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ANTHORA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS SONGS INTO THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM IN GHANA

Bright Essel

Department of General Studies, Komenda College of Education, Ghana
brightessel@komendacollege.edu.gh

Abstract

This paper presents the Anthora (Anthology of Songs) conceptual framework, a model designed to guide kindergarten teachers in the systematic selection, categorisation, and application of indigenous songs for holistic child development. Developed in response to the 2019 Ghanaian Kindergarten Curriculum's emphasis on an integrated approach to the 4Rs (Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, and cReative arts), the framework addresses a critical gap in teachers' pedagogical resources and skills. A qualitative case study in the Gomoa Central District, incorporating observations and interviews with 40 teachers, culminated in the collection and thematic categorisation of 78 indigenous Akan songs. The Anthora framework demonstrates how these songs can be strategically used to foster cognitive (numeracy, literacy), psychomotor (movement, coordination), and affective (moral values, cultural identity) development. This paper outlines the framework's structure, provides exemplar songs and teaching activities, and argues for its potential to make learning more meaningful, contextually relevant, and aligned with the goals of the national curriculum.

Keywords: *indigenous songs, kindergarten curriculum, conceptual framework, early childhood education, music integration, 4Rs*

1. Introduction

The 2019 Kindergarten curriculum in Ghana represents a significant shift towards a holistic, integrated, and play-based approach to early childhood education. It seamlessly blends four thematic areas: Language and Literacy, Numeracy, Creative Arts, and Our World and Our

People, to foster the development of the "4Rs": Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, and cReative arts (NaCCA, 2019). Music, particularly through songs and movement, is recognised as a vital component of this integrated approach, serving as a powerful tool for cognitive development, emotional expression, and social interaction (Edohan, 2023). However, a preliminary study in the Gomoa Central District revealed a significant implementation gap. Kindergarten teachers often lack a sufficient repertoire of indigenous songs and a structured approach to integrating them effectively into the curriculum (Essel, 2024). This results in the underutilisation of songs, their use primarily as entertainment, and a disconnect between children's learning at school and their cultural experiences at home. The curriculum, while advocating for the use of indigenous songs, does not provide teachers with a collection or a pedagogical model for their application. This paper responds to this gap by introducing the Anthora (an abbreviation for "Anthology of Songs") conceptual framework. This framework provides a structured model for teachers to select, categorise, and utilise indigenous songs to achieve the interconnected learning objectives of the 2019 KG curriculum, thereby enhancing the educational experience and fostering the holistic development of the child.

2.0 Theoretical Underpinning and Related Literature

The Anthora conceptual framework is underpinned by three mutually reinforcing theoretical perspectives: the integrated kindergarten curriculum, sociocultural learning theory, and culturally responsive pedagogy, all situated within scholarship on indigenous knowledge systems. Together, these perspectives provide a robust foundation for understanding how indigenous songs can function as culturally grounded, curriculum-aligned pedagogical resources in Ghanaian kindergarten classrooms.

2.1 The Integrated and Interconnected Kindergarten Curriculum

Contemporary early childhood education recognises learning as a holistic and interconnected process rather than a compartmentalised acquisition of isolated subject knowledge. This orientation is explicitly reflected in Ghana's 2019 Standards-Based Kindergarten Curriculum, which emphasises both intra-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary integration as core principles of instructional design (NaCCA, 2019). Intra-disciplinary integration refers to the deliberate linking of related skills within a single learning area. For example, connecting listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Language and Literacy, thereby supporting continuity and progression in learning (Atsumbe et al., 2015). More significantly, the curriculum foregrounds inter-disciplinary integration, encouraging teachers to design learning experiences that cut across thematic areas such as Numeracy, Language and Literacy, Creative Arts, and Social Studies. At the kindergarten level, this approach is particularly appropriate, as young children learn most effectively through concrete, experiential, and contextually meaningful activities rather than through rigid subject boundaries. Campbell and Henning (2010) observe that an integrated curriculum enables teachers to "structure learning across disciplines and piece together common learning," allowing children to make connections between ideas in ways that mirror real-life experiences.

The Anthora framework operationalises this curriculum principle by positioning indigenous songs as an integrative pedagogical core. Through a single song-based activity, learners may simultaneously engage numeracy skills (counting and pattern recognition), language and

literacy skills (listening, vocabulary, and oral expression), creative arts (rhythm, movement, and performance), and social studies concepts (values, cooperation, and cultural norms). In this way, indigenous songs function as connective tissue within the curriculum, supporting holistic learning in line with national curriculum expectations.

2.2 Sociocultural Learning Theory and Early Childhood Education

The Anthora framework is further grounded in sociocultural learning theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process embedded within cultural practices and shared activities. Vygotsky (1978) argues that children construct knowledge through interaction with more knowledgeable others using culturally available tools, including language, symbols, and artistic forms. From this perspective, songs are not peripheral classroom activities but powerful mediational tools through which cognitive, social, and emotional development occurs. Rogoff (2003) extends this view by emphasising that children's learning is inseparable from the cultural contexts in which it takes place. In Ghanaian communities, indigenous songs constitute familiar cultural practices through which children encounter language structures, social norms, and communal values from an early age. When such songs are integrated into formal kindergarten instruction, they create continuity between home, community, and school learning environments, thereby enhancing meaning-making and learner engagement. Within the Anthora framework, song-based learning aligns with sociocultural principles by encouraging participation, imitation, call-and-response interaction, and guided performance. These practices support scaffolding within learners' zones of proximal development while promoting collaboration, communication, and shared understanding.

2.3 Indigenous Songs and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The framework is also informed by culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), which advocates the use of learners' cultural knowledge, experiences, and modes of expression as foundations for effective teaching and learning (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching recognises culture not as an add-on to instruction but as a central organising framework for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

In the Ghanaian context, scholars such as Nketia (1999) and Flolu (2003) have long argued that indigenous music forms an essential component of traditional education systems. Indigenous songs function simultaneously as artistic expressions, moral texts, historical records, and instructional tools. Ohene-Okantah (2003) further highlights the role of music in cultural transmission and identity formation, while Nzewi (2003) emphasises that African musical practices embed philosophical, environmental, and social knowledge. From a language development standpoint, instruction grounded in the mother tongue enhances comprehension, cognitive flexibility, and participation among young learners. Cummins (2009) maintains that strong first-language foundations support broader academic development, while studies by Vermeulen and Kalinde (2016) show that culturally familiar linguistic forms facilitate smoother transitions into formal schooling. With this view, the Anthora framework aligns with both culturally responsive pedagogy and early childhood language development principles. Rather than treating indigenous songs as enrichment activities, the framework conceptualises them as core pedagogical resources capable of addressing curriculum objectives while reinforcing cultural identity and learner confidence. Drawing on principles of

curriculum integration, sociocultural learning theory, and culturally responsive pedagogy, the Anthora framework positions indigenous songs as central pedagogical resources in Ghanaian kindergarten education.

3. Methods and Process

This study adopted a qualitative case study design situated within the interpretivist research paradigm to explore how indigenous songs are used and conceptualised within kindergarten teaching in the Gomoa Central District of Ghana. Qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to understand meanings, practices, and experiences from participants' perspectives within their natural contexts (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, a case study design allows for an in-depth examination of a bounded system, such as a district, institution, or programme, through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (Yin, 2018). The study was guided by an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through participants' subjective interpretations and cultural meanings (Schwandt, 1994). Given that indigenous songs are culturally embedded practices shaped by local histories, languages, and pedagogical traditions, an interpretivist approach was particularly suitable for uncovering how teachers understand, select, and deploy such songs in kindergarten instruction.

The study was conducted in the Gomoa Central District, a culturally rich area with strong Akan musical traditions. Participants were purposively selected from 20 public kindergarten schools across five educational circuits within the district. Purposive sampling was employed because it enables the selection of information-rich cases that can provide deep insight into the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). In total, 52 participants took part in the study, comprising 40 kindergarten teachers, 10 head teachers, and 2 community members recognised locally for their knowledge of indigenous songs. The inclusion of head teachers and community members was intended to triangulate perspectives on the pedagogical and cultural relevance of indigenous songs. Additionally, a subset of 15 kindergarten teachers with a minimum of five years' teaching experience was selected for in-depth interviews, based on the assumption that experienced teachers possess richer pedagogical repertoires and sustained engagement with indigenous musical practices.

Data were collected in two phases using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, consistent with qualitative case study research that relies on multiple data sources for depth and credibility (Yin, 2018). In the first phase, 20 kindergarten teachers were observed on two separate occasions during regular classroom instruction to document their natural use of songs in lesson delivery. Classroom observation is a valuable method for capturing authentic pedagogical practices as they occur in real-time settings (Tisdell et al., 2025). An observation guide was used to focus on the types of songs used, instructional contexts, learner participation, and links to curriculum content. In the second phase, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the selected 15 experienced teachers. Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow flexibility while ensuring that key issues related to song selection, pedagogical purpose, and cultural meaning were addressed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Teachers were asked to sing indigenous songs they knew or commonly used in their classrooms and to explain the contexts in which these songs were applied. All performances were audio-recorded with consent. Through this process, a total of 78 indigenous Akan songs

were collected. The songs were subsequently transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and prepared for analysis.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, which involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Observation notes, interview transcripts, and song texts were read repeatedly to ensure familiarisation with the data. Initial codes were generated relating to pedagogical use, curriculum alignment, linguistic features, cultural content, and learning outcomes. Following coding, the collected songs were notated, translated, and categorised based on their pedagogical suitability for teaching concepts within the four thematic areas of the Kindergarten curriculum—Numeracy, Language and Literacy, Creative Arts, and Social Studies. This categorisation enabled the identification of recurring pedagogical functions and curriculum linkages across the song repertoire.

The emergent themes from the analysis informed the development of the Anthora conceptual framework. Specifically, the alignment between indigenous songs, integrated curriculum domains, and holistic learning outcomes formed the conceptual basis of the framework. In this way, the Anthora framework is empirically grounded in teachers' lived practices and culturally situated knowledge, rather than being imposed a priori. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, strategies such as data triangulation (across observations, interviews, and song artefacts), prolonged engagement in the field, and member clarification were employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process.

4. Discussion of Findings

The study's findings validated the need for and structure of the Anthora framework.

4.1 The Anthora Conceptual Framework

The Anthora framework, developed from the analysis of data collected in this study, is visualised in Figure 1 below. It positions the anthology of indigenous songs at the centre of the kindergarten learning experience, directly supporting the four thematic areas of the curriculum to achieve holistic child development.
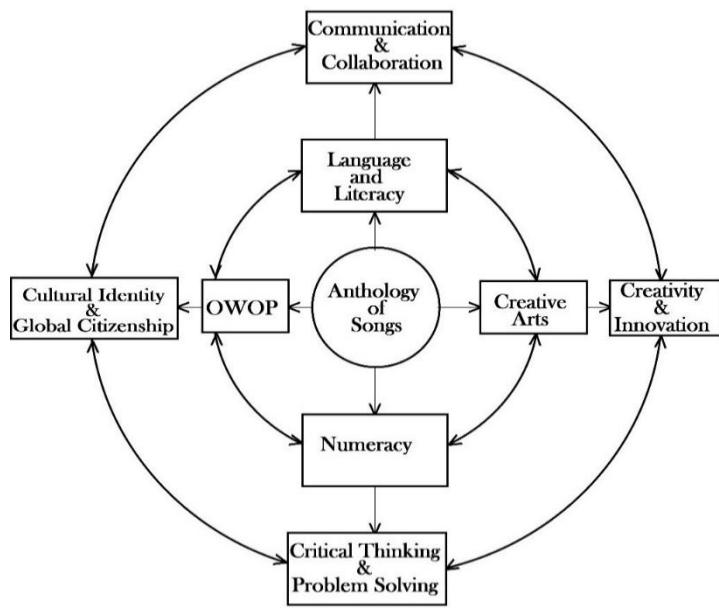
Figure 1: Anthora pedagogical framework for kindergarten instruction by Essel

The Anthora conceptual framework illustrates that a carefully curated anthology of indigenous songs functions not as a supplementary or enrichment activity, but as the central pedagogical resource from which all learning domains are activated. In line with Acquah et al. (2015), the framework positions indigenous musical materials as core instructional resources that meaningfully feed into multiple areas of learning rather than existing at the margins of the curriculum. At the centre of the framework are indigenous songs, grounded in learners' cultural and linguistic realities. These songs operate as culturally situated pedagogical tools that simultaneously engage rhythm, repetition, movement, language, and social interaction. As depicted in the diagram, the integration of indigenous songs into kindergarten instruction is intentionally directed toward holistic child development across the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of learning. This orientation reflects the assertion by Bloom et al. (1956) that meaningful education must engage intellectual understanding, physical skills, and emotional dispositions in a balanced and interconnected manner.

Within indigenous Ghanaian contexts, songs serve as comprehensive educational systems through which language development, motor coordination, social values and emotional expression are nurtured concurrently. This affirms the view by Nketia (1974) that African musical practices are not isolated artistic expressions but integrated modes of teaching and learning embedded within community life. The Anthora framework aligns with broader educational perspectives that recognise culture as central to identity formation, learner engagement, and effective learning (UNESCO, 2015). Again, radiating outward from the central song repertoire are the interconnected curriculum domains such as Numeracy, Language and Literacy, Creative Arts, and Social Studies. As represented in the diagram, these domains are linked through song-based activities rather than treated as discrete instructional units. For instance, counting and accumulation songs support early numeracy skills; action and body-part songs reinforce vocabulary, listening, and physical awareness; while narrative and moral songs transmit social values, cooperation, and cultural knowledge. Through this design,

curriculum integration occurs organically, reflecting the way young children naturally learn through unified, meaningful experiences.

The outer layer of the framework represents the holistic outcomes of learning that includes the 21st Century skills encompassing cultural identity and global citizenship; critical thinking and problem solving; creativity and innovation; as well as communication and collaboration. Sustained engagement with indigenous songs enables learners to develop intellectual competencies, physical coordination, expressive and emotional skills, social competence, and a strong sense of cultural identity. Consequently, the Anthora framework demonstrates how indigenous songs can serve as foundational pedagogical resources that prepare young learners to be academically responsive while remaining firmly grounded in their cultural heritage.

4.2 Categorisation of Songs and Application of Framework
The 78 collected songs were systematically categorised to align with the curriculum. Examples include:

Numeracy

Indigenous children's songs such as "Bɔdambɔ" (Bottles) and "Kor na kor yɛ ebien" (One plus one is two) can be strategically aligned with Ghana's KG Numeracy standards, which emphasise foundational number concepts within the Standards-Based Curriculum for Kindergarten. In the Ghanaian curriculum, Numeracy is one of the four key thematic learning areas designed to develop early mathematical understanding through culturally relevant activities. Such songs naturally embed counting sequences, numerical patterns, and simple arithmetic within rhythmic and repetitive structures, supporting learners' grasp of number sense and operations that are central to early numeracy development. Educational research indicates that integrating rhythm and repetition in learning activities enhances memory, sequencing, and pattern recognition, which are foundational for mastering counting and basic addition concepts. (An et al., 2004; Ginsburg et al., 2008). Situating mathematical learning within familiar and culturally meaningful musical contexts, songs like "Kor na kor yɛ ebien" make abstract mathematical ideas more tangible and memorable for young learners, aligning with constructivist views that stress learning through culturally grounded, concrete experiences (Bruner, 1966; Rogoff, 2003).

Study the following song.

Song 1: : Bɔdambɔ

Bɔ dam bɔ   e   kor   nao si   e   dan   do____   sɛ   bɔ dam bɔ   e   kor   na   dze kor kɛ   ka

hoa   ɔ   yɛ   bɔ dam   bɔ   e   bien____   nao   si   e   dan   do

Song 2: Kor na kor

Kor na kor yɛe bien e bien nae bien yɛa nan e baa sa nae baa   sa   ɔ yɛe sia   a nan na nan   ɔ yɛa

wɔ   twe   e   num   nae   num   ɔ   yɛ   du

Language and Literacy

Indigenous children's songs such as "Kyerɛ wo tsir" (Show your head) and "Dano Dwowda" (One Monday) align closely with Ghana's Kindergarten Language and Literacy standards, which emphasise oral language development, vocabulary acquisition, and listening–speaking skills as foundations for early literacy. Within the KG curriculum, learners are expected to identify parts of the body, name everyday objects, and demonstrate an understanding of time-related concepts such as days of the week through meaningful oral activities. Songs like "Kyerɛ wo tsir" support this objective by reinforcing body-part vocabulary through coordinated movement and repetition, while "Dano Dwowda" introduces temporal sequencing in a rhythmic and memorable form. Furthermore, songs rich in vocabulary, rhyme and rhythm such as "Akyerɛwmba" (The Alphabet), contribute significantly to the development of phonological awareness, articulation, and expressive language, which are critical predictors of later reading success (Goswami, 2001; Yopp & Yopp, 2009). From a sociocultural perspective, the use of familiar indigenous songs situates language learning within culturally meaningful contexts, thereby enhancing comprehension, participation, and communicative confidence among young learners (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). Through such practices, the Anthora framework demonstrates how indigenous songs function as effective language and literacy resources that support curriculum-aligned early childhood learning in Ghana.

Song 3: Kyerɛ wo tsir

Kye rɛ wo tsi   kye rɛ w'a so   kye rɛ w'e nyi wa＿ wo hwen w'a no wo kɔn

me wɔ n sa e bien ya fun kɛ se e nan e bien me nsa tsia baa ye du me nan tsia ba yɛ du

Song 4: Da no dwoda

Da no dwo da＿ bi me kɔ si ta hyɛn＿ me ko hua baa bi na oa ka na no fɛ fɛ fɛw

ɔ fo ke te ke＿ oa pa bɔ fa muo o Ko fi ne pa pae yɛ maw' da bir fa

Song 5: Akyerɛwmba

'A' gye gye 'a'   'A' gye gye 'a'   a kyerɛw mba bia ra wɔ ngye gye 'A' gye gye 'a'

'B' gye gye 'b'   'B' gye gye 'b'   a kyerɛw mba bia ra wɔ ngye gye 'B' gye gye 'b'

'D' gye gye 'd'   'D' gye gye 'd'   a kyerɛw mba bia ra wɔ ngye gye 'D' gye gye 'd'

'E' gye gye 'e'   'E' gye gye 'e'   a kyerɛw mba bia ra wɔ ngye gye 'E' gye gye 'e'

Creative Arts

A vast majority of songs, with their inherent rhythms and melodies, serve this area. For example, "Okusi ne dua" (The rat's tail) encourages call-and-response singing and rhythmic movement. Songs are the basis for performance, movement, dance and artistic expression, fulfilling the creative arts strand directly.

Song 6: Okusi ne dua

O ku si   o ku si   ne dua no a yɛ fi taa a yɛ fi taa   ɔ da bɛkwan   mua ɔ yɛ dɛw pa   pa

bi   ɔ da bɛ kwan mua ɔ yɛ dɛw pa   pa   bi

Our World and Our People

Songs such as "Nursery Sukuul" (Nursery School) teach the importance of education, while "Abɛnkwan yɛ dɛw" discusses local food. Infact, songs about local foods, animals, social norms and moral values (e.g., "Abɛnkwan yɛ dɛw" - Palm nut soup is sweet) teach learners about their environment, culture and civic responsibility.

Song 7: Nursery Sukuul

Nɛ sir skuul   a boa me na   nɛ sir skuul   a boa m'e gya   a bera me tsi fie   mu su

gye si ka   a bera me tsi fie mu su gye tɔ fee   nɛ sir skuul   a ma m'e nyie bue

Song 8: Abɛnkwan yɛ dɛw
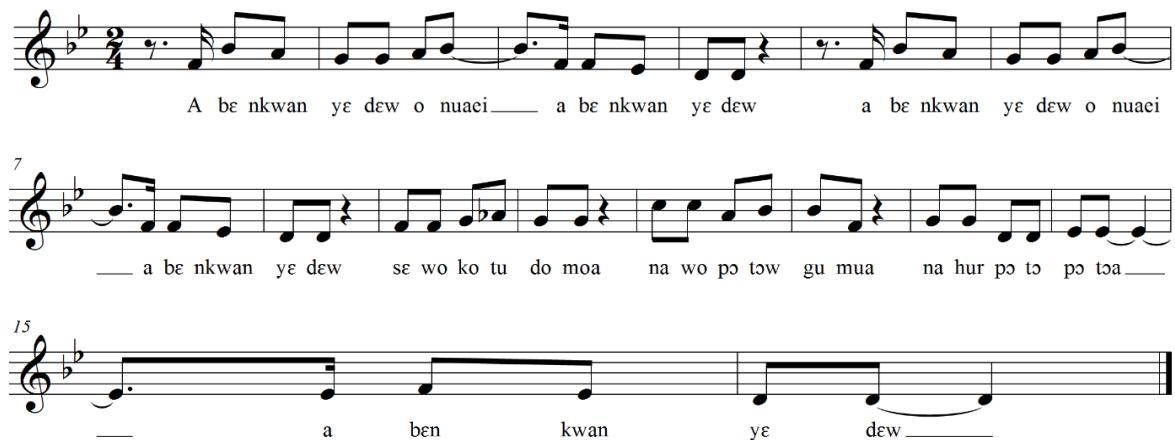
A bɛ nkwan yɛ dɛw o nuaci___ a bɛ nkwan yɛ dɛw   a bɛ nkwan yɛ dɛw o nuaci

___ a bɛ nkwan yɛ dɛw sɛ wo ko tu do moa   na wo pɔ tɔw gu mua   na hur pɔ tɔ pɔ tɔa___

___   a bɛn   kwan   yɛ   dɛw___

5.2 Exemplar Teaching and Learning Activity

To demonstrate the framework's application, an activity using the song "Kakro yɛ dɛw" (Donut is sweet) was designed.

Song 9: Kakro yɛ dɛw

Akan Text

Madam Rose ne kakro yia
Akakro yɛ dɛw
Madam Rose kakro yia
Akakro yɛ dɛw
Mbɛyɛ dɛn na meeya bi edzi?
Akakro yɛ dɛw
Ekor, ebien, ebiasa anan
Akakro yɛ dɛw
Enum, esia, esoun, awotwe
Akron, idu, fa hyɛ w' anomu
Akakro yɛ dɛw

English Translation

Madam Esi's donut
Donut is sweet
Madam Rose's donut
Donut is sweet
How can I get some to eat?
Donut is sweet
One, two, three, four
Donut is sweet
Five, six, seven, eight
Nine, ten, put it inside your mouth
Donut is sweet

"Madam Rose ne kakro yia... Ekor, ebien, ebiasa anan..." (Madam Rose's donut... One, two, three, four...). With this song, in terms of numeracy, Learners count pretend donuts up to ten, practicing one-to-one correspondence and number sequence. For language and Literacy, they learn the words "kakro" (donut), "dɛw" (sweet), and the numerals in Akan but for creative arts, learners create donut shapes with clay or playdough and perform a dance mimicking the making of the donuts. Again, for Our World and Our People, discussion about local foods, the process of making donuts, and the value of hard work (as Madam Rose is a vendor) will help learners develop critical thinking. This integrated activity, guided by a single song, exemplifies how the Anthora framework enables teachers to deliver a rich, multi-faceted lesson that addresses multiple curriculum indicators simultaneously.

5. Conclusions

The Anthora framework offers a practical solution to the challenges identified in the implementation of the 2019 KG curriculum. By providing a structured model for song selection and integration, it empowers teachers to move beyond using songs as mere fillers and to harness their full pedagogical potential. This framework aligns with the curriculum's call for interconnectedness, demonstrating that learning in kindergarten need not be siloed. An indigenous song about counting bottles can simultaneously be a lesson in language, culture, and creative movement. This approach makes learning more engaging, memorable, and relevant to the child's lived experience, effectively bridging the home-school cultural divide. For the Anthora framework to be widely adopted, it must be supported by concrete resources. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with curriculum developers, produces a resource pack for kindergarten teachers containing a printed anthology of categorised indigenous songs with notations and translations, digital repository with audio recordings of the songs and in-service training for teachers on using the framework to design integrated lesson activities. In conclusion, the Anthora framework repositions indigenous songs as the cornerstone of a vibrant, effective, and culturally sustaining kindergarten education in Ghana. It is a testament to the power of local knowledge in shaping globally competitive and culturally confident future citizens.

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