

The Significance of the Ikenike Dance in Sustaining Urhobo Social Fabric and its Potential Contribution to African Educational Paradigms

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Abstract

This paper explores the sociocultural significance of the *ikenike* dance, a vital component of the Urhobo cultural heritage in Nigeria. Despite its importance, traditional dances like *ikenike* are often overlooked in scholarly discourse, hindering a comprehensive understanding of their role in preserving cultural narratives. The study highlights the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous practices, like the *ikenike* dance, recognising its potential to shape educational curricula and foster cultural pride. The research methodology employed a qualitative approach, incorporating interviews and participant observation as primary data collection methods. The findings reveal that the *ikenike* dance is a dynamic form of non-verbal communication that encapsulates collective memory and identity. Despite the challenges posed by modernity and cross-cultural influences, the *ikenike* dance remains a significant part of the Urhobo people's cultural heritage. The study concludes that integrating traditional dances into educational curricula presents an innovative and transformative approach to learning and preservation. It underscores the need for inclusive, equitable, and relevant education, paving the way for a culturally responsive pedagogy that genuinely reflects the diversity and richness of African societies.

Keywords: *ikenike* dance; Urhobo culture heritage; African dance practices; indigenous practices; cultural preservation; educational paradigms

Introduction

Traditional dances are more than mere performances – they serve as living chronicles of cultural history and identity, embodying a rich tapestry of collective memory and shaping cultural narratives (Abiola, 2018; Buckland, 2001). This holds particularly true for the *ikenike* dance of the Urhobo people in Nigeria, a practice deeply interwoven with spiritual significance and cultural expression. The *ikenike* dance form exists in religious and secular settings, embodying meanings that may not be easily conveyed through verbal or written communication. In religious settings, it serves as a medium for spiritual expression and connection, often forming an integral part of rituals and ceremonies. It functions as a social tool in secular settings, facilitating community

bonding and cultural preservation. This duality in settings and nuanced highlights their ability to convey intricate cultural narratives and values beyond linguistic articulation. Despite its undeniable importance in the Urhobo community, the *ikenike* dance has been overshadowed in scholarly discourse, reflecting a broader undervaluation of traditional dance forms (Darah, 1982; Page, 2012). This oversight neglects a crucial aspect of cultural expression and undermines the potential contribution of indigenous practices to the educational landscape and cultural narratives.

This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the cultural history and practices of the *ikenike* dance, thereby shedding light on its spiritual, cultural, and educational dimensions. Recognising the transformative potential of indigenous arts, particularly in shaping cultural narratives and curricula, the paper underscores the importance of preserving and integrating traditional dances into educational frameworks. Beyond mere entertainment, the *ikenike* dance is a reservoir of spiritual, cultural and economic benefits for its practitioners, making its preservation crucial in cultural and pragmatic contexts (Oghi, 2014b; Odefunso, Bravo, and Chen, 2022). Given the challenges posed by cross-cultural influences, technological advancements, and formal education to the continuity of traditional practices (Sibani, 2018; Aristidou, Stavarakis, & Chrysanthou, 2014), it becomes imperative to understand and safeguard the *ikenike* dance. This study highlights its cultural significance and emphasises the potential role of indigenous practices in revitalising educational curricula in African schools. Through this lens, the *ikenike* dance emerges not only as a cultural treasure but also as a dynamic force capable of shaping the future educational landscape in the continent.

However, given that culture is inherently dynamic and constantly evolving, the goal is not to freeze traditional dances in time but to ensure they continue to be appreciated and evolve along with society (Aristidou et al., 2014). This approach ensures that traditional dances remain a living tradition, appreciated by and relevant to contemporary audiences. It allows these dances to continue serving as vibrant expressions of cultural identity, even as they adapt to changing societal contexts (Aristidou et al., 2014). Therefore, this article focuses on fostering an understanding and appreciation of traditional dances that acknowledge their dynamic nature and support their ongoing evolution. This perspective forms the foundation of the discussions and analyses that will follow in the subsequent sections of this article.

1-Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, incorporating interviews and participant observation as primary data collection methods to delve into the sociocultural implications of the *ikenike* dance among the Urhobo people. Grounded in the conceptual and ethnographic theory of Katherine Dunham, who has extensively studied the sociological significance of dance (Das, 2017), this study provides a theoretical foundation for exploring the function of the *ikenike* dance among the Urhobo people.

The research was conducted over two years, from 2014 to 2016, as part of the researcher's doctoral studies, aiming to fill the gap in existing literature regarding the *ikenike* dance. Given the limited literature on the *ikenike* dance, this study relied on semi-structured interviews with eight key informants selected for their profound knowledge of *ikenike* dance traditions. These informants included the Ovie (king), community chiefs, and the chief priest of the Abraka Kingdom. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in probing deeper into participants' insights while maintaining a degree of standardisation (Smith, 1995).

In addition to interviews, the researcher attended and observed dance performances during the annual *Ovwuvwe* festival in Abraka in 2014. This fieldwork contributed to a holistic understanding of the dance's cultural context. Each village event attracts participants from other villages, including dancers and observers travelling from one Urhobo village to another. These communities are geographically connected and share common traditions. Thus, an event in Abraka may include participants from *Orogun*¹⁰ and *Agbaro*,¹¹ while an event in *Agbaro-otor*¹² may include participants from the *Ughievwen*¹³ clan. These communities are geographically connected and share common traditions.

The collected data was then analysed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification and analysis of patterns or themes within the data. Ethical considerations were considered during the research process, including obtaining informed consent from the participants and ensuring confidentiality.

2-Historical background of the Urhobo people

Understanding the *ikenike* dance of the Urhobo people necessitates delving into the rich historical tapestry of this ethnic group. The designation "Urhobo" does not pertain to a defined geographical region but signifies a collective population of roughly two million individuals (Aziza, 2019). This implies that the term encapsulates a community bound by cultural and historical ties rather than being confined to a specific geographic boundary. According to Anthony (2015), the Urhobos, constituting the largest ethnic

¹⁰ The Orogun Kingdom, located in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State, is one of the many kingdoms constituting the Urhobo nation. It is approximately 26 kilometres away from Abraka.

¹¹ Agbaro, a town in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, is part of the Urhobo kingdom. It is approximately 40 kilometres distant from Abraka.

¹² Agbaro-otor, a town in the Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, is part of the Urhobo kingdom. It is located approximately 40 kilometres from Abraka.

¹³ Ughievwen, located in the Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, is one of the 24 kingdoms that comprise the Urhobo nation. It is approximately 62 kilometres away from Abraka.

group in Delta State, Nigeria, and the fifth largest in Nigeria overall, possess a history predominantly passed down through an intricate oral tradition.

The origins of the Urhobo people are multifaceted and complex, involving various historical accounts. The historical accounts of the Urhobo origin are broadly consistent, with variations only in narrative details. Otite (1982) identifies four main accounts or theories within the Urhobo tradition. Some Urhobo oral traditions assert that the Urhobo people did not migrate from anywhere before settling in their current location. Ofuafor (2023) considers the Urhobo people autochthonous, meaning they originated in their current location. Otite (1982) emphasises this view, describing Urhobo as indigenous people with no known migration history.

Another account proposes migration from the *Bini*¹⁴ Kingdom during the Ogiso and Egbeka dynasties, associating Urhobo with Edo-speaking people. Anthony (2015:49) connects Urhobo to a Bini prince, Urhobo, who established his kingdom in the South around 1370. Supporting this perspective, Otite (1982) refuted that the Urhobos transformed from the Bini people upon reaching their territories. Instead, he argued that they identified as Urhobo before departing from Benin. The belief in Urhobo migration from Benin likely stems from noticeable linguistic, political, social, and cultural similarities between the Bini and Urhobo communities.

The third historical account of the traditional origin of the Urhobos posits that they migrated from the Ile–Ife territory in the western part of Nigeria. This belief is grounded in the presence of a substantial Urhobo population in and around Ile–Ife today (Idjakpo 2010). Otite (1982) questions this, suggesting that their organisation and social structure resemble migrants rather than original settlers. Lastly, a more tenuous tradition posits migration from Sudan and Egypt, akin to the Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples (Otite, 1982; Idjakpo, 2010).

Despite variations, the theory of migration from *Bini* appears more plausible due to linguistic and cultural similarities; this is also in line with the information obtained from the research participants during fieldwork. Notwithstanding differences in origin accounts, characteristic features defining the Urhobo people include their geographical location, religion, worship practices, and kinship-political governance. Hence, the Urhobo people have flourished in their territory, marked by a heterogeneous composition of 24 autonomous clans, each headed by an *Ovie* (king) or traditional clan head.

Socio-politically, the Urhobo people exhibit a complex structure, with their political organisation categorised into kingdoms and towns. The governance structure is further distinguished by age-based organisations (gerontocracy) and wealth-based organisations

¹⁴ The Bini people, also known as the Edo, reside in Edo State, Nigeria, and are descendants of the founders of the ancient Benin Empire. They have a social and cultural affinity with the Urhobo people, stemming from ancestral migrations.

(plutocracies) among the community members (Idjakpo, 2010:245). At the helm of this political structure is the Ovie, the paramount leader responsible for safeguarding the customs and traditions of the kingdom.

3-The Ikenike Dance: Cultural Heritage and Evolution

The *ikenike* dance, as an integral component of Urhobo culture, plays a pivotal role in conferring social and cultural prestige upon the community. Initially reserved for male performers, the *ikenike* dance has undergone a transformative evolution, now inclusive of women who contribute to its thematic richness. The evolution of the dance has resulted in an enriched expression of historical narratives, societal roles, and spiritual beliefs that underpin the essence of Urhobo culture. According to Oghi (2014a), the *ikenike* dance has historical roots that are deeply embedded in Urhobo culture. Oral histories from community members who were part of this study attest to its existence since ancient times. This dance, originating from such a distant past, is seen as a profound representation of Urhobo culture. It serves as a powerful medium for conveying communal values, historical narratives, and spiritual beliefs, thereby reinforcing the belief system of the Urhobo society.

According to Oghi (2014a:94), the *ikenike* dance reportedly grew in the 1930s and 1950s to the point where social organisations with committees and executives were established. However, the decline in *ikenike* performance can be traced to cross-cultural influences and social and technological changes. For instance, the infiltration of Western forces during colonialism facilitated the obtrusion of Western knowledge systems into African societies, undermining the essentiality of African indigenous knowledge systems and destroying Africans' zeal to modernise and ameliorate their systems (Mosweunyane, 2013). Sibani (2018) also notes that traditional ways of worship have undergone significant changes and modernisation and that the traditional drums, which lend a unique and meaningful character to the indigenous music of the people, have been replaced with band sets and English songs.

This shift could potentially contribute to the decline of indigenous practices like the *ikenike* dance. Moreover, the enduring role of education in every society is to prepare individuals to participate fully and effectively in their world; it prepares youths to be active and productive members of their societies by inculcating the skills necessary to achieve these goals. While this has many benefits, it could also lead to a shift away from traditional forms of learning and cultural expression, such as the *ikenike* dance. According to Aristidou et al. (2014), the demands of formal education often leave them with limited time to engage in the original forms of these dances. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, in the 21st century, the influence on African practices is not solely directed by European cultures. We now live in an era marked by cosmopolitanism and technological advancements, allowing individuals to draw influences from various parts of the globe (Kapur et al., 2018).

In light of this new reality, recognising the dynamic nature of cultural influences, it becomes imperative to emphasise the need for cultural preservation (Durie, 2008). By preserving their practices, tradition bearers stand to gain economically and in various other aspects (Odefunso et al., 2022). Moreover, these preserved cultural practices could play a resourceful role in revitalising the curriculum of schools in the present era, focusing on transformative approaches in African universities (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019).

Specifically addressing the impact of formal primary education on the learning of cultural dances, it is crucial to underscore the importance of retaining and continuing these original dance forms. The passing away of master dancers often leaves a void, and without successors, there is a risk of the native culture giving way to external influences (Green, 2018). Therefore, the retention and continuity of these cultural dance forms emerge as critical aspects, not just for preserving tradition but also for navigating the complex dynamics of cultural exchange in the contemporary world (Lykesas, 2018).

The *ikenike* dance, as described by research participants, is more than just entertainment; it serves as a dynamic form of non-verbal communication, encapsulating the collective memory and identity of the Urhobo people. The *ikenike* dance narrates stories and imparts messages intricately intertwined with the community's shared experiences, traditions, and worldview through intricate dance movements, rhythmic patterns, and accompanying songs. During this study, research participants were asked about their reasons for partaking in the *ikenike* dance performance; they responded, "It is our custom," "It is our tradition," and "It is our religion." Community members similarly regard the dance as an integral part of their lives and community, a tradition they cherish and admire. While this tradition may appear complex and intricate to outsiders, it is deeply ingrained in their history and identity.

Despite the challenges attributed to cosmopolitan influences and the pervasive impact of Western culture, the *ikenike* dance's popularity may be declining. Nevertheless, it remains a vital component of the Urhobo people's cultural heritage, articulating individual experiences and embodying the community's collective identity. The dance's enduring significance lies in its unique movements, its cultural impact on broader society, the utilisation of local instruments and objects, and the skills and craftsmanship integral to its creation—all constituting facets of an invaluable cultural heritage.

4-The Path to Ikenike Dance Mastery in Urhobo Communities

Becoming an *ikenike* dancer in Urhobo communities is a communal journey uniquely shaped by each community's nuances. Experienced practitioners play a pivotal role, offering training opportunities to those aspiring to join the ranks of *ikenike* dancers. Aspiring individuals seek mentorship from renowned practitioners within the community, marking the initiatory phase of deliberate immersion into the specific dance traditions associated with the dance. Notably, this approach to becoming a dancer is diverse, accommodating specialised roles and processes.

The apprenticeship formally begins once the intended apprentice comprehensively grasps the dance's guidelines. While age is not a strict criterion, most *ikenike* dancers are youth, reflecting the belief in their agility and readiness to preserve cultural traditions. This nuanced approach acknowledges the interplay of age and cultural expectations in selecting *ikenike* dancers.

After a formal agreement, the apprenticeship starts with the apprentice carrying the master's stilts and learning their setup. Public performances and group practices provide platforms for masters and seasoned dancers to demonstrate their craft to the apprentices. Progressively, apprentices learn stilt walking, deferring challenging dance moves until mastering this fundamental skill. Transitioning from novice to expert is a gradual process, recognising the creative gap that may persist between the master and the apprentice throughout their journey.



Fig 1: Ikenike dancer during a cultural event in Delta State, Nigeria.

Source: Tony Ifie (2015).

Guiding the dance performance are specific rules, including occasional occurrences during festivals, where audience participation is encouraged. The assessment of a dancer's progress is mainly informal, with comments, praises, and reprimands expressed by peer groups, parents, and traditional leaders during the learning process, based on social ethics (Amegago 2011). The absence of barriers between dancers and the audience aligns with the Urhobo belief that engaging in the dance invites blessings from ancestral fathers upon individuals and communities alike. This communal celebration reflects the enduring cultural significance of the *ikenike* dance in the Urhobo tradition.

5-Ikenike Dance Dynamics: Rituals, Performances, and Spiritual Connection

The *ikenike* dance performance unfolds as a vibrant tapestry, weaving together spirituality, culture, costumes, song, rhythm, and movement. Drums reverberate in sync with the dancers' movements while dust swirls rise from their stilts. The dancers, adorned with costumes crafted from feathers, cloth, and hide, contribute to the visual spectacle, embodying the collective memory and identity of the Urhobo people.

The *ikenike* dance performance entails a dancer balanced on long wooden stilts that vary in height from five to ten feet depending on the performer's capability. The performer usually ties his feet to a pair of stilts with the assistance of colleagues, stands up to walk and then dances elegantly to the rhythm of drums and other instruments. To this end, Nicholls (2012) opines that the *ikenike* dancers showcase choreographed group performances, competitive solo dances, and a dramatic playlet featuring non-stilted dancers. A standout spectacle is a high-wire performance, where a dancer gracefully swings with stilts entwined in a rope suspended from two tall poles.



Fig 2: An *ikenike* dancer performing in a cultural event in Delta State, Nigeria.

Source: Tony Ifie (2015).

As the tall dancers captivate the audience with acrobatic steps, the communicative essence of their movements takes centre stage. Attention to visual aesthetics and expressive movements underscores the intricate connection between the dancer's presentation and the spiritual and artistic elements conveyed. This emphasis on visual elements becomes a conduit for expressing and preserving the community's shared values, traditions, and beliefs. Each movement and visual element contributes to a cultural

tapestry defining the Urhobo people. The nuanced interplay between visual aesthetics and spiritual significance reveals the essence of the *ikenike* dance, transcending physical performance to become a profound expression of the community's collective consciousness.



Fig 3: During a cultural event, an *ikenike* dancer performing in Delta State, Nigeria.
Source: Tony Ifie (2015).

The height and beauty of a dancer's costume extend beyond mere aesthetics among the Urhobo people; they delve into the spiritual connotations of the dancer's expression. Specific emphasis is placed on stilt height, costume intricacies, and dance precision, revealing more profound insights into the spiritual dimensions of the performance. The careful balance and interaction between the visual aesthetics (how the dancer looks) and the spiritual significance (what the dance means) reveal the essence of the *ikenike* dance. It is not just about the physical movements but what those movements represent on a deeper, spiritual level.

Unlike many dance forms, the *ikenike* dance incorporates a reciprocal call-and-response, creating an interaction between the dancer and the audience. This characteristic, shared with other West African dance traditions, emphasises communal participation and engagement. For instance, the *Atilogwu* dance from the Igbo people of Nigeria, known for its energetic and acrobatic movements (Nkoro 2015; Adumati, 2019), and the *Sharo* dance from the Fulani and Hausa people of Northern Nigeria, which is performed during rites of passage (Eze, and Adebimpe, 2014), also involve significant interaction between the dancers and the audience.

The participatory nature of *ikenike* dance performances breaks traditional barriers between dancers and the audience. A rhythmic communication unfolds between dancers, drummers, and the audience, highlighting the integration of performance, audience, and

spatial environment. The dance's unifying aesthetic feature lies in the emphasis on rhythm, expressed through various body parts and extended to the stilts. *ikenike* dancers combine movements from eyes to stilts, assigning particular social significance to specific body parts. This reciprocal exchange, rooted in rhythm, underscores the profound importance of the *ikenike* dance in shaping Urhobo culture.

6-Spiritual Significance and Communal Roles

The *ikenike* dancers have several functions; they traditionally symbolise protectors or guardians who deter evil spirits from entering a village. The height of the stilts represents the powers of the gods of the land. They serve as an intermediary between the living and the dead, offering protection to the community by seeking out and destroying any evil forces attempting to intrude into their society. They are believed to ask for special favours like rain to save crops from drought. According to Oghi (2014a:96), the *ikenike* is a dance of the gods, and according to general myth among the Urhobo people, individuals who practice it were taught its secrets and techniques by the gods. As seen in the image below, the dexterity and talent needed to dance on stilts indicate the possession of supernatural abilities.



Fig 4: Dancer on stilts (Ikenike) at Orughworun in 1971.

Source: Perkins Foss (2003)

In the Urhobo cultural context, a dancer's physical elevation on stilts is believed to transcend the purely physical realm. The heightened stature symbolises an elevated spiritual presence, allowing the dancer to bridge the gap between the earthly and the spiritual dimensions. Therefore, the dancer's height represents their connection to the spiritual elements embedded in the dance.

The *ikenike* dance is profoundly spiritual and sometimes involves rituals. Historically, a dedicated group performed the dance, and rituals bound the members initiated into this group (Oghi, 2014a). From the perspective of the Urhobo people, these practices are a significant part of their cultural and spiritual heritage. Hence, Mabingo (2020) suggests that different African communities draw on philosophies that guide how people share, generate, distribute, and organise knowledge and develop systems of realities. This philosophy underpins the reciprocal interactivity and relationality between the individual and the community in cultivating experiences, constructing meanings, forming identities, and building interpersonal connections.

In this context, the *ikenike* dance can be considered part of this broader interactive and communal dance practice tradition, highlighting its cultural significance within the Urhobo community and its connections with wider African dance traditions. The *ikenike* dance becomes a means of educating the young within the community to learn and adapt to the ways of their forefathers. Through entertainment, the traditions of the Urhobo people are preserved and handed down to the younger generation as a form of education connected with tradition and recreation. Through the *ikenike* dance, the moral standards accepted within the Urhobo society are nurtured and taught to the younger generation.

The *ikenike* dance serves as a powerful unifying force, encapsulating the entirety of Urhobo culture in its captivating movements and accompanying songs that narrate the community's rich traditions. Beyond its cultural significance, the economic importance of the *ikenike* dance cannot be overstated. The *ikenike* performances hold immense economic value for the practitioners, as they are commissioned to showcase their artistry at important ceremonies both within and outside the country. This provides a platform for cultural expression and serves as a source of income for the performers, contributing to the community's economic well-being.

Hence, the *ikenike* dance catalyses progress by reinforcing social bonds, promoting collaboration, and instilling a shared sense of purpose. The Urhobo people can navigate challenges, celebrate achievements, and advance as a community through this collective effort. The *ikenike* dance is a multifaceted cultural practice that intertwines economic significance with its role as a unifying force. The call for unity during each performance goes beyond symbolism, actively fostering progress and resilience within the diverse Urhobo community.

7-Musical Ensemble of the Ikenike Dance

Integral to the *ikenike* dance is its inseparable connection with a rich musical accompaniment, forming an interactive art form that enhances the overall performance. The intricate synergy between dance and music is a hallmark of the *ikenike* tradition, with various local instruments contributing to the rhythmic tapestry. Consequently, no *ikenike* dance performance is complete without diverse musical accompaniments, encompassing vocals, rattles, gongs, rhythm sticks, handclaps, maracas, and drums. These instruments collectively dictate the movements of the dance, creating a symbiotic relationship between sound and motion. The Urhobo language, intricately woven into the musical lyrics, adds a distinctive cultural touch to the auditory component.

The drum is pivotal in the *ikenike* dance performance, serving as a communication tool between the musicians and the dancers. Its beats convey cues to the performers, guiding them through the intricate dance movements.



Fig 5: Omi-Igede (baby drum).

Source: Museum of Danish America (2016)

While the *ikenike* dance can be performed with minimal musical accompaniment, larger ensembles are common. Drums, particularly the *Ozi* (large drum), *Oni-igede* (mother drum), and *Omi-igede* (baby drum), play central roles. Additionally, the ensemble incorporates clappers, carved from bamboo; *Ahwala* (wood rattle); *Ikise* (maracas), producing a tambourine-like sound; *shege shege* (gourd rattles); *agogo* (metal gong); and *igege*, strung metal bells tied around the dancer's waist or clapped together for a jingling effect.



Figure 6: Shege shege (gourd rattles).

Source: Green (2013)

The *agogo*, a double-bell gong, functions as a signal instrument with deep spiritual roots. In traditional contexts, it calls the *ikenike* dancers from the spiritual world to the dance arena, aligning with the belief that the dancers embody spirits. However, in secular performances, the *agogo's* role may adapt, signalling the commencement of the dance rather than a spiritual summoning.



Fig 7: Agogo (double bell gong).

Source: Kanu (2019).

Simultaneously, the *igede* (drum), a stimulating instrument, prepares the dancers mentally for the performance. The rhythmic sound of the *igede* symbolises the high point of the dance, and drummers, considered custodians of the ageless *igede* traditions, play a vital role in sustaining its cues. Made from various materials, including wood, metal, and local resources, *igede*, *agogo*, and *shege-shege* emerge as central components of the *ikenike* dance's musical ensemble. The *ikenike* dance's musical dimension adds auditory richness and guides the movements and symbolic expressions integral to this vibrant Urhobo cultural tradition.

8-Challenges and Conservation

However, the *ikenike* dance faces ongoing challenges from external influences, highlighting the pressing need to sustain and conserve this cultural practice in a manner

that respects its historical evolution. Recognising that cultural practices naturally evolve, it is essential to acknowledge the dance's dynamic nature, shaped by tradition and adaptation. Moreover, advocating for ceremonies featuring the *ikenike* dance becomes pivotal in reintegrating this cultural expression into society. By doing so, the dance can regain its significance and relevance, serving essential roles within the community. This approach safeguards the tradition and allows it to evolve organically within the changing cultural landscape.

In the past, the *ikenike* dancers were often seen performing during Christmas and New Year's celebrations. However, these occurrences have become rare in recent years, except for major events such as annual festivals. The influence of cosmopolitan and Western culture has also led to changes in these traditions. To preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Urhobo people, there is an urgent need to revitalise the *ikenike* dance. The *ikenike* dance, being a cultural treasure, demands urgent attention for restoration. In essence, revitalising the *ikenike* dance is not merely an attempt to salvage an endangered tradition but a proactive measure to secure and perpetuate the rich cultural heritage of the Urhobo people. By doing so, the community actively contributes to the ongoing narrative of its identity, resisting potential misunderstandings that could arise from external influences.

The *ikenike* dance, like other traditional African dances, is an integral part of people's culture that should be preserved. According to Miller (2000:40), African traditional dances have always been an essential part of the people's culture that aid in transmitting cultural ideals and strengthening mutual relationships. The *ikenike* dance is more than a cultural artefact for the Urhobo people; it is a living expression of their worldview and a testament to their rich cultural heritage. For instance, the dance's intricate movements and rhythms can be seen as a reflection of the Urhobo people's deep connection with nature, while the communal performance of the dance underscores their values of unity and cooperation. Participating in or observing the *ikenike* dance gives one a glimpse into the profound experiences that shape the human condition, as understood by the Urhobo people.

9-Revitalising African Educational Curricula through the Lens of Ikenike Dance

As we navigate the complexities of contemporary education in Africa, there is a growing recognition of the profound impact that indigenous practices, like the *ikenike* dance, can have on shaping a more holistic and culturally resonant educational experience. The *ikenike* dance, serving as a living repository of Urhobo cultural heritage, embodies many traditions, values, and beliefs. Integrating indigenous practices into educational curricula offers students a unique opportunity to connect with their roots. By immersing learners in the rhythmic movements, symbolic expressions, and rich narratives of the indigenous dances, educational institutions can foster a sense of cultural pride and identity among students.

In the face of modernisation, indigenous practices risk fading into obscurity. However, introducing African traditional dances like the *ikenike* into educational dimensions establishes a bridge between generations. Elders, often the bearers of traditional knowledge, can actively engage with younger learners, ensuring the transmission of cultural wisdom and practices. This intergenerational exchange becomes a dynamic facet of the educational process, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

Additionally, the *ikenike* dance, with its intricate fusion of movement, music, and spirituality, offers a holistic learning experience. By incorporating such performing arts into the educational curriculum, a more comprehensive approach to learning emerges. Students are not merely recipients of information but active participants, engaging both mind and body. This experiential learning model enhances cognitive development, creativity, and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, embedded within the *ikenike* dance are moral standards and communal values upheld by the Urhobo people. These values become an implicit part of the learning journey through thoughtful integration into educational curricula. The dance becomes a conduit for instilling ethical principles, promoting social cohesion, and nurturing responsible citizenship. Education transcends the classroom, encompassing the broader dimensions of character development and societal contribution.

Beyond cultural enrichment, the *ikenike* dance holds economic significance for its practitioners. Educational institutions can capitalise on this by fostering entrepreneurship and skill development related to indigenous practices. By equipping students with the tools to showcase their cultural artistry, schools contribute to both cultural preservation and economic empowerment. Traditional dances, in this context, catalyse creativity, innovation, and sustainable livelihoods. Finally, understanding local narratives becomes integral to fostering global citizens with a nuanced worldview in a rapidly global world. The *ikenike* dance, as a window into Urhobo culture, encourages students to appreciate diversity, challenge stereotypes, and develop a global perspective rooted in respect for indigenous knowledge. By embracing local narratives, educational curricula become enriched with a depth of cultural understanding that extends beyond geographical boundaries.

Consequently, integrating indigenous practices, like the *ikenike* dance, into educational curricula presents an innovative and transformative approach to learning and preservation. It goes beyond the conventional boundaries of education, fostering cultural pride, intergenerational connectivity, holistic learning, ethical values, economic empowerment, and global awareness. The *ikenike* dance, as a lens into Urhobo heritage, offers a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity, paving the way for an education that resonates with the diverse and dynamic tapestry of African identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring the *ikenike* dance as a vital component of Urhobo cultural heritage reveals its profound artistic and communal dimensions. It underscores its potential as a transformative tool in education. By integrating this indigenous practice into curricula, educational institutions can create a holistic learning experience that connects students with their roots, fosters cultural pride and facilitates intergenerational knowledge exchange. The *ikenike* dance's unique blend of movement, music, and spirituality offers a paradigm shift in education, enhancing cognitive development, creativity, and ethical values. Furthermore, its economic significance and global perspective contribute to the broader goals of education, making it a catalyst for cultural preservation, economic empowerment, and the development of global citizens. The *ikenike* dance serves as a dynamic lens into Urhobo heritage, offering a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity that resonates with the diverse and dynamic tapestry of African identity.

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