



# International Journal of Education and Teaching

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

## Examining the usage of traditional Akan poems in early childhood education

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### Article Info

Volume 1, Issue 1, March 2021

Received : 07 November 2020

Accepted : 20 January 2021

Published : 05 March 2021

doi: [10.51483/IJEDT.1.1.2021.19-28](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJEDT.1.1.2021.19-28)

### Abstract

This paper examines the importance of employing traditional Akan poems for teaching Ghanaian children about their long-cherished African values, norms and worldview or heritage, which are becoming “endangered” because of lack of preservation and usage in the educational curriculum. In this respect, the in-depth textual analysis of Yeboah-Dankwa’s, *Mmofra Anwensem*, a collection of children’s poems translated from the Akan Twi-language into English is one major way to promote this awareness among African educators and children as well as their preservation. The authors believe that the introduction of African Literature, specifically, traditional African poetry in the teaching curriculum at the pre-school and primary levels exposes children to their historical roots at an early age so as not alienate them from their societal values, thereby providing them with a sense of cultural identity. Specifically, the study looks at how Akan poetic texts, designed by African poets can educate pupils about their African cultural environment, family life, religious beliefs and the traditional lore embedded in them. In sum, the major significance of this study is the promotion of African oral traditions in educational curriculum at the lower levels as a foundation for the rapid socio-cultural, economic and political development of the continent.

**Keywords:** *Traditional Akan poems, African literature, Childhood studies, Cultural values*

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*The African child cannot go on forever singing Baa, Baa, Black Sheep and Here we Go Round the Mulberry Bush.<sup>1</sup>  
When we deprive children of their historical roots, it may depersonalize the people.<sup>2</sup>*

### 1. Introduction

According to J O deG Hanson, “one of the most significant developments in post-independence Africa has been the spectacular emergence of modern creative writing” (Hanson, 1993). However, he notes further that, “until quite recently, the bulk of African literature was aimed at adult and mature readership, almost exclusively, and children’s literature was

<sup>1</sup> See J.H. Kwabena, Nketia, (n.d.). *The Present State and Potential of Music Research in Africa*. Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana-Legon. Unpublished Manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> F.B. Nyamnjoh, (2012). ‘Potted plants in greenhouses’: a critical reflection on the resilience of colonial education in Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 47(2) 129-154.

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a sorely neglected phenomenon. This seems like putting the cart before the horse; for the enjoyment and appreciation of literature should more properly speaking start and be developed from childhood” (*ibid*). This was mostly due to the harsh historical realities of the experience of colonial rule and its contemporary neocolonialism, which meant that scholarly attention on the study and development of traditional literature for children has to wait until the latter half of the twentieth century. Of course, African writers have very good reasons such as the crucial need for political emancipation as strongly advocated by the nationalists, and all other things will be added unto it. With time, the increasing awareness and growth of the need for special attention for the development of children’s literature in Africa and elsewhere has been guided by two main motives: firstly, the need for the documentation and the effective dissemination of historical sources, as well as making it more accessible to students of African children’s literature; and, secondly, that of research, which was presumably largely set in motion and influenced by the childhood research of the past few decades in Ghana and Africa in general.

Presently, there is the need to promote the awareness of the usage of traditional literature in the form of poetry for the holistic education of the African child, as a way of inculcating our long-cherished African values, norms and world view into our children, during the preparatory and primary stages, in order to effectively improve on the speaking and listening skills of pupils at the subsequent stages of the educational ladder. Scholars must take stock of this growing African imaginative writings, particularly in the field of African traditional literatures, especially its rich poetic expressions as well African literatures in the fields of archaeology, history, politics, anthropology, religion, music, art and literature (Angmor, 1996).<sup>3</sup> As Nana Abarry,<sup>4</sup> puts it “the intellectual, educational, and artistic values of Ghanaian oral literature, initially suggested in the pioneering works of people like Kwabena Nketia, C. A. Akrofi, and G. Adali-Moratty, have been confirmed in the contemporary writings of E. Ofori-Akyea, J. Y. Eglewogbe, Kofi Awoonor, Ama Atta Aidoo, E. Sutherland, Atuquaye Okai, J. C. Hagan, Kofi Agovi, Kofi Anyidoho, Akosua Anyidoho, Kwesi Yankah, Amanor Djeagu, Dannabang Kuwabong, and Abu Abarry.”

Nevertheless, according to Abarry, “in spite of the significance of literature and its recognition as an academic discipline, evidenced by the organization of a whole national conference on it at the University of Ghana in 1988, it is yet to be fully integrated into the curricula and pedagogical schemes of Ghanaian schools and colleges.” Dei-Anang, also concurs that there are “rich poetic culture in our folk music about which we have done so little in our literary works. Songs from Ananse stories, indigenous lullabies, funeral dirges and others, constitute a rich fund, indeed the poet’s paradise, for enterprising and literary-minded Ghanaians.”<sup>5</sup> In sum, African oral literature is richly pregnant with its own “worldview, history, cherished values, fears, hopes and aspirations,” (Abarry, 1994) which serves as the main foundation blocks of the crucial sociocultural and political institutions that hold the entire life of the society firmly together (*ibid*).

This paper aims at examining and analyzing the traditional artistic, symbolic, and cultural values of some selected Akan traditional poems as a complement to the teaching materials of pre-school and primary levels of the education ladder. We believe that these critical stages in the intellectual development of our children are crucial to their development of self-identity and confidence as Africans because most of the western indoctrination takes place at these pre-school stages. Hence, this paper approaches the selected poetic literature for Ghanaian children based on their own social and cultural environment. We demonstrate this in the study and analysis of Yeboah-Dankwa’s, *Mmofra Anwensam*. In this way, this study assesses how modern African literature—in terms of poetry in the Akan<sup>6</sup> language for children, can aid in the teaching of pre-school pupils to improve upon their cultural sensibilities. Specifically, it looks at how Akan poetic texts, designed by African poets can educate pupils about their African cultural environment, family life, religious beliefs and the traditional lore embedded in them. Hence, the central argument of this paper is that, the African teacher is not just a mere “instructor” or “promoter” of foreign culture and idioms, but a sociological or anthropological educator of African culture and values, who with the right tools and training, can contribute immensely to the cultural emancipation of pre-school and primary pupils, to help achieve sociocultural development in the African society. In sum, one major important significance of this study is to give oral traditional poetry of Africa its deserved place both in the literature curriculum in our schools and in our general understanding of what African traditional oral poetry aims to achieve in the

<sup>3</sup> See the “Preface” to Charles Angmor, (1996). *Contemporary Literature in Ghana 1911-1978: A Critical Evaluation*.

<sup>4</sup> See Nana Abarry (1994). Teaching Akan oral literature in Ghanaian schools. *Journal of Black Studies*, No.3, Special Issue: Social, Economic, Political, and Cultural Dimensions of Life in Ghana., pp. 308-328.

<sup>5</sup> See K.K. Dei-Anang, (1972). *Discipline in the Making of Poetry: a Critical Review of John Okai’s the Oath of the Fontomfrom and Other Poems*. Universitas (New Series) 2(1), 104-116, October.

<sup>6</sup> As defined by Kwesi Yankah (1995: 5) in *Speaking for the Chief*, the designation “Akan” “refers to a wide variety of ethnic groups occupying a large part of southern Ghana. The groups are culturally and linguistically homogenous, and may be subgrouped as Ashanti (Asante), Fante, Akwapem, Kwahu, Akim, Bono, Wassa, Agona, Adansi, Denkyira,” and others. Thus, “even though each of these groups speaks a separate dialect and may have subtle” divergences in cultural norms, including Childrens’ poetry, are beyond doubt as we will see in the analysis below.

sociocultural and political realms of the African society. The researchers hope that this humble beginning of using African oral poems in early child development will encourage other African poets in general to write in their own native languages for their own pupils in pre-school and primary schools where such poems of sociocultural and historical significance are lacking.

## 2. Oral literature as a form of poetic existence in Akan cultural education

The traditional Akan oral art in Ghana consists of a variety of prose narratives and poetry. The major forms of the genre (i.e., prose narratives) are the folktales, legends and myths, while; the poetry is rendered variously by speech, chants and surrogates such as the horn and the drum. Hence, the indigenous Akan poetry is generally expressed through three media: the spoken word, songs and surrogates such as the drum and the horn. Poetic expression is therefore not a new phenomenon to the African mind (Okpewho, 1985). What is new is poetic expression as a written art. As Nketia (1960) puts it, African oral literature tends “to give more prominence to persons, interpersonal relationships and attitudes and values derived from their conception of the universe.” Hence, poetry in this context, for the African is “full of animals and plants, but these are used because they provide good sources of metaphors or similes, or compressed ways of stating bits of social experience” (*ibid*). In the view of Nketia (1960), “the development of the poetic tradition of the Akan appears to have followed four distinct courses, each one giving rise to a distinctive style of arrangement or delivery.” He identifies *Oral poetry* as the first of these distinctive styles of arrangement, which is performed by way of recitals and not to be sung. Moreover, it was noted that the greatest use of this is in connection with chieftaincy; where “at state functions special poems of praise are recited by minstrels to paramount chiefs. These poems include allusions to past successes in war, particularly the decapitations of enemy chiefs and potentates. They are used to remind the chief of his former enemies, to remind him of his power as war leader and to incite him to deeds of bravery” (*ibid*).

The second type of this genre, as Nketia points out was termed as *Recitative*, which involves a kind of verse, which is half-spoken and half-sung. The recitative style used in dirges and the poetry of hunters’ celebrations. He also states that a number of references are made which can be grouped around a few themes: for instance, the ancestors, the deceased or any particular individual, the place of domicile, etc. (*ibid*).

The third tradition of poetry Nketia identifies is the *lyric poetry*. He explains further, “this genre involves the use of the song as a vehicle for poetry.” As he indicates, “this tradition constitutes the bulk of Akan poetry. In this genre, there is no uniformity of themes, for the songs are used in different contexts.” Moreover, he points out “the structure of lyric poems in Akan society is greatly influenced by the musical requirements.” These “songs performed by individuals tend to have a sustained verse form with the minimum of wholesale repetitions, whereas those sung by solo and chorus tend to have some phrases repeated over and over again.” He explains further that, “poems in this tradition fall into various lyric types: songs of prayer, exhilaration and incitement” (*ibid*). For instance, “cradle songs for nursery and kindergarten children, as a form of an introduction to poetry starts very early in life, long before one is able to understand the language.” Nketia, indicates that “the tune, the sound sequences which form the words, and most important of all the rhythm evoke responses from the child, responses of excitement or of calm and repose, which lull it to sleep, etc.”

The fourth distinct style of poetry is that of the *horns and drums*. According to Nketia, “the development of the poetic tradition has not been confined to the spoken voice.” Thus, “a great deal of African heroic poetry is conveyed through the medium of horns, pipes and drums.” He notes further, “although drums are used in Akan society for making a limited number of announcements, they are also vehicles of literature.” Moreover, he explains that, “in view of the radio, the newspaper and other modern means of communication there would be no hope for the talking drum if its only function was to give information.” On state occasions, “poems of special interest are drummed to the chief and the community as a whole. Thus, these poems run into scores of verses and a few groups” (*ibid*).

However, with respect to early childhood education in formal settings such as schools, the origin and storehouse of Akan poetry is not just the individual member, per say, but in this case the “pupil teacher”, brought up on the traditions of his people, the “pupil teacher” who from childhood has been socially conditioned “or has learned through social experience to use certain words and expressions, to regard some as beautiful, deep, proper, improper, correct, bad and so on; the “pupil teacher” who has been taught to understand and use the proverbs in his own native language, who has also been taught to sing cradle songs, dance songs, war songs and love songs, to drum and dance or to appreciate drumming and dancing” (*ibid*). In this line of thought, Nana Abarry (1994), also concurs that, the “pupil-teacher” can effectively “do this through such teaching methods such as miming, recitation, games, improvisation, interchange of proverbs, storytelling, dancing, drumming and rhythmic clapping; as well as the use of such aids as pictures, scenic objects, pots, and other things portraying the things mentioned or alluded to in the recitals and songs, in short, in the various forms of oral tradition.” He explains further that, children at these preparatory and primary stages of the

educational ladder, are “ready for tales of talking animals and other stories, so this is the time for the “pupil-teacher” to tell them a lot of Ananse stories and poems which appeal to their sense of magic and fantasy” (*ibid*).

Moreover, by appreciating much of African oral poetry in general and Ghanaian poetry in English in particular, it is important for the “pupil-teacher” to bear in mind of certain features of the indigenous art. One of these is its group consciousness. Traditional poetry is essentially concerned with a group of persons—a family, a lineage or an ethnic group—their joys and woes, aspirations, petitions and gratitude. As one scholar commented, “in Africa, poetic expression is always in the service of the content; it is never a question of expressing something... Nor is the African poet ever concerned with his inner nature, with his individuality.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is important to note that the key to understanding and appreciating the poetry of Kofi Awoonor, Atukwei and selected poems slated for analysis below, is in this communalistic outlook.

### 3. On the selection and analysis of the “Mmofra Anwensem” (poems for children)

In this study, the poetic text of Yeboah-Dankwa’s “*mmofra anwensem*” (Poems for Children) is perhaps one of the best embodiments of a classic “poetic existence” in the literature for children from the rich African context, as exemplified by the use of the indigenous language (Twi) as a medium of instruction at the nursery and kindergarten stages. The selected Akan poetic texts cut across the “major ethnic groups, such as the Asante, Fante, Akwapim, Assin, Brong, and the Kwahu which make up the Akan people, in general. They speak dialects of the same language, Akan, and interact socially, religiously and politically” (Abarry, 1994). Moreover, the poetic texts, as we shall soon discover “teaches life at the traditional level and provides the foundation for a sense of cultural identity and national integration and solidarity.” As Abarry notes that, “because the predominant communication system in Ghana is the spoken, not the written language, and considerable value is attached to eloquence, the educational system should be made to cater to the teaching of the various indigenous languages, the oral genres, their traditions, contexts and usages” (*ibid*).

However, as rightly indicated by Abarry (1994), “Akan oral literature should be ideally taught orally.” Thus, in this case with the translated texts of the oral poetry, much is left out (in terms of the nuances of the language and its sonic effect) particularly translation in normal orthography. Thus, “the child in the urban area is likely to be fascinated by unusual materials or articles from the rural areas and vice versa” (*ibid*). For instance, as Abarry puts it, “it is significant for the “pupil-teacher” to also select some Akan proverbs in relation to the culture and environment of the people who use them, as well as the selection of poetic texts or pieces, with good moral lessons as children tend to identify themselves with the heroes of the stories or poems” (*ibid*).

This study explores how African oral traditional poetic texts, designed by African poets, can educate pupils about their cultural environment, family life, religious beliefs and the traditional lore embedded in these poetic texts, in order to map out their lived poetic experience and existence among the Akan society of Ghana. The main source for this exercise, as noted above will be an anthology (i.e., the list of Akan<sup>8</sup> poems for children) compiled by J. Yeboah-Dankwa (1985). This work is a collection of poems literally translated from the Akan Twi- Language into English, which is based on a few things in the environment of particularly, the Akan child of Ghana. The justification for the selection of this classic Akan poetic text from Ghana for in-depth analyses is that, scholars specializing on the linguistic problems of Ghana, have sought from the logical principles of scientific research to begin with the Akan, as we have done because, in the first place, they form the largest single group in the country than any other Ghanaian language, as rightly pointed out by Nketia.<sup>9</sup>

### 4. Analysis of selected Akan poetic text from Yeboah-Dankwa’s, *Mmofra Anwensem*

The *Mmofra Anwensem*, compiled by Yeboah-Dankwa (1985), is a collection of poems literally translated from the Akan Twi-language into English. This work by Yeboah-Dankwa is unique in that it is based on a few things in the environment of children, specifically, Akan children. As said by Yeboah-Dankwa (1985), children are naturally curious and tend to be interested in the things that are immediately around them. From their interest in the things found in their environment, they extend their knowledge to other things found in different environments. Thus, children’s own experiences within

<sup>7</sup> See Janheinz Jahn’s *Muntu* (1961: 148), as quoted in Charles Angmor (1996). *Contemporary Literature in Ghana 1911-1978: A Critical Evaluation*. p.97.

<sup>8</sup> According to Florence Abena Dolphyne, “the name Akan has, since the 1950s, been used in Ghana to refer to the language whose dialects include Fante, Akuapem, Asante, Bron, Wasa, Agona, Akyem, Kwahu, etc. These dialects are spoken in the Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti and Central Regions, and in parts of the Western and Eastern Regions (see Map 1) of Ghana by about 40% (1960 Census) as first language. Refer to *The Akan (Twi-Fante) Language: Its Sound Systems and Tonal Structure*. Ghana Universities Press, Accra. 1998. P.xi.

<sup>9</sup> See J.H. Kwabena Nketia, (n.d.). *The Present State and Potential of Music Research in Africa*. p. 273.

their environment serve as a platform for engaging with things in other environments, thereby providing them a basis for comparison. African oral poetry thus serves an important function in society in that it underpins the sociocultural and political 'institutions that hold the entire life of the society together' (Abarry, 1991). Four (4) poems of Yeboah-Dankwa's Mmofra Anwensem will be examined with reference to the context and message.

## 1

**Ena pa obaatan pa,** Good mother, good nursing mother,  
**Wo na wowoo me,** You gave birth to me,  
**na wohwe me,** You cared for me,  
**Me mmofraase.** My childhood.

**Womaa me nufu,** You gave me breastmilk,  
**Womaa me aduan,** You gave me food,  
**Wugyee me taataa,** You taught me how to walk,  
**Ma menantewee,** And made me walk.

**ɔ kom dee me,** I was hungry,  
**Womaa me aduan,** You gave me food,  
**Osukɔ m dee me,** I was thirsty,  
**Womaa me nsu.** You gave me water.

**Mesɛ ee me ho,** I soiled myself,  
**Wusiesiee me ho,** You cleaned me,  
**Me yaree,** I was ill,  
**Wosaa me yare.** You cured me.

**ɛ na pa, obaatan pa,** Good mother, good nursing mother,  
**Woayɛ ade ama me,** You have done much for me,  
**Onyame nka wo ho,** God be with you,  
**Na woanyin akyɛ.** To make you live for long.

This poem is about motherhood that is acceptable in the society. The poem describes the praise and appreciation of a child for her mother's tender care, love, affection and training, from the time of birth to maturity. As suggested by Abarry (1994), the need for the 'pupil-teacher' to use poetic pieces with good moral lessons such as the above poem is important, as 'children tend to identify themselves with the heroes of the poems they recite (*ibid*).' Thus, from the poem, children will be taught life at the traditional level which will in the long-run serve as the 'foundation for a sense of cultural identity, group-awareness and solidarity' (Abarry, 1991). From the poem, we understand how Akan societies, and by extension, other African societies, cherish and appreciate responsible motherhood. The first line of the poem begins with, *na pa* „!baatan pa, describing a good mother as one from whom nourishment comes. From the poem, one is exposed to the seemingly unbreakable bond that exists between a mother and her child. The second line of the first stanza, *Wo na wowoo me*, presents mothers as the vessel through which all humans came into this world. This symbolizes the importance of mothers in the society, because in a way, they are the source of life. The second and third stanzas provide specific examples that make a woman an ideal mother. From the poem, the notion of an ideal mother goes beyond merely giving birth. It seems to suggest that every woman can give birth, but not every woman can take care of a child. Thus, among the Akan, and by extension, African societies, social motherhood is recognized and idealized more than biological motherhood. Beyond giving birth, a good mother nourishes her child through providing precious breast milk,

and is responsible for training her child in the values, norms and practices of the society, in order to mould her child into a responsible member of the society. The last two lines of the second stanza, *Wugyee me taataa, Ma menantewee*, tells about the patience that a mother needs to care for an infant from the time of birth to the time of maturity. This tells us about a major characteristic of a good mother, patience. It is because of a mother's patience that she is able to guide and encourage her child to take his or her first walk, which represents an important stage in the life of every human being. The poem also presents mothers as providers who will sacrifice their own interest to see their children eat. Thus, a good mother's hunger is filled by her child's satisfaction. The last two lines of the third stanza, *Osuk'm dee me, Womaa me nsu*, is quite captivating, because it describes the burning desire for the child to quench his or her thirst. In Akan societies, water symbolizes life, and therefore when a mother quenches her child's thirst, she in effect would have given him or her, life. Thus, a good mother is not just a source of life, but a sustainer of it. In situations where a child does something 'unpleasant' as soiling him or herself, the love of the mother gives her the patience to clean the child up and restore his or her dignity. In the same way, when a child does something terrible, the good mother gently reprimands the child but never abandons him/ her. It is therefore not surprising that children confide in their mothers or run to them for protection when they do something terrible. The last stanza of the poem ends with the child asking for God's blessings in the form of long life, in appreciation of the immense role his or her mother played in his or her life. The last stanza seems to inform us that, good motherhood is so invaluable to the extent that it is only God's blessings, and not financial payment, that can equate desirable motherhood.

## 2

<b>M'abusuafo ne hefo?</b>	Who are the members of my family?
<b>M'agya, me na,</b>	My father, my mother,
<b>Me nuabarima, me nuabea,</b>	My brother, my sister,
<b>M'agya ne nuabarima,</b>	My father's brother,
<b>M'agya ne nuabea,</b>	My father's sister,
<b>Me na ne nuabarima,</b>	My mother's brother,
<b>Me na ne nuabea,</b>	My mother's sister,
<b>M'agya n'agya,</b>	My father's father,
<b>M'agya ne na,</b>	My father's mother,
<b>Me na n'agya,</b>	My mother's father,
<b>Me na ne na,</b>	My mother's mother,
<b>Bebree ka ho,</b>	There are many more,
<b>Nanso eyinom, abusuafo</b>	But these, the important members
<b>titiriw</b>	of my extended family.

The poem is about the family, an important social unit found in human societies. The first line of the first stanza begins with a question, *M'abusuafo ne hefo?* This approach by the poet allows for audience (in this case, children) to express their views on who they deem as their relatives. The questions posed provide avenue for children to answer based on their experience of their environment and their traditions. Thus, it encourages active participation by the audience, and stimulates interest. As deGraft. Hanson puts it, this form literature offers children unlimited scope for exercise in creativity by stimulating their imagination in the creative use of their own languages. After giving their own answers, the instructor (in this case, their teacher), can then proceed to explain the concept of family in Africa, and how it differs from western notions. In Africa, the notion of family and their manifestation differ because of diversities of culture(s) (e.g., the economy, politics and religious orientations). Many African societies, including the Akan, view the family beyond the nuclear family (mother, father and children) to include the extended family. The importance of the family among the Akan of Ghana is reflected in the following proverbs:

*Life is a struggle but the family is an army*

*You do not throw away your intestines and replace it with rubbish.*

The Western European family, unlike the African family, tends to be more autonomous (i.e., in the economic, political, social realms), where the husband and wife have a certain degree of independence from their parents and siblings. This

is not to suggest in any way that in western countries, people do not talk about their parent's brothers and sisters, as well as their parent's parents. Among the Akan and by extension, Africa, society frowns upon members of a family who fail in their obligation towards each other. There is a common saying among the Akan that, Parent's take care of their children till their teeth mature, while children take care of their parent's until their teeth fall out (literal meaning). In African societies and particularly among the Akan, an individual's identity in a society emanates from his or her family. It is therefore not surprising that members who belong to an *abusua* (lineage) share the same family name. The extended family is responsible for collective socialization of individual members, providing affection and support (emotional and financial), protection, and performance of religious rituals (naming ceremonies and funeral rites). From the poem, it becomes clear that the poet talks about the family by beginning with family members we are closest to, and come into contact with daily. Thus, the poet begins by mentioning father and mother, before gradually introducing other relationships. It also becomes clear from the poem that, an individual in the Akan society has several fathers, mothers, siblings, grandfathers and grandmothers, who take interest in the affairs of individual members. This is exemplified by the Akan saying, *When one father dies, another father lives*. In the last stanza, the poem makes us aware the list of relatives is not exhaustive, although the ones mentioned seem to be most 'important'. The poem may be suggesting that the notion of family among the Akan and other ethnic groups in Ghana extends beyond 'blood' relations, to possibly include the entire community. The technique of leaving the list of relatives open, also aims at encouraging the audience to discover and mention other relatives who constitute the African family, thereby bringing a kind of 'adventure' into the learning process.

## 3

**Akokɔ ba, se[w, se[w,**

**Akokɔ bere, krɔ, krɔ,**

**Akokɔ nini, kokurokoo,**

**Dabodabo, kwakwakwa.**

The chick, seɛw, seɛw,

The hen, krɔ, krɔ,

The cock, kokurokoo,

The duck, kwakwakwa.

**Krakum, tow prɛmɛ,**

**Akomfɛm, kwakwakwakwa,**

**Akokohwerew, twrrr, twrrr,**

**Kwaakwaaadabi, kwaa, kwaa.**

The turkey, shoot your gun, **Akomfɛm,**

The Guinea fowl, kwakwakwakwa,

The bush fowl, twrrr, twrrr,

The crow, kwaa, kwaa.

**Oguanten, mɛɛ, mɛɛ,**

**Abirekyi, bee, bee,**

**Agyinmoa, meaw, meaw,**

**ɔkraman, wow, wow.**

The sheep, mɛɛ, mɛɛ,

The goat, bee, bee,

The cat, meaw, meaw,

The dog, wow, wow.

The above poem is about animals that are found in our environment. The poem aims to make the audience aware of their immediate environment, by highlighting some animals found in their environment. Rodney (1976), argues that pre-colonial African education develops from the 'environment; the learning process being directly related to the pattern of work in the society.' It is for this reason Rodney (1976) states that the 'crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans, in terms of its close links to social life (both in material and spiritual sense); its collective nature, and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child.' Thus, indigenous African education encapsulates the reality of 'African society and produced well-rounded personalities to fit into that society (*ibid*). In order to make the animals come alive, the poet employs the technique of relating each animal in the poem to the unique sound it makes. Such a technique involves a- call-and-response approach in learning, and makes learning fun, especially for children. It is in light of this that Okpewho (1985) points out that as far as African traditional oral poetry is concerned, the teacher has to make every effort to bring the poem to life by performing it so as to make it easier for pupils to understand. The mention of the cockerel, for example, is significant in light of the important function it plays in the society. It is the sound of the cock at dawn that makes

people aware that they have to wake up and make ready for their daily activities. Interestingly, when the hen makes its sound, it means it is calling its chicks to itself for protection, especially when it smells danger from a hawk. The poet employs the use of onomatopoeia in order to stimulate interest and bring the animals in the poem to life. The repetitions of the sounds made by the animals may look ridiculous, but a careful enquiry shows that they emphasize important points and help children learn effectively (Okpewho, 1987). In a classroom setting, the teacher recites the first line in the stanza and the pupils repeat after their teacher. This approach will make it possible for children to easily identify these animals in their environment, thereby making what they learnt at school, relevant to their everyday experiences.

4

**Ghana ahofadi,**  
**Dr. Danquah na ofii ase,**  
**Nanso Dr. Nkrumah na onyae 1957.**  
**Kotoka betuu Nkrumah,**  
**Maa Ankrah bedii ade.**

Ghana's independence,  
 Dr. Danquah started it.  
 But Dr. Nkrumah got it in 1957.  
 Kotoka overthrew Nkrumah,  
 For Ankrah to rule.

**Afrifa na odii hɔ,**  
**N'akyi, Dr. Busia bae.**  
**Akyeampong nso betuu no,**  
**ɔno nso Akuffo betuu no.**  
**Rawlings nso tuu Akuffo.**  
**Rawlings de Ghana hyɛɛ Limann nsa.**

Afrifa was the next,  
 After him came Dr. Busia.  
 Akyeampong also overthrew him,  
 He also, was overthrown by Akuffo.  
 Rawlings too overthrew Akuffo.  
 Rawlings entrusted Ghana to  
 Limann.

**Rawlings san bae bio.**  
**Ghana nkɔso nyinaa,**  
**Gyina adwensakra so.**

Rawlings came back again.  
 The progress of Ghana,  
 Depends on mental change.

The poem recounts the role played by important personalities in the struggle for Ghana's independence, and the various Heads of States that ruled Ghana from independence till the time of President Rawlings. The poem narrates in chronological order, the rulers of homeland, Ghana. In the first four lines of the poem, we are reliably informed that our struggle for independence begun with prominent personalities like J.B. Danquah, although Kwame Nkrumah was the one who gained independence for Ghana. The message the poet seems to put across is that, the struggle for independence must be seen as a collective struggle, and not an individual achievement. From the poem, we are given a glimpse of some unconstitutional ways in which some of our leaders were overthrown, and through which others also came to power. One interesting part of the poem is, *Rawlings de Ghana hilla Limann nsa*, *Rawlings san bae bio*, which immediately provokes the audience to ask, why? The poem ends by suggesting that Ghana's development is not the sole responsibility of leadership, but rather, the collect change in the mindset of Ghanaians. The last two lines of the poem seek to instill civic awareness, and strengthen our sense of civic duty. When pupils are thought this poem, it will arm them with the political history of Ghana, and instill in them a sense of civic duty; rather than western poems that do not relate to their life experiences.

## Conclusion

From the analysis of Yeboah-Dankwa's, *Mmofra Anwensem*, it is clear that we need to take stock of our African Oral Poetry because it inculcates our history, cherished values, norms and worldview into children in their early years, in order to give them a sense of cultural identity. African oral poetry thus 'teaches children life at the traditional level, about the African cultural environment, family life, religious beliefs; thereby providing them a sense of cultural identity, group-awareness and unity' (Abarry, 1994). However, our failure to incorporate African oral literature, specifically, oral poetry in our education at the pre-school and primary levels means that we are training future generations who may end up being alienated from their society with no sense of cultural identity. We must also recognize that the only way we can



achieve the positive goals of sociocultural development in our society depends on the calibre of teachers 'armed' with the necessary tools and training to contribute to the cultural emancipation of our children. Finally, as stated by Abarry, 'if African education leaders need a purposive education for our children, then sociocultural institutions should be used to prepare our children to play meaningful roles in society by inculcating into them values, through oral literature' (*ibid*).

This study also concurs with Abarry's observations that 'the lack of formal literary appreciation courses in the vernaculars for Ghanaian children makes it difficult for them to develop the right sort of responses when they come to the English literature course, common in Ghanaian schools at a later stage and where there is always underachievement' (*ibid*). As a result, 'our children tend not to develop any feeling for good literature either in their own language or in the foreign idiom. If children do not have adequate literacy in their mother tongue, they will be unable to realize their imaginative purpose adequately in the European language' (*ibid*). This is why the 'effective usage and study of the traditional oral literature in Ghanaian schools and in Africa in general is strongly advocated so that the young, from whom future writers or scholars will spring, may be exposed to the forms, and thus get so acquainted with them that even if the potential scholar opts for the European language, he or she will bring to it the feel and form of traditional literature in an unaffected, unconscious marriage of the Western and the African' (*ibid*). In sum, we concur with other eminent pan-African scholars that the awareness and usage of the traditional oral poems in early child education in our pre-schools cannot be underestimated considering its importance as an effective tool of learning and a means of developing the personality of the child in terms of self-confidence, control of his emotional behavior, speech and the ability to cultivate relationships and cooperate with others.

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**Cite this article as:** Christopher Appiah-Thompson and Prince Ofei Darko (2021). *Examining the usage of traditional Akan poems in early childhood education*. *International Journal of Education and Teaching*. 1(1), 19-28. doi: 10.51483/IJEDT.1.1.2021.19-28.