

Dance Performance and Skill Learning of Professional Traditional Dancers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study aims to demonstrate the characteristics of the traditional dancers in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and to elucidate the mechanism of the skill acquisition of dancers. The research was conducted at the National Theater and three restaurants from August 2017 to March 2019. Since August 2020, an online survey has been conducted by using Facebook messenger approximately once a week.

The dancers displayed two characteristics. The first is that they created programs based on their region or ethnic group. The second is that they conducted a performance by combining the characteristic movements in each program. For example, 29 programs and 262 movements were observed in the performances at the National Theater. In a few cases, they began to learn dance using other means. In this study, however, dancers who became professionals eventually learned in this manner. After becoming professionals, the dancers improved their performance by arranging their movements according to the scenario. Moreover, they formulated new programs by combining movements. In a few cases, the dancers enhanced the entertainment value of their programs by adding storylines or comedies to the combination of movements.

In the careers of the dancers, conflicts existed between acquiring skills and earning money as a profession. Moreover, they learned dance by participating in apprenticeship courses in amateur groups and theaters without pay or for low pay. Another problem in this career was the instability of dance groups. In certain cases, their groups were abruptly disbanded and forced to relocate according to the requests of organizers or owners. However, they adopted a method for learning movements individually and gained the chance to receive direct instruction from professional dancers despite the unstable situation.