

**DANCE AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL USING OBITUN AS A CASE STUDY**

**BY**

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**TMA/11/0088**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND  
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ARTS**

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## ATTESTATION

I, Adeoye Adetutu Boluwatife hereby attest that this research report is carried out by me and that I am solely responsible for all errors and omissions, if any.

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by ADEOYE, Adetutu Boluwatife with the matriculation number (TMA/11/0088) in the Department of ~~Theatre and Media Arts~~, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Federal University, Oye Ekiti, under the supervision of the following:

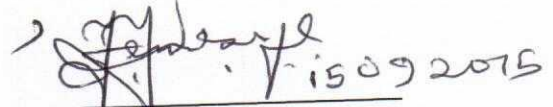
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## **DEDICATION**

This research work is dedicated to God Almighty, the one in possession of wisdom and knowledge, and to those who strongly believe in the higher height dance is going.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I appreciate God Almighty for the guidance and leading from the time of choosing this title, throughout the duration of the project work, for His protection, provision and making it possible for me to complete this course.

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## ABSTRACT

In recent times, traditional African dance seems to be given less cognizance in the society which is been compounded by high level of attention given to contemporary dance and less attention to African traditional dance. The level of involvement of the youth in African traditional dance is not encouraging, worse still, there is the tendency for this trend to continue in view of ignorance of the uniqueness of our own dance for the present and younger generations. Although there are youth who loves the African culture but because of discrimination for the profession, many Africans do not even know dances from their own community neither do they know how their dance communicate. Hence, this study tends to reveal the uniqueness in African traditional dance and the ability it has to function the same as communication using Obitun dance of the Ondo town, Ondo State, Nigeria.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The law of nature brings about the comprehension of the knowledge that everything or every phenomenon has a genesis; suffice to say that dance can be traced back to the existence of man. Man, in his quest to survive in his environment, engaged in various activities such as hunting, planting and farming. During their encounter with animals, they observed the movement of the animals which help them in catching the game and later celebrate their victory with their families and neighbors, in the process of celebrating; the hunters mime the movement of the animals they have killed and they re-enact their encounter with the animals, the strategy used, the struggling of the animal for survival. During planting, they move in the same pace in order to heighten the spirit to work relentlessly on the farm.

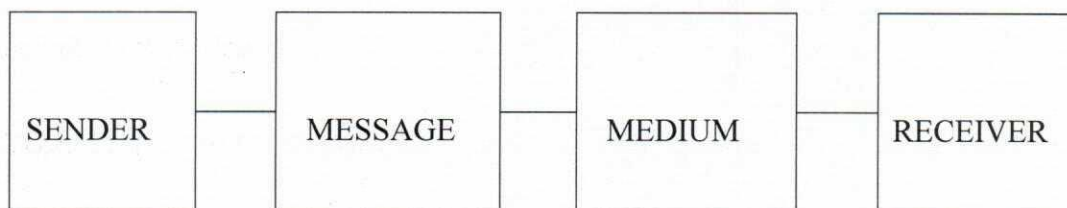
However, man began to think that all the works of nature such as the hills, mountains, rain, the growing of plant, sun, and moon, are not just happenings but that there is a higher power behind their existence. They resorted to appreciating the unseen spirit by worshipping and sacrificing to the unseen spirit. Although they sacrifice their food crops and animals they believed it is not enough, in their bid to show more gratitude decided to use their body to appreciate the unseen spirit. In the light of this, dance was created, and gradually costume, music, stage, was introduced. The movement of their body is today called 'dance'.

Dance is seen in the society as the movement of the body rhythmically and a means of preserving culture, tradition, clothing and even the way of dressing if well employed. Dance is the art form in which human movement becomes the medium for sensing, understanding and communicating ideas, feelings and experiences. The body is the instrument used in speaking the

language of dance. Dance is the art form in which human movement becomes the medium for sensing, understanding and communicating ideas, feelings and experiences. That provides a way of learning or developing communication abilities, problem solving techniques and creating critical thinking skills along with kinesthetic abilities. Dance came to stay as part of the norms and values of the society and it is used for various purposes, in the society. Like any other art form, dance is dynamic and has multi-dimensional functions. As an artistic expression, it is explored to communicate, entertain and educate. Dance communicates inner feelings or ideas, hence, communication is the process of transforming information from one entity to another and it is not just a process but an art of first listening or reading it, comprehending it, processing it and then transforming it.

There is a huge amount of effort that goes into communication such as gesticulations, voice modulation, body language and the spoken language.

Communication is the means of sending or receiving information, it is also the system signally in which signals are received by the eyes. It is an exchange of thoughts and ideas. True communication is an outcome of a feeling of commonness between the two or more individuals and it requires a sender, a message, a medium and a receiver.



The sender has a message in mind, it can be an idea, information or feeling, and he then encodes it and sends it through a medium and finally, the receiver decodes the message.

Relating this simple logic to dance, the sender is the dancer who already has a message to send which might be an idea, information or feeling or the combination of the three, he then encodes it which is the movement, semiotics, aesthetics, music through the medium which is the body and then, the audience is left with the responsibility of decoding the message received by translating the concept.

Communication has two (2) major forms and they are: verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication as the name implies means spoken communication and it is dependent on a number of factors and cannot be fully isolated because it goes hand in hand with non-verbal communication. But primarily, verbal communication include speech, but to achieve an effective communication, especially a face-to-face communication, body language plays a significant role and may have a greater impact on the listener than informational content.

Non-verbal communication is the process of communicating by sending and receiving messages by means of gestures, body language, or facial expression. In other words, it is the sending and receiving of messages without the use of words.

Though it may be surprising but a considerable part of our communication is non-verbal and we often concentrate on words when we are in conversation with someone but we often do not notice that conclusions are derived from the speaker's actions; the way he talks, whether he maintains eye contact or not, the manner in which he holds his hands, whether he is standing or sitting erect etc. Non-verbal behavior predates verbal communication because before a sentence

is uttered, the listener observes the body structure, placement, gestures and facial expression of the speaker and it will enable the listener know the state of mind of the sender or speaker.

There are different forms of non-verbal communication and they include:

**FACIAL EXPRESSION-**: facial expression plays a crucial role in non-verbal communication. It is a dynamic feature that communicates the speaker's attitude, emotions and intentions. The face is the primary source of emotions and it can depict the state of mind of a speaker. For example, a simple smile or frown can speak thousands of words. The face has the capacity to depict various emotions. And importantly, they are the same throughout the world and thus help when it comes to language barriers.

**EYE CONTACT-**: eye contact or eye movement or even gazes are an effective tool of non-verbal communication. It is primarily used to gauge the degree of attention or interest. While looking at something, it often indicates interest or hostility, evading eye contact indicates that the person is hiding something, lying, shy. The ability to read facial expression can give insights into the thoughts and feelings of other people. And importantly, they are the same throughout the world and thus very helpful when it comes to language barriers.

**POSTURE-**: This is the bearing or the position of the speaker's body. It is a more or less stable state and thus not to be confused with body gestures which is the movement of some part of the body. There are some body postures that are not elements of body postures that convey messages such as lying down, standing, sitting but it is the way and manner the speaker is standing or sitting. However when a speaker is slouched or erect, legs crossed or arms fold, a degree of formality or relaxation is conveyed.

**GESTURES-** They are deliberate movements or signals made to convey something to another person. Most commonly used gestures are waving of hands, pointing fingers, clenched fist, salute, clapping, thump up etc. Body gesture is the movement made with the limbs, especially the hands to express, demonstrate, describe, confirm, and emphasize to back up the speaker's attitude or intention.

**PROXEMICS-** is the study of the cultural, behaviors and sociological aspects of spatial distances between individuals. The amount of space kept between the speaker and the observer or listener can be attributed to various factors including social norms, familiarity with the person, and personal characteristics of an individual. Roughly about 1.5ft of space around an individual is considered 'intimate space' such as embracing, touching or whispering. 4ft is considered 'personal space' and it is for interaction with close friends and family members where different gestures and postures can be used. 12ft is for 'social space' and mostly interactions with acquaintances and commonly used in workplace, school settings and 25ft is for 'public space' and it is for strangers or public speaking.

**APPEARANCE/ CLOTHING-** this is one of the most common forms of non-verbal communication. Appearance of an individual conveys non-verbal clue about the personality, background, tradition, culture, financial status, social class, profession of a speaker and this will trigger the way others will respond or address the speaker. An individual clothing style can determine the culture, mood, level of confidence, interests, age, authority, state of mind, values/beliefs, sexual identity, occupation, nationality. It can also be as a non-verbal clue to attract others such as men and women may shower or adorn themselves with accessories and high end fashion in order to attract partners. In this case, clothing is used as a form of self-expression in

which people can flaunt their power, wealth, sex appeal or creativity. The way one chooses to dress tells a lot about one's personality.

Thus, dance falls under the non-verbal form of communication because of the use of the various aspects of non-verbal communication such as body movement, eye contact, facial expression, and proxemics.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

Dance is an art form which can be used to express emotions or feelings e.g. Happiness, sadness, anger, joy etc. Since the western influence everything has changed and most of our indigenous heritage lost its place of which dance is no exception. African traditional dance has been abandoned and the culture and meanings of the dances are diminishing. It has been left for contemporary dance; even choreographers have infused contemporary steps in African dances.

## **1.3 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Dance is primarily used to communicate, educate, and entertain. Recently, dance is now used majorly for entertainment purpose, the function of communication and education in dance is diminishing, hence this study is aimed at bringing the uniqueness, beautiful history and exceptional features of African traditional dance and its ability to communicate the same way we can communicate with words.

## **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In an attempt to discuss dance as a communication tool: Obitun dance as a case study, the work shall aim at achieving the following:

- Understanding Obitun dance

- Understanding the concept behind Obitun dance
- How Obitun dance educate, entertain and informate (communication)
- Relevance of Obitun dance to the people of Ondo

### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

It is hoped that the documentation of research work will serve as a material useful for further educational research work. Dance, which has been an important part of most cultures throughout the world as part of celebrations and ceremonies, entertainment and teachings serves social, spiritual, artistic and emotional functions and this research work will be useful for theatre practitioners and scholars to always have all these functions in mind to be able to use and dance effectively. Dance is already part of human existence and it plays a role in communication, if the concept applied to speaking is applied to dance, dancers will do a better job communicating effectively to the members of the audience.

### **1.6 SCOPE OF STUDY**

This research work will be restricted to Obitun dance of the Ondo State, Ondo town precisely in Nigeria so as to reduce the cost in time and money and for effective monitoring of the research process. African dances are numerous, even Nigerian dances but the researcher decided to study Obitun dance since it is one of the dances of the researcher's region and because it will be more easier to understand their language and way of life.

### **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The data collection for this research work is one of the limitation encountered and this is because there are limited books on dance by Nigerian scholars and practitioners that discusses

the area of this research work. We had to consult various literary works by different scholars where ideas related to this research will be used. Also, lack of fund in carrying out the research work on time also contributed to the limitation.

## **1.8 METHODOLOGY**

It is pertinent at this juncture to discuss the method used in the course of this research and the research method as used in this context is as a result of the nature of this research work.

This work shall be accomplished through the process of bibliographical tools and other library materials such as books, journals, articles and dance inclined write ups also the use of webliography is included. In other words, the use of this books or documented materials will further compliment the effort that will be made to carry out this research successfully.

This research work shall also be accomplished through the process of interviews of some personnel who hail from the state and area where the dance that is being discussed in this context originated from. Some of the personnel that will be interviewed could also be an expert in the art of the dance that is the Centre of focus.

Furthermore, through observation by participation, the researcher will be able to gather more and factual information as regards the dance that is being discussed in this context.

## **1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**DANCE-**: it is the rhythmic movement of the body in time and space to make statements.

**COMMUNICATION-**: it is the process of sending and receiving messages through a medium.

**TOOL-**: any device used in the process of carrying out an operation.



AESTHETICS-: concerned with beauty or appreciation of beauty.

SEMIOTICS-: the study of signs and symbols, especially as a means of language or communication.

OBITUARY-: it literally means "maiden" which means a girl about to get married.

## 2.1 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature of similar researchers with the notion of guiding the researcher in the examination of the concepts in communicating with dance.

Dance is part of the African culture since the development of man. It is one of the valuable assets of the Africans. It is a very important activity in the lives of man and the way of life for African people associated with their everyday activities. Dance in African society emanates due to certain events such as birth, death, marriage, puberty, war, recreation, initiation and ritual. Dance is used to give meaning and significance to these important occasions. Dance in Africa is a way of life, a tool of communication and history documentation through movement.

Hence, dance in Nigeria is a way of life of the people. According to Chris Ugolo (2006:46) "Dance in fact is the expression of life and living, so that no aspect of life of the people is lived without expressing it in movement form" To him, the life of the people cannot but be expressed through dance.

Plato, a Greek philosopher defines dance as "an instinctive desire to explain words by gestures". To Aristotle, dancing is "an imitation of actions, characters and passions by means of gestures and rhythmical movement".

Hornby (2000) defines it as "series of movements and steps that match the speed and rhythm of music"

According to Encyclopedia Britannica (1971)

Dance is the art of moving the body in a rhythmical way, usually to music, to express emotion or idea, to narrate a story or simply to delight in the movement itself.

Ugo Onwuka (4) says

Dancing is therefore a functional art, it is the expressive medium of the body, an outward interpretation of musical rhythms and movement that is sensuously carried out by the human affective domain.

Okwesa (1983) sees dance as the

Oldest of the arts which concerns itself with the movement and gestures of the body in space and time of the accompanying music either to express ideas or emotional experience of man in his environment.

Hence, dance is as old as man and has become an integral aspect of daily life of the Africans.

Keita Fodeba (20) says "unlike other forms of dance, African dance is not detached from the lives of the people who own it.

Tunde Tosin (20) further explains the essence of dance as a daily life emoticon saying "it is an emotion icon which serves as a message carrier of inner feelings"

Dance can make one forget about his worries and in fact the amount of energy given to it can easily make the dancer release his tensions.

Encyclopedia Americana (1978) explains dance as

The motion that arises from emotion, the instinctive channeling of energy into rhythmic forms that will convey meaning to both the beholder and the doer.

This is to say that every dance comes from the inner feelings of man.

Socialization is made possible.

Rust (3) identified dance as

An indispensable arm of socialization process by which culture patterns come to be incorporated in the personalities and the members of the society.

In other words, a community or a society uses dance in enabling citizens participate in its expressive life and also to imbibe the standards, values and norms of the society.

It has been observed that dance form an integral part of the African life. Dance is a natural characteristic of a people since it has been incorporated into their everyday activities. It has the ability to project the language, mode of dressing, cuisine, occupation, norms and belief of a people.

Sharing the same view, Olomu Jane (29) remarked that

People's daily movement, habits usually reflect in their dances. For example, people from the hilly parts of our country indulge in energetic dances and sedentary folks use their hips a lot in dancing. People who live in swampy areas do not step firmly and riverine folks have a lot of the water movements and paddling.

Okafor and Emeka (88) also shared the same view and added that ".....Royalty move majestically and the fighting folk show the cut and thrust of the battle".

Okko Offoboche (4) says "In Africa, some character dances portray occupations such as farming, weaving, fishing and hunting"

He further said "....many of the ethnic dances in Africa also express the people's feelings and loyalties to their deities.

Dance in Africa is the way of life of the people, dance surfaces in every of their life happenings so also does their day-to-day activities surfaces in their dance, hence; dance cannot be detached from Africans.

## 2.2 COMMUNICATION IN DANCE

The word communication has two root words 'con' a latin word which means 'with or together with' and 'union' meaning 'union' hence; communication can be referred to as union with or union together with.

According to Oheneme and Ataman (2006:6) communication comes from the Latin words 'communicare' and 'communico' meaning to impart, to participate, to share or make common.

Many scholars have contributed to the definition of communication. It is the means by which a thought is translated from one person to the other. Communication is a universal phenomenon and it is relevant in everyday activities. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8<sup>th</sup> edition defines communication 'as the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information'.

Berko et al (4) defines communication as

Conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas are express, verbal and non-verbal messages sent, received and comprehended.

Communication involves sharing ideas, opinions, feelings and experiences between two or more people.

Communication is divided into verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication is the type of communication that makes use of speech to communicate feelings, emotion and information.

Non-verbal type of communication is the communication without words, rather the movement of the body, facial expression, gestures, eye movement etc. and through this type of

communication, information and communication is effective because words can be said as in verbal communication but might not be the true feelings of the sender, and the best way to understand people is the non-verbal message they are sending. Communication has always been the reason for dance because all African dances have a message to pass to the members of the audience.

Bakare (2004:4) defines dance as 'the rhythmic movement of the human body in space and time to make statements' he further buttress that the fundamental reason why dance takes place is to make statement; to communicate; put across a message; express a thought. All arts, no matter the nature and form, have something to say.

Communication and dance go hand in hand because the same functions communication play in the society is also the same functions dance play in the society. The functions of communication will be discussed below according to Chiedozi Nzeh (146-153) and how dance functions in the same area.

**COMMUNICATION AS A SURVEILLANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT**:- communication enables the people to be aware of what is going on around them. Dance also gives out information of the environment to the audience. According to Okafor and Emeka (88)

... Hill men have energetic dances... people who live in swampy areas do not step firmly and riverine folk have a lot of the canoe movement and paddling.

Monyeh (110) also share the same view point saying

African dance has the ability to adapt to the environment, thus the riverine do dance movements that represents aquatic life while people in the hinterland, rocky rough surface do acrobatic dance that portrays the geographical location.

The assertion reveals that dance portrays the environment where a particular dance movement is been done.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTION-**: communication functions in the expression of man's feelings and emotions, the need and urge for man to pour out his intentions.

Dance is also a medium to express inner feelings and emotions. According to the words of Machlis (1997) he says

Dance springs from man's joy in his body, his love for expressive gesture, his release of tension through rhythmic movement. It heightens the pleasure of being and at the same time mirrors the life of the society.

Onwuka (74) also remarked that dance contributes to the development of the mind and character of the performer.

**SOCIAL FUNCTION-**: communication serves social functions in the area of information, socialization, motivation, cultural promotion, education, entertainment as identified by Mac Bride in his classification of the social functions of communication.

**Social contact and sense of community-**: mass communication gives people a sense of belonging and a sense of community. It can serve as a stimulant that could provoke interaction to an extent of engineering people to share a common interest as information consumers.

Dancing serves a vital role in human society to achieve social cohesion or togetherness, causing them to feel a deep sense of communication with each other. As a result, people are liberated from the bound of individuality. Ossie Enekwe (11)

According to Onwuka (2012:70)

Dance serves as an effective vehicle for social control. Dance ensures social cohesion in apparent diversity. Through dance, performances staged during festivities and other social ceremonies, people from different walks of life come together to share fellowship in social communion.

**Communication as a vehicle for Information-:** communication functions in providing common fund of knowledge that ensures that members of society operate effectively and efficiently. The vehicle that conveys the information can either be print, radio, television, social media

Dance also functions as information carrier and sender. According to the definition of dance by Bakare (1994:3) 'dance is the rhythmic movement of the human body in space and time to make statements' the definition states that dance must make statement; communicate; put across a message; express a thought. The vehicle that conveys the message is the dancer.

**Communication as a tool for socialization-:** communication functions as the process of grooming people to be well integrated into the society in which they find themselves, it is through communication that one gets to learn about social norms, values and ethics.

Dance functions as one of the society's agents which ensure that all social and moral obligations of the community are observed by every class and functionary of the citizenry. Onwuka (70)

According to Olomu Jane (30) she says

In all societies, dance is an expression of social organization in that it differentiates and defines the roles of individuals, the sexes and groups within the society; social units, such as age groups, express their identity and cohesions of social significance and celebration.

Dance reveals the social norms, ethics and values of a given society. Through dance, culture (way of life) of a particular people can be interpreted, transmitted and nurtured.



**Communication as a source of motivation-:** Effective communication stimulates personal choices and aspirations that inspire individuals to work towards accepted goals in the society.

Dance stimulates people and causes intriguing responses and reactions which can inspire the individual's view of their environment and work towards its betterness.

According to Okwesa (116)

Dance has an integrative value that welds together several ideas, emotions, expression and culture in such a way that evokes unified experience of a total personality..... It stresses co-operative involvement, discipline and self-control.

According to Onwuka (78)

Dance serves as a vehicle for purposeful community development and for social mobility. As participants reach out to the other people, spirits are awakened and the people's morale is heightened to effect laudable changes in their social standing, beliefs as well as aspirations and to accept challenges which later yield desirable changes and progress in the society.

**Communication as a tool for education-:** in the classroom scenario, communication takes place in the effort of the teacher imparting knowledge to the students through the process of collection, storage, processing and dissemination of news, data, pictures, messages, opinions and comments.

Dance can also be seen in the same classroom scenario, the teacher in his bid to impart knowledge to the students does it through both verbal and non-verbal means, he makes use of body movement, facial expression, gestures for the student to better understand, this can be referred to as dance according to the definition of dance by Plato that 'dance is an instinctive desire to explain words by gestures'.

In the primitive age, there was no medium of documentation; dance was used to educate the young ones on how to sit, walk, cook, greet and any other norms, values, and ethics of the society and also the histories of the societies are learnt.

Chris Ugolo (2006:47) remarked that

The educational and historical documentation function of dance cannot be overlooked, for dance serves the function of passing on significant information because of its oral nature, especially in passing on moral values to different age grades.

According to Buckland (1) 'dance has a propensity to foreground cultural memory as embodied practice by virtue of its predominantly semiotic modes of transmission'.

Josephine Abbe (8) further buttress Buckland words by saying

What it means is that dance, due to its non-verbal nature could or has the ability to document and bring to bare the history of a people and their culture. For instance, most traditional dances are a documentation of events which had earlier occurred.

**Communication as a channel for cultural promotion-:** communication serves as the basic means with which products of culture and artistic skills are disseminated in order to preserve past heritage.

Dance has been used to preserve culture and dance is a component of culture. Dance reflects the society in which it is created.

According to Chris Ugolo (2006:46)

Dance in fact is the expression of life and living, so much so that no aspect of life of the people is lived without expressing it in movement form. This to a large extent embodies the symbolic and cultural identities of the people.

Dance in the assertion is a tool for cultural promotion and preservation, since culture is the totality of people; dance promotes and reveal the totality of people. Dance indicates and identifies culture and also projects their day to day activities.

Rust (3) pointed out that 'dance is an indispensable arm of socialization process by which culture patterns come to be incorporated in the personalities and the members of the society'.

Culture is the way of life of a people, so also is dance and Josephine Abbe (4) says

... due to the fact that expressive movement is so spontaneous and dance is almost universal and intimately interrelated with other activities of culture... These dancers serve as chronicle of cultural values.

Jacques Lipchitz (1972) says 'dance serves as a mirror for African life and at the same time, as a support in the framework of its culture'

Dance and culture are interwoven, also according to Susan Nazarette (407) 'dance is an ancient art whose origin coincides with the advent of organized human culture'.

**Communication as an avenue for entertainment-:** this is another crucial social function of communication which is evident in drama, art, literature, dance, music, games and other related sports that provide enjoyment and recreation. Communication in this regard takes place when signs and symbols and images are properly diffused.

'Dance performs entertainment functions and purposes where psychic tensions are relieved'  
Chris Ugolo (2006:47)

Chris Ugolo (2014:233) states that 'at the dawn of civilization, dance was closely associated with having recreational values in terms of entertainment' he further says that 'dance has always had

the potential to provide man with the ingredients for recreation, leisure and entertainment, particularly after a hard day's work'.

**Economic function-:** communication plays a role in the economy of any given society, through marketing, advertising and awareness creation.

Dance serves economic functions, according to Chris Ugolo (2006:47)

Dance could serve purposes of economic activities as farmers, hunters, blacksmiths and other occupational groups have dance representations that portray their daily work activities.

Olomu Jane (30) also says

Dance also expresses the economic life of the community. For example, manual work is facilitated by the rhythmic execution of actual working movements performed by a team of workers, engaged in communal forest clearing or road building.

Dance has also provided an avenue for dancers to get paid or appreciated either with money or gifts, hence boosting their economic stances. It has also become source of income for professional dancers.

**Political function-:** communication serves key purpose in building the political fabric of any society. Communication is vital between the government and the society.

According to Encyclopedia (1998:936)

... dance has been used as a means of displaying political or social strength and identity, in Greece for example, citizens were compelled to attend dance dramas partly in order to encourage allegiance to the city state.

Chris Ugolo (2014:234) says

Politically, dance serves purposes of social engineering, being used to establish class structures, age group, and social mobilization.

### 2.3 AESTHETICS AND SEMIOTICS IN DANCE

Aesthetics is derived from the Greek word 'aisthetikos' meaning 'sense of perception'. Aesthetics is used to indicate the response to art and was especially concerned with beauty. Aesthetics can narrowly be defined as the study of beauty. The term aesthetics is also said to be the philosophy of beauty and taste.

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 'aesthetics has been concerned with beauty and art and the understanding of beautiful things'. It may be said to be what is thought of as beautiful.

Depending on the context, the word aesthetics can refer to a response, principle or set of principles or a philosophical system. The common concept in this paradigm is beauty, and beauty of course is not inherent in any object or thing but it's a mental construct of an individual which may or may not be shared by others. Beauty can be defined as something that is moving or stirring to the senses. Dance in its bid to communicate takes in a lot of input for effective communication.

According to Offoboche (101)

Dance is structured art; it is composed of organized experiences meant to show ways of extending our perception of design, rhythm, space and style. As an art, it demands careful assemblage of the different aspects of human communication for it to bring out its message. The coordination of the units into a harmonious presentation makes a pleasing perception.

In the study of aesthetics, there have been two major lines of inquiry which are the objective and the subjective. The objective approach focuses on the creative act of the artist and the experience

of the object i.e. the person or persons who experience the object aesthetically. Nigeria dance combines aesthetics and symbols to make statement.

Ossie Enekwe (28) remarked that

The beauty of the Nigerian dance lives in its combination of purposiveness and high aesthetic concern, its celebration and reflection of communal life and virtue, its seeking to unite the dancer with the dance, its embodiment of the collective beliefs and symbols, which constitute both the structure and content of the art.

The term semiotics is derived from the Greek word 'semeiotikos' meaning 'observant of signs' or 'semeion' meaning 'a sign, a mark'. Semiotics can then be said to be the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior: the analysis of systems of communication as language, gestures or clothing.

In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects.

Charles Peirce, as cited by Fisch, Maxh defined semiotics

as irreducibly triadic process wherein something, as an object, logically determines or influences something as a sign to determine or influence something as an interpretation or interpretant, itself a sign, thus leading to further interpretants.

He further provided a definition of the term 'sign' as

A sign or representation is something which stands to somebody for something in sole respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in mind of that person an equivalent sign.

Semioticians classify signs or sign systems in relation to the way they are transmitted.

Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics proposed a dualistic notion of signs, relating the signifier as the form of the word or phrase uttered, to the signified as the mental

concept. Signifier is the form which the sign take; it refers to any motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern or event which conveys meanings and communication. The signified is the way or the perspective of individual; the way people perceive or decode a particular sign. It is also the meaning the signifier propends. Dance is a universal cultural symbol that sends out vital information.

Ahmed Yerima (124)

Dance itself, is deeply rooted in the semiology of images because it is not merely an agglutination of symbols, but symbols contained in the language content of any given society. The conception of images, therefore, becomes an expansion of the linguistic pattern of a group of people. It becomes a signification of the words in gestures and movement which represent an analogical code which further highlights man's determination to understand his environment and express his inner feelings of fear and joy.

While Ossie Eneke(11), state further that;

Man is superior to animals in his capacity for conceptual thought, his movement conveys sophisticated meaning in a more compact and rapid manner than speech. Movement is therefore, closer to the biological existence of man than language with his code system already verbally externalize.

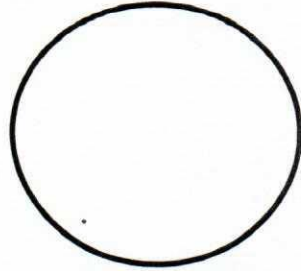
Dance encodes different information in its movement which leaves the audience with the role of decoding the meaning, as the dance makes use of symbols, images, music and costume. Nigeria dance is rich with symbols because of the purpose to communicate.

In encoding messages in dance all the above has to go into dance. However, to encode messages, floor patterns are used to create images that send the message effectively to the mind of the audience. Bakare (2004:34) and Onwuka (9) broaden the directions of movement.

Bakare highlights them as: Circle, Zigzag, Serpentine, Straight line, Curve, Arc, Angles.



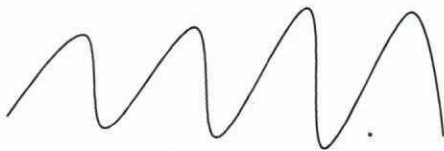
1. circle-: it gives a feeling of communality when dancers have something in common. It suggests some sort of affinity exist among them.



2. Zigzag: it communicate a feeling of uncertainty and hesitation.



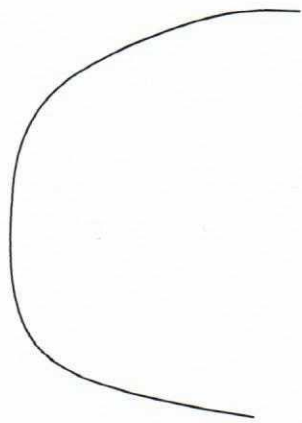
3. Serpentine: the shape is likened to the structure of a serpent when crawling. Serpentine formation gives a feeling of sensuousness, it communicate erotic feelings and desires.



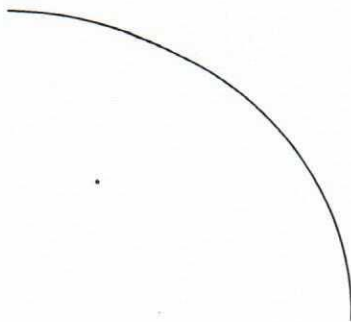
4. Straight line this gives a feeling of boldness. It communicate strength and determination, sometimes it expresses confrontation



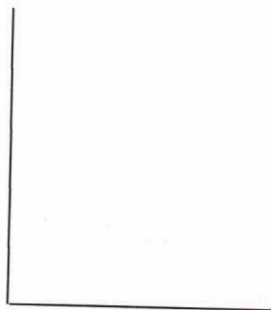
5. Curve: this suggests gentleness.



6 Arc: this direction suggests incompleteness. It gives a feeling of disintegration.



7. Angles: this gives an illusion of depth on stage. It communicates a sense of security on stage.



Also according to Onwuka (2012:9) he classified the movement directions into linear, circular, angular, winding, curvy and twirling.

1. Linear:- linear direction of body movement suggests boldness and expresses resolution.
2. Circular:- circular direction implies close relationship, communicate communality.
3. Angular:- this direction of body movements gives protective feelings.

4. Winding:- this is of two types; when it exhibits sharp ends (zigzag), it conveys feeling of uncertainty, but when it reveals curve ends (serpentine) it connotes erotic feelings.

5. Curvy:- naturally, arcs and curves are parts of a circle. They therefore imply incompleteness, whereas curvy patterns of body movement express emotional feelings. Arc communicates the feeling of uncertainty and disintegration.

6:- Twirling:- When body movement of dancers follows twirling direction, they tend to communicate acrobatic and secret or mysterious feelings.

Hence, design in dance is effective for effective communication process.

Adeoye (2014:344) remarked that

The vitality of dance, as an art form and a valid means of communication, depends on design. Traditional dance therefore cannot be severed from pictorial interpretive semiotics- the principal determinant of the interpretive community or target audience of the content of dance.

He further said

Dance as an art responds to the fundamental principles of design especially because it is a pictorial mode of communication.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OBITUN DANCE

African dance has diverse notions just as it plays different cultures across ages. It is a way of life for the inhabitants of the culture. Dance in Africa has religious (cultic) and social (secular) functions.

The religious functions of dance manifest when magic, sacrifices and rituals are involved. While the social functions of dance encompass ceremonies and activity involving the community. Ceremonies that incorporate symbolic dance include transition from childhood to adulthood, changes in status within the community, marriage, and then celebration of life.

Here in Nigeria, virtually all Nigerian culture has their own traditions of music and dance, which are central to the way they remember their past and celebrate their present.

Songs and dances are played on drums, flutes, stringed instruments, gongs, and maracas and are often linked to specific places and events, such as the harvest. However, traditional song and dances continue in modern Nigeria especially in rural areas and on ceremonial occasions. One of such ceremonial dances is the Obitun bridal dance from Ondo town in Ondo state.

This dancing ceremony was originally orchestrated to be performed for every maiden before she gets married. Marriage is a very important turning point in the life of a young man or woman. At marriage, the bride and the groom take independence from their parents to establish a home of their own. It is an opportunity for the bride and groom to show their neighbors how good ambassadors they are in their respective homes. Though marriage confers independence on the

married, the cultural norms require that the man and woman consider themselves as members of their respective families.

Marriage is seen as an important bond of friendship and cooperation between the family of the bride and that of the groom. Ondo people practice an exogamous pattern of marriage. A man and a woman cannot marry within his or her lineage. Inbreeding is frowned at.

According to my source; Mrs. Adeotanle, a 78 year old woman from the royal lineage, who described Obitun as an old tradition of the Ondo people and has been in existence for time immemorial, Obitun means maiden in Ondo. She states that before Christianity, Obitun was a ritual performed by every girl who is ready to get married, and still a virgin. She said that there are two main reasons for the ritual; the first is to ward off evil and secondly, to ward off unseen mates that may be disturbing the progress of a girl to become a mother in her marriage.

According to another source of mine; Mr. Adeniyi an indigene of the land and a Theatre Practitioner, says that girls that get married always have matrimonial problems ranging from barrenness, being sent up in their father's house until they grow old and die. All this issue became rampant and order of the day which made the king summon the Ifa priest who consulted the oracle and told the king the cause of the problem which is not appeasing 'ogba' meaning unseen mates of the girls, it can also be called 'ore orun' or 'oko orun' (spiritual friend or spiritual husband) of the girls who in turn causes problem for the girls either because of jealousy of them getting married to another man or because of the covenant between the girls and the mates. The priest prescribed a rite to be performed by every girl that wants to get married so as to ward off the spiritual mates from causing them trouble in their marriage. The rite include all kinds of fruit such as sugarcane, banana, orange, mango and foods such as boiled yam, 'Eko',

'Ekuru' 'Aadun' with palm oil poured on the fruits and foods which are placed inside a calabash wrapped with white cloth. The girl's body is rubbed with 'Osun' (black soap) and 'Efun' (white chalk) and used to inscribe patterns with meaning on her body. she ties a white wrapper from the bust and carries the calabash on her head; she walks through the street with other girls throwing sand on her body shouting 'ole' (thief) until they get to a place they can no longer follow her, she is left to go and drop the sacrifice at the shrine alone. If she dies during the course of the rite, whether at the point of offering the sacrifice or on her way back, it shows that her unseen husband is not ready to let her go because he cannot bear to lose her to another man or maybe the girl has made a strong covenant with her unseen mates which can't be breach. If she succeeds to come back home, she is bathed and dressed in white wrapper again which she ties from the bust and adorned with beads, the other girls also dress in white but the adornment is less than the Obitun's adornments. The husband-to-be will then join in the dance with the ladies, and the Obitun will do the plate dance.

The advent of western civilization and religion has influenced the age long tradition. He remarked, saying that the people who have converted started losing interest and belief in the traditional rites. However, the Ondo indigenes scattered around the country later came together to do something that can remind them of their tradition and culture so that it would not die with the rise of religion and civilization. They evolved a type of dance they named Obitun dance, and its purpose has varied from what Obitun rite purpose was. The Obitun dance was not meant to ward off any unseen mates nor to give the girls opportunity to have a good home, rather it as meant to foster love and unity, relief them of tension, means of cultural identity, to give them a sense of community, to use it as a means of educating younger ones, a means of creating job and also to entertain.

Although, many other ethnic dances also evolved as cultural shows and it became competitive because of the involvement of the government in the 70's during the rejuvenation of the arts and culture through the National Festival of Arts and culture. Obitun dance featured in FESTAC '77 and it became the dance of Ondo state and the first choice dance to represent the state at any cultural show or competition.

Hence, the Obitun was more of a rite than dance and it has changed from what it used to be to become a dance package which has also included 'Aje'.

'Aje' is an extra ordinary being who is believed to have the power to give people wealth, relieve them of their financial burden, and help in the progress of people's business. The only thing she is not capable of doing is giving people children. Myth has it that a man being faced with barrenness in his marriage decided to ask her for a child, but 'Aje' told him to go and meet Orunmila who is capable of giving out children but the man in annoyance spoke rudely to her which provoked 'Aje' to say that humans are ungrateful and said that if not because she has given humanity a lot of opportunity, even to the extent they can see her, humans could have appreciated her. She then decided to turn herself into "ikaraun".

### 3.2 THEATRICAL ELEMENT IN OBITUN

#### COSTUME

The new Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines costume as ‘a cloth worn by people from a particular historical period’ costume helps to communicate roles and also establish the social and economic status of a character and also establish the locale of the performance. Costume is the artistic arrangement of garment in a play, appropriate to the time, place, mood and other circumstances or to a particular style of clothing worn to portray the wearer as a character other than their regular persona, it can also be referred to wardrobe and dress in general to the distinctive style of a particular people, class or period. Costume is not exclusive to the theatre alone; it is used for social activities like wedding, carnival, and masquerade. Costume helps to portray characters social class, role, profession, age, gender, personality, historical period, ethnicity, era, geographical location, season, time of day.

In the Obitun rite performance, the following are the costumes and accessories used in carrying out the performance: White wrapper (Iro funfun), White scarf (osuka), Bead (neck, waist, wrist ankle hair)

The Obitun ties the white wrapper including the other girls but the elaborate beads of the Obitun is what differentiate the Obitun from the other maidens.

The drummers are usually three (3) and their costume includes: Aso oke:Agbada, Fila, Soro





Fig.0.1 picture of drummers in their costume

In the modern Obitun dance, the costume has changed to: Aso oke (wrapper, head tie, as waist belt), Beads (neck, waist, ankle, and wrist), White wrapper and scarf for the 'Aje' carrier



Fig.0.2 picture of the Aje carrier in their costume

### **MAKE-UP**

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines make-up as substances used especially by women to make their faces more attractive, or used by actors to change their appearance.

Make-up can also be said to be anything applied on the face or body of an actor/character to alter his/her look in order to depict a certain role. It enhances the character of the actor, it also helps to dictate the period, setting, locale, culture etc.

The maidens might decide not to make-up but the Obitun's body is rubbed with 'osun' (black soap) and then inscription of 'ese ifa' is made on her body. The drummers can decide to make-up or leave it bare.

## **INSTRUMENTS**

Musical instruments according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary are 'objects used for producing musical sounds'. The following are the instruments used in Obitun performance: Iya ilu, Dabua, Opon

## **PROPS**

According to Olutola Lawal (2010:147) Props are objects carried or handled by the actor, separate portion of the set on which the actor stands or sits such as rocks, stumps, or logs. Decorative features not permanently built or painted on the scenery (pictures, draperies, and so on). He further classified it into three (3) which are: Hand property, Set properties, Dress properties

The props used in the Obitun dance performance include: Calabash, Horse whip, breakable plates, and saucers.

## **SONGS AND MUSIC**

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, Music is sounds that are arranged in a way that is pleasant or exciting to listen to. It also defines a song as a short piece of music with words that you sing. In Obitun dance, song is a powerful tool that gives a clear meaning to the movement of the dancers. It is also used to give cue for change of movement. The following are the songs used in an Obitun performance:

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, Music is sounds that are arranged in a way that is pleasant or exciting to listen to. It also defines a song as a short piece of music with words

that you sing. To Africans, music making and dancing are significantly integral as well as inseparable. Tracy Akpabot (40). Onwuka thus asserts that

Music in Africa means vocal participation, the physical manipulation of instrument and the rhythmic or dance movement associated with music.

Since dance is the rhythmic movement of the body, it shows that music cannot be separated from dance, especially African traditional dance. Whether a dance is graceful or energetic, it is performed in accordance with rhythm; hence, music cannot be overlooked in African traditional dance.

In Obitun dance, song is a powerful tool that gives a clear meaning to the movement of the dancers. It is also used to give cue for change of movement. There are up to 20 songs including chant but the researcher of this work has chosen 12 and they are:

SONGS	TRANSLATION
1. Onile palemo o kuuke	Clear the house, owner of the house
Olona I pona da kuuke	Clear the path, owner of the path
Omo 'ndo wa lona kuuke	Ondo citizens are on their way

The above song is the entrance song.

2. Moki won o onke onke	I greet all
Mo k'onile onke onke	I greet the citizens
Mo k'alejo onke onke	I greet strangers
Mo ki bami onke onke	I greet my father
Mo ki 'yemi onke onke	I greet my mother
Moki won o, onke onke	I greet all

The above song is a song to pay homage.

3. dapo nano daje wolosowo oloye uke Mo aje meiyo oloye uke Dowowoli domo wolosowo oloye uke	Mix riches together aje I've seen aje I'm happy Let riches enter
--	--

The above song is announcing the presence of 'Aje'.

4. Aje i toke ibo tiyeye iye	Aje is coming from above
------------------------------	--------------------------

The above song is a song for Aje carrier to display and drop the Aje on the floor.

5. Oni Aje faraba o done Aje farabami o	Anybody touched by Aje is fortunate Aje come and touch me
--	--

The above song is a song of prayer

6. Aje idagbehun eeyeuke	Come and carry the Aje
--------------------------	------------------------

The above song is to propel the Aje carrier to carry the Aje.

7. Abo ba mobila owo mi o Domo araye ma semi si basibo Abo ba mobile owo mi o Domo araye ma pami da saida	I was born with the lines on my palm Let no man distort my destiny I was born with the lines on my palm Let no man destroy my destiny.
--	---

The above song is a song of prayer.

8. Alawo mi kawo mi komi o Awo e alawo Motikawo e funbe o Awo e womagba	Give me my plates, plate carrier Plate carrier I have given you the plates I have collected the plate
--	--

round the 'Aje' chanting 'oriki Aje'. Song 5 bring the dancers in twos to touch the Aje and then go back to form two vertical lines. Song 6 takes the 'Aje' carrier offstage, and the dancers dance forward starting from the last two people on the line who pass in between themselves. They all dot the stage and the drummers give them rhythm which can be easily translated to:

Iyabimometa alugin	A mother has three children
Okannaroko alugin	One wants to farm
Okan I narodo	One wants to go to the stream
Eyikekere inu won	The last of them
Ferehunlohun o fun	Wants to blow whistle
Ferehunfereoba	His whistle is the king's
Oba toto bi aro	King clean like the dye
Oba rere bi osun	King generous like the soap
Yo I yo I yo I (2ce) kakaka	(drum sound)
Ijo lo ijo lo ijo lo	

The dancers crouch with their knees flexed, and bodies bent at the waist to rock their knees and waist from side to side; swaying their hip in three count from side to side. at the concluding part of the rhythm, the dancers form two horizontal line; facing the audience.

The drummers give another rhythm which is translated into:

Kojusi mi baby	Turn your face to me baby
Oni kojusini la n kojusi	Whoever faces one, that one too will be faced
Kojusimi baby	Turn your face to me

The dancers face their partners and meet at the center, thrusting their horse whip and they go back with their back. Again, the drummers give another rhythm translated into:

Kehinsimi baby	Turn your back to me baby
Oni kehinsini la n kehinsi	Whoever backs one, that one too will be backed
Kehinsimi baby	Turn your back to me

The dancers back their partners and dances forward then backward and later turn to face the audience with another drum piece from the drummers translated into:

Obo obotakitiporoniso	Monkey summersaults
Obo obotakitiporoniso	Monkey summersaults
Poroyereyereporoniso	(drum beats)

The dancers bend at the second to the last beat and at the last beat they leap; kicking their right leg. At the 7<sup>th</sup> song, the dancers dances round the stage with their two palms raised until they form an arc and the plate dancer is at the center waiting for the plate carrier. At the 8<sup>th</sup> song the plate carrier brings forward the plate and hands it over to the plate dancer who places them on her palm depending on her perfection.

The plate dancer places the 'Awo' of various numbers according to her perfection on different points/places on her body and spins with plates. As she is performing, song 9 is been sang. At song 10, the spinner goes back to her former position after giving the plate to the plate carrier. The same song ushers in the hunter who dances and does lot of jerking movement. At song 11, the hunter exits and with song 12, the women dance out bringing the dance to an end.

### 3.4 COMMUNICATION IN OBITUN DANCE USING AESTHETICS AND SEMIOTICS

Obitun dance encodes messages with signs, symbols, visual (spectacle), music and the beautiful design of the body movement and the creation of certain images through floor patterns for the audience to decode.

The dancer's entrance which is in a linear form is not just for the beauty alone but it sends out the message of strength, boldness of the maidens. The horse whip can be art to some people or to some people a prop but the way it is been used sends the message of clearing the way for them to enter the arena for performance. The single act can be said to be a source of motivation just as in functions of communication.

The point where they pay homage to the audience, they break into circles as they crouch and leap a bit and at the bit they crouch, they place their horse whip on their knee and this communicates greetings in Yoruba land as it is believed that a woman kneels to greet an elderly person to show that she has a good upbringing. This is also a means of promoting their culture and this is one of the functions of communication. The floor pattern is a sign designed to appease the vision of the audience but it also sends a message of a common bond shared among the people of the community and also that they have respect for the elderly ones in their community.

They break into an arc as the 'Aje' carrier comes forward in twirling body movement as they perform the 'Aje' rite which sees to the dancers touching the 'Aje' in turns. The floor pattern communicates the need for the rite as Obitun performance cannot be complete without the rite of 'Aje'. The entrance of the 'Aje' carrier communicates mysterious or secrecy, as the 'Aje' is a deity and it also communicates the presence of a spirit being. After the rite, the dancers fill the stage and this is sending a message of fulfillment and blessing from the deity. The dancers crouch



with their knees flexed and bodies bent at the waist to rock their knees and waists from side to side; swaying their hips in three count from side to side. This body position is a beautiful one but it is sending a message to the audience which might mean the women flaunting the beauty of the woman's body structure.

The next segment sees the formation of an arc and the plate dancer being the center of attention as she dances with the plate according to how perfect the dancer is. The hunter comes in and does jerking movement in accordance to the music and leaves. The women form a circle and later go out in a straight line. The plate dancer is majorly for entertainment purpose and the exit of the dancer see to the fact that they are still going back to their community sharing the bond between them.

In Obitun dance, floor patterns may vary depending on the choreographer but there are some major floor patterns in Obitun dance that cannot be disputed and they include: Linear pattern which can be vertical or horizontal and also a single line. Circle and Arc

The body patterns also mostly used includes:

Bending forward from the waist, Stamping of the feet on the floor, Shifting, Shuffling, Shuffling to the right and left, little leaps and jumps, Bent knees and tilted trunk

Other movements include, turning on a spot and Crisis crossing

Hence, the movements, floor patterns and body patterns not only send message, it is also aesthetic in nature, and whether it is a sign, a symbol or pattern, it communicate one thing or the other to the audience.

#### RECOMMENDATION

#### **4.1 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS**

Generally, the word 'dance' is a whole complex of communication symbols, a vehicle for conceptualization. It may be a paralanguage, a semiotic system, like articulate speech, made up of signifiers that refer to things other than themselves. Also, information necessary to maintain a society's or group's cultural patterns; to help it attain its goals, to adapt to its environment, to become integrated, to build the society's economy may be communicated. Obviously, dance may not communicate in the same way to everyone but it can communicate necessary information. Within a culture, differential understanding of symbols may be based on, and sometimes be exclusive to, the dancer's age, sex, association, occupation, political status, groups and so on.

During the course of this project, the following are the summary of findings of this research work based on the data collected. The study discovered the following:

- The reason for Obitun was because of the problem facing the girls of the land.
- "Ogba" (unseen mates) needs to be appease before a girl gets married so as to ward off evil from her home.
- The Obitun ritual is now performed by very few families of the society because of the diversity in religion.
- The dance which was originally meant for maidens are now being performed by older women instead of young girls.

#### **4.2 RECOMMENDATION**

This study revealed the fact that the survival of any African dance depends on the amount of exposure given to it and for dance to be given high importance and priority in the society, dance should be handled to perform the function of communication. Therefore, choreographers, dance

scholars, dancers and government should invest on African traditional dances because it is only with such contributions that a lot of cultural dance in our society can be preserved.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The aim of this project is to draw the attention of everyone to the power dance as in communicating with symbols, codes and aesthetics. Therefore, theatre practitioners should learn to always have it at the back of their mind to always communicate with dance either as a choreographer or as a dancer.

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