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Reviewing the National Cultural Festival: The Case of the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate from 2009 – 2019, Ghana

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Abstract:

The culture of reviewing national programs or events has received little attention from researchers, although recommendations from such reviews assist in strengthening the programs for the development of the nation as a whole. The study takes the case of the Effutu Municipal and investigates the success story of the National Cultural Festival from 2009 to 2019. It highlights the strengths, challenges, and finally offers suggestions for similar future events. A qualitative case study enquire was employed using focus group discussion with nine (9) respondents. Secondary data was gleaned from journals and score sheets from various festivals covering the period of 2009 to 2019. Major findings disclose a serious decline in participation level by schools in some particular disciplines. Recommendations are that some thoughtful attention be paid to the decline in these disciplines. Projections are that the future consequences of this decline will not give a true cultural reflection of the Effutu Municipal in this all important national event.

Keywords: Cultural festival, Effutu, basic and second cycle schools, Ghana education service

1. Introduction

The culture of reviewing national programs or events has received little attention from researchers, although recommendations from such reviews assist in strengthening the programs for the development of the nation as a whole. The purpose of a program review is to determine the viability and effectiveness of that program or event (Hanover Research, 2012). The National Cultural Festival for basic schools in Ghana which started in 1989 is one such event that requires review.

Culture provides the knowledge needed to adapt to our surroundings to harness resources from the natural environment (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2003) and to solve problems of living in a particular place. It gives people the skills they need to produce the tools, shelter, clothing and other objects they use to service the community (Gbadegbe & Mensah, 2013; van der Borg & Russo, 2005). As they grow up, children socially learn skills for tracking game, gathering wild plants, making gardens, herding livestock or finding jobs, depending on how people make their living in a particular society.

The National Cultural Festival is run alternatively between basic and the second cycle schools. Hence it is an event that is held biennially for each category of schools (basic and second cycle). The year 2018 saw the 12th edition of second cycle school's cultural festival which was held at Koforidua in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The year 2019 saw the 16th edition of the basic school's cultural festival held at Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. The rationale for holding the National Cultural Festival is to inculcate into the pupils the habit of positively contributing to national development aspirations.

The National Cultural Festival has two (2) main disciplines, which are performing and visual arts. Under the performing arts discipline are the performance of choral music, sight singing, drum language, poetry recital, dance and drama in English. The visual arts category usually takes the form of exhibitions showcasing painting, still life drawing, sewing, paper craft, and cook art.

Each competing year there is a theme, compulsory song and dance that guides activities of the National Cultural Festival taking into consideration the host region. For example, Asafo and Osoode were chosen for the 16th edition of the basic schools' cultural festival held in Cape Coast in 2019.

Due to the limited reviews of events of this nature, it has become imperative to take a critical look at the event as it is held in the Effutu Municipal area. The study investigates the success of the event, its strengths and challenges and finally offers suggestions for similar future events. The Effutu Municipal is one of the seven (7) Municipalities in the Central Region of Ghana, having Winneba as its capital. The Municipality has forty-two (42) government basic and Junior High Schools (Effutu Municipal Education Directorate, 2019). In the arena of Education, the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate covers Winneba township and some villages dotted around Winneba, comprising Ateitu, Osubonpanyin,

Gyaahadze, Gyangyanadze, Atekyedo, Ansaful, Akosua Village, New Winneba and Essuekyir. The Municipality has also been divided into three circuits namely; East, Central and West Circuits respectively.

2. Methodology

The study employed the qualitative research design by taking the case of the Effutu Municipal. The population was drawn from local stakeholders in education who are directly connected to the organization of the National Cultural Festival activities in schools. The simple random and purposive sample techniques were employed for respondents. The total sample size was nine (9) respondents; comprising one (1) personnel from the Effutu Municipal Education Office, three (3) school administrators/Heads of basic schools, three (3) school-based cultural teachers, two (2) members from the local organizing committee for the National cultural festival. The main data collection instruments were focus group discussion and observation, while secondary data was gleaned from journals and score sheets from the Ghana Education Service, Effutu Municipal for various festivals held over the period covering 2009 to 2019. Data was analyzed thematically. Three main questions guided this study: *What has been the participation level for the various disciplines? At the Municipal level what challenges have been faced in the organization and execution of the National Cultural Festival? What successes have the municipal chalked from 2009 to 2019 as part of the National Cultural Festival?*

3. Discussion of Findings

Through the score sheets of the cultural festival competition from 2009 to 2019 held in the Effutu Municipal, the following findings were made for the first research question. The score sheets were collected from the education's cultural coordinator for the Effutu Municipal. These score sheets helped to gather data on the various schools that had participated in the national cultural festival from 2009 to 2019, the marks obtained by each school in the various disciplines and even the positions obtained in the competition at the municipal level.

3.1. Participation Levels

Scholars in the area of the arts have indicated the role the arts play in the cultural, social, emotional and even economical development of the members of each community (Aibie, 2017; Amoako-Atta, 2001; Ebeli, 2018). The participation level per discipline can be seen in *Table 1*. It can be seen from this table that the performing arts disciplines are itemized as choral music, sight singing, drum language, dance, poetry, and drama in English while the visual arts disciplines of painting, still life drawing, sewing, paper craft, and cook art have been grouped into exhibition. Out of *Table 1*, reference will be made to the various disciplines.

	Discipline	Various Years					
		2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
1	Choral Music	7	6	6	3	1	1
2	Sight Singing	5	4	3	2	1	4
3	Drum Language	3	5	4	5	2	3
4	Dance	5	7	7	2	1	2
5	Drama in English	0	0	3	4	3	4
6	Poetry	7	12	14	10	3	4
7	Exhibition	9	12	10	11	14	14

Table 1: Participation Levels of Schools per Discipline from 2009 – 2019

Under Choral Music it was observed that in 2009, seven (7) schools presented themselves to partake in the choral music competition. In 2011 and 2013 the participation level reduced to six (6) schools for each year. In 2015 there was a deeper downward trend to three (3) schools that performed in the choral music. In 2017 and 2019 only one school was presented for both years as a choral music group. Under sight singing, years 2009, 2013, 2015, and 2017 had five (5), four (4), three (3), two (2), one (1), participation by schools respectively. This shows a serious decline in this discipline. In 2019, the situation was encouraging; there was an increase in participation levels to 4 schools for the sight singing. Drum language had a fluctuating pattern of three (3) schools in 2009 to five (5) schools in 2011, then four (4) schools in 2013 and then five schools in 2015. Like the choral music and sight singing 2017 also saw a decrease from the previous year to two (2) participating school and in 2019 there was a little boost to three (3) participating schools in the drum language discipline. Dance started very well in 2009 with five participating schools. The next two years, 2011 and 2013 saw an increase to 7 schools for each year. This interesting increase suddenly declined to two (2) schools in 2015, one (1) school in 2017 and finally two schools in 2019 for participation in dance. Drama in English became one of the disciplines from 2013. That year and 2015 saw three (3) and four (4) schools participating respectively in each year. A similar pattern was repeated in 2017 and 2019 in the participation of schools in the drama in English discipline. Poetry started with seven (7) participating schools in 2009 and increased to 12 schools in 2011. The following year, 2013 still saw an increase, which gave that year fourteen (14) participating schools. This interest by schools in poetry declined to ten (10) participating schools in 2015. This decline went further to three (3) and four (4) participating schools in 2017 and 2019. The last but not the least is the exhibition of visual art works in the area of painting, still life drawing, sewing, paper craft, and cook art. From a starting participation of nine (9) schools in 2009, it increased to twelve (12) in 2011, had a little decline to ten (10) schools in 2013, an increase to eleven (11) schools in 2015, and finally an increase to fourteen (14) schools in 2017 which was also maintained in 2019.

Figure 1: Over All Participation Frequency Levels of School in the Various Disciplines from 2009 – 2019

Figure 1 shows the number of times schools have participated in the various disciplines covering the 2009 to 2019 period. Choral music has $f = 24$, sight singing $f = 19$, drum language $f = 23$, dance $f = 23$, poetry $f = 49$, exhibition $f = 70$, and drama in English $f = 14$.

Figure 2: Participation Levels of Schools per the Festival Years

Figure 2 shows the school participation levels for each year. It can be seen that 2009 $f = 36$ schools, 2011 $f = 45$ schools, 2013 $f = 47$ schools, 2015 $f = 36$ schools, 2017 $f = 26$ schools, and 2019 $f = 32$ schools. It can be observed that in 2015 and 2017, there were falls in the participation levels by schools in the municipal. However, from 2015 to 2019, the participation levels have been fluctuating.

Generally, as indicated in the findings, participation by schools is not too encouraging. The participating decline in some of the disciplines may result in the the extinction of these disciplines which may eventually head towards a nose dive of the National Cultural Festival in the Effutu Municipal area. Another cause for worry of such decline in participation by schools is that the performance level of the municipal at the various levels of the competition (zonal, regional, national) will not be a true reflection of the performance level of the municipal in a particular discipline. If a discipline can have at least three schools participating, it will strengthen the competition level and the best school will be selected to represent the municipal at the various levels of the competition. However, in the cases that are presented in the findings, where one school is presented for a discipline, that school will automatically be selected to represent the municipal at the various levels of the competition. The consequences of the latter are that chances of the municipal winning even at the zonal level is very low.

3.2. Challenges

The following findings were identified for the second question on the challenges faced by the municipal in the organization and execution of the national festival. For this question a focus group discussion was held with nine respondents; comprising one (1) personnel from the Effutu Municipal Education Office, three (3) school administrators/Heads of basic schools, three (3) school-based cultural teachers, two (2) members from the local organizing committee for the National cultural festival. The discussion was recorded and transcribed for analysis. After several reviews of the discussion, comments were filtered into four (4) thematic categories: challenges with rehearsals, challenges with time, challenges with finances, and challenges with lack of motivation.

3.3. Challenges with Rehearsals

Moving into the challenges faced in organizing the students for the completion, all three school-based cultural teachers expressed great frustration when asked about the reality of the rehearsal environment. The main limitation raised during the discussion by the school-based cultural teachers was that of disciplines that required group rehearsals (choral music, dance, drama). The three interviewees shared similar descriptions: 'It can be very challenging putting the groups together,' 'Getting committed students to make up the four voice parts of the choral music, can be hard,' 'You need a full house before you can start a rehearsal session,' 'It is the same with dance and drama,' 'You hardly start the rehearsal and the time is up.' They also shared possible reasons that contribute to such a challenge. Responses include: Since Effutu is a fishing community, many of the children have to assist their parents to fish or sell the fish at the market, 'Some will tell you they are going to change their cloths, but do not return,' 'When I went home my mother sent me to buy something,' 'I had to fetch water for the house.' Other respondents shared their experience on difficulties with rehearsals: 'I think it's all about parental ignorance,' 'Most of these parents are not educated and don't know the essence of schooling let alone the

arts, 'If some education can be made to the parents on the need for such national events, probably the attitude can change'. As with previous responses, answers revealed a high level of frustration with the school-based cultural teachers.

3.4. Challenges with Time

Another obstacle that hindered the progress of organizing the cultural festival was time. Responses to this include: 'the students don't have a sense of time at all, the time for rehearsal is when they leave their homes to the school premises for rehearsals, 'By the time you have a full house its time to close them, so very little is achieved.' There was also another dimension to the theme of time. The respondents indicated a delay in the release of each year's themes at the National level. The theme for the year determines the content of the song text, the text for the drum language, the script for the poetry, and the script for the drama. Particular dances for each competing year are also determined at the National level. Some of the responses for this include: 'the theme for the year doesn't come early enough for good preparation, coupled with all the challenges of rehearsals, it puts so much pressure on the teachers, 'since the song text is determined by the year's theme, nothing can be done until the theme is received.'

3.5. Challenges with Finance

The last but not the least identified theme in the analysis of the responses received for the challenges faced was financial constraints. This was an interesting theme because it got every respondent giving some submission. Some of the responses include: 'this money thing, hmmm, 'The capitation grant is not released early at all, 'Once there is no money, things become slow, 'Most of the planning involves money, when you ask about it, you are told the money hasn't come.' Most of the respondents indicated that they had to spend money from their own pocket to refresh the students before or after rehearsals just to be able to maintain the attendance of the students. They felt that if they had a little support from the municipal directorate it would really aid in taking care of some of the needs during the initial rehearsals.

3.6. Challenges with lack of Motivation

Just like the challenges with finances, the challenge with lack of motivation was also a very sensitive area of discussion. Respondents spoke with a lot of passion concerning motivation. 'This cultural festival thing demands a lot of sacrifice; sometimes I have to buy some refreshments for the kids just to motivate them to come for rehearsals, 'after school when other teachers are gone home I would be left with the students having rehearsals, 'Since some students live far from the school, I sometimes have to give students money to take transport from their homes to the rehearsal grounds, and no one refunds this money.' Frankly, it is just the respect I have for my head teacher, otherwise I wouldn't take up such responsibilities of teaching the students.' There is no motivation for the teacher or the student; so, commitment levels are low.' When asked about what suggestions they would provide with regards to the motivation these were some of the recommendations: 'If the directorate could pay surprise visits during rehearsals and give some words of encouragement to the students and their teachers it would be good, 'How much will it cost the directorate to supply participating students with some basic refreshment like sachets of water or snack?, 'It is not about putting money in our hands as motivation, if we could adopt some sports processes and provide trophies for winning schools in the various disciplines, then schools would be motivated to compete, 'I share similar thoughts for the teachers, some citations for a good job done will compensate for all the troubles.'

3.7. Successes

The Effutu municipal has not done too bad in successes chalked during the the National Cultural Festival, from 2009 to 2019. Generally, participation by schools in the National Cultural Festivals enhances the training of the students by subjecting them to series of activities which makes them acquire some skills that may be lacking in the classroom studies. These skills once acquired can be very useful in the life of the student in many endeavors. Essel, (2014) investigated teaching of Music and Dance in Junior High Schools, a work in which he vividly highlighted the significance of the arts in the life of the Ghanaian student, its role in national development and restoring moral standards in the society. From 2009 to 2019 the Effutu municipal has participated in six (6) main cultural and restoring moral standards in the society. For each year after participation at the municipal level, the best participants for each discipline are selected to participate at the regional level and when successful the municipal goes further to represent the region during the National level.

	Discipline	Various Years											
		2009		2011		2013		2015		2017		2019	
		R*	N*	R	N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R	N
1	Choral Music	1	4							1	2		
2	Sight Singing	1	3										
3	Drum Language	1	3										
4	Dance					1	3					1	2
5	Drama in English	-	-	-	-			1	3				
6	Poetry	1	3							1	2	1	3
7	Exhibition					1	3	1	2	1	5	1	1

Table 2: Regional and National Achievements of Effutu Municipality from 2009 – 2019

*R Means Regional and *N Means National

From *Table 2*, it can be observed that at the regional level participation, the Effutu municipal took 1st position in 2009 for choral music, sight singing, drum language and poetry. These participants were selected to participate at the National and the achievements were choral placed 4th, while participants for sight singing, drum language and poetry placed 3rd. Still in figure 2, it can be observed that in 2011 there was no discipline that placed 1st at the regional level for which reason Effutu could not participate in any of the disciplines. In 2013, the first position was in Dance and exhibition at the regional level and in that same year these participants placed 3rd at the National level. In 2015, drama in English and exhibition took 1st place at the regional level and at the National level, drama in English placed 3rd while exhibition placed 2nd. In 2017, choral music and poetry placed 1st at the regional level and 2nd at the national level respectively. In that same year, exhibition placed 1st at the regional level and 5th at the National level. Last but not the least in 2019, dance, poetry, and exhibition placed 1st at the regional level and at the national level dance placed 2nd, while poetry placed 3rd and exhibition placed 1st.

The above observation indicates that for Effutu municipal, sight singing, drum language and drama in English have all had the chance to participate at the national level once during the period of 2009 to 2019. Choral music and dance have participated twice while for poetry and exhibition the municipal has participated in each thrice. Analysis of the data on the achievements by the Effutu municipal at the regional and national levels indicate that the municipal could do better when there is a true reflection of better participation during at the municipal level.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ghana National Cultural Festival is a very good initiative that needs to be supported and encouraged as an event for the young growing Ghana child. However, to maximize the full potential of this event it is very important that such events can undergo some form of review or evaluation. These evaluations would identify the shortfalls in the previous events and make adequate preparations for success in future. This current review of National Cultural festival in the Effutu Municipal concludes that in spite of the numerous basic schools in the Municipality, participation of the schools in the biennial cultural festival has seen a downward trend since 2013. Unfortunately, there has not been any attempt at studying or addressing this particular problem of serious decline in the participation of some of the schools in some disciplines during the cultural festival in the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate and the fear is that with time, these disciplines may crash out of basic training and hasten the fall of the benefits of the Ghana National Cultural Festival. Also, the fewer the number of school participation in the various disciplines, the higher the risks of not having a true reflection of the cultural potential of the municipal. Most of the challenges faced by the municipal can be given some attention especially by the Education Directorate. Through the help of the directorate, some of these concerns could be tabled before the National Committee so that the needed assistance could reach the various levels in time for adequate preparations towards the festival. Lastly, if these recommendations are given some attention the Effutu municipal has potential to do better than it is doing now in most of the disciplines at both the regional and national level.

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