



Perspective Article

Indigenous Art Forms in the Akuapem North Basic Schools' Cultural Festival

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Abstract

This study investigated the indigenous art forms exhibited at basic schools' cultural festivals within the Akuapem-North Municipal Assembly. The study used Schechner's (2003) performance theory as the theoretical framework for the study. Employing a qualitative approach and a descriptive design, data was collected through interviews and questionnaires from 28 participants, including 14 pupils, 7 head teachers, and 7 school-based cultural coordinators, and analysed thematically. The findings revealed that the cultural festival served as a platform to showcase diverse Ghanaian musical and cultural practices. Common performing art forms identified were visual arts exhibitions, drama and theatre, poetry and storytelling as well as drum language. The study concluded that these indigenous performing arts embody Ghana's culture through artistic expressions rooted in traditional practices, with visual arts activities like drawing, painting, sculpture, and literary arts being encouraged. Participation in these arts was found to enhance pupils' communication (listening, observation, language, speech), build confidence and self-esteem (through leadership opportunities), stimulate creativity (through imaginative roles and competitions), and promote inclusivity (by expressing diverse perspectives and fostering understanding). The study concluded that Indigenous Arts should be integrated into the school curriculum, providing resources and teacher training, encouraging guest performances, and organizing cultural exchange programs to better support and project indigenous performing arts in basic schools.

Keywords: Indigenous, Arts forms, cultural festival, Akuapem-North.

1. Introduction

Globally, history has shown that arts and culture are inseparable and interdependent. Every culture has specific art forms that are peculiar and unique to societal traditions [1]. The culture of a society is closely associated with traditional art forms that culturally identify its people. However, beyond material expressions, culture also includes non-material elements such as established traditions and conventional norms that articulate ideas within society.

These established traditions and conventional norms include dancing, literature, drumming, songs, and other traditional forms of expression that focus on humans and their society. The

material elements associated with art forms include pottery, basketry, textiles, sculpture, and leatherwork. Asihene [2] observed that every cultural performing art ends with an artwork. This suggests that art offers vivid insights into past cultures and plays an important role in the political, social, and religious systems of traditional Ghanaian life, which continues today. The arts therefore provide ideas about past and present cultures and play a significant role in the political structures and socio-religious lives of traditional Africans.

The origins of indigenous African arts have a complex and long history dating back to prehistoric times, and in many cases, their origins are explained through myths found in African oral traditions. Read [3] defined art as the way and way symbolic forms are created by tools, materials, images, and movements. Performing arts relate to art forms perceived by human senses, particularly the kinaesthetic sense. Indigenous performing arts are not static creations but are performed using the voice or body to convey artistic expressions such as storytelling, music, acting, and dancing [4].

Adjepong [5] noted that performing arts include drama, dance, and music performed during durbars, festivals, naming ceremonies, funeral rites, and marriages to entertain people. Adjepong [5] further noted that performing arts teach societal norms, promote fitness, and reinforce societal values. Amenuke et al. [6] also observed that poetry recitals, music, and dances performed during festivals not only evoke emotions but also educate people on appropriate societal behaviours.

Performing arts during festivals offer both instrumental and intrinsic benefits to individuals within a community. According to McCarthy et al. [7], the intrinsic benefits derived from performing arts in festivals include cognitive growth, social bonding, emotional experience, and empathy, while the instrumental benefits include the understanding of cross-cultural activities, community development, and economic activity. The art forms performed during festivals are therefore relevant because they not only educate people but also entertain them.

In the view of Appiah [1], performing arts include jubilations, chanting, dancing, and drumming that promote cultural and religious activities such as naming ceremonies, funerals, and festivals in African traditional societies. Similarly, Lopes [8] observed that performing arts include oratory, music, mime, dance, and other forms of art in which human performance is the central object. Lopes [8] further noted that performers often wear special costumes and make-up to attract their audiences.

In Ghana, Kemevor [9] defined a festival as a joyous occasion characterized by pageantry and pomp in celebrating important cultural events. The word festival originated from the Latin word *festivus*, meaning feasting or enjoyment. Ogunba [10] defined festivals as indigenous cultural institutions developed over many centuries, possessing distinct characteristics and forming a dynamic aspect of African cultural life. Adjepong [5] summarized African festivals as seasons of participation, sacrifices, and ceremonies during which traditional Africans acknowledge the blessings of God, lesser gods, and ancestral spirits for good health, fertility, and abundant harvests.

Festivals in Africa have therefore become occasions for social entertainment, cultural spectacles, and the observation of rituals. Arts and culture function together and depend on each other, and cultural festivals provide an avenue to display both culture and performing arts.

Indigenous cultural arts in Ghana have suffered significant setbacks since the mid-nineteenth century due to foreign influences, including Western education and religion. Foreign religious beliefs such as Christianity and Islam have altered aspects of Ghanaian cultural beliefs, norms, customs, and values that are considered inconsistent with Western culture. As a result, some Ghanaian cultural practices such as widowhood rites, *trokosi*, *Dipo*, and the pouring of libation have been perceived as primitive or pagan. Linguistic influences have also altered the pronunciation of certain Ghanaian towns, such as the change from *Kyebe* to *Kibi*. Beyond language, traditional customs such as widowhood rites and *trokosi* have also been affected by Western influence.

This study attempts to assess indigenous art forms presented during cultural festivals in

basic schools within the Akuapem-North Municipality. Specifically, the study focuses on the art forms showcased during basic school cultural festivals, the indigenous performing arts embedded in these festivals, the benefits of indigenous performing arts to pupils, and the challenges faced by basic schools in promoting indigenous performing arts through cultural festivals.

2. Statement of the Problem

The foundation of every community revolves around its culture. As an institution, culture provides checks and balances that ensure orderliness within society [1], [18], [21]. Through exposure to cultural activities in their communities, children acquire skills and knowledge related to indigenous cultural performances, the occasions in which such activities are performed, and their utilitarian values [3], [5].

Since most cultural activities are participatory in nature, pupils' direct involvement enables them to acquire the necessary skills, experiences, and competencies required to showcase their talents when opportunities arise [6]. During the Basic School Cultural Festival, pupils are given opportunities to demonstrate the talents they have acquired through exposure within their respective communities. Over the years, the festival has been highly competitive within the Akuapem-North Municipality.

Furthermore, the Municipality became vibrant, well-resourced, and widely recognised in the Eastern Region because almost all the art forms contested during the National Basic Schools' Cultural Festival were represented by pupils from the Akuapem-North Municipality. This achievement positioned the Municipality as a force to reckon with in the Eastern Region in relation to cultural festival performances [5].

School cultural festivals therefore became an innovative means of inculcating indigenous Ghanaian arts into basic school pupils by providing them with skills, knowledge, and understanding through traditional performances sanctioned by the Ghana Education Service [3], [5]. Specifically, basic school cultural festivals in the Akuapem-North Municipality were once vibrant and widely recognised in the Eastern Region for their outstanding performances in indigenous art forms contested during the National Basic Schools' Cultural Festival.

However, in recent years, the standards of basic schools in the Akuapem-North Municipality at the Regional Basic Schools' Cultural Festivals have declined considerably. The performance of the Municipality, as well as that of the entire region, at the National Basic Schools' Cultural Festivals has further deteriorated, with the Municipality now ranking at the bottom in zonal and regional cultural festival competitions. Records from the Education Management and Information System (EMIS) of the Akuapem-North Municipal Education Directorate indicate that pupil participation in choral music declined from 100% in 2009 to 30% in 2019. Sight singing performance also declined from 100% in 2009 to 30% in 2019, while drum language performance dropped from 100% in 2009 to 30% in 2019. Dance performances declined from 100% in 2009 to 30% in 2019, and Drama in English dropped from 100% in 2009 to 11% in 2019. In addition, poetry recital performances declined from 100% in 2009 to 55% in 2019, exhibition performances fell from 100% in 2009 to 22% in 2019, and proverbs performance declined from 100% in 2009 to 44% in 2019 [23].

Clearly, the evidence demonstrates a consistent decline in the standards of indigenous art forms presented at basic school cultural festivals in the Akuapem-North Municipality. The decline in performance at both the regional and national levels can be attributed to several factors. Teachers who also serve as school cultural coordinators experience significant challenges in promoting indigenous cultural values due to inadequate training in indigenous arts, limited knowledge and skills, and a lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials [3], [6]. Consequently, teachers are often able to teach only the theoretical aspects of indigenous cultural values, while the practical components remain largely neglected.

In addition to these challenges, studies assessing indigenous art forms at basic school-level cultural festivals in Ghana, particularly within the Akuapem-North Municipality, appear to be limited. This situation presents both a knowledge gap and a literature gap that the present study seeks to address. The study therefore attempts to assess indigenous art forms at basic school-level cultural festivals in Ghana, using the Akuapem-North Municipality as a case study.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the various art forms performed during the basic school cultural festivals in the Akuapem-North Municipality.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Schechner's performance theory as its theoretical framework [22]. The fan model of Schechner's performance theory conceptualizes performance as a wide range of acts and activities that are not necessarily intended for the theatre.

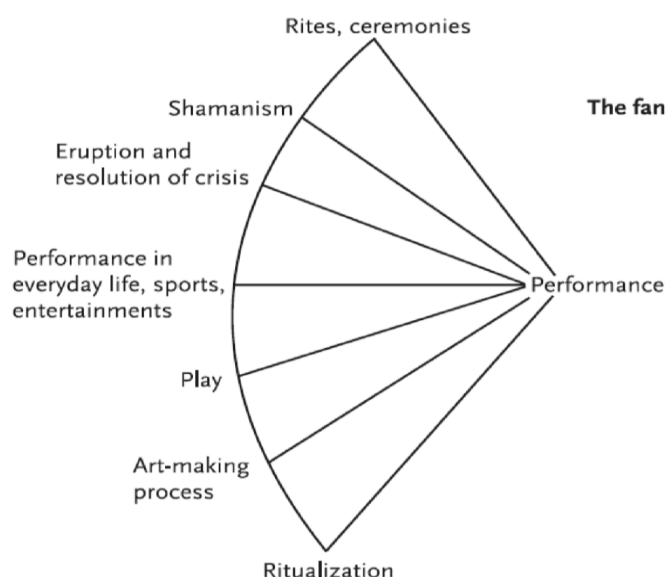


Figure 1 presents the fan model of performance theory as proposed by Schechner [22].

According to Schechner's performance theory, performance is not limited to theatrical presentations but encompasses actions performed in different locations, under various circumstances, and for diverse purposes [22]. In other words, drama is not confined solely to stage work but is embedded in everyday life and functions as a cross-cultural phenomenon. The theory further posits that there are no strict historical or cultural boundaries in defining performance.

Schechner [22] defined performance as the framing, presenting, highlighting, and displaying of actions. For instance, the Dipo puberty rites celebrated by the Odumasi Krobo people in the Eastern Region of Ghana consist of ceremonies that usher virgin girls into puberty or womanhood. These rites involve a sequence of ritual activities that serve both cultural and social functions.

The Dipo rites comprise several stages through which the girls undergo rituals and tests as proof of their virginity before qualifying to participate fully in the festival. On the first day, the girls' heads are shaved and they are specially clothed from the waist to the knee. This ritual is performed by a designated elder woman who assists the girls in transitioning from childhood to adulthood. On the second day, the chief priest performs the initiation ritual bath by pouring libation to invoke blessings for the girls. The third ritual involves the girls sitting on a sacred stone to confirm their virginity. Upon qualification, the girls are secluded for about a week, during which they are trained in housekeeping, cooking, childbirth, child nurturing, and the Klama dance. After this period, they

are presented to the community to celebrate their transition into womanhood.

Schechner [22] categorizes all these ritual activities associated with the Dipo puberty rites as performances. Although these rituals are not conducted within a conventional theatrical setting, they are still classified as performances because they involve structured actions, symbolic meanings, and public presentation.

This study aligns with Schechner's interpretation of performance, as the arts presented during school cultural festivals are activity-based performing arts that may be performed in various settings depending on context and purpose. Such performances may serve to celebrate cultural values, encourage positive behaviour, or correct inappropriate conduct [22].

3.2. Indigenous Arts in Ghana

Indigenous arts in Ghana are diverse, vibrant, and deeply rooted in the country's rich cultural heritage. These arts encompass a wide range of artistic expressions, including visual arts, music, dance, crafts, and storytelling. They play a significant role in preserving the history, traditions, and beliefs of Ghana's various ethnic groups [15].

Ghanaian visual arts are characterized by intricate designs and symbolism. Traditional art forms include Adinkra symbols, Kente cloth weaving, wood carving, and pottery. Adinkra symbols, for example, are ancient visual representations with specific meanings and are commonly used on textiles and in decorative contexts [7]. Music and dance are integral to Ghanaian culture, with each ethnic group possessing distinct musical styles and dance forms. Drumming is central to Ghanaian music, and different drums are used for specific ceremonies and occasions. Traditional dances such as Adowa, Kpanlogo, and Agbadza are commonly performed during festivals and social gatherings [13].

Traditional Ghanaian music and dance are closely linked to cultural history and social life. Drumming and dancing play crucial roles in social and religious ceremonies, including funerals, festivals, and initiation rites. Each ethnic group maintains unique drumming and dance styles that convey specific meanings and cultural significance [2].

Ghanaian craftsmen and women produce a wide variety of traditional crafts using indigenous techniques passed down through generations. These crafts include basket weaving, leatherwork, beadwork, and metalwork, which serve both utilitarian and artistic purposes [4]. Ghana is also internationally recognised for its colourful and intricately designed textiles, particularly Kente cloth. Kente is a handwoven fabric originating from the Ashanti and Ewe ethnic groups and is historically associated with royalty and important social occasions [18].

Ghana has a long tradition of visual arts such as pottery, weaving, basketry, wood carving, and metalwork. These art forms have served practical, religious, and ritualistic functions in everyday life [11]. Ghanaian sculptors have produced numerous statues and sculptural works representing ancestral figures, religious symbols, and spiritual objects, many of which are found in sacred spaces and shrines [12]. Adinkra symbols remain an important visual art form, conveying proverbs, moral lessons, and philosophical ideas within Ghanaian society.

Storytelling forms a vital part of Ghanaian oral tradition, through which history, myths, and moral lessons are transmitted across generations. Griots and storytellers play an essential role in preserving ancestral knowledge and cultural values. Festivals further serve as significant platforms for cultural expression, combining music, dance, crafts, and storytelling to celebrate heritage and honour ancestors [21]. In addition to traditional forms, contemporary Ghanaian artists have gained international recognition by integrating modern themes with indigenous cultural elements through media such as painting, sculpture, photography, and mixed media [8]. Government agencies, cultural organisations, and local communities continue to support initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting indigenous arts in Ghana.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is commonly used in the social sciences to explore and understand individuals' subjective experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena [10]. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the researchers to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of indigenous art forms performed during the Akuapem-North basic school cultural festivals.

The study also employed descriptive research design, as it facilitated a detailed understanding of the research problem by allowing the use of varied instruments for data collection. This design provided the flexibility required to document and describe the indigenous art forms performed during the Akuapem-North basic school cultural festivals. The use of thematic analysis in this study further aligns with the descriptive research design.

The population of the study comprised all pupils who had previously participated in basic school cultural festivals, as well as all school-based cultural coordinators and head teachers within the Akuapem-North Municipality. The sample consisted of fourteen (14) pupils drawn from seven selected basic schools and fourteen (14) school-based cultural coordinators and head teachers, resulting in a total sample size of twenty-eight (28) participants.

Primary data for the study were obtained through personal observations, interviews, and observation of performances during school cultural festivals. Qualitative data collected were analysed using thematic analysis. In its broadest sense, thematic analysis is a qualitative data classification strategy used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data [9].

The procedures for thematic analysis followed in this study were adapted from Braun and Clarke [9] and included the following stages: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) review of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) development of the results.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1. Various Art Forms Performed During the Basic School Cultural Festival

The first objective of the study was to explore the various art forms performed during the basic school cultural festivals in the Akuapem-North Municipality. To achieve this objective, the study identified the art forms performed by pupils and examined the activities associated with each art form during the festivals.

To identify the art forms performed by pupils, participants from selected schools who had previously taken part in the basic school cultural festivals were asked to indicate the art forms in which they participated. Responses from the pupils revealed that the art forms performed during the festivals included drama, music, dance, literature, visual arts, and drum language. This is illustrated in the following excerpts from the pupil participants:

"Well, as far as the school cultural festival is concerned, I performed at least two of the art forms including music and drama, while other pupils also participated in poetry, literature, exhibitions and drum language" [Pupil 1].

"In my opinion, five key art forms are performed during the basic school cultural festival, including drum language, visual arts, dance, choral music and drama" [Pupil 2].

To further explore the identified art forms, the study examined the specific activities associated with each art form as performed by pupils during the basic school cultural festivals.

5.2. Drama Performances

Pupils who participated in drama performances were first asked to indicate the titles of the plays they performed. The responses indicated that the drama titles included “Adepa,” “This is Our Own, Let’s Cherish It,” “Culture Is Globally Gold,” and “The Relevance of Cultural Education to the Ghanaian Economy.”

“I performed drama and the titles of the plays were ‘Adepa’ and ‘This Is Our Own, Let’s Cherish It’” [Pupil 3].

“I performed three plays in the school cultural festival titled ‘Let’s Cherish It,’ ‘Culture Is Globally Gold,’ and ‘The Relevance of Cultural Education to the Ghanaian Economy’” [Pupil 4].

Pupils were also asked to indicate the roles they played in their drama performances. The responses showed that pupils assumed roles such as newscaster, seller, minister of state, customer, daughter, family friend, son, teacher, mother, child, nurse, father, pupil, doctor, and stagehand.

“I played three roles during the basic school cultural festival: a family friend, a son, and a teacher. Other pupils played roles such as a mother, a child, and a nurse” [Pupil 5].

“I played various roles, including a father, a student, a doctor, and a stagehand” [Pupil 6].

Regarding preparation for drama performances, pupils reported preparing through watching local movies, observing people in their communities, particularly their mothers, and participating in rehearsals.

“I prepared for my role by observing mothers in the community, watching local movies, and taking part in rehearsals to bring authenticity to my performance” [Pupil 7].

“Rehearsals were my main preparation method, and watching local movies helped me understand performance styles better” [Pupil 8].

Finally, pupils were asked to describe how they felt about participating in the drama performances. Responses indicated that pupils felt happy and excited about their participation.

“I felt very happy and excited about my performance during the basic school cultural festival” [Pupil 9].

“I felt more than happy and excited about my performance” [Pupil 10].



Figure 2. A drama performance during the basic school's cultural festival

5.3. Music Performances

To explore music performances, pupils were asked about the activities they undertook during the festivals. Pupils reported using instruments such as drums, microphones, keyboards, and guitars.

“I played the drums and the keyboard during the cultural festival” [Pupil 11].

“I performed using the guitar, drums, and keyboard” [Pupil 12].

Pupils indicated that they practised for more than one hour before performing.

“I practised between one and two hours before my music performance” [Pupil 13].

“I spent more than one hour practising for my performance” [Pupil 14].

Regarding performance format, some pupils performed as solo artists, while others performed as part of a group or choir.

“I performed both as a solo artist and as part of a group” [Pupil 1].

“I performed as a solo performer and also as part of a choir” [Pupil 2].

The titles of musical performances included “*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*,” “*Adehye Kronkron*,” “*Ghana Bapaa Ba*,” “*Tumtum Kpe Ma*,” and “*Ghana Lɔm*.” Pupils also indicated that they had previous experience performing music, often through church activities.



Figure 3: Pupils performing traditional music during the basic school’s cultural festival

5.4. Dance Performances

Pupils who participated in dance performances reported performing traditional dances during the festivals.

“As it is a cultural festival, we perform traditional dances” [Pupil 8].

“All the dances showcase the traditional heritage of the host region” [Pupil 8].

Pupils indicated that they rehearsed for more than one week before performing.

“I practised for about nine days to prepare for my dance performance” [Pupil 9].

Dance performers reported drawing inspiration from Ghanaian cultural heritage, family members, and traditional leaders.

“I was inspired by my father, traditional leaders, and Ghanaian cultural values” [Pupil 9].



Figure 4. Pupils performing traditional dance during the basic school's cultural festival

5.5. Oral Poetry and Storytelling Performances

Pupils who participated in poetry and storytelling reported performing poetry, short stories, and essays.

"I performed poetry, short stories, and essays during the cultural festival" [Pupil 10].

The themes of the poetry and storytelling performances included "*Yenkura Y'amammere*," "*Menim Amammere Nti Mensee Amammere*," and "*Ghana Amammere Ma Impuntuo*."

Pupils reported rehearsing their scripts for more than one week and engaging in readings and discussions prior to performing.

"I practised for nearly two weeks before performing my poetry and storytelling" [Pupil 12].

"I participated in several readings and discussions before performing" [Pupil 13].



Figure 5. Poetry and storytelling performances by pupils during the basic school cultural festival.

6. Findings

The findings from both pupils and teachers revealed that the art forms performed during the basic school cultural festivals in the Akuapem-North Municipality included drama, music, dance, poetry and storytelling, visual arts, and drum language. Among these, drama, dance, music, and drum language were the most frequently performed art forms, with poetry performances being particularly prominent.

Drama performers presented plays such as “Adepa,” “*This Is Our Own, Let’s Cherish It*,” “*Culture Is Globally Gold*,” and “*The Relevance of Cultural Education to the Ghanaian Economy*.” Pupils played diverse roles and prepared through rehearsals, observation, and engagement with local media. This finding aligns with the view that performance in traditional societies involves communal participation through which skills and knowledge are acquired [2].

Music performances involved the use of traditional and modern instruments, with pupils rehearsing for extended periods and often performing as part of groups or choirs. Pupils had prior musical experience, frequently through church participation.

Dance performances consisted of traditional dances inspired by Ghanaian cultural heritage and traditional leadership. Pupils rehearsed for more than one week and expressed positive emotions about their participation.

For poetry and storytelling, pupils performed poetry, short stories, and essays centred on cultural themes. Most pupils rehearsed extensively and engaged in preparatory readings and discussions prior to performance.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that the dominant art forms performed by pupils during the basic school cultural festivals include drama, music, dance, poetry and storytelling, visual arts, and drum language. Examining indigenous art forms within their cultural context provides pupils with a deeper understanding of Ghanaian cultural heritage and enhances their appreciation of indigenous artistic expressions. The findings suggest that participation in cultural festivals offers pupils valuable opportunities to acquire traditional knowledge and skills through poetry recitation, drama, dance, and music performances. These experiences encourage active community engagement and contribute to the preservation and transmission of indigenous cultural values among basic school pupils.

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