

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY  
NIGERIA DANCE: ATILOGWU AND LEG WORK DANCE AS CASE STUDY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,  
BENIN CITY.**

**JUNE, 2024**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS,  
FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA. IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD  
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS.**

**JUNE, 2024**

## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by IMAFIDON AYOMIPOS I  
JANNETH of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, Benin City and  
that it is adequate in scope for the award of a Bachelor of Arts (B.A. Hons) Degree in  
Theatre Arts.

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**PROF. C. E. UGOLO**  
Supervisor

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**DATE**

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**DR. VINCENT DIAKPKOMRERE**  
Head of Department

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**DATE**

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**EXTERNAL EXAMINER**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty who in His infinite mercy saw me through my years of study. His grace and words are my pillar of strength through my years of study. Also to my wonderful parents, Mr & Mrs Imafidon who inspite of t their limited resources have made it possible for me to successfully complete my Bachelor of Arts (B.A. Hons) Degree.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Almighty God, the maker of dreams and architect of desire, I thank you for everything visible and invisible that you have done for me. Special accolade to my parents, Mr. and Mrs Imafidon for the time and support you invested in me both financially and spiritually. All the inward and outward love you have shown to me will not be taken for granted.

I must also acknowledge my siblings. You all are my biggest support and motivation. You are the best, for God took His time when He made us. To my grandparents for their support and advise. To my good friend, I appreciate all your financial and emotional support.

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I wish to specially acknowledge the Head of Department, Dr. Vincent Diakpomrere. My deep gratitude also goes to my lecturers in the Department of Theatre, Dr. Mrs Josephine E. Abbe, Dr. Praise Akpughe Mudiaga and others for their collective efforts to free from the shackles of academic slavery and bring to the arena of knowledge.

Finally, to all those who contributed academically and emotionally to the success of this Bachelor's degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a comparative analysis of traditional and contemporary Nigerian dance forms, examining their evolution, characteristics, and cultural significance. The study delves into the historical roots of traditional Nigerian dances, exploring how they have been preserved and adapted over time. Additionally, it investigates the emergence and development of contemporary Nigerian dance, highlighting its fusion of traditional elements with modern influences. Through a combination of literature review, observation, and interviews with dancers and scholars, this research aims to shed light on the similarities, differences, and transformative processes between traditional and contemporary Nigerian dance. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of Nigerian cultural heritage and its dynamic expression through dance forms, while also providing insights into the broader discourse of cultural preservation and innovation in dance.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Dance is an art form that uses movement of the human body to express ideas, stories, emotions, or feelings. It can be performed as a solo, with a partner, or in a group. There are many different forms of dance, such as ballet, jazz, tap, hip hop, traditional and contemporary.

Dance can be performed for entertainment, for artistic expression, or for cultural or religious purposes. It can also be a form of physical fitness and self-expression.

The Atilogwu dance and legwork dance are intricately connected, sharing a symbiotic relationship that elevates both to dazzling heights of expressiveness and rhythmic complexity.

Atilogwu originated in Igbo culture, Southeastern Nigeria, as a celebratory dance. It is characterized by fast footwork, intricate patterns, and energetic movements synchronized with syncopated fast rhythmic drummings.

Atilogwu is a traditional dance form from the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria. It is a very energetic and acrobatic dance, which features a lot of leg movement, jumping and stomping. It is usually performed at village festivals and weddings, and often involves large groups of dancers dancing together in intricate patterns. The dance is accompanied by drumming and singing.

I'll transcribe the text from these images for you. This appears to be an academic document about Nigerian dance, specifically focusing on Atilogwu and Legwork dance styles.

Footwork forms the cornerstone of Atilogwu, with rapid leg movements, intricate canons and precise coordination between steps and drumbeats. The footwork becomes the canvas upon which legwork embellishments are painted.

Legwork Dance on the other hand is dance style originated in Nigeria and was popularized by street hop artists like Zlatan and Naira Marley. In fact, the Zanku dance style is said to be an acronym for "Zlatan Abeg No Kill Us", which went viral following the release of the star's hit singles Killin Dem and Zanku (Leg Work).

Legwork adds layers of complexity and visual flair to the movements. It incorporates movements of the knees, thighs, and ankles, creating dynamic isolations, extensions, and kicks that accentuate the rhythm and amplify the energy.

Legwork allows for individual interpretation and stylistic improvisation. Dancers showcase their creativity and skill through nuanced variations, personalized flourishes, and unique combinations within the framework of the dance's core steps.

How are the two styles similar and different?

There are similar and some differences between these two dances.

Emotional Storytelling: Legwork, within the context of Atilogwu, serves as a powerful tool for emotional expression. Different movements can convey joy, sorrow, strength, or agility, adding depth and narrative to the overall performance.

Cultural Significance: Both Atilogwu and legwork are deeply rooted in Nigeria dance culture, embodying its history, traditions, and social values. Mastering these intricate movements represents a connection to past generations and a celebration of cultural identity and continuity.

## **1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to understand the intertwined relationship between Atilogwu and Legwork dance created by Zlantan (ibile).

The objectives include analysing the specific ways legwork complements and enhances the core elements of Atilogwu. This could involve examining how different legwork patterns interact with footwork rhythms, contribute to storytelling, and add visual complexity to the dance.

Investigate the historical and cultural factors that led to the development of legwork and Atilogwu dance. Explore how social changes, artistic innovation, or influences from other dance forms might have shaped this dynamic relationship.

### **1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

#### **Scope:**

The scope of this study is to analyze and compare how the leg movement are used in both dances. A comparison of both dances shall be undertaken in order to find out the differences in the use of the legs.

The study shall also determine the social and cultural significance of these dance forms.

It shall also conduct a deep research into specific aspects of both dances and provide a broader overview of both dance forms.

#### **Limitations:**

Available literatures on both dance may be very scanty.

How to overcome this?

- i) Visit to the library
- ii) online source
- ii) perseverance

### **1.4 Research Methodology:**

The methodology for this study shall basically be on the primary and secondary source of information like books, journals and internet sources. Also interviews shall be used.

It shall include:

- 1). Literature Review: Thoroughly review existing scholarly works on Atilogwu and legworks, Nigerian dance history, and related topics.
- 2). Comparative Analysis: Critically analyze the collected data to identify key similarities and differences between Atilogwu and legwork, drawing connections and highlighting the broader context of Nigerian dance.
- 3). Visual Analysis: Incorporate video and photographic analysis of performances to examine movement patterns, spatial relationships, and costume details.
- 4). Archival Research: Explore historical documents, recordings, and photographs to gain insights into the early development and evolution of each dance forms.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This project aims to make the following contributions:

Deepen understanding of Nigerian dance: By comparing two prominent contemporary and traditional dance forms, we gain a richer appreciation for the diversity and dynamism of Nigerian dance traditions.

Bridge historical and contemporary contexts: Tracing the evolution of Legwork to the Atilogwu dance sheds light on the continuity and transformation of Nigerian dance culture.

Highlight social and cultural significance: Analyzing the social impact and cultural engagement of these dance forms offers insights into contemporary Nigerian society and its artistic expressions.

It shall be of great significance to dancers, dance scholars, dance ethnographer and anthropologist and also cultural activist.

By examining Atilogwu and legwork dance, this project aims to contribute to a nuanced and insightful understanding of contemporary African dance in Nigeria. Through rigorous research and cross-cultural dialogue, we hope to illuminate the rich tapestry of Nigerian dance, its social significance, and its potential to connect communities and inspire audiences worldwide.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Traditional Dance in Nigeria

The history of traditional dance in Nigeria is as diverse and vibrant as the dances. Dance is a beautiful and multifaceted art form, encompassing a wide range of movements, expressions, and meanings. Dance plays a crucial role in religious ceremonies, rituals of passage, festivals, and celebrations. It serves as storytelling tools, conveys cultural values, and honors ancestors (Kansese, Rudolf 2013:67).

Peggy Harper, a scholar in dance anthropology, offers insight into the concept of dance in Nigeria that complement Robin Horton's work. Harper's perspective emphasizes the embodied nature of dance as a form of cultural expression deeply rooted in Nigeria traditions. She explores how dance serves as a means of communication, storytelling and community bonding, reflecting the values, beliefs, and identity of various Nigerian ethnic groups. (Peggy, Harper 1969:16)

Nigerian dance traditions are an expression of the country's significant ethnic variety. Research by scholars like Chukwuma Azuonye and Andrew Obiyan highlights the variety of dance styles practiced by numerous ethnic groups, including the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and many more. These examine each dance form's unique moves, attire, and musical accompaniments, showing how each one reflects the particular cultural history of each tribe. (Andrew Obiyan 1990; 46)

Each ethnic group developed distinct dance forms influenced by their environment, beliefs, and social structures. For example, the Yoruba dances are known for their complex drumming and elaborate costumes, while the Igbo dances emphasize energetic footwork and storytelling elements (Peggy, Harper 1968;24).

Nigeria boasts a vibrant tapestry of traditional dances, each reflecting the unique cultural heritage and traditions of its diverse ethnic groups. From the energetic footwork of the Igbo Atilogwu to the graceful movements of the Yoruba Bata, these dances tell stories, celebrate community, and connect people to their ancestral roots. (<http://Nigeria.appliedworldwide.com>)

While Horton's work focuses on the cultural significance of dance within Nigerian society, particularly within the context of religion, social structure and identity formation, he explores how dance serves as a means of communication, expression, and ritualistic practices, reflecting the values, beliefs and traditions of various ethnic groups across Nigeria. (Horton,1967:46)

To understand the art and nature of dance, it becomes imperative to trace it from the three sources of origin which according to Lange (1975:19), evolved from emotional impulse and improvisation, the need by man to release psychic tension by means of rhythmic movement and ecstasy or magic.

Research by scholars Toyin Falola and Babatunde Lawal delves into the cultural significance of traditional dance in Nigeria. They explore how dance is used to celebrate rites of passage, mark important events, and express communal identity. For

example, the Yoruba “Bata” dance is often performed during ceremonies honoring deities or ancestors, showcasing the spiritual connection embedded in Nigerian dance forms. (Babatunde Lawal,1996:108).

Dance skills and knowledge were passed down through generations, through observation, participation, and apprenticeship. Introduction of Christianity and Western culture challenged traditional dance forms. Some dances were banned or discouraged, while others faced cultural appropriation and exploitation. (Georgiana, Gore1986:39).

Despite these challenges, communities continued to practice and adapt their dances. They incorporated new instruments, rhythms, and costumes, while retaining their core cultural essence.

After independence, there was a renewed interest in preserving and promoting traditional dances. Dance troupes emerged to perform traditional dances for audiences nationwide and internationally. (Clark,2000:284).

Various scholars have defined Nigerian dance to include various expressive modes: Monyeh says that “Nigerian dance expresses movement, mime, costume, make up, music and song” (111). With this, many contemporary artists and choreographers draw inspiration from traditional dances, creating new interpretations and fusion of styles. This ensures the continued evolution and relevance of these cultural expressions. Traditional Nigerian dances are gaining international recognition, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and artistic beauty of the country. They serve as bridge between

cultures and promote understanding and appreciation for diversity. These dances continue to inspire artists and audiences worldwide, demonstrating the power of cultural expression and the enduring human spirit (Monyeh,2007:108).

There are many different forms of traditional dance in Nigeria, but some of the most well-known include the masquerade dance, Ritual, Ceremonial, Cheiftancy, Royalty, Entertainment, Social Creativity, Age group and Occupational dance. The Igbo masquerade dance is a ceremonial dance that is performed at festivals and other special occasions. The Yoruba Ayo dance is a group dance that is often performed at weddings and other celebrations. The Edo Ohogho dance is a ritual celebratory dance that is performed by a specific age groups of dancers. The Swange dance of the Tiv is an example of the Occupation dance that farmers used to celebrate their Harvest.

Traditional dances in Nigeria are many and reflect every aspect of life: from simple entertainment to worshipping the gods, wars and marriage. Many of them still exist and are performed at different events and festivals. (<<https://www.legit.ng/1187993>>).

## **2.2. Styles of Traditional Dance in Nigeria**

Nigeria, known as the “Giant of Africa” due to its large population and diverse ethnic groups, boasts a rich tapestry of traditional dances. These dances are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the various communities and serve as a powerful medium for storytelling, celebration, and spiritual connection.

Some examples of traditional dance in Nigeria include;

**(1) The Bata Dance (Yoruba)**

The Bata dance is a vibrant and energetic dance originating from the Yoruba people in the western region of Nigeria. It is dedicated to Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder, and is believed to be associated with its athleticism and fiery nature. The dance features intricate footwork, synchronized movements, and acrobatic elements, all accompanied by the rhythmic beats of the “bata” drums.

**(2) The Atilogwu Dance (Igbo)**

The Atilogwu dance is a spirited youth dance originating from the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria. The name itself, “Atilogwu,” translates to “has magic, as in sorcery/witchcraft” in the Igbo language. This name stems from the incredible energy and agility displayed by the young dancers, often leading to rumors of magic or special portions being involved.

**(3) The Ekombi Dance (Efik)**

Ekombi, a graceful dance of the Efik people in Calabar, Cross River State, draws inspiration from the gentle movements of the ocean. It is a visually captivating dance primarily performed by women, showcasing their elegance and femininity. The dance involves swaying motions, intricate footwork, and a sense of serenity that reflects the beauty of the Efik culture.

#### **(4) The Mmanwo Dance (Igbo)**

Mmanwu, meaning “masquerade” in the Igbo language, is a unique and captivating dance form practiced throughout the Igbo culture in southeastern Nigeria. It involves masked dancers, often representing deities or ancestral spirits, performing in elaborate costumes and vibrant colors. The dance plays a significant role in various ceremonies, including festivals, funerals, and cultural events, serving as a bridge between the spiritual and physical realms and so on.

#### **(5) The Ikipirikpi-ogu (Abia)**

Ikipirikpi-ogu, also known as the “war dance,” is a powerful and dynamic dance traditionally performed by the men of Abam in Abia State. Originally performed to celebrate the return of warriors from battle, it signifies bravery, strength, and victory. Today, the dance has evolved into a symbolic representation of overcoming community challenges and is often displayed at festivals and important gatherings.

#### **(6) Ohogbo Dance (Benin)**

The Ohogbo dance, originating from the Benin culture, holds a special significance in religious ceremonies. Performed by specific age groups, dancers wear traditional attire and carry gongs or bells while moving in a circle around a bowl containing burning medicinal leaves. The dance is believed to ward off evil spirits and bring blessings to the community.

(<https://www.legit.ng/traditional+dance+styles+in+Nigeria>).

Each dance tells a story, embodies a cultural value, and contributes to the rich tapestry of Nigerian heritage.

### **2.3 Contemporary Dance in Nigeria**

Contemporary dance is a new genre of dance which emerged in America and Europe as a break away campaign from classical ballet.

It is easy to identify Nigerian traditional dance through its form, structure and style. Components of the dance such as concept, movements, music, costume and props are integrated and help to interpret one another thereby making the form easy to assess. Contemporary dance on the other hand cannot be identified as a particular style; since it fluctuates with every choreographer and with every dance style created. This is why it is often difficult for contemporary dance to be appreciated and accepted by indigenes as an art form like conventional dances. Using the Alajota dance Company as a reference here; Evidence gathered shows that the emergent form of Alajota Dance Company is dependent on three major factors; Nigerian traditional dance themes, personal dance creativity and western or Foreign dance features. Christopher Emmanuel and Oluranti as choreographers in the company depend highly on indigenous dance and traditional motifs to compose dances which are personal to their experiences and exposures. (Kansese, Rudolf 2013, 284).

The growth of contemporary dance in Nigeria has been linked with the perennial support and sponsorship provided by private institutions such as Alliance Française, French Cultural Centre, French Embassy, German Cultural Centre and Goethe

Institute. Notable is the workshop organised by the French Cultural Centre in Lagos where Benjamin Larmache was invited to impart on Nigerian choreographers and dancers, especially the French contemporary dance concept in 1994. (Kansese, Rudolf 2013, 287).

The workshop had in attendance about three hundred dancers, but only seven out of the lot were selected at the end of the workshop to participate in the “artist-in-residence programme at the Centre Choreographique National de Nantes” in France in 1995 (Genevier 50).

The discovery is that contemporary dance has been evolving in Nigeria from 1861 through the conflict in the Nigerian and European cultures experienced during colonialism before the age of cultural consciousness in Nigeria influenced particularly by the Aladura church. Hubert Ogunde became the doyen of contemporary dance by fusing Nigerian and European dance steps. (Begho1977:85).

This was the dawn of dance commercialisation in Nigeria with Hubert Ogunde forming the first professional dance company in 1961 to package dance presentations. Nigerian universities also contributed its quota towards the emergence of the dance genre, especially through the academic and practical foundations laid by PeggyHarper (<[https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ljcrh/](https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ljcrh/article/view/259949) article/view/259949).

While contemporary dance in its formal sense emerged in the mid-20th century, its roots can be traced back to earlier artistic movements and experimentation with

traditional dance forms, inspired by figures like Hubert Ogunde, who incorporated ballet and other Western elements.

Contemporary dance in Nigeria is a vibrant and evolving art form, drawing inspiration from traditional dance styles, global influences, and the realities of modern Nigerian life. Contemporary dance in Nigeria often draw up elements of traditional dances, incorporating their rhythmic structures, movement vocabularies, and cultural symbolism. This connection to heritage is crucial for maintaining cultural identity and fostering creativity (Asante, Kariamu, 1996:67).

Nigerian contemporary dance is characterized by its willingness to experiment with movement, music, and theatrical elements, pushing boundaries and creating unique expressions. Contemporary choreographers engage with social issues, political struggles, and cultural themes, using dance as a platform for critical reflection and dialogue. Contemporary dance in Nigeria reflects the nation's vibrant cultural heritage, dynamic social context, and artistic ingenuity. It is a testament to the creativity and resilience of Nigerian artists, pushing boundaries and offering a captivating lens through which to explore the complexities of modern Nigerian life. (Monyeh, 2007:108).

## **2.4 Styles of Contemporary Dance Form in Nigeria**

### **(1) Legwork Dance:**

The dance style originated in Nigeria and was popularized by street pop artists like Zlatan and Naira Marley. In fact, the Zanku dance style is said to be an acronym for “Zlatan Abeg No Kill Us”, which went viral following the release of the star’s hit singles Killin Dem and Zanku (Leg Work). Omoniyi Temidayo Raphael (born 19 December 1994), known professionally as Zlatan Ibile, is a Nigerian rapper and singer. He is the chief executive officer and founder of Zanku records and originated the Zanku dance style.

### **(2) Alanta:**

Not all Nigerian dance styles are rooted in tradition or inspired by music icons. Some, like the “Alanta,” emerged spontaneously from the streets and captured the imagination of the public. Alanta, characterised by its quirky and playful movements, became a sensation in Nigeria during the mid-2000s. Dancers of the Alanta style often incorporate humorous gestures, exaggerated facial expressions, and exaggerated body movements. It’s a light-hearted and entertaining dance that reflects the Nigerian spirit of resilience and humor.

### **(3) Gwara Gwara:**

While originally a South African dance style, “Gwara Gwara” found its way into Nigerian dance culture, thanks to its infectious appeal. Made famous by South African musician DJ Bongz, Gwara Gwara features dynamic leg and arm movements that

mimic the swaying of a mining dance. In Nigeria, it has become a popular addition to dance routines, blending seamlessly with Afrobeat and Afro-pop music.

#### **(4) Skelewu:**

“Skelewu” is a popular Nigerian dance that took the country’s music and dance scene by storm when it first emerged. It gained widespread recognition through the music of Nigerian superstar Davido, who released a hit song of the same name in 2013. The dance is characterised by its energetic and rhythmic movements, which mimic the act of shaking off water, hence the name “skelewu” (which loosely translates to “Shake It Off”).

#### **(5) Shaku-Shaku:**

The name “Shaku Shaku” is derived from the Yoruba word for shaking or trembling, which aptly describes the fast-paced movements of the dance. Although its origins is unclear, Shaku Shaku is characterized by its freestyle nature and incorporates a combination of legwork, arm movements, and body shakes. Dancers often move to the beat of Afrobeat, hip-hop, or Afro-pop music, creating a fusion of styles that’s both captivating and infectious. With its catchy moves and universal appeal, Shaku Shaku has found its way into music videos, clubs, and dance floors around the world.

(<https://www.legit.ng/contemporary+dance+style> +in+ Nigeria).

## CHAPTER THREE

### ATILOGWU AND LEGWORK DANCE STYLES

#### 3.1 Historical Origin of Atilogwu Dance

The Atilogwu dance is a vibrant and energetic dance originating from the Igbo ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria. It is known for its vigorous body movements, acrobatic feats, and colorful costumes, making it a captivating display of cultural expression.

The Atilogwu dance has its historical roots in the Igbo cultural legacy, where it has been transmitted down the centuries. . The name “Atilogwu” itself is derived from the Igbo language “Ati” means “together” and “ogwu” means “magic.” This is a reflection of the dances communal and festive character, which unites people in a joyful celebration of their shared culture.

Music and dance are fundamental to the African ways of life. Dance is considered sacred, holding deeply symbolic meanings and significance. One of such dances is Atilogwu Dance, regarded as the national dance of the Igbo people of Eastern part of Nigeria.

According to Mr. Daniel Okafor, Atilogwu dance has ancient roots, tracing back to the traditional festivals and ceremonies of the Igbo people. It was originally performed as a celebratory dance during significant events such as weddings, funerals, and cultural festivals. The dance was not only a form of entertainment but also served as a means of cultural expression and communication.

The movements of Atilogwu dance are characterized by energetic and acrobatic footwork, with dancers showcasing agility, strength, and rhythm. Dancers often perform intricate steps, jumps, and spins, accompanied by vibrant music and singing. Traditionally, Atilogwu dance was performed by both men and women, with each gender bringing its unique style and flair to the dance.

Over the years, Atilogwu dance has evolved and adapted, incorporating elements of modern music and dance styles while still retaining its cultural significance. It has become a popular performance art form, not only in Nigeria but also internationally, with dance troupes and cultural groups showcasing the dynamic and vibrant movements of Atilogwu to audiences around the world.

Mr. Daniel Okafor has played a significant role in preserving and promoting Atilogwu dance, organizing workshops, performances, and cultural events to ensure that this traditional dance form continues to thrive and be appreciated by future generations. Through his efforts, Atilogwu dance remains a cherished part of Igbo cultural heritage, representing the spirit, resilience, and vibrancy of the Igbo people.

Dancers frequently wear vibrant traditional clothing, and to improve their performance, they occasionally employ props like hand fans. The dancers' agility and talent are displayed through their precise footwork, jumps, and spins.

In the heart of Igbo culture, vibrant and pulsating, lies the Atilogwu dance. A tapestry woven from intricate footwork, exuberant energy, and deep-rooted traditions, its origins whisper tales of celebration, community, and ancestral reverence. Delving into

its past invites us on a journey through the heartbeat of Igbo life, where history and rhythm intertwine.

While pinpointing a precise birthdate for Atilogwu remains a challenge, its roots undeniably stem from pre-colonial Igbo society. Oral histories and cultural practices weave intricate narratives, suggesting the dance emerged as an offering to the spirits, a joyous expression of gratitude for blessings bestowed. During significant life events, from coming-of-age ceremonies to harvest celebrations, Atilogwu served as a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms, a vibrant conduit for honoring ancestors and invoking their blessings.

One popular origin story links Atilogwu to the mythical figure Mili Agu. As legend speaks, Mili Agu, a hunter renowned for his agility and speed, mesmerized villagers with his rapid, rhythmic movements while tracking prey. These awe-inspiring steps, it is said, evolved into the foundation of Atilogwu, forever entwined with the spirit of the skillful hunter.

Beyond folklore, the dance itself speaks volumes of its origins. The core element, the rapid shuffling of feet known as “mkpo mkpo,” echoes the rhythmic pounding of mortars during food preparation, a fundamental daily activity reflecting Igbo community and sustenance. The intricate patterns that unfold on the ground, mimicking the intricate designs woven into traditional Igbo fabrics, showcase a deep connection to artistic expression and cultural identity.

However, Atilogwu has never been static. Like the ever-shifting sands of time, it has adapted and evolved. Colonial influences introduced new instruments and rhythms, creating vibrant fusions that enriched the dance's tapestry. Contemporary dancers continue to push boundaries, adding personal flourishes and modern interpretations, ensuring Atilogwu remains a living, breathing testament to Igbo resilience and artistic brilliance.

### **Historical Origin of Legwork Dance**

Attributing a singular origin to the captivating art of legwork is like chasing smoke in the wind. Its rhythmic pulses echo through the history of Nigerian dance, interwoven with the vibrant tapestry of Atilogwu and countless other local traditions. While pinpointing a specific birthdate remains elusive.

One strand of this tapestry leads back to the pre-colonial Igbo society, where Atilogwu flourished as a celebration of life, community, and ancestral reverence. In these vibrant rhythms, the seeds of legwork might have been sown. Rapid footwork, known as "mkpo mkpo," pulsed like the pounding of mortars, while dancers incorporated intricate leg movements for balance and control. These early glimpses of stylistic embellishments, driven by individual flair and the spirit of play, laid the foundation for what would become the mesmerizing flourishes of legwork.

Another thread links legwork to the storytelling traditions of Nigerian cultures. Through rhythmic variations, isolations, and extensions, dancers could convey emotions, mimic animal movements, and even retell myths and legends. Imagine

warriors stomping out battle rhythms with their feet, while their legs mimicked the movements of powerful animals, imbuing the dance with layers of narrative and cultural significance.

Colonial influences also played a role in shaping legwork. The introduction of new instruments and rhythms, like the driving beats of highlife music, provided fertile ground for innovation. Dancers incorporated syncopated patterns and dynamic legwork patterns, adding a layer of complexity and modern flair to the ancient traditions. Therefore, understanding the origin of legwork is not about pinpointing a specific moment, but rather appreciating the rich tapestry of influences that have shaped it. It is a story of community, celebration, and artistic innovation, woven into every tap, kick, and extension. As long as the spirit of play and the pulse of creativity throb through dancers' hearts, legwork will continue to evolve, captivating audiences and keeping the vibrant pulse of Nigerian dance tradition alive for generations to come. Zanku-legwork is a dance step which was accidentally created by a Nigerian rapper named Zlatan Ibile when he wrote and produce a rap song titled Zanku (Legwork)where the name was gotten,

Omoniyi Temidayo Raphael (born 19 December 1994), known professionally as Zlatan Ibile, is a Nigerian rapper and singer.He is the chief executive officer and founder of Zanku records.

He is from Ekiti state.

He was signed into the record label (YBNL) by Rapper Olamide popularly known as Baddo in the year 2016. Then on January 1,2019, he announced his record label THE ZANKU RECORDS.

### 3.2 Movement Characteristics and Key Elements of Atilogwu Dance Style:

The Atilogwu dance is a vibrant and energetic performance originating from the Igbo ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria. It's known for its vigorous body movements, acrobatic feats, and colorful costumes, making it a captivating display of cultural expression. Here's a breakdown of its key characteristics and elements:



**Figure 1: Atilogwu dance movement**  
Source: (<<https://www.legit.ng/1187993>>)

## **Movement and Technique**

**Energetic Footsteps:** Fast and intricate footwork forms the foundation of Atilogwu. Dancers shuffle, jump, and stomp to the rhythm of the drums, creating a pulsating energy.

**Acrobatic Displays:** Atilogwu dancers impress audiences with their agility and athleticism. They incorporate flips, tumbles, and high kicks into their routines, showcasing their physical prowess and training.

**Synchronized Movements:** While there's room for individual expression, dancers often perform coordinated movements in unison, creating a sense of unity and collective power.

## **Music and Rhythm**

“O nwe-kw-ra aha...EZE kachasi

NDI-EZE nile, na ONYE-NWENU kachasi

NDI-NWENU nile.”

Nkpughe 19. 16.

All hail the power of Jesus's name.

1. K'ora tobe ike Jisus,  
Ka ndi-m'ozu Ya da,  
Weputa okpu nke eze,  
Bia me Ya Ez'ora.

2. Me Y'Eze, ndi-ama Chuku

Neguzo n'iru Ya,  
To Ya, b'Onye unu soro,  
Bia me Ya Ez'ora.

3. Umu Isreal arotara,  
Ndi agbaputara,  
Kelenu Onye-nzoputa,

**Drum Ensemble:** The driving force behind Atilogwu is the powerful drumming. Ensembles typically include various sized drums like the “igba” (clay pot drum) and the “ikoro” (slit drum) that create a complex and rhythmic soundscape.



Figure 2: IGBA

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/SF9ywWekfaWzgj7f8>)



Figure 3: Ishaka

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/SF9ywWekfaWzgj7f8>)



Figure. 4: Ekwe



**Figure 5: Ogene**

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/N6Myv9qDAv4JsQS5k6>)

**Ogene:** This large metal gong adds punctuating accents and rhythmic variations to the drumming, further amplifying the energy of the performance.

**Flute and Vocals:** In some variations, flutes might be included to add a melodic layer, while energetic chanting or singing by the dancers can compliment the percussion.



**Figure 6: Ojà**

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPXGBmKpMA9j6A>)

### **Costumes and Attire**

**Colorful Fabrics:** Dancers adorn themselves in vibrant clothing that reflects the celebratory nature of the dance. Wrap around skirts for women and loose pants for

men are commonly observed, often made from colorful wax prints or traditional woven fabrics.



**Figure 7: Colourful fabric I**

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPXGBmKpMA9j6A>)



**Figure 7: Colourful fabric I**

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPXGBmKpMA9j6A>)

**Accessories:** Ankle bells or beaded leg ornaments add rhythmic jingling sounds as the dancers move. Headbands, feathers, and other adornments might be worn to enhance the visual impact.



**Figure 8:** Handbands made from shredded white sack, and feathers used as head cap.  
Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPXGBmKpMA9j6A>)



**Figure 9:** Ankle bells.

Source:

([https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX\[...\]|MA9j6A|\(https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX%5B%E2%80%A6%5DMA9j6A\)](https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX[...]|MA9j6A|(https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX%5B%E2%80%A6%5DMA9j6A))

### **Performance Context:**

**Celebration and Festivals:** Atilogwuis traditionally performed during festive occasions like harvest celebrations, weddings, and cultural events. It serves as a form of entertainment, a display of cultural pride, and a way to connect the community through shared experience.

**Competitive Spirit:** In some settings, Atilogwu might have a competitive element, with different troupes showcasing their skill and vying for the audience's approval.



**Figure 10: Different troupes showcasing their skills in** ([https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX\[...\]MA9j6A](https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX[...]MA9j6A))(<https://images.app.goo.gl/wZFEPX%5B%E2%80%A6%5DMA9j6A>)



**Figure 11: Legwork dance**  
Source: (<https://www.legit.ng/1187993>)

**Overall Significance:**

**Cultural Expression:** Atilogwu is more than just a dance; it's a vibrant expression of Igbo culture and tradition. It reflects the Igbo people's love for music, movement, and celebrating life's milestones.

**Physical Fitness:** The demanding nature of the dance makes it a form of physical training, requiring strength, stamina, and agility.

Atilogwu's energetic movements, captivating music, and colorful costumes make it a captivating spectacle that continues to be a cherished part of Igbo cultural heritage.

**Movement Characteristics and Key Elements of Legwork Dance Style:**

Legwork dance styles are a diverse group of movements that emphasize intricate footwork patterns and rhythmic variations. Found across the globe, these dances showcase incredible agility, improvisation, and a deep connection between the dancer and the music. Here's a breakdown of some key characteristics and elements that unify these styles:



**Figure 12: Footwork:**  
(<https://images.app.goo.gl/Ced9Pxmn275vSDzM9>)

**Fast and Precise movement :** The foundation of legwork dances lies in rapid and precise footwork. Dancers perform intricate steps, shuffles, kick and taps, often incorporating complex patterns and variations.

**Polyrhythms:** Many legwork styles utilize polyrhythms, where dancers perform multiple rhythmic patterns with their feet simultaneously. This creates a mesmerizing display of layered movement and sound.

**Syncopation:** The emphasis on off-beats and unexpected accents within the footwork adds a dynamic and playful element to the dance.

**Musical Accompaniment:**

Music is an accompaniment to dance and example of music that initiates a legwork dance are Hip-hop, Jazz, Afromusic and so on.

Skelewu by Davido is a very good example of a legwork dance music.

**LYRICS:** All the girls dem dey dance galala  
But this new dance don cause casala  
For this dance you no need shakara  
Oya whine your hips like a this like a dat  
Like a this like a dat  
To your right to the front  
And your yansh to the back  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le  
Oh girl what is the plan  
We are planning to love your demands  
Shey you want to dance dance  
You wan collect money from my bank  
Oya scatter the town

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Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le  
Oh girl what is the plan  
We are planning to love your demands  
Shey you want to dance dance

You wan collect money from my bank  
Oya scatter the town  
Na the baddest wey dey in the town  
When they see me around  
Dem dey scatter the dance like clown

Oya fi jo gba owo  
Oya so jo di owo  
Oya dance to the sound  
Like a this like a dat  
All the girls dem dey dance galala  
But this new dance don cause casala  
For this dance you no need shakara  
Oya whine your hips like a this like a dat  
Like a this like a dat  
To your right to the front  
And your yansh to the back  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le

Ileke idi yen o idi yen o  
Esu bo ko yoko esu bo ko yoko  
Owa degbo so na owa degbo so na  
Bebe idi yen o  
Oya fi jo gba owo  
Oya si jo di owo e  
Oya dance to the sound

Like a this like a dat  
All the girls dem dey dance galala  
But this new dance don cause casala  
For this dance you no need shakara  
Oya whine your hips like a this like a dat  
Like a this like a dat  
To your right to the front  
And your yansh to the back  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le

But this new dance don cause casala  
Shizzi shizzi  
Oya whine your hip like a this like a dat

To your hand o  
And your yansh  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le  
Skelewu skelewu skelewu skelewu ske le le le le

**Vocal Accompaniment:** In some styles, energetic chanting, singing, or rhythmic vocalizations by the dancers or a chorus can complement the percussion and add another layer of energy.

**Body Movements:**

**Upper Body Control:** While the focus is on the legs, strong upper body control is crucial for maintaining balance and posture during the rapid footwork. Some styles might incorporate torso movements or arm gestures, but they typically complement the legwork rather than stealing the spotlight.



**Figure 13: Legwork body movement**  
Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/eEM9xhA3RMkwzTiH9>)

**Acrobatic Elements:** In some variations, dancers might incorporate acrobatic feats like jumps, spins, and kicks, adding a layer of physical prowess to the performance. However, intricate footwork remains the primary focus.



**Figure 14: Legwork body movement**

Source: (<https://images.app.goo.gl/eEM9xhA3RMkwzTiH9>)

**Performance Context:**

**Competitive Spirit:** In some settings, legwork dances might have a competitive element, with dancers or troupes showcasing their most intricate footwork patterns and vying for the audience's approval or judges' scores.

Legwork dance styles are a testament to human creativity and physical expression. They showcase the beauty and power of intricate footwork, creating a captivating visual and auditory experience.

These dances continue to evolve and captivate audiences worldwide, serving as a powerful form of cultural expression and artistic appreciation for rhythm and movement.

### **3.3 Performance Style of Atilogwu Dance**

Atilogwu dance boasts a vibrant performance style that blends energetic movements, synchronized routines, and a lively atmosphere. The dancers perform vigorous body movements, an array of energy sapping moves, several rigorous training protocols, displays of acrobatic prowess and stunts. This dance is usually performed by agile youths who have been trained for years.

Here is a breakdown of the performance styles of Atilogwu dance

**Group Dynamics:**

**Ensemble Performance:** Atilogwu is primarily a group dance. Dancers perform together, creating a unified and visually impactful presentation.

**Synchronized Movements:** While individual expression is valued, coordinated routines are a hallmark of Atilogwu. Dancers often perform steps and formations in unison, showcasing their training and teamwork.

**Call and Response:** In some variations, a lead dancer might initiate movements or chants, and the rest of the group responds in a coordinated way, adding a dynamic element to the performance.

**Energy and Enthusiasm:**

**High-Energy Display:** Atilogwu performances are known for their electrifying energy. The fast-paced music, vigorous footwork, and acrobatic feats create an atmosphere of excitement and engagement.

**Audience Interaction:** Dancers might interact with the audience through facial expressions, gestures, or even encouraging participation in some parts of the dance. This connection between performers and spectators heightens the overall experience.

**Variations and Improvisation:**

**Regional Variations:** Atilogwu might exhibit slight variations in style depending on the specific region in Igbo land where it's performed. Footwork patterns, musical accompaniment, or even costuming might differ slightly.

**Room for Improvisation:** While some elements are synchronized, skilled dancers often incorporate improvisational flourishes within the established structure. This showcases their individual talent and adds a dynamic element to the performance.

**Costumes and Presentation:**

**Colorful Attire:** As mentioned earlier, dancers adorn themselves in vibrant clothing that reflect the celebratory nature of the dance. This adds to the visual spectacle and festive mood of the performance.

**Props and Adornments:** Ankle bells, beaded leg ornaments, and other adornments can enhance the visual impact and add rhythmic sounds as the dancers move. Headbands or other decorations might also be used.

Overall, Atilogwu performance styles combine synchronized routines, energetic movements, and a spirit of joyful celebration. The variations, improvisational elements, and audience interaction all contribute to the captivating nature of this Creative Igbo dance.

## **(II) Performance Style of Legwork Dance**

Legwork dance style, despite their shared focus on intricate footwork, showcases a surprising diversity in performance style. Here's a breakdown of some key variations you might encounter:

### **Solo vs. Group Performances:**

**Solo Spotlight:** Some legwork styles, like certain tap dance routines or some freestyle interpretations, feature a single dancer showcasing their individual skill and creativity through intricate footwork patterns.

**Group Power:** Many legwork dances are performed in groups, creating a unified visual spectacle and emphasizing teamwork. Synchronized routines, formations, and call-and-response elements add another layer of complexity and excitement.

**Energy and Stage Presence:**

Legwork dance, sometimes referred to as footwork or footworking, is distinguished by its rapidity, agility, and complex foot motions. Performers move their feet quickly, frequently executing complex spins, leaps, and steps. Typically, the style places a strong emphasis on improvisation, syncopation, and precise rhythm. It's intimately linked to a number of urban dance forms, especially in hip-hop culture.

**Improvisation and Creativity:**

**Freestyle Flow:** Some legwork styles, like certain breaking variations, encourage improvisation and freestyle expression within the established footwork vocabulary. Dancers showcase their creativity and ability to respond to the music in the moment.

**Structured Improvisation:** In some group legwork dances, there might be sections where dancers improvise variations within a set framework. This allows for individual expression while maintaining the overall structure and cohesion of the performance.

Overall, the performance styles of legwork dances vary greatly depending on the specific cultural context and the artistic goals of the dancers. From high-energy battles to subtle displays of technical mastery, legwork performances offer a diverse and

captivating window into different cultures and artistic interpretations of rhythm and movement.

### **3.4 A Comparative Analysis of the Atilogwu and Legwork Dance Styles**

Talking about comparative analysis, it can also be known as Similarities and differences Similarities and Differences: Atilogwu vs. Legwork Dance Styles

While both Atilogwu and legwork dances share a focus on intricate footwork and energetic movement, they also exhibit distinct characteristics in terms of performance styles, cultural context, and overall feel. Here's a comparative analysis:

#### **SIMILARITIES**

#### **DIFFERENCES**

**Musical Beats:** Both Atilogwu and legwork dance are performed in sync with the rhythm of the music. Dancers in both styles follow the beats of the music to execute their movements.

**Musical Complexity:** Atilogwu dance is often performed to traditional African music with complex polyrhythms and percussion patterns. The beats in Atilogwu music can vary in complexity, featuring multiple layers of rhythms.  
  
On the other hand, legwork dance is typically performed to contemporary hip-hop or electronic music with more straightforward beats, often centered around a consistent tempo and rhythm.

**Footwork Focus:** Both Atilogwu and legwork dances prioritize complex and rhythmic footwork patterns as the foundation of the movement vocabulary. Dancers

showcase their agility, coordination, and ability to connect with the music through their feet.

**Use of Legs:** To produce rhythmic patterns and motions, both dances mostly rely on the use of legs. Dancers in Atilogwu use their legs to execute complex leaps, kicks, and steps. Similar to this, legwork dancers use their legs to perform intricate and quick footwork.

**Leg movements:** Atilogwu dancers frequently use broad, sweeping leg motions, emphasizing jumps and kicks. These movements frequently encompass a greater portion of the performance space and are more expansive.

In contrast, legwork dance focuses on intricate, rapid foot movements performed close to the ground, with less emphasis on large jumps or kicks. The movements in legwork dance are often more intricate and detailed, requiring precise control of the feet.

**Energetic Performances:** Both styles often involve high-energy performances with fast-paced music and vigorous movements. They aim to create an exciting and captivating experience for the audience.

**Complexity in Legwork:** Legwork dance is known for its highly complex footwork patterns, which involve quick transitions between steps and intricate combinations of movements. Dancers in legwork styles such as footwork or Chicago footwork often perform rapid movements such as spins, slides, and quick directional changes, showcasing a high level of technical skill and agility. Atilogwu dance, while also featuring complex footwork, tends to focus more on the rhythmic and expressive

aspects of the dance, with movements that are often more fluid and less frenetic compared to legwork dance.

**Overall:**

**Atilogwu:** A specific, culturally rooted dance with a focus on synchronized group performances, energetic movements, and vibrant costumes.

**Legwork Dances:** A broad category encompassing diverse styles from various cultures, with variations in performance styles (solo vs. group, energy level), costumes, and musical accompaniment.

In conclusion, both Atilogwu and legwork dances offer captivating displays of rhythmic footwork and cultural expression. However, appreciating their similarities and differences allows for a deeper understanding of the unique artistic traditions they represent.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1. Summary

Dance is an Integral part of the Nigerian Culture, it is a vibrant blend of traditional and contemporary styles that truly reflect the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. The comparative study of traditional and contemporary Nigerian dance, with emphasis on Atilogwu and Legwork, examines the differences and similarities between the two styles. From the energetic and acrobatic movements of Atilogwu to the infectious footwork of Legwork. Nigerian dance forms are a celebration of rhythm, expression, and community. Whether it's during festivals, weddings, or everyday gatherings, bringing people together and showcasing their creativity and joy.

Traditional Nigerian dances are deeply rooted in cultural and religious practices, while contemporary Nigerian dances draws inspiration from modern Ideas and styles. Traditional dances often have specific meanings and are performed during ceremonies and celebrations, while contemporary dances are more diverse and can be seen in music videos and dance competitions. Both styles showcase the rich cultural heritage and creativity of Nigeria.

Traditional dances in Nigeria are many and reflect every aspect of life: from simple entertainment to worshipping the gods, wars and marriage. Many of them still exist and are performed at different events and festivals.

Atilogwu is a traditional Igbo dance from southeastern Nigeria. It is known for its energetic and acrobatic movements, with performers showcasing impressive jumps, flips, and high kicks. Atilogwu is often performed during festivals, weddings, and cultural events, and it embodies the strength, agility, and vibrancy of the Igbo people.

On the other hand, Legwork dance is a contemporary Nigerian dance style that gained popularity in recent years, especially in the Nigerian music scene. It involves fast footwork, intricate leg movements, and creative improvisation. Legwork dance has become a cultural phenomenon, with many artists incorporating it into their music videos and live performances. It's a fun and expressive dance style that allows individuals to showcase their creativity and groove to the rhythm.

Both Atilogwu and Legwork dances represent the dynamism and diversity of Nigerian dance culture, with one rooted in tradition and the other reflecting the contemporary trends. It's fascinating to see how dance evolves and continues to be a vibrant part of Nigerian culture.

By nature, an Igbo dance employs all the senses in the performance. It is also the positioning of human body in time and space in order to give expression to emotions. Atilogwu, which literally means "is this magic"? Used dance movements and its wonderful formations to capture the heart of the people.

The Legwork dance also known as Zanku originated in Nigeria particularly in the Urban street by the popular Musician Zlantan Ibile is characterized by energetic footwork, leg movements, and occasional arm gestures, often performed to fast-paced

Afrobeat, Afrobeats, or hip-hop music. Its appeal lies in its simplicity, as well as its ability to allow for individual creativity and expression within a structured dance style. While Atilogwu highlights the cultural traditions and heritage of the Igbo people, Legwork represents the modern and evolving dance scene in Nigeria. Both dances are captivating in their own ways, embodying the spirit, rhythm, and joy that Nigerian dance is known for.

The study explores various aspects such as cultural significance, movements, costumes, music, and social contexts to understand how these dances reflect Nigerian culture and society across different time periods.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

**Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are proposed:**

1. There is a need for adequate resources and materials on traditional Nigerian dance by encouraging additional study and documentation of traditional dances in order to comprehend their historical background, relevance, and developmental trajectory.
2. There is a need to encourage the ongoing practice and preservation of traditional dances like Atilogwu by incorporating them into cultural education programs and community events.
3. In order to preserve our culture for the coming generations, I suggest that there is a need to create a fusion that embraces modern trends and pays tribute to

cultural heritage, incorporating parts of old dances with more modern techniques, such as legwork.

4. It is suggested that the government should increase public awareness and appreciation of Nigerian dance forms through academic schemes, workshops, performances, and educational initiatives in schools and communities.
5. It is suggested that the government should provide resources and platforms for dancers, choreographers, and musicians to showcase their talent and creativity, both locally and internationally.
6. It is also suggested that the Nigerian government should encourage collaborations between traditional and contemporary dancers to create innovative performances that celebrate Nigeria's rich cultural diversity.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Nigerian dance is a beautiful expression of culture, tradition, and creativity. From the captivating acrobatics of Atilogwu to the energetic footwork of Legwork, these dances showcase the vibrancy and diversity of Nigerian dance culture. Whether it's the traditional or contemporary styles, Nigerian dance brings people together, celebrates rhythm, and fills the air with joy and excitement. So, let's embrace the rhythm, move our bodies, and join in the celebration of Nigerian dance! In recent time our dance has stepped up into global recognition and styles being infused into the modern day dances known as Legwork due to the civilization of the youths exhibiting different dance styles into Modern music.

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