Akan folklore as a philosophical framework for education in Ghana

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Abstract

Philosophies of education serve as frameworks for producing lifelong learners and a knowledgeable and skilled human workforce who brace up their societies for changes in the 21st century. However, the Ghanaian education system continues to relegate its rich Indigenous philosophies to the back burner, favouring Western educational philosophies to drive its educational policies and practices. Ghana cannot continue to pursue a lifelong education agenda by relying on education that is entirely centred on foreign cultural values. The author of this article argues that lifelong education in Ghana needs to incorporate more elements of an authentic Ghanaian framework. Based on the view that a connection between education, culture and development in Ghana is imperative, he thus analyses the educational strengths of African folklore from the Akan ethnic group of Ghana. His conclusion is that aspects of Akan folklore, including its stories and proverbs, its kinship rights and rules, its moral codes, its corporate and humanistic perspective, present a viable alternative and complement to the country's current westernised education. The author therefore proposes an enhanced Ghanaian framework for education which takes on board Akan philosophy and pedagogy. This will be beneficial for promoting quality and lifelong education in the country and serve the common good of Ghanaians.

Keywords Ghana · Folklore education · Indigenous education · De-colonising education · Adult education · Moral education

Résumé

Le folklore akan, un cadre philosophique pour l'éducation au Ghana – Les philosophies de l'éducation servent de cadres pour produire des apprenants tout au long de la vie et une main d'œuvre humaine instruite et qualifiée, préparant leurs

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sociétés à faire face aux mutations du 21ᵉ siècle. Toutefois, le système ghanéen de l'éducation continue de reléguer ses riches philosophies autochtones au second plan et de privilégier les philosophies pédagogiques occidentales pour mener ses politiques et pratiques éducatives. Le Ghana ne peut pas continuer de maintenir un agenda de l'éducation tout au long de la vie qui s'appuie sur une pédagogie entièrement axée sur des valeurs culturelles étrangères. L'auteur du présent article affirme que l'éducation tout au long de la vie au Ghana doit intégrer davantage d'éléments d'un cadre ghanéen authentique. Se basant sur le point de vue selon lequel il est impératif de créer un lien entre l'éducation, la culture et le développement au Ghana, il analyse les atouts éducatifs du folklore africain du groupe ethnique akan du Ghana. Il en conclut que certains aspects du folklore akan, entre autres ses récits et proverbes, ses droits et règles de filiation, ses codes moraux, et ses perspectives sociétales et humanistes, constitueraient une alternative et un complément viables pour l'éducation occidentalisée telle qu'elle est actuellement pratiquée dans le pays. Par conséquent, l'auteur préconise pour l'éducation un cadre ghanéen élargi qui incorporerait la philosophie et la pédagogie akanes, ce qui serait bénéfique pour promouvoir une éducation de qualité et tout au long de la vie dans le pays et servirait l'intérêt général des Ghanéens.

Background

Ghana, like many other developing countries, has undergone several educational reforms since it gained independence from colonial rule in 1957. However, the expected transition to an education which does justice to Ghanaian culture has yet to be reached. This status quo has been maintained because the country's education curriculum is still largely a product of colonial education (Ng'asike 2019). Ghana's education system continues to be affected by its reliance on foreign philosophies, and thus the viability of drawing on the current curriculum as a basis for lifelong learning does not seem convincing. This assessment of the situation is supported by Ishak Diwan and Irina Vartanova's consideration of "the possibility that national values can be changed during major historical events that may overwhelm previously formed social values" (Diwan and Vartanova 2020, p. 7).

To address this situation, Mejai Avoseh (2012) brings to attention the need to go back to our ancestors. He argues that ancestors' values act as the most important frameworks for education, which they managed to pass down to generations through the power of spoken words.

> The values of living in a community are intricately linked to the educational system. Traditional African education is synonymous with life and living in a community. The values are oral and are couched in songs, festivals, celebrations, myths, taboos, proverbs, and stories (Avoseh 2012, p. 15).

Avoseh further points out that what the ancestors handed down encapsulated the core objective of education, thus, to produce citizens who are active lifelong learners who uphold good morals. This awareness emphasises, to a large extent, the beneficial use

of African folklore as a framework for sustainable quality education, and intersects with Kofi Poku Quan-Baffour's assertion that,

> As Africa renews itself in this [21st] century it is prudent for its peoples to look at their cultural and indigenous practices to enable the continent to develop, protect and project its heritage and identity to the outside world (Quan-Baffour 2011, p. 31).

The importance of incorporating folklore in education cannot be overemphasised. As Cristina Pinto (2008) asserts, it is through storytelling that African elders endeavoured to inculcate in the younger generation virtues such as good behaviour, manners, hard work, fairness and respectful submission to authority.

Sadly, the incorporation of African philosophies into African educational systems is still rare. Exceptions are Nigeria, which has included the Yoruba concept of *Umoluwabi* (individual with good virtues) (Adeniji-Neill 2011), South Africa, which has emphasised the philosophy of oneness or humanity (*Ubuntu*); and Tanzania, which has revived a similar philosophy called *Ujamaa* to depict brotherhood and oneness. These philosophies are important aspects of the Indigenous African education system that should trickle to other cultures and geographical locations. As captured by Micheal van Wyk (2018), higher education institutions in South Africa have engaged in strategies to transform their existing curriculum with a focus on integrating decolonisation, Africanism and ubuntism. Taking cues from South Africa would be beneficial to Ghana in terms of drawing on its own Indigenous systems in order to leverage its educational system, thereby also preserving them for future generations.

It is against this backdrop that Emmanuel Mgqwashu (2016) has argued for the *decolonisation* of curricula and asserts that doing away with colonial ideologies and epistemologies [in schools] is an integral part of the decolonisation process as a whole. This corroborates Andrea Tamburro's (2013) earlier claim that any approach to education which includes the perspectives and worldviews of Indigenous peoples captures their experiences and decolonises their way of knowing. To further strengthen the above argument, Kehdinga Fomunyam's (2017) stance on decolonising the African curriculum establishes that African perspectives can best be used as the lens through which students can view issues more clearly, as participants' responses in his case study revealed a dire need for a total overhaul of the curriculum. This revives an imperative by Alan Dundes in 1969 that one way of getting back to the ideal future and moving away from "destructive civilization" (Dundes 1969, p. 16) is to re-establish contact with folklore which has been missing in Ghana's formal education system for a long time.

Among the dominant Western philosophies that have influenced the Ghanaian education landscape are those classified by the Reinert-Alumni Library (2010) as teacher-centred philosophies such as perennialism, essentialism and behaviourism on the one hand and learner-centred philosophies such as progressivism, humanism, existentialism and social reconstruction on the other. Although all these philosophies have the ultimate aim of making teachers effective and bringing out the best in students, they may not guarantee success in teaching and learning in Ghanaian schools,

as they seem alien to both teachers and learners who have been brought up in their particular cultures different from the origins of the Western philosophies.

Just as the effectiveness of foreign aid to develop education is limited, if not counterproductive, the aid agencies' interest is not always on the genuine development of the Indigenous peoples, as highlighted by Abby Riddell and Miguel Niño-Zarazúa (2016). Rather, as noted by Herme Mosha (2007), every society prides itself on its highly educated human workforce, who not only exhibit knowledge of their culture, but use this acquired knowledge to brace up society for the extensive changes of the 21st century. This dovetails into Avoseh's (2009) call for local philosophies to form the framework for education.

One key strength of the Western philosophies of education is that they have been documented for centuries. By contrast, most African ones, including those of the Akan people I focus on later in this article,[1] are characterised by orality. Despite the perceived advantage of their being recorded in writing, Dundes (1969) refers to Western philosophies as "forward marching destructive civilization" (ibid., p. 16). By contrast, the seeming disadvantage of undocumented Akan folklore, which resonates with an old African proverb that "when an old man dies, a library is burnt to the ground", leads Quan-Baffour (2011) to point out that historically the Akan were "non-literate", at least in the eyes of one with a Western-philosophised educational orientation who believes documentation is the mark of the literate. In spite of this perceived weakness, Akan folklorists have still preserved their culture through orality and works of art. Akwesi Arko-Achemfour (2013) corroborates this mode of recording African philosophical values by postulating that school children usually share aspects of folklore which the older generation has introduced them to with their classmates.

Formal education in Ghana today

Unfortunately, with the introduction of Western philosophies, Ghana's formal education system often sets students in competition with each other for laurels in academic performance with little room for sharing knowledge passed on from the older generations. Moreover, many Ghanaian private pre-tertiary institutions that are classified as high-performing schools do not even have spaces for sports and recreational activities. The measure of their performance is purely academic, based on cognitive abilities without factoring in cultural, affective or psychomotor knowledge and skills. As a result, our educational system adores learners who speak perfect English and score high in academic courses but know next to nothing about their own culture and hardly anything beyond knowledge found in prescribed textbooks. These learners are thus alienated from their sociocultural realities.

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[1] The Akan people constitute the largest ethnic group in both Ghana and its neighbour Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire). They include the Agona, the Ahanta, the Akuapem, the Akwamu, the Akyem, the Ashanti, the Bono, the Fante, the Kwahu and the Wassa. These Akan subgroups share many cultural traits, such as the matrilineal tracing of descent, matrilineal inheritance of property, and hereditary matrilineal succession to high political office. They speak different dialects of the same language, Akan, which is the most widespread Indigenous language in Ghana with 8.1 million speakers (USAID 2020, p. 4).

It is important at this point to highlight that the structure of the educational system in Ghana takes the form of 6-3-3-4. Thus, it takes six, three, three and four years to complete primary education, junior high school, senior high school and tertiary education respectively. Currently, around 375,000 students per year sit the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at the end of their junior high school education, while 404,856 are enrolled in senior high school, with another 547,000 enrolled in tertiary institutions (Sasu 2022; US Embassy in Ghana n.d.). Though the enrolment figures have been increasing over the years, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF n.d.) found that as many as 623,500 Ghanaian children are still not enrolled in schools (ibid.), while some who are enrolled drop out for various reasons. To curb the dropout rate and shore up the enrolment ratio, efforts should be made to ensure that the curricula are more relatable to learners' day-to-day experiences. This, I believe, can be attained if the country's educational system is decolonised by underpinning it with Indigenous philosophies which form an integral component of our learners' culture. Some research into how this might be put into practice already exists. In their study on integrating Indigenous knowledge in the teaching of intermediate mathematics, for example, James Owusu-Mensah and Kofi Poku Quan-Baffour (2015) argue that Akan Indigenous knowledge systems such as storytelling and games could be integrated into teaching at the intermediate phase of schools to make subjects easier for learners to relate to and comprehend. The authors believe that the integration of Indigenous knowledge into the school curriculum may not only enhance learning but will help learners to relate subjects to their identity.

Furthermore, there is a belief that traditional African settings have little regard for females, and this claim has been bought into by the younger generation. However, the opposite is the case, as Ghanaians and many other African cultures have always revered their women. For instance, the story of Yaa Asantewaa (the Asante queen mother) who organised women to fight against colonial rule as far back as the 19th century continues to form a strong basis of Ghanaian history. It is proof of women's leadership and how they have played key roles in governance for ages. Also, a careful look at proverbial sayings in Akan folklore reveals how women are revered in Ghanaian societies. Cecilia Addei and Isaac Addei give examples that translate as "a mother does not sleep in the afternoon"; "if a hard-working woman gets married, she brings good things into the house"; "if a hard-working woman puts her child on her back, she carries a load at the same time"; "a woman's strength is in her bustle"; and "a man who does not have a woman prepares his own stew" (Addei and Addei 2010, p. 5). These sayings showcase the strength of women, their industrious nature and how they can multitask. These are evidence of the power of folklore to educate the younger generation through heroic stories and proverbs.

Given the strengths and flaws of both dominant Western philosophies and the alternative Ghanaian ones, the intention of this article is not to argue against the Western philosophies that have foregrounded the educational system of Ghana for many decades. Rather, I aim to reinforce what has been established by earlier scholars (e.g. Arko-Achemfour 2013; Avoseh 2012; Chilisa 2012; Quan-Baffour 2011), namely that Indigenous frameworks provide an integral new look at the idea of a philosophical framework in education in the Africentric sense, and that 21st-century education systems can draw on Indigenous knowledge systems in order to theorise

about appropriate methods. In this regard, I seek to make a case that education in Ghana needs more of the authentic Ghanaian frameworks to complement the existing frameworks from the West. To illustrate this idea, I analyse aspects of Akan folklore (its stories and proverbs, its kinship rights and rules, its moral codes, its corporate and humanistic perspective) below. I argue that folklore can present a viable alternative and complement to the country's current westernised education, and I propose an enhanced Ghanaian framework for education which takes on board Akan philosophy and pedagogy. This will be beneficial for promoting quality and lifelong education in the country and serve the common good of Ghanaians.

The Akan in perspective

It is estimated that there are 92 ethnic groups in Ghana (Asante and Gyimah-Boadi 2004), of which the Akan constitute the highest population. They make up almost 48% of Ghana's entire population and it is interesting to note that they are domiciled in eight out of the 16 regions in Ghana. Quan-Baffour (2011) notes that the language of the Akan (Akan) is also spoken in some parts of Eastern Ivory Coast and Western Togo, an indication that the Akan people have settlements in those two West African countries. Beyond the coast of Africa, certain groups in the Caribbean and others in Latin America refer to themselves as Akan because they trace their origins to West Africa and specifically to the Akan of Ghana (Arko-Achemfour 2013). These include the Afro-Surinamese, the Afro-Guyanese, and the Coromantee in Jamaica.

It is believed the culture of the Akan has remained relatively unadulterated over time and has remained one of the purest in West Africa. In support of this claim, Quan-Baffour asserts:

> In the African context, folklore is considered as a pure, valuable, unadulterated original native culture where change can hardly affect its purity (Quan-Baffour 2011, p. 32).

Some of the most important mythological stories preserved among the Akan are called *anansesem*, which literally means "spider stories" but can, in a figurative sense, mean "travellers' tales", and are sometimes also referred to as *nyankomsem* (words of a sky god). Aside from the spider stories, Akan folklore features myths, proverbs, kinship rights and rules, and works of art among others.

The influence of the Akan in Ghana and West Africa is not just by virtue of their numerical strength but also due to their strong culture and spirit that binds them. Like other parts of Africa, their culture, chief among them their language, has been handed down to generations through the power of spoken language. They have been able to maintain their culture throughout the blows of colonial history, and their folklore has served as a tool for lifelong education and development. The Akan saying *ɛti korɔ nnkɔ agyina*, for instance, translates to "two heads are better than one", which gives an indication of the unity of purpose and the need to learn from one another (collaborative living and learning), both of which culminate in the personal development of individual lifelong learners and the survival and sustainability of the community at

large. Essentially, folklore in any form remains the communal expression of the Akan and can be leveraged as a tool to promote and sustain quality education in Ghana. South Africa, Tanzania and Nigeria provide clear evidence of the effectiveness of this approach, which could be emulated through the adoption of their Indigenous philosophies highlighted earlier in this article.

Finally, it is worth highlighting here that informal and formal education lie at the extreme ends of the lifelong learning continuum, with non-formal education situated in the middle. In theoretical terms, informal learning is considered a form of incidental, at times unintentional education through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from environmental exposure and experiences (La Belle 1982). On the other hand, formal education is explained as institutionalised, graded, and hierarchically structured from primary school through to tertiary level, while non-formal education is an organised, intentional educational activity that provides a selected type of learning. Marjan Laal (2011) argues that lifelong learning occurs at all times and places and thus encompasses all forms of learning.

In my own view, lifelong learning as a converging point for the three forms of education can be consolidated when it is based on local philosophies of education. For example, heroic stories such as that of Yaa Asantewaa will instil in the youth the need to learn, persevere and do all they can to sustain their generation while preparing the ground for future generations. Also, Akan proverbs such as *kae sɛ woredi wo nkosua no, na worewe wo nkokɔmma*, which roughly translates to "eating your eggs means consuming your chicken", is a powerful way of reminding people that without the discipline to save the little one has today, there would be nothing for them to depend on in the future or in times of need. This is a lesson that can guide people of all ages to be mindful of their present situation as they prepare for the future by learning throughout life.

Folklore conceptualised

Due to the controversial areas folkore as a concept covers and the materials it constitutes, folklore, like many other concepts, barely has a single universally accepted definition (Mould-Iddrisu 1997). Although Quan-Baffour (2011) indicates that folklore could be as old as humankind, he admits that its origin is not clear. A situation, he believes, which has reduced folklore to mere speculation. However, Stephen Gencarella (2009) advocates for the forging of a robust path of convergence to promote folklore as a critical praxis. This, he indicates, can be attained if the social and political nature of folklore is addressed.

Despite the difficulty of conceptualising folklore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), following the five-day convention of an appointed Committee of Governmental Experts on the Safeguarding of Folklore in Geneva, offered a broad definition of folklore as

> a group-oriented and tradition-based creation of group or individuals reflecting the expectations of the community as an adequate expression of its cultural and social identity, its standards and values are transmitted orally by imitation or by

other means. Its forms includes [*sic*] among others language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and arts (Mould-Iddrisu 1997, p. 3).

The Ghanaian Copyright Law in force in the mid-1980s (RoG 1985) aptly captured folklore as a concept made up of any

> literary, artistic and scientific work belonging to the cultural heritage of Ghana which were [*sic*] created, preserved and developed by ethnic communities of Ghana or by unidentified Ghanaian authors, and any such works designated under this Law to be works of Ghanaian folklore (Mould-Iddrisu 1997 p. 3, citing RoG 1985, p. 22).

In 2005, the Ghanaian Copyright Law (RoG 1985) was replaced by the Copyright Act (RoG 2005, still in force today) and the definition was altered slightly:

> "folklore" means the literary, artistic and scientific expressions belonging to the cultural heritage of Ghana which are created, preserved and developed by ethnic communities of Ghana or by an unidentified Ghanaian author, and includes *kente* and *adinkra* designs, where the author of the designs are [*sic*] not known, and any similar work designated under this Act to be works of folklore (RoG 2005, p 31; italics added).[2]

It is generally accepted that individuals create folklore based on their experiences; nonetheless, communal use through time has erased individual recognition in the creation of folklore (Mould-Idrissu 1997). African folklore, as Betty Mould-Idrissu puts it, does not recognise borders. This explains why the same folktales or proverbs can be heard in several distinct African ethnic groups, but not without local spice. This is validated in Chinua Achebe's seminal novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in the statement,

> Ikemefuna had an endless stock of folktales. Even those which Nwoye knew already were told with a new freshness and the local flavour of a different clan (Achebe 1958, p. 25).

Achebe's mention of "[they] were told…" (ibid.) supports Stith Thompson's (1946) argument that folklore usually moves down orally from "culturally higher" to "culturally lower" people in society.

Efforts to arrive at a single, universally accepted definition of folklore have been accompanied for decades with arguments over its meaning and scope. Initially, *folklore* as a concept in Europe literally meant the wisdom of the unlearned members of a learned society, that is, the "lore" of the "folk". This definition still seems valid

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[2] *Kente* and *adinkra* are fabrics produced by the Akan. "But *adinkra* and *kente* are much more than textiles produced in a specific location using certain methods and materials. They have moved through generations of history … marking rites of passage, like marriage and death, and telling stories about wealth, prestige, and kinship ties" (Boateng 2014, p. 1; italics added).

even today. Folktales somehow metamorphosed into "lore" by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Meanwhile, in Africa, the limited scope of scholarship on folklore was essentially confined to animal tales and ancient myths. Perhaps this has inhibited the ability to translate folklore into a meaningful framework for promoting and sustaining quality education for the development of Ghana.

However, Philip Peek and Kwesi Yankah (2004) note that African folklorists extend the scope of folklore to expressive behaviour, just like European anthropologists and Folklife Studies[3] do. This broader scope demands continual awareness of the challenge of using the European lens of viewing African genres individually. This is due to the significant and interesting differences between folkloristic genres of different peoples. This beckons the folklorist to pay attention to critical features of each of the several oral arts genres and how the various media of their delivery overlap – like the proverbs told by the carvings on West African linguists' staffs or sayings "speaking" from their clothes.

In their own attempt to come up with an all-embracing definition of folklore, Peek and Yankah postulate the following,

> Folklore is those esoteric traditions (oral, customary, or material) expressed in the form of artistic communication used as operational culture by a group within the larger society (primarily to provide group identity and homogeneity) (Peek and Yankah 2004, p. xi)

This definition, the authors believe, encapsulates a lot of academic material and also covers some aspects of the concept hitherto ignored, notably those not captured under conventional oratory transmission, such as artworks and clothing.

Quan-Baffour (2011) travels back to the origins of folklore with a more theoretical angle. He argues that folklore is both evolutionary and devolutionary in nature. He explains that its evolutionary nature is depicted in the way it gradually responds to changes in society, whereas its devolutionary nature is reflected in the power that the gradual change in society equips it to reinvent itself and assert its authority among the folk. Quan-Baffour's argument is based on Dundes' (1969) assertion that remnants of the aristocratic origin of folklore have managed to survive through the oratory nature of transmission.

The arguments adduced by Dundes (1969), and more recently by Quarn-Baffour (2011), suggest that folklore should be introduced into the school environment, but the Ghanaian education system does not seem to have embraced the idea. This situation could be reversed, for the common good of all Ghanaians. Folklore can be used as a valuable tool to equip and inspire citizens of the world – starting in early childhood – to internalise the norms of society through lifelong learning. This could also avert a fading away of Indigenous philosophy in modern times as captured by Arko-Achemfour (2013) and prevent further dwindling and decay of the kind already noted by Edward Tylor (1958).

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[3] "'Folklife Studies' or 'Folklife Research' … is a total scholarly concentration on the folk-levels of a national or regional culture. In brief, folklife studies involves the analysis of a folk-culture in its entirety" (Yoder 1963, p. 43).

In spite of the seemingly gloomy picture of folklore in the 21st century, Arko-Achemfour (2013) inspires some hope by sharing that the oratory nature of transmitting folklore will lead to its eventual survival, as some of its "mutilated fragments" will remain as a part of the people's culture. In a similar vein, Quan-Baffour (2011) posits that there is a renewed interest in African studies and the African renaissance, which has brought about more African scholars and ethnic groups within the African setup to protect their culture. The benefit of this is that folklore, a pillar in the culture of Africans and people elsewhere, is not about to die, so there is an urgent need to conscientiously develop and adopt it as a complement to extant Western philosophies. In the context of decolonising the curriculum, this becomes imperative, as Western philosophies hold remnants of a colonial legacy.

In a nutshell, [Akan] folklore has remained difficult to adequately conceptualise, while the Western philosophies which have been accepted in Ghanaian schools have not been helpful in training African youth to appreciate their own people's values and culture. Despite this negative impact, Dundes (1969) did see light at the end of the tunnel and, as referred to by Quan-Baffour, assures us that,

> There has always been folklore and, in all likelihood, there will always be folklore. As long as humans interact and, in the course of so doing, employ traditional forms of communication, folklorists will continue to have golden opportunities to study folklore (Quan-Baffour 2011, p. 33, quoting Dundes 1969, p. 19).

Hence, the earlier the adoption of Akan – as well as other Indigenous – folklore as philosophical underpinnings of the Ghanaian education system, the more effective it will be in contributing to lifelong learning in the country.

Indigenising Ghanaian education

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda includes Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), concerning education, which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN 2015). A major requirement of SDG 4 is to optimise the quality of education by incorporating the beliefs and norms of the people into the planning and implementation of school systems. Monitoring this includes assessing "pupils' characteristics and their learning environments, teacher characteristics, head teacher characteristics and their views on school infrastructure and management" (UIS 2018, p. 15).

Despite this noble motive, it still stands that Ghana has yet to benefit, as local philosophies are still subservient to their Western counterparts and do not occupy important spaces in the formal education sector except for learners studying Ghanaian Language at high school or tertiary education levels. Researchers such as Grace Diabah and Nana Appiah Amfo (2015) have established the power of proverbs as important tools in dealing with gender issues, for example, and others have extensively discussed the usefulness of wise sayings and other forms of Ghanaian, specifically Akan, culture as traditional pedagogical tools for shaping the future of the

younger generation to ensure sustainable quality education. This has been the practice in traditional Ghanaian societies and partly in the non-formal sector, but hardly has a place in the formal education sector, where the focus is on assessment performance and readying learners for the job market instead of fostering character formation or familiarising them with the culture of their society.

Akan folklore as a critical lens

It is on this account that I raise the argument that in spite of the dominance of Western philosophies in Ghanaian educational settings, Akan folklore could serve as a critical lens through which to promote and sustain quality education in Ghana. It is in this spirit that Quan-Baffour asserts that the Akan proverb, *Tete wobi ka, tete wobi kyere*, to wit, "heritage has lots to say, heritage has lots to teach" alludes to the fact that folklore is perceived as the vehicle which helps lifelong learners travel back in time, reaping substantial benefits (Quan-Baffour 2011, p. 31). He concludes his article on the use of Akan proverbs [an integral aspect of Akan folklore] by arguing that they can be integrated into the school curricula to teach our youth social skills and emotional intelligence, making them good community members. I fully concur with his argument, bearing in mind that education seeks to provide learners with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that will make them functional and responsible members of their communities. This is in line with Madronna Holden's (2008) view that folklore is an educational tool for socialising the next generation.

However, this tool may also benefit learners in colleges of education and universities offering Ghanaian Languages and related courses. The crucial question here is: "where is the place of Indigenous pedagogy as an important tool in nursing and agricultural training colleges, technical universities and the like?" In the absence of Indigenous components from their course curricula, people may graduate from such institutions as professionals who have lost their sense of culture and may be alienated from their own culture. By consequence, they do not pass on Indigenous values in their own teaching practice. It is therefore not too surprising to hear the older generation accusing the younger ones of being disrespectful and at times referring to them as "ignorant" due to their ways of communicating with their elders and how they relate to them.

Storytelling

Traditionally, Akan elders, like other Africans, used stories to instil obedience, hard work, manners, fairness, good behaviour and submission to authority in members of their community (Pinto 2008). It was at story-sharing meetings that the elders artistically expressed their imagination; engaged, excited and amused their audience. I am of the firm belief that aside from the stories that were told as a way of instilling in people, especially in the younger generation, virtues held in high esteem by their societies, the act of sitting together, singing together and perhaps sharing roasted corn or a local drink was enough to help socialise the younger ones and newcomers into the society. It also demonstrated, in practical terms, the corporative and collaborative nature of learning among Africans. Thompson (1946) reflects on the excitement that

is generated when African families gather by the fireside to entertain themselves. He notes that this helps to get people to live, reason and develop together. Such cooperative forms of living, though informal, might be compared to the more structured Western forms of community learning, which run counter to the individualistic living and learning that is detrimental to individual and societal development. Storytelling also serves to develop the spirit of lifelong learning, as what the younger generation learned during these storytelling times was practised and handed down to generations after them. Unfortunately, creating individualised and competitive individuals in classrooms fuelled by the westernised education system is not helpful in reclaiming a collaborative mindset among Ghanaian learners.

Cultural identity

Furthermore, Akachi Ezeigbo (2013) underscores the importance of folklore as an ingredient of cultural identity. The author notes that the Japanese "love and 'live' their culture", which is "an identity that they are proud of. It is this consciousness that drives their technology today" (ibid., p. 8). In view of these positive effects, Africans [Ghanaians in the case of this article] should be urged to cultivate a love for and promote their cultures and folklore and see them as an instrument for education. Ezeigbo corroborates Dundes' affirmation that,

> one of the ways of getting back to nature, ideal human nature that is, and away from the forward marching destructive civilization, was by regaining contact with folklore and this is the essence of popular culture (Dundes 1969, p. 16).

Hence, finding meaningful ways of making Akan folklore an established philosophical framework to organise education in Ghana will help in the sustenance of education as citizens are likely to claim ownership of such a philosophical framework.

It has been noted that folklore as an educational gamut has proven to be effective in imparting knowledge because it engages imaginations, hearts and minds at the same time. Thus, Ezeude (2009) observes that students are able to retain more information and are better able to retell a story to someone else when the story is told to them than when they read it themselves. In the formal setting where teaching methodologies are borrowed from the West, teachers are taken through training to prepare them to deliver the content with the appropriate methods at the scheduled times to benefit students entrusted into their hands. However, in the African setting, where orality established itself as the principal means of transmitting knowledge to younger generations, the elders, who were astute orators and imbued detailed content (in terms of the various forms of folklore), were responsible for sharing stories, myths, legends, traditions, customs among others with the members of their society. By so doing, they were able to aesthetically bring "life" to the elements they transmitted, thereby enabling listeners and/or participants (learners) to pick up the full import of the stories and use them to guide their lives – or risk falling victim to the laws of the land.

Social rules and norms

Another major benefit of folklore is its ability to internalise social rules and norms among members of society and its ability to help youngsters adjust, adapt and deal effectively with various life conditions as lifelong learners (Majasan 1969). Typically, the selection process of an *abusuapanin* (family head) in the Akan setup demonstrates that prospective candidates need to thoroughly understand the culture of their people and live above reproach to qualify for selection. The criteria for chiefs are even higher. People who are potential candidates by birth are groomed first by their parents and the extended family so they grow up and live under the ambit of their societal laws and regulations. Eventually, such persons may qualify and serve as models for the youth they will lead while valuable lessons are picked from their earlier private lives and later as leaders. This is evident in Dennis Banda's (2008) doctoral thesis, where he reports that Zambian vocational trainers generally observe that trainees with rural backgrounds, where folklore features prominently in their mode of education, are better behaved and more responsible compared to their fellow learners from urban areas. It is obvious that urban dwellers are more exposed to foreign cultures and philosophies of education than the rural population, and some might copy what Dundes (1969) terms destructive civilization. This is evident in how modernisation has succeeded in relegating African cultures to the background in their own settings. To reverse this trend, there is a dire need to re-establish the authentic Akan philosophies in Ghanaian educational curricula.

Sustainable quality education for Ghana's development

Furthermore, short Akan sayings also add a lot of spice to the debate that African philosophies hold the key to contributing to sustainable quality education for Ghana's development. One example is *Kwan nkyɛn ade yɛfɛ, wɔde sika na ɛyɛ*, which roughly translates to "money is needed for everything". Taken literally, this adage may imply that the emphasis is on amassing wealth, but it has a deeper meaning beyond that. It rather seeks to alert individuals that money is needed for everything; therefore, people have to use their creativity and ingenuity to work hard to acquire the necessities of life decently and to help others as well. Also, people need to be lifelong learners to keep abreast of changes and make the best of the changing times.

Another short saying in Akan, *wɔnsom ɛne nipa* (success accrues from collective efforts) undoubtedly takes Africans back to their roots where they lived cooperatively and learned from each other with the belief that the *ubuntu* system (I am because of you) is the best for the survival of humankind. Furthermore, *ubuntuism* instils in people the urgency to preserve what *ɔbɔadeɛ* (the Creator of the universe) has bequeathed to humankind for the use of others and future generations.

Accentuating the focus of this article, I agree with Gencarella in his assertion that,

> folklore is a rhetorical act of instituting a people. Its power lies in recalling the reasons we develop common sense, namely, to learn how to identify with constitutions or "our" folk and with it, constitutions of those who are not "we folk" (Gencarella 2009, p. 181).

This resonates with Quan-Baffour's (2011) opinion that Africa's bid to renew itself in the 21st century calls for its peoples to draw on their cultural and Indigenous practices as best practices for developing, protecting and projecting their heritage and identity to the rest of the world. Though Quan-Baffour's statement is profound, I reiterate that it can only be achieved in our country if a Ghanaian philosophy, within the broad context of African philosophy, is accepted as a viable framework for shaping quality education that will sustain Ghana's development.

Lastly, seeing educated, mostly urban members of our society live recklessly, abuse state and local legislations, littering and destroying our environment through various activities (such as sponsored illegal mining, known as "*galamsey*" in Ghana [a conflation of "gather and sell"], and bribery for example) leaves much to be desired. While those educated through formal schooling are generally respected and seen as the enlightened in society, Ghana's rural dwellers have much more respect for authority and their environment. Taboos and customs are still adhered to among most rural dwellers, so that even without the kind of education provided in current formal schooling, they are in a position to sustain what nature has offered them. This paradox raises the question whether Western philosophies of education are sufficient for providing the learner or graduate Ghanaians and Africans with a curriculum they can appreciate and apply in their own contribution to their country's development. As I have argued above, the answer to this question is no. Rather, a blend of Akan and established Western philosophies of education stand to produce balanced students and graduates who can make meaningful contributions to Ghanaian society.

Looking ahead

In this article, I have emphasised that for Ghana to promote and sustain quality education, there is an urgent need to develop and implement an alternative Indigenous philosophical framework, conceptualised from the perspective of Akan folklore. As I have argued elsewhere (Amponsah et al. 2018), there is a need to display a sense of commonalities, affirm culture, tradition and value systems, and foster comprehension of the local consciousness in a bid to blend both Western and African methodological approaches to resolving the challenges local people are facing. It is my firm belief that incorporating both philosophies will create ownership among local people, who will then actively participate in Ghana's development efforts. Also, each philosophical framework will compensate the deficiencies of the other. Most importantly, incorporating Akan beliefs and norms will help promote lifelong education and make the people's voices heard.

Based on Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey's popular saying that people without knowledge of their culture are like trees without roots, the culture, history and feats achieved by our Ghanaian forefathers and ancestors should be the basis of cultural/social studies and history. My proposal, therefore, comes on the back of SDG Indicator 4.7 of the UN 2030 Agenda (UN 2015; UIS 2018), which seeks to ensure by 2030 that

all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UIS 2018, p. 36).

To achieve this, Ghana cannot continue to perpetuate an educational agenda fully hinged on Western philosophies. Consequently, folklore as an educational praxis that brings to the fore the onto-epistemic foundations of education should serve as the basis of a truly sustainable educational system – devoid of any imposed Western frames of economic and social relations which Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) has described as abyssal. Since folklore would serve as an obvious practical teaching tool for cognitive justice in the decolonisation of Ghanaian curricula, it should be introduced into Ghanaian school curricula so that people who go through the Ghanaian education system would benefit from the best elements of both Western and traditional philosophies.

As noted earlier, rural dwellers exhibit their culture and are "more African" in the non-formal education sector than their urban counterparts and those teaching and learning in formal schools. Hence, there is the need for a conscious effort to reintroduce urban dwellers to their culture through storytelling and the heroic exploits of their ancestors to provide them with models to emulate. In this way, they could draw on history to look to the future (lifelong learning) while internalising virtues that would make them productive and useful for future generations. Modern educational delivery could incorporate documentaries on the culture and history of the people into the teaching and learning resources for schools and the non-formal education sector. This would be another example of complementarity between Western and traditional philosophies.

Furthermore, incorporating aspects of folklore into Ghanaian school curricula would follow the way American and European school-going children are already being made to appreciate their origins. This incorporation is likely to make Ghanaian students and youths appreciate their own history and culture and may in turn reawaken true African *ubuntuism*, long lost in the quest to outperform each other in school activities and portray Western lifestyles instead of a blend of that and their own culture. It also makes sense to say that Akan folklore can be infused into our educational curricula with the ultimate aim of ensuring the sustainability of our education and culture and at the same time safeguarding that individuals remain relevant in this globalised world. This potential is evidenced in how Akan folklore was used as a collaborative tool in societies through storytelling while its idioms effectively served the guidance and counselling needs of individuals in society.

Lastly, the use of Akan folklore as a traditional pedagogical tool should be revisited to complement the more popular Western philosophies. The inclusivity of different forms of folklore among different learners, with different backgrounds, can approach folklore as a teaching tool for learning and understanding different topics while taking advantage of learners' backgrounds and cultures. For instance, sharing the story of Yaa Asantewaa (the Asante queen mother) who organised women

to fight against colonial rule will go a long way to inform learners that women have been at the forefront of leadership in the country as far back as the 19th century – which runs contrary to the long-held view that Ghanaian or African women were relegated to woodchoppers and drawers of water. This insight could activate the sense of communalism, leadership and activism among [female] learners from the African perspective and also restore the respect Africans had for their female community members. In a nutshell, while Western philosophies open the students up to global understandings and perspectives, Akan folklore grounds them in their own culture. Consequently, quality education of the kind proposed in this article will produce students and graduates who are beneficial to their societies while understanding, appreciating, cooperating and contributing to global issues and development. In the end, the complementarity of the philosophies could be an effective vehicle for promoting SDG Indicator 4.7 (UIS 2018).

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