Problems and Prospects in Organising a Dance Among the Agulu People in Anaocha Local Government Area, Anambra State

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Abstract

This paper examines the problems and prospects in organizing dance among the people of Agulu in Anambra State. Dance is an integral aspect of human culture. The role of dance is enormous in the development of the society, upbringing of a child and cultural awareness. However, dance practice among the Agulu people is faced with numerous challenges such as lack of sponsorship, poverty, negligence language barriers amongst others. To generate the needed data for this study the researcher adopted the use of primary and secondary sources of information. The study reveals that in Agulu, there are so many cultural dances that have added value to the culture of the people and also promoted tourism in the area. However, the organizations of such dances are characterized by numerous challenges such as size and selection of the dance group. Lack of expertise on the part of the organizers, lack of time to rehearsal, lack of venue, lack of furniture and poor parental attitude and belief system. The study establishes that the above challenges is an impediment to the cultural development of Agulu people if not checked. Researcher therefore recommends a holistic practice of Agulu culture through dance and encouragement from the government, community and parents. This involved the use of both published and unpublished books such as textbooks, journals article, magazines, student projects, thesis and dissertation work. These

materials were source from the departments, university and private library. Because of the changes in academic research Internet materials were also useful in this work. The interdisciplinary approach was also adapted as knowledge from the related disciplines from Humanities were applied in the work. Akpabot theory was adopted.

Key words: Organisation, prospects dance, instruments and community.

Introduction

Agulu is one of the largest communities in Anambra State with population of over fifty thousand people as of census 2006. It shares boundaries with many towns like Nn and a gateway of important towns. A short interview with some elderly men from the town and Ugene (1987) stated that the origin is not certain but believed that it emanated from a man called Agulu of Efo.

The indigenes embrace culture and celebrate all the cultural feast of the community's deities with music and dance. Music and dance are the road way to culture therefore they are not detachable. Dance is a concept of emotion toward motion. Dance expresses the phenomenon ideas of a particular community and cannot be dispensed.

According to Jacquie (1989) in Aluede and Eregare (2005) 'dance is an exposition of movements, talking specifically about the position in Africa. Bebey (1995) and Graeme (1991) observe that music is an art form which embraces other parts of the society (p. 51). Dance is not a separate art nor is music. Both are rather a complex of whole living. In support of this, Okafor stressed that traditional dance reflect the environment and the way people move in their environments, people's daily movement habits usually reflect in their dance. It is true because people's culture is characterize by their dance and musical instrumental performance practice for example, we should know that people from riverine area reflect their culture in their performance and dramatize it while dancing by paddling,

fishing and singing. As this may be subjected to a functional social or ritual as the purpose may be to the art and the context of the performance. According to Peggy (1999) stated that a dance usually fulfills several function simultaneously with main overt functions which may be explicit expressions or implicit reflections of the structure of the society and way of life.

> Okafor (2005) stressed that traditional dance reflect the environment and the way people move in those environments for example hill men have energetic dance and sedentary folk use their hips a lot in dancing. People who live in swampy areas do not step firmly hard on the ground in their dance (p. 65)

Therefore, if the dance organizer do not know or study all these about the area/environment is going to lace a serious problem in setting up a dance. Still Okafor the nature of the physical locality in which the people live affects their daily movement and subsequently their dance movements, which mean that their totality of life is interwoven into their style of dance. This is opposite of Igbos that are upland that dance energetic, acrobatic and vigorously due to their food, work and body building. These must be put into consideration before the concept of setting up a dance group in particular area.

Okafor (2005: 3) also affirmed in support of Igbo feature that both the free medley and stylized dances are very common among the Igbo but one is more complex than the other in terms of preparation, skill and use of energy. Agu in Okafor (2005) says that:

> The free medley dance is the type of dance that offers greater scope for individual freedom in composition and body movement. Each dancer creates his/her own movement in keeping with convenience. An observer can see that the steps and body configuration of the dancers differ from each other, yet all are accommodated within the rhythm of the dance.

> This shows that the performers number determines the performance content and the density structure. The dance organizer must note all these before hand, though they might be minor observation but still important and aesthetics of African dance.

In support of the above statement the dance must not be form without considering the Peggy statement as first step in organizing dance even though within the storm of problem along the way in organizing dance group among the people in the community with their different conception of dance and gender. In organizing a dance group, a lot of factors hinder the concept from being actualized.

Problems of Organizing Eliko/Umuma Dance

According to the researcher interview conducted with one of the organizer of Eliko/Umuma dance in Agulu community, it was reveal that a lot of problems were countered such as:

1. divergence belief of the ethnic group
2. the organizer's quality
3. the rehearsal time
4. the location
5. equipment/costumes
6. instrumentalist
7. recruitment
8. musical problem

1. **Divergent belief:** Cultural influence and gender background plays a lot of roles in the organizing of a dance in the community especially in the type of dance one is establishing whether for only male or female or mix. The cultural attitude and influence – women do not dance this type of dance, it is specifically meant for men. As they open their legs/climb upon each other, hold hands is not permitted and married women also are not allowed to wear short or a man

holding a woman by their waist, their culture are against it. Dancer patterns must not be ignored.

Marital and ethical issues – Married men and their wives cannot dance together to avoid marital issues and is forbidden in their cultures. Method of teaching someone how to dance also affect the dance depending on what type of dance; acrobatic, waist dance, hip dance that required moving a person from to exhibit gymnastic display. Faith of parents/peer/cult must not be neglected, it has a lot of role to play on the choice of dance, the dancers and the purpose it serve in the community (such as fund raising or festive purposes).

2. **The organizer's quality**

The research shows that some of the dance are amateur. They know nothing about dance, they are not dancers. The research proves that the organizers are not skilled. Some of the village organizer though they are looking out for the prospect and finance, they are not talented, need training orientation. Aluede (1999: 206) stressed that the performance of African music and dance is complicated process that involve psychomotor skills. Movement in dance has cultural significance thus dance conveys joy, grief, sadness, surprise, anxiety, etc. in Nigerian communities. This is of course why Oko (1999) says:

> The dance of the day is a good reflection of the values of the time. If the organizer tacks this, that sense of creativity disrupted. (p. 8)

Therefore, this affected the leadership and he has to contract a good dancer and well skilled leader. He also accepted that the level of knowledge matters a lot.

3. **The rehearsal time**

Many of the dancers don't keep to the rehearsal time and this affects the dance drastically. Some participants are irregular to the meeting.

Distractions with talk and gossip have its effect. Rehearsal location, some complain of distance and time not suitable for them. Some argue about date of performances in relation to their activities, so to settle and get the appropriate time is a problem for not meeting up and they demand for change.

4. **The location**

This is one of the serious problems the leader encountered. No peace was available initially but leader found a place that was not accessible by the dancers. They complain of far from their residence which made some to forgo the offer. Even the interested ones drop. They also come with psychological problem by refusing certain places. Asking question-like; this is it that place human? I will not go there, instead let look for another and better place we will not want church or organizer place. Where do you think that is better, the organizer asked, it took him a time before he could found a convenience place for all.

5. **Equipment/Costume**

Insufficient funds contribute to the inadequate equipment/costume for the dancer and thereby make it impossible to achieve well organize dancing costume/equipment. The instructor cannot demand for finance from the participant else there will abscond. This situation they encounter makes it difficult for the success of the programme. Transportation is also a problem facing the participants because they might not be able to afford the cash at time to transport themselves to the venue to participate in the dancing event.

Traditional dance in support of this Peggy (1999) also stated that system of religious beliefs and pattern of social organization in the community also affect the traditional dance (p. 47).

Different sizes of dancers clashing with different dancing abilities and talents, skills and character, struggling to coordinate

with the interpretation of the dance steps. The sizes available some are not good dancers and the good dancers are not presentable because dancing is a visual art. So the stylistic dancers with creative styles are very few, shape and outstanding physical body building is also a problem. Performing artists are not just dancers, their bodies also speak because they are part of the instruments which the art is created but these are lacking.

6. **Instrumentalist**

Instrumentalist provides the rhythm to guide and direct the design of body movements. Ufford and Ufford are not move in this position. Naturally music (spurs)/motivates a listener to dance. Hence Anne (1987) stated that "good dances exhibit three basic qualities: a sense of rhythm, a love of music and a willingness" (p. 3) to learn from the above dance is propelled by the instrumentalist but in this case the instrumentalist are mischievous they don't keep to the rehearsal time. Their irregularity to the time kills the learner's moral. Some don't take corrections from the contracted leader. And this always make them to play off beat. The pomposity from the instrumentalist is a great problem and they absent themselves without permission. The chief organizer further said that this first group initially gathered later disappeared one by one. In fact it wasn't easy to set up a new dance group even to reestablish the old one. There will be moving from one problem to another because they need money immediately without working, before leaping, no matter the type of dance ensemble you want to set up. The instrumentalists are the pivot of the dance ensemble and it is difficult to get them especially where you needed all these rhythmic instruments like xylophone, slit drum, talking drum, then a flure player (Oja) is one of the ganger and energizing instruments. It adds colour to the dance ensemble.

7. **Recruiting of Personalities**

   Class of music and class of people are not quite easy to get. Some also from neighbouring town, communities possible not available within the immediate locality. Some have participated in the dance and some have not at all. Selection is not easy because the dancer might not have the exact style or skills that is require by the instructor. Also selection might be difficult due to the sizes of the dancers and the dancing style or skills.

   Urbanization contributes to lack of people in rural community due to the migration of the indigene to the city for greener pasture. Therefore, it affects the rural community drastically in terms of population, this resulted to fewer number of people in the village which might not be able to participate in most of the dance that are selective base on gender issue. In the other hand, the instructor might not be an experts in the musical field, therefore, it is necessary for them to employ or seek the assistant of a qualify person in order to remedy the technicalities involvement in dancing performance.

8. **Musical Problems (Time/Attendance/Venue)**

   The time of rehearsal matters a lot and also is problem in organizing a dance. So many dancer complaint of the time and venue. Village square is role out due to its exposure of dancer and its technicality which ought to have been secluded. Proper season for organizing dance can affect the dancer. During the harvesting period, the activities affect the attendance and learning of dance couple with the venue, where the rehearsal is slated. If the rehearsal is fix at night, whereby there is no light in the community, the dancer might be afraid for security threat hence it will prevent the organizer from carrying out their functions. These might attract attention of the parents to prevent their children from participating in the dancing troop therefore frustrating the plan of the organizers. Time management is one of the problems facing the dance organizer in

that the participant lackadaisical attitude towards the dancing event hampered the progress or the success of the programme.

Lack of storage facilities – The porous nature of rehearsal arena which does not support storage of the instrumentation after usage is also a challenge to the dance organizer.

Economic involvement

In fact initial there was no money for purchase of costume. He was afraid of tasking the group because they might disappear it was such mutinied. Registration fees were not asked. Since he was trying to get hold of them therefore to raise among them was difficulty. Many complain that they don't have to and fro transport. They don't have enough money for out transport. The organizer further said that even when they raised fund from outsiders and made costume to keep it neat becomes a problem couple with lack of space. They eventually raised money and made in-lock for safety of their costume.

Lack of uniformity of step Ufford, (1995) say "dance is a medium of expression of emotion" (2) and Ufford (2000) concludes that "dance is perform according to musical beasts" (36). This could mean that music comes to mind first before the rhythmic movements of the body. But in this case their body movement some portray angle movement with bend.

According to Okafor (2005) he affirmed in stylized dance, the rate and sequence of change of choreographic variations are programmed, well rehearsed and uniform for all dancers.

Some creative dancers can be individualistic even within a stylized dance situation with regards to the individualistic aesthetic creation. This individualistic expression of such dancer helps to classify performer.

It can only take place when a performer put in much time in the practice which means how much you spent in rehearsal then you can acquire different techniques that will throw more light in our performance.

Age at which the performer commences the training matters a lot and how serious the performer devoted also counts. As the researcher said

before that the experience and status of instructor or a teacher need to be considered as a first step in dance organization. The type of quality of organizer affects the dance ensemble drastically. It can promote and enhance productive and the instructor or teacher don't just train for training sake but set their eye on the criteria on which audience or spectator may likely base their assessment of the dance ensemble. It will enable him/her to select the performance and performers with their aesthetic criteria's for ability to dance.

> Harper (1999) said that dance is an art of which the basic material is the movement of human bodies in space and time. Harper goes on to the analysis of dance movements entails breaking them down into their component elements of time, energy and space. The element time is expressed in the overall duration of the dance, the tempo or relative speed at which the movements are performed and the metric and rhythmic patterns which bind the movement to the accompanying music. These movements are perform within a specific of use of energy or muscular effort which gives the dynamic quality or dramatic texture to the movement and springs from the conceptual intention and emotional motivation of the dance. The use of is recognized in terms of the design or spatial delineation of the dance movement on a surface of the performing area, or through the air surrounding the performer.

Instructions or teachers that don't have foreknowledge of the Peggy's explanation will have problem of organization of dance and skills, setting up dance ensemble is not a mere job but a tedious work. From the research the found out that to set up dance is not very easy as one think of it.

Dance different from one community to another and one culture to another with different occasions.

The Prospects of the dance

The prospect of dance among the people of Agulu varies in different form. Dance among the people could be a motivator in showcasing the culture and traditions of the people. Its sustainability in any African society is through teaching the younger generation the mode of dance in the society. Economically, dance could be uphold belief of its financial benefits to the people hence dance serves as a physical exercise every community in Nigeria should imbibe for sustainability. In order to embrace our traditional music and dance there should be less emphasis on Western style of music and dance.

It is recommended that the dance organizer must understand the community and area very well before setting up a dance group and the type of dance that will befit the people in the environment because one man's meat is another man's poison. In other words, what is obtainable in one community might be otherwise in another community.

The dance organizer supposed to be acquainted with various styles of dance in order not to require assistant or an expert. Also, they will know the appropriate season in which the organizing of dance will be suitable.

It is also recommended that the organizer should be well known personnel that have government backing or could get support from the philanthropy to enhance the training.

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