

## EKOI DANCE EDUCATION: A PLATFORM FOR COMMERCIALIZATION

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### **Abstract**

*Ekoi dance education has been in existence for decades but its economic value has not been fully exploited. Its functionality dwindles due to its limitations to merely ritual rites, inculcation of societal norms and oral means of transmission from one generation to another. In this era of globalization, it is pertinent for humanity to diversify to other streams of income in order to support the sustainable development goal on poverty eradication. Therefore, ekoi dance education of the Yakurr people in Cross River State has been identified as a cultural art with several potency for commercializing its activities beyond mere ritual rites but also entertainment for commercial purposes. Historical method will be employed to collate vital information; and the collated activities of this group, will be documented for its sustenance. The researcher concludes this study by pointing that the creative and skillful ability of ekoi dance education has the potency of improving the economic value of her devotees. To achieve this, the researcher recommends that all hands must be on deck, citizens should rejuvenate their intrinsic skills to become self-employed rather than over dependency on white collar jobs.*

**Keywords:** Ekoi, dance, education.

Indigenous dance is an aspect of arts that begins from conception. The movement of the embryo within the womb and the physical dance engaged in by a

pregnant woman is an indicator that dance is as old as humanity. From inception, indigenous dance education formed the business of every citizen of the immediate

society. Infants were introduced to dance by mothers or care-givers who often danced with babies fitted to the back or carried on arms. With time, children clustered in pairs during moonlight games, creating, teaching and learning different dance steps from each other. These processes, rebirthed several dance groups that gradually became groups used for entertainment as occasion demands. The indigenous dance education utilizes each rehearsal time to inculcate norms and moral values that help in curbing social vices and made the society a better place. Beside, no societal event was worth attending or interesting without the sound of the drum which would always be accompanied with different dance steps. Okafor (2005) affirms that a society without the sound of the drum is likened to the city of the dead. In accordance with this submission, a high sense of patriotic patronage was a collective responsibility of every indigene but with little or no conscious economic value attached. The question is, should the devotees of such an art form that enhances communal solidarity be only applauded without any monetary benefit?

The economic status of the country is dwindling on daily basis due to over dependence on white collar jobs. The need to look inwards for self-employment and improving on individual skill for commercial purpose would be a pointer to another stream of income for an average citizen. Commercialization therefore is defined by Longman dictionary (2005) as to be more concerned with making money from something. Humanity is naturally

endowed with diverse creative ability that if properly utilized, it will enhance an individual with self-employment. To drive in this point, *ekoi* dance education will be delved into as a platform for commercialization.

*Ekoi* dance is an integral art for ceremonies and festivals in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Historically, Yakurr communities had been performing indigenous dance for decades. According to an oral interview with Enang (2017), the indigenous dance was introduced to the indigenes as far back as 1912 by MmaObia (the Princess of Ariba community). Obia separated from King Obiagu (her father) over an unresolved conflict on poor administration of the palace. She sojourned to an unknown land where she encountered a hunter from Akpa settlement which is also known as Lekanakpakpa near Okuni. Nature bonded the two strangers together and they begat a son named Itobo. Just like every other mother, Obia trained Itobo into several arts from cradle. As time went by, Itobo mastered the various arts and inculcated same to his peers during moonlight games. This practice continued and later spread like wide fire to the neighboring communities. Several steps and creative ideas also sprout with group names being introduced. *Ekoi* dance is one of the indigenous names found during the communal practices.

#### **Brief History of *Ekoi* Dance Education**

Literarily, '*ekoi*' means 'parade'. By implication, *ekoi* dance connotes parade dance. The dance was initiated in

1937 during the migration of Akpa indigenes to Yakurr. The movement was as a result of the sound of drums heard from a distance by the Akpa indigenes and was traceable to the *laboku* festival (new yam festival) in Yakurr. With the spirit of festivity, both the migrants and the Yakurr citizens unanimously paraded round the neighboring communities, celebrating another bountiful harvest of that year. This is the remarkable act rebirth *ekoi* (parade) dance as orally submitted Obongha, (2017). Agada (2017) notes that the parade was enthralling, colourful and promoted cultural diversity. The Yakurr citizens mimicked the new dance steps and finally embraced the migrants, by leaving in peace with the Yakurr people.

**Membership:** *Ekoi* dance ensemble comprises of both men and women who are energetic and skilful. Famous hunters and productive farmers have added advantage to membership role. Members accompany both planting and harvesting seasons with dance, this act expresses their prayers for bountiful harvest from the gods of the land. Photographs below shows an excerpt of *ekoi* members with their array of aesthetic costumes and symbols.



**Members of *ekoi* dance Ensemble**

**Leadership Role:** *Ekoi* dance ensemble is often coordinated by the Obol (Chief) of every ward. Prior to *leboku* festival, citizens are grouped and saddled with different responsibilities of collating tubers of yam with palm wine from citizens along the farm roads; others hunt for domestic fowls and goats that roam around the streets while others gather fire wood from different compounds. These procedures are usually accompanied by the *ekoi* dancers and passive citizens who are willing to parade round the neighborhoods Agada (2017).

**Rehearsals:** *Ekoi* dance ensemble stages their rehearsals a week preceding any upcoming event. For an annual event such as *leboku* festival, the group organizes series of rehearsals for a week at the *ebolta* (palace ground). Members are divided into sub-units, the instrumentals, singers and dancers. These units assemble to practice/learn new skills as it suits their art. After sub-units practice, they collapse into one group and harmonize their ideas to a common musical sound. This they practice consistently until its perfection

and final presentation. Meanwhile, major star dancers and instrumentals are at some point, isolated to rehearse at the forest where they commune with divinity in the absence of any mortal being. This act bounds citizens together and gave them a common goal to a thrilling performance.

**Occasion for performance:** *Ekoi* dance ensemble comprises of beautifully-skilled maidens and energetic men that often stage their performances at any invited occasion; and annually, during the *leboku* festival of the Yakurr society. The aesthetic performance of this group habitually thrills the audience, hold them spellbound and thus, leads the audience to the realm of fantasy. Apart from the climax of their performances which is always accompanied with some stylistic acrobatics, the star drummer also extemporizes the sound of the drum to sweep audience off their feet. At this point, endless yelling and voluntary participation among the audience becomes dominant. Little wonder Okafor (2005) stressed that a society without the sound of the drum is likened to the city of the dead.

**Costumes and symbols:** Apart from the stylistic dance which is beautiful in steps, the aesthetics of *ekoi* dance is supported by the array of colourful costumes the devotees employed. Eno (2017) highlighted major costumes and symbolic items of *ekoi* dance ensemble as tabulated below.

Local name (in Yakurr) name	English
<i>Kojongha</i>	Local cap
<i>Nzigiza</i>	Animal skin
<i>Kokpabaa</i>	Wrapper
<i>Nkpoka</i>	Leg rattle
<i>Epam-se</i>	Horse tail
<i>Ego-se</i>	Feathers
<i>Yiwong</i>	Sword
<i>Yilon</i>	Chewing stick
<i>Ejoom</i>	Native chalk
<i>Ejigida</i>	Beads (neck, hand and waist)

**Musical Instruments used in Ekoi Dance:** *Ekoi* dance group employs musical instruments with authentic sound that propels the spirit of dancing. These instruments are mostly of membranophone (instruments made with vibrating membrane) and idiophone (shaking, struck and beating instruments made from different objects but without membranes surface) categories. The instruments includes: *ekoma* (drum), *lokuma* (slit wooden drum), *yisung* (metal gong), and *yikpokpa* (wood block).

#### **Commercialization of Ekoi Dance for Societal Transformation**

Commercializing *ekoi* dance would help the society with not only moral values that will in turn promote good humanitarian relationship but also increase the societal revenue as well as an individual economic standard. Other societal transformation includes:

♣ Mutual interaction, peace and unity among humanity. *Ekoi* dance attracts participation of tourists from different

society. The art promotes peaceful coexistence and bonds among humanity. Commercializing this genre of music will make people from different cultural affinity to patronize the group for the period of time the performance last. Also, the performance creates lots of avenue for interactions and inter-marital relationship among citizens and visiting tourists.

♣ Improvement in the economic growth of the society. Tourists across the globe usually clamor at the annual *leboku* festival where *ekoi* dance is often performed. The period of time the tourists cohabit in the environment, commercial goods such as farm produce, craft works, accommodation, food and drinks will be largely consumed. By so doing, the indigenes tend to making lots of profits from their sales.

♣ Agricultural development. Farmers are often empowered with farm tools to help improve their productivity. More so, tourists patronize most of the refined farm products such as cassava flour (popularly known as *gari*) and other food items.

♣ Infrastructural development. Most stakeholders from Yakurr communities utilize this period to identify and implement various community projects that in turn, improve the aesthetic ambiance of the land.

♣ Employment opportunity. Artisans for different crafts are usually employed to make costumes, make-ups and symbolic objects that are needed for the *ekoi* dancers. Performers are also compensated

with some royalties that usually boost their means of livelihood.

### **Conclusion**

In a dwindling economy such as is in Nigeria, it is hazardous for indigenes of any society to solely depend on white collar jobs. Several organizations today developed to becoming employers of labour by putting their creative skills to use. Therefore, commercializing *ekoi* dance and other art forms from various communities will in turn serve as an additional platform for job creation and on the other hand, promotes and sustains the cultural heritage of the people.

### **Recommendations**

Generally, this discourse recommends all hands to be on deck to bring back the rich cultural heritage of the society, from its lost glory. Hence, citizens should limit the over dependence on white collar jobs and focus on cultural values as a means to self-development. Borrowing a leaf from Obia parenting skill, modern parents should in addition to Western education introduce (teach) their wards to create cultural arts that will be preserved for the upcoming generations. Policy makers on education should incorporate more of indigenous education into the curriculum plans. Finally, government and non- governmental organizations should support indigenous arts by employing their services as civil servants.

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