

**Effects of Cultural Dance Music Ensemble Studies on Students in Ignatius Ajuru  
University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria**

By

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**Abstract**

Ensemble studies is a course of study in the Department of Music, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. It is also called Performance Workshop. The focus of this study is to x-ray the effects of traditional music on students both music students and elective students who take part in the ensemble studies as their elective course in the faculty of Humanities. Ensemble studies are made up of five items which include Dance, Choirs, Band, orchestra and Opera and students are expected to take part in all. The ensemble studies is as old as the Department of Music but the students are not taking it serious and this has affected them positively and negatively. Primary and secondary sources were employed which includes oral interview, observation, participation, books, journals articles, internet source and unpublished works. It was discovered that finance to purchase costume, cultural dance steps, traditional languages and Christina religion forms part of the challenges to the students. Also, during examination, students put in their best to score good grades in order to increase their CGPA. It is recommended that students should participate and not allow our traditional dance to go into extinction due to acculturation and western civilization.

**Key Words:** Ensemble, Culture, Dance, IAUE, Tradition

**Introduction**

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State is in South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and the only University of Education in South South Nigeria and one of the universities where quality teachers are trained. The motto of the university is "Excellence, Integrity and Service." The university is made up of six faculties which Faculty of Humanities is one of them. The Faculty is made up of seven Departments namely English and Communication Arts, Fine and Applied Arts, French and International Studies, History and Diplomatic Studies, Music, Religious and Cultural Studies and Theatre Arts and Film Studies. The focus of this paper is on the effect of

cultural dance on music and elective students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Department of Music is of age and according to the Departmental Students' Handbook (2013):

The Department started as a combination with Fine and Applied Arts in the Faculty of Arts in 1988. In 1991, the Department of Music was established in the main campus of the then College of Education with Mr. Lapaz Akpa as Head. It ran combinations with English, Religious Studies and Primary Education Studies of the then NCE programme (p. 1).

In line with the above statement, the Department has made tremendous contributions as far as the growth of the university is concerned in the training of music teachers and students they have also made enviable progress in the field of music. The students have participated in both internal and external competitions and have also organized performances within and outside the university.

The Department runs a four (4) years training programme in Music and different courses are offered by the students before graduation. Among the courses is Western and African Ensemble which is a compulsory course which is open to students in the faculty from other departments as an Elective Course. With the current new programme embraced by the Department, (B.A. programmes), the course title of Western and African Ensemble is currently named Performance Workshop which runs from first year to final year level (four years program). The Performance Workshop is also open to students of the faculty as an elective course. The performance workshop course are made up of different music groups and elective students are allowed to choose two out of the groups and these groups are grouped into two main divisions which are Western group and African group. The western groups comprised choir group, orchestra group, stage band group and opera group. While African group comprised cultural dance and African choral. The students are allowed to make their choice where they have interest but it is compulsory that students choose one western group and one African group out of the different groups. This is to allow students display creativity, dexterity and also feel the impact of performance of western and African groups. Different lecturers are assigned to different groups to instruct, direct, guide and assist the students both music students and elective students to get it right. During examination, students in their different groups put in their best in the performance because it is competitive and also part of their examinations. Students and lecturers teaching at different levels encourage their students to put in their best. In the African group, most students register for cultural dance group to depict their culture through songs, dances and instrumentations. Students are allowed to choose tradition of any ethnic culture in Nigeria and other African countries.

### **Concept of Culture/Song Texts**

Culture is popularly known as people's way of life. It depicts the traditional music of the people and people are at their best when they display their cultural dances. Adegbite (2006) affirms that "the heterogeneity of African music cuts across cultural barriers, in other words, there is music for every aspect of African life – rural, religious, social, political, entertainment, recreational" (p. 41). The cultural groups formed by the students are a reflection of their culture and cultural practices in as much as they come from diverse cultures. They come together to imbibe one culture and also sing their songs to compliment the culture. Nwankpa (2013) ascertains that "community music programme provides opportunity for the members of the community to express, explore, create, recite and enjoy music and musical activities." (p. 3) Cultural dance groups formed by the students gives them the opportunity to create, explore and display different cultural dance from different communities where they come from and this reflect in their songs, dances and instrumentations and to portray the communities way of life in an aesthetic and creative forms. Their music therefore is a performing art from which different communities' cultural dance are displayed to inform who they are, what they do, what they believe in and how they live to promote their culture. Students from different communities and culture come together in the department of music to display this cultures in order to foster in unity, love and progress among themselves.

Okafor (2005) supports that:

Through song texts, a person learned the moral codes of his land, its chronology and history and the guiding principles and ethics of his land. He also learned about his own language, the things his people live by and how the society worked (p. 209).

Traditional music consists of words that makes meaning and drives home the point of what the singers intend the audience to understand. Each cultural dance group through their song texts pass message to the students, lecturers and the spectators since the students come from different cultural backgrounds to form a group. The message of the song texts are communicated to them for a better understanding of what the songs are all about and the message it portrays. These songs portray the good and bad aspects of a community. Ekwueme (2004) expresses that "the most natural method of music-making is the employment of the natural instrument that which every person owns or carries wherever he goes – the human voice." (p. 15) The cultural dance goes with songs in the language of the people. Singing has been known to accompany cultural dance. Song texts are used to express feelings during all performance activities, maintain laws of the land and unite musical accepted behavioural patterns in the group are assimilated through

dance and songs. Songs are also used for motivation, express emotion and also to send messages both positive and negative messages. Ajenifuja (2009) says “music is one of the greatest of all arts, has a multidirectional character, poetry, language and speech.” (p. 30)

Since the students come from different ethnic groups, all the students in each group are expected to sing in the language and also dance cultural dance of the communities and also to understand the meaning of the songs for a better understanding and performance. Their music not only serve as a medium of entertainment and course of study but also as an intricate part of the uniqueness of the Department as a creative and performing art. Among the group songs are natural means of self-expression through observation and participation. The students who are talented musically can through observation and participation develop individualistic charm of vocal mastery and dexterity in dance performance. Idamoyibo (2007) affirms that “music is a human behavior that is acquired directly through observation, imitation and practice.” (p. 40) During rehearsals songs which go with the dance take the students time to learn. The rhythm of the cultural dance is played by the instruments and sometimes the dance groups due to language barrier display their cultural dance without songs because of not being able to sing in the language of the people. Ogisi (2006) confirms that “Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and heterogeneous society with a diversity that reflects in music, language, dance, cuisine, belief systems and other cultural manifests.” (p. 76) Due to heterogeneous society, the language of other communities apart from the one which the students come from is given special attention for easy assimilation and participation.

Olisaeke (2007) posits that “every culture of the world has peculiar ingredients that make it unique and easily identifiable. These are what composers capture and infuse in their music as a way of displaying or marketing their cultural heritage musically” (p. 69). In line with the above statement, Agu (1989) agrees that “traditional music is noted and perpetuated by the people. It is the spontaneous music of a people, race, region or nation. It is more directly associated with traditional, religious and political systems.” (p. 15) The above contributors seem to agree on the need to include traditional elements in traditional music because when students understand the language of a piece of music then, he or she can perform, sing, dance, play and appreciate it. Therefore, the different cultural dance displayed by the groups depicts the identity of the cultures through their songs, dance and instrumentation. Every music is expected to deliver a message, inform, educate and possibly entertain the Faculty and University for their wellbeing.

### **Concept of Dance and Instrumentation**

Dance cannot be separated from musical instruments; without musical instruments dance cannot take place. Hornbostel in Akpabot (1975) informs that "African music is not conceivable without dancing or African rhythm without drumming, nor the forms of African without antiphony." (p. 5) in ensemble studies students play musical instruments to accompany the dance. As soon as the rhythm is being played by the musical instruments especially the drums, it spurs the students to display dexterity on the different dance steps exhibited by the performers. Kansese and Abraye (2013) ascertains that:

Dance is usually seen as a medium through which information, messages and ideas are communicated by the dancer's body to onlookers. The dancer engages in movement patterns which are often symbolic and sometimes reflects some true situations (p. 325).

In other words, dancing may change moods, serve as a face of attraction and influence people's perception through body movement. Agu (2006) admits that "when people respond to music they do so with their feelings and emotions." (p. 25) This is so with the students' cultural dance performance. In the process, they manipulate their skills through intellectual means through which they communicate ideas to their audience who are also students and lecturers in the Faculty of Humanities and other spectators. According to Onwuka (2012), "for the body movement to qualify as dancing, it must be characterized by the following; design, gesture, steps, dynamics, techniques, speed or temp, posture, shape and flexibility." (p. 8) He went further to explain:

- a. Design: this involves arranging the dance movements in a logical order and outlining the actual directions which dancers must follow while performing. During rehearsal, students arrange the dance movements to correspond with the rhythm of the music.
- b. Gesture: this refers to the shaping of the various parts of the body in order to express feelings or intent. Student's express facial expressions through smiles and body movements to convey message on the type of dance.
- c. Steps: it refers to a series of movements that one makes with ones feet and which forms a dance. Different dance steps are exhibited during performance and these dance steps are displayed to correspond to the rhythm of the dance.
- d. Dynamics: this is the moral force, which produces activity, change or effects. The cultural dance affects the students to abide by the norms and values of the culture.
- e. Technique: this is the skill with which the dancer is enabled to move his or her body in the particular way he or she is required to move. The cultural dancers show dexterity on the techniques agreed by the dancers.

- f. Speed or tempo: this is part of time and refers to the rate at which the movement is executed. During performance the cultural dancers make their movement to the time and rhythm of the music.
- g. Posture: refers to the position in which the dancer holds his body when attending, standing or moving. The cultural dancers position their bodies to the agreed movement of the dance steps.
- h. Shape: this refers to the form into which the dancer makes different parts of the body to enable him define, interpret and express the creative intent of the dance designer. The cultural dancers interpret the dance through their body movements.
- i. Flexibility: this is concerned with the ability of the dancer's body to move, stretch or bend without breaking. Since the cultural dancers are young men and women, their body movements involve locomotor movements. This includes twisting, swaying, turning, shaking, stretching, swinging, pulling, falling and rising. Locomotor movement involves walking, running, leaping, bouncing and jumping and other aerobic movements (p.35).

There are two types of dancing styles, the formalized dancing style and free-medley dancing style. The cultural dance in the ensemble studies comprised of both formalized and free-medley dancing styles but more of formalized dancing styles applies. It showcases the uniformity of body movements of the dancers. The cultural dancers agree on different dancing movements and every member of the group adheres to the dancing styles after much rehearsals for perfection during performance and examination. The free-medley dancing style is also added where the cultural dancers have the freedom to show dexterity and creativity on their dancing skills. During performance, different cultural dance groups differ in their performance styles, that is why different groups arrange a private venue for their rehearsals which is secluded at different time and location so that other groups will not copy their dance steps, styles and instrumentations. The dance formations which are mostly displayed by cultural dance groups are linear formation, parallel formation, circular formation, semicircular formation and triangular dance formation. These dance formations are displayed during examination where each group performs and displays dexterity and lecturers in the Department watch and score each group according to their performance.

### **Instruments**

Students' instrumentalists' come together to play musical instruments of different shapes and sizes for the dancers to display their cultural dance. Eric von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs in 1933 classified African musical instruments into four main divisions which are (a) idiophones (b) membranophones (c) aerophones (d) chordophones. The musical

instruments performed are rattles of various shapes, metal gongs big and small sizes, drums of different shapes and sizes, slit wooden drums and musical pots. All the instruments are classified under idiophones and membranophone families.

### **Costumes**

On performance workshop examination day, students appear in different colours and styles of cultural attires. According to Agu (1990),

In the past costumes were carefully chosen to enhance the psychological aspects of the music performed, with a view to interpreting the socio-cultural identity of the performance. Today, emphasis is on bright and well-designed colours that do not portray the mood of the performance. Costumes are simply modernized to suit urban and contemporary tests (p.65 ).

Students select costumes which are bright, cheap and in vogue to display cultural dances. Some groups dress on t-shirts, BYC singlet's on print wrappers and some put on different colours of packet shirts and tie wrapper on top of long trousers to suit their taste and not the culture they display. Also, students dress in the attire of the culture they display example Fulani dance, Igbo dance, Kalabari dance, Ogoni dance, Ikwerre dance, Uhrobo dance, South African dance, etc. they are allowed to make their choice of costume on the culture they intend to display.

### **Effects of ensemble studies on Students**

The ensemble studies is an avenue where students from different cultural areas come together in groups to perform cultural dance. According to Raphael Bakor and Green Genewaral students of Department of Music and joy, Daniel of English Department in an oral interview disclos that performance workshop has positive and negative effects on the students. The positive effects include:

- a. It promotes inter-ethnic cultural development because students from different ethnic groups come together to perform the cultural dance of an ethnic group.
- b. Students sing songs in indigenous language of other ethnic groups and this promotes cultural diversity
- c. Students also learn how to drum and play rhythms of other musical instruments from different cultures
- d. It promotes stage courage as students perform cultural dance, they tend to overcome stage fright and have more courage to perform in public

- e. They also acquire skills, they learn cultural dance from different cultures and replicate it anywhere both in schools and communities
- f. It also add to their income. Since students learn cultural dance from other areas, they move from one group to another to teach them dance from their ethnic area and they collect remunerations from those groups especially the elective students groups
- g. The performance also avail the students the opportunity to learn contemporary cultural dance steps
- h. It promotes cultural diffusion; they learn cultural dance from other ethnic communities and take it back to their home town and introduce the dance to their people
- i. It acquaints students to be abreast of other communities' cultural dance.

### **Negative Effects of Cultural Dance on Students**

- a. Time factor: due to limited time allotted to rehearsal in cause of giving attention to other courses, sometimes they don't come out in their best
- b. Costume: dressing in complete cultural attire pose a challenge on the students due to financial constraints
- c. Cultural belief: Due to Christianity some students find it difficult to dress up in the cultural dance dress code of other cultures and also to participate in their dance, cultural dance due to their religious belief
- d. Language: since the students come from different ethnic communities, and time constrain learning to sing songs in another language is always difficult to accomplish
- e. The students also adulterate the cultural dance by adding their own styles to suit the cultural dance that is in vogue
- f. Sometimes, some groups due to lack of instrumentalists to play the rhythm of their cultural dance in its natural form students tend to hire synthesizers to support the sound of their music and dance.
- g. Also, sometimes students have clash of interest; they insist on performing cultural dance from their communities and abandoning others.

### **Findings**

The inclusion of ensemble studies in the course contents of music Department in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education is a good one. The ensemble studies is included in the course content from first year to final year and this assists the course content to include the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains and this makes the students all round

musicians and also assist the elective students to fit into the creative arts department in any work place they found themselves.

Ensemble studies is given much attention by the students that on examination day, they put in their best in order to score a good grade. The cultural dance is performed mainly in formalized dance steps and sometimes free medley dance steps are also applied to display dexterity on the dance. The instrumentalists are also students, they play the instruments for the dancers to dance to the rhythm of the cultural music, the drummers also display skills on the drums and other instruments play supportive roles to the drums. The instruments are mainly instruments classified under idiophone and membranophone families. The ensemble studies has affected the students negatively and has also equipped them positively to teach in any school or work in any entertainment industry.

### **Conclusion**

The place of cultural dance in Department of Music, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt cannot be overemphasized. This cultural dance has come to stay because it brings students from different cultural areas to come together and display their culture. It has also assisted some students who are not rooted in their culture to learn what cultural dance is all about. The knowledge acquired in the cultural dance can be replicated in their home town. The students can form a cultural dance group in their village and these groups can go to places once they have a good performance to present. Through this cultural dance a student can be a celebrity in his community, state in particular and Nigeria in general. The positive and negative effects of dance on students make them to come out stronger and it also ushers in joy, love, unity and cultural improvement in all its ramifications.

### **Recommendations**

1. The inclusion of synthesizer to compliment the cultural dance should be discouraged
2. Acrobatic dance display should be made compulsory from third year (300 level) to final year
3. Elective students should be encouraged to take the course serious and participate fully in cultural dance
4. Students should be encouraged to sing in the language of the people
5. Students should be encouraged to dress in cultural attire.
6. Christianity should be encouraged but should not make our culture to go into extinction.

### Dance from Different Ethnic Groups



**CULTURAL DANCE COSTUME ON TROUSER**



**EFIK CULTURAL DANCE**



**IGBO CULTURAL DANCE**



**KALABARI CULTURAL DANCERS**



**SOUTH AFRICA DANCE**



**YORUBA DANCE**

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