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CULTURAL PERFORMANCE PRACTICES OF AKAN FOLK GAMES ACROSS THREE GHANAIAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Akan folk games are commonly described as recreational or educational activities, yet their cultural significance is produced through performance: bodies move in patterned formations, songs regulate action, rules organize conduct, and local narratives connect play to collective memory. This study examines the cultural performance practices of selected Akan folk games across Asotwe in the Ashanti Region, Drobo in the Bono Region, and Kade in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The study adopted a qualitative, multi-case ethnographic design within a broader doctoral project. Expert purposive sampling technique was used to select Thirty-nine participants: nine traditional authorities and elders, six basic school-teachers, and twenty-four youth and students. Data were generated through interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, audio-visual documentation, and field notes. The data were analyzed thematically and compared across communities. Thirteen games were documented, including Antoankyire, Asɔ/Teele, Mpeewa, Ampe, Kurope, Krodom, Dua ooo Dua, Karikokoo, Merepe-Kwan-M'asen/Makɔ, Kwasiada Frankaa, Kyem-pe, Karikokoo, and Twe-ma-Mentwe. The findings show a shared performance grammar built around communal participation, song, rhythm, bodily movement, spatial formation, rule-following, correction, and audience involvement. At the same time, local versions preserved distinct histories and linguistic forms. The games also functioned as practical pedagogies for language, numeracy, classification, coordination, cooperation, and moral formation.

The study argues that Akan folk games are embodied community archives rather than marginal childhood amusements. The study recommends the selected Akan folk games preservation should therefore be community-specific and multimodal, retaining movement, sound, language, spatial organization, rules, and historical interpretation.

Keywords: *Akan folk games, cultural performance, embodied heritage, indigenous knowledge, cultural transmission, Ghana*

1. Introduction

Traditional games occupy an important but often underestimated place within intangible cultural heritage. Their cultural content is not confined to rules or names; it is enacted through the coordinated relationship among players, leaders, spectators, songs, gestures, objects, spatial formations, and locally understood consequences (Matsekoleng et al., 2024; Nxumalo & Mncube, 2018). The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which was reiterated in 2024 Convention recognises performing arts, oral traditions, social practices, and knowledge transmitted across generations as central domains of living heritage (UNESCO, 2024). Folk games frequently combine all these domains. They are sung, moved, remembered, corrected, adapted, and renewed within the ordinary social spaces of childhood and community life.

The performance-centred nature of traditional games is especially significant in African contexts, where knowledge is often transmitted through participation rather than detached written instruction. Indigenous games create opportunities for children to learn communal responsibility, language, bodily control, reasoning, and moral expectations while taking part in familiar cultural activities. Studies affirm that indigenous African games support culturally grounded teaching, collective values, and learner participation (Hadebe-Ndlovu, 2022; Matsekoleng et al., 2024; Nxumalo & Mncube, 2018). From an ethno-motor perspective, African traditional games also preserve cultural information through their internal rules and their external conditions, including who plays, where play occurs, what objects are used, and how social relationships are organised (Luchoro-Parrilla et al., 2021; Addo & Adu, 2022; Hou et al., 2022).

In Ghana, scholarship further emphasises that indigenous games contribute to children's social, creative, physical, and educational development (Acquah et al., 2015; Addo & Adu, 2022). However, much of the available literature tends to emphasise the educational value, repertoire, or the need for curricular inclusion. Addo and Adu (2022) study focused on the relevance of integrating folk games into the pre-tertiary curriculum, emphasising on creative arts. Mensah et al. (2023) also call for using of traditional games as pedagogical skill in teaching Ghanaian Language in Ghanaian basic schools. In addition, Agyeman and Brewu (2020) document on some Akan folk game performances and their instructional use in selected basic schools in the Ashanti region of Ghana. The Akan folk game practice and educational implications identified by Opoku and Obeng study unveils the use of some folk games assist in teaching music at the early grade (Opoku & Obeng, 2022). Their works centres on the general folk game performance, relevance, and methodological practices. Boateng-Nimoh and Nantwi (2020) concluded in a study conducted in Kumasi metro, Ghana that the introduction of computer games, urbanisation, migration, and its related accolades have resorted to the decline of Akan folk games. There is the need to study, and recognise these gaps; the complete performance practice of individual games: the sequence of action, player formation, locally specific song responses, historical narratives, spatial symbolism, disciplinary mechanisms, and differences

between community versions. When games are reduced to short descriptions, the cultural logic through which they carry memory and meaning is easily lost.

This problem is intensified by changing patterns of childhood recreation, urbanization, migration, formal schooling, and digital entertainment (Boateng-Nimoh & Nantwi, 2020). These changes do not necessarily erase indigenous play, but they alter the spaces and relationships through which games are learned (Boateng-Nimoh & Nantwi, 2020; Agyeman & Brewu, 2020). In some communities, schools have become important sites of continuity; in others, elders retain detailed narratives that younger performers may no longer know (Opoku & Obeng, 2022). Digital preservation can widen access, but text-only documentation cannot adequately represent cultural practices whose meaning depends on sound, movement, timing, gesture, and interaction (Hou et al., 2022). Research on embodied intangible heritage therefore emphasizes the need to document the full relationship between performance and context (Hou et al., 2022; Skublewska-Paszkowska et al., 2022).

The present study addresses the gap raised above by examining how selected Akan folk games are culturally performed and interpreted across three Ghanaian communities; Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade. The communities represent Asante, Bono, and Akyem cultural settings within the broader Akan heritage field. The study asks: How are Akan folk games performed across the three communities? What cultural meanings are embedded in their performance structures? How do shared forms coexist with local variations? The study offers a focused account of selected Akan folk games as embodied systems of memory, pedagogy, discipline, and community-specific identity.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Performance theory provides a useful lens for understanding folk games because it treats cultural meaning as something accomplished through organised action (Wang, et al., 2026; Schechner, 2003). Performance involves more than a scripted event; it includes repeated behaviour, roles, spatial arrangements, bodily techniques, interaction, audience response, and culturally recognized sequences (Schechner, 2013). From this perspective, the rules of a game are inseparable from the way participants stand, sing, move, wait, respond, correct one another, and interpret victory or defeat. The body and the performance space become cultural texts.

This approach also clarifies why apparently simple children's games may preserve complex social knowledge. A circle can organize collective attention; an opposing line can represent struggle or boundary; a claimed square can symbolize territorial ownership; and a song can function simultaneously as memory, instruction, timing device, and warning. The meaning of a game is therefore distributed across speech, sound, movement, objects, and relationships. Luchoro-Parrilla et al. (2021) similarly demonstrate that traditional games mirror cultural life through both motor structures and sociocultural conditions.

Stefano and Davis (2017) argue that the concept of living heritage complements performance theory by emphasizing that cultural practices are sustained by communities and remain open to variation. Intangible heritage is not authentic because it is unchanged; rather, it remains meaningful because communities recognize, transmit, and reinterpret it (Stefano & Davis, 2017; UNESCO, 2024). This principle is important for Akan folk games. A shared game may have different names, song responses, stories, or emphases in Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade. Such differences should not be treated as errors to be standardized. They are evidence that heritage is locally situated and historically layered.

The analysis therefore attended to two related dimensions. The first was the shared performance grammar of the games: communal organization, song, rhythm, movement, rules, correction, objects, and spatial formation. The second was community-specific meaning: how participants connected a performance to sanitation, labour, war, land, language, classification, measurement, schooling, or moral instruction. Together, these dimensions allow the games to be interpreted as embodied archives that carry both common Akan patterns and distinct local memories.

2.2 Cultural Performance Practices of African (Ghanaian) Folk Games

Traditional and indigenous games are now widely recognised as part of the world's cultural heritage because they express communal identity, creativity, memory and social organisation. UNESCO (2024) affirms that traditional and indigenous games, dances and sports express the diversity of cultural heritage and require protection and promotion. This position is relevant to Akan folk games because the games are embedded in communal life and often involve patterned performances through which children and adults learn social expectations. For instance, games involving singing, clapping, chasing, hiding, counting, call-and-response and collective movement teach more than physical coordination. They also reinforce attentiveness, discipline, respect, turn taking, alertness, cooperation, leadership and moral responsibility. In this sense, Akan folk games can be examined as forms of embodied pedagogy, where the body becomes a medium through which cultural knowledge is practised and remembered.

The literature on intangible cultural heritage emphasises that living heritage must be understood within the communities that practise, sustain and interpret it. Stefano and Davis (2017) argue that intangible cultural heritage is inseparable from the people, places and social relations through which it is enacted. This means that the study of Akan folk games should not be limited to cataloguing game names or documenting surface-level rules. Instead, researchers attention must be given to who performs the games, when they are performed, where they are performed, how participants learn them, and what roles are assigned to children or adults, and how the games reflect Akan social values. Performance practice also requires attention to variation, since the same game may be performed differently across Akan communities due to differences in dialect, local history, religious influence, gender expectations, festivals, migration, urbanisation and generational change.

Recent scholarships on traditional games show that such games serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and collective memory. Luchoro-Parrilla et al. (2021) and Kyei-Nuamah (2026) explain that traditional games are forms of intangible cultural heritage because they preserve cultural meanings through movement, interaction and social rules. Both studies perspective is useful for Akan folk games because the meaning of a game is often produced during performance. For example, the rhythm of a song, the speed of bodily movement, the emotional response of spectators, the humour of participants and the competitiveness of players may communicate values that cannot be fully captured through written description. Therefore, the performance practice of Akan folk games must be analysed as a complete cultural event involving sound, movement, space, interaction, memory and social interpretation.

Folk games also function as culturally grounded pedagogical resources. Nxumalo and Mncube (2018) argue that indigenous games can support African-centred learning by promoting communal values and reconnecting education to local knowledge systems. Matsekoleng, Mapotse and Gumbo (2024) similarly maintain that indigenous games create participatory and culturally meaningful learning experiences. In the Akan context, this suggests that folk games may help learners understand indigenous systems of knowledge through direct participation.

The games may teach counting, language, social reasoning, moral conduct, coordination, problem-solving and group identity. This educational function is particularly important in a context where modern schooling, digital entertainment and urban lifestyles have weakened children's everyday exposure to traditional communal games.

The cultural performance practice of Akan folk games must also be studied in relation to oral transmission. Isa, Zin, Rosdi and Sarim (2018) observe that intangible heritage is often stored in the memories of practitioners, making it vulnerable when older generations pass on without proper documentation. This argument is highly relevant because many Akan folk games are learned informally through observation, imitation and repeated participation. Children often learn the rules, songs and movements of the games by watching older siblings, peers, parents or community members. Such informal transmission is culturally powerful, but it also creates preservation challenges when social spaces for performance decline. As communities become more urbanised and digitally mediated, the continuity of folk game performance may depend increasingly on deliberate documentation and educational reintegration.

The cultural performance practice of Akan folk games constitutes a major foundation for understanding how traditional games operate as living cultural expressions rather than ordinary recreational activities. Cultural performance refers to the organised ways through which a community enacts, transmits, interprets and renews its values through bodily movement, song, rhythm, gesture, speech, role-play, competition, cooperation and audience participation (Akinsola, 2025; Addaquay, 2025; Adjepong & Obeng, 2018). In the context of Akan folk games, performance practice includes the rules of play, the order of performance, the spatial arrangement of participants, the use of songs and chants, the rhythm of movement (Addaquay, 2025), the social occasions on which games are performed, and the meanings attached to participation. These elements are central to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage because they show how cultural knowledge is embodied and transmitted through practice rather than through written instruction alone.

The review of related literature on cultural performance practice therefore offers the basis for examining selected Akan folk games as living cultural structures. It directs attention to the performative conditions under which the games are enacted, the meanings produced through participation, and the ways in which communal knowledge is sustained through embodied action. By reviewing literature on intangible cultural heritage, indigenous games, oral transmission and embodied pedagogy, it establishes the intellectual foundation for analysing the study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach/Research Philosophy/Paradigm

The study was guided primarily by an interpretivist research philosophy. Interpretivism was considered appropriate because the study examined cultural meanings, performance practices, and community interpretations associated with selected Akan folk games. This philosophical position assumes that social and cultural realities are not fixed or externally imposed but are constructed through human experience, interaction and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Tisdell, et al., 2025). The study adopted a qualitative-dominant research approach supported by developmental and evaluative components. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on meanings, performance practices, cultural contexts, oral accounts, and community-based interpretations of selected Akan folk games. Qualitative

inquiry is suitable for studies that seek to understand human experiences, cultural meanings and social practices within their natural settings (Poth & Shannon-Baker, 2022; Tisdell, et al., 2025).

3.2 Research Design

The article used a multi-case ethnographic design to document folk games within their cultural and social settings. Ethnographic inquiry was appropriate because the study required detailed attention to performance, oral explanation, memory, interaction, and local interpretation rather than numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected in Asotwe community in the Ashanti Region, Drobo community in the Bono Region, and Kade community in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The sites were selected to provide culturally connected but locally differentiated Akan settings – Asante, Bono, and Akyem respectively.

3.3 Study Areas/Context

The study was conducted within the periphery of Akan communities. It centred on three selected Akan dialect-specifics, predominantly Twi-speakers comprising Akyem, Asante, and Bono. In Akyem dialect, Kade community was chosen, where Asotwe community represented Asante, and Drobo community was recruited for Bono. The three communities enabled comparison without assuming that Akan cultural practice is uniform. Asotwe community data highlighted school-based performance and peer learning; Drobo community participants offered detailed accounts related to sanitation, cocoa labour, strength, and communal discipline; and Kade community participants emphasized Akyem linguistic forms, land, boundaries, warfare, indigenous measurement, and strategic movement. The comparative design made it possible to identify both recurring performance structures and community-specific historical interpretations.

3.2 Population, Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The study population comprised traditional authorities and elders knowledgeable in Akan game culture, cultural teachers handling creative arts, language or mathematics, and youth and students who are enthusiast in Akan game culture. The population categories should reside within Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade communities in Asante, Bono, and Akyem respectively.

The study involved thirty-nine participants, with thirteen participants selected from each community. The sample comprised nine traditional authorities and elders, six basic school teachers, and twenty-four youth and students. Expert purposive was used to select the participants because the study needs those possessed relevant cultural, educational, performance-based game knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Selective snowball referrals were used when initial participants identified additional expert knowledge holders in the study. This made the researchers arrived on the sample size for each community, when the data saturated because of the information gathered from game cultural experts participants from all categories in each community. This confirms Creswell and Poth (2018) assertion that sampling continued until recurring descriptions and interpretations indicated adequate thematic depth, which inform the researchers to select the thirty-nine participants. The table 1 gives the detail and explicit distribution of the sample size.

Table 1. *Distribution and contribution of participants*

Participant category	Asotwe	Drobo	Kade	Total	Primary contribution
Traditional authorities and elders	3	3	3	9	Historical narratives, cultural meanings, rules, local versions, and performance contexts
Basic school teachers	2	2	2	6	Educational interpretation, school-based continuity, and curriculum relevance
Youth and students	8	8	8	24	Current performance experience, peer learning, enjoyment, and intergenerational transmission
Total	13	13	13	39	Multi-stakeholder evidence across three communities

The analysis presented in this article drew most directly on interviews and focus groups with elders, teachers, youth and students, together with observed performances and field notes.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, field notes, and audio-visual documentation. Interviews with elders and traditional authorities explored game histories, names, performance sequences, song texts, rules, objects, occasions, participant roles, and cultural meanings. Teachers discussed how games were practiced in school settings and how their performance could support language, music, mathematics, creative arts, physical education, environmental knowledge, and moral education. Focus groups with youth and students provided collective recall, demonstrations, peer correction, and accounts of contemporary play.

Observation focused on the complete organization of performance: the preparation of space, number and arrangement of players, leader and follower roles, movement sequences, gestures, songs, clapping patterns, objects, penalties, audience reactions, and the conditions under which a game ended. Audio-visual documentation was used because many culturally significant details could not be captured adequately through verbal description alone. The researchers also recorded contextual information about school compounds, open communal spaces, local terminology, and variations between participant accounts.

Participant identifiers were organized by community, participant category, method, sequence number, and objective. For example, AS-E-PI-01-O1 identifies an Asotwe community elder interviewed for Objective One, while KD-YS-FGD-01-O1 identifies a Kade community youth or student focus-group contribution. The coding system preserved traceability while protecting personal identity.

3.5 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data were analysed thematically following the logic of familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and interpretive writing described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview accounts, focus-group data, observations, and audio-visual records were read and reviewed repeatedly. Initial codes captured observable practices and cultural meanings, including circular formation, call-and-response, strength testing, land symbolism,

classification, correction, peer learning, and community-specific song forms. Codes were then organized into cross-community themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ten comparative themes emerged: communal participation; song, rhythm, and movement; rule-following and correction; community-specific variation; historical memory; performance space and bodily formation; educational meaning; moral and social values; differences in local emphasis; and cultural performance as living heritage. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, comparison of oral accounts with observed demonstrations, cross-checking with knowledgeable participants, thick description, and a documented analytic trail. These procedures are consistent with guidance on credible and transparent thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Administrative and community permissions were obtained before fieldwork. An introductory and consent letter was issued through the Department of Painting and Sculpture, College of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Relevant education directorates, school heads, community authorities, and participants granted permission for interviews, observations, and documentation. Adults provided informed consent. For children and younger participants, consent was obtained from appropriate guardians, teachers, or responsible adults, and assent was sought where applicable. Participant codes are used in the article, and identifiable photographs are not reproduced.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of the Documented Games

Thirteen games were profiled across the three communities. They differed in motor structure and immediate purpose, yet each joined physical action to cultural meaning. The repertoire included circle games, clapping and jumping games, strength contests, throwing and catching games, classification games, spatial strategy games, symbolic sharing games, and performances built around human barriers or marked boundaries. The table 2 below identifies the game, core performance form, and principal cultural meanings identified in the study. It therefore elaborates and simplify the selected Akan folk game and principal performance meanings underline in all the three Akan communities.

Table 2. *Selected Akan folk games and principal performance meanings*

Game	Core performance form	Principal cultural meanings identified in the study
Antoankyire (Do not look back)	Players squat in a circle while a leader moves around and drops a folded cloth or object; song, clapping, pursuit, and correction structure the game.	Alertness, sanitation, wrongdoing, remorse, vigilance, language awareness, and social correction.
Teele / Aso (Throw and catch)	A player is lifted or thrown and caught by a supporting group, usually with singing and clapping.	Trust, courage, mutual support, bodily confidence, and dependable companionship.

Game	Core performance form	Principal cultural meanings identified in the study
Mpeewa (Slap palm and clap)	Players coordinate palm slapping, clapping, singing, and patterned response; mistakes may lead to elimination.	Rhythm, concentration, coordination, creativity, discipline, and peer learning.
Bankye-ma-Akrakuro (Cassava produces doughnut)	Participants pass stones or small objects in time with a song and coordinated hand movement.	Food memory, desire, symbolic substitution, timing, and collective participation.
Ampe	Two players or teams clap, jump, display leg positions, score, tease, and encourage one another.	Quick reasoning, bodily intelligence, counting, competition, confidence, and humour.
Kurope (Town search / Hopscotch)	Players hop through marked spaces and may claim a successful space as a town.	Land search, settlement, ownership, boundaries, permission, estimation, and balance.
Krodom (Loving community)	Players draw circles and paths, measure with hand-spans, and move turkey berries strategically.	Direction, return, survival, indigenous measurement, planning, and spatial reasoning.
Dua ooo Dua (Tail ooo tail)	A leader names animals; players respond only when the animal fits the agreed category, with running or correction after errors.	Animal classification, listening, quick reasoning, environmental knowledge, and correction.
Mepe Kwan M'asen / M'ako (I want a way to pass)	One player attempts to break through a human barrier formed by the group.	Persistence, courage, resistance, individual effort, and collective unity.
Kwasiada Frankaa (Sunday flag)	Players engage in flag-related or symbolic spatial play associated with collective display and memory.	Identity, symbolic representation, movement, and shared cultural recall.
Kyem-pe (Let us share evenly)	Participants divide or exchange items according to agreed rules.	Fairness, sharing, generosity, agreement, promise-keeping, and communal responsibility.
Karikokoo (Carry / weigh cocoa)	Two players interlock arms or stand back-to-back and lift one another while the group sings.	Cocoa labour, weighing, carrying, strength, endurance, bodily limits, and work memory.

Game	Core performance form	Principal cultural meanings identified in the study
Twe-ma-Mentwe (Tug-of-war)	Two opposing teams hold one another and pull across a marked line.	Unity, coordinated strength, endurance, boundaries, defeat, courage, and war-related readiness.

A Shared Performance Syntax

Across the three communities, the games were consistently described and observed as communal performances. Players formed circles, semi-circles, pairs, lines, or opposing teams. Meaning emerged through coordinated participation rather than isolated action. In Antoankyire, the circle organized attention around the moving leader. In Asɔ/Teele, the group assumed physical responsibility for the person being lifted. In Twe-ma-Mentwe, players depended on the grip and balance of teammates. In Mpeewa and Bankye-ma-Akrakuro, the continuity of the game depended on shared timing and coordinated hand movements.

AS-E-PI-01-O1: *“Akan folk games were not introduced only to entertain children. They helped children learn how to live with others, respect rules, accept correction and remember the practices of the community.”*

The Asotwe elder’s account illustrates that participation itself was regarded as a mode of instruction. Rules were not normally delivered as abstract lessons. Players learned by joining the formation, observing others, responding to cues, making mistakes, and accepting correction. This produced an informal cultural classroom in open spaces, school compounds, and communal settings.

Song, rhythm, and movement were equally central. The songs did not merely decorate the games. They regulated pace, announced transitions, held collective attention, and signalled when a player should move, clap, lift, run, pull, or respond. Mpeewa required simultaneous control of voice, eyes, hands, and timing. Antoankyire depended on the interaction between the leader’s movement and the group’s clapping and song. Karikokoo used the repeated call “Kari-kokoo” and response “Kari-waa-waa” to sustain alternating lifting. In Dua ooo Dua, call-and-response framed classification and quick decision-making.

Rule-following and correction formed a third shared feature. In Mpeewa, a broken rhythm could remove a player from the round. In Antoankyire, failure to notice the dropped object placed a player in the position of offender. In Dua ooo Dua, a wrong response attracted correction. In Kurope, stepping on a prohibited line or entering a claimed space without permission violated the game’s order. In Twe-ma-Mentwe, crossing the marked line defined defeat. Penalties were generally playful, public, and restorative rather than hostile. They taught attention, consequences, and reintegration.

Historical Memory Enacted Through the Body

Participants connected several games to older forms of social life. The performance did not recount history through formal narration alone; it translated remembered practices into bodily action. In Drobo, Antoankyire was linked to communal sanitation inspection. Squatting players were interpreted as houses, the moving player as an inspecting figure, and the folded cloth as hidden filth or an offense. The game dramatized wrongdoing, detection, correction, and restored membership.

DR-E-PI-01-O1: *“Antoankyire is an old game our forefathers used to discourage people from keeping their surroundings dirty. In the past, people who kept filth behind their houses were inspected, exposed and corrected.”*

Karikokoo preserved a different historical field. Drobo participants associated its back-to-back lifting with cocoa weighing, carrying, and the testing of bodily capacity. The performance taught that strength is measurable and that a person should recognize physical limits. Twe-ma-Mentwe was connected in Drobo and Kade to the testing of people for war-related responsibilities. The present children's contest retained memories of firmness, selection, courage, collective defence, and the dependence of group success on coordinated strength.

Kade accounts gave particular prominence to land, territory, direction, and strategy. Kurope was interpreted as a symbolic search for and possession of a town. Successful movement through marked spaces allowed a player to claim an area; other players then had to respect the boundary or request permission to pass. The ground became a cultural map rather than a neutral play surface.

KD-E-PI-04-O1: *“Kurope means searching for a town. In the olden days, people had to fight, move and secure land before they could call a place their town. In the game, the spaces drawn on the ground represent land.”*

Krodom similarly linked motor activity to spatial intelligence. Participants drew circles and paths, measured with hand-spans, and moved turkey berries through an organized field. Elders associated the game with a warrior or traveller who had to remember the route back to the community. Counting, measurement, direction, memory, and strategic planning were therefore embedded in the material and motor structure of play. Dua ooo Dua preserved environmental classification through a leader-controlled call-and-response structure in which children distinguished animals according to the presence or absence of a tail.

Local Variation within a Shared Akan Heritage Field

The same game could retain a recognizable structure while displaying community-specific language, naming, or interpretation. Antoankyire appeared in Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade, but the song responses and semantic emphases varied. Drobo participants emphasized a Bono response rendered as “Yeee ye,” whereas Kade participants identified the Akyem response “Kyin-ko.” Kade elders also distinguished between “Anto w’akyi?” and “Ato w’akyi?”, explaining that a small linguistic change alters the message from a question to a warning that something has fallen behind the player. The performance therefore trained semantic attention as well as physical vigilance.

Local naming also marked identity. The throwing-and-catching game called *Asɔ* in Asotwe was referred to as *Teele* in Drobo. The motor structure remained recognizable, but the local name, song, and interpretation formed part of the community version. These differences show that standardizing a single “correct” Akan form would erase meaningful variation.

Each site also placed a different emphasis on the repertoire. In Asotwe, observations at Asotwe Basic School showed that school leisure periods and organized game sessions had become important settings for continuity. Teachers and youth emphasized participation, rhythm, peer learning, and curricular value. Drobo participants foregrounded sanitation, cocoa labour, endurance, war-related strength, and social discipline. Kade participants provided elaborate interpretations related to Akyem language, land ownership, boundaries, classification, indigenous measurement, and strategic return. The differences did not fragment the heritage field; they revealed how shared forms absorb local history and experience.

Performance as Cultural Pedagogy and Moral Formation

Teachers in all three communities viewed the games as resources for practical learning. The educational content was not an external benefit attached after play; it was built into the performance itself. Kuropɛ involved counting, estimation, balance, and respect for marked space. Krodom involved hand-span measurement, addition, line and circle formation, and strategic planning. Dua ooo Dua involved animal classification, listening, and rapid reasoning. Mpeewa developed rhythmic accuracy, concentration, and eye-hand-voice coordination. Ampe combined counting, choice, timing, jumping, and quick bodily response.

AS-T-PI-01-01: *“Some Akan folk games can support teaching and learning because they involve counting, movement, rhythm, singing, shapes, listening and cooperation.”*

Moral and social lessons were likewise embedded in action. Asɔ/Teele required trust and dependable support. Twe-ma-Mentwe taught that one weak grip could affect the entire team. Mepe Kwan M’asen/M’ako dramatized persistence against resistance while also requiring the barrier group to remain united. Kyem-pe made fairness, sharing, and promise-keeping practical. Antoankyire linked vigilance to confession, correction, and return to the group. Children learned rules, consequences, boundaries, and cooperation through repeated participation rather than through detached moral instruction.

Youth accounts confirmed that the games were experienced as enjoyable and demanding at the same time. Suspense, teasing, competition, singing, and public correction sustained interest, while the rules required concentration and self-control. The combination of pleasure and discipline made the games effective vehicles of peer-based cultural transmission.

Cross-Community Thematic Synthesis

In cross-community thematic synthesis, table 3 below outlines the detailed and comprehensive analysis drawn from the three communities, namely, Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade. The table 3 further gives various shared themes, shared pattern across-communities, and community specific emphasis.

Table 3. Shared themes and community-specific emphases

Theme	Shared pattern across-communities	Community-specific emphasis
Communal participation	Circles, pairs, lines, teams, leaders, and spectators created meaning through interaction.	Asotwe emphasized school-based group learning; Drobo emphasized discipline and collective strength; Kade emphasized territory, strategy, and classification.
Song, rhythm, and movement	Songs functioned as cues, timing devices, memory carriers, and social signals.	Different response texts and pronunciations were retained, particularly in Antoankyire.
Rules and correction	Mistakes produced elimination, pursuit, teasing, symbolic punishment, or group correction.	Sanitation and remorse were prominent in Drobo; boundaries and permission were prominent in Kade.

Theme	Shared pattern across-communities	Community-specific emphasis
Historical memory	Games translated older social experiences into bodily action.	Drobo foregrounded cocoa labour and war-related testing; Kade foregrounded land, direction, and settlement; Asotwe foregrounded school continuity.
Space and bodily formation	Circles, opposing lines, paths, claimed spaces, and human barriers organized performance.	Kurope and Krodom in Kade carried especially detailed territorial and spatial meanings.
Educational meaning	Learning occurred through singing, counting, measuring, balancing, classifying, responding, and cooperating.	Teachers linked games to Creative Arts, Ghanaian language, mathematics, music, physical education, environmental studies, and moral education.
Moral and social values	Trust, fairness, unity, courage, discipline, persistence, and responsibility were enacted rather than merely stated.	Specific values were attached to particular games and local narratives.
Living heritage and variation	Shared structures coexisted with local names, songs, pronunciations, and explanations.	Community versions were treated as culturally valid records rather than deviations from a single standard form.

4.2 Discussion

Akan Folk Games as Embodied Community Archives

The central finding is that Akan folk games operate as embodied community archives. They preserve knowledge not by separating it from action, but by organizing the body, voice, space, objects, and relationships into repeatable cultural forms. This interpretation extends beyond the common description of traditional games as leisure. Like the traditional games examined by Luchoro-Parrilla et al. (2021), the Akan games reflect cultural life through both their motor rules and their social conditions. The games specify who leads, who responds, how the body is positioned, what counts as error, and how the community reacts.

Performance theory helps explain why these details matter. The games rely on restored and repeated behaviour: squatting in a circle, lifting a partner, interlocking fingers, hopping through demarcated spaces, measuring with a hand-span, or answering a leader's call (Schechner, 2013). Repetition makes the practice recognizable, but each performance also renews it. The historical meaning of Karikokoo, for example, is carried not only by an explanation of cocoa labour but by the bodily experience of weight, balance, endurance, and public evaluation. Kurope preserves territorial consciousness because players physically negotiate marked spaces and permission. Krodom retains strategic memory through lines, measurement, direction, and return.

This embodied structure is particularly important where oral memory is vulnerable. Isa et al. (2018) note that intangible cultural knowledge may remain concentrated in the memories of

practitioners when systematic documentation is limited. The present findings show that the risk is not only the loss of stories; it is also the loss of timing, formation, pronunciation, movement sequence, correction, and locally understood symbolism. A written list of rules would preserve only a fraction of the heritage.

Communal Participation, Discipline, and Social Learning

The findings also demonstrate that communal participation is not simply a practical requirement for play. It is a value enacted by the game. Players learn that success depends on mutual attention and reliable relationships. Aso/Teele makes trust literal because the lifted player depends on the catchers. Twe-ma-Mentwe turns collective strength into an observable outcome: a single weak grip can destabilize the group. Mpeewa requires performers to sustain a shared rhythmic order, and Antoankyire requires collective observation and response.

These findings support scholarship that positions indigenous games as culturally grounded pedagogies. Nxumalo and Mncube (2018) argue that indigenous games can transmit communal values and reconnect curricula to African knowledge. Hadebe-Ndlovu (2022) similarly reports that teachers view indigenous games as supporting interaction and culturally familiar learning, while Matsekoleng et al. (2024) emphasize their relevance to meaningful, participatory education. The Akan cases deepen this argument by showing precisely how the pedagogy works: through rules, bodily interdependence, rhythmic coordination, peer correction, spatial boundaries, and consequences.

Correction in the games was especially significant. Rather than being external discipline imposed after play, correction was built into the performance sequence. The offending player was chased, eliminated, teased, redirected, or required to acknowledge fault. This produced a social environment in which error was visible and consequential but usually temporary. The player could return to the group. Such structures suggest that the games teach not only obedience but also restoration, tolerance, and the acceptance of communal judgment.

Local Variation as Cultural Authenticity

The study further shows that variation should be understood as a feature of living heritage rather than evidence of inconsistency. Antoankyire retained a common circular structure and alertness motif across the sites, but its song responses, linguistic distinctions, and historical emphases differed. Aso and Teele named closely related performances in different communities. The same strength contest could be interpreted through labour, war, unity, or school-based physical education. These local layers are precisely what make the games meaningful to particular communities.

Living heritage is sustained by communities, groups, and individuals who recognise and transmit it (UNESCO, 2024). The implication is that preservation should not seek a single generalised Akan version at the expense of local records. The community source, dialect, alternative name, performance setting, song text, and interpretation should remain visible. Stefano and Davis (2017) similarly stress the importance of social context in understanding intangible heritage. In the present study, local variation was not peripheral metadata; it was part of the cultural content.

Educational and Preservation Implications

The educational findings are consistent with Ghanaian research showing that indigenous musical games and folk resources support children's holistic development and culturally relevant arts education (Acquah et al., 2015; Addo & Adu, 2022). The present study adds detailed evidence that specific performance structures can support specific learning domains. Kuropɛ and Krodom connect indigenous spatial practice to counting, estimation, measurement,

drawing, and balance. *Dua ooo Dua* connects call-and-response to environmental classification. *Antoankyire* connects song semantics to listening and language awareness. *Mpeewa* links rhythm to concentration and coordination. These associations provide a basis for classroom use that respects the game's cultural integrity rather than using it as a superficial activity.

For preservation, the findings establish a clear design principle: embodied heritage requires multimodal documentation. Research on digital intangible heritage emphasizes the importance of representing motion, interaction, sound, and contextual knowledge rather than relying on text alone (Hou et al., 2022; Skublewska-Paszkowska et al., 2022). A robust archive of Akan folk games should therefore include full-performance video, clear audio of songs and calls, photographs or diagrams of player formations and ground markings, local-language transcriptions, translations, alternative names, rules, historical narratives, educational notes, and community-specific metadata.

The digital record should also remain connected to live practice. Documentation cannot substitute for the social experience of joining a circle, being caught by peers, negotiating a boundary, or responding to communal correction. Its strongest role is to support memory, teaching, revival, and intergenerational access. Schools, cultural institutions, and communities can use digital materials to introduce a game, clarify its history and rules, and then return it to embodied performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The cultural performance practices of Akan folk games reveal a heritage system in which memory is carried through coordinated bodies, voices, objects, spaces, and rules. Across Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade, the selected games shared a recognizable grammar of communal participation, song, rhythm, movement, correction, leadership, and audience involvement. Yet the same heritage field also retained locally specific names, linguistic forms, historical narratives, and moral emphases.

The games preserved sanitation practices, cocoa labour, war-related strength testing, land consciousness, indigenous measurement, animal classification, and social expectations. They also supported language awareness, numeracy, environmental knowledge, coordination, trust, persistence, fairness, and collective responsibility. Their educational force came from performance itself: learners counted, measured, listened, balanced, cooperated, and accepted consequences while playing.

The selected Akan folk games should therefore be treated as living cultural knowledge rather than as residual childhood entertainment in Akyem, Asante, and Bono communities. Ethnographic scholars should document community-specific versions and retain the relationship among narrative, language, movement, sound, spatial formation, rules, and social meaning. Basic Schools in the study communities should use the games as culturally grounded learning resources while maintaining opportunities for actual performance. Ethnographic digital archives developers should function as supports for renewed participation, not replacements for the communities and bodies through which the heritage lives.

This article makes three related contributions. First, it provides a comparative, community-based account of the performance grammar of Akan folk games across Asotwe, Drobo, and Kade. Second, it demonstrates that historical memory is encoded within motor and spatial structures: labour becomes lifting, land becomes claimed space, vigilance becomes circular attention, and classification becomes call-and-response. Third, it establishes that community-specific variation is not incidental but essential to accurate preservation. These contributions

reposition Akan folk games as sophisticated systems of embodied knowledge and provide an empirical basis for culturally responsible digital archiving and heritage education.

6. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The findings are bounded by the three selected communities and thirteen documented games. Akan-speaking communities differ in dialect, history, settlement, livelihood, and performance practice; the results should therefore not be treated as a complete account of all Akan folk games. The study also relied partly on oral memory, which may vary across generations and knowledge holders. The presence of recording equipment and the researcher may have influenced some demonstrations. Future research should compare additional Akan subgroups, examine gender and age differences in participation, document changes over time, and evaluate how school-based and digital reintroduction affects continued live performance.

Ethics and Consent

Permission was obtained from relevant departmental, educational, school, community, and traditional authorities before data collection. Adult participants provided informed consent. Guardian or responsible-adult consent and participant assent were obtained for children and younger participants where applicable. Participant identities are represented through codes, and identifiable field photographs are not included in this article.

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