
A Systematic Review of the Aesthetic and Performative Dimensions of Akan Folk Games

Isaac Asare-Aboagye*

Department of Languages and General Studies, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana

**Corresponding author: Isaac Asare-Aboagye.*

Abstract

Akan folk games are living performance traditions in which movement, song, speech, rhythm, gesture, material objects and social rules operate as an integrated expressive system. Although their educational and sociocultural value is increasingly recognised, evidence about the aesthetic and performative dimensions of these games remains dispersed across ethnomusicological, educational, cultural and practice-based scholarship. This review synthesised evidence on how Akan folk games generate aesthetic meaning, organise performance and sustain cultural transmission. A systematic integrative review was conducted in accordance with PRISMA 2020, with additional guidance from ENTREQ and synthesis-without-meta-analysis principles. Searches covered Google Scholar, ERIC, Crossref Metadata Search, named institutional repositories, targeted publisher and journal websites, and backward citation searching from database inception to 31 July 2026. English-language empirical, ethnographic, practice-based and analytically substantive studies focused on Akan games or closely related Ghanaian play-song traditions were eligible. Sixteen studies were included and appraised using design-appropriate Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool criteria. The evidence revealed six mutually reinforcing dimensions: sonic and oral, kinetic and embodied, spatial and material, dramatic and affective, communal and ethical, and transmission and adaptation. Adaptation for schools and digital media can extend access, but decontextualisation may weaken linguistic, embodied and community-authenticated meanings. Akan folk-game aesthetics are relational and performative. Their beauty emerges from coordinated action and from the fit between artistic form, social purpose and cultural memory. Safeguarding therefore requires multimodal documentation, community validation and educational use that retains the games' sonic, kinetic, spatial and participatory integrity.

Keywords

Akan folk games, aesthetic performance, indigenous games, embodied heritage, intangible cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Folk games occupy a distinctive position in Akan cultural life because they join play to music, language, bodily discipline, imagination and social instruction. A game may begin with a leader's call, a sung formula or an agreed spatial arrangement; it may then unfold through clapping, stepping, jumping, pursuit, object passing, strategic calculation, mimetic gesture or collective response. The event is simultaneously recreational and performative. Participants do not merely execute rules. They shape tempo, produce sound, manage suspense, display skill, interpret social cues and sustain a shared aesthetic atmosphere.

This integrated quality is consistent with broader African performance traditions in which artistic form is rarely separated from practical, moral and communal purpose. Nketia's documentation of Ghanaian folk songs [1] demonstrated that music is embedded in social activity, while Taylor's distinction between the archive and the embodied repertoire [2] clarifies how cultural memory is transmitted through repeated action as well as through written records. From this perspective, Akan folk games are not minor children's diversions. They are embodied repositories in which movement patterns, song texts, tonal modulations, materials, rules and social relationships are repeatedly enacted.

The aesthetic dimension of these games has sometimes been reduced to visible attractiveness or musical ornament. Such a reduction is inadequate. Everyday aesthetics [3] emphasises that ordinary practices can organise perception, emotion and value, while performance studies treats play, ritual and games as structured events that generate meaning through presence, repetition, interaction and restored behaviour [4]. Aesthetic analysis of Akan folk games must therefore ask how the event feels, sounds and moves; how bodies and objects are arranged; how suspense, humour and rhythm are created; and how participants recognise a performance as skilful, appropriate or culturally resonant.

Existing studies have examined Ghanaian children's singing games, indigenous music pedagogy, school-based folk games, language learning, mathematical instruction and cultural preservation [5-10, 18, 22, 26]. A smaller body of directly Akan-focused work has documented particular games such as Antoakyire, Pilolo, Oware, Abatoɔ, Alikoto and other locally named forms. However, findings remain dispersed across journals, theses and institutional repositories, and many studies foreground educational outcomes without explicitly theorising the performative mechanisms that produce those outcomes. This fragmentation obscures the aesthetic system linking sound, movement, space, materiality, emotion and communal regulation.

A systematic synthesis is particularly necessary at a time when urbanisation, changing leisure patterns, reduced intergenerational contact and screen-based entertainment are reshaping children's play. Curricular integration and digital documentation offer important opportunities, but preservation can become reductive when a game is represented only through its rules or a short video detached from language, occasion, local variation and participant interpretation. A rigorous account of aesthetic and performative dimensions is therefore a prerequisite for culturally responsible documentation, teaching and digitisation.

The purpose of this systematic integrative review was to synthesise scholarship on the aesthetic and performative dimensions of Akan folk games and closely related Ghanaian play-song traditions. The review addressed four questions: (1) Which sonic, embodied, spatial, material, dramatic and communal elements structure the performance of Akan folk games? (2) How do these elements produce aesthetic experience and cultural meaning? (3) What educational and social functions are enabled by the performance structure? and (4) What methodological and preservation priorities emerge from the existing evidence?

2. Methods

2.1 Review Design and Reporting Framework

A systematic integrative design was selected because the evidence base combines ethnography, qualitative case studies, practice-based accounts, educational interventions, quasi-experimental work and theses. The review was reported in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 statement [11]. ENTREQ [12] informed the transparent reporting of qualitative synthesis, while the Synthesis Without Meta-analysis guideline [13] informed the explanation of study grouping and narrative comparison. A meta-analysis was not appropriate because outcomes, units of analysis and methods were heterogeneous and because the primary aim was interpretive synthesis rather than estimation of a common intervention effect. The review protocol was specified before full-text selection but was not registered in a public registry. Eligibility criteria, selection counts, extraction fields, appraisal procedures and the recoverable search information are reported below and in Appendix A; complete reconstructed source-specific strategies are provided in the accompanying Supplementary Search Strategy.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility was organised around population and cultural context, phenomenon of interest, evidence type and report characteristics. Studies were included when they examined Akan traditional or folk games, Akan children's play songs, or Ghanaian indigenous games whose performance features were directly transferable to the interpretation of Akan traditions. The phenomenon of interest comprised at least one aesthetic or performative element, including song, rhythm, clapping, movement, gesture, bodily coordination, spatial formation, costume or objects, humour, role-play, improvisation, audience participation, affective response or culturally patterned rules. Empirical qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, ethnographic, practice-based and analytically substantive educational studies were eligible.

Reports were excluded when they concerned digital or commercial games without a clear indigenous Akan or Ghanaian basis; discussed games only as an abstract metaphor; described educational benefits without reporting identifiable game features; lacked sufficient methodological or analytical substance; duplicated another report; or were not available in English. Books and foundational theoretical works were used to frame interpretation but were not counted as included studies. No lower publication-date limit was applied; searches ended on 31 July 2026.

2.3 Information Sources and Search Strategy

The information sources were Google Scholar; ERIC; Crossref Metadata Search; the University of Education, Winneba Institutional Repository; the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Institutional Repository; the University of Ghana Research Repository; and targeted searches of the journal or publisher websites that hosted potentially eligible records. These sites included International Journal of Education & the Arts, Social Education Research, International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities, Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies, International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, Research Journal in Advanced Humanities, Cogent Education, Youth Theatre Journal, African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies, Simulation & Gaming, and European Journal of Mathematics and Science Education. Backward citation searching was undertaken from the included reports and key Akan-focused studies. Searches covered each source from inception to the final update reported on 31 July 2026. The consolidated log did not retain the execution date for each individual source.

The principal concept structure was (Akan OR Ashanti OR Ghana*) AND (“folk game*” OR “traditional game*” OR “indigenous game*” OR “play song*” OR “singing game*”) AND (aesthetic* OR perform* OR music* OR rhythm OR movement OR gesture OR dance OR embody* OR “cultural value*”). The syntax was adapted to each platform, and targeted searches used the game names Antoakyire, Pilolo, Oware, Abatoɔ, Alikoto and Kyempe. English-language reports were retained; no lower publication-date limit was applied. The search generated 78 records from database, metadata and publisher-platform searching and 18 from repositories and citation searching, for 96 records in total. The original consolidated log did not retain counts for each individual source. Duplicate records were identified by normalising and matching titles, author names and publication years, with DOI comparison where available, followed by manual review; 24 duplicates were removed. Appendix A and the supplementary file distinguish contemporaneously reported information from reconstructed reproducible strategies.

2.4 Study Selection

Titles and abstracts were screened against the predefined criteria. Potentially eligible reports were then examined in full. To reduce inconsistency in a single-author review, all inclusion decisions were verified in a second screening pass using the same criteria, and exclusion reasons were recorded at full-text stage. When a study contained both educational outcomes and descriptions of performance, only evidence relevant to aesthetic form, enactment or culturally mediated function was extracted.

2.5 Data Extraction

A standardised extraction form captured bibliographic details, location, cultural group, participants, named games, study design, data-collection methods, aesthetic and performative elements, reported cultural or educational functions, and limitations. Extracted aesthetic evidence was coded initially using descriptive

categories derived from the literature: sound and oral expression; movement and bodily technique; spatial organisation; material and visual features; dramatic and affective expression; participation and social regulation; and transmission or adaptation. New categories were added when evidence did not fit the initial framework.

2.6 Methodological Appraisal

Methodological quality was appraised using design-appropriate criteria from the 2018 Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool [14]. The appraisal considered clarity of the research question, adequacy of data sources, coherence between design and analysis, relevance of participants, completeness of outcome reporting and acknowledgement of limitations. Practice-based and reflective papers were judged for transparency of context, analytic depth and the traceability of claims to described experience. In keeping with MMAT guidance, no aggregate numerical score was calculated. Studies were assigned high, moderate or limited methodological confidence to aid interpretation rather than to determine inclusion.

2.7 Synthesis Procedure

The synthesis proceeded in three stages, guided by ENTREQ and SWiM reporting principles [12, 13]. First, extracted evidence was summarised by study and game type. Second, line-by-line codes were grouped into descriptive themes. Third, relationships among themes were interpreted to produce an integrative model of Akan folk-game aesthetics. Greater interpretive weight was given to findings that recurred across culturally specific ethnography, direct observation and participant testimony. Educational outcome studies were used primarily to clarify how performative structures functioned in learning rather than to infer causal effectiveness beyond their designs.

3. Results

3.1 Search and Selection Results

The search produced 96 raw records: 78 from databases, metadata and publisher platforms and 18 from repositories and citation searching. After 24 duplicates were removed, 72 titles and abstracts were screened. Forty-four records were excluded during screening, and 28 reports were sought for retrieval. Two reports could not be retrieved, leaving 26 full-text reports for eligibility assessment. Ten reports were excluded because they fell outside the Akan or Ghanaian scope, lacked usable aesthetic or performance evidence, provided insufficient methodological detail, or overlapped with another report. Sixteen studies were included in the qualitative synthesis, as shown in Figure 1.

Only one in six raw records was retained. This attrition reflects a field in which many publications discuss the educational or cultural value of indigenous games without describing how the games sound, move, occupy space or organise participation. The final corpus therefore privileges reports with traceable performance evidence.

3.2 Characteristics of Included Studies

The 16 studies spanned 1996 to 2026 and were concentrated in Ghana, as shown in Table 1. Most used qualitative designs, including ethnography, case study, interviews, focus groups, observation and multimedia analysis. Sample sizes ranged from nine expert players to 129 pupils. Two recent studies used quantitative or quasi-experimental approaches to examine mathematical learning, while several studies analysed children's singing games or classroom adaptation. Directly Akan-focused studies examined game repertoires in Ashanti and other Akan-speaking settings, including Antoakyire, Pilolo, Oware, Abatoɔ, Alikoto and a range of locally named singing and movement games.

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for the identification, screening and inclusion of studies.

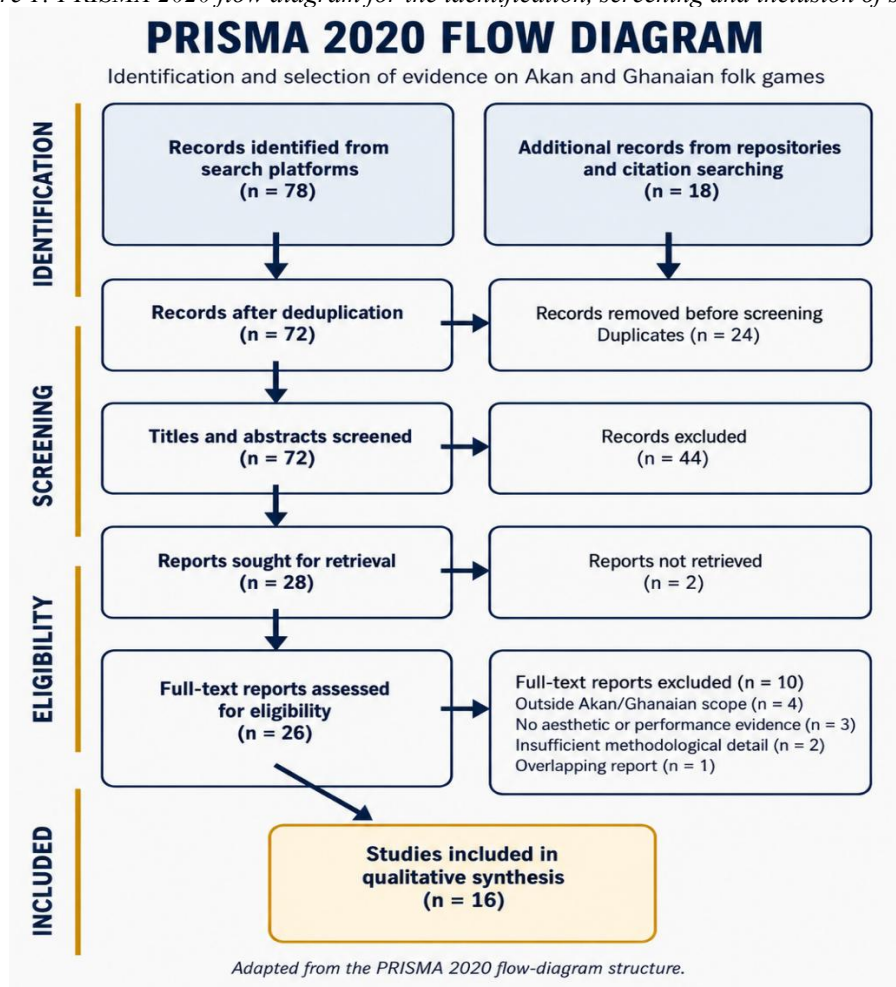


Table 1: Characteristics and principal contributions of the 16 included studies

Study	Setting / participants	Design	Game focus	Contribution to this review
Addo (1996)	Ghanaian children; multimedia corpus	Multimedia/ethnomusicological analysis	Play songs and singing games	Links musical form, performance practice and social meaning; foregrounds song, movement and cultural norms.
Dzansi (2002)	Ghanaian children's singing games	Interpretive qualitative study	Singing games	Shows indigenous culture through language, rhythm, communal participation, gendered roles and embodied play.
Gyadu (2014)	Six public schools, Central Region	Qualitative case study; observation, interviews, questionnaires	Folk games in schools	Documents cognitive, psychomotor and psychosocial values and the decline of regular play.
Acquah et al. (2015)	Children and indigenous music educators in Ghana	Qualitative descriptive study	Musical games and songs	Treats music, movement and participation as resources for holistic wellbeing and social development.
Boateng-Nimoh & Nantwi (2020a)	129 pupils, Ghana	Qualitative survey/case study	School folk games	Reports reduced participation but sustained educational value; identifies social and academic implications.
Boateng-Nimoh &	115 pupils, Ghana	Action-oriented qualitative study	Modified Abatoo	Demonstrates how visual-art elements and structured

Study	Setting / participants	Design	Game focus	Contribution to this review
Nantwi (2020b)				adaptation can increase engagement while retaining a traditional game base.
Agyeman & Brewu (2020)	16 children aged 7–10, Ashanti Region	Eight-week ethnographic case study; video and focus groups	Eight Akan ethno-musical games	Rich evidence on song, movement, rules, role allocation, social context and children's interpretations.
Duhoe & Otibua (2020)	12 Ghanaian participants	Qualitative thematic analysis	Indigenous children's play songs	Identifies aesthetic pleasure in singing, clapping, dance, rule-governed creativity and emotional expression.
Opoku & Obeng (2022)	Asotwe community; pupils, teachers and community representatives	Qualitative case study	Seventeen Akan folk games	Details artistic integration through singing, clapping, dancing and game materials; connects performance to values and curriculum.
Obeng et al. (2022)	25 participants in early childhood setting	Qualitative case study; observation and interviews	Indigenous folk-game songs	Shows how repetition, melody, movement and local language enable active learning and participation.
Agbenyo et al. (2022)	Three members of the Organization of American Kodály Educators	Multiple-case interview study	Kodály principles and contextual adaptation	Explains how Kodály principles may be adapted to Ghanaian basic-school music education through local singing and movement resources.
Mensa et al. (2023)	100 participants in three Ghanaian municipalities	Qualitative interviews and observation	Akan traditional games	Associates interactive performance with communication, teamwork, language proficiency, motivation and cultural appreciation.
Deh (2023)	University of Ghana drama-education context	Practice-based reflective analysis	Ghanaian indigenous games	Shows the dramaturgical value of role-play, improvisation, mime, concentration, spontaneity and ensemble work.
Owusu & Obuo Addo (2023)	Ghanaian upper-primary mathematics context	Educational case/application study	Alikoto	Demonstrates how a culturally familiar spinning game embodies numerical reasoning, prediction and participatory problem-solving.
Kyei-Nuamah (2026)	Nine Akan expert players	Narrative and interpretative phenomenological analysis	Antoankyire, Pilolo, Oware and related games	Connects expert experience to imagination, observation, social intelligence, storytelling, physical activity and wellbeing.
Baidoo (2026)	80 Basic Six pupils, Ghana	Quasi-experimental study	Kyempe adapted for fractions	Shows measurable mathematics gains and illustrates the pedagogical conversion of embodied, rule-governed indigenous play.

3.3 Methodological Confidence

Four studies provided high methodological confidence because they combined a clearly bounded cultural context with direct observation, transparent analysis or a well-described comparison design, as summarised in Table 2. Ten studies provided moderate confidence. Their findings were useful and generally coherent, but reporting of sampling, reflexivity, analytic procedures or participant characteristics was sometimes incomplete. Two studies provided limited confidence because their methods and evidential chains were only briefly described. No study was excluded solely on quality grounds because thinly reported local scholarship can still

preserve culturally important detail; however, lower-confidence evidence was not used alone to support major interpretive conclusions.

Table 2: Design-sensitive methodological confidence in the included evidence

Confidence	Studies	Basis for judgement
High	Addo (1996); Agyeman & Brewu (2020); Kyei-Nuamah (2026); Baidoo (2026)	Clear research focus; traceable data; appropriate design; transparent connection between evidence and claims.
Moderate	Dzansi (2002); Gyadu (2014); Acquah et al. (2015); Boateng-Nimoh & Nantwi (2020a, 2020b); Duhoe & Otibua (2020); Opoku & Obeng (2022); Obeng et al. (2022); Mensa et al. (2023); Owusu & Obuo Addo (2023)	Relevant evidence and coherent findings, with some limitations in sampling detail, reflexivity, analytic description or consistency of reporting.
Limited	Agbenyo et al. (2022); Deh (2023)	Strong contextual or practice insight but restricted empirical breadth or insufficiently detailed analytic procedures.

3.4 Thematic Synthesis

3.4.1 Sonic and Oral Architecture

The most consistently reported aesthetic domain was sonic and oral form. Songs, chants, spoken cues, clapping and rhythmic patterns organised the beginning, continuation and closure of play. In singing games, the musical phrase commonly specified when a player should move, turn, pass an object, change position or respond. The leader-and-chorus pattern distributed authority while allowing the group to sustain a shared pulse. Repetition made the performance learnable, but variation in tempo, vocal intensity, wording or response prevented repetition from becoming mechanical.

Across the evidence, sonic form was inseparable from action [5, 6, 9, 15, 16]. Clapping was both music and measurement: it marked beats, coordinated bodies and signalled collective attention. Song text also carried linguistic and social content through names, proverbial expressions, instruction, teasing and commentary. Aesthetic pleasure arose from accuracy of response, vocal blend, rhythmic stability and the gradual intensification of the group. The evidence therefore supports the interpretation of sound as an operational architecture rather than an accompaniment.

3.4.2 Embodied Movement, Timing and Virtuosity

Movement constituted a second major domain. Running, hopping, turning, crouching, balancing, stamping, hand gestures, object passing and coordinated changes of direction made knowledge visible through the body. The studies described games in which players learned by watching and imitating, then refined their performance through repeated participation and correction. Timing was especially important. A movement made too early, too late or outside the agreed rhythm could alter the outcome of the game and expose a player to playful correction or elimination.

This bodily precision created a vernacular form of virtuosity. Skill was recognised in quick reaction, balance, strategic deception, graceful movement, accurate hand-eye coordination and the ability to remain composed under group attention. The body functioned as both medium and archive: participants remembered the game by performing its sequence. Studies of Akan ethno-musical games and classroom adaptations also showed that embodied action supported attention, numeracy, language use and observational learning. These educational effects were not external benefits added after play; they emerged through the sensory and motor organisation of the performance itself.

3.4.3 Spatial and Material Dramaturgy

Akan folk games were spatially composed. Circles enabled visibility, equality of response and the circulation of a leader or object. Lines created opposition, sequence or pursuit. Grids, marked grounds and bounded areas converted everyday spaces into temporary performance environments. Proximity and distance generated tension: the nearness of a pursuer, the hidden location of an object or the narrowing space available to a player intensified attention and suspense. Material objects were generally simple but symbolically and functionally rich. Seeds, stones, sticks, chalk marks, cloth, spinning tops and locally available objects served as counters, props, targets, boundaries or instruments of chance and calculation. Their aesthetic significance

lay partly in transformation: ordinary materials became meaningful through agreed rules and skilled handling. Studies of Abato and Alikoto further showed that visual form and object manipulation could be deliberately adapted for classroom learning. Such adaptation was most culturally coherent when the object, movement and social pattern of the original game remained recognisable [17, 18].

3.4.4 Dramatic, Humorous and Affective Expression

The evidence consistently portrayed games as affective events. Suspense arose from uncertainty about selection, capture, successful concealment, strategic response or the final beat of a song. Humour appeared in mimicry, teasing, exaggerated gesture, deliberate feinting and the public but temporary embarrassment of a mistake. Victory could produce celebration and boasting, while defeat was ritualised through laughter, correction or immediate reintegration into another round.

Practice-based drama and play-song evidence clarified the dramaturgical importance of these features [15, 19]. Indigenous games trained spontaneity, role awareness, concentration, ensemble sensitivity and improvisation. Participants moved between being players, observers, judges, leaders and responsive chorus members. The event's emotional range - anticipation, excitement, fear of error, relief and collective amusement - made cultural rules memorable. Humour therefore did more than entertain; it regulated tension and allowed instruction and correction to occur without severing belonging.

3.4.5 Communal Participation and Ethical Form

Aesthetic success depended on communal cooperation. Even competitive games required agreement on rules, turn-taking, boundary conditions and acceptable conduct. Leaders initiated songs or organised the sequence, but the group's response sustained the performance. Spectators were often active witnesses who clapped, sang, corrected, encouraged and authenticated the event. This participation produced a social aesthetics in which beauty was perceived through coordination, reciprocity and the visible fit between individual skill and collective order. The studies repeatedly linked these structures to discipline, patience, respect, cooperation, courage, fair competition and acceptance of outcomes [6, 20]. Such values should not be romanticised as automatic or uniform, because games may also reproduce age, gender or status distinctions. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that ethical learning was embedded in the form of play: participants practised waiting, leading, responding, correcting and rejoining. The communal framework also permitted local variation. A game could retain its identity while songs, rules, names or movement patterns changed across communities.

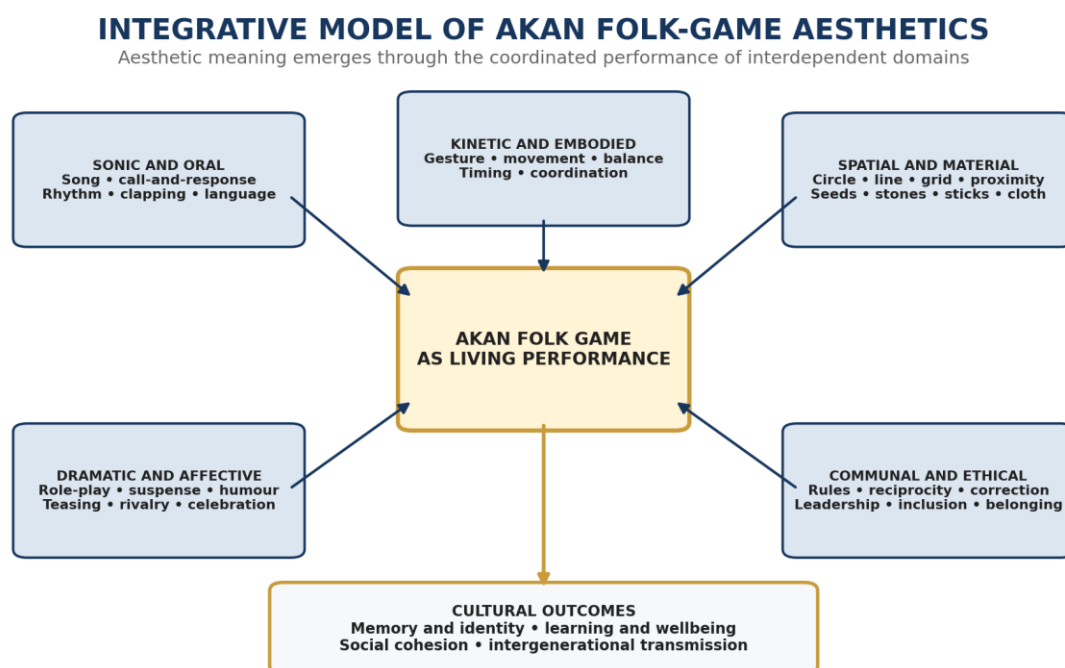
3.4.6 Aesthetic Pedagogy and Cultural Transmission

The sixth theme integrated the preceding domains. Folk games taught because they were aesthetically compelling. Rhythm held attention, movement embodied concepts, repetition strengthened memory, suspense motivated persistence, and group response made learning public and collaborative. Studies in language, music, drama and mathematics showed that culturally familiar games could support communication, storytelling, problem-solving, fraction concepts, observation and social intelligence [10, 18-22]. However, the synthesis does not support a simple claim that every traditional game automatically improves every educational outcome. Benefits depended on appropriate selection, skilful facilitation, curricular alignment and preservation of the game's internal logic. When a game was reduced to a motivational label or detached worksheet, its cultural and performative resources were weakened. Effective aesthetic pedagogy retained the sequence of action, the collective rhythm, the local language or narrative where applicable, and opportunities for participants to interpret the game's meaning.

3.5 Integrative Model

The themes were synthesised into a relational model with five interacting performance domains and a set of cultural outcomes. Sonic and oral, kinetic and embodied, spatial and material, dramatic and affective, and communal and ethical domains converge in the live game event. None is sufficient in isolation. A recorded song without movement, a rule list without spatial practice, or a video without community explanation preserves only a partial object. Cultural memory, learning, wellbeing, cohesion and transmission arise through the coordinated operation of the domains.

Figure 2: Integrative model of the aesthetic and performative dimensions of Akan folk games



The model in Figure 2 positions aesthetic value as an emergent relation rather than an ornamental layer. Sound, bodily action, space and materials, affective drama and communal ethics meet in the live event. Preservation or teaching is strongest when it represents these domains together and links them to cultural outcomes.

4. Discussion

This review shows that the aesthetics of Akan folk games are best understood as relational performance. Beauty is produced when the timing of bodies, voices, materials, space and social response becomes coherent. The pleasure of a well-executed game is therefore not reducible to a beautiful tune or graceful movement. It lies in the patterned coordination of elements and in the cultural intelligibility of that coordination. This finding aligns with performance theory, which understands play as structured behaviour restored through repeated enactment [4], and with everyday aesthetics, which locates aesthetic meaning within ordinary practices that shape perception, conduct and world-making [3]. The synthesis also clarifies why educational studies repeatedly report engagement and holistic development. The games compress multiple learning channels into one event. Participants hear and produce language, observe sequences, calculate timing, move within constraints, predict others' actions, regulate emotion and negotiate social expectations. Such density helps explain why indigenous games can support language, mathematics, music, drama, physical development and social learning. The educational power resides in multimodality and participation, not simply in the presence of a culturally familiar label.

A further contribution is the identification of audience participation as part of the aesthetic system. Western distinctions between performer and spectator do not adequately describe many of the reviewed games. A person outside the immediate round may still sing, clap, judge, warn, tease or correct. The performance is co-produced by a responsive community. This social aesthetics explains how games transmit norms: approval, laughter, correction and repetition make standards visible without requiring formal exposition. At the same time, the literature frequently treats 'tradition' as stable and uniformly positive. A more critical approach is needed. Games vary by town, generation, gender, age and occasion, and their meanings may change when moved from a courtyard to a classroom, stage or digital archive. Curricular adaptation can democratise access, but institutional control may also standardise one local version as authoritative [24, 25]. Digital recording can preserve sound and movement, yet framing, editing, metadata and platform design determine whose interpretation is visible. Community participation is therefore epistemic, not ceremonial: knowledge holders

should help identify versions, meanings, restrictions, ownership and appropriate modes of access. The review further demonstrates that scarcity of high-quality evidence should not be confused with scarcity of cultural knowledge. Much Akan game knowledge remains oral, embodied and locally held [23, 26]. The academic record is uneven because performance is difficult to represent in print and because regional scholarship is dispersed across repositories and journals with variable indexing. Future research should combine audiovisual ethnography with detailed textual description, local-language transcription, music and movement analysis, participant interpretation and transparent ethical protocols.

5. Implications for Scholarship, Education and Heritage Practice

5.1 Research and Documentation

Researchers should document the complete performance ecology of each game: local name and variants; community and occasion; participant roles; opening and closing procedures; song text and translation; rhythm and tempo; movement sequence; spatial formation; materials; rules and sanctions; humour and affect; audience response; and interpretations offered by knowledge holders. Video should be supplemented with annotated stills, movement maps and notation, where useful, as well as field notes that explain what a camera cannot capture, including social relationships and locally understood cues [2, 23, 27, 28].

Comparative studies should avoid assuming that a shared name denotes an identical game. Researchers should specify version, place, language and generation, then analyse both continuity and variation. Longitudinal work is needed to examine how play changes across rural, urban, school and digital settings. Mixed-methods designs can connect ethnographic depth to measurable outcomes without treating cultural context as a nuisance variable.

5.2 Curriculum and Pedagogy

Teachers should introduce games as cultural performances rather than as isolated classroom techniques. Instruction can begin with community history and demonstration, proceed through embodied participation, and conclude with reflection on language, music, movement, mathematics, ethics or social meaning. Learning objectives should arise from the internal structure of the game [17, 19, 10]. A counting or strategy game may support mathematics; a singing and response game may support language and music; a mimetic game may support drama and oral narrative. Adaptation should be proportionate. Safety, class size and accessibility may require modification, but the rhythm, sequence, relational roles and cultural explanation should be retained wherever possible. Elders, cultural practitioners and experienced players can support teacher preparation and prevent inaccurate or trivialised representation.

5.3 Digital Preservation and Public Presentation

Digital archives should preserve more than names and rules. Each game record should connect searchable metadata to audiovisual performance, song transcription and translation, movement description, spatial diagram, material culture, community commentary, educational possibilities and rights information [25, 28]. Multiple versions should be presented as legitimate local expressions rather than errors to be normalised. Interface design should allow users to hear the rhythm, follow the movement sequence and understand the cultural context before attempting the game. Ethical design requires informed consent, agreed access levels, attribution of communities and performers, protection of restricted knowledge, and a mechanism for communities to correct or update records. Sustainable preservation also requires durable file formats, redundant storage, descriptive and preservation metadata, and a governance plan extending beyond the initial project.

6. Limitations of the Review

The review has five principal limitations. First, English-language and web-accessible reports were prioritised, which may have excluded locally circulated texts and unpublished community documentation. Second, the boundary between Akan-specific and broader Ghanaian evidence required interpretive judgement. Closely related Ghanaian play-song studies were included only when they provided performance mechanisms

directly relevant to the Akan evidence, but they cannot erase cultural differences among Ghanaian groups. Third, most included studies were qualitative and heterogeneous, and several provided incomplete reporting of sampling, reflexivity or analysis. Fourth, selection and appraisal were conducted by one reviewer with a structured second-pass verification rather than by two independent reviewers. Fifth, the consolidated search log retained aggregate identification counts but not source-specific retrieval counts, individual execution dates or complete platform query histories; consequently, those details could not be reported retrospectively as contemporaneous records. The findings should therefore be interpreted as a rigorous integrative map of the available literature rather than as a complete inventory of living Akan game traditions.

7. Conclusion

Akan folk games are aesthetic performances in which sound, language, body, space, objects, emotion and community are organised into culturally meaningful play. Song and clapping regulate time; movement gives knowledge physical form; circles, lines, grids and materials create a temporary performance world; humour and suspense intensify participation; and collective response binds individual skill to social order. These elements do not simply decorate the game. They are the means through which the game teaches, entertains, remembers and renews communal identity. The most important implication is that preservation must retain relationships among elements. A name, rule list or isolated recording cannot represent the full cultural object. Scholarly documentation, curriculum design and digital archiving should therefore be multimodal, community-validated and attentive to local variation. When safeguarded in this way, Akan folk games remain not remnants of a disappearing past but adaptable repertoires of artistic intelligence, social knowledge and embodied heritage.

References

- [1] J. H. K. Nketia, *Folk Songs of Ghana*. Legon, Ghana: University of Ghana, 1963.
- [2] D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, doi: 10.1215/9780822385318.
- [3] Y. Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- [4] R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 4th ed., S. Brady, Ed. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2020.
- [5] A. O. Addo, "A multimedia analysis of selected Ghanaian children's play songs," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 129, pp. 1-28, 1996.
- [6] M. P. Dzansi, "Some manifestations of Ghanaian indigenous culture in children's singing games," *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, vol. 3, no. 7, 2002.
- [7] E. O. Acquah, K. A. Sackey-Sam, and J. F. Annan, "Use of indigenous musical games and songs in developing the total well-being of the child," *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, vol. 2, no. 12, pp. 112-123, 2015.
- [8] K. O. Agyeman and J. K. Brewu, "The socio-cultural context of Akan ethno-musical games and their relevance to the lives of children in Ashanti Region," *Social Education Research*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 229-244, 2020, doi: 10.37256/ser.122020444.
- [9] E. Opoku and P. Obeng, "The relevance of Akan traditional folk-games in the primary schools' curriculum: A case study of Asotwe Community," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, vol. 6, no. 11, pp. 251-265, 2022.
- [10] A. A. Mensa, C. Sarpong, F. N. Kubi, and O. Donkor, "Akan traditional games: An indispensable tool in Ghanaian language classroom in respect to classroom interaction," *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 69-75, 2023, doi: 10.55544/ijrah.3.4.9.
- [11] M. J. Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews," *BMJ*, vol. 372, art. n71, 2021, doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

- [12] A. Tong, K. Flemming, E. McInnes, S. Oliver, and J. Craig, "Enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research: ENTREQ," *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, vol. 12, art. 181, 2012, doi: 10.1186/1471-2288-12-181.
- [13] M. Campbell et al., "Synthesis without meta-analysis (SWiM) in systematic reviews: Reporting guideline," *BMJ*, vol. 368, art. l6890, 2020, doi: 10.1136/bmj.l6890.
- [14] Q. N. Hong et al., *Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), Version 2018: User Guide*. Montreal, Canada: McGill University, 2018.
- [15] A. A. A. Duhoe and F. Otibua, "Aesthetics of Ghanaian indigenous children's play songs," *Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 44-58, 2020, doi: 10.58256/hjlcs.v2i4.399.
- [16] P. Obeng, J. K. Brewu, and E. Opoku, "Use of indigenous and folk-game songs for teaching and learning in early childhood education setting," *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 1-11, 2022, doi: 10.36948/ijfmr.2022.v04i06.1111.
- [17] V. Boateng-Nimoh and W. K. Nantwi, "Modification of Ghanaian traditional Abatoɔ game to improve the quality of basic education," *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 70-92, 2020, doi: 10.58256/rjah.v1i4.266.
- [18] P. Owusu and A. Obuo Addo, "Alikoto: Mathematics instruction and cultural games in Ghana," *Cogent Education*, vol. 10, no. 1, art. 2207045, 2023, doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2023.2207045.
- [19] T. H. Deh, "Teaching drama in education in the University of Ghana: My perspectives about Ghanaian indigenous games," *Youth Theatre Journal*, vol. 37, nos. 1-2, pp. 84-94, 2023, doi: 10.1080/08929092.2023.2235354.
- [20] V. Boateng-Nimoh and W. K. Nantwi, "The state of folk games and their educational implications on children's academic achievement," *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 53-64, 2020.
- [21] S. Agbenyo, A. Arko-Mensah, and M. A. K. Adomina, "Kodály music instructional principles in Ghanaian basic schools: A contemplation on adaptation," *Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 9-17, 2022, doi: 10.52589/JARMS-MRVEBKHK.
- [22] J. Baidoo, "Effects of the indigenous 'Kyenpe' game on Ghanaian basic school learners' performance in fraction subtraction," *European Journal of Mathematics and Science Education*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1-15, 2026, doi: 10.12973/ejmse.7.1.1.
- [23] R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2012, doi: 10.11647/OBP.0025.
- [24] J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955. (Original work published 1938).
- [25] D. Kyei-Nuamah, "Indigenous games for digital natives: Generative games from the African Akan philosophy for healthy schooling," *Simulation & Gaming*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 115-137, 2026, doi: 10.1177/10468781251371071.
- [26] A. Gyadu, "Folk games and life skills development among children in public schools in the Central Region of Ghana," M.Phil. thesis, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana, 2014.
- [27] B. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- [28] UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris, France: UNESCO, 2003.

Appendices

Appendix A Search Strategy and Eligibility Logic

A1 Principal Search Strategy

The original manuscript recorded the following principal concept structure: (Akan OR Ashanti OR Ghana*) AND ("folk game*" OR "traditional game*" OR "indigenous game*" OR "play song*" OR "singing game*") AND (aesthetic* OR perform* OR music* OR rhythm OR movement OR gesture OR dance OR embody* OR "cultural value*").

Targeted title and topic query: (Akan OR Ashanti) AND ("traditional games" OR "indigenous games") AND (culture OR education OR performance).

Play-song query: Ghana* AND ("children's singing games" OR "play songs") AND (movement OR rhythm OR culture).

Named-game query: (Antoakyire OR Pilolo OR Oware OR Abatoa OR Alikoto OR Kyempe) AND Ghana.

Repository query: (site:ir.uew.edu.gh OR site:ir.knust.edu.gh OR site:ugspace.ug.edu.gh) AND ("folk games" OR "play songs" OR "indigenous games"). The accompanying Supplementary Search Strategy documents platform adaptations, fields and filters, and the limits of the surviving search record.

A2 Reporting Notes and Inclusion Decision Rule

The final search update was reported as 31 July 2026. The surviving consolidated log records 78 records from database, metadata and publisher-platform searching and 18 from repositories and citation searching, but it does not preserve individual source dates or counts. A report was included when it met all three minimum conditions: (1) an Akan or directly relevant Ghanaian indigenous-game context; (2) identifiable evidence about the enactment, sensory form, material organisation, affective experience or social performance of a game; and (3) sufficient methodological or analytical substance to trace the reported claim. Reports focused only on generic gamification, commercial digital games or abstract educational benefits were excluded.

Appendix B Thematic Coding Framework

Domain	Indicative codes	Analytic question
Sonic and oral	Song, chant, call-and-response, rhythm, clapping, spoken cue, tonal variation, repetition	How sound regulates action, memory, participation and linguistic meaning
Kinetic and embodied	Gesture, stepping, running, turning, jumping, balance, timing, coordination, imitation	How bodily technique produces skill, pleasure and embodied knowledge
Spatial and material	Circle, line, grid, boundary, distance, seeds, stones, sticks, cloth, spinning object	How place and objects create a temporary performance environment
Dramatic and affective	Role-play, suspense, humour, mimicry, teasing, rivalry, celebration, embarrassment	How emotion and dramaturgy intensify attention and make rules memorable
Communal and ethical	Leadership, chorus, audience, turn-taking, correction, reciprocity, inclusion, local variation	How collective order and values are enacted through participation
Transmission and adaptation	Observation, repetition, oral teaching, curriculum, redesign, digital recording	How games persist, change and risk de-contextualisation

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author (s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).