

INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL IGBO CHILDREN'S RECREATIONAL SONGS AND DANCE INTO CHOREOGRAPHY AS REPACKAGING AND PRESERVATION STRATEGY

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Abstract

In spite of the availability of numerous children's recreational games in Igbo folk arts, finding children engage in traditional leisure activities is rare in modern Igbo society because parents and guardians, especially those who live in the cities, rely on the modern entertainment resources which radio, television programmes and other ancillary electronic media provide for their children. It is no longer fashionable for parents and elderly siblings to thrill the young members of the family with *ifo* tales, riddles or folk songs. And the societal values embodied in these art forms and the effects they produced on the children are now being lost (Ikwubuzo, 2002; 2012). The study adopts unstructured interview to collect data on games from Igbo-speaking communities, and Focus Group Discussion to get the participants' subjective views on the idea of repackaging the recreational songs and games for the interest of the present-day children. The study found that incorporating choreographic concepts into physical activities which involve the recreational games, has the potential to boost children's physical fitness, mental well-being, social bonding as well as rekindle their waning interest in the traditional leisure culture, and inadvertently encourage their Igbo language learning. This paper, recognizing the pastime's many benefits, which, if nothing is done, stand to be lost, proposes the integration of traditional Igbo children's recreational songs and dance into choreography, which children themselves love doing, as a packaging and preservation strategy. The paper concludes by recommending that traditional Igbo children's games should be repackaged to make them attractive as well as to ensure their generational preservation.

Keywords: Choreography; Igbo recreational songs/dance; preservation strategy; repackaging.

Introduction

The modern Igbo society does not appear to attach much value to some aspects of its cultural heritage. Infiltration and influence of alien culture occasioned by the Igbo colonial experience, western education, and contact with the outside world have been identified as being largely responsible for this situation. In spite of the availability of the numerous recreational games, nowadays, as opposed to what obtained in the past, people no longer have time for such pastime in their immediate family, let alone encouraging the youths from the neighbourhood to congregate and relish in this age-long genre of children literature. It is no longer fashionable for parents and the elderly to thrill the young members of the family with *ifo* tales, riddles or folk songs. And the societal values embodied in these art forms and the effects they produced on the children are now being lost (Ikwubuzo, 2002; 2012).

With reference to leisure culture, Egudu and Nwoga (1971, p. 21) observe, in recognition of some change in Igbo socio-cultural life, that:

In the past, moonlight play was such an important cultural feature that it drew adults as well as children to the *Oboli* or *Mbala* (village square) for singing, dancing, reciting of riddles, tongue twisters and jocular and satirical poems. But with the intrusion of “civilization” and the tendency of most of the capable and skilled adults to seek employment in urban centres, this aspect of Igbo culture is more and more the concern of children. Even at that, many children do not any longer attend the play because they are in schools away from their homes. However, the cultural significance of the moonlight play still exists even if the practice of it has diminished.

Consequently, a pertinent question that needs to be asked is: what then is the current status of the traditional Igbo children’s recreational games?

Scholars have also observed that traditional games are waning; Sriwidayati Wulan and Nurhenti (2019) maintain that traditional children’s games have lost their popularity in contemporary times as a result of modernity. They state that society’s preference for modern lifestyle has led to a substantial decline in the attention paid to traditional games. While collaborating with this view, Akbari Behrouz, Mohsen and Hassan (2009) regret that in spite of the benefits of these children’s games to the society, they have been forgotten due to industrialization and urbanization. They posited that traditional children’s songs and games as a form of indigenous knowledge systems are facing possible extinction. As a proof, they cited the result of an empirical inquiry involving 50 children and found that only 20% of the number played traditional games during leisure time in their community. Researchers such as Omolewa (2007) and Lester and Russell (2010) contend that with the prevalence of westernized education, traditional African games have continued to be relegated as Africans prefer the modern alternatives.

According to Ogunyemi and Henning (2020), in spite of positive reports from across African countries such as Tanzania, South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Ghana supporting the idea that integrating traditional songs and games can contribute considerably to facilitating children’s overall development, the realization of this goal has been militated against by westernization. Their work stressed the fact that westernization is at the root of the endangered status of children games as such games were seen as pagan and idolatrous (Chudacoff, 2007, p. 26), traditional and outdated, leading Africans to embrace modern games that are rooted in European culture, with all the negative implications to African social values (Odongo & Onderi, 2014).

Resonating with the position of the participants during the Focus Group Discussion about non-transmission of traditional Igbo children’s games to the subsequent generation, Reza and Puji (2018) lament that traditional games are rarely played by contemporary children despite the fact that such games represented the most important part of the childhood of our ancestors in the past. This is coupled with the fact that the present generation of parents is still very familiar with the traditional games, but not their children. Their point is that, although today’s parents are still conversant with traditional games which they played in their childhood days, they have not really transmitted the games to their children.

Children's Preference for Modern Leisure Resources and its Effects on Traditional Igbo Children's Recreational Activities

As revealed above, it is apparent that today, the tradition of engaging in folktale narration, riddles and other forms of traditional leisure activities is also almost extinct in Igbo society because parents and guardians, especially those who live in the cities, rely on the modern entertainment resources which radio, television programmes and other ancillary electronic media provide for their children. Let us highlight some of these modern leisure resources.

i. Children's Cartoon Network

Because the modern Igbo society tends to abandon some of its traditional ways of life, their folklore, in preference to western lifestyle, especially in the homes of the elite, what we witness these days is heavy indulgence of children in the watching of cartoon network. Such cartoon networks include *Nickolelion*, *Toonami*, *Kidsco*, *Kartoon*, *Cbeebies*, *Boing* and *Jimjam*, as well as audio and video entertainment resources like *Benny and Friends*, *Cinderella*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. Precisely, children's entertainment resources such as songs, games and tales are recorded in both audio and video media and circulated worldwide. The children may even join to watch other foreign films and home videos some of which even contain violent scenes and pornography that are not good for children's and youths' moral upbringing. All these entertainment resources have replaced the traditional leisure culture of the Igbo.

Evidently, these dramatized English tales have Igbo equivalents; the difference is that, whereas the English saw their culture as superior to others, Igbo and other African groups (due mainly to colonialism and its attendant cultural imperialism) saw their culture as inferior to the West. Consequently, there is often a tendency to adopt that which is believed to be superior at the detriment of the inferior. Ironically, there is no culture that is superior to another, as every culture satisfies the needs of its people.

A belief system that has contributed to the strange concept of Western cultural superiority is the writing system; because of the age-long history of documentation of their art forms in books, the English seem superior to others whose genres exist only in oral forms. The fact is that all cultures maintained and operated the oral tradition before the evolution of writing boosted by the invention of the printing press. It is left for Africans, including the Igbo to prioritize documentation of their art forms to perpetuate its value and aesthetics for posterity, as the West has done. Presently, attempts have been made by Igbo to document their art forms in books, but the publications leave much to be desired. The publications are so bland that they cannot command the attention of adults, let alone the children who constitute the main target audience.

ii. Nollywood Movies and Related Entertainment Providers

These days, it is also common to find members of the family stay awake late in the night watching Nollywood films or other late-night movies, even in the rural communities. Even where people would have shown some interest to spend some time outside the house during the moonlight, the prevailing level of insecurity discourages them.

One of the reasons reported by participants in the inquiry for endangerment of traditional Igbo games is that children are no longer allowed by their parents to go outdoors for play for reasons of security, coupled with the preference to watch television and cartoons at home. This aligns with the

observation of Akintunde and Ohiare-Udebu (2021) that television viewing and playing computer games on screens are perceived by the present generation of young people as more exciting than playing [traditional] games. The submission of Akintunde and Ohiare-Udebu (2021) is that the incidence of children playing games in groups outdoors has considerably diminished compared to the situation about twenty years ago. They traced the trend to urbanization; as cities are getting bigger and traffic is getting heavier, parents are usually hesitant to let their children play outside the house.

Igbo youths through their exposure to the electronic media, engage themselves in listening to and watching all sorts of modern audio and visual materials, including obscene ones whose contents are devoid of moral elements upheld by the Igbo for children, as we mentioned above. For instance, many home-video films televised or watched in CDs, make jest of marriage, and promote promiscuity, one-parent family, the practice of young men and women living together before marriage and such other immoral behaviours that are deviations from the people's cultural norm. Indeed, today's media are of terrible influence on marriage and family life.

The view being expressed here is not that children should be barred from television programmes that have something positive to inculcate in them but rather that children should also be led to have some basic knowledge of their parents' cultural background that are deeply rooted in oral literature. It is not also advocated that good educational films and computer games are not good for the cognitive development of children. The point being made is that those modern films and home-videos, whose negative impacts outweigh their positive ones, should be avoided.

With the current trend of acculturation and enculturation which makes the Igbo children more westernized, it is possible that the future generations of the Igbo are not likely to know of such traditional forms of recreation except from books, which will even be possible only if such materials are recorded or documented for posterity.

Implication for Igbo Children's Leisure Culture

Undoubtedly, the reality that modern leisure resources now take over time that otherwise would have been given to traditional leisure activities has negative implication for the survival of Igbo traditional leisure games. Also, preference for modern leisure resources, mainly the indoor technology-driven entertainments which do not entail or encourage physical exercise and physical development also has negative health implication in that the various physical and health benefits derived from children's recreational activities are missed by growing children. Bemoaning the unpalatable situation, Akintunde and Ohiare-Udebu (2021) again stress that the situation has several negative outcomes in the society such as health issues as an outcome of lack of bodily movement among children, and decreased social skills arising from the inability of children to learn social conventions and regulations which are reflected in those games they ignore. In comparison to traditional games which are active, they referred to activities such as watching television as passive games because they do not involve physical movements.

The health issues that are likely to result from lack of bodily movement among children may not arise when children actively participate in traditional games that involve physical movements. A veritable repackaging strategy for traditional Igbo children's recreational activities, which his paper

emphasizes, is in incorporating them into choreography not only for entertainment but also for the multifaceted benefits that are embedded in it.

Choreography as a Repackaging Strategy of Igbo Children's Recreational Resources

On the issue of repackaging traditional recreational resources, the inquiry at various states, during the fieldwork, was aimed at finding out if participants, mainly parents, believed that repackaging will help to make these traditional resources more appealing and attractive to the younger generation, or not, and the reasons for not thinking so. Additionally, it sought to know the degree or extent to which repackaging can enhance Igbo traditional recreational resources. The cultural recreational resources referred to here are inclusive of folktales, riddles, folk songs, and folk games. These researchers strongly believe that choreography is a viable mode into which some Igbo children's traditional recreational activities could be repackaged to make them more attractive to children and by extension enhance their proficiency in Igbo language. Let us briefly highlight what choreography is all about.

Choreography

Beyond traditional dance, choreography is the skill of creating movement sequences that specify motion, shape, or both, and has been used for a variety of physical activities.

Implications of Choreography for Children's Recreational Activities

Relevance to Education

The study of the literature on choreography looks at how different choreographed activities affect kids and how dance, play, and educational frameworks interact with one another. The literature also delves into cultural variations in singing, hopping, and clapping movements during play. Different societies may place varying degrees of importance on these activities, shaping the way they are integrated into childhood experiences. Cross-cultural studies highlight the universality of play-related movements while emphasizing the unique cultural expressions that accompany them.

The literature on singing, hopping, and clapping movements during play underscores the multifaceted benefits of these activities in children's development. From cognitive and motor skill enhancement to emotional and social well-being, the integration of these movements into play-based learning environments proves to be a valuable approach. As educators, parents, and researchers continue to explore the depths of this rich field, a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between play and development emerges, offering insights that can shape early childhood practices and interventions.

Learning experiences can be improved by incorporating choreography into educational environments. Dance is a kinesthetic learning experience that accommodates many learning styles and melds well with disciplines like science, mathematics, and language arts (Minton, 2008). For example, learning dance's patterns and rhythms can help children remember mathematics topics (Stevens, 2011). Additionally, dance-based storytelling can improve reading and language proficiency (McCutchen, 2006).

The combination of singing, hopping, and clapping in play activities has been explored as a holistic approach to early childhood education. Researchers argue that integrating these elements into educational programs not only enhances physical and cognitive development but also contributes to the emotional well-being of children. Play-based learning, enriched with these movements, creates an environment where children are actively engaged, motivated, and more likely to retain information.

Incorporating cognitive, affective and psychomotor elements into physical activities such as children's recreational games has the potential to boost mental well-being, encourage creativity, and increase physical fitness of children. All these are what the Igbo children stand to gain when they are encouraged to engage in recreational games.

In addition to fitness, choreography has been integrated into sports training. Football, for example, has utilized choreographed drills to improve players' coordination, agility, and teamwork (Smith, 2010). Similarly, figure skating and synchronized swimming heavily rely on choreographed routines to enhance performance quality and artistic expression (Adams, 2011). These activities demonstrate how choreography can be a critical component in the training and execution of sports.

In educational settings, choreography can be a valuable tool for enhancing physical education (PE) curricula. Integrating traditional Igbo children's recreational activities, a good deal of which are choreographed activities, into PE programmes can, to use Giguere (2011)'s explanation, motivate students to participate in physical activity, particularly those who may not be interested in traditional sports. Dances are prominent in a number of children's recreational activities. Dance education promotes creativity, self-expression, and cultural awareness, contributing to a well-rounded educational experience (Stinson, 2010). Apart from incorporating children's recreational games into PE curriculum, school Cultural Day or cultural exhibitions provide another platform for the performances of choreographed children's recreational dances.

Additionally, choreography in physical education can support the growth of cognitive abilities. According to studies, memory, attention, and spatial awareness can all be enhanced by learning and recalling dance routines (Bläsing et al., 2010). Beyond the dance floor, these cognitive advantages have a positive effect on daily activities and academic achievement.

Physical, Social, Mental and Health Benefits of Choreography

There are several advantages of using choreography in physical exercises, which underscore the imperativeness of adapting some Igbo children's recreational arts for choreography. Studies have indicated that coordinated exercise regimens can enhance muscular strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular health (American College of Sports Medicine, 2014). Furthermore, repetitive and rhythmic movements are common features of choreographed physical activities, which can improve body coordination and motor abilities (Bläsing, Puttke, & Schack, 2010). Choreographed activities, particularly the dance aspect which features in children's recreational activities, play a significant role in enhancing children's physical health. According to Kassing and Jay (2003), dance activities improve cardiovascular health, muscular strength, flexibility, and coordination. These physical benefits are crucial during childhood as they lay the foundation for a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, dancing helps in refining motor skills, which are essential for various daily activities

and sports (Giguere, 2011). In addition to their physical advantages, these activities support social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

Benefits to mental health are also substantial. Recreational activities that are coordinated have been shown to improve cognitive function. Memorizing steps and sequences is necessary for dancing, and this improves memory and cognitive processing (Bläsing, Puttke, and Schack, 2010). According to a Hanna's (2008) study, children's problem-solving abilities and spatial awareness are enhanced by dancing activities. Multiple brain regions are activated by these activities, which increase executive function and attention (Cruz-González et al., 2011). Reductions in stress and anxiety have been linked to participating in coordinated physical activities (Kiepe, Stöckigt, & Keil, 2012). Dancing's creative and expressive qualities enable people to explore their feelings and let go of tension.

Activities that are choreographed also provide significant social benefits. Children learn to coordinate their movements and work as a team through group dancing activities, which promote cooperation and teamwork (Bond and Stinson, 2000). These exchanges support the social skills and friendship-building that are essential to a child's social development (Lobo & Winsler, 2006). Dance's inclusiveness fosters tolerance and cultural understanding as well (Smith, 2006). Additionally, engaging in coordinated group activities promotes social contact and a sense of belonging, both of which can lessen feelings of loneliness and enhance general wellbeing (Quin, Frazer, & Redding, 2007). These physical activities are aligned to the study's interest in repackaging traditional Igbo folk games for the benefit of children.

Effects on Emotion and Psychology

Participating in activities that require choreography also promotes psychological and emotional health. In their recreational activities, children can express themselves via dance, which helps them express their feelings and develop their self-worth (Burton, 2018).

Analysis of Some Recreational Songs that can be Adapted for Choreography

Children's leisure activities frequently include choreography, the skill of creating movement sequences. Examples of repetitive and rhythmic movements which are a common feature of choreographed physical activities abound in traditional Igbo children's recreational activities. Such games as (i) *Akpakōrō/Akpakōlō*, (ii) *Ero m̄ oo, Ēro m oo*, (iii) *Onye na-àkò edè*, (iv) *Mèe nù Ihe m mèrè*, (v) *Egwu Ògòdò ògòdò*, etc., for instance, have dance elements that fit into choreography. Let us discuss these Igbo children's recreational activities and their various benefits.

(i) *Akpakōrō/Akpakōlō*

This song may have variations depending on the locality but with a similar beat.

<i>Akpakōlō;</i>	<i>Akpakolo;</i>
<i>Kpamkōlō.</i>	<i>Kpamkolo.</i>
<i>Ùdù m, o;</i>	<i>O! My resonating pot;</i>
<i>Ògelè.</i>	<i>Is sonorous.</i>
<i>Ùdù m, o;</i>	<i>O! My resonating pot;</i>
<i>Ògelè.</i>	<i>Is sonorous.</i>

Òkukò ocha;	A white chicken;
Nwa na-eyi n'ụsụ ọhịa	Who lays (egg) at the edge of bush
Òkukò ocha;	A white chicken;
Nwa na-eyi n'ụsụ ọhịa	Who lays (egg) at the edge of bush
Onye ọ mara;	Whosoever fails (to get up after squatting);
Sùrùyaáá, sùrùyaám.	<i>Sùrùyaáá, sùrùyaám.</i>
Onye ọ mara;	Whosoever fails (to get up after squatting);
Sùrùyaáá, sùrùyaám.	<i>Sùrùyaáá sùrùyaám.</i>
Ma yā ma yā,	Fails to get up, fails to get up
Sùrùyaáá, sùrùyaám.	<i>Sùrùyaáá, sùrùyaám.</i>

Children perform this moonlight folk song by holding one another's hands in a circular formation; running in that ring-shaped formation on the same spot as they sing and dance but squatting and springing up rhythmically at regular intervals at the point of singing. Every participant is expected to squat and spring up at the same time.

The *Akpakōrō/Akpakōlō* sung play combines entertainment and some physical exercises that are good for body development. The songs, therefore, have some kinesthetic effects good for the physical development of the children. As children engage in the lively activity of singing, dancing, and holding hands in a circular formation, while squatting and springing up rhythmically at regular intervals in the game, they activate a multitude of muscle groups. Thus, integrating traditional Igbo children's recreational songs and dance into choreography will make the children reap various health benefits, which include, among others:

- (i.) **Enhancement of Lower Body Strength:** The repetitive squatting and springing up motion engage the quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes, and calf muscles. This strengthens the lower body muscles, enhancing leg strength and endurance. When children spring up in unison and perform repetitive squatting motions, they engage various muscle groups to execute these movements effectively
- (ii.) **Cardiovascular Conditioning:** The repetitive nature of springing up and squatting elevates heart rate and promotes cardiovascular fitness, contributing to improved endurance over time. Coordinating the timing of springing and squatting challenges balance and coordination skills, enhancing proprioception and spatial awareness.
- (iii.) **Body Flexibility:** The dynamic movements involved in dancing and squatting promote flexibility in the joints and muscles, including the hips, knees, and ankles. This enhances range of motion and reduces the risk of injury.
- (iv.) **Enhancement of Mental Well-being:** Engaging in rhythmic singing, dancing, and physical activity releases endorphins, neurotransmitters that promote feelings of happiness and reduce stress. This boosts mood and enhances overall mental well-being.
- (v.) **Strengthening of Social Connection:** Leaping and squatting in unison can be a fun and engaging activity for children, promoting enjoyment and social interaction when done together as a group. Interacting with peers in a fun and energetic environment strengthens social bonds and relationships. Children build friendships, develop empathy, and learn to collaborate, contributing to positive social development. They also instill in children the spirit of sportsmanship and competition.

In summary, the combination of singing, dancing, and rhythmic movement in a group setting offers numerous physical and health benefits for children. Through joyful expression and shared experiences, they develop physical fitness, social skills, and emotional resilience, fostering holistic well-being and happiness.

(ii) *Ero m̃ oo, ēro m o* (My Mushroom, my mushroom)

Ero m̃ o, ēro m o	Soloist: My mushroom, my mushroom;
Ero m kpara aka n'àlà foro	Chorus: The mushroom I picked from the ground.
Ero m fòtàrà n'uzò iyī	Soloist: The mushroom I picked on the way to the stream;
Ero m kpara aka n'àlà foro	Chorus: The mushroom I picked from the ground.
Ero m fòtàrà n'uzò nkū	Soloist: The mushroom I picked while going to fetch firewood;
Ero m kpara aka n'àlà foro	Chorus: The mushroom I picked from the ground.

This is another song-game played by children, which involves the action of imaginary picking a mushroom from the ground. It is acted or demonstrated by the children by bending and stretching their hands towards the ground at each refrain (chorus). As the song continues, the leader and players will re-enact the art of harvesting mushrooms from the bush. The leader will fold her dress as a basket and start pulling imaginary mushrooms from the ground and depositing them into her folded dress and the rest of the players will follow suit, as they continue the singing.

In the game, the imaginative play of picking mushrooms and dropping them into a dress engages children physically, socially, and mentally. Through this playful activity, they develop physical strength, coordination, social skills, and emotional resilience, all while enjoying the magic of imaginative exploration with their peers. As a group of children engage in the imaginative play of bending and stretching their hands out as if picking mushrooms and dropping them into their dress, they activate various muscle groups.

Although imaginary, the physical movements involved in picking mushrooms and dropping them into a dress provide a form of physical activity. This contributes to overall health and well-being by promoting active play and movement. It enhances upper body strength and flexibility: The action of reaching out, bending, and stretching engages the muscles of the arms, shoulders, and upper back. This helps to improve upper body strength and endurance over time. Bending and stretching to pick imaginary mushrooms requires flexibility in the arms, shoulders, and upper back. Regular practice of these movements can contribute to increased flexibility in these muscle groups.

Coordinating the movements of bending, reaching, and dropping imaginary mushrooms challenges balance and coordination skills. This can help children improve their proprioception and spatial awareness. These physical activities are germane to the study's interest in repackaging traditional Igbo folk games for the benefit of children. Playing together in a group setting enhances social interaction and peer relationships. Children learn to share, take turns, and empathize with others, fostering positive social development and a sense of belonging.

iii. *Onye na-àkò Edè (One who plants/cultivates Cocoyam)*

Onye na-akò edè?	Who is cultivating cocoyam?
Edè mara mma òkùkò (2x)	Cocoyam is good to be cultivated (2x)
Ada na-akò edè	Ada is cultivating cocoyam
Edè mara mma òkùkò	Cocoyam is good to be cultivated

The game showcases one of the major traditional crops in Igbo society, the cocoyam. Pretending with an imaginary hoe in *Onye na-àkò edè* (One who plants or cultivates Cocoyam), promotes peer interaction and cooperation. Children can collaborate on imaginative projects, take turns, and negotiate roles, fostering teamwork and communication skills. This type of play helps children build social confidence and empathy as they engage in shared experiences with one another. The spontaneous gathering of children in a setting shows the premium they place on inter-personal relationship. Thus, the game is a social elixir.

When children pretend to dig with an imaginary hoe in *Onye na-àkò edè*, they engage muscles in the arms, shoulders, and core, simulating the movements involved in real digging. This activity strengthens these muscle groups, promoting physical development, coordination, and muscle endurance. It also encourages physical movement and outdoor play, supporting cardiovascular health and aiding in weight management.

Overall, pretending to dig with an imaginary hoe offers a multifaceted approach to child development, blending physical exercise, cognitive stimulation, and social interaction.

(iv) *Mèe nù Ihe m mèrè (Do as I do)*

Ọgụụ:	Mèe nù ihe m mèrè	Soloist: Do as I do
Ukwe:	Anyị gà-ème ihe i mèrè taà	Chorus: We shall do as you do today
Ọgụụ:	Gbàa nù egwu m gbāra	Soloist: Dance like I dance
Ukwe:	Anyị gà-àgba egwu i gbāra taà	Chorus: We shall dance like you dance today
Ọgụụ:	Kùò nù aka m kùrù	Soloist: Clap like I clap
Ukwe:	Anyị gà-àkụ aka i kùrù taà.	Chorus: We shall clap like you clap today

This song-game played among children is actually a game of mimicry; the children or players imitate the action of the leader until the end. It is a game of physical movements involving different parts of the human body. At the onset, the leader begins by saying *Mèe nù ihe m mèrè* (Do as I do), and the children respond with *Anyị gà-ème ihe i mèrè taà* (We will do like you today). Thereafter, the leader takes a particular position such as bending and touching the ground with the tips of their fingers, and the children replicate that action. If the leader claps, the children will clap; if the leader dances, the children will dance; if the leader squats, the children will squat; if the leader jumps, the children will jump, etc. Other activities include raising the legs, going round on the spot, boxing the air, raising the hands in the air, etc. The idea behind the game is to take the children through exercise routines in a playful way for the purpose of keeping them fit.

Clapping primarily engages the muscles in the arms, including the deltoids, biceps, and triceps, as well as the muscles in the hands and fingers. These muscles contract and relax to produce the clapping motion. Jumping involves a variety of muscles, including the quadriceps, hamstrings,

calves, and glutes. These muscles work together to propel the body upward and control the landing. Squatting targets the muscles in the thighs, hips, and buttocks, particularly the quadriceps, hamstrings, and glutes. These muscles contract to lower the body into a squat position and then extend to return to a standing position.

Through this game, the children are acquainted with various movements that are necessary to keep them fit. Apart from the kinetic value, the clapping, jumping, and squatting in response to the leader's action have social effect which is the heightening of interaction among the players in one setting, and their cooperation as they replicate the actions of the leader. Ordinarily, this game, like many others, is played under the moonlight in the open spaces in the villages. It is an avenue of bringing kinsfolk together. The Igbo believe that the joy of life and living is seen when people come together to interact. The activities provide opportunities for children to learn to follow instructions. It also imbues in the children sense of attentiveness, obedience, followership and being focused. Furthermore, imitation is a component of Igbo cultural ideology. In Igbo culture, premium is placed on imitation of good things as against imitation of bad ones.

(v) **Egwu Ògòdò (Wrapper Dance)**

Call: Egwu ògòdò ògòdò	<i>Ògòdò ògòdò dance</i>
Chorus: Hìhāa! hìhàà!!	<i>Hìhāa! hìhàà!!</i>
Call: Onye nā-enweghì ògòdò	Whoever does not have wrapper
Chorus: Hìhāa! hìhàà!!	<i>Hìhāa! hìhàà!!</i>
Call: Ya jèè zùrù ògòdò	Should go and buy wrapper
Chorus: Hìhāa! hìhàà!!	<i>Hìhāa hìhàà!!</i>
Call: Ògòdò kaa	If the wrapper tears
Chorus: Ànyì akwachie yā	We shall sew it
Call: Ògòdò kaa	If the wrapper tears
Chorus: Ànyì akwachie yā	We shall sew it

This game is played only by girls. It is usually played by girls due to the nature of their dressing. Girls wear skirts or blouses that have hems that could be lifted up and held by the hands. The game requires that a player lifts the hem of her dress and starts dancing with such intensity as if the aim is to tear the dress into shreds. The idea behind holding the hem of the cloth is that the dance is marked by intensity and vigour. In the game proper, the leader begins by singing a song *Egwu ògòdò ògòdò* while the other group of girls (Chorus) responds thus: *Hìhāa!! hìhàà!!* At this point, the dance begins, as the leader continually repeats *Ògòdò kaa* (If the cloth tears) while the players continually chorus *Ànyì akwachie yā* (We shall sew it) and so on and so forth.

Dancing, as seen in *Egwu ògòdò ògòdò*, provides opportunities for little girls to participate in group activities, collaborate with peers, and express themselves creatively. It fosters a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and teamwork, as girls learn to coordinate movements, follow choreography, and support one another. Additionally, dance classes and performances offer social interactions and friendships, promoting social skills and positive relationships.

Vigorous dancing engages a variety of muscles throughout the body, depending on the movements involved. Here is an overview: Dancing involves frequent bending, kicking, and jumping, which

engage the muscles in the thighs (quadriceps and hamstrings), calves, and hips. These muscles contract and extend to generate movement and provide stability during various dance steps.

These muscles help create dynamic shapes and add expression to the dance. The muscles of the back, including the *erector spinae* and *latissimus dorsi*, provide support and stability during movements like bending, twisting, and arching. Other physical benefits of vigorous dancing for little girls include:

Cardiovascular fitness: Dancing vigorously raises the heart rate and promotes cardiovascular health, improving endurance and stamina over time.

Strength and flexibility: Regular dancing helps strengthen muscles and increase flexibility, contributing to better posture, range of motion, and overall physical fitness.

The health benefits of dancing extend beyond the physical, as it also promotes mental well-being by reducing stress, improving mood, and boosting self-esteem and body confidence. Overall, dancing vigorously provides a holistic approach to physical activity, benefiting both the body and mind of little girls.

The benefits of choreographic displays that feature in these children's recreational activities cannot be divorced from what obtains in the games generally. They offer a wide range of educational, physical, social, mental and health benefits. By providing visual appeal, organization, and engagement, choreography improves cultural leisure activities and increases their appeal to modern audiences. Traditional cultural expressions such as the above examples of children's folk songs and dances, and other community performances can be revitalized through well-structured choreography, blending authenticity with modern elements (Kaeppler, 2007). This approach helps sustain cultural heritage while appealing to younger generations and tourists.

In sum, in this study, all the participants in the Focus Group Discussion admitted that traditional Igbo children's games (including songs, dances, sports, etc.) are endangered as such games are no longer played in the communities by children for whom they are meant. Additionally, the participants cited certain factors as responsible for the endangerment such as parents' lack of interest and more importantly modernization via western culture. The analysis above has highlighted the reasons this endangerment should not be allowed to endure.

Conclusion

There are several advantages of incorporating choreography into physical activities (such as dance aspect of children's recreational activities), which include promotion of more social connection, better mental and physical health, and increased physical fitness. The value of traditional games to children cannot be overemphasized; the endangered status of the games cannot be ignored; therefore, strategies mapped out to reactivate traditional Igbo children's games include, among others, identifying and cataloguing choreography-based ones and using them in public social functions for entertainment, and most importantly their use in childhood education and as indigenous language learning tool.

Even with the difficulties, it might be a beneficial addition to sports and fitness programs because of the possible benefits. The role of choreography in physical activities is expected to grow as

research into creative techniques and inclusive strategies develop enhancing the general well-being of people and communities. When any of the recreational art forms is incorporated into choreography, the need for proper instruction by skilled instructors and all other factors that will standardize the activities must be taken into consideration. All participants can benefit from choreography-based activities if they are made accessible to them through modifications and adaptive tactics (Quin et al., 2007). With the rise of social media, choreographed cultural performances can gain wider recognition, making heritage more accessible globally (Shay, 2014). Thus, integrating choreography into cultural recreational activities ensures their relevance, vibrancy, and continuity in today's world. With all the benefits highlighted above, choreographing some Igbo children's recreational arts can indeed be a repackaging and preservation strategy.

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