

COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMANCE OF THE MANGOR AGE GRADE OF THE EJAGHAM PEOPLE, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research work entitled “Communicative Performance of the Mangor Age Grade of the Ejagham People, Cross River State, Nigeria” examined the role of the Mangor age grade in the Ejagham community of Oban. It also explored the performances of the Mangor age grade and their values and significance to the

Ejagham people. The study was grounded in Performance Ethnography Theory, propounded by Norman K. Denzin in 2003. The study adopted ethnography as its method, using observation and interviews to collect data. The population of the study comprised of Oban community chiefs, youths, and members of the Mangor age grade. The study was conducted in Oban community with a sample size of 30 participants. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to gather data from people. Findings indicated that the Mangor age grade comprised of individuals born between 1987 and 1989 in Oban. The age grade played important roles in socialization, community development, cultural practices, and the transmission of values. Their outing, which occurred during the planting season of maize, involved performances of dances, songs, oral narratives, and instrumentation. These performances created a platform for negotiation and the promotion of unity, cultural identity, heritage, and values among the Ejagham people. The study concluded that the Mangor age grade, through its performances, contributed to the shaping, construction, and definition of Ejagham cultural identity and performance traditions in the face of modernity and globalization. The study recommended that local government authorities, cultural custodians, and community leaders should actively support and sustain Mangor age-grade performances through funding, cultural festivals, and documentation initiatives in order to preserve Ejagham cultural heritage and ensure its continuity for future generations.

Key words: Age grade, Communicative, Ejagham, Mangor, People

Introduction

The Ejagham people are one of the indigenous ethnic nationalities found predominantly in Cross River State, Nigeria, and parts of Cameroon. They are widely known for their rich cultural heritage, traditional institutions, and complex social organization which have remained significant in sustaining communal identity and indigenous knowledge systems. Historical accounts trace the origin of the Ejagham people to the broader Bantu migration across Africa. Talbot (1969) observes that the ancestors of the Ejagham migrated from Northeast Africa through the Green Sahara region before settling around the Lake Ejagham area. According to him, this migration was connected to the expansion of Sahel agriculture during the African Neolithic period following the desiccation of the Sahara around 3500 BCE. Similarly, Ozar (2018) explains that the Ejagham people later migrated from the Lake Ejagham region in present-day Cameroon into

different parts of Cross River State in search of fertile land, salt deposits, and security, leading to the formation of various Ejagham-speaking communities.

The Ejagham people share a common language and cultural heritage despite the existence of several dialectal variations. Takon (2021) notes that the Ejagham, also referred to as the Ekoi, belong to the Bantu linguistic stock and possess a homogeneous cultural identity expressed through their religion, festivals, arts, social institutions, and traditional practices. The Ejagham are found in communities such as Ikom, Etung, Boki, Akamkpa, and parts of Ogoja in Cross River State, as well as in areas of Cameroon including Ekok, Eyumojock, and Mfum. Across these communities, the people maintain similarities in their worldview, social structure, agricultural practices, and indigenous systems of communication.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ejagham civilization is its contribution to indigenous African communication systems. Talbot (1969) argues that the Ejagham civilization had attained a sophisticated level of social and cultural development as early as 200 AD, evident in the existence of the Ikom monoliths and the Nsibidi symbolic writing system. Nsibidi, in particular, served as a traditional medium of communication through symbols, signs, and coded expressions used in rituals, governance, social interaction, and secret societies. This demonstrates that communication among the Ejagham people transcends ordinary speech and incorporates symbolic and performative elements embedded within their cultural life.

The Ejagham culture is also characterized by elaborate festivals, ceremonies, and traditional institutions that function as important avenues for communication and social interaction. Festivals such as the New Yam Festival and the Akachak Festival among the Oban Ejagham people involve rituals, songs, dances, masquerades, drumming, and dramatic displays which communicate communal values, spirituality, and collective identity. Ikey (2021) observes that the Akachak Festival was established to promote unity,

social cohesion, and cultural preservation among the Oban Ejagham people. Through these performances, cultural meanings are transmitted from one generation to another while reinforcing communal bonds.

Another important cultural institution among the Ejagham people is the Nkim tradition, which marks the transition of maidens into womanhood. Takon (2021) explains that Nkim serves as a traditional institution for training young women in moral conduct, domestic responsibilities, and social values. The ceremony culminates in public performances involving songs, dances, and symbolic movements that communicate the virtues of womanhood, family life, and communal responsibility. These performances reveal the extent to which communication in Ejagham society is deeply rooted in performance, symbolism, and oral tradition.

Among the various traditional institutions of the Ejagham people, the age-grade system occupies a central position in social organization and cultural continuity. Age grades are social groupings comprising individuals born within a particular period who collectively perform communal duties and participate in cultural activities. Edet (2022) notes that age grades among the Ejagham people serve as important institutions for leadership training, community development, social control, and cultural preservation. Through these age grades, members learn communal values, norms, and responsibilities while contributing to the welfare of the society.

One notable age grade among the Ejagham people is the Mangor age grade. The Mangor age grade plays significant roles in the social and cultural life of the community through participation in ceremonies, festivals, sanitation exercises, conflict resolution, and community development projects. Beyond these responsibilities, the age grade functions as a medium of indigenous communication through its performative activities. Members communicate ideas, values, and communal expectations through songs, chants, dances, proverbs, costumes, symbols, gestures, and dramatic performances during public ceremonies and social gatherings.

Communicative performance refers to the use of verbal and non-verbal expressive forms to convey meaning within a social and cultural context. In African traditional societies, performance serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for education, socialization, historical preservation, mobilization, and social criticism (Ayuk, 2020). Among the Ejagham people, communicative performances by age grades constitute an important aspect of indigenous communication systems through which cultural knowledge and communal identity are preserved and transmitted.

The communicative performance of the Mangor age grade therefore represents an important aspect of Ejagham cultural expression. Through songs, dances, oral narratives, drumming patterns, costumes, and ritual displays, the Mangor age grade communicates messages relating to unity, morality, leadership, social responsibility, and cultural identity. These performances also create avenues for interaction, participation, and collective consciousness within the community. However, the influence of modernization, urbanization, Western education, and Christianity has contributed to the gradual decline of many traditional institutions and indigenous communication practices among the Ejagham people (Ikey, 2021). As younger generations increasingly adopt modern lifestyles, aspects of traditional communicative performances associated with age grades face the risk of extinction.

Statement of the Problem

The Mangor Age-Grade is a crucial component of Ejagham culture and society that plays significant role in indigenous performance, entertainment and education of the community members. However, this institution seems to face numerous challenges that threaten its relevance, effectiveness and continuity and undermine its ability to fulfill its traditional functions. These hindering factors include erosion of culture, aging of the once active population, disconnection from traditional cultural practices, loss of interest in local traditions, and lack of documentation on age grades and

their significance in the Ejagham society. Moreover, despite its remarkable role and importance, there is a lack of in-depth research on the Mangor Age-Grade, its current state, and its impact on the Ejagham community. This research therefore seeks to fill this gap and address these problems in order to enhance the role of "Mangor" among the people

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the performances in the Mangor Age-Grade of the Ejagham People. Hence, the major objectives of the study are outlined as follows:

- i. To identify and analyze the performances of the Mangor Age-Grade in Ejagham society and culture
- ii. To highlight the communicative role of the performances (dance and songs) in Mangor Age-grade in promoting values, unity and cultural heritage in Ejagham
- iii. To examine the values and significances of the Mangor age-grade in Ejagham society and culture

Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study

- i. What are the major performances of the Mangor Age-Grade in Ejagham society and culture, and how do these performances function within the community?
- ii. What are the communicative role of the performances (dance and songs) in Mangor Age-grade in promoting values, unity and cultural heritage in Ejagham
- iii. What are the values and cultural significances of the Mangor Age-Grade in Ejagham society and culture?

Review of Related Literature

Age grade and Performance in African Societies

Age-grade is a traditional system of social organization in which individuals within a particular age range are grouped together and assigned collective responsibilities, social functions, and cultural roles within the community. In many African societies, age-grade institutions serve as mechanisms for socialization, leadership development, cultural transmission, and communal integration. Contemporary African scholars argue that age grades remain significant indigenous institutions because they promote unity, discipline, communal participation, and preservation of cultural identity (Aguilar & Immason, 2020).

Age-grade systems in traditional African societies are usually structured hierarchically, with each group occupying a distinct social position and performing specific communal duties. Members progress through different stages marked by initiation rites and ceremonial activities that signify transition from one social status to another. Ayuk (2020), in his study of Ejagham traditional institutions, observes that age grades provide frameworks through which individuals develop identity, social consciousness, and a sense of belonging within the community. According to him, age-grade institutions also function as channels for transmitting indigenous values, customs, oral traditions, and leadership skills from older generations to younger ones. Performance, on the other hand, refers to the enactment of cultural expressions through music, dance, drama, ritual, songs, chants, gestures, and symbolic displays before an audience. In African societies, performance serves communicative, educational, religious, and entertainment purposes. Contemporary performance scholars maintain that indigenous performances are culturally encoded activities through which communities express social realities, preserve collective memory, and negotiate identity (Okpiliya, 2020). Performance in traditional African

communities therefore extends beyond entertainment to include rituals, festivals, ceremonies, oral narratives, masquerades, and age-grade displays that communicate communal values and historical experiences.

Traoré (2021) explains that festivals and communal performances in Africa integrate different artistic forms such as music, dance, costume, storytelling, drumming, and dramatic enactment into a unified cultural expression. These performances are often participatory and symbolic, reflecting the worldview, spirituality, and social structure of the people. Similarly, Nketia (2019) notes that African performances are deeply rooted in oral tradition and function as media for education, moral instruction, social regulation, and cultural continuity. Oral performance occupies a central position in indigenous African performance traditions. Finnegan (2018) describes oral performance as a composite art involving speech, songs, poetry, rhythm, gesture, facial expressions, audience participation, and dramatic action. Such performances are usually presented during festivals, coronations, initiation rites, weddings, funerals, and communal ceremonies. Through these performative expressions, communities preserve oral history, reinforce social norms, and communicate cultural values across generations. Among the Ejagham people of Cross River State, age-grade performances are important aspects of indigenous communication and cultural preservation. Members of age grades participate actively in communal festivals, marriage ceremonies, funeral rites, sanitation exercises, and traditional celebrations through songs, dances, drumming, and processional displays. One significant example is the performance of Moninkim music and dance during marriage and coming-of-age ceremonies, where age-grade members collectively perform to celebrate womanhood, communal identity, and social continuity.

Communicative performance further emphasize the role of creative performance in transmitting social messages and promoting development

within communities. Igbe, Ntui, and Eneji (2026) observe that “during role-play activities, participants were able to reflect on their interests and make informed career choices, indicating that the approach fosters self-awareness and decision-making skills”(p.508) This suggests that performance-based communication and creative dramatic activities are effective tools for personal development, social learning, and value orientation within society.. This means that creative drama and performative expressions function as participatory communication systems that encourage communal interaction, cultural consciousness, and social transformation. This perspective is relevant to the communicative performances of the Mangor age grade because their music, dance, songs, and symbolic displays serve not only as entertainment but also as mediums for communication, education, and cultural preservation within Ejagham society.

Empirical Review

Enaikele, M. D. (2025). *An ethnographic study of the roles of age grade in South Ibie, Etsako West Local Government of Edo State, Nigeria.* NIU Journal of Social Sciences, 11(3), 15–23.

The study investigated the functions of age-grade institutions among the South Ibie people of Edo State using ethnographic methods. Data were collected through participant observation and interviews. Findings revealed that age grades contribute significantly to community development, social control, conflict resolution, cultural preservation, and social cohesion. The study concluded that age-grade institutions remain relevant despite modernization and social change. The study concentrated on the socio-political functions of age grades and paid little attention to their communicative performances through songs, dances, and symbolic expressions. It also did not focus on the Ejagham people or the Mangor Age Grade.

Ita, O. O. (2022). *The communicativeness of Okobo traditional dance performances. Asia-Africa Journal of Academic Research and Review*, 2, 77–90.

This study examined traditional dance as a medium of communication among the Okobo people of Akwa Ibom State. Through documentary and library research, the author found that dance serves as a cultural language through which social values, beliefs, identity, and communal aspirations are communicated. The study emphasized the importance of indigenous dance in sustaining cultural heritage. Although the study addressed communication through dance, it did not investigate age-grade institutions as performance groups. It also neglected the communicative roles of songs and age-grade performances among the Ejagham people.

Ode, G. (2020). *A semiotic study of the performance rituals of Igede dance group: The case of Aita Musical Ensemble. Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria*, 23(1), 58–69.

The study employed semiotic analysis to examine the communicative signs embedded in the rituals and performances of the Aita Musical Ensemble among the Igede people. Findings revealed that gestures, costumes, ritual objects, and dance movements function as communicative symbols that convey cultural meanings and social values. The study focused on ritual symbolism and non-verbal communication in a dance ensemble rather than age-grade institutions. It also did not investigate the communicative functions of performance in promoting unity and cultural heritage among the Ejagham.

Okoro, J. C., & Okoro, B. D. (2010). *The peculiar significance of 'Ese' music and dance in Mbaise community of Imo State, Nigeria. Journal of Communication and Culture*, 1(3), 37–47.

The researchers explored the social and cultural significance of Ese music and dance in Mbaise community. Through interviews and participant observation, the study found that music and dance function as channels for transmitting indigenous knowledge, social values, and communal identity. The study further revealed that traditional performances strengthen social integration and cultural continuity. The research concentrated on music and dance generally and did not address age-grade organizations as communicative institutions. It also did not focus on the Ejagham cultural setting.

Ozah, M. A. (2015). *Moninkim: A symbiotic performance of ritual, music, and dance by the Ejagham people of Nigeria and Cameroon. Ethnomusicology*, 59(3), 421–449.

Ozah examined the Moninkim performance tradition among the Ejagham people of Nigeria and Cameroon. The study revealed that ritual, music, dance, and performance serve as important mechanisms for cultural continuity, socialization, identity formation, and transmission of indigenous knowledge. The researcher emphasized the role of performance in sustaining Ejagham cultural heritage. Although the study focused on the Ejagham people, it examined Moninkim female initiation performances rather than the Mangor Age Grade. The communicative roles of Mangor songs, dances, and performances were not explored.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Performance Ethnography Theory, propounded by Norman K. Denzin in 2003 as a contemporary approach within performance and communication studies. The theory emerged from the broader field of ethnography and performance studies and focuses on the interpretation of cultural performances as communicative acts through which people express identity, values, beliefs, and social realities. Denzin (2003) explains that performance ethnography studies human experiences and

cultural activities through performances such as music, dance, rituals, storytelling, festivals, chants, and symbolic displays. According to him, performances are not merely artistic or recreational activities; rather, they are socially constructed actions through which meanings are created and communicated within society.

Performance Ethnography emphasizes that cultural performances function as important channels of communication and cultural preservation. The theory views performance as a medium through which communities transmit indigenous knowledge, historical experiences, moral values, and collective memory from one generation to another. Denzin (2003) further argues that performances provide insight into the worldview and social life of a people because they embody the beliefs, emotions, traditions, and cultural identity of the performers and their audience.

Contemporary scholars have expanded Denzin's ideas by emphasizing the communicative and participatory nature of indigenous performances. Okpiliya (2020) notes that performance ethnography examines the relationship between culture and performance by studying how songs, dances, rituals, symbols, and oral traditions function as systems of meaning within African societies. Similarly, McIntosh and Eguchi (2020) observe that performance communication creates spaces where communities negotiate identity, preserve cultural heritage, and strengthen social relationships through embodied expressions such as movement, costume, drumming, and ritual enactments.

The relevance of Performance Ethnography Theory to this study lies in its focus on performance as a communicative and cultural activity. The performances of the Mangor age grade among the Ejagham people involve songs, dances, chants, drumming patterns, costumes, symbols, and ceremonial processions which communicate meanings beyond ordinary speech. These performances express communal values such as unity, solidarity, discipline, leadership, morality, and cultural identity. Through

these performative acts, the Mangor age grade functions as an indigenous communication system that promotes social interaction and cultural continuity within the Ejagham community.

Methodology

This study adopted the ethnographic research design. Ethnography is a qualitative research method that involves the researcher's immersion in a particular culture, community, or social group in order to observe and understand their behaviour, interactions, beliefs, and cultural practices. Ethnographic research enables the researcher to gain firsthand knowledge of the people's way of life through direct observation and interaction with members of the community. The population of this study comprised all members of the Mangor age grade and chiefs of Oban community. Oban is a community in Akamkpa Local Government Area and it is part of the Ejagham ethnic group. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to gathered information from knowledgeable members of the communities who possess adequate knowledge of the activities and performances of the Mangor Age Grade. Given the qualitative and ethnographic nature of the study, a sample size of thirty (30) participants, 5 each from different compounds in Oban community using participant A-E to describe them, this was selected for in-depth investigation. The researcher found that thirty respondents were sufficient to provide rich, detailed, and reliable information on the communicative performances of the Mangor Age Grade and to achieve data saturation. Data were collected through observation and interviews responses obtained from the participants were carefully transcribed, categorized, interpreted, and analysed thematically in line with the objectives of the study.

Data Presentation

Research Question One: What are the major performances of the Mangor Age Grade in Ejagham society and culture?

Theme 1: Setting and Occasion of Mangor Age Grade Performance

Data from the interviews revealed that Mangor Age Grade performances are seasonal, ceremonial, and community-oriented. Participants explained that performances are commonly organized during the planting season when members of the community have relatively fewer farming engagements. Participant A noted that the appearance of the Mangor Age Grade serves as a reminder to community members that it is time to begin the planting of important crops such as maize and yam. According to the participant, the performance functions as a cultural signal that mobilizes people for agricultural activities. Similarly, Participant B explained that members usually gather at a designated village square before moving through the community in a processional manner while singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. Participant C stated that Mangor performances are not limited to agricultural seasons but also feature during weddings, naming ceremonies, youth gatherings, and other communal celebrations. Participant D further observed that the performances are often presented during coronations, festivals, birthday celebrations, and marriage ceremonies. The findings indicate that Mangor performances are embedded in various social and cultural occasions and function as mechanisms for social mobilization, celebration, and community participation.

Theme 2: Performers and Nature of Performance

The study found that Mangor Age Grade performers are predominantly young men who belong to a particular age cohort and have undergone cultural training and initiation. Participant B explained that members are introduced to singing, drumming, and dancing from childhood

and are gradually enculturated into the performance traditions of the community. Selection into active performance is based on skill, physical ability, and commitment to cultural values. Observation revealed that performances consist mainly of music, singing, dancing, drumming, chanting, and audience participation. Participant A emphasized that performances are characterized by collective singing, clapping, cheering, and instrumental accompaniment. The findings suggest that Mangor performance is a structured cultural activity involving trained performers who preserve and transmit indigenous artistic traditions.

Theme 3: Dance and Drumming as Performance Elements

Dance emerged as one of the central features of Mangor performances. Participants described the dances as participatory, flexible, and rooted in existing Ejagham dance traditions. Participant D explained that Mangor dancers often perform elements of Ngban Offa, a traditional warrior dance associated with bravery and communal protection. The participant noted that the dance reinforces collective responsibility for community security. Participant B stated that dance movements are coordinated by drum rhythms and that performers move in unison according to the tempo established by the drummers.

The study identified several musical instruments used during performances, including Okam (drum), Ikpiri (small drum), Ndam Okam (long drum), Ekifung (gong), Ikankang (double gong), Egyuk (slit wooden drum), Akachak (rattle), and Ibang (horn). Participant E explained that the Okam serves as the principal instrument that dictates the rhythm and pace of both music and dance. The participant added that the sound of the drum is often interpreted as a signal announcing important communal events. Observation further showed that drumming and dancing create an atmosphere of collective participation and strengthen social bonds among community members.

Theme 4: Costumes, Properties and Symbolic Objects

Findings revealed that Mangor performers do not wear elaborate costumes. Instead, emphasis is placed on symbolic properties carried during performances. Participant D noted that performers usually wear ordinary clothing while carrying culturally significant objects. Participant F explained that the Akachak (rattle) symbolizes unity and collective identity among the Ejagham people. According to the participant, the rattling stones inside the instrument symbolize cooperation and interdependence within the community. Participants also identified fresh palm fronds as symbols of peace, reconciliation, and social harmony. These props communicate important cultural messages without the use of spoken language. The findings indicate that symbolic objects serve as important communicative tools during Mangor performances.

Research Question Two: What are the communicative roles of the dance and song performances of the Mangor Age Grade in promoting values, unity, and cultural heritage among the Ejagham people?

Theme 1: Music and Songs as Indigenous Communication Systems

Interview responses revealed that music and songs constitute major channels of communication within Mangor performances. Participant C stated that Mangor songs are used not only for entertainment but also for education, moral instruction, celebration, and cultural transmission. The participant explained that songs teach community members about Ejagham traditions, values, and collective responsibilities. Participant E noted that the songs evoke memories of important historical events and reinforce communal identity. The study found that most songs follow a call-and-response pattern in which a lead singer initiates a line while other members respond with a repeated refrain. This structure encourages participation and strengthens group cohesion.

Theme 2: Communicating Messages through Songs

Analysis of selected songs revealed various communicative functions. The song *Se Okam Oba* ("Let the drum go first") serves as a signal announcing the beginning of performance activities and coordinates interaction between drummers, singers, and dancers. The song *Ebae-Nache Ekaba Enok* ("We came to dance and not to fight") communicates peaceful intentions and promotes social harmony within the community. The song *Ekub Ekuba* ("We greet you") functions as a greeting song that establishes rapport between performers and audience members. The song *Aji Kpereme* ("We are going because we are done") communicates the conclusion of the performance and signals dispersal. These findings demonstrate that songs perform practical communicative functions beyond entertainment. Observation revealed that Mangor songs are performed in the Ejagham language and contain poetic devices such as repetition, refrain, imagery, and rhythm. Participant A explained that repeated phrases help emphasize important messages and make them easier for community members to remember. Non-verbal communication was also observed throughout performances. Performers used gestures such as hand clapping, finger pointing, foot stomping, and body swaying to reinforce musical messages. Facial expressions, eye contact, and bodily proximity were employed to communicate joy, confidence, solidarity, and collective identity.

The findings suggest that both verbal and non-verbal elements contribute significantly to meaning-making during Mangor performances. The study found that audience participation constitutes an essential aspect of Mangor performance. Participant E explained that audiences actively respond through dancing, singing, clapping, cheering, and other forms of participation. Participant B stated that songs such as *Etamana Ome Ome* encourage audience members to listen carefully and engage actively with the performance. Observation further revealed that performances provide

opportunities for social interaction and community dialogue. Participant A explained that community members sometimes present complaints concerning domestic disputes and social conflicts during Mangor outings. The age-grade members often mediate such disputes or refer them to appropriate traditional authorities. These findings demonstrate that Mangor performance functions as both an entertainment platform and a community communication forum.

Research Question Three: What are the values and cultural significances of the Mangor Age Grade in Ejagham society and culture?

Theme 1: Promotion of Unity and Social Cohesion

A recurring theme across interviews was the role of Mangor performance in promoting unity. Participant F stated that the collective nature of singing, dancing, and processional movement fosters togetherness among community members. Observation showed that songs frequently emphasize collective pronouns such as "we" rather than "I," highlighting communal identity over individual interests. The symbolic significance of the Akachak rattle further reinforces the ideals of cooperation and unity.

Theme 2: Cultural Preservation and Transmission

Participants unanimously agreed that Mangor serves as an important institution for preserving Ejagham culture. Participant C explained that the songs, dances, language, musical instruments, and performance practices transmit indigenous knowledge from older generations to younger members of the community. Participant B emphasized that participation in Mangor activities enables young people to learn cultural values, traditions, and social responsibilities. The findings indicate that the age-grade functions as a vehicle for cultural continuity and heritage preservation.

Theme 3: Moral Education and Social Regulation

The study revealed that Mangor performances promote moral values such as peace, respect, cooperation, discipline, and communal responsibility. Participant D explained that songs often contain moral lessons and messages encouraging peaceful coexistence. Participants further noted that age-grade members play mediatory roles in resolving conflicts and maintaining social order within the community.

Theme 4: Identity Formation and Community Development

Participants identified Mangor as a symbol of Ejagham identity and cultural pride. Participant E stated that performances showcase the uniqueness of Ejagham culture and strengthen community consciousness. The study also found that Mangor activities encourage community participation, collective action, and support for communal development initiatives.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is organized thematically in line with the research questions that guided the study. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature on age-grade institutions, indigenous performances, music, dance, and cultural communication.

Research Question One What are the major performances of the Mangor Age Grade in Ejagham society and culture?

The findings of this study reveal that the major performances of the Mangor Age Grade consist of music, songs, dance, drumming, processional movement, audience participation, and the use of symbolic properties. The study further found that these performances are usually organized during the planting season, festivals, weddings, naming ceremonies, coronations, birthday celebrations, and other important communal events. Participants consistently emphasized the seasonal and ceremonial nature of the

performance. Participant A explained that the appearance of the Mangor Age Grade serves as a reminder to community members that it is time to commence the planting of important crops such as maize and yam. Similarly, Participant B observed that members gather at a designated village square before moving around the community in a procession characterized by singing, dancing, and instrumental accompaniment. These findings suggest that Mangor performances serve not only artistic functions but also social and economic functions by mobilizing community members towards collective activities.

The findings further revealed that the performers are predominantly young men who have undergone cultural initiation and training in singing, dancing, and drumming. Participant C noted that performers are enculturated from a young age and are expected to demonstrate competence and discipline before participating actively in performances. This finding underscores the role of the Mangor Age Grade as an institution for cultural education and transmission. The study also found that dance occupies a central place in Mangor performances. The dances are largely participatory and draw from established Ejagham dance traditions such as Ngban Offa and Moninkim. Participant D explained that Ngban Offa functions as a warrior dance that reinforces the responsibility of young people toward community protection and security. The dance movements are coordinated through drumming, with instruments such as Okam, Ikpiri, Ndam Okam, Ekifung, Egyuk, Akachak, and Ibang serving different musical and communicative functions.

These findings agree with Enaikele (2025), who found that age-grade institutions in African societies function as mechanisms for social organization, cultural preservation, and community mobilization. The present study extends Enaikele's position by demonstrating that performance itself constitutes one of the major ways through which age-grade institutions accomplish these functions. The findings also support Ozah's (2015) study on

Moninkim performance among the Ejagham, which established that indigenous performances function as cultural institutions through which social values and communal identity are preserved and transmitted. However, whereas Ozah's study focused on female initiation performance, the present study demonstrates that the Mangor Age Grade employs music, dance, and processional performance as mechanisms for community engagement and cultural continuity. Furthermore, the findings align with Okoro and Okoro (2010), who observed that indigenous music and dance serve as channels for social integration and communal participation. The present study confirms that Mangor performances provide opportunities for collective gathering, celebration, and community interaction. Therefore, the study establishes that Mangor Age Grade performances are multifaceted cultural activities that function as instruments of entertainment, social mobilization, cultural preservation, communal participation, and indigenous education.

Research Question Two: What are the communicative roles of the dance and song performances of the Mangor Age Grade in promoting values, unity, and cultural heritage among the Ejagham people?

The findings indicate that songs and dances constitute the primary communicative tools employed by the Mangor Age Grade. Beyond entertainment, these performance elements serve educational, informative, symbolic, and integrative functions within the community. Participants unanimously agreed that music functions as a medium for communication. Participant E explained that Mangor songs are used to educate community members, transmit cultural values, mobilize participation in communal activities, and foster unity among the people. Similarly, Participant F noted that the songs preserve historical memories and evoke important events in the history of the Ejagham community. The analysis of selected songs revealed their communicative significance. For instance, the song *Se Okam Oba* ("Let

the drum go first") serves as a signal for the commencement of performance activities and facilitates communication between drummers, singers, dancers, and the audience. Likewise, *Ebae-Nache Ekaba Enok* ("We came to dance, not to fight") communicates peaceful intentions and promotes social harmony. The greeting song *Ekub Ekuba* establishes cordial relationships between performers and community members, while *Aji Kpereme* signals the conclusion of the performance. These findings demonstrate that songs within the Mangor Age Grade are functional forms of indigenous communication rather than mere entertainment. The study further revealed that communication occurs not only through language but also through non-verbal means. Observation showed that performers employ gestures, body movements, facial expressions, eye contact, clapping, foot stomping, and body swaying to reinforce messages contained in the songs. These paralinguistic elements communicate emotions such as joy, confidence, excitement, solidarity, and communal belonging.

The findings support Ita's (2022) study on the communicativeness of Okobo traditional dance performances. Ita argued that indigenous dance functions as a cultural language through which communities communicate values, identity, beliefs, and collective aspirations. Similarly, the present study found that dance functions as a communicative system through which Mangor performers express unity, communal identity, and social values. The findings are also consistent with Ode's (2020) semiotic study of performance rituals among the Igede people. Ode found that gestures, costumes, ritual objects, and performance practices function as symbolic communication systems. Likewise, this study found that drumming patterns, body movements, props, and symbolic objects communicate important cultural meanings within Mangor performances. A significant finding of this study is that performer-audience interaction constitutes an important communicative dimension of Mangor performances. Participant B observed that audiences actively participate through dancing, singing, applause, cheering, and

gestures of admiration. Participant A further revealed that Mangor outings provide opportunities for community members to present complaints regarding disputes and social disagreements for mediation by age-grade leaders.

This finding suggests that Mangor performances function not only as artistic events but also as community communication forums. In this regard, the study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that indigenous performance can serve practical governance and conflict-resolution functions within traditional societies.

Research Question Three: What are the values and cultural significances of the Mangor Age Grade in Ejagham society and culture?

The findings reveal that the Mangor Age Grade embodies several important values and cultural significances, including unity, cultural preservation, moral education, identity formation, social cohesion, peacebuilding, and community development. A major finding is that the performances promote communal unity and togetherness. Participants repeatedly emphasized the collective nature of the performances. Observation further revealed that the songs frequently employ the pronoun "we" rather than "I," thereby emphasizing collective identity over individual expression. Participant F explained that the communal structure of the performance encourages cooperation and strengthens social bonds among community members. This finding is symbolically reinforced through the Akachak rattle. Participants explained that the instrument symbolizes unity because the stones within it produce sound only through contact with one another. The symbolism reflects the Ejagham belief that community progress depends on cooperation and collective action. The findings support Abaliwu's (2025) argument that traditional dance and music promote social cohesion and reinforce communal identity. Similarly, Okoro and Okoro (2010) found that indigenous performances strengthen social integration and foster collective consciousness among community members.

Another important finding is the role of Mangor performances in preserving cultural heritage. Participants explained that the songs, dances, language, musical instruments, symbols, and performance traditions transmit indigenous knowledge from one generation to another. Participant C specifically noted that participation in the age-grade enables young people to learn the customs, traditions, and values of the Ejagham people. This finding aligns strongly with Ozah's (2015) study, which identified performance as a major vehicle for cultural continuity among the Ejagham people. It also supports Enaikele's (2025) finding that age-grade institutions remain important custodians of indigenous culture despite modernization.

The study further found that Mangor performances contribute to moral education and peacebuilding. Songs communicate messages of peace, respect, discipline, and communal responsibility. Participant D noted that songs such as *Ebae-Nache Ekaba Enok* encourage peaceful coexistence by emphasizing that the performers come to celebrate rather than fight. Participants also revealed that age-grade leaders mediate disputes and promote reconciliation within the community. This finding suggests that Mangor performances function as mechanisms for social regulation and informal conflict resolution. Such a role expands the significance of performance beyond entertainment into the sphere of community governance and social control. Finally, the findings reveal that Mangor serves as a symbol of Ejagham cultural identity. Through performance, community members celebrate their language, history, traditions, music, and collective heritage. The continued existence of the Mangor Age Grade therefore contributes significantly to the preservation and promotion of Ejagham cultural identity in the face of social change and modernization.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

1. There is need for the documentation and preservation of Mangor Age-Grade performances through audio-visual recordings, written texts,

and digital archiving in order to safeguard the cultural heritage of the Ejagham people for future generations.

2. Community leaders, cultural organizations, and educational institutions should encourage the active participation of youths in age-grade activities and performances through cultural festivals, workshops, and indigenous arts programmes to promote cultural continuity and identity formation.
3. Scholars and researchers in theatre arts, communication studies, anthropology, and cultural studies should undertake further interdisciplinary research on Ejagham age-grade performances to deepen understanding of their communicative, social, and developmental significance in contemporary African society.

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