

An Iconography of An Invisible Majority: Selected Ewe and Mole Dagbani Cultural Artifacts in the Curriculum of Junior High School Learners

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ABSTRACT

Ghana is a populous, ethnically diverse, and multicultural society where diversity and inclusivity is celebrated. However, the representation of Ghana's cultural heritage predominantly emphasizes the Akan ethnic society, neglecting the majority of the nation's ethnic societies. This study aimed to unearth the socio-cultural significance and the design iconography of selected Ewe and Mole Dagbani artifacts in Ghana for formal educational purposes. Using the qualitative research method of phenomenology, the history and socio-cultural relevance of the artifacts were obtained from key informant interviews. Thick interpretations and observations were conducted to obtain emic perspectives on selected cultural artifacts of the Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic society from an accessible population of (n=21) participants comprised of divisional chiefs, craftsmen, vendors, and elders. The Panofsky iconographic analysis of these Ewe and Mole Dagbani cultural artifacts, *Fiakuku*, *Dzonu*, *Mugri*, and *Saba*, enabled the researchers to decode the symbols, forms, materials, and historical meanings of the artifacts and to determine their socio-cultural and educational relevance. Findings suggest that these cultural artifacts embody the philosophies of the people that communicate historical narratives and ethical principles that guide societal behaviour. They function as leadership art with resonances in the spirit and as a method of passing on cultural wisdom and traditions to succeeding generations. Through these artifacts, learners can develop an appreciation for Ghana's diverse cultural landscape while gaining valuable skills in cross-disciplinary academic disciplines thus consolidating national identity, social cohesion, and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Cultural artifacts, cultural diversity, Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies

1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana is a populous ethnically diverse and multicultural society where diversity and inclusivity is celebrated (Danso-Wiredu and Brako, 2021; Ayentimi *et al.*, 2020) and the basis of the diversity is largely seen in the different languages spoken and the cultural traits depicted by different ethnic groups, with over 100 ethnic groups living in Ghana from six main ethnic societies: the Akan (Ashanti and Fanti), being the largest, the Mole-Dagbani, the Ewe, the Ga Adangbe, Guan and Gurma https://libraryguides.umassmed.edu/diversity_guide/ghanaianm.

This diversity is evidenced in the cultural heritage and artifacts that define a particular culture-sharing group and inform about the culture and ideas that are associated with them (Pradhan, 2023). As physical objects, cultural artifacts represent fashioned or refashioned objects humanly made to support a culture (Wagner, 2020). They are the physical evidence of indigenous knowledge and serve as vessels for cultural continuity and collective memory (Adzahlie-Mensah & Dunne, 2018). In light of this, education policy and curricula in Ghana must encompass the cultural heritage of the ethnic societies in the country. To establish the legitimacy, and authority of Ghana and Africa as a modern nation-state, the first president of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah extensively incorporated the aesthetics of Asante chieftaincy and adopted the Asante royal insignia as state symbols (Witte & Meyer, 2016). Furthermore, educational policy post-independence focused on Africanization, that is, blending European and traditional elements, symbolized by the president adopting the *fugu* and *Kente* as national attire (Yalley & Acquah, 2021). This attempt at integration did not adequately reflect the cultural diversity of the people of Ghana. Quarcoopome (2023) and Adjei (2020), indicate that recent scholarship represents a biased focus that neglects the visual traditions of Ghana's non-Akan cultures which constitute around 55 percent of Ghana's population. This knowledge gap fails to accurately depict Ghana's multi-ethnic constitution and vibrant cultural heritage, rendering the existing canon on Ghanaian cultural artifacts insufficient. Hence, the objectives raised by this study were to discover the cultural artifacts of the Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies in Ghana, determine their socio-cultural relevance and their integration into formal academic disciplines of education. This study aims to demonstrate that the selected cultural artifacts from Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies would contribute to cultural pluralism and reveal their socio-educational relevance for formal education. In line with the ethical considerations and the principles of qualitative research (Bell, et al., 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen, et al., 2018). The study obtained ethical clearance from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The scripted version was translated and read out to the participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study explores the socio-cultural relevance of the cultural artifacts of the Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies and their application in formal education. The theoretical framework of this study integrates Saussure's semiotic theory and Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism. Blumer's symbolic interactionism rests on the premise that human action is influenced by the meanings attributed to objects, which are formed through an interpretive process. These cultural artifacts, components of Ewe and Mole Dagbani culture, have symbolic meanings that represent their philosophies and convey their interpretations. Therefore, the experiences and interactions of people, whether subjective or concrete, lead to the creation of the facts, folk, and lore (Aylmer et al., 2024) that drive the sociocultural relevance of the artifacts.

Saussure postulates that symbols can be classified into two distinct components: the signifier and the signified. A signifier is the tangible manifestation of a sign, the symbolic representation or the symbolic form (Su et al., 2024). Whereas the signified refers to the cognitive concept or importance that is ascribed to a signifier or a group of signifiers with the connections between them influenced by cultural factors embedded within and derived from a signifier (Raaphorst et al., 2017). Conversely, the signified involves the interpretation and comprehension of the symbolic significance inherent in cultural objects. In this particular instance, the application of the Saussurean semiotic concept of signifier and signified is

extended to the cultural artifacts. This theory would lead learners and teachers to the significance of the artifacts to the respective societies and the inherent values associated with them.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed phenomenology as a qualitative research approach to determine the significance of the cultural artifacts in the lived experience of the people who created them. This approach was employed to provide rich insights into the meanings, values, and importance associated with these objects within a particular cultural context. To deepen understanding and enrich the interpretation of phenomena (Chan & Smith, 2024; R. Dangal & Joshi, 2020; Ramsook, 2018). Phenomenology enabled the researchers to acquire profound knowledge and comprehension of novel viewpoints on human experiences by analyzing the data and emphasizing their cultural, historical, and philosophical attributes.

To obtain thick interpretations and emic perspectives from the participants, the researchers engaged with the study participants through in situ observations and immersion in the local communities' social settings to unearth the history and socio-cultural relevance of the artifacts. Data collected through interviews were facilitated by a semi-structured interview protocol categorised into three sections. It solicited demographic details, the history, origin of the artifacts, their function and role within their respective ethnic communities. Sixteen interviews that spanned forty-five minutes and an hour were audio recorded with the participants' permission. Data collection occurred between November 2023 and April 2024. The interviews began with one of the researchers reading an opening interview script that stated the purpose of the interview translated orally into the local dialects. The interviews took place at the palaces and residences of the chiefs, markets, homes, and workshops of vendors and craftsmen. Interviews were conducted in the local dialects of Ewe, which two of the researchers were fluent in, or Dagbani with the assistance of an interpreter or by utilizing the Twi dialect. Data was collected at Dzodze, Tekpor, Agotime Kpetoe, and Keta in the Volta region; Sawaba, Asokore Mampong, and Adako Jachie in the Ashanti region; Aboabo market, Zongo, and Centre for National Culture in Tamale in the Northern Region. All interviews were later transcribed into English for further analysis.

3.1 Data Selection Procedure and Sample Size

Before choosing respondents for interviews, the researchers made observational visits to the sites to identify a suitable sample that aligned with the study's goals and to build a connection between the researchers and possible participants. These visits enabled the researchers to select participants and facilitated a survey and selection of the appropriate cultural artifacts for the study. The adoption of a homogeneous, purposeful, and snowball sample of the target population, comprising 32 participants from both ethnic societies, yielded an accessible population of 21 participants, including chiefs, vendors, elders and craftsmen. The selection of the participants was based on their experience and knowledge as custodians of culture and their familiarity with these cultural artifacts. Data from interviews and observations were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. The process of reflexive thematic analysis coding, theme development, and interpretation was undertaken by two members of the research team to facilitate a deep and appropriate development of emergent themes and allow for deep interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Panofsky iconographic analysis which consists of three distinct stages: the pre-iconographical description, the iconographical analysis, and the iconological interpretation was done by the research team to identify, describe and interpret graphic elements, symbols, and themes (Alimin & Triatmodjo, 2025; Asamoah, Adom & Kushiator, 2021; Abdullah, Ibrahim & Khalid, 2020; Sherer, 2020). In the first stage, Pre-Iconographical Description, the researchers identified and described the visible

content of the artifacts. It included the identification of pure forms, detailed groupings of colour, and the specific way the ornaments and illustrations were shaped. The Second Level, Iconographical Analysis, included the information of the cultural background or the history related to the artifacts. The researchers focused on the subject matter through understanding of oral and historical themes. The Third Level: Iconological Interpretation, interpretation was made within the context of the artifacts and analyzed from a historical perspective, exploring social and cultural connections that can enhance the meanings associated with the artifacts.

Designation	Ewe ethnic society	Mole Dagbani ethnic society
Divisional chiefs	2	2
Vendors	3	3
Craftsmen	3	4
Elders	2	2
Total	10	11

Table 1 Sample for the study

4. RESULTS

Following the interviews and survey of the cultural artifacts of the Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies. The research team of art teachers and experts in consultations with the participants settled on the *Fiakuku* and *Dzonu* for the Ewe ethnic society and *Mugri* and *Saba* for the Mole Dagbani ethnic society because they facilitated easier interpretation and were readily associated with the respective ethnic societies. The data was gathered using the interview guide based on the research questions outlined for the study. The major themes of the guide were the history, origin, function, and role of the selected cultural artifacts. The findings on the *Fiakuku* and *Mugri* revealed that both are symbols of authority, whilst the *Fiakuku* evolved from a woolen cap that had undergone several iterations to its current form, the *Mugri* evolved from the riding boots of Hausa Calvary men and subsequently adopted to function as a status symbol of leadership and wealth and to preserve the cultural identity of the people of Dagbon. The origin of the *Dzonu* is tied to divine provenance; however, literature suggests that the bulk of glass beads and old revered millefiore beads the pride of the Ewe were of Venetian, Dutch, or Portuguese provenance introduced by European traders between the 15th and 19th centuries (Bednarik, 2015; Shonsey, 1995). The *Dzonu* are protective and decorative accessories that serve a communicative function and a determiner of the social status of individuals. The *Fiakuku* and *Dzonu* are frequently organised hierarchically, and the choice of each for an occasion reflects the importance put on a person's social rank. The *Saba* predates the formation of the Mole Dagbani ethnic society. They function as status symbols and play the role of portents of invincibility and spiritual power. It can be rightly inferred from the findings that these cultural artifacts are representations of the philosophies of the ethnic societies represented in tangible form. The *Fiakuku*, *Dzonu*, *Mugri*, and *Saba* communicate historical narratives, authority, and ethical principles that guide societal behaviour. They serve as leadership art with resonances in the spirit realm and act as a means of passing on cultural wisdom and traditions to succeeding generations.

4.1 The *Fiakuku*

Pre-iconographic description

The *Fiakuku* is available in two variants, uncovered and covered. The uncovered *Fiakuku* features a stiff band handcrafted from leather covered with soft black, red, or maroon high-grade velvet fabric with

rectangular projections. They are embellished with gold or silver-plated carved wooden symbols, leather-encased amulets, and cast ornaments sourced from traditional metal smiths. The covered *Fiakuku* is a brimless oval cap with a soft upper covering often festooned with symbols. Figures 1, 2, and 3 feature the two main variants of the *Fiakuku*.



Figures 1, 2, and 3. The uncovered and covered *Fiakuku*

Source: Photographed by researchers

The *Fiakuku* Iconographical Analysis,

Fiakuku are crowns handcrafted by expert craftsmen within the society and commissioned by elders. It is a symbol of authority in Ewe culture and was originally made of woven colorful yarns known as *Togbenya* and evolved to its current form due to European contact (Agbotadua Togbe Kummasah, the Agbotadua of the Tay Agbodzo family and spokesperson for the Awomefia, Paramount Chief of the Anlo State, personal communication, Keta, November 26, 2023). The *Fiakuku* consists of two words: *fia* swear and *kuku* hat. The term "*Fia*" refers to making a solemn declaration or oath. Thus, a chief donning the *Fiakuku* is a symbolic gesture that signifies his agreement to uphold and safeguard the institutions that form the state. From a cultural standpoint, it is a representation of God and the Ewe. Ewe culture and philosophy prioritize the head as the most significant part of the body, as indicated in the following statement by Agbotadua Togbe Kummasah:

The head consists of the skull, *ta ku*, and brain *hoho*. The "*ta*" symbolizes a serene body of water that contains all the knowledge, qualities, and life lessons that one must possess. To get the answer to a question, one must turn to the vast repository of knowledge. The *Fiakuku* is worn exclusively by chiefs with the necessary authorization. Some wear only within their territory. Additionally, when departing from a subordinate region to a superior region, chiefs do not wear *Fiakuku* (Togbe Demachianu I, warlord of Tanyigbe, Personal communication December 26, 2023, Adakor Jachie, Kumasi). The *Fiakuku* encapsulates the philosophy of Ewe authority, position, knowledge and dignifies the chief as the repository of traditional wisdom. These crowns are commissioned by elders and kingmakers who discuss the duration and design elements to be featured on the crown. Consequently, some possess supernatural potency. (Togbe Demachianu I, Personal communication, December 26, 2023). The chiefs of the Ewe possess autonomy within their territory, which is reflected by the specific crowns they wear, especially when they leave their territory. *Fiakuku* embodies the principles of the Ewe conveyed through their proverbs "Ewe Lodowo". The Ewe depend on proverbs to articulate their psychology, philosophies, sociology, history, and lifestyle, which shape their culture for the collective good of the people. (Kojo Fugah elder, Personal communication, November 28, 2023, Keta). These are then represented through visual symbols '*dzesiwo*'

which incorporates zoomorphism as it is considered significant for accentuating aspects of human nature through animal imagery.

The *Fiakuku*: Iconological Interpretation

The *Fiakuku* serve as leadership art and are frequently organized in a hierarchical manner, delineating rules and responsibilities based on social status, and religious significance. The symbol of the royal sword, '*fiayi*' is often found on the *Fiakuku* of paramount chiefs. It represents the symbol of authority and justice derived from the proverb *Nukoe wu ame wots) fiayi se atie* which translates to "some situations compel a person to cut a tree." This refers to the ability to find varied solutions to common issues with skill and agility. (Alfred Dugah craftsman and vendor Personal communication Agotime Kpetoe, March 10, 2024). As symbols of communication, the types of *Fiakuku* worn by a particular chief within his territory and outside his territory tend to maintain cultural concepts in the form of identification and status symbols. (Personal communication, December 26, 2023, Adakor Jachie). Thus, symbols on the *Fiakuku* of selected animals, such as the crocodile, represent invincibility, enlightenment, and confidence. The chameleon represents patience and versatility. The *adzoya* umbrella symbol represents security and is derived from the proverb *Xexi menoa kekea yiazu*, which translates to "An open umbrella is not taken to a grove". The onion, *sabala* represents co-existence and tolerance. Unity or togetherness, *venonyo* is a symbol of mutuality. The depiction of ammunition symbolizes the military prowess of a chief. The big cowry *agaga lolo* derives from the proverb *Agaga lolo me fle na agaga eve fe nu o*. This sign represents the importance of valuing and respecting others due to their distinct qualities. Process or procedure is represented by the symbol *atrakpi* (Kojo Fugah, craftsman and vendor, Personal communication, February 9, 2024, Agotime Kpetoe).

4.2 The *Dzonu*

Pre-iconographical description

The *Dzonu* typically come in many shapes, such as tubular, rectangular, cylindrical, elongated flat, or rhomboid pieces, which are constructed from materials such as pulverized glass and natural stone. Some *Dzonu* are plain in appearance, while others are artfully embellished with abstract and geometric designs. They exhibit a diverse range of colours and hold great importance in all rites of passage and ceremonial events that hold significance for the Ewe people.

The *Dzonu* Iconographic analysis

The *Dzonu* are heirlooms, decorative accessories worn around the neck, waist, wrists, and ankles by individuals of all genders and ages. The *Dzonu* is closely linked to Ewe migration from Ketu in Benin, and it is arguably a subject of dispute due to conflicting expert opinions and the existence of other connected narratives regarding its origin. Their provenance is often attributed to God and natural elements. The supernatural origin of the *Dzonu* was emphasized by some bead vendors who were interviewed for the study. To them, the Ewe people did not personally transport the beads to their current location. Instead, the beads were found by individuals who were guided by fate or divine intervention (Daavi Florence Tay, Personal communication, November 28, 2023, Tekpor). The *Dzonu Blotsi*, '*Tomeblotsi*, and *Aflablotsi* plain tabular beads in muted or vibrant shades of yellow, green, and cobalt blue and are reported to have been placed by a divine entity either in river beds or at the intersection of the rainbow and the earth within territories where the Ewe established their settlements. The Ewe subsequently gathered, transported, and relocated with them from their home settlement in Benin (Amegashie Mama Leke Sogbedzi, voodoo priestess and bead vendor, Personal communication, November 27, 2023, Dzodze).

The *Dzonu* iconographic interpretation

Beads convey a great deal more information about their makers and users than their history and often depict a deeper, more meaningful message than the mere aesthetic beauty they often portray. Beads convey complex information about the wearer and ideological and religious meanings (Personal communication, Mama Leke Sogbedzi, November 27, 2023, Dzodze; Bednarik, 2015). They serve as a collective repository of community knowledge and history. The beads serve as vessels of memories, representing the culture and invoking past attitudes and beliefs that foster an emotional connection to a cultural heritage. According to the participants, Ewe oral tradition, reveal their connection to God, origin, travels, and social status, thus preserving their identity and cultural heritage. The *Dzonu* are accorded values and attributes that are often based on their source of origin, the status of an original possessor, and the method of acquisition. *Dzonu* incorporates symbols and motifs that hold significance in Ewe culture, and the names given to the beads serve as a means of communicating their ideas, values, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Some of the names of the beads denote their origin; others denote proverbs communicated both aurally and visually. (Florence Tay, elder and vendor, Personal communication, November 27, 2023, Tekpor).

Colour symbolism of the *Dzonu* plays a communicative function and is a determiner of the social status of individuals. In Ewe society, brown spherical seed beads are used to identify the widowed and to symbolise new beginnings for those who have lost their spouse. White *dzonu* symbolise joy, virtue, or purity and are commonly worn by newlyweds, priestesses, or diviners. Priestesses of shrines are adorned in blue and red *blotsi* beads that signify holiness, harmony, and life. These *dzonu* are strung together with flat ostrich shell beads. In ritual contexts, they represent the established contractual agreements between the priestesses and deities.

Green symbolizes the process of spiritual renewal or purification, while yellow represents the state of spiritual purity and energy. On the other hand, red is associated with the essence of life and vitality (Amegashie Mama Leke Sogbedzi Personal communication, November 27, 2023, Dzodze). In certain contexts, *dzonu* are a harbinger of good fortune or success. *Vinye le ablotsi*, translated as “a relative of mine is outside the country,” is a cylindrical bead with stratified layers of blue, red, and yellow, overlaid with light blue curvilinear forms. *Letivi* is a white cylindrical *dzonu* with red zigzag lines at both ends. It features a green dot encircled by minute yellow dots. Figures 3 and 4 feature the *Dzonu Letivi* Star and *Vinye le Ablotsi*.

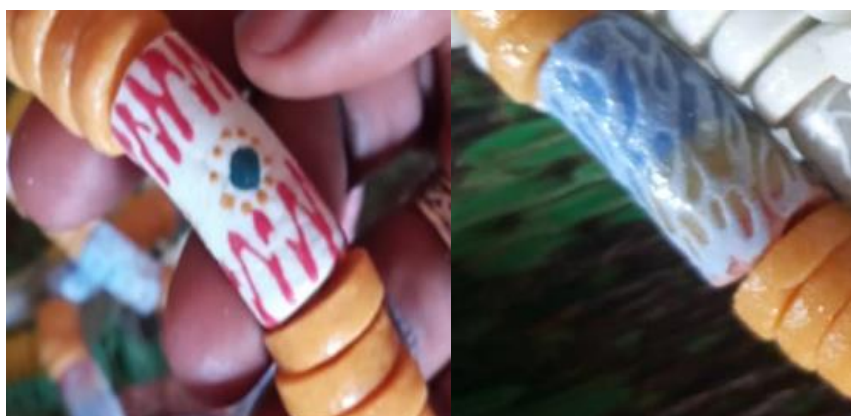


Fig: 3 *Letivi*

Fig: 4 *Vinye le ablotsi*

Source: Researchers' fieldwork photograph collection, 2023.

The Ewes place a high premium on aged Dzonu such as the *Aglobo* and *Dzinyegba*. Figure 6 shows the *Aglobo*, a circular, cylindrical, or rectangular bead designed with a base colour of varying shades of blue with zigzag patterns all around accentuated with white outlines, *Dzinyegba* a cylindrical bead with medium-sized orange circular motifs on a vivid green background peppered with white minute dots enclosing the orange motif is shown in Figure 7. These Dzonu symbolise wealth and prestige (Amegashie Mama Leke Sogbedzi Personal communication, November 27, 2023, Dzodze).



Figure: 5 *Dzinyegba* bead



Fig: 6 *Aglobo* chevron bead

Source: Researchers' fieldwork photograph collection, 2023.

4.3 The *Mugri*

Pre-iconographic description

The *Mugri* are round-toed, flat-soled boots handcrafted from leather. They are dyed with colours such as green, yellow, blue, and black. The *Mugri* has 6 parts: welt, shaft, heel cap, in step, counter, and outsole. They are worn by the male gender during festivals and special occasions. It comes in one distinct shape. Designs on the *Mugri* are on either side of each pair, though some feature an all-round design. The *Mugri* comes in two distinct styles, the knee length and the calf length. *Mugri* for the overload is usually calf-length, weightier, and constructed from superior-quality materials (Alhaji Fousseini Abu, Chief of the Dagomba Ashanti Region, Personal communication, September 13, 2023, Sawaba). The *Mugri* features a red leather trim around the welt, heel cap, and instep of the boot, complemented by detailed hand stitching all around the welt, with the interior of the boot lined with denim fabric. The shaft and instep of the boot showcase intricate designs of elaborate geometric forms, intricate swirls, and patterns characterized by meticulous stitching.

Iconographic analysis

The *Mugri* is a boot indigenous to the Dagomba of the Mole Dagbani ethnic society. Alhaji Fousseini Abu disclosed that the *Mugri* was adopted from Hausa cavalrymen *Gbanzama* via interactions through trade. The Hausa of the Sahel in Africa, noted for their extensive knowledge of leathercraft, made elaborate riding boots and leather thongs. These were often decorated with strips of leather dyed with natural pigments such as henna to create intricate geometric designs. The name *Mugri* is a Dagomba expression of the tight fit of the boot. Umar Shamuna Jemanna, entertainment chief of the Dagomba in the Ashanti region, revealed that the *Mugri* is purported to have inspired the invention of Wellington boots, hence its informal name, Wellington Boots, after a white man probably of British origin. The style and make of the *Mugri* were primarily to fulfill a utilitarian need to protect the legs and feet of the overlord of Dagbon

during horse riding and keep the edges of the pantaloons *Binti* clean. Some *Mugri* are heirlooms passed down through generations (Simon Adongo, vendor, Personal communication February 2024, Tamale).

The *Mugri* Iconographic Interpretation

The *Mugri* preserve the cultural identity of the Dagomba people. They function as indicators of social standing, provide a means of protection, and serve as a visual narrative of Dagomba history. It illustrates their dynamic trade interactions with various communities and demonstrates how cultural adaptation can enhance or enrich the cultural fabric of a society. The *Mugri* fulfill a dual religious role, embodying elements of both traditional and Islamic faiths, as evidenced by the intricate patterns and designs adorning the boots. Fousseini a vendor and craftsman revealed that some of the illustrations on the *Mugri* are not influenced by any traditional beliefs however, both serve as status symbols, protection, and the visual expression of Dagomba history. The circular or crescent-shaped motifs on the *Mugri*, which represent the moon, illustrate the chiefs' profound connection to the divine. In traditional Dagbon iconography, triangles signify broken calabash, '*Wansagzi*' that embody the concept of usefulness (Ahmed Tijani, vendor and craftsman, Personal communication September 13, 2023 Tamale). The short white dashes found on certain *Mugri* signify the seed of the calabash plant.

Islamic aesthetics prominently displayed on *Mugri* are characterized by highly decorative geometric forms, elaborate floral patterns, and abstract shapes. These are defined by the Islamic concept of Tawhīd, God Oneness (Mustapha Amin; Ahmed Tijani vendor and craftsmen, personal communication March 26, 2024, Tamale). This substantiates the principle of the utter transcendence of the Godhead that expresses the nobility of God's representation on Earth (Zahra and Shahir, 2022). Figure 7 features a *Mugri* dyed in shades of yellow and brown with white leather trimming on the shaft and instep decorated with varied sizes of circular motifs interspersed with white broken lines. Figure 8 features a dark blue *Mugri* with red trim on the shaft and instep and different sizes of colourful circular shapes delineated by a black outline.



Figure: 7 *Mugri*

Figure: 8 *Mugri*

Researchers' fieldwork photographs collection, 2023.

4.4 The *Saba*

Pre iconographic description

The *Saba* is constructed from large quantities of colorful strands of yarn, leather cords, or leather encased in strands of yarn elegantly suspended from pendants shaped in two or three dimensions. These pendants are made of polished brass, cast iron designs, or rectangular amulets. They are available in a range of arrangements, including single or multiple strands with or without pendants. The introduction of the yarn represents a versatile method of infusing a contemporary element into this time-honoured craft. The *Saba* presents several geometric shapes that potentially embody elements of Dagomba culture (Titus Naporo, Personal communication, February 18, 2023, Tamale).

The *Saba* Iconographic analysis

The *Saba* is a necklace traditionally worn by men of the Mole Dagbani ethnic society. It originally referred to a leather talisman or amulet affixed to personal belongings. The *Saba* pre-dates the inception of the Dagbon kingdom. It served as a means of fortification employed by medicine men and traditional priests. It is used by individuals of distinction during significant assemblies or celebratory events where competing groups or contrasting factions converge (Personal Communication Umar Shamuna Jemanna, March 25, 2024). The *Saba* often have pendants symbolizing depictions of abstractions of natural objects in Dagomba culture. Figures 9 - 11 feature *Saba* with brass ornaments. Figure 9 is a single length gold-plated cord suspended from a large spherical pendant with a small circular protrusion in the middle. Figure 10 is a fluffy, cocoon-like length of fabric interspersed with cylindrical beads with a spherical pendant with a brown rhombus at the center attached to two cuboid pieces of varying lengths. These cuboid pieces are banded with neutral hues of cream, brown, and black strung onto a leather cord. Figure 11 is a *Saba* made from strands of red yarn interspersed with cylindrical beads on a tortoise pendant.



Figure 9 Saba



Figure 10 Saba



Figure 11 Saba

Source: Researchers' fieldwork photograph collection, 2024.

The *Saba* Iconographic Description

The *Saba* functions chiefly as a safeguard against malevolent influences. Additionally, they serve as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge and traditions to future generations. Circles serve as a representation of the python embodying the concept of familial guardianship. The rhombus or triangle shape symbolizes "*Wanzagsi*," fragments of a smashed calabash. The calabash is a revered plant esteemed for its diverse applications that span both practical and therapeutic realms. The diamond shape symbolises

the cowry, “*Ligipelga*” signifies wealth in the form of cowries, and the tortoise symbolises endurance, patience, and abundance. (Fusseini Yahya, Personal Communication, craftsman and vendor, March 17, 2024, Tamale). He disclosed further that the pendants on the *Saba* represent the profound connections the Dagomba people maintain with their deities and their faith in the protective powers they embody (Personal communication, September 13, 2023, Umar Shamuna Jemanna, Sawaba; February 6, 2024, Aboabo Tamale).

5. DISCUSSION

Beyond aesthetic appeal, the *Fiakuku*, *Dzonu*, *Mugri*, and *Saba* hold cultural and symbolic meanings that function as a visual language that convey elements of identity and social roles within the community. Incorporating Ewe and Mole Dagbani cultural artifacts in formal educational curricula would represent a comprehensive spectrum of the backgrounds and perspectives of the people of Ghana, fostering inclusive education and an appreciation for cultural diversity, enhancing cultural identity and pride, and promoting social cohesion.

Through the *Fiakuku*, *Dzonu*, *Mugri*, and *Saba*, learners acquire high-quality cultural experiences through direct contact. This fosters an understanding of culture and history as learners recognize the folk wisdom and societal values inherent in these artifacts afforded by deeper contextual meanings. The concentric circles on the *Fiakuku* in Figure 3 represent co-existence and tolerance. They communicate principles of acceptable behaviour, thereby strengthening the moral fabric of society (Muhammad et al., 2021). Understanding the history and sociocultural significance of these artifacts enhances communication in multicultural contexts, thereby promoting adaptability. Thus, as learners learn to engage deeper with these artifacts, they would imbibe a sense of inclusivity that promotes ideals of communitarianism (Molefe, 2016) at an early age. As well as decipher the reasoning behind the use of symbols on these artifacts, as in the symbol of authority in the *Fiakuku* Figures 1,2, and 3 to convey leadership.

The incorporation of cultural artifacts would foster learner-centered pedagogies, enabling engagement in activities that enhance collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills essential for achieving 21st-century skills (Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2023; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023) as well as workforce-related competencies (Hauf, 2010). Utilizing the cultural artifacts of these ethnic societies as instructional resources serves cross-curriculum purposes. They would promote curiosity that draws learners' attention to the subjects being taught in schools. The analysis of design elements on the *Fiakuku*, *Dzonu*, *Mugri*, and *Saba*, and the craft processes of these artifacts can be utilized as a pedagogical tool to enhance comprehension. This approach would transition learning from abstract concepts to more concrete applications, thereby enhancing learners' creative abilities (Wang, 2021). In the subject design, these cultural artifacts would expose learners to the interoperability of the design elements on the artifacts (Yang and Shen, 2023; Wang, 2021). The play of different-sized dots on the *dzonu Dzinyegba* Figure 5, and the vibrant colours of the *Aglobo* Figure 6 illustrate some elements and principles of design shape, line dominance, and contrast, which are the foundational principles of the subject design and make design lessons less abstract. The subjects of career technology and visual arts in Ghana's common core programme curriculum have a component of product design and entrepreneurial skills. Thus, as instructional resources, the *Fiakuku*, *Dzonu*, *Mugri*, and *Saba* can enhance the novelty and quality of design outcomes (Dong et al., 2023) while fostering learners' creative skills for entrepreneurship. The juxtaposition of cultural artifacts in language lessons stimulates verbal skills and imagination as students develop stories around these artifacts, thereby enhancing communication, creativity, and collaboration.

Representations of plant and animal life found in the *Saba* Figure 11, *Mugri* Figure 7, and *Dzonu dzinyegba* Figure 5 illustrate a profound connection to nature and emphasise the importance of conservation in sustainable education that would inculcate in learners the significance of making responsible environmental choices as indicated in the component environment of the social studies curriculum for JHS schools. Lessons on the physical features of the earth can be augmented by active interaction with the cultural artifacts. The history of the cultural artifact serves as an interesting introduction to the subject and can inspire a broader exploration of the topography of the regions where these artifacts are located, resulting in a more relevant study. The subject Religious and Moral Education has components of ethics and moral life, religion and economic life. As instructional resources, these artifacts would enhance learners' understanding of their contextual significance, the local wisdom, and the interplay between work, religion, ethics and morality.

The Fiakuku, Dzonu, Mugri, and Saba serve as visual representations of Ewe and Dagomba history, embodying ceremonial significance through culturally relevant symbols. The highly decorative geometric forms, floral patterns, and abstract shapes reminiscent of Islamic aesthetics and the abstraction of the natural elements on the Fiakuku and Dzonu illustrates values such as honesty, integrity, cooperation, perseverance, tenacity, teamwork, and respect for others which may serve as a countermeasure to tendencies toward radicalization (Fobel and Kolleck, 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cultural Education unit of the Ghana Education Service ought to be incorporated into the team responsible for overseeing the scripting and production of textbooks to provide publishers with the requisite knowledge and education regarding the history, culture, and practices of the ethnic societies in Ghana. This will facilitate the seamless incorporation of cultural artifacts into formal education. Professional development sessions organised by the Ghana Education Service for teachers must include knowledge of the cultural diversity of the Ghanaian. This initiative seeks to equip teachers with the requisite knowledge of the nation's cultural heritage and to provide learners with educational experiences that nurture an appreciation for Ghanaian culture, motivate learners to cherish, understand the history and traditions of their family, community, and nation.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was aimed at examining the cultural artifacts of the Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies, the invisible majority, to assess their sociocultural relevance and application in formal education. These artifacts hold religious, political, economic, and social significance for the Ewe and Mole Dagbani ethnic societies, illustrating the interdependence of their sociological and religious functions and roles. The significance of these artifacts enhances cultural pluralism and reveals their socio-educational relevance for formal education. The Fiakuku, Dzonu, Mugri, and Saba embody sustainable education through experiential learning and the interrelationship between humans and the environment.

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