THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Mmensoun Ensemble Participation among Female Students of the Department of Music Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

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Abstract:

The study was an investigation into female students' involvement in mmensoun, ensemble in the Department of Music Education, University of Education, Winneba. It sought to find out the motivation as well as the importance of females' participation in traditional ensembles and Through ethnographic research, rooted in the theory of self-determination, 6 female students were purposefully sampled and interviewed on phone calls and WhatsApp platform using semi-structured interview. It was seen that participation of musical activities in the cultural setting of females is a great motivation to unearth the innate abilities of the females. It is concluded that females should be assisted and not stigmatized in all their endeavours to pursue what would give them inner satisfaction that would consequently improve their well-being.

Keywords: Mmensoun, UEW, self-determination, ethnography, organismic integration

1. Introduction

It is traditionally and culturally known that the role of women in any musical practice in Africa has been dominated with singing and dancing. Even in female musical types, accompaniment has always been the prerogative of men. However, recent scholarly documentations have changed the status-quo on their roles in such ensembles. For instance, Ebeli (2015), citing Acheampong (1996) highlighted the monopoly of women in performing music during bragoro (a traditional initiation that usher's a young female into adulthood). Ebeli (2015) reported that 'there were no men, only women played the *dondo* (a traditional drum), drummed, sang and danced' (p.21). This was a report of an event that occurred in the 1910s. Ampene (2005) had also devoted several pages to the role of women in the perpetuation of *nnwomkorɔ* (a music that accompanies Adowa dance) in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions of Ghana, giving credence to prominent personalities who deserve publicity.

Mmensoun ensemble is one of such ensembles which have culturally been the preserve of men. As Arhine (2009) explained, they are traditionally considered sacred and mostly associated with political hierarchy, therefore, women were not made to participate. The belief was that women would contaminate the instrument and render them ineffective, and since one would not tell when a woman was in her menses, the best thing was to forbid them from touching the *mmensoun*. Arhine (2009) vividly explains the nomenclature of the Fante *mmensoun*:

The Fante language has grouped all air-blown instruments as *mmen* (plural) or *aben* (singular), which is very difficult to translate in English. The *mmen* could be trumpets, horns or flutes. They are practically air-blown instruments. Usually, it is the material used in making the instrument, the size or the number of instruments put together in an ensemble that identifies one group of *mmen* from the other; for example, *abentsia* (short horn/trumpet/flute), and *mmensuon* (seven horn/trumpet/ flute. (p.108)

To corroborate what Arhine has explained, etymologically, *mmensoun*, as used by the Fante is from the words *mmen* (horns) and *esoun* (seven). *Mmensoun* therefore means seven horns. The participation of this horn ensemble has been in the hands of men. Indeed, most African cultural environment excludes females because they see females to be impure. The Department of Music Education of the University of Education, Winneba has an established *Mmensoun* ensemble comprising both males and female performers. They are seen performing with power and enthusiasm in University functions as well as at special programmes they are invited to perform. The questions then arise? What has been the motivation of these female student performers in the ensemble? How has their participation impacted on their general wellbeing and the ensemble as a whole? The paper therefore unravels the motivation behind female's involvement in the *mmensoun* group in the Department and how their participation has influenced the general aesthetic performance of the ensemble.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study was supported with the theory of Self-Determination propounded by Deci and Ryan (2008). In music education and music therapy, Self-determination theory has been used in the works of Valenzuela et al., (2018), Evans and Bonneville-Roussy (2016) as well as Lee et al., (2016). The theory outlines how the concept of human motivation, development, and wellness relate to one's behaviour and wellbeing. Within Self-Determination Theory, two mini theories; Basic Psychological Needs and Organismic Integration Theory connect musical participation and its benefit is perceived. According to the theory of Self-Determination Theory, the internal, external, and contextual factors, combine to influence the fulfillment of needs by either increasing or decreasing individual's motivation to participate. In this manner, how the female students were motivated to participate in a culturally men prerogative ensemble and how they gain some benefits from it is fostered. In other words, motivation and well being of the female participants in musical ensemble are very well placed in the theory of self-determination. Hagger et al. (2006) postulated that Basic psychological needs theory connects how people strive to satisfy three innate needs such as competence, relatedness and autonomy.

In another development, Amanda et al. (2019) citing Ryan and Deci (2000) explained that competence refers to the need to be effective in one's efforts; relatedness concerns being connected socially, and integrated into a social group; and autonomy concerns the need to feel that one's pursuits are self-governed and self-endorsed. Deci and Ryan (2000) assert that needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are universal – they are essential, regardless of culture and life domain. In this regard, the social environment, coupled with the internal and personal factors. They have the opinion that meeting these needs leads to personal growth, vitality, and well-being. Similarly the organismic integration theory differentiates types of motivation and places particular emphasis on the quality of motivation, rather than merely the quantity (Niven & Markland, 2016; McLachlan et al., 2011; Ryan & Connell, 1989). The current study which sought to find out the motivation of female students in Mmensoun ensemble and how their performance has impacted on the general performance behavior and aesthetic representations of such performances is within the context of the theory of self-determination.

3. Related Literature

Literature along the lines of innate talent of female participation in African music, concept of cultural construction, gender asymmetry in Music was reviewed. Related issues with consideration to the general question of male dominance over instrumental musicianship that highlight issues such as male exclusivity, gendered divisions of labour, and gendered space were also considered. The review begins with what the mmsoun ensemble is.

3.1. The Mmensoun

Mmensoun instrument is classified among the aerophone group of African instruments. It originated from the Fante community of Ghana and has the function of giving appellations to royals. They are basically four similar instruments differentiated by their sizes. The following shows the measurements and types of the instruments with their names.

Name	Centimetres	Sound	Size	Role in the Ensemble
Sesɛ	40	F	Small	Lead instrument
Agyesoa,	45	D	Medium	Supporting
ɔfar,	45	G	Medium	Supporting
Otu	50	B-Flat	Big	Supporting

Table 1: Mmensoun Instruments Sizes

Source: Arhine (2009)

Figure 1: From Left; Sesɛ, Agyesoa, ɔfar and Otu

Source: Arhine (2009)

In an ensemble, *agyesoa*, *ɔfar*, and *otu* are doubled to make the number the number seven but in the cultural context, the minimum number in an ensemble is four and the maximum is ten. The current practice as experienced with the mmsoun ensemble at the University of Education, each of the instrument type is increased in number to generate powerful sound and enhance the timber of the performance. Like Arhine (2009) again asserts, that apart from the *sesɛ*

which 'speaks' clearly, all the others are supporting instruments and therefore they could be four or ten depending on the context of performance and what the players want to achieve; and the larger the number of horns in an ensemble the greater the volume of the sound and, the smaller the number of horns in ensemble the lower the volume of the sound. In any case, within the cultural musical practice of the Fante people, the number is limited to seven horns.

3.2. *Innate Talent of Female Participation in African Music*

Musical instruments are significant cultural artefacts invested with a wide range of meanings and powers. Through their presence and through the sound they produce, they have a special ability to transform consciousness. To possess or play a musical instrument is to wield power (Doubleday, 2008). Although all performance may be regarded as a locus of power, performance on musical instruments is often bound up with cultural notion of gender and control (Koskoff, 1996). Gender is one of the most important parameters in human power relations, influencing most aspect of life, and the power play between humans over musical instruments is often enacted along gender lines.

Doubleday (2008) stated that in many different parts of the world there are numerous instruments that girls and women are expected not to touch or play, and female experience of these 'negative relationships' is a logical outcome of instrumental monopolies. When exclusivity is firmly established, it is common for women to accept the negative relationship to an instrument as almost natural. When musical instruments are heavily invested with power, the exclusive relationship may take on an almost 'fetish' (strong attachment to a magically charged object) intensity.

Gendered relationship is rarely egalitarian, and in today's world the realm of musical instruments remains clearly male-dominated. From instrument makers to commercial producers, from sound engineers to orchestral conductors, from patrons to theorists, and right across the span of instrumental performers, women are starkly in the minority (Doubleday, 2008). Similarly, Kartomi (1990) pointed out the conceptualisation and classification of instruments normally abstracts ideas and beliefs from a wider intellectual complex and these discourses have generally been a male preserve. As for the sound mix engineer, this person assumes an important degree of creative control and is almost always male. Doubleday (2008) notes that a female mix engineer and ethnomusicologist, Sandstrom said that issues of power and control are inherent in access to this technology (2000, p. 290). Specifically focusing on instrumental performance, male dominance is still a powerful phenomenon, even if women are currently 'breaking taboos' and playing instruments that were previously male cultural property. Social strictures about gendered divisions of space have frequently supported male instrumental musicianship, keeping women away. Some religious ideologies actually prescribe the exclusion of women from public life (Doubleday, 2008). Another outcome is that women have often been cast into the role of vocalist or dancer. Sometimes they complement male instrument in shared performances, as is common in European and African popular entertainment genres.

Doubleday (2008) again was of the view that, some important cross-cultural phenomena arise from the male dominance over musical instrument in so many performance arenas. One effect is that male instrumental musicianship may emerge as the cultural norm, with the female instrumentalist being seen as 'unthinkable' or deviant. The very image of a woman playing an instrument may be seen as 'weird', awkward or laughable. In relation to these, it is however possible for women to experience comfort, appreciation and social approval in their role as instrumentalist.

3.3. *Concept of Cultural Construction and Gender Asymmetry in Music*

In terms of feminine constructions, Peoples and Bailey (2011) hold the view that human beings think and act within the framework of a cultural system that affects worldviews and social behaviour among others. As seen in the work of Ebeli (2015), this concept of construction of feminine is prevalent among the Avatime people of Ghana as feminine is culturally defined in the locality. Avatime perspective about gender is based on how males and females perceive and define themselves and one another. The Avatime hold a notion about what it means to be a woman, what roles are seen as appropriate for women. 'These dimensions of femaleness are learned during socialization rather than fixed at birth' (Peoples & Bailey, 2011, p.213). In the light of this, cultural conceptions of femininity and masculinity matter to the Avatime. Hence, their social behaviour is affected by the norms, categories, worldviews, symbols and other ideas and beliefs that influence their conception about femininity. Indeed, it is as a result of this that it is important to find out from the female students their motivation for engaging in mmensoun performance.

Furthermore, several scholars have substantiated such cultural constructions about gender roles (Anku, 2009; Burns, 2009; Ampene, 2005; Charry, 2000). Gender based asymmetry in music is also manifested in the work of Sakata (1987) quoted in Sarkissian (1999) who notes that 'in Afghanistan musical instruments are generally played by men' (p.343). The issue of gender differences in musical roles as they operate in indigenous music operates in classical as well as popular music spheres (Sarkissian, 1999). These constructions are linked to hegemonic processes of gender type of cultural reproduction and resistance. In the face of such cultural typecasts females in contemporary times have proven beyond every doubt that they are capable of performing some roles traditionally reserved for men. This is evident in academic institutions where males and females are required to undertake the same task in drumming for assessment. Hence, this standpoint must inspire music practitioners to break away from the classification of music and differential roles based on the premise of seemingly natural biological differences.

Participation of women in drumming is generally prohibited in both Akan and Ewe societies (Anku, 2009). Meanwhile, women constitute the core of the chorus and dance in several ensembles for mixed groups while men lend a supporting hand as drummers in female ensembles. Ampene (2005) also highlighted a similar cultural experience among male instrumentalists and female singers and dancers in *nwomkorɔ* ensemble. This phenomenon is prevalent among many African cultures. Most African musical cultures including the Kpelle and Vai of Liberia; and the Akan and Ewe of

Ghana assign chorus singing to be a feminine activity, and instrument playing to be a male activity. Such inspiration explains the rationale for bringing in men to play instruments while women take charge of singing and dancing (Ebeli, 2015). We perceive the source of this limitation to be lack of motivation. Many women in rural communities are noted to control economic capital (Acheampong, 1996). It can be argued that the financial outcome generated from their trading activities serves as the motivation to pursue and sustain their businesses. Evidence of motivation to create music can be found in the accounts of Burns (2009) which states that jeli (female musicians) among the Mande and the female *nwonkorɔ* singers among the Akan receive financial incentives, and this fuels their interest to compose new songs. It is important for women to strive hard to come out from their shells otherwise cultural taboos may restrict them from supplanting sustenance activities with music. Women play very important roles in our society, more often than not, the aesthetic nature of our culture has been overlooked relegating some women to the background. These perceptions that women have on African instruments must change because their role is essential to the development of aesthetic nature on African traditional ensembles.

3.4. Inability of Women to Participate in Traditional Instrumental Ensembles

According to Onwubiko (2016), decisions may often be taken about what a person thinks or their core beliefs such as choosing lifestyle, religious affiliation, or political position. Another decision is to choose the instrument to be studied. Everyday, people are inundated with decisions, big or small. What has been discussed so far is in line with Cognitive psychology motivation theories which share strong ties with cognitive learning theories. We examine two cognitive motivation theories, attribution theory and self-efficacy theory. Both emphasize that learners need to know, understand and appreciate what they are doing in order to become motivated (Onwubiko, 2016).

Onwubiko further explained that, self-efficacy describes how people's beliefs about their capacities to perform at designated levels influence their choices. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes (Bandura, 2010). In contrast, people who doubt about their own capabilities shy away from difficult task which they view as personal threats. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. This is because they view insufficient performance as deficient aptitude and does not require much failure for them to lose faith in their capabilities. They fall easy victim to stress and depression (Bandura, 2010). Also, attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at casual explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it combines to form a casual judgement (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Attribution theory is concerned with how and why ordinary people explain events as they do.

3.4.1. Gender Stereotyping

On the issue of segregation by gender, career and sustainability in terms of instrumental performance, some scholars have given exposure about them (Onwubiko, 2016; Abeles & Porter, 1978). They had the opinion after investigating students' choice of instrument that, gender stereotyping of instrument influences a respondent's choice, to examine timbre preferences in relation to the student's gender using synthesized sounds rather than natural instrument timbres.

Similarly, Bayley (2000) researched in music education and concluded that gender stereotyping of music instruments is consistent across age and grade levels both in tertiary institutions that is, specific instruments are consistently identified as masculine or feminine regardless of subjects' ages. In the case of mmenoun, both males and females have the same roles to play in the performance.

3.4.2. Intrinsic Motivation Influencing Choice

Onwubiko (2016) stated that access to the arts is intrinsic to a high quality of life. Intrinsic motivation is the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressure, or rewards. Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in a behavior because it is personally, rewarding, performing an activity for its own sake rather than the desire for some external reward (Onwubiko, 2016).

Examples of intrinsic motivation given included:

- Participating in a sport activity because you find the activity enjoyable.
- Solving a word puzzle because you find the challenge fun and interesting.

3.4.3. Extrinsic Motivation Influencing Choice

Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that comes from outside an individual. The motivating factors are external, or outside, rewards such as money or grades. These rewards provide satisfaction and pleasure that the task itself may not provide. Motivation can come from the outside, such as the motivation to win medals, receive financial rewards and attract attention from the media. This is known as external, or extrinsic, motivation because it involves participation in something for some kind of reward that is external to the process of participation (Onwubiko, 2016). In conclusion, these are some of the factors influencing female's inability to participate in traditional instruments.

4. Methodology

The research design used for this traditional research is ethnographic design. As Brewer (2000) explained, ethnographic research is a qualitative method where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in

their real-life environment. According to him, ethnography was popularized by anthropology, but it is used across a wide range of social sciences. A total number of 6 female mmensoun players were selected purposefully from a population of 20 where 14 of them are males. These 6 female students have been very active in the performances of the group.

Figure 2: Mmensoun Ensemble of the Department Leading Procession at 23rd Congregation of UEW

Interview was used as the main instrument to collect the data for the study. The interview was semi structured and therefore no strict formalized list of questions was followed.

Before the data collection, we spoke to the participants about the research and explained the objectives to them when they were on campus. It was very easy to speak to them since we had been with them for almost three years. The research coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, so phone calls WhatsApp platforms were the main tools used for the interview sessions after verbal consent was obtained from all the respondents. We spent an average time of 30 minutes per participant while we used the phone recorder to record all conversations for transcription and analysis. The interview detailed information on their motivation for joining the group and how their participation has impacted on how people perceive the group. The responses were recorded while other follow up questions were noted in a notebook. Data collected on the field with the instrument and tools were analyzed and inferences drawn from it.

Figure 3

5. Results and Discussion of Findings

The outcome of the interview conducted among respondents is presented under subheadings according to the research questions, and all that were gathered during the interview on the field regarding each research question were equally presented exactly as each respondent had rendered her view.

Participants revealed that their motivation was from their knowledge in musical performance from their pre-tertiary school days. Some also indicated that, prior to their admissions to the university, they had the opportunity of participating in a Vacation Music Camp programme organized at the Department of Music Education, University of Education, and Winneba. That built their interest to taste most of the ensembles in the Department, and consequently, became part of the Mmensoun ensemble when they finally got admission.

Figure 4: UEW Mmensoun Group Captured at a Congregation

One participant for instance said this:

It was fun playing mmenoun at university functions, an instrument which has been the prerogative of men for a long time. I learnt music at the Senior High School but I did not find an ensemble like this to participate, however, attending the University here made me gain more interest to join the ensemble. (Respondent 2)

Another respondent said:

I have the talent of blowing. I can play trumpet, so being exposed to the playing of mmenoun was an easy task for me. I really enjoy playing it because I love it. (Respondent 4)

Most of the respondents attributed their innate talents to interest as well as upbringing they had during infancy. As reported by one of them:

I grew in a community where music making is the hub of the cultural heritage of the people. I grew in Volta region and I had the chance of participating in those communal traditional musical activities. It was very common as we sang, played instruments and danced to our drumming every evening. (Respondent 5)

Indeed, according to the respondents, their upbringing training goals in music as well as those ones learnt in school have motivated them to belong to an ensemble like this.

The data collected on how they have benefited from participating in the ensemble indicated that they have improved their senses and their general well being. Like the first respondent stated:

instrument playing increase the memory capability of human beings, in view of this females are supposed to play any instrument of their choose. In a way of reducing stress in the female's system, playing instrument is the best way, so also females should be allowed to play and perform different role in any ensemble that they find themselves. (Respondent 1)

The second respondent also believed that when women take part in mmenoun playing it adds beauty to their performance in whole. She explained again that:

Because of the flexibility of the females' body, dance moves become very simple and easy for them. In other ways too, females' involvement can ease the men in the way that, they can assist the men in teaching other people how to play the instrument also. She ended by saying females play important role in the field of life and their mere presence causes marvelous change. (Respondent 2)

The third respondent said that, academically playing the mmenoun helps her to learn more about things concerning culture which is the way of life a group of people live. She also said that performing the instrument helps her to really appreciate traditional music very well. According to her:

it gives me the opportunity of teaching others when the need arises. It has given me exposure in the university environs and outside university campus as well. (Respondent 3)

They were of the opinion that, when females are part of the mmenoun group, it brings out the beauty and variety in addition. It therefore breaks the prerogative characteristics of the male dominance and presents females well enough in our traditional music making. Respondent 5 had this to say:

It was also said that it is very important for females to participate in the mmenoun ensemble in the sense that, active role females' play in the mmenoun ensemble defuses the notion people have about the mmenoun being for males. It also brings about gender equality. (Respondent 5)

According to respondent 5, the sustainable development goals; the 2030 goals, under the goal 5, talks about gender equality, which aims at ending discrimination against women. Based on this, she strongly insisted that women should be allowed to participate in most musical ensembles to benefit them and the entire nation as a whole.

It is true to state that culture should not undermine abilities of females over instruments in school environment (Lun, Fischer & Ward, 2010). Similarly, females should keep fear and panic out and work hard as the men do in order for them to be good and even be better like the men. Most of the respondents had culturally informal and formal training and that created the motivation for them to join any ensemble of their choice including the mmenoun ensemble. Eraut (2004) commented on informal training:

A parallel account might describe a set of impressions being extracted from the flow of experience and committed to long-term memory with or without further reflection. Concurrent or later attention to this

set of impressions may treat them as constituting an event or episode and link them to other episodes construed as related, possibly even to thoughts about those episodes. (p.251)

Clearly, those experiences gained from informal training and formal training will be with them and serve as catalyst to embark on certain threshold of events. Suffice it to say that gone were the days when females were not allowed to have access to education but now due to modernization, females are allowed to school to any level of their choice without restrictions. When females are able to do away with panic and fear, they can show themselves worthy of performing after gaining such experiences (Sullivan, 2002). Female's participation in traditional ensembles really begins from being encouraged through training where they can release their talents through imaginative and constructive manner to the benefit of themselves and their community.

It is worth stating that females and males are considered equal in the field of academics, so if the notion of culture and tradition restrict them from developing their talents, then they will end up failing. Due to enlightenment, females should climb high the academic ladder than rules and regulations (Coughlin, Wingard, Hollihan & Hollihan, 2005) because women have the courage to do everything, they set their minds on to do. This gives them some innate abilities released naturally and intrinsically towards everything they do in life.

Figure 5: Some of the Female Performers of Mmensoun Who Participated in the Study?

Roles of females in many musical ensembles cannot be overemphasized. Females play monumental role in any musical ensemble, be it men oriented or women oriented. Ensemble participation involves both musical and social collaboration. Various issues have emerged from this study, such as the importance of leadership in group work, the ways in which individual personalities and social stereotyping might affect group. These females have brought their knowledge to bear by beautifying the performance with their flexible and emotional facial expressions. Similarly, the presence of females in the mmensoun group makes the ensemble unique from other groups who do not have female performers. People become happy while the performers become satisfied. As Noddings (2003) recently underscored, we rarely talk about happiness in educational circles, yet happiness can be understood as an organizational goal of human life. Happy people are healthier, more successful, and more socially engaged (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Figure 6: A Cross Section of the Mmensoun Group in a Performance

Indeed, participating in the mmensoun ensemble has improved their senses and their general well being as Coffman and Adamek (1999) purported. Human beings also have an amazing capacity to learn new skills and adapt to new environments (Green & Bavelier, 2008), and so these females revealed how their brains are developed through the learning of such skills. Just like views from the respondents, an instrument playing increases mental alertness and that is why the ladies also tried playing some *mmensoun*.

Figure 7: Two of the Female Performers with Some of The Male Counterpart in a Colorful Outfit

Through the dance activities involved, they experienced reduced stress anytime they joined the ensemble for a performance. This is very true because a rapidly growing body of work suggests that aerobic exercise of any sort may benefit a range of cognitive abilities, particularly in older persons, with consistently positive results having been found in many cross-sectional studies (Green & Bavelier, 2008). Positive effects have been documented on tasks as varied as dual-task performance by scholars such as Colcombe and Kramer (2003), Hillman, Erickson and Kramer (2008) as well as Kramer and Erickson (2007).

6. Conclusions

Ability of females to perform musical ensembles is dependent on innate capabilities as a factor of motivation. These innate capabilities are acquired through education as well as their participation in most traditional ensembles in their communities. Their involvement usually beautifies the performance and adds more variety to the ensemble as a whole. Their flexible bodies, artistic abilities and antics usually catch eyes of much audience and give them satisfaction. Consequently, their general well being is enhanced due to inner and satisfaction and aerobic benefits. Thus, self-determination unfolds in this regard making participants of musical ensembles fulfill their needs by having quality motivation. As a result of this, females need support in their communities to participate in their music heritage. Women in general, play vital roles in our communities and institution they find themselves. In this regard, females of the mmensuon group as well as women in Ghana and Africa in general should be allowed to exhibit their innate talents in where ever they find themselves, and in any traditional ensemble that they join. They have to take education seriously as that will pave the way for a successful self sufficient in life.

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