



# Strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood education in Northern Ghana



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## ABSTRACT

**Incorporating indigenous stories into early childhood education has recently received enormous attention in scholarship. Indigenous stories are recognized as practical tools to facilitate effective learner participation, develop social skills such as listening and speaking and represent the cultural heritage of learners. Despite these benefits, there are gaps in the pathways to incorporate indigenous stories into classroom pedagogy at the early childhood level in the Bongo District in Northern Ghana. The primary objectives of this research were therefore to describe the strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood education pedagogy and how teachers can deploy indigenous stories as pedagogical strategies in their classroom practice. The study employed a qualitative research design and conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 46 educators (KG teachers, head teachers, other education officers) and 25 parents on strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into KG classroom teaching. The study found vital strategies that include teacher training and re-training to have creative skills, implementation of the early childhood education policy, documentation of stories, and strengthening school-community relationships for knowledge sharing. The study, therefore, recommends efforts toward comprehensive implementation of early childhood education policy and highlighting indigenous knowledge systems, documenting relevant stories, and creating an interactive and participatory learning environment to facilitate learner-centred pedagogy and institutionalize parents' role as critical in the education of children.**

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## INTRODUCTIONS

Early childhood pedagogy in the classroom continues to be mediated through indigenous knowledge systems, particularly indigenous stories of learners' communities in the context of holistic childhood learning. The use of indigenous stories in early childhood pedagogy is part of the broader domain of incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into formal education; it is delivered through storytelling, games, proverbs, play, and songs, among other strategies using the learner's local language (Ukala and Agabi, 2017). This instructional pathways, among others, expose learners to relevant indigenous knowledge systems of the communities that socialize them to grow to represent their society in all aspects of life in the

reflection of their cultural heritage besides the core academic knowledge. Early childhood teachers are expected to use the relevant indigenous stories from communities and incorporate them into their classroom practice. Indigenous stories are a component of the inherent community's cultural values and practices in pedagogy (Mweli, 2018).

Indigenous stories in childhood education delivery remain indispensable globally and among various cultures (Soudee, 2009; Stasiuk and Kinnane, 2010; Dei, 2012; Mweli, 2018). UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR, 2016) identified the use of stories, songs, play, and other strategies that promote learning stimulation

in learners' local context to formalize indigenous knowledge systems in early childhood pedagogy. The current sustainable development goals (SDG) declared at Incheon, South Korea, in 2016 for education- goals 4.2 and 4.7 reiterates recognition of the relevance of early childhood education to include how it is contextualized in learners' indigenous culture as a means to contribute to the sustainable development agenda (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/sustainable-development-goals-report-2016.html>).

In Africa, communities' cultural heritage and history are part of their education process and transmitted through oral genres such as stories, proverbs, and wise sayings mediated by the local language (Shizha, 2014). The author argues that before the entry of the missionaries into the continent, Africans had their education and socialization within the boundaries of their indigenous knowledge systems. These indigenous knowledge systems are the lenses through which society views the world. Education contextualized in communities' cultural ecosystems is significant for early childhood development because this stage sets a good foundation for children's educational socialization to identify with their cultural background. Ironically, education and learning construction in postcolonial Africa remain plugged and constructed through a Eurocentric lens, and Ghana is no exception to this paradigm of knowledge and teacher practice. These experiences, as articulated by scholars in the field to include incorporating learners' indigenous genres such as stories used in learning stimulation in the classroom (Soudee, 2009; Stasiuk and Kinnane, 2010; Dei, 2012; Mweli, 2018).

Indigenous stories are engrained in the oral tradition of communities and families and characterize the teaching principles of indigenous pedagogy. These stories are narrated mainly by the elderly or the older generations at the home or community level (Van Wyk, 2014). The author argues that indigenous stories of the ancient era that are narrated today reflect key events that teachers can strategically be employed as tools for indigenous knowledge pedagogy in the classroom. They remain part of the broader domains of indigenous education, shared with children through oral instruction and practical works (Osaat and Ikechie, 2017).

In Ghana, storytelling is one of the revered socialization tools for children both at home and in the formal education setting. Indigenous stories involve not only the use of voice as a tool but also gestures, facial expression, and movements that make the stories effective in both amusement and learning systems in schools. The relevance of indigenous stories is visibly illuminated in various education policies in the country to uphold the critical need to incorporate them into early childhood education. These policies, over the years and in multiple ways, require teachers to use the mother tongue, indigenous stories, and artefacts of learning communities

in learning stimulation (MWCSP-ECCD Policy, 2004; MoE-ECCD Policy, 2020). The 2020 early childhood education policy recognizes the unique role of mothers in the play-centred pedagogy among KG learners because their strategies embody the indigenous stories of the various school communities across the country.

Earlier, the introduction of the pre-tertiary curriculum as part of the educational reforms in Ghana in 2019 articulated the relevance of indigenous resources in the pedagogical process facilitated by teachers. To enable the uptake of the new strategies to teach at the KG level, teachers underwent a period of training to facilitate the implementation of the child-centred pedagogy, which recognized indigenous genres, including stories and other community resources for the teacher to deploy in the classroom practice. Despite the recognition of the use local stories in the class as demonstrated through empirical evidence and policy logics above, strategies for teachers to incorporate indigenous stories into classroom pedagogy remain unclear. The rationale for this current research is therefore to identify and describe relevant strategies that early childhood teachers can use to incorporate indigenous stories in their classroom work. For this paper and within the context of the research location-Bongo District, stories are called '*Solma*' in the local language of the people.

### Statement of the problem

Several research findings recognize the critical role of storytelling in knowledge construction in traditional schools in general and in particular at the early childhood level (Abdulai, 2016; Wadende et al., 2016; Milne, 2017; Forsyth, 2017; Stagg, 2018; Amoah, 2022).

In Ghana, though policymakers have attempted to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood education delivery, the sector remains bedevilled with many challenges that teachers face (Amoah, 2022). Though the available and successive early childhood education policies and their correspondent instructional curricular articulates the critical role of oral genres in the play centred learning, conversation around the incorporation of indigenous oral genre remain limited around reliance of old mothers as story tellers (MoE-ECE, policy, 2020). But how teachers in the classroom can incorporate these in the world of practice is not considered.

However, very little empirical records are available regarding the strategies for teachers to use currently in northern Ghana. Amoah (2022) thinks that, despite the challenge teachers face in incorporating indigenous stories into early childhood pedagogy, they recognize their relevance in learning stimulation, hence the need to have some verified strategies to actualize this in the classroom practice. This research therefore sought to explore and describe critical strategies to effectively incorporate

indigenous stories into early childhood education in the Bongo District of northern Ghana. The research in this regard is thus premised on the following questions below:

1. What is the value of indigenous stories to early childhood education pedagogy?
2. What are the strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood education pedagogy?
3. How can teachers deploy indigenous stories as pedagogical strategies in their classroom learning practice?

### **The purpose of the research**

Teachers are critical knowledge holders and hence need to appreciate the relevance of indigenous stories in terms of the social, physical, and spiritual revelation of the self in knowledge construction (Millar and Abazaami, 2018).

This research will descriptively highlight critical strategies by which teachers of early childhood education can incorporate indigenous stories into their classroom pedagogy and how these can be practically conducted. It will add to the debate of indigenous stories being critical pathways to transmit indigenous knowledge systems to shape children's horizons in terms of knowledge and upholding their cultural heritage.

### **LITERATURE**

The review of relevant literature for the research is centered on stories and indigenous stories, the rationale for incorporating indigenous stories into early childhood pedagogy, and the incorporation of stories practically into the classroom. The pedagogical approaches to facilitate the incorporation of indigenous stories into class pedagogy. This will end with a summary of the issues and gaps in the literature and a conceptual framework that underpins the research.

### **Stories and indigenous stories**

Stories do not have a clear definition as a concept with multiple applications. Stories are oral narrations that embody pieces of wisdom, philosophies, or advice that are passed on from one generation to another. They are presented metaphorically based on shared human experiences. Stories carry a basket of varied genres that entertain, inform and educate. Stories are hearing and spoken expressions by humans to describe who we are as a people, the basis of our existence, and how we come to draw meaning in our communication; stories present a natural and humane strategy for us to relate to the world around us (Vitali, 2016).

Stories come in various types depicting their origin and rationale behind them. Relating to the classroom context, which is the domain of this article, stories have long been used as a metaphor for learning, and storytelling is one of the world's oldest teaching tools (Spagnoli, 1995, cited in Baker and Gower, 2010). According to Cajete (1994) cited in Iseke (2013, p.,559), "story is a basic of all human learning and teaching" Stories are, therefore, basic blocks for knowledge construction and reconstruction in various settings, particularly in the classroom, as well as pathways through which indigenous experiences and knowledge systems are expressed and shared (Iseke, 2013).

It is essential to recognize that the keepers of indigenous stories are the elders of the communities and homes (Ermine, 1995, cited in Iseke, 2013); they remain the leaders in holding and perpetuating the community's cultural heritage and pedagogies. The keepers of these knowledge systems transmit them based on a previous contact and relationship with their ancestral trajectory that has sustained the knowledge to this generation and should be maintained for those yet to come. The current early childhood education of Ghana recognizes this as in the role of mothers in holistic child development (ECE Policy, 2020).

### **Relevance of indigenous stories into ECE classroom pedagogy**

History holds it that in many jurisdictions in Africa, knowledge in its various forms has been orally passed on to the present generation from the older ones through stories. Stories are memorials, easy to understand genres and establish a common ground with others and create credibility in their value. According to Soin and Scheytt (2006, pp. 55) cited in (Baker and Gower, 2010), "Stories help us to make sense of what we are, where we come from, and what we want to be". The power of storytelling as a strategy for communication make use of humans as narrators with the ability to send and receive messages that establish a value-laden reality, establishing a common ground among all participants, and providing a faster method of establishing a social relationship (Baker and Gower, 2010, pp. 302).

In the social and cultural contexts, several findings posit that indigenous stories remain a pathway through which children are socialized to construct their cultural identity, their ancestral background, appreciate their language and existing cultural heritage (Roslan, 2008; Soudee, 2009; Stasiuk and Kinnane, 2010; Iseke, 2013; Mwelii, 2017; Ukala and Agabi, 2017; Amoah, 2022).

On the other hand, and in the educational setting, these authors also agree that indigenous stories make learning and knowledge transmission in the classroom generally easy, especially for children's development of listening, recall, creativity, and speech skills. Mwelii (2018) thinks

indigenous stories promote detailed comprehension of subject matter in schools and provide learners with skills to cope with life in their environment. It presents a premise for constructing and reconstructing the past and a map for the future regarding one's cultural identity. These completed and reconstructed identities serve as a fulcrum for learners to situate knowledge in the context of who they are and their needs.

### **Incorporation of indigenous stories into early childhood pedagogy**

There are various strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into classroom pedagogy in early childhood education.

### ***Teacher Knowledge of learners' indigenous community***

In the Ghanaian context, research supports the need to incorporate indigenous pedagogical strategies that expose teachers to understand and utilize their learners' practical backgrounds and knowledge systems as tools in the classroom (Dei, 2011). This is because teachers with relevant 'cultural tools' make effective pedagogy contextualizing indigenous values in the classroom (Foy, 2009). Mumuni (2019) believes that a teacher's knowledge of the learner's needs and background is critical for pedagogy. To a greater extent, teachers' effectiveness in this depends on the synergy between schools and communities to afford knowledge of mothers and grandmothers to be tapped by teachers for classroom practice. Schools should therefore have indigenous teachers who represent the local worldviews of learners and their communities in classroom pedagogy and value their indigenous knowledge systems as critical in learning (Kinzel, 2020).

### ***Implementing policies to adapt indigenous knowledge systems***

African countries, in particular, should implement their indigenous knowledge systems as captured in their educational policies, this provides legitimacy to amplify these knowledge systems in learning stimulation (Shizha, 2007; Reyhner et al., 2013). The possibility of this lies in the belief that government, education policymakers, and teachers will have a mental shift to place equal value on the significance of indigenous knowledge systems and see them as complements to the western knowledge systems (Shizha, 2007).

### ***Teacher training***

Several research findings support the position that teacher training institutions have to review their programmes to allow the incorporation into the content that contextualizes the use of existing indigenous knowledge systems and practices of school communities which encompass stories, games, and other artefacts (Shizha, 2007; Belet and Dal, 2010; Nomlomo and Sosibo, 2016). Schafer et al. (2004) think that higher academic institutions should make indigenous knowledge systems part of their curriculum to produce graduates who represent the relevant indigenous worldviews and western perspectives. As a tool for a conversation on decolonizing epistemologies, Stagg (2018) recommends that classrooms that encourage indigenous story pedagogy are a powerful way to break the strings of colonization in terms of knowledge construction in schools. Teacher training should also incorporate perspectives of indigenous knowledge systems, particularly stories, to empower teachers to create and inculcate indigenous genres into their learners (Dei, 2002; Amoah, 2022).

### ***Supportive and enabling environment***

Teachers create a classroom environment that encourages learners to appreciate the values of home practices and indigenous genres in learning (Acquah et al., 2015). An enabling environment in storytelling class allows for friendly and supportive interaction with the teachers facilitating the process.

As an enabler, Soudee (2009), in cross-border research in Mali, Gambia, and Senegal on incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into early childhood education, established that using the mother tongue in storytelling and other indigenous genres were common routes to transmit such knowledge to learners. The author also identified the role of grandmothers and mothers as volunteers in delivering these local systems. A study in Nigeria by Oduolowu and Oluwakemi (2014) also revealed that using the mother tongue in storytelling instruction effectively reinforced listening among learners in the classroom. In the authors' view, Yoruba learners' better-understood stories narrated in the Yoruba language than those of non-Yoruba extract.

### ***Teacher attitude***

Available literature demonstrates that the attitude of teachers as a product of their self-disposition remains critical to the extent to which they conceive and actualize indigenous stories in the classroom. Teachers' attitudes favour postcolonial worldviews, thus fail to allow space for indigenous systems to thrive in classroom interactions

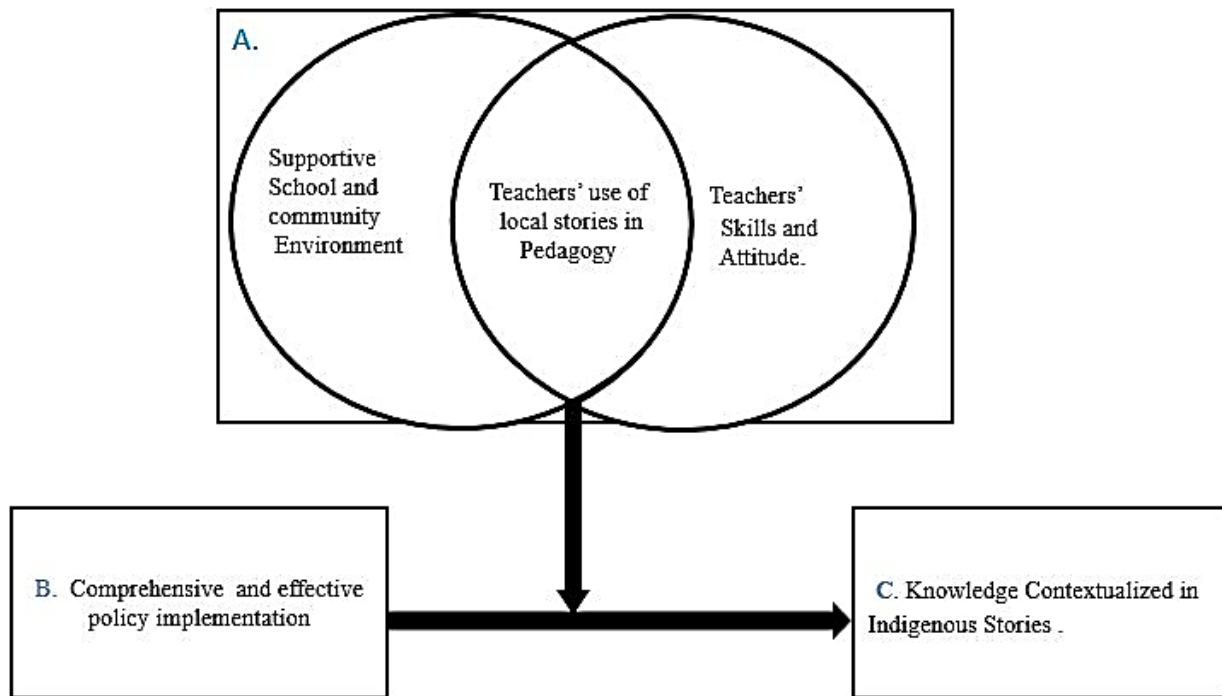


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

(Shizha, 2007). According to the author, 'to address both overt and covert biases against indigenous knowledge in schools, teachers must first of all address their own personal attitudes' (p, 311). Teachers must be aware of themselves in terms of their worldview of indigenous stories in the classroom and their level of knowledge of stories in terms of creating and narrating them to fit the purpose of influencing the appropriate knowledge systems expected.

**Summaries from the literature review and identified gaps**

The reviewed literature reveals several relevance of indigenous stories in learners' social and educational development. The various reports highlight the extent to which indigenous stories lay a good foundation for preserving learners' cultural heritage and facilitate learning. The literature shows how indigenous stories promote the development of listening, speech, and assertive skills among children in early childhood education and development. It support the argument for indigenous stories to be incorporated into early childhood pedagogy and highlight some pathways through which they can be included in classroom. However, how teachers can practically deploy the stories into classroom learning practice remains still scanty and generally embedded in unclear narratives. This is a critical gap that the current

research sought to bridge; it accordingly identified key responsive strategies to integrate indigenous stories in early childhood education in Ghana and the Northern sector.

**Conceptual framework for the research**

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 demonstrates the interdependencies in relationship between teachers and the environment in which they work at the school. The framework presents a three interdependent relationships. Diagram A: shows the teacher in two intersected circles, the teacher's use of indigenous stories in learning stimulation in the classroom is motivated by acquired skills and a personal attitude to use them. A supportive community and school environment further influence the motivation to use the stories; this involves parents and guardians participation in child learning process as storytellers to children in and out of the school setting and general support for using indigenous stories in the classroom.

Therefore, a teacher with adequate skills and a positive attitude will demonstrate and sustain the use of indigenous stories with a clear policy prescription in place, as in Diagram B. With the needed logistical and environmental support to navigate the pathways, the end product is knowledge contextualized largely in the indigenous stories of learners, as in diagram C.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The study employed the qualitative descriptive research design. The qualitative research design explores people's attitudes and worldviews associated with a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Boateng, 2020). It involves an in-depth investigation of people's knowledge and perspectives through interviews, observation, and documentary analysis (Grix, 2001). The author argues that qualitative research "...involves the interpretation of data, whereby the researcher analyses cases, usually a few in number, in their social and cultural context" (p. 33).

The research used the descriptive design because it provides a comprehensive account of an issue or a process (Grix, 2001). In this regard, a detailed description of the perspectives of respondents of the study were made. The study used both primary and secondary data to draw appropriate inferences. The primary data was collected through personal interviews, focus group discussions with teachers and parents, key informant interviews of senior education officers with adequate knowledge of the subject matter for the research. On the other hand, the secondary data was also collected from documentary sources, including policy documents, annual education reports, empirical study reports, and websites. A total of seven interactive sessions were held within five months, from July 2021 to December 2021.

### Research setting and context

The study took place in the Bongo district in Northern Ghana. The district is located in the Upper East Region, with a population of 84,545 representing 8.1 percent of the region's total population. Females constitute 52.4 percent, and males represent 47.6 percent. Ninety-four percent of the population is in rural areas. The district has a sex ratio of 90 males per 100 females. The district's population is youthful (42.7%), depicting a broad base population pyramid with a relatively small number of elderly persons (9.7%) who are 60 years and older.

Historically, the people of Bongo trace their ancestry to the Mamprugu Kingdom in the Northern Region of Ghana. The district is multi-ethnic, with Bossis and Gurunsis as the major ethnic groups. This translates into two major languages spoken in the district; Bonni, which the Bossis speak, and Guruni, which the Gurunsis speak. The Bossis are heirs to the paramountcy and are enskinned by the Nayiri, the overlord of the Mamprugu kingdom. The district has one paramountcy with the traditional authority residing in the paramount chief, Bonaba. There are 11 divisional chiefs and 31 sub-chiefs who support the Bonaba in the administration of the traditional area. There are also the Tindanas, who are the land owners (traditional priests) and are responsible for appeasing the gods and making sacrifices on behalf of the chiefs and people of the place.

Over forty-seven percent of the district population under 11 years are literate, and 52.3 percent are non-literate. The proportion of literate males is higher (53.1%) than that of females (46.9%). Thirty-six percent can read and write in both English and Ghanaian languages. Children of 3 years and above (77,722) in the district; thus, 42.6 percent had never attended school, and 44.2 percent are currently attending school. The Bongo district has 77 public Kindergarten centres, 78 primary schools, and 57 J.H.S. The Kindergarten centres have 95.5% of the teachers trained (Bongo District Profile, 2021; Bongo District Education Profile, 2019/2020).

### Research population and sample participants

The target population for the research includes KG teachers, parents, and senior education officers. The actual participating sample includes trained public KG teachers who have been in practice for 3 three years or more and parents who have their children in the KG class. Parents, storytellers, and senior education officers (Circuit supervisors, early childhood development coordinators, cultural officers, training officers).

### Sampling process and Data collection procedures

The design used non-probability sampling techniques in selecting respondents for the research. The sample size for the study was determined using the data saturation approach. Saturation sampling is a process where qualitative data is collected from respondents until there is no new and emerging knowledge from the data (Grix, 2001). Qualitative data collected from the various respondents reached a point that very little new information was emerging, hence a reach to data saturation point where there was no need to collect further data.

Participants for the study were recruited through a purposefully sampling approach. The purposive sampling approach is premised on the logic that respondents represent a great deal of knowledge of the content and context of the research subject. Purposive sampling is the type in which units within the research population are deliberately selected by the researcher based on the researcher's view of the unique characteristics required for the research (Kothari, 2004; Boateng, 2020). As a result of the research design, the KG teachers, parents of learners, mother storytellers and education officers were purposively selected for primary data collection.

An initial meeting was held with the district education directorate following receipt of permission to carry out the study. The list of KG centres was provided, after which introductory meetings were held with the head teachers to explain the rationale for the research and planned field

visits. The schools were visited one after the other for primary data from the teachers after they were oriented on the study and given the option to decide their participation. Days, times, and locations for the interview sessions were agreed upon with all respondents for both the individual interviews and the focus group discussion. The head teachers informed parents and guardians of the KG learners in the school communities, and those interested availed themselves to participate in the process. They were also met to be oriented and consent sought prior to the actual data collection as with the KG teachers.

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Personal interviews***

The study drew primary qualitative data from respondents through interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with 71 participants (46 educators and 25 parents). The educators' sample comprises 30 KG teachers, 7 KG head teachers, 2 early childhood development coordinators (from the district and region), 1 culture officer, and 6 senior education officers as key informants. 12 parents/guardians with their children/grandchildren in the KG class were also drawn, with 7 mothers as storytellers for the KG centres. Lively minds trained these mothers to engage in games and storytelling activities with the learners. Lively minds is a charity organization that promotes early childhood learning using indigenous interactive approaches, including storytelling with KG learners in the Bongo District. 4 fathers with children/grandchildren at the KG level and 2 fathers as key informants. It was more tasking to get the fathers than mothers for the interview sessions. The common reason was that the mothers take care of the children.

### ***Focus group discussions***

Five focus group discussions were held with a section of educators in practice (KG teachers, KG head teachers, early childhood development coordinators, and the cultural coordinator), senior education officers, and parents as key informants to triangulate the data from the personal interviews. Respondents for the focus group (FGD) discussion were drawn from the primary sample from which the initial personal interviews were conducted, except for three senior education officers and three mothers of KG learners. Four FGDs made up of 2 for teachers, 1 for senior education officers and 1 for parents were held. Each group discussion comprised six to eight participants. The interviews and the focus group discussion sessions lasted between 45 min to 1 h, with the researcher leading the process and posing a question for responses from the respondents in an informal

conversational manner.

### ***Data analysis***

The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed into themes that emerged and categorized under the broader themes under the research questions. The comprehensive descriptions highlight the general and specific views of the research respondents that addressed each of the research questions in terms of strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood education and how teachers practically deploy these strategies in the classroom. These themes were intentionally presented as key headings for the analysis as the pertinent ideas distilled from respondents as the strategies to incorporate indigenous stories in classroom work by teachers.

### ***Ethics***

All participants were initially contacted to seek consent from the institutional level- GES and the individual level. The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted based on the convenience of respondents. Symbols and identities for respondents were changed to protect the privacy of the research participants. To ensure the empirical validity of the findings, preliminary findings of the study were shared with a section of the respondents informally, and their feedback was incorporated to strengthen the final results.

## **Findings and discussions**

### ***The value of indigenous stories in ECE classroom pedagogy***

Respondents shared varied perspectives to highlight the extent to which indigenous stories play a significant role in classroom pedagogical practice in early childhood education. In their responses, teachers identified learners' effective participation when stories mediate the pedagogical process. They described the use of indigenous stories as a means to construct knowledge because it rides on and exemplifies the indigenous knowledge systems of school communities, for that matter, the local culture and indigenous practices of the learners, stories allows them to assimilate or relate to the subject matter through the stories narrated.

Respondents further said that indigenous stories shape children's social and moral development and make learning less difficult for both the learners and teachers. Interviewees also described indigenous stories as a facilitative tool that exposes learners to experiences to

appreciate their culture as it highlights in the stories quickly. A KG teacher, in response to substantiate the value addition of indigenous stories, said that:

*“Indigenous stories add more to our cultural values and help the children to learn about their history and culture. No one can underestimate the importance of indigenous stories, especially at the KG level as a learning strategy” (KG teacher 5).*

To corroborate the views of the teachers, parent respondents explained that community culture is critical in maintaining one’s identity. Indigenous stories are among the friendly and essential vehicles through which children can imbibe these values to uphold their identity. The mother story tellers expressed how their participation in games and stories with KG learners has been helpful in the assimilation of their cultural artefacts and terms.

The key informants during the interviews and focus group discussions further corroborated views of the former that indigenous stories add value to KG learning, it makes the work of teachers easy, especially for those who have the creative knowledge and like to use them. Stories give learners a broader understanding of life from home to school.

They described indigenous stories as one approach that has illuminated the relevant role of mothers as stakeholders in the teaching and learning of children at the early childhood education level. One key informant said that:

*“Some of us parents appreciate and have interest in the way the children learn, stories are important for their total development, and we can share the stories that exist in our communities for the children to relate to” (Mother-Key informant- 2).*

### **Strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood classroom pedagogy**

Respondents' presented various strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into classroom pedagogy in early childhood education. However, some pertinent ones are presented below.

**Comprehensive policy implementation:** Most respondents, in a common expression, said that comprehensive implementation of the early childhood education policies and the curriculum to practically reflect the indigenous knowledge systems of learners’ environments is a critical vehicle to use indigenous stories in the classroom. Teachers expressed worry that though the existing policies recommend using indigenous knowledge systems, for that matter, stories of school communities in the classroom, however, the extent of practical implementation remains unclear, snail-paced,

and uncoordinated. This is how some teachers put their responses:

*“The possibility of teachers using indigenous stories as tools in learning activities depends on the practical implementation of the KG policy and the curriculum that recommends it” (KG teacher, 8).*

As a validation of the expressed views by the teachers, the majority of parents and the other senior education officers, in a collective response, affirmed that effective implementation of early childhood education policy and curriculum which recognize communities’ cultural heritage in school learning must be practical. The respondents added that implementing the policy would empower and ensure teachers’ use of the mother tongue, making it easy for indigenous storytelling in the classroom.

**Training and re-training of teachers:** Respondents believe that teacher training institution should incorporate indigenous knowledge systems into their training programmes. That training curriculum that embodies indigenous stories as aspects of pedagogical approaches will equip trainees with appropriate knowledge and skills to stimulate learning using indigenous stories in classroom interaction. In the same way, teachers in the field of practice should also be empowered with appropriate skills through targeted continuous professional development programmes (CDP). Many respondents identified teachers’ ability to create simple stories as a critical aspect of any training programme to be mounted for teachers. In specific terms, this is how some of them captured their responses.

*“The study of culture and Ghanaian language should be well structured so that teachers will have a broader knowledge of communities’ cultural practices to create stories for learning interaction with children in the classroom” (Senior Education Officer, 6).*

**Documentation of indigenous stories:** Respondents said collecting and documenting indigenous stories is critical to their availability in schools. They lamented that very little effort is made to verify the available oral narrations that remain in the minds of elderly storytellers and called for effort to get to get them documented in any way possible. Parents’ respondents expressed the urgency for about policy makers in education to document indigenous stories for the school learning in order to prevent a near extinction of these oral genres due to their continuous neglect in the wake of society’s search for modern knowledge for economic productivity.

**Strong school-community relationship and parent’s participation in childhood learning:** Respondents said that one key strategy to have indigenous stories in schools is to strengthen the school-community relationship for



teachers to share in the bank of the indigenous knowledge that community members are endowed with. Teachers recognized that in the context of incorporating indigenous stories in the classroom pedagogy, schools are responsible for reaching out to the communities as partners in knowledge construction for children. On the part of the senior education officers, schools should see parents as critical associates in delivering some of the relevant content of the curriculum that relates to indigenous knowledge systems. They expressed that the parents teachers association (PTA) meetings will be a good platform to reinitiate this conversation to get the communities and parents involved in school learning. Parents equally described their relationship with school authorities as necessary in their contribution to sharing indigenous stories with children at the early childhood education level. Most mothers who are volunteer storytellers and game facilitators in some KG centres expressed hope that rekindling the relationship between communities and the schools is a productive strategy to exchange indigenous stories. Some respondents had this to say:

*“Wisdom is not acquired from only the classroom; the indigenous stories also carry relevant knowledge to prepare children for a promising future” (Mother and volunteer storyteller 2).*

*“I think it is proven that our mothers are good storytellers, and the education directorate and the school authorities can work with communities through PTA/SMC for parents to have this awareness to narrate exciting stories with the children at home” (ECD, Coordinator).*

**How teachers can deploy indigenous stories in their classroom pedagogy:** When the question of how teachers can deploy the strategies in the classroom setting, the response that resonated across the divide was the adaption of a play-centred pedagogy by teachers in their classroom. Respondents found play-centred pedagogy as an effective means to influence the two-way interaction between teachers and learners. This will enable teachers to effectively conduct an excellent post-storytelling questioning to elicit learners' perspectives to questions following the narration or repeating key aspects. Participants identified the teachers' creation of a friendly environment as a good learning stimulating strategy for learner participation in the interaction in general and story narration in particular. Some of the respondents said specifically that:

*“One of the effective ways that teachers can use the strategy is the learner-centred teaching approach which is critical to make learners participate in the process to be able to share their views despite their level” (Senior Education officer, 4)*

*“The classroom environment and the atmosphere is*

*essential here. Teachers must use learner and play-centred approaches to get learners involved in all the activities and ask them questions in play” (KG teacher, 23).*

## DISCUSSION

Pertinent findings emerged from teachers' and parents' opinions of the strategies to incorporate stories into early childhood pedagogy in the classroom. First, participants in the study think that comprehensive implementation of the early childhood education policy with the required logistical and human resources will facilitate the incorporation of indigenous stories in classroom learning. The successive early childhood education policies recognize the use of learners' indigenous knowledge systems, particularly songs and games in the school curriculum, as part of the content to empower learners. The recently revised early childhood education policy (2020) further affirms that storytelling is relevant in the classroom. The government formalized and called for adapting the methodology by lively minds into classroom practice which involves mothers playing games and narrating indigenous stories to KG learners using the mother tongue. This step by the government in policy construction suggests that incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and storytelling for that matter is well received in knowledge construction at the formative level in primary schools in Ghana. Participants were equally audible in their call for policymakers to factor in formalizing teachers' use of the mother tongue to ensure adequate adherence. They recognize the local language as a strong chord that links the indigenous stories since teachers must use the local language to deliver them. This clearly aligns with literature by some scholars on the need to entrench the use of the mother tongue in school learning (Owu-Ewie, 2006; Klu and Margeret, 2018).

However, it is imperative to be reminded of the gulf between the two sets of narratives; policies showcased and their actual implementation to the latter. Many setbacks in realizing educational policy outcomes in Ghana are primarily related to inadequate support and inefficiencies in their performance (Abdulai, 2014; Send Ghana, 2018). As reflected in the participants' views, the expectation of this study goes beyond policy formulation to actual implementation, reflecting the incorporation of indigenous stories into early childhood education concretely.

Second, participants identified that enhanced knowledge and skills for teachers lay an excellent foundation to make incorporating indigenous stories in the classroom plausible. Training of teachers especially in story creation has a singular purpose of instilling sets of knowledge systems and attributes to learners, including national and community culture, through learning interaction. The 2004 and 2020 early childhood education

policies have all identified teacher training as one of the critical pathways for the effectiveness of policy implementation. This revelation from the study aligns strongly with the current policy action requirements. Training for teachers at pre-service and in-service remain relevant because the ineffective use of indigenous knowledge systems in the classroom is partly attributed to teachers' inability to pedagogically employ indigenous strategies in socializing learners in the school setting (Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2011; Dei, 2011). The specific knowledge and skills is also anchored on the content and context of training provided by training institutions and the units in charge of teacher continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers and subsequent support systems for them to function in the classroom.

Third, the study's findings show parents' role in incorporating indigenous stories into early childhood education as substantiated by literature (Soudee, 2009). Soudee in this report illustrates how grandmothers engaged early childhood education learners by narrating local stories as part of their school learning. In Soudee's (2009) view, this strategy has contributed to effectively incorporating indigenous knowledge systems in children's education and good brain development for primary school education. The current study also found that parents' participation in narrating stories at home for children can contribute mainly to incorporating indigenous stories into early childhood pedagogy. The evidence is supported by available empirical studies (Ottmann and Pritchard, 2010; Hansen, 2018). It is imperative to note that the participation of parents in education delivery at the school level largely depends on conscious leadership and decision by school and community authorities.

However, the responses on parental participation in classroom pedagogy in the context of the study were gendered. Females (mothers and grandmothers) appeared more excited to take up the role than males; the males (fathers and grandfathers), though support the view, see it as a role of females. This worldview by the fathers only confirm the long held worldview of most men that child care is the responsibility of women.

Moreover, the study found that indigenous stories should be documented to provide a reference for teachers. One of the fears expressed by scholars in indigenous knowledge systems has been inadequately documented materials. Research reports show that the lack of teaching and learning resources/materials remains one of the barriers to effective pedagogy in Ghanaian schools (Osei-Poku and Gyekye- Ampofo, 2017; Send Ghana, 2018).

In the case of the local language, which is the pathway to narrating indigenous stories, Owu-Ewie (2006) and Klu and Margeret (2018) report the lack of reading materials for local language pedagogy. This fit clearly for the call by some researchers of African descent, including Dei (2011) and Batibo (2013), who have separately argued for the documentation of indigenous knowledge systems.

However, it must be noted that documenting indigenous knowledge systems requires a proper context in terms of developmentally appropriate pedagogy (DAP). This process allows the documentation of stories that aligns the age and development levels of learners in terms of content and context.

In addition, the study identified the adaptation of learner-centered pedagogy as the main pedagogical strategy by teachers to initiate and hold learners' attention during learning in the classroom. Teachers must look beyond learner-centeredness by ensuring interactive participation by learners during any learning stimulation session.

Participants find strengthening school-community relationships as an excellent pathway to deepening the bond between school and communities to share knowledge. Schools and communities are complementary institutions that work together to educate children. Available literature supports teachers' augment that a good bond with communities makes it possible for parents to share indigenous stories with their children to expose them to the community's worldview and cultural practices (Kagoda, 2009; Dei, 2012; Amoah, 2020). Findings from this study also validate the available empirical reports that parents and communities make up a bank of indigenous knowledge systems relevant to school learning (Kagoda, 2009; Batibo, 2013; Dolphen; 2014; Hansen, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The crux of the research was to explore and describe the strategies to incorporate indigenous stories into early childhood education pedagogy by teachers. Pertinent findings are distilled and discussed upon which key conclusions are drawn as below.

The incorporation of indigenous stories into classroom pedagogy at the early childhood level is not only relevant to stimulate culturally responsive knowledge construction but possible with appropriate strategies as deployed by teachers in practice. Both teachers and parents have complementary roles as pathways for learners' assimilation of stories as part of the indigenous knowledge systems in the school.

Comprehensive implementation of the early childhood education policy (ECE, 2020) remains very critical in empowering teachers and experts within the space to adequately conceive, create and document stories from community's indigenous knowledge system for their classroom practice holistically.

The research further amplifies the validity of the conceptual framework for the study. Teacher motivation to use local stories in the classroom pedagogy is grounded on skills, attitude, and support from the school and the community ecosystem backed by a clear policy prescription.

The study, in a nutshell, has brought to the fore the



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