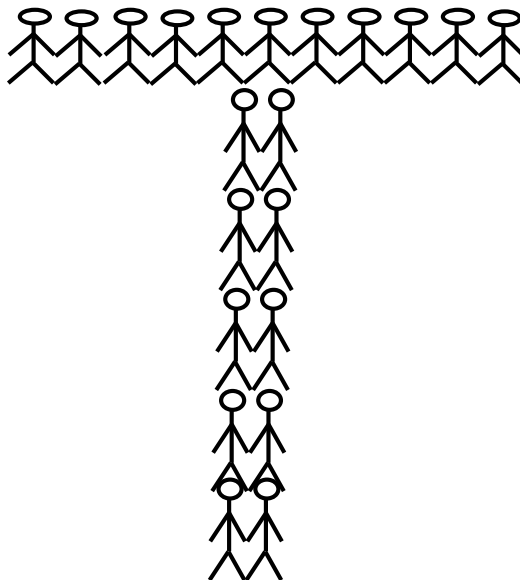
The “V” formation is not filled with rows of dancers. Rather the pattern begins with one person at the tip of the “V” followed by four dancers approximately a foot behind on either side. The formation keeps adding a dancer to the outside of each until a “V” shape is formed. The “V” formation is commonly used as the final formation.



The Square Formation

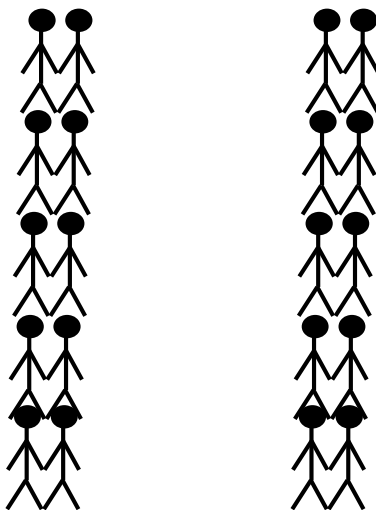
The square formation is a combat formation where every member of Agbalani forms a square at the middle of the dance backing the audience as if they are

P. I. Okpararuekwe: *Indigenous Learning Techniques of Agbalani Dance Music of...* building a defence wall. This they do from the beginning of this formation and suddenly turn front to face the audience displaying the unique steps with perfect moves.



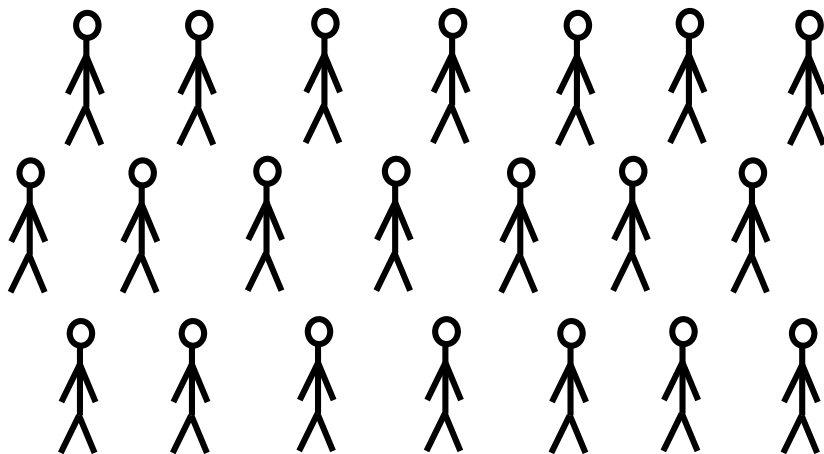
The T-Formation

In Agbalani dance, a T formation is a formation used by the group to create dynamics in which the dancers line up in a row about five yards behind other members that already has formed a straight line, forming the shape of a “T”. The Agbalani dancers use this formation as one of their formation during their performance.



The Double Line Formation

In this formation, dancers stand in two double line rows, facing each other and dancing forward to meet each other at a point and then going back ward. This formation involves partner dance which could be male and female dancing together.



The Blocking Formation

Different kinds of steps are involved in the blocking formation. In this formation, every one is standing out. Not blocking each other but blocking every space in front of each dancer. This formation splices all the previous formations because the dancers display varieties of steps.

Conclusion

The study discovered that the nature, scope and quality of the training in Okpanam is so efficient that the knowledge it offered is enough to lead the gifted, musically inclined and hardworking member into involvement and active participation in music making throughout all stages of life. All aspects of life ranging from birth to death in Okpanam community are integrated with Agbalani music. It is therefore assumed that the training starts from cradle. As a matter of fact, Okpanam children are actively involved in musical activities and performances right from infancy. An Okpanam child is believed to have been introduced to Agbalani rhythmical movements right from the womb through the mother's participation in some Agbalani musical activities during pregnancy. When the baby is born, he/she gradually becomes acquainted with Agbalani musical sound through the lullabies sung to lull him/her to sleep and through the mother's continuous musical involvements with the baby strapped firmly to her back. When the child grows up and reaches the age of joining the Agbalani dance troop, it now becomes very easy for the fellow to adapt.

The study also discovered that there are various techniques used in teaching and learning Agbalani music. These techniques/methods include: Imitation method, Observation method, Discovery method, Improvisation method, Directive method. With these methods of teaching Agbalani music mentioned above, it was therefore observed that the main style of learning Agbalani music is by Strict Observation and Active Participation.

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