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Visual Meanings of Newly Created Ghanaian Cultural Symbols with Inspirations from Existing Adinkra Symbols from Indigenous Communities in Ghana

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Abstract. *In Ghanaian culture, our predecessors' perception of symbols and meanings hold profound significance, reflecting the rich cultural traditions and beliefs embedded in the society's heritage. The perception of symbols in Ghana's cultural traditions depicts the visual language communicating history, values, and identity. Symbols in Ghana are generally perceived to be merely decorative and not recognized as carriers of deep meanings, handed down through generations, encapsulating stories, proverbs, and spiritual beliefs. There is a need for indigenous communities to be involved in the creation and interpretation of cultural symbols, especially those inspired by Adinkra symbols in Ghana. This study aims to describe the meaning of symbols rooted in Ghana's rich cultural traditions by creating designs and meanings based on inspirations from Adinkra symbols. The study employed phenomenology and creative arts-based research methods under the qualitative research design. Personal interviews and focus group discussions were used in data collection, and participants were purposively sampled based on their experiences with the newly created Ghanaian cultural symbols. The study results showed the perceptual gap between the actual meanings of the symbols and what the respondents meant by interpreting these symbols through the lens of their cultural upbringing, historical knowledge, societal values and the new symbols as a continuation of Ghana's rich cultural heritage, bridging the past with the present.*

Keywords: *Adinkra symbols; cultural heritage; Ghanaian cultural symbols; Ghanaian philosophy; visual meaning*

INTRODUCTION

Symbols and their essence in culture are universal aspects that transcend geographical boundaries and unite people worldwide through shared meanings and values. In cultures worldwide, symbols are powerful tools for communication, storytelling, preserving heritage, and reflecting different communities' beliefs, traditions and identities (Savitsky, 2019). According to Nizhnikov and Grebeshev (2019), in the world, symbols play a crucial role in shaping cultural practices and expressions. From ancient civilization to modern societies, symbols have been used to communicate complex ideas, feelings, and experiences. Whether the symbols are visual representations, gestures, or rituals, symbols can convey deep meanings that connect with individuals and communities on a

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deep level. Also, Narziyeva (2022) opines that in many cultures, symbols are deeply intertwined in everyday life and influence art, language, religion, and social interaction. These symbols often have historical significance and represent a particular group's key events, values, or aspirations. To cite an example, using national flags, religious symbols, or traditional motifs on clothing and objects around the world can create a sense of belonging, pride, and cultural identity in people.

Furthermore, the essence of symbols in culture is their ability to cross language barriers and convey universal truths and feelings (Morris, 2014). Symbols such as the lotus flower, which represents purity and rebirth in Eastern cultures, or the dove, which symbolizes peace in Western traditions, demonstrate the power of symbols to communicate shared values and aspirations that resonate with people from different backgrounds (Jung, 2012). This illustrates that by studying the role of symbols and their nature in world cultures, we gain a deeper understanding of the diversity and richness of human expression. Cultures use symbols to communicate their stories, beliefs, and heritage, promoting connections and understanding between people from around the world.

Adom et al. (2016) expressed that symbols and concepts have deep meaning in Ghanaian culture and support Ghanaian values, beliefs, and heritage. Deeply embedded in various aspects of Ghanaian life, from art and clothing to architecture and jewellery, these symbols enrich the nation's cultural fabric (Kuwornu-Adjaottor et al., 2016). In Ghana, symbols are central in conveying shared meanings and traditions. One notable example is the Adinkra symbols, known for their intricate designs and rich symbolism. Adinkra symbols are traditional visual symbols created in Ghana that convey deep meanings and represent proverbs, concepts, beliefs, values and aphorisms. The Adinkra symbols matter because they are vital to Ghanaian cultural heritage and identity. Each Adinkra symbol has a unique meaning that reflects concepts such as wisdom, unity, or resilience. These symbols are not just decorative but function as a language of expression, conveying profound messages and cultural values to those who understand their meaning (Kquofi et al., 2018). Jecty (2022) arguably supported belief that incorporating symbols into Ghanaian culture goes beyond visual representation to influence perceptions and interpretations of social norms and traditions. Symbols are often used to convey historical events, sayings, or moral teachings that shape people's feelings about their cultural identity and heritage. Mathematical concepts such as geometric transformation, the cartesian plane and basic calculation resources in creating Adinkra symbols can be used in teaching mathematics and science (Babbitt et al., 2015). It also provides inspiration for creative writing, corporate design, architectural design and book design.

Through symbols, Ghanaian culture preserves its stories and values, passes them down from generation to generation, and promotes a sense of continuity and pride among the people. In addition, the use of symbols in Ghanaian craftsmanship and historical perspective reflects the art and practice of Ghanaian artisans. These symbols in crafts or artefacts are not only for their aesthetic appeal but are also a sign of status, identity, and cultural heritage (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021). Also, Blount and Brookins (2022) show that delicate designs with symbols embody Ghanaian culture's cultural significance. This showcases the country's rich artistic traditions and skilled craftsmanship. Delving into the symbols and concepts of Ghanaian culture, we gain insight into the complex tapestry of Ghanaian heritage and understand how symbols shape Ghanaian society's stories, understandings, and expressions. Through symbols, Ghanaian culture continues to thrive, connecting the past with the present and preserving the essence of its diverse cultural identity for future generations.

The problem here is the need for indigenous communities to be involved in the creation and interpretation of cultural symbols since there is the need for the development of our culture, especially those inspired by Adinkra symbols in Ghana since the development of culture is not

static but adapt to changing societal dynamics and reflect the growth and diversity within a community (Zhang & Lopez-Pascual, 2012). This challenge highlights the importance of ensuring that Indigenous people's perspectives are accurately represented in the design process to reflect their cultural expressions and values fully. Addressing this issue, the researchers strive to promote cultural inclusion, respect for traditions and a deeper understanding of Ghana's heritage through visual representations.

Previous studies contextually were delved into by researchers. Chu (2003) studied cross-cultural comparison and perception of symbols. The purpose of Chu's (2003) study was to review the visual understanding of symbols among students in Hong Kong and the United States. The aim was to investigate possible differences in visual perception and understanding of symbols and to measure subjects' knowledge of images from their own culture and images from another culture. One hundred and twenty graphic design students from the University of Minnesota and Hong Kong Polytechnic were presented with twenty business and national symbols, ten from the United States and ten from Hong Kong, with a survey about them. Oppong-Wadie (2020) researched educators' perceptions of Adinkra symbols, a phenomenological study. This study aimed to discover the nature of teachers' experience using Adinkra symbols as a teaching tool. The study discussed the meaning that interacts with Adinkra symbols, which are multidimensional and multidisciplinary. Related to this desire is the need to determine the impact of using multimodal communication tools within a cultural framework to emphasize the importance of cultural, social, and historical knowledge in literacy learning. The present study seeks to explore the formulation of newly developed symbols and meanings in Ghanaian cultural traditions, delving into the intricate significance of symbols and how they shape perceptions within Ghanaian society. It emphasizes the importance of involving Indigenous communities in the creation and interpretation of Ghanaian cultural symbols to ensure that they accurately reflect the community's evolving cultural expressions and values.

Study Area

The Ashanti region of Ghana is a vibrant region with a rich cultural heritage and historical significance (Figure 1). It is one of the 16 administrative regions of Ghana and is located in the central part of the country (Asabere et al., 2020). The Ashanti region is known for its strong cultural identity and traditional practices, making it a fascinating area to explore. The Ashanti region is one of the most populous regions in Ghana. According to the latest data, the population of the Ashanti region is about 5 million people (Owusu et al., 2023).

The region's population is diverse and consists of different ethnic groups and communities. The primary language spoken in the Ashanti region is bilingual. Twi is a widely spoken Akan language and is the primary language of communication among the region's people. In addition, English is also commonly spoken, especially in formal settings and educational institutions. The Ashanti region is historically known for its traditional governance structure. The king of the Ashante people, the Asantehene, plays an essential role in the cultural and political landscape of the region. The current Asantehene is Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, who ascended the throne in 1999, as asserted by Quampah et al. (2022).

Rattray (1927) opines that the Ashanti region is inhabited mainly by the Ashanti people, who belong to the Akan ethnic group. Ashanti has a rich history and cultural heritage, including living traditions, festivals, and customs that are integral to the region's identity. In addition to the Ashanti, other ethnic groups and tribes such as the Brongi, Ahafo, and Bono live in the region. Exploring the Ashanti region offers a unique opportunity to delve into the region's cultural dynamics, historical significance, and social structures (Akyeampong & Obeng, 1995). By examining aspects such

as population demographics, linguistic diversity, traditional leadership, and ethnic composition, researchers gain valuable insight into the cultural tapestry of the Ashanti region and its role on the broader context of Ghana.



Figure 1.
The Ashanti region located on the Ghana map used as a study area

METHOD

The study employed phenomenological and creative-arts-based research under qualitative research (Zahavi, 2018), which aimed to collect detailed verbal data through personal interviews and focus group discussions. The phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study because it emphasized understanding the individual and shared experiences of the participants in the Ashanti Region. Understanding these shared experiences was crucial to a deeper understanding of the characteristics of interacting with participants for the symbols. The study recognized the importance of clarifying the broad philosophical assumptions underlying phenomenology. This study focused on the participants' lived experiences with symbols in the Ghanaian culture and their creation of meaning, which informed the researchers' formulation of symbols through creative art-based research and their establishment. The study's population consisted of accessible individuals from the Ashanti Region. All data collected in the Ashanti Region, with a total accessible population of 60, is illustrated in Table 1. Creswell (2014) estimated that 30% of the accessible population for a sample size would be ideal to offer significant and complete data for the study, making it appropriate for the researchers to sample 20 respondents. Purposive sampling was employed for the study. This technique was employed to select participants related to the study. Cultural experts from the cultural center in Kumasi who are more knowledgeable on the symbols of the Ghanaian culture. Also, art students from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) expertise were required to obtain data. The Manhyia Palace gift shop was explored to gain information on symbols from the palace tour guides. Lastly, Craftsmen at Ash-town and Asafo produced artefacts relating to Ghanaian symbols. The selected participants, such as Cultural experts at the Cultural Centre, Arts Students in KNUST, Manhyia Palace Tour Guides, and Craftsmen at

Asafo and As-town, ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings because they are the experts. Various views were sought through their engagements and the dominant themes were considered.

Table 1.
Distribution of the accessible and sampled population of the study

Population of the study	Accessible population	Sample size 30%
Cultural experts at Cultural Centre	9	3
Arts Students in KNUST	30	10
Manhyia Palace Tour Guides	6	2
Craftsmen at Asafo and Ashtown	15	5
Total	60	20

Data were collected mainly through in-depth interviews. Participants were asked to explain their experiences with symbols such as Adinkra symbols and the context in which these experiences occurred. The result of the data analysis led to the development of structural descriptions of the participants' experiences, which helped establish formulated symbols and meanings. The researchers did not force the original respondent's interviews against their will. However, they sought the consent of the participants in the Ashanti Region with ethics taken into consideration for the study. The focus group discussions were video-recorded. They were all carefully converted from the local languages to the English language by two of the researchers with the help of the study participants. The views expressed by some participants were not tagged with their identities since not all of them wanted to be a part of this vital process by keeping the confidentiality of their names in analyzing and asserting the meaning of the symbols. In analyzing the data using thematic analysis asserted by Terry et al. (2017), the researchers sifted through the interview transcripts. They highlighted "significant statements," phrases, or quotes that informed the participant's interactions with the phenomenon, in this case, their understanding of the symbols. This allowed the researchers to develop "clusters of meaning", identifying and categorizing those clusters as themes. The researchers used those themes to write a description of the experiences of the participants. This description forms a description of the experiences of the participants. The themes were considered to craft descriptions of the context that shaped the participants' experiences, aiding in the development of symbols and meanings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of Traditional Symbols from Ghanaian Culture

Symbols of Ghanaian culture, which include Adinkra symbols, festivals, and rituals, play an important role in shaping perceptions and preserving Ghana's rich cultural heritage. Deeply rooted in Ghanaian traditions, Adinkra symbols established by tour guides and cultural experts in the Ashanti Region have deep meanings that reflect various aspects of life, values, and beliefs. Each Adinkra symbol tells a unique story, symbolizing wisdom, courage, unity, and resilience. These symbols are decorative and act as a visual language that communicates cultural values and social norms. Symbols representing different themes and stories within the community play a central role in Ghanaian festivals. Today's rituals are about honoring personal and community ancestors. There is a gathering called Akom, where drumming, dancing, and singing are frequent celebrations honoring Abosom (minor gods in Akan tradition) and Nsamanfo (spiritually nourished ancestors). Food offerings include dishes such as 'eto' (African yam soup) garnished with hard-boiled eggs, asserted by Steegstra (2004). Every Ashanti celebrates this festival. For those Ashanti who do not

observe the Odwira festival, Akwasidae is very important to celebrate their ancestors, where these symbols were incorporated and idolized in the festival gatherings.

Festivals such as the Homowo Festival, which celebrates the migration and harvest of the Ga people, contain symbolic elements such as colorful clothing, dances, and rituals that embody the history and traditions of the community. These symbols at festivals unite the community, boost a sense of belonging, and strengthen cultural identity. The rituals of the Ghanaian culture are also rich in symbols with deep meaning. From naming ceremonies to funerals, symbols are woven into various rites of passage and ceremonies that mark transitions, honor ancestors, and invoke blessings for the future. For example, pouring potions during ceremonies symbolizes connecting with the spirit world and seeking guidance and protection from the ancestors. We gain insight into Ghanaian culture by understanding the perception of symbols in Adinkra symbols, festivals, and rituals. Acting as a link to the past, a reflection of the present, and a guide to the future, these symbols embody the essence of Ghana's cultural wealth, heritage, and values. By studying these symbols, we deepen our appreciation for the traditions by formulating symbols and meanings that shape Ghanaian society and contribute to preserving and promoting its cultural identity.

Symbols Formulated and Meanings

Various symbols were formulated with corresponding names and meanings in Akan and English. These symbols serve as conduits for cultural expression and foster a sense of identity among the Ghanaian people. The following symbols, meanings, and illustrations are highlighted below.

Bravery (*Akokoduru*)

The flame represents courage that gives the power to chase after things that are important to oneself. Akokoduru, a concept in Akan culture, signifies courage, strength, and determination (Appiah, 2023). It is often associated with the story of a small bird that stood up to a mighty elephant, showcasing the power of determination and bravery in the face of adversity. *Akokoduru* serves as a reminder never to give up but to stand tall and face challenges head-on. (Figure 2). It is a concept deeply ingrained in the Akan culture and is a source of inspiration and motivation for individuals to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals (Oduro-Frimpong, 2021). It embodies facing fear with determination and strength, demonstrating inner strength and moral courage. Appiah (2023) explains the proverb in Akan '*Ebinom wo akokoduro a wo-fa tu sa*' as some dare to face war. In another instance, *Akokoduru* is seen as encouraging fearlessness, leadership, initiative, and inspiration, often correlated with leadership qualities. Celebrated through storytelling, folklore, and traditional practices, it highlights the value of bravery as a personal virtue and a contribution to the community's well-being and progress (Appiah, 2023; Bonsu, 2007). It is a powerful reminder to act bravely and decisively, demonstrating inner strength and moral courage.



Figure 2.
Bravery (*Akokoduru*) symbol

Responses from Participants

In the study, the researchers presented a symbol of bravery resembling a flame to respondents for their comments. This symbol signifies courage, strength, and the unwavering spirit to face challenges.

Respondent 1: *"The symbol of bravery looks like grass on a support. It embodies the idea of standing tall in the face of adversity, like grass that withstands any weather. It represents the courage to persevere and overcome obstacles."*

Respondent 2: *"Hmm, a flame of fire for bravery? Sounds strange to me. I do not see how a flame on something can symbolize bravery. It feels like a mismatch of elements and does not convey the idea of courage."*

Respondent 3: *"Absolutely, the symbol that looks like fire, bravery is profound. It conveys the message that even in the darkest times, a light of courage guides us forward. It symbolizes the inner strength to confront fears and move ahead."*

Respondent 4: *"I am not sure I get the whole thing for bravery. It seems a bit random and does not scream bravery to me. I think there could be better and more symbols out there that represent courage more effectively."*

Hope (*Anidasoo*)

A feeling of expectation and desire for a thing to happen. Hope reduces feelings of helplessness and stress and increases happiness. *Anidasoo*, a philosophy in Akan culture, expresses hope, optimism, resilience, faith, spiritual and emotional strength, and proactive behaviour. It teaches individuals to have faith in themselves and their abilities, remain hopeful, and remain resilient in challenging times (Figure 3). Yadav and Kumar (2016) describe hope as a positive psychological resource and its relevance in the workplace. *Anidasoo* encourages individuals to take proactive steps towards achieving their goals, cultivating inner strength and spiritual well-being (Pruyser, 1986; Yadav & Kumar, 2016). It encourages perseverance, trusting in oneself, others, and a higher power, and provides spiritual and emotional strength during challenging times. *Anidasoo* is often reflected in proverbs, songs, and traditional beliefs, guiding individuals and communities toward positive change and improvement.



Figure 3.

Hope (*Anidasoo*) symbol

Responses from Participants

In the study, the researchers presented the symbol of hope to participants for their comments, depicting different ideas. This symbol represents resilience, unity, and the belief that strength comes from diversity and togetherness.

Respondent 1: *"The symbol of hope looks like it has three heads and looks fascinating. It signifies*

different perspectives in fostering hope. It shows that uniting and collaboration among diverse individuals can lead to a brighter future."

Respondent 2: *"Yes, the ball with three symbols of hope is quite intriguing. It conveys that hope can stem from various sources and viewpoints, highlighting the importance of unity and solidarity in facing challenges and moving forward."*

Respondent 3: *"Um, I am not sure about that symbol. It looks weird with three heads on something. I do not see how that represents hope. It seems confusing and does not make much sense to me."*

Unity (*Nkabom*)

Unity (*Nkabom*) means being united or joined as a whole. Unity equals good guidance, proper growth, and true development (Figure 4). Unity symbolises growth, understanding, and development, promoting strength, resilience, and collaboration (Smail, 2023). It is a powerful force that can bring about positive change and create a sense of belonging and community. In Akan culture, *Nkabom* is an active call to action that promotes unity, harmony, and solidarity among people. It encourages peaceful coexistence, dialogue, and mutual understanding, recognizing diversity's strength. *Nkabom* is a collective responsibility and cultural identity, reinforcing shared values. It guides Ghanaian society's social interactions, governance, and national development, emphasizing collaboration and solidarity for progress and prosperity. Smail (2023) explores Ghanaian citizenship lessons from primary teachers in Accra, Ghana, emphasizing oneness, relational Indigenous ontology, and harmony in difference for economic development and Black African identity. In another study, Jeffreys (2022) explores the social identities of Asafo companies among the Fantis of Ghana and conceals that unity is reflected in their role as they discharge duty in violence, irrespective of political change. Understanding and applying these principles can foster a sense of oneness and shared purpose in our communities and societies (Jeffreys, 2022; Smail, 2023).



Figure 4.
Unity (*Nkabom*) symbol

Responses from Participants

The study performed a pretest before presenting the symbols for participant comments. This was done to make sure it met the expectations of the audience.

Respondent 1: *"In the study, I encountered a symbol representing unity resembling a leaf intertwined with another. I believe this symbol can signify strength in togetherness and the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. The symbol of *nkabom* embodies the idea that unity brings about resilience and support in challenging times."*

Respondent 2: *"The symbol is deeply rooted in unity and cooperation within communities. It reflects the belief that when individuals come together like the leaves on a branch, they create an unbreakable bond that fosters growth and harmony."*

Stability (*Gyina pintinn*)

Stability (*Gyina pintinn*) means being firm in everything you do - your "YES" should be "YES" and "NO" should be "NO" (Figure 5). *Gyina pintinn*, a concept in Akan culture, represents stability, balance, and reliability (Appiah, 2023). It is a desirable trait that individuals strive to embody daily, reflecting their character and ability to maintain harmony within themselves and relationships. *Gyina pintinn* is vital to personal integrity and building strong relationships in Akan society. This symbol outlines the importance of consistency, reliability, and being true to oneself for a fulfilling life. Stability is the quintessence of consistency, which is vital for building trust, establishing awareness, fostering momentum in personal and professional relationships, driving long-term success, avoiding failures, and shaping one's journey towards success (Villanueva et al., 2020). *Gyina pintinn* promotes order and structure in personal, social, and community life, promoting organised systems and routines. It is a skill (Smith, 2015) acquired through encouraging individuals to cultivate strength through discipline, foresight, and commitment to maintaining positive relationships.



Figure 5.
Stability (*Gyina pintinn*) symbol

Responses from Participants

This symbol represents strength, resilience, and the ability to remain steadfast in the face of challenges, as presented to respondents for their comments:

Respondent 1: "*The symbol of stability looks like a plant with its fruit, which is quite intriguing. It signifies the importance of having a strong foundation to withstand life's ups and downs. It conveys the idea of standing firm and unwavering amid uncertainties.*"

Respondent 2: "*Yes, the image expresses a pole on a support as a symbol of stability is profound. It represents the idea of finding balance and grounding in turbulent times. Just like a pole that holds steady in the ground, this symbol conveys the essence of staying rooted and secure.*"

Respondent 3: "*I am not sure I understand how this represents stability. It seems like a simple and uninspiring symbol. I think there could be more creative ways to depict stability rather than just this design.*"

Respondent 4: "*A symbol for stability? That sounds a bit boring and unimaginative. I do not see how that symbolizes stability effectively. It feels like a basic representation without much depth or meaning for the symbol.*" "*But in any case, having a wider base to hold firm the elements at the top depicts stability*".

Comfort (*Awerekyekyere*)

Comfort (*Awerekyekyere*) means relieving someone who is sad or disappointed (Figure 6). *Awerekyekyere* is associated with Akan culture, expressing emotional ease, tranquillity, and well-

being. It includes physical comforts like shelter, clothing, food and emotional comfort like feeling secure and free from anxiety (Agyekum, 2020). *Awerekyekyere* also values warmth, hospitality, contentment, and satisfaction. It encourages gratitude and appreciation for one's circumstances and relationships. Community support is an aspect of *Awerekyekyere*, valuing solidarity and a harmonious social environment. *Awerekyekyere*, as an Akan philosophical concept, expresses kindness, generosity, and mutual respect, which creates and maintains comfortable environments. It promotes a harmonious and supportive society, fostering a sense of belonging and happiness (Agyekum, 2020; Dzokoto et al., 2018).



Figure 6.
Comfort (*Awerekyekyere*) symbol

Responses from Participants

Our research explored a symbol for comfort that holds significant meaning in various Ghanaian cultures. This symbol represents solace, reassurance, and the ability to provide emotional support during challenging times.

Respondent 1: *"I do not see the point of a symbol of comfort. The symbol seems unnecessary to have a specific symbol for something like that. Comfort is a personal feeling, and I do not think it needs to be represented by this symbol. It is a bit overrated and does not correlate with the meaning in my opinion."*

Respondent 2: *"The symbol of comfort is like a warm embrace during difficult moments in our Ghanaian culture. It offers a sense of security and peace, reminding us that we are not alone in our times of need and during struggles. It serves as a beacon of hope in desperate times."*

Wisdom (*Nyansa*)

Wisdom means having in-depth knowledge and understanding of many things. The symbol shows an object with lines moving in eight directions, signifying knowledge (Figure 7). Wisdom, known as *Nyansa* in Akan culture, holds deep significance in Ghanaian and Akan philosophical traditions. It is not just knowledge or intelligence but the application of knowledge to promote good judgment, understanding, and ethical living (Abban-Ampiah et al., 2020; Antwi et al., 2020). In Akan's thought, wisdom, *Nyansa*, is acquired through experience, learning, reflection, and the guidance of elders and the community (Antwi et al., 2020). Older people believe that they should put wisdom into the minds of the younger generations. The *Nyansa* symbol draws people's attention to knowledge acquired through learning, making mistakes, re-learning, and application. The Akan maxim, "*Nyansa, nyansa na wode kyere Prempeh*", to wit, 'wisdom is applied to win the elder's heart'. This explains that wisdom is applied to win citizens when authorities want to embark on a community project. It is seen as essential for navigating life's complexities,

resolving conflicts, and maintaining harmony within oneself and society. Central to *Nyansa* is the idea that true wisdom involves not just knowing (Abban-Ampiah et al., 2020), but also acting by moral principles and the greater good of the community (Wiredu & Gyekye, 2010).



Figure 7.
Wisdom (*Nyansa*) symbol

Responses from Participants

Respondent 1: *"Honestly, I do not get the whole symbol thing with wisdom and what the researchers seek to accomplish. How can the researchers represent this symbol of being smart or making good decisions? It feels like an extra layer of complexity that is not needed in designing the symbol but showing a symbol one can easily identify such as a crown."*

Respondent 2: *"I do not see why wisdom comes out as this symbol. It seems unnecessary to assign a specific symbol to something as abstract as wisdom. I think it is a bit of a misconception to represent wisdom in this manner."*

Abundance (*Mmorosoo*)

Abundance means having more than you need of something. In this symbol, something is being split out of the triangular container, which signifies abundance (Figure 8). *Mmorosoo*, in the Akan language, refers to abundance, which is explained as a surplus of something, often associated with wealth, resources, opportunities, or emotions like love and happiness. Abundance (*Mmorosoo*) is a mindset of prosperity and gratitude, recognizing the richness of life beyond material possessions. Abundance promotes richness, fulfilment, and joy through love, opportunities, creativity, and well-being. It requires understanding, worthiness, generosity, awareness, gratitude, and letting go of scarcity-based beliefs (Baugh, 2021). In Akan culture, abundant love, kindness, and generosity make them proud. Fear can lead to scarcity-based arguments, but when we are more grateful, happier, mindful, self-aware, and generous, it swallows the fear. Shifting our mindset from fixed to gratitude and giving thanks to God for His mercy, with faith over fear, will produce abundance (Allan, 2024; Musya, 2023). This perspective encourages a focus on abundance in relationships, health, creativity, and personal growth. Cultivating an abundance mindset involves shifting from scarcity thinking to celebrating existing abundance, promoting generosity, optimism, and belief in development and fulfilment.



Figure 8.

Abundance (*Mborosor*) symbol

Responses from Participants

Respondent 1: *"I do not see why abundance needs a symbol like this. It seems the researchers needed to assign a specific symbol to something as material for wealth."*

Respondent 2: *"Abundance is just shown as having much stuff, right? Why do we need a symbol like this to represent that? It feels like the symbol should not be pretty straightforward. I do not see the point in symbolizing abundance like this."*

Time is money (*Mmere ye sika*)

Time should not be wasted, since one can use the time to work and earn money rather than sit idle (Figure 9). *Mmere ye sika* is a proverb in Akan culture that specifies the efficient and productive use of time (Quainoo, 2022). It suggests that wasting time is similar to wasting money, as both are finite resources. The proverb encourages individuals to prioritize tasks, maximise their time, and invest in activities contributing to their goals and success. When tasks are prioritized, schedule usage and time management positively impact job performance (Islam et al., 2021). In business and economic contexts, it highlights the cost of time lost or inefficiencies in work processes, emphasizing the value of time as a precious commodity. A meta-analysis study conducted by Aeon et al. (2021), Islam et al.'s (2021) study revealed that time management is moderately related to job performance, academic achievement, and wellbeing, with a moderate negative relationship with distress. They conclude that time management enhances well-being more than performance, challenging the common perception that it primarily enhances work performance.



Figure 9.

Time is money (*Mmere ye sika*) symbol

Responses from Participants

In studying the symbol "Time is Money" with the time and money signs, the researchers gathered insights from various respondents. Here are their perspectives:

Respondent 1: *"The symbol of 'Time is Money' with the time and money signs depicts that time is a valuable resource that should be used wisely to generate wealth. It emphasizes the importance of efficiency and productivity in using time to earn money."*

Respondent 2: *"Indeed, the combination of the time and money signs in the symbol shows productivity. 'Time is Money' conveys the impression that time, like money, is a precious asset that should be managed effectively. It serves as a visual reminder of the correlation between time management and financial success."*

Respondent 3: *"I do not see the point of having a symbol like 'Time is Money' with time and money signs. It is kind of obvious that time and money are important, and the researchers could have used one simple design to represent both, not this complex one."*

Findings from the Study

By exploring the perception of symbols in Ghanaian cultural traditions, the research revealed the perceptual gap between the actual meanings of the symbols and what the respondents meant. The first symbol of bravery depicts courage that gives the power to chase after things. There can be a big difference in what the bravery symbol means and how various respondents interpret it when they look at it. Some people may associate bravery with facing obstacles head-on with strength and fearlessness or facing danger or misfortune. Others, on the other hand, may view bravery differently, connecting it to fortitude in the face of adversity or the courage to take chances to achieve one's objectives.

The second symbol is hope, a feeling of expectation and desire for a thing to happen. Respondent's perceptions of it can range significantly from its actual meaning. Some respondents use hope as a symbol of optimism, fortitude, and the conviction that better days are ahead, a beacon of hope throughout trying times.

The third symbol is unity, which means the sense of being united or joined as a whole. There might be a significant discrepancy between the genuine meaning of the unity symbol and how respondents understand it. Some respondents interpret unity as a symbol of people's oneness, harmony, and solidarity, highlighting the power of teamwork and shared purpose. Others, on the other hand, may view unity as little more than surface-level agreement or conformity.

The fourth symbol, stability, shows being firm in everything you do. The symbol's meaning can range significantly from person to person when it comes to symbols. Stability can represent safety, equilibrium, and dependability to some people, according to respondents, giving them a sense of security and comfort during uncertain times. On the other hand, others see stability as stiffness or stagnation, ignoring the dynamic combination of resilience and adaptation that true stability requires.

The symbol comfort means giving comfort to someone who is sad or disappointed. When we talk about the symbol of comfort, there can be a notable difference between its factual significance and how respondents interpret it. For some, comfort may represent solace, ease, and a sense of security, providing relief and well-being in challenging moments. However, others might perceive comfort as complacency or avoidance of discomfort.

The symbol of wisdom means having in-depth knowledge and understanding of many things. When the researchers delve into the symbol of wisdom, there can be an essential gap between its true essence and how respondents see it. Some may view wisdom as profound knowledge, insight, and sound judgment gained through experience, deeply understanding life's complexities and the ability to make wise decisions.

The symbol of abundance means having more than you need of something. When we look at the symbol of abundance, there can be a significant gap between its factual significance and how respondents interpret it. Some respondents perceive abundance as a state of plentifulness, prosperity, and wealth, symbolizing a bountiful and flourishing existence. However, others might

view abundance merely as material possessions or external wealth, overlooking the deeper aspects of abundance that depict richness in relationships, experiences and personal growth.

Lastly, the symbol of time is money, which shows time should not be wasted since one can use the time to work and earn money rather than sit idle. Participants may perceive the "time is money" symbol differently, indicating a perceptual discrepancy between what is truly understood and one's perception. Some might see this symbol as highlighting the significance of productivity, efficiency, and time management. It links time to money and emphasizes the necessity of using time prudently to succeed financially. Indeed, on the other hand, may take a more philosophical approach, seeing time as a precious resource that ought to be used prudently in pursuits that lead to fulfilment and significant experiences rather than merely monetary gain.

These kinds of perceptual gaps, and scientific meanings, happen when respondents understand symbols or concepts differently than they intended. Cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and individual standpoints can influence these variations in understanding. Acknowledging and bridging these perception gaps is essential for effective communication and ensuring that symbols are comprehended in their full depth, encompassing a range of interpretations that reflect the diverse insights and values of different Indigenous communities.

The Contribution to Cultural Symbolism Beyond Ghana

The findings illustrate the dynamic nature of cultural symbols as evolving expressions of societal beliefs and values that are not confined to a single cultural context. It emphasises the importance of involving Indigenous communities in the creation and interpretation of symbols. The study highlights a universal principle that also applies to other cultures: the need for authentic representation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives in cultural expressions. This approach deepens the comprehension of symbols within a specific cultural context and offers a methodological guide for researching and preserving cultural heritage globally. The study's findings on the perceptual gaps between intended and interpreted meanings of symbols underscore the complexity of cultural communication and offer valuable lessons for cross-cultural studies and the development of culturally sensitive education and arts initiatives worldwide.

The study on newly created Ghanaian cultural symbols can be applied to other cultural contexts by involving Indigenous communities in creating and interpreting cultural symbols. This approach ensures that symbols accurately reflect a community's evolving cultural expressions and values - a universal principle that applies to all cultures. By engaging local communities, researchers and cultural practitioners will ensure that symbols represent traditional values and can be adapted to today's societal dynamics. Furthermore, the study's methodology, which combines phenomenological and creative arts-based research, can be used in other cultural contexts to explore people's lived experiences and perceptions of their cultural symbols. This can lead to a deeper understanding of how symbols shape cultural identity and heritage, fostering cultural inclusion and respect for traditions globally. Furthermore, the study's recommendations for incorporating symbolism into educational curricula and cultural events can be adapted to enhance cultural awareness and appreciation in diverse cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

In completing our study of the symbols of Ghanaian cultural traditions and on perception, symbols, and meanings, the researchers formulated symbols embody Ghana's cultural essence. These symbols are pillars of tradition with the weight of history and depth of meaning defining Ghanaian identity. In summary, the symbols and the gaps in perception around their meanings emphasise how

crucial it is to match findings with observable interpretations. Based on recognition and acceptance of respondents' diverse perspectives about symbols, the researchers appreciated the comprehension of how symbols are portrayed in culture and the richness and complexity of symbol interpretation, which reflects the various viewpoints and values within a cultural context. The researchers' journey led to several key findings. First, the symbols of Ghanaian culture are not static; they are dynamic expressions of the evolving beliefs and values of the Ghanaian people. Second, these symbols are the threads that weave the fabric of Ghanaian identity, connecting the past with the present and guiding the way forward. Ultimately, understanding and appreciating these symbols is essential to protecting Ghana's cultural heritage and fostering a sense of pride and belonging among Ghanaians. To ensure the preservation and promotion of Ghana's cultural symbols, key stakeholders such as cultural institutions, policymakers, and educators must work together to increase the visibility and importance of these symbols. These symbols can be documented in books and made available as supplementary books. Stakeholders can strengthen the appreciation of Ghana's cultural heritage by incorporating symbolism into curricula, organizing cultural events, and supporting local artisans.

The research recommends prioritising ethical considerations, documenting findings for preservation, engaging closely with indigenous communities to ensure their knowledge is integrated, conducting a comparative analysis with traditional Adinkra symbols, and developing educational initiatives to raise awareness about Ghana's cultural heritage. These recommendations are based on the study's objectives, which include exploring Ghanaian cultural symbols and incorporating indigenous perspectives. By taking these actions, the research's authenticity, cultural representation, and ability to help conserve Ghana's rich cultural heritage for future generations will all be improved. Future research can consider integrating newly formulated and existing symbols in STEAM education.

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Appendix

Symbols	Symbolic Name and Meaning
	Mind of the Wicked (<i>Adwene fi</i>) Be careful about people in this world, since one doesn't know their intentions. Not everyone who laughs with you wants the best for you.
	Victory (<i>Nkonimdie</i>) There is a victory when one defeats his/her enemy or opponent in a battle or competition.
	Hard work (<i>Adwumaden</i>) This symbolises hard work. One works very hard to achieve his/her aim.
	Peacefulness (<i>Asomdwoe</i>) The state of having peace of mind, joy and being calm.
	Faith (<i>Gyidie</i>) Faith is a strong word in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof.

	<p>Humility (<i>Abobrasee</i>)</p> <p>Humility plays a vital role in every endeavour of our lives, that is having patience in everything you do leads to a great success.</p>
	<p>Loyalty (<i>Nokwafo</i>)</p> <p>Loyalty talks about being honest, trusting and committed to each other through both good times and bad times.</p>
	<p>Knowledge is Power (<i>Nimdee ye tumi</i>)</p> <p>You are not easily influenced when you have knowledge. It is hard to be deceived.</p>
	<p>Diligence (<i>Dee n'ani ku n'adwuma ho</i>)</p> <p>The cowry represents money and can only be acquire through continuous efforts of work.</p>
	<p>What goes Around, Comes Around (<i>whimwhim ade ko surosuro</i>)</p> <p>The consequences of one's action will have to be dealt with eventually.</p>
	<p>Endurance (<i>Abobyeso</i>)</p> <p>Enduring hardship that comes one's way. Nothing lasts forever - things will change.</p>
	<p>Love (<i>odo</i>)</p> <p>Love means to feel deep affection for someone. It is seen in the symbol that an object of different structure is being buried deep in a bowl-like container and that signifies love.</p>
	<p>Growth (<i>Onyini</i>)</p> <p>Growth can simply be said as moving from the bottom to the top and avoiding any resistance. In the symbol, it is seen that a line moves from the bottom through a heavy object which seems to be an obstacle but still resist to the top.</p>

	<p>Split or Division (<i>Mpaepaemu</i>)</p> <p>It is an act or state of being separated. This symbol is telling us how people keep apart, disconnect, or divide themselves.</p>
	<p>Transition of life (<i>Asetena mu nsakrae</i>)</p> <p>Life starts from a certain point before you get to another.</p>
	<p>Focus (<i>Baabi a ani si</i>)</p> <p>Focus can be said as paying close attention and concentration on a particular thing.</p>
	<p>Wickedness (<i>Abonefosem</i>)</p> <p>This symbol depicts the wickedness in the mind of people. If we know what is in the mind of people, we will be very careful when we get closer to people. This is a stool turned upside down to hurt whoever sits on it.</p>
	<p>Lean on me (<i>Twere me</i>)</p> <p>We all need someone we can get help from In one way or the other to move forward in life.</p>
	<p>Key to Success (<i>Nkunimdie safoa</i>)</p> <p>The most important determining factor needed to achieve success. A positive adjective can be used between “success” and “key” to have diligent work ethics.</p>
	<p>Wisdom (<i>Nyansa</i>)</p> <p>It is the body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specific society or period.</p>
	<p>Survival (<i>Nkwa nya</i>)</p> <p>The semicolon punctuation becomes a symbol with a slight modification to represent/signify survival of people affected by suicide, depression, addiction, anxiety, and self-injury.</p>
	<p>Fruitfulness (<i>Abasoo</i>)</p> <p>This symbol shows fruitfulness. It shows the fertility and productivity of people or a society.</p>

	<p>Co-operation (<i>Nkabomdie</i>)</p> <p>The action or process of working together to the same end. Individuals or groups combine their effort in an organized way for the attainment of common objective.</p>
	<p>Pure heart (<i>Akoma a eho tew</i>)</p> <p>This symbol is traditionally seen as a symbol of faithfulness, love, purity, innocence and relationships filled with love.</p>
	<p>Divine Protection (<i>Akokyem</i>)</p> <p>This symbol represents a force providing protection against external attacks.</p>
	<p>The Heart (<i>Akoma</i>)</p> <p>This symbol represents a pierced and shattered heart (In Akan, "<i>Akoma a ebubu</i>"). It can also be referred to as a broken heart.</p>
	<p>Friendship (<i>Adamfofa</i>)</p> <p>This symbol depicts friendship. It represents the cordial relationship that exists among individuals.</p>
	<p>Shield or Protection (<i>Abobammo</i>)</p> <p>This symbol depicts protection against the enemies' weapons.</p>
	<p>Abundance (<i>Mmorosoo</i>)</p> <p>The word "Abundance" means exceeding, very highly, beyond measures, a quantity so abundant as to be considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate.</p>
	<p>Security (<i>Banbo</i>)</p> <p>This symbol represents security against any external harm such as theft.</p>
	<p>Impartation (<i>Dawuro</i>)</p> <p>This symbolizes communication being key, as the saying goes, 'Distance should not deter the ability of conveying messages to people'.</p>
	<p>African eye (<i>Ani a ebu biribiara</i>)</p> <p>Synonymous to Omnipresent. The power of being present everywhere at the same time.</p>

	<p>Brilliance (<i>Nsaa</i>)</p> <p><i>Nsaa</i> is a type of women cloth. It is a symbol of excellence, genuineness, authenticity, from the Akan proverb “Nea onnim nsaa na oto n'ago’.</p>
	<p>Justice (<i>Atentrene</i>)</p> <p>It is a symbol of law and justice.</p>
	<p>Ankh (<i>Daa nkwa</i>)</p> <p>This symbol sometimes referred to as the key to life, representing eternal life.</p>
	<p>Sanctum (<i>Kronkronbea</i>)</p> <p>This symbol represents a sacred or holy place, an inviolably private place or retreat.</p>
	<p>Hope (<i>Anidasoo</i>)</p> <p>To hope for something is to look forward to it with desire and reasonable confidence.</p>
	<p>Understanding (<i>Ntsiase</i>)</p> <p>The ability to understand. The capacity to apprehend general relations of particulars.</p>
	<p>Royalty (<i>Adehye</i>)</p> <p>This symbol represents royalty. It shows the royal blood that runs through our traditional society.</p>