



## THE STATE OF FOLK GAMES AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS ON CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study used a Qualitative Research design to examine the current state of Ghanaian folk Games in schools. The study used a convenient sampling technique with an interview as a data collection instrument to collect data from One hundred and twenty-nine (129) pupils from various classes in both Lower and Upper Primary at Amakom S.D.A. Preparatory School in Kumasi. The main aim of the study was to find out whether folk games are still popular and played among Ghanaian children and their implications on educational achievements. The study revealed that most Ghanaian folk games are waning as most children are attracted to non-traditional activities such as Computer related games which may have negative implications on their learning if not properly monitored. It is therefore recommended that most of these declining folk games be given a boost at home, during events in the community, schools, and churches. This will help to recuperate the folk games for children's physical, emotional, and social development.*

**KEYWORD:** Folk Games, Game, Culture, Heritage, Education, Children, Ghana

### INTRODUCTION

Culture plays an important role in man's life. According to Radhika (2018), culture is a complete package of knowledge, beliefs, customs, art, morals, law, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Awareness regarding various kinds of culture can help an individual adjust to the natural and social environment, develop an individual's personality, socialize with others, use of freedom as it should be, and understand other cultures and meanings of liberality. It is the integrated, social, biological, and ethnic modes of behavior of a group or a society. All over the world, every society has their own traditional cultures, which are passed from one generation to another to maintain and ensure a smooth transition of cultural heritage. In most African traditional communities, especially among some communities in Ghana, folk games are one of the cultural elements that are passed onto the younger generation. Its accumulated knowledge and values enable children to play adult roles, thereby ensuring the survival of their offspring and the continuity of the community. Furthermore, through the rules and regulations attached to these games, children learn to be disciplined, respectful, resourceful, and above all, the community's code of conduct is taught. Unfortunately, most of these folk games were not documented since they were developed in the era when there were no written records (Osei-Wusu, 2006). The study, therefore, focused on finding out whether folk games are still popular and played among Ghanaian children and their implications on educational achievements.



## Statement of the Problem

Our Forefathers contributed immensely to ensure a smooth transition of Cultural heritage from one generation to another. They used Traditional or Folk Games such as *Abatoɔ*, *Kwasiada frankaa*, *Pilolo*, *Antoakyire*, *Mennya Kwan Mansan*, *Ahyehyeaba*, *Ampe*, and *Afrukutu* to educate the younger ones informally. They were also used to initiate children to adult roles, social norms, and relevant cultural values needed for their upbringing in Ghana. Also, through the rules and regulations attached to traditional games, children learn several psychosocial values such as tolerance, sharing, togetherness, perseverance, and confidence. Despite the significance and enormous benefits derived from these games, the infiltration of non-traditional activities such as computer and video games into most Ghanaian traditional cultures have relegated most of the folk games to the background, rendering them unpopular especially in schools, homes, and communities in the urban areas. Most Ghanaian children, as well as adults, are no more interested in the Ghanaian Folk Games, but rather in electronic games such as video and computer games, and other non-traditional activities like hip pop music and dance, through which some sort of violent acts might be adopted. This in the long term affects children's academic performance in school as they may become addicted to games play, and may also breed truancy due to lack of improper supervision from parents. The study, therefore, discusses the state of Ghanaian Folk Games in Schools.

## The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the state of folk games in Ghanaian primary schools and their implications on children's academic performance.

## Research Question

What is the state of Folk Games in Ghanaian schools?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Game

Parlett (1992) indicated that one cannot define 'Game' without talking about 'Play' since both have been studied in uncountable ways for decades. 'Play' and 'Games' have a surprisingly complex relationship that, sometimes they are used interchangeably - 'to play a game'; where play becomes a verb and game a noun. Maroney (2001) posited that 'Play' is both a larger and a smaller term than 'Game' depending on the way it is framed. In one logic, 'Play' is a larger term that includes 'Game' as a subset. In another, the reverse is true - 'Game' is the bigger term, and includes 'Play' within it. He concluded that a 'Game' is therefore a form of 'Play' with goals and structure. Wittgenstein (1953) who was probably the first academic philosopher to address the definition of the word 'Game' hinted that, the elements of games, such as play, rules, and competition, all fail to adequately define what games are. It encompasses a wide variety of arenas and uses for so many different activities. Salen & Zimmerman (2003) hinted that a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, governed by rules, that results in a measurable result. A game can also be described as an activity among two or more independent decision-makers seeking to achieve their objectives in some limiting context (Clark, 1987).



A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal (Costikyan, 1994). Besides, Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) explained that game is an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules to produce an unstable outcome. Supporting this view, Liegh (2008) shared similar views with Salen & Zimmerman and posited that, games are guided by explicit rules that are set in advance, and violations of these rules result in some form of sanction which is non-negotiable. Furthermore, to play a game is to engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, guided by specific rules, with limited scope (Bernard Suits).

### **Folk Games**

Children's folk games (also called traditional games) are those that are passed from child to child, generation to generation, informally by word of mouth. Folk Games are popular and traditional games chiefly played in rural areas and passed along from one generation to another. Folk games are defined as those that are played informally with minimal equipment. These games are usually played by children between the ages of 7 and 12 (Lindon, 2001). These games are also played for physical exercise and entertainment purposes, at times in a competitive environment (Saha, Bipani & Kolkata, 1991). According to Gryski, (1998), folk games are a list of games that used to be played by children, some of which are still being played today. Traditional children's games do not include commercial products such as board games but rather, games that require props such as hopscotch or marbles.

Osei-Wusu (2006) maintains that every society passes onto the new generation traditions of the old, to maintain their cultural heritage. One such tradition is children's folk games. In most African traditional societies as well as the Ghanaian traditional society, folk games are one of the cultural elements that are passed onto the younger generation. Its accumulated knowledge and values enable children to play adult roles, thereby ensuring the survival of their offspring and the continuity of the community. Through the games, children have informal education. They learn by listening, observing, and doing. In practical ways, therefore, they learn how to live as members of their community. They are taught the community's code of conduct and behavior by the rules and regulations of the games. Besides, benefits such as, bodybuilding, enjoyment, protection against immoral practices, and becoming sociable are acquired (Osei-Wusu).

Pulsipher (2008) hinted that there are two types of traditional games:

1. The public domain ones that have come down to us over centuries and
2. Those that are commercially produced that have become habits with the buying and playing public.

The former tends to be for two players only, while the latter is often for two or more players. Most traditional games are played because everyone knows how to play. They are accepted because everyone is familiar with it. Folk games are often played in rural and peri-urban areas for physical exercise, entertainment, carrying out hidden messages, protection against immoral acts, and socialization among the same peers. This is not to say that folk games are not played in urban areas, different variations of folk games can be sometimes found in urban areas. It is also obvious from the discussion that, folk games were used as an educational tool through which the younger ones were informally educated to become full members of the society.



Furthermore, two types of traditional games exist; those handed down from one generation to another which is played by everybody usually with two players and the games which are bought and play. Despite being transmitted primarily through word of mouth, traditional games have evolved into new versions.

### **The State of Folk Games in Ghana**

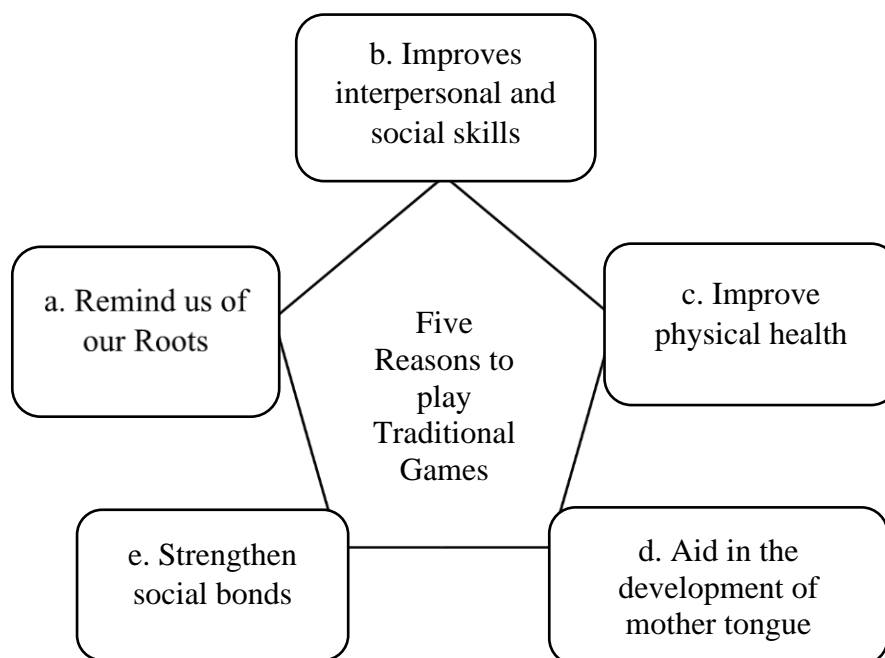
In many villages in Ghana, folklore, folktales and folk games play an important role in the educational process of children. Unfortunately, many of these communities are gradually deprived of these traditional activities due to the high western influences, as children are lured to these western attractions leaving the traditional activities and games in jeopardy. Some of the strongest distractions affecting these traditional activities are partly due to the advent of technology thus televisions, films, and music from cassettes. (Osei-Wusu). As noted, the current state of folk games is in jeopardy; there has been a drastic reduction in the rate at which these games are patronized in different communities in Ghana due to the high Western influences, coupled with the fact that most communities now have access to electricity to enjoy these foreign activities which hold the potential of killing the Ghanaian rich Culture.

Tatjana & Siniša (2013) hinted that some old, folk games, common in the past, are forgotten and disappear because today's children no longer know them. Folk games, which were an integral part of our ancestors' childhood, have almost vanished. Our parents' generations still recall some of the folk games, but children in modern society do not know about them. Folk games have had a great significance and have left a mark in the childhood of every human who played them. The question that arises is why parents no longer pass on folk games to their children. Perhaps it is because they are trying to be contemporary or, due to the influence of the consumer society we live in, they have replaced genuine activities for their children with material goods. Lawrence (2015) claimed that, although Modern games have their fair share of cognitive benefits ranging from improved problem-solving skills to spatial navigation abilities and exposing children to technology, it is also important to inject some folk games into children's playtime to counteract these 'adverse' effects from foreign games and better optimize the benefits of playing folk games.

Once in Ghana were ampe, pampanaa, oware, pempenaa, pilolo, alikoto, Zanzama, sansankroma, kyempe, Adwoa Ata and many other children's games enjoyed by the young. These Traditional games were held in high esteem by both the aged and the young in society. These games gave Ghanaian Children a sense of identification and belonging. Aside from being educative, folk games also play the role of reuniting families and friends. They were a great source of entertainment, self-expression, and cooperation. Since time immemorial folk games have developed skills in solving real-world problems while providing the opportunity to communicate face-to-face with team players. Helping to hone social skills, individuals were able to familiarize themselves with their environment and interact properly with others. (Ofosu-Hemaa, 2016). A careful study of children's games indicates a gradual decline in their patronage among Ghanaian children. This is sometimes attributed to civilization or modernization. Modern games such as Clash of Clans, candy crush, pokémon, criminal case, temple run, fruit ninja, and many others are the order of the day. David Dontoh, a Ghanaian Theatre Monger in an interview, expressed deep concern about the way Ghanaian folk games have been poorly handled and have not done much to protect and promote them. He concluded that, if care is not taking, in the next two decades, the Ghanaian folk games will be lost.

## Significance of Folk Games

Khalid (2008), hinted that most parents and caregivers disregard folk games as aimless leisure. However, research endorses that, play is the best form of physical activity for children and that, through folk game playing children learn about the rules and values of their culture. Besides, folk games carry immense benefits for the academic and healthy development of children such as sharpening gross and fine motor skills, improved control and balance, enhance hand-eye-coordination, increased spatial awareness, and greater social skills (Bruce, 2004). Herlina (2018) expounded that, the Folk game as one of the play activities can be used as a learning resource to meet the needs of children in developing the learners' potentials in areas such as cognitive development, language acquisition, emotional growth, social and physical motor development. Playing a folk game aims not only to develop physical activity but more to cognitive and social abilities. Lawrence (2015) used a concept map to highlight five reasons why children must play folk games in figure 1.



**Fig. 1: The Concept of the Educational Implication of Folk Games on Children's Development**

### a. Remind Us of Our Roots

Folk games are often linked to the culture and language of its land of origin. Hence, the games indirectly inculcate the moral and cultural values that were held important by the founding tradition and pass this heritage down to those who play them. This happens in the form of behavior that is encouraged by the game (the mindset or actions which best facilitate winning) or even the songs sung whilst playing (as many comprise of folktales or historical stories). Grandmothers can often be heard advising their grandchildren to "share to win"! Hence, folk games reemphasize the values that were held important by our cultures, allowing us to better understand our roots, giving us a clearer sense of identity and belonging.



**b. Improve Interpersonal and Social Skills**

Several traditional games involve group play (or at least with one other person, as you couldn't challenge a computer back then). Hence these games readily encourage people interaction. Such social interaction greatly benefits child development as it teaches children to work well with others when they learn to wait to play their turn and achieve group victories via teamwork. Perhaps the most important skill that children pick up is that of emotional literacy. Emotional literacy is the ability to recognize, understand, and express our emotions appropriately. It also involves perceiving others' emotions. Playing with others improves this skill as children get accustomed to picking out emotional cues from their friends' body language and learn to react accordingly. Children also learn to better handle their own emotions, as they can readily witness the effects of their actions within their play circle.

**c. Improves Physical Health**

Many modern games are rather sedentary. Unlike folk games, which usually involve a significant level of physical activity such as hopping, jumping, turning, squatting, running, and throwing.

**d. Aid in the Development of the Mother Tongue**

Folk games tend to involve the usage of the language of their land of origin. This can be in the form of play songs or even through technical terms that are used during gameplay. Either way, children are exposed to their mother tongues when they play these games, which can aid in increased usage and/or development of this language.

**e. Strengthens Social Bonds**

Most traditional games tend to be social activities. Unlike most modern games that are either solitary pursuits or exclusive gatherings of youngsters, due to the complexity of the games or the skills and techniques involved. However, traditional games require less complex skill sets and basic amenities, making them more inclusive. Therefore, they encourage interaction with friends and family regardless of age or expertise. Such interactions allow us to get to know each other better and strengthen social and/or family bonds that may otherwise be difficult to establish.

**Materials and Methods**

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine the current state of Ghanaian Folk Games in Primary schools. It was a case study at Amakom S.D.A. Preparatory School in Kumasi, with an accessible population of five hundred and eighty-seven pupils (587) at both upper and lower primary levels. A Convenience Sampling Technique was adopted to select Forty (40) pupils from Class One (1) of which Twenty-two (22) were Males and Eighteen (18) Females; Forty-six (46) pupils from Class Four (4) comprising of Twenty-two (22) males and Twenty-four (24) females; and Forty-three (43) pupils from Class Six (6), of which Twenty-one (21) are males and Twenty-two (22) females, as Sample for the study. Data were collected through interviews and presented in tables with discussions.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### What is the state of Folk Games in Ghanaian schools?

To answer the Research Question, some pupils of class One (1), Four (4), and Six (6) of Amakom S.D.A. Preparatory School, Kumasi, Ghana were interviewed. Findings from interviews conducted are presented in tables 1.

**Table 1: Findings from Favorite Games of Class One (1) Pupils**

Pupils Best Games/Play	Male	Female	No. of Pupils who play the game
1. Computer-related games	12	3	15
2. Football/Basketball	10	1	11
3. Ampe	0	7	7
4. Skipping	0	8	8
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>

*Source: Authors' fieldwork.*

Table 1, presents the favorite games of Class One pupils totaling forty (41 pupils) of Amakom S.D.A. Preparatory school-aged, six (6) to seven (7) years old. From the table, four (4) major games are played by these pupils, among them, computer-related games are the most patronized games, while the traditional game *ampe* is the least played. This result might suggest that a lot of pupils as young as six (6) to seven (7) now do have access to computers in their homes and the implication is that Ghanaian pupils may lack interpersonal skills and Emotional literacy since most computer-related games are played solely. Today's children are poorer because the spirit of togetherness that pervades in folk games is lacking in computer-related games. Through folk games, children learnt the skills of socialization and acquired rules of behaviour that apply during play (Vujanović, 2009). In a TV documentary produced by Lord Asante Fordjour for *Infobox TV 2013*, Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam, child Psychologist, children who engaged in video and other computer relates games grow up to have some interpersonal problems because, at that stage, they have missed the opportunity to relate to the very people they are growing together with. Such children however relate to strange people, models, and gadgets. They find it difficult to filter the right from wrong in terms of relating and growing up. The child who prefers computer-related games will grow into a more selfish child who is accustomed to his world because he is no longer doing cooperative activities, learning to tolerate, understand each other, forgive, coarse motor movements, and balance in a game (Susilo, 2016). According to Lawrence (2015), Emotional literacy is the ability to recognize, understand, and express our emotions appropriately. It also involves perceiving others' emotions. Playing folk games with others improves this skill as children get accustomed to picking out emotional cues from their friends' body language and learn to react accordingly. Children also learn to better handle their own emotions, as they can readily witness the effects of their actions within their play circle during folk gameplay. Again, in the *Infobox TV* Documentary, Dr. Dan Bright, a senior member of the Sociology Department, University of Ghana is of the view that children who spend more time on computer-related activities tend to



be more individualistic. They play games in the virtual world and what they learn is not applicable in the actual world. They come into the real world and have no social skills to connect with others.

**Table 2: Findings from Favorite Games of Class Four (4) Pupils**

Pupils Best Games/Play	Gender		Number of Pupils who play the game
	Male	Female	
1. Computer-related games	9	3	12
2. Football games	10	0	10
3. <i>Ampe</i>	0	10	10
4. Skipping	0	9	9
5. Ludo	1	1	2
6. Drought	2	0	2
7. <i>Oware</i>	0	1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>46</b>

*Source: Authors' fieldwork.*

These were pupils between the ages of eight (8) and twelve (12). Primary Four pupils play more different games (7) than Primary One (4). This perhaps, indicates that, as pupils grow, they are exposed to many different games. Again, looking at the table, computer-related games (12 pupils) have re-occurred to be the most played games against the Folk game *oware* (1 pupil). This is not different from what happened in Class One and suggests a decline in the patronage of the Folk games. The implication is that folk games are being relegated to the background due to the infiltration of non-traditional activities such as computer-related games and that emphasis on cultural values is lost. Nguyen (2009) confirmed this finding and hinted that, Folk games are being gradually lost and that children are at a disadvantage acquiring cultural values through Folk games. Tatjana & Siniša (2013) added that Folk games which were an integral part of our ancestors' childhood have almost vanished. Our parents' generations still recall some of the folk games but children in modern society do not know about them.

According to Herlina, (2018) traditional games reemphasize the values that were held important by our cultures, allowing us to better understand our roots, giving us a clearer sense of identity and belonging. Although some people argue that modern games can develop the cognitive abilities of children because in the game there are activities of strategy preparation. But that is not entirely true, as Amini's (2014: 96) study concluded that computer games have negative effects on children's learning achievement. Furthermore, Dr. Dan Bright hinted in the Infobox TV documentary that Children learn things that are not within the cultural settings where he or she is growing up through computer-related activities. In the same documentary interview, Prof. Esi Sutherland-Addy noted that children have aggressive feelings and thoughts as they watch the killings, kickings, stabbings, and shooting. They also come across sexual provocative scenes and controversial languages that teach children the wrong values.



**Table 3: Findings from Favorite Games of Class Six (6) Pupils**

Pupils Best Games/Play	Gender		Number of Pupils who play the game
	Male	Female	
1. Computer-related games	10	5	15
2. Football games	8	1	9
3. <i>Ampe</i>	0	7	7
4. Skipping	0	3	3
5. Ludo	1	2	3
6. Drought (Dame)	2	0	2
7. <i>Oware</i>	0	2	2
8. <i>Abatoc</i>	0	2	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>43</b>

Source: Authors' fieldwork.

These are also pupils between the ages of eleven (11) and thirteen (13) years old. The table again shows an increase in the total number of games (8 games) played by pupils of Class six as compared to Class four. Again, the trend reoccurs with computer-related games (15 pupils) leading the table followed by football (9 pupils). This strongly confirms the high patronage of Computer related games which is devoid of physical activities. It might also imply that some parents are being overprotective as they don't want their children to go out and play but rather stay indoors and play computer games. According to Khalid (2008), Folk games provide the best form of physical activity for Children. Lokman & Kanchan (2016) supported Khalid that, the folk game is one of the most important methods of improving the physical fitness and psychological aspects of a child. Sitting and playing computer games for long hours have the tendencies of rendering most children physically unfit and psychologically weak. In the *Infobox TV Documentary* (2013), Dr. Addul-Samed Tanko, a Cardiologist at the Cardiology Unit at Korle-Bu, Accra-Ghana, explained in a documentary that, many children, especially in the U.S.A are now developing the cardiovascular disease since they put up excessive weight without exercise as a result of sitting and playing computer games for long hours.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The major finding from the study is that Ghanaian folk games are about to be forgotten and some have already vanished due to the high influence of electronic games such as computer and video games. The implications of this major finding are that:

- i. Folk games, which were an integral part of our ancestors' childhood, have almost vanished.
- ii. Most Ghanaian children are not familiar with folk games and their relevant cultural values.
- iii. Children who are addicted to nontraditional games mostly lack physical fitness due to solitary games which have health effects on them.



- iv. Folk games are not largely played by pupils in Ghanaian schools.
- v. Children may lack interpersonal skills and emotional literacy since they do not play in teams.
- vi. The child who prefers a computer-related game will grow into a more selfish child who is accustomed to his world.
- vii. Some Parents sometimes overprotect their children and prevent them from engaging in outdoor games.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts should encourage people to modify or recreate Ghanaian folk games while improving their qualities and values to become popular and attract foreigners into the country.
- ii. Ghanaian folk games should be put onto Information and Technology (I.T) to compete in the contemporary world.
- iii. Places should be established or allocated in schools, where solely Folk Games such would be kept for students to play during recess or leisure times.
- iv. Again, educators should collaborate with Ghanaian artists, researchers, television and radio stations, writers and publishers to research, broadcast and publish books, journals, and articles on some of the abundant traditional games to help preserve and promote our cultural heritage since most of such games were not documented in the past.
- v. There should be an organized competition or festivals on Traditional game among communities, schools, and churches to ensure smooth transition and preservation of cultural heritage.
- vi. There should be a balance in the benefits of Technological Advancement while maintaining and promoting the cherished traditional games in Ghana.
- vii. Parents particularly should guide and ensure proper supervision of the sort of computer and video games their children play and talk to their children about folk games and their benefits.

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