

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY



**COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING DESIGN ART AND TECHNOLOGY (CEDAT)
THE MARGARET TROWELL SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL AND
FINE ARTS (MTSIFA)**

**VISUALISING THE TRADITIONAL DANCES OF THE AJOSI AND AKOGO OF
ITESO- EASTERN UGANDA.**

BY


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2022/HD08/22342U
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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF GRADUATE TRAINING IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN FINE ARTS OF
MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**

DECEMBER 2025

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my loving family for their unwavering support and for instilling in me a desire to learn and make sacrifices despite having little so that I could have access to high-quality education at one of the most recognized universities in the world. I also dedicate this to my friends and the academic staff of Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts, Makerere University, and the Hochschule für Bildende Künste (HFBK) Hamburg state academy of higher artistic and scientific education in Germany, for their encouragement. Lastly, I dedicate this to the Iteso community for sharing their rich cultural heritage.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
APPROVAL	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ABSTRACT	xxi
CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION	1
1.0.1 Overview of the Study	1
1.1 Background to the Study	2
1.2 Problem Statement	3
1.3 General Objective	4
1.4 Specific Objectives	4
1.5 Research Question	4
1.6 Significance of the Study	4
1.7. Justification	5
1.8 Scope of the Study	6
1.8.1 Content Scope	6
1.8.2 Geographical Scope	6
1.8.3 Time scope	6
1.8.4 Artistic Scope	6
1.8.5 Temporal Scope	7
1.8.6 Theoretical Framework	7

CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.0 Introduction.....	9
2.1.1 Traditional African Dance as Cultural Heritage	9
2.1.2 Ritual and Communal Role.....	10
2.1.3 Aesthetic and Political Function of Dance.....	15
2.2.1 Cultural Symbolism in African Dance.....	16
2.2.2 Dance as a Social Function and Cultural Cohesion	17
2.2.3 Dance Informed by Spiritual Beliefs	17
2.3 Documenting Traditional Dances Visually.....	20
CHAPTER THREE : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	32
3.0 Introduction.....	32
3.1 Research Design and Methodological Framework"	32
3.2 Study Area	33
3.3 Target Population.....	35
3.4 Sampling Techniques and Participant Selection Documentation	35
3.4.1 Detailed Selection Criteria and Documentation	35
3.4.2 Evidence of Selection Process: Sample Recruitment Documentation.....	36
3.4.3 Sampling Techniques.....	37
3.5 Data Collection Methods	38
3.5.1 Interview Protocol and Audio Recording Procedures	39
3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion Protocol.....	40
3.5.3 Participant Observation Documentation	41
3.6 Data Analysis Procedures	42
3.6.1 Audio Recording Transcription	42
3.6.2 Coding and Thematic Analysis	42

3.6.4 Analytical Memos and Reflexivity	42
3.6.5 Validation Strategies	43
3.6.6 Establishing Trustworthiness	43
3.7 Ethical Considerations	43
3.8 Limitations of the Study	44
3.9 Mitigation of Study Limitations	44
CHAPTER FOUR : FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	46
4.0 Introduction.....	46
4.0.1 Definition of Traditional Drawings in This Study.....	46
4.1 Analysis of the Cultural Heritage, Purpose, and Significance of Ajosi and Akogo	47
4.1.1 Cultural Heritage of the Dances.....	47
4.1.2(c) Instruments of Akogo and Ajosi Dance and Cultural Symbolism	76
4.1.3 Recognition and Social Roles in Ajosi and Akogo Dances.....	85
4.1.4 Performance Style, Communal Pride, and Gender Dynamics.....	91
4.2 Analyzing Culturally Informed Movements and Adornments	93
4.2.1 Adornments in Akogo and Ajosi	96
4.2.2 Contemporary Adaptations and Debates	100
4.2.3. Studio Methodology.....	108
4.2.4. Movements and Timing of the Dances	118
4.2.5. Changes and Evolution	134
4.2.6 Preservation and Promotion of Iteso Traditional Dances	135
4.3 Artistic Visual Imagery of Ajosi and Akogo Traditional Dances.....	136
4.3.1 Introduction to Studio Experimentation and Artistic Reinterpretation.....	136
4.3.2 Rationale for Using Diverse Artistic Forms	137
4.3.3 Visualizing the Dances: Techniques and Artistic Painting on Animal Hides	137

4.3.4 Studio-Based Visual Interpretation of Dance Formations and Movement	147
4.3.5 Conclusion	151
CHAPTER FIVE : SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	153
5.0 Introduction.....	153
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	153
5.2.1 Conclusion	154
5.2.2 Navigating Preservation and Innovation: A Tripartite Framework	156
5.3 Recommendations.....	157
REFERENCES	159
APPENDICES	161
Appendix 1 Interview Guide Development	161
Appendix 2: Questionnaire	163
Appendix 3: Focus group discussion guide	166
Appendix 4: Purposive Sampling	167
Appendix 5: Glossary of terms in Ateso.....	168
Appendix 6: Introduction Letter	169
Appendix 7: Coding Development and Thematic Analysis Process	170

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: Spiritual dance to honor ancestors, Peggy,(2021) Yoruba dance in Nigeria in honor of the god Shango. Photo retrieved from Britannica,</i>	10
<i>Figure 2: Cultural dance in Honor of the gods, Peggy. (2021), Ajun Kpa dance, [Photograph]. Image retrieved from</i>	11
<i>Figure 3: Etida dancers getting possessed by the ancestral spirits during the dance performance, photo by researcher.</i>	13
<i>Figure 4: Ajosi dance, Photo by Agama.</i>	14
<i>Figure 5: Ajosi dance of Iteso with the adornments similar to the Ingoma Ya Mapiko dance, photo by researcher</i>	18
<i>Figure 6: Adornments and Headgears (UNESCO n.d.) Ingoma Ya Mapiko, dance, 2018, [photograph], Retrieved from</i>	19
<i>Figure 7: The Dancers, painting inspired by dance, Edgar Degas (1834–1917), 1898 [Photograph]. Photograph by Light Bender. Retrieved from Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).</i>	21
<i>Figure 8: Spiritual dance, Matisse, H. (1909). Dance performance (I) [Benson] Fifth Wave Production Retrieved from</i>	22
<i>Figure 9: Courtship Dance by William Blake (c. 1786) features Oberon, Titania, and Puck amidst fairies dancing.</i>	23
<i>Figure 10: The dance costumes, Edgar Degas (1871- 1874), Ballet Class – Retrieved from</i>	24
<i>Figure 11: Amagunju the Baganda Royal Dance, oil painting by Xavier Ifee Francis, 2024. Photo by researcher.</i>	25
<i>Figure 12: Bakisimba Dance by Kigozi (2024), showcased in Two Men’s Show. Image published by The Independent Magazine. Retrieved from</i>	26

<i>Figure 13: Sculpture of the Mbalu dance of the Bagishu, Photo by researcher 2023 at Mbale city.....</i>	27
<i>Figure 14: Embola and Arakaraka dances by Stephen G 2022 featured in his PHD exhibition.</i>	28
<i>Figure 15: Depicts animals in a cohesive population structure. Area girl during the fashion show on the final day Traditional maker’s market & a demonstration of traditional weaving to create the bus shelter.</i>	29
<i>Figure 16: Display of mixed media art alongside traditional performance.....</i>	30
<i>Figure 17: Map of Uganda showing regions and a magnified view of the Teso subregion.....</i>	34
<i>Figure 18: Akogo Dance Performers, Both Men and Women Dancing to the Tunes of Akogo (2023). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. ...</i>	47
<i>Figure 19: The Iteso Taking Ajono at the Chief’s Place in the Evening (2023). Medium: Graphite drawing on paper. Size: A1. Artist: Agama Peter.....</i>	48
<i>Figure 20: Depiction of Women Joining the Dance and Choosing the Best Dancer (2024). Medium: charcoal drawing on manila. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2025.....</i>	49
<i>Figure 21: Depiction of Men Taking Ajono After Dancing Ajosi While the Best Dancer Continues (2024). Medium: Charcoal on paper. Size: A1. Artist: Agama Peter.....</i>	50
<i>Figure 22: Idegudegu, Abyeese, and Aduuma Akogo of Different Sizes (2023). Medium: photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter.</i>	53
<i>Figure 23: Nyero Akogo Dancers on Stage Performing During the Akogo Festival (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm. Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.</i>	54
<i>Figure 24: Akogo Instrumentalist (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.....</i>	55
<i>Figure 25: Adult Boys and Girls in the Stage of Courtship Performing Akogo (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm. Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.....</i>	56

<i>Figure 26: Akogo/Akebe Dance, Performed During Evening Hours (2023–2024). Medium: Acrylic on canvas. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024. Analysis of Figure 28</i>	57
<i>Figure 27: Seductive Akogo Movements Demonstrated by Women towards Men (2024). Medium: Graphite and charcoal on paper. Size: A3. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	58
<i>Figure 28: Seduction During Akogo Dance: Male Dancers Make Advanced Moves to Seduce the Main Girl (2024). Medium: charcoal drawings: A3. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	59
<i>Figure 29: The Pairing Up with a Special Admired Partner During Akogo Dance (2024). Medium: Colored pencil on paper. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	61
<i>Figure 30: Akogo Tail Dance (2024). Medium: Charcoal and white chalk on toned paper. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	62
<i>Figure 31: Digital Painting Depicting Ajosi Dancers Performing While Presided Over by Emorimor Sipping Ajono (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	64
<i>Figure 32: A Big Drum Known as Atenus, Always Drummed by a Woman While Standing, Signifying the Respect for Division of Roles and Elevated Values of Women (2024). Medium: Graphite drawing on paper. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	66
<i>Figure 33: Explanation of the Term "Ajosi " Coming from "Ejos," Representing the Sticks Used in the Dance (2024). Medium: Ink drawing on paper. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	68
<i>Figure 34: Digital Drawing Showcasing the Unique Role of Animal Tails in Dance (2024). Medium: Digital drawing. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	69
<i>Figure 35: Depiction of Ajosi Being Performed on Stage (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm) Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	70

<i>Figure 36: Ekiryakirya Rainmaking Dance Also Used for Cleansing People from Bad Luck</i> (2024). Medium: graphite and charcoal drawing. A2 paper size, Artist: Agama Peter.	72
<i>Figure 37: Digital Drawing of Etida Dance (2024) by artist Agama Peter, created in A3 size</i> (29.7 × 42 cm) using the medium of digital drawing, is sourced from the author in 2024.....	73
<i>Figure 38: In 2023, Agama Peter captured "Ekuma Dance Performed Without Loud</i> <i>Instruments Specifically for Birth Rites," a digital photograph measuring 20 × 25 cm</i> (print size) (Author, 2023).	75
<i>Figure 39: Oil Painting on Animal Skin Showing Iteso Traditional Musical Instruments Used</i> <i>During Performance of Traditional Dances (2024). Medium: Oil on treated animal</i> <i>hide. Size: 60 × 45 cm. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	77
<i>Figure 40: Group from Tororo (Iteso Tororo Kenya United) Playing Adungu During</i> <i>Performance in Soroti Akogo Festival (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20</i> <i>× 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.</i>	79
<i>Figure 41: Atenu and Itelelei of Moto Moto Akogo Wera Used for Royal Dance (Ajosi) and</i> <i>Communication in the Community (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25</i> <i>cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.</i>	80
<i>Figure 42: Ngora (Fire Fire Atooto Akogo Group) with Body Paint, Wearing Isimana for</i> <i>Performing Ekiryakirya and Etida Dance (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size:</i> <i>20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.</i>	82
<i>Figure 43: Various Groups Depicted Using Ebilo as a Musical Instrument, Played by Skilled</i> <i>Musicians (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size).</i> <i>Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.</i>	83
<i>Figure 44: Best Dancers Receive He-Goats and Women as Awards During Ajosi</i> <i>Performances. Medium: digital painting, Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama</i> <i>Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	86
<i>Figure 45: Best Dancer Rewarded with a Girl During Akogo Dance Performance. Medium:</i> <i>Digital illustration. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author,</i> <i>2024.</i>	88

<i>Figure 46: Performance of Traditional Dance Used to Welcome Newborns without Musical Instruments, Variation Called Ekuma.</i> Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.	89
<i>Figure 47: Drawing Process for Ajosi Dance Meant to Communicate Messages to the Community.</i> Medium: digital line art illustration, Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.....	90
<i>Figure 48: Depiction of Ajosi Dancers with Spears, Meant to Convey Messages About Desertification to Leaders (2024).</i> Medium: Digital painting and cross-line sketching. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.	90
<i>Figure 49: Male Dancers with Dancing Sticks and Women with Itambalan (Handkerchiefs).</i> Medium: Oil painting on canvas. By Author, 2023.....	95
<i>Figure 50: Dancer Adorned with Animal Hides, Ankle Bells, Ostrich Feathers, and Animal Tails.</i> Medium: Oil paintings on a wooden board by Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.....	96
<i>Figure 51: Inspiration for Traditional Dance Attire of Iteso.</i> Photos by Edulu Emmanuel (2023). Source: Facebook post.	97
<i>Figure 52: Adornments for Akogo Traditional Dancers.</i> Medium: Traditional and digital painting. Artist: Agama Peter.	97
<i>Figure 53: Depiction of Dancers and Dance Adornments of Akogo.</i> Medium digital painting. Artist: Agama Peter.....	99
<i>Figure 54: Akogo Dancers Adorned with Beads as Jewelry, Ekitambi, Apatirisi, Specific Cloth (Abei Lolo Ai), and Other Props.</i> Medium: Charcoal Drawing. Size: A1, Artist: Agama Peter.....	99
<i>Figure 55: Akogo Dancers Wearing Sisals, Skins, Kitambi, Animal Tails, Vests, and Animal Prints.</i> Medium: Oil painting on animal skins. Artist: Agama Peter.....	100
<i>Figure 56: Inspiration for Digital Drawing on the Use of Sisal in Iteso Traditional Dance.</i> Photo by author.	101
<i>Figure 57: Drawing Process Toward Drawing of Akogo Dances and Their Adornments.</i> Medium: digital painting - developmental sketch, Artist: Agama Peter. Size: A3...	101
<i>Figure 58: Sisals Worn as Dancing Costumes During Performance of Akogo, Ekiryakirya, and Etida.</i> Medium: digital painting, Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.	102

<i>Figure 59: Jewelry Meant to Attract Suitors During Akogo Dance, Worn by Girls. Medium: Painting, Artist: Agama Peter (2022-2024)</i>	103
<i>Figure 60: Headgear (Ostrich Feathers), Animal Skin, Beads Used as Adornments for Ajosi . Medium: Photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter (2023)</i>	103
<i>Figure 61: Painting of Ajosi Dancers with Headgear and Other Adornments Having Symbolic Meaning in Iteso Society. Medium: Oil painting on animal skins, Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	104
<i>Figure 62: Painted Dancers with Ankle Bells. Medium: Photo and digital painting by Agama Peter (2023)</i>	105
<i>Figure 63: Bells Worn on Legs by Ajosi Traditional Dancers. Medium: Photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter</i>	106
<i>Figure 64: Alugabiren Traditionally Worn During Cultural Dances by Performers and Cultural Leaders in Teso. Photo by author (2023).</i>	107
<i>Figure 65: Performers Dancing Using Alugabiren. Medium: Charcoal Drawing. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter</i>	107
<i>Figure 66: Digital Illustration Depicting Use of Dancing Sticks During Ajosi , Used for Fighting. Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	109
<i>Figure 67: Drawing Depicting a Fight Between Losers and Winners. Medium: Graphite and charcoal drawing on normal paper. Size: A2, Artist: Agama Peter</i>	110
<i>Figure 68: Line Art Depicting Winning Team with Opponent's Royal Drum and Women. Medium: digital illustration, A3 size by Agama</i>	111
<i>Figure 69: Digital Grayscale Painting Depicting Joyous Akogo Occasion Accompanied by Ajono Drinking. Medium: Digital grayscale painting. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm). Artist: Agama Peter</i>	114
<i>Figure 70: Akogo Used to Welcome In-Laws to Girl's Home with Dowry. Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter</i>	115
<i>Figure 71: Escorting Girl to Her Marital Home and Passing Tests. Medium: Drawing. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter</i>	116

<i>Figure 72: Depiction of Ajosi Being Performed in the Evening.</i> Medium: Digital painting Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.....	119
<i>Figure 73: Instrumentalist Kneeling While Playing Akogo.</i> Medium: Typographic drawing, a3 size by agama peter. 2024.....	120
<i>Figure 74: Main Girl Takes the Stage.</i> Medium: charcoal drawing, Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.	121
<i>Figure 75: Seductive "Hooing" Dance Moves During Akogo Dance.</i> Medium: Charcoal drawing Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.....	121
<i>Figure 76: Boys Pairing Up to Dance with Girls on Stage.</i> Medium: Charcoal drawing on normal paper. Size: A2, Artist: Agama Peter. 2023	122
<i>Figure 77: Leader with Whistle Signaling Dance Move Changes During Akogo.</i> Medium: Charcoal drawing on manila paper Size: A2, Artist: Agama Peter.	123
<i>Figure 78: Signaling with a Dancing Stick and Mock Fight During Ajosi Dance.</i> Medium: Digital Illustration, Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.	124
<i>Figure 79: Ajosi Dancers Entering Fighting Segment. And Figure 99: Initial Digital Drawing Sketches of Ajosi Dancers in Fighting Segment. Respectively, Medium: Digital drawing. Size: A3 by Author</i>	125
<i>Figure 80: Ajosi Best Dancers Showing Best Dance Strokes in Atail Stage.</i> Medium: Charcoal drawing, A2 by the Author.	126
<i>Figure 81: Akogo Dance Originally Performed in Letter Formation, Later Transitioning to Circular Flow.</i> Medium: Charcoal drawing, Size: A1 by the author.	127
<i>Figure 82: Performers Taking Turns to Perform in the Center, Surrounded by Women as They Alternate.</i> Digital art in A3 size	127
<i>Figure 83: Women Form Inner Ring While Men Dance on Outer Edge, Facing Admired Partners.</i> Medium Digital art. A3 size by the author 2023	128
<i>Figure 84: Akogo Performers Change from Circle into Straight-Line Formation.</i>	129
<i>Figure 85: Dancers Change Form to Separate Lines for Boys and Girls.</i> Medium: digital illustration. Size: A3, by the author.	130
<i>Figure 86: Climax of Akogo, Where Dancers Display Strongest Moves to Attract Partners.</i> Medium: Charcoal drawing. A1 size by the author.	130

<i>Figure 87: Best Dancers Showing Best Dancing Moves in the Tail Dance Stage. Medium: charcoal on manila A2 size by the Author.</i>	131
<i>Figure 88: Ajosi Levels, Left Shows Getting to Stage, Right Shows Middle Dance Level.</i>	132
<i>Figure 89: Girl Dancer Kneeling During Low Level of Ajosi Dance. Medium: acrylic painting on wooden board, charcoal drawing on manila paper by the author, 2024</i>	132
<i>Figure 90: Akogo Levels of the Dance. Digital painting by the author 2023 A3 size</i>	133
<i>Figure 91: Dancers Forming Circle as They Take Turns Performing in the Middle with Dancing Partners. Charcoal drawing by author 2022</i>	133
<i>Figure 92: Akogo Upper Body Dance Movement for Girls in the Courtship Stage (2024). Medium: Digital line drawing. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	141
<i>Figure 93: Evening Dance Scene Painted Digitally, Capturing Twilight Mood (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A2 extended. Artist: Agama Peter. Digital drawing inspired by German Artist Christian Meiboom.</i>	142
<i>Figure 94: Painting on Animal Hides Symbolizing Traditional Dance Costumes (2024). Medium: Acrylic on treated animal hide. Size: 50 × 40 cm. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	145
<i>Figure 95: Akogo Dance Line Formation Transitioning to Circular Flow (2024). Medium: Digital drawing. Size: A3 Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	147
<i>Figure 96: Performers Alternate Center-Stage Roles, Surrounded by Women (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	148
<i>Figure 97: Inner Ring Features Female Dancers, Men Encircling Them (2024). Medium: digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	149
<i>Figure 98: Performers Shift Back into Linear Formations (2024). Medium: Digital illustration. Size: A2 Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.</i>	149
<i>Figure 99: Dancers Reposition While Instrumentalists Kneel (2024). Medium: Charcoal and graphite. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). By Agama peter, the Author</i>	150
<i>Figure 100: Group Separates into Distinct Gendered Lines (2024). Medium: Digital line drawing. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.</i>	150

Figure 101: Climax of Akogo: Vibrant and Creative Moves to Captivate Partner (2024).

Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source:

Author, 2024. 151

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABR	:	Arts-Based Research
AGL	:	Artist/Akogo Group Leader
AVI	:	Artistic Visual Imagery
CL	:	Cultural Leader
EI	:	Elders
FGD	:	Focused Group Discussion
ICU	:	Iteso Cultural Union
IRIN	:	Integrated Regional Information Network
ITD	:	Iteso Traditional Dances
LRA	:	Lord's Resistance Army
NDP	:	National Development Plan
RP	:	Radio Presenter
UN SDG	:	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UPA	:	Uganda People's Army

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the cultural heritage, purpose, and significance of Ajosi and Akogo traditional dances among the Iteso people of Eastern Uganda, using practice-based visual research to document endangered performance traditions. Employing qualitative ethnographic and arts-based methodologies, the research included fieldwork across six Teso sub-region districts and studio-based artistic production. Data were collected through participant observation at major cultural events (2023 Akogo Festival, 2024 MDD Festival, Atekere Reunion Festival), semi-structured interviews with 32 participants (elders, cultural leaders, dancers), and visual documentation.

Findings revealed that Ajosi serves as a royal dance linked to traditional authority and communal solidarity, while Akogo is performed for courtship. Both dances encode complex cultural knowledge through movement and symbolic adornments (beadwork, animal hides, ostrich feathers, bells), functioning as "embodied archives" that transmit Iteso identity across generations. However, colonial disruption, religious transformation, and modernization threaten their continuity, with knowledge concentrated among aging specialists and declining youth engagement.

Methodologically, the study employed artistic media such as charcoal sketching, digital painting, and ink drawing as analytical tools to capture dimensions inaccessible through text or photography, including kinetic energy and spatial choreography. The artworks serve as ethnographic documentation, cultural preservation, and contemporary reinterpretation, aligning with UNESCO's focus on safeguarding intangible heritage while engaging younger generations. The research contributes to visual anthropology (showing artistic production as a knowledge-generating methodology), performance studies (documenting African dance's ritual and social functions), and practice-based research (establishing visual art as both method and outcome). Recommendations target cultural institutions, educational bodies, artists, government policy, and further research into digital preservation technologies.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This dissertation explores the visualization of Ajosi and Akogo traditional dances of the Iteso people in Eastern Uganda through practice-based artistic inquiry. Uganda's rich cultural diversity includes the Iteso, known for vibrant dances that embody cultural identity and historical traditions.

The study aims to visually document the cultural heritage, movement, and material culture of Ajosi and Akogo dances, addressing a gap in visual representation amid modern transformations. By using fine art techniques, drawing, painting, and digital illustration, the research creates an archive capturing the dances' physical forms, emotional resonance, and cultural significance.

1.0.1 Overview of the Study

Chapter One establishes the study's foundation, offering background on the Iteso people, their historical context, and the importance of traditional dance in African culture. It articulates the research problem regarding the lack of visual documentation of these dances amid cultural changes and defines key concepts like "Iteso," "Traditional Dances," and "Visualization."

Chapter Two reviews existing literature on traditional African dance, visual documentation, and cultural preservation, identifying scholarly gaps and exploring concepts like embodied knowledge and cultural hybridity.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, combining ethnographic fieldwork with studio practice, detailing qualitative design and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents research findings, analyzing cultural contexts and artistic representations of the dances, linking empirical insights with existing literature.

Chapter Five synthesizes key findings, concludes, and offers recommendations for artists, cultural institutions, and policymakers while identifying areas for future research.

1.1 Background to the Study

Traditional dances around the world are vital expressions of cultural identity, reflecting community histories and values. However, globalization, urbanization, and technology have transformed their practice and preservation (UNESCO, 2003). Visual documentation has become essential for maintaining these traditions.

In the U.S., the Smithsonian Institution's Folkways Project has captured indigenous dances through photography and film since the 1960s (Seeger, 2006). Aboriginal Australians also use visual art for preserving ceremonies (Morphy, 2008), while Indonesia showcases Javanese dances through batik paintings (Soedarsono, 1984). These examples highlight the effectiveness of combining artistic documentation with community involvement.

African traditional dances serve as rich cultural texts conveying social structures and spiritual beliefs. Judith Lynne Hanna (1979) notes their religious, educational, and recreational roles. Many African nations document their dances to combat cultural erosion, such as Ghana's National Commission on Culture's work on Adowa and Kete dances (Nketia, 1965) and the documentation of Yoruba Bata and Igbo Atilogwu dances in Nigeria (Drewal, 1992).

In Uganda, over 50 ethnic communities have unique dance traditions, with this study focusing on the Iteso, the fourth-largest ethnic group, known for dances like Ajosi and Akogo that reflect their cultural heritage. Inhabiting Eastern Uganda, particularly Soroti and Kumi, their dance traditions are tied to their migration history. The Akogo Cultural Festival in Soroti showcases the region's diverse Teso groups and the need to document these dances.

Traditional music and dance for the Iteso are integral to communal life, marking life transitions, celebrating agricultural cycles, facilitating courtship, and maintaining spiritual connections. Their musical tradition features varied instruments like drums, thumb pianos, and flutes, creating rich, communal performances. Understanding Ajosi and Akogo requires recognizing their evolution through changing social contexts.

Historically, these dances served communal functions and integrated influences from neighboring groups. Colonialism disrupted participation, while modernization and global media now challenge youth involvement, creating knowledge gaps across generations. Cultural revival movements post-independence emphasized traditional dances as national heritage, but political instability weakened supportive social systems.

To address limited documentation, the need for artistic visualization arises, moving beyond photos and videos to capture the dances' meanings and contexts. Elders possess essential knowledge about the costumes and instruments, but their insights risk disappearing without proper preservation.

Artistic visualization can document and interpret these dances, translating embodied movement into two-dimensional forms through various artistic methods. This study investigates how artistic visualization can preserve cultural knowledge and communicate the meanings of Iteso traditional dances, contributing to both fine art scholarship and cultural heritage preservation.

1.2 Problem Statement

The Iteso traditional dances, Ajosi and Akogo, face a serious documentation gap that threatens the survival of embodied cultural knowledge. Although the Iteso are among Uganda's largest ethnic groups, these dances remain largely absent from academic literature and visual art documentation, unlike other well-studied communities such as the Baganda or Acholi (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005). Existing photos and videos merely capture isolated moments without explaining cultural meanings, movement, or symbolic adornments (Salongo, 2011; Okiror, 2021).

This problem is urgent as elderly custodians, key sources of historical and cultural insight, are aging without their knowledge being systematically recorded. Younger Iteso increasingly adopt urban and globalized lifestyles, widening intergenerational knowledge gaps (Salongo, 2011). Historical disruptions, from missionary influence to modern stage adaptations, have further altered these dances, yet such changes remain poorly documented.

A major methodological gap is the lack of **artistic visual illustration**, which can interpret and preserve intangible heritage more effectively than photography (Pink, 2013; Sullivan, 2005). Without this research, Ajosi and Akogo risk becoming decontextualized performances lacking

cultural meaning. This study addresses that risk by producing visual documentation aligned with UNESCO's (2003) call for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

1.3 General Objective

To investigate the cultural heritage, socially embedded meanings, and embodied attributes of Ajosi and Akogo dances and translate these findings into artistic visual imagery for cultural preservation.

1.4 Specific Objectives

- I. To examine the cultural heritage, purpose, and social significance associated with the Ajosi and Akogo dances within the Iteso community.
- II. To analyze the culturally informed movement, symbolic adornments, and material properties that characterize the Ajosi and Akogo dances
- III. To develop artistic visual imagery that interprets and documents the cultural meanings, movement patterns, and adornments of Ajosi and Akogo dances through traditional and digital art techniques.

1.5 Research Question

- I. What cultural heritage, functions, and meanings define the purpose and significance of the Ajosi and Akogo dances?
- II. What culturally informed movement vocabularies, symbolic adornments, and material properties characterize the Ajosi and Akogo dances?
- III. How can artistic visual imagery be developed to interpret and document the cultural meanings, movements, and adornments of Ajosi and Akogo dances?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study supports the preservation and appreciation of the Ajosi and Akogo dances of the Teso region, offering academic, cultural, and artistic value. It contributes to cultural heritage promotion, which aligns with national policies such as the Uganda National Culture Policy (2006), which emphasizes safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The study enriches cultural scholarship by highlighting traditional dance as a pillar of Iteso identity and encouraging discourse on its relevance. For artists, it provides insights into traditional movements and adornments, promoting

cultural authenticity. Through visual documentation, it enhances public appreciation while bridging tradition and modernity, ensuring these dances remain visible, valued, and accessible for future generations.

1.7. Justification

The following are the justifications for the study:

i. Preservation of cultural heritage:

Ajosi and Akogo are forms of intangible cultural heritage that embody the values, history, and identity of the Iteso people. Visualizing them through artistic practices contributes to preserving the dances in ways that are accessible, engaging, and educational.

ii. Cultural revitalization and education:

As younger generations increasingly engage with global cultures through digital media, there is a risk of cultural alienation. This study produces artistic visual materials that can be used in cultural education and awareness programs.

iii. Visual arts documentation:

Traditional documentation methods (textual, oral, and audio-visual) do not always fully convey the aesthetic, emotional, and symbolic depth of dance. AVI offers an alternative and complementary mode of documentation that can capture gesture, form, rhythm, and costume in evocative and interpretive ways.

iv. Contribution to artistic and academic discourse:

This research contributes to the growth of academic discourse in the fields of visual arts. The study explores how traditional African dances can be interpreted and archived through creative practice. It also expands the role of the artist from just being a creator to that of a cultural documentarian.

v. Empowerment of local communities:

Data was collected through engagement with communities from Teso region. This process promoted community ownership of the process and created opportunities for local talent to participate in heritage documentation. Knowledge from the universities was empowering communities of practice.

1.8 Scope of the Study

1.8.1 Content Scope

The study concentrated on the cultural dances of the Iteso people, with a primary focus on the Ajosi and Akogo dances, as these are the most prominent and widely recognized in the region. However, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural context, purpose, and significance of traditional dances among the Iteso, other dance forms such as *Ekuma*, *Kiryakiryra*, *Akisuku*, *Etida*, and *Ekata/Ebuda* were also briefly referenced and visually depicted. This broader inclusion allowed for a richer appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of Iteso traditional dance practices.

1.8.2 Geographical Scope

The specific geographic region under consideration included areas where the Iteso people, who still practice these traditional dances, are predominantly found. The geographical boundaries thus include Amuria, Soroti, Pallisa, Ngora, Kumi, and Katakwi in eastern Uganda. Fieldwork was conducted in various communities and places where music festivals occurred within this region to gather firsthand information through observations.

1.8.3 Time scope

The time scope of the study was between 2023 and 2024, which took 18 months, allowing sufficient time for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Fieldwork, interviews, observations, and documentation of performances were carried out during this time frame.

1.8.4 Artistic Scope

The study explored different methods of visualizing these traditional dances through media such as drawings, digital painting illustrations, photography, videography, and other visual arts. This multidisciplinary approach was necessary because certain cultural aspects related to the study objectives, such as movement, symbolism, and atmosphere, could not be fully captured using only one medium. The aim was to document, educate, and preserve the essence of Iteso cultural dances more holistically.

1.8.5 Temporal Scope

The study covered contemporary and historical aspects of Iteso dances, examining how they evolved and how modern influences affected their performance and cultural relevance.

1.8.6 Theoretical Framework

1.8.6.0 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This research is underpinned by three interconnected theoretical frameworks that justify the necessity of visualizing Iteso traditional dances and establish their contribution to fine art scholarship and cultural preservation discourse:

UNESCO's 2003 Convention recognizes traditional dance as vital intangible heritage, requiring active documentation and transmission for cultural continuity. Preservation is not about freezing culture, but documenting living, evolving practices. This study examines how Ajosi and Akogo dances have adapted from pre-colonial times through colonial and missionary influences to modern urbanization and commodification. Cultural change is a negotiation, where communities selectively retain, adapt, and transform practices, revealing both persistent elements and transformations in response to social change.

Visual Anthropology and Embodied Knowledge

Cultural knowledge about dance is embodied, rooted in bodily practices, sensory experiences, and performance, not just texts. Artistic visualization offers unique insights, representing movement, gesture, and aesthetics in ways that complement written ethnography. By engaging in repeated observation and sketching, the artist-researcher develops an embodied understanding, with artworks serving as visual arguments about cultural significance.

Arts-Based Research and Visual Knowledge Production

Arts-based research treats artistic processes as legitimate inquiry, generating insights beyond conventional methods. Artistic visualization involves interpretive choices that foreground culturally significant elements, such as adornments, spatial dynamics, and emotional expression. Studio artworks are primary research outputs, embodying and communicating cultural knowledge, and contributing to both fine art scholarship and heritage research.

Key Terms

Traditional Dances: Culturally-rooted performances unique to the Iteso, like Akogo and Ajosi , are performed at community events.

Visualizing: Creative interpretation of dances through drawings, paintings, or videography to preserve and share cultural knowledge.

Iteso Cultural Dances: Expressive forms embodying collective memory and customs, passed down through generations.

Artistic Creativity: Innovative use of art to communicate and celebrate Iteso dance practices.

Cultural Significance: The meaning and importance of dances in fostering shared identity and continuity.

Visual Artistic Imagery Documentation: Methodical recording of dance elements for education and archiving.

Cultural Heritage Preservation: Active efforts to safeguard dance through community engagement, education, and visual archiving.

Ritualistic Elements: Sacred aspects of dance, such as drumming, attire, and spiritual gestures.

Cultural Identity: Sense of belonging expressed through dance, reinforcing community beliefs and history.

Symbolism: Use of gestures, movements, and costumes to convey deeper meanings and narratives.

Costume Design: Traditional clothing reflecting historical context and aesthetic values.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter explores scholarly perspectives on African traditional dance, intangible heritage preservation, and visual art documentation. Drawing from performance studies, anthropology, and visual arts, the review frames traditional dance's relevance within Iteso cultural context, focusing on Ajosi and Akogo dances. A recurring theme is insufficient representation of smaller ethnic groups, highlighting the need for culturally specific research like this study.

2.1 The Cultural Heritage, Purpose and Significance of Dance in African Communities

2.1.1 Traditional African Dance as Cultural Heritage

Traditional dance in Africa transcends entertainment; it constitutes a living expression of history, values, and identity. According to UNESCO (2003), intangible cultural heritage includes practices and expressions that communities recognize as central to their cultural fabric. Traditional African dances serve as vital vessels for shared memory, social structure, and spiritual belief systems (Hanna, 1979; Nketia, 1974).

Researchers like Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2005) have examined Ugandan dance forms as reflections of societal order, gender roles, and belief systems, affirming their value as oral texts embedded in performance. However, scholarly attention to Iteso dance traditions remains limited. Literature focuses disproportionately on groups such as Baganda, Banyankole, or Acholi (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005; Kiguli & Bukenya, 2011), creating an imbalance in Uganda's cultural narrative. This gap underlines the importance of regional case studies, especially those applying visual art to portray and preserve overlooked traditions.

In many African societies, dance cannot be separated from daily life, it integrates into rituals, religious practice, storytelling, and community functions (Hanna, 1987; Kaeppler, 2001). For the Iteso, Ajosi, and Akogo are integral to communal events: weddings, funerals, initiation ceremonies, and harvest festivals. These performances transmit key values, including togetherness, resilience, and mutual respect. As Okpewho, Davies, and Mazrui (1999) note, traditional dances function as cultural texts communicating belief systems, ethics, and worldviews.

2.1.2 Ritual and Communal Role

Traditional African dance often serves a multidimensional purpose—spiritual, educational, social, and therapeutic. Understanding the motivations behind specific dance forms helps contextualize their relevance in community life. One vivid example is the *Gelede* ritual of the Yoruba people, which blends spirituality, public performance, and social commentary. Mbiti (1991) emphasizes that African spirituality is deeply embodied in music and dance, which function as tools for connecting with the spirit world, honoring ancestors, and celebrating life’s transitions.

Among the Iteso, the *Ajosi* dance is closely associated with mourning rituals and is often performed during funerals. This dance serves as both a public expression of grief and a symbolic gesture of hope, marking the continuity of life even amid loss (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1.2). Similar sentiments are echoed by scholars such as Tara (2021) and Peggy (n.d.), who stress that dance is a way of preserving and expressing a community’s cultural voice. In the Iteso context, such performances are not isolated displays; they are part of a broader spiritual and communal experience. Comparative studies, including those by Picton (n.d.), show that in many African traditions, dance is a conduit for spiritual energy, deeply intertwined with the everyday life and identity of the community.



Figure 1: Spiritual dance to honor ancestors, Peggy,(2021) Yoruba dance in Nigeria in honor of the god Shango. Photo retrieved from Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/orisha>.

Omuya (2019) highlights the dynamic and inclusive nature of Ekiryakirya, a traditional performance that fosters communal involvement across generations, reflecting the spiritual and

social roles of dance in African communities (Peggy & Picton, n.d.). Ekiryakirya utilizes body paint, intricate costumes, and rhythmic movements to connect participants with ancestral and spiritual realms, resembling Nigeria's Ajun dance and demonstrating shared artistic languages across Africa (see Figures 5 and 55).

In examining the Iteso people, this study posits that the visual and performative elements of Ajosi and Akogo carry spiritual significance, symbolizing values like respect for ancestors, fertility, communal healing, and the cycle of life. While Ajosi features slower, processional movements for mourning, Akogo's lively rhythms focus on courtship, both deeply rooted in tradition and identity.

The dances are crucial for ancestral reverence and social cohesion, serving as conduits for memory and spiritual continuity. Although some scholars acknowledge the emotional aspects of traditional African dances, the therapeutic potential of Ajosi and Akogo has been largely overlooked. This research suggests they may offer emotional relief and connection to heritage, akin to the healing properties of Bori cult dances among the Hausa.

By placing Ajosi and Akogo within the context of African traditional dance, the study emphasizes their cultural uniqueness while recognizing common themes like ancestor worship and communal healing. It calls for deeper engagement with these living traditions and warns against overgeneralizing African dance, urging recognition of the distinct meanings and contexts that define each form.



Figure 2: Cultural dance in Honor of the gods, Peggy. (2021), Ajun Kpa dance, [Photograph]. Image retrieved from [https://www.britannica.com/art/African dance](https://www.britannica.com/art/African%20dance)

The photograph shows women in Nigeria performing the Ajun Kpa dance, a ritual aimed at driving away evil spirits. The Yoruba Ajun dance, like the Iteso dances Ajosi , Ekiryakirya, and Etida, addresses issues like hysterical disorders through spirit-cleansing rituals and utilizes symbolic elements such as animal skins and beads to connect with ancestral spirits (Peggy, n.d.).

Female spirit mediums from the Kalabari community use dance and song for healing, emphasizing the spiritual and therapeutic significance of traditional African dances (Peggy, n.d.). Research highlights the rich cultural dimensions of these dances, with rituals focused on spirit exorcism and symbolic adornments that reflect ancestral ties.

Chinazor (2023) points out that traditional dances in Nigeria serve as a means of expression and community values, conveying themes of triumph and love. Snyder (2021) notes their role in marking significant life transitions and maintaining cultural traditions, often incorporating drums and vocal performances.

The similarities between Yoruba and Iteso dances are notable. The Ajosi dance, like the Ajun, uses animal skins and beads to reinforce its ceremonial nature. The Etida dance includes a segment called "Abwanger," which honors ancestors and involves dancers embodying these spirits during the performance.



Figure 3: Etida dancers getting possessed by the ancestral spirits during the dance performance, photo by researcher.

Traditional dances, like the Ajun of Nigeria, reveal a significant spiritual connection among dancers, as noted by Snyder (2021). The Iteso dance, Ekiryakirya, featuring gourds, ash, and blood, adds depth to Iteso cultural expression, paralleling the diversity found in Nigerian traditions (Chinazor, 2023). Just like the ajun kpa dance refer to figuree 2

Despite the rich symbolism, modern influences challenge traditional practices. The recent demolition of Iteso cultural sites by a church overseer, Gen. Peter Elwelu, who labeled them as "evil darkness," highlights this conflict (Emwamu, 2024). Such developments, alongside the rise of Christianity, threaten the survival of these traditions, similar to the dilution observed in the Baganda Amaggunju dance due to cultural shifts and intermarriages (Godfrey, 2020).

Comprehensive documentation of dances like Ajosi , Akogo, Ekiryakirya, and Etida is essential to ensure their preservation, as emphasized by Snyder (2021) and Okirior (2023). The origins of Ajosi in celebratory gatherings, as described by Owaraaga (2020), are increasingly at risk as younger generations drift away from these customs.



Figure 4: Ajosi dance, Photo by Agama

The photograph depicts women in Nigeria performing the Ajun Kpa dance, a ritual aimed at driving away evil spirits. This Yoruba dance, similar to Iteso dances like Ajosi and Ekiryakirya, serves to address issues such as hysterical disorders through spirit-cleansing rituals and utilizes symbolic elements, such as animal skins and beads, to connect with ancestral spirits (Peggy, n.d.).

Female spirit mediums in the Kalabari community use dance and song for healing, underscoring the spiritual and therapeutic significance of traditional African dances (Peggy, n.d.). Chinazor (2023) highlights these dances as expressions of community values with themes of triumph and love, while Snyder (2021) notes their role in marking significant life events and preserving culture.

The connection between Yoruba and Iteso dances is evident, with both using animal skins and beads in ceremonies. Traditional dances like the Ajun reveal a strong spiritual bond among dancers (Snyder, 2021). Modern influences threaten the survival of these traditions, as seen with the demolition of Iteso cultural sites by church overseers, reflecting a broader cultural conflict (Emwamu, 2024).

Documenting dances such as Ajosi, Akogo, Ekiryakirya, and Etida is crucial for preservation (Snyder, 2021; Okirior, 2023). The Etida dance's diminishing significance highlights the risk of

cultural disintegration (Summer, 2007). This study aims to creatively document these practices, evoking their spiritual essence.

Ajosi and Akogo, like Yoruba Ajun and Kalabari dances, go beyond ritual performances, acting as reflections of community values and identity (Afriklens, 2024). However, cultural assimilation and modern pressures challenge these traditions, calling for preservation efforts that acknowledge local realities (Okiror, 2021). Revitalizing these practices is essential to maintain the Iteso identity in today's world.

2.1.3 Aesthetic and Political Function of Dance

Dance plays a crucial role in many cultures, particularly in Africa, where it conveys powerful messages beyond mere entertainment. According to Kasfir (1999), performances can serve as resistance and cultural celebration. In Uganda, traditional dances like Ajosi and Akogo symbolize ethnic pride and cultural renewal, as seen in the Akogo cultural festival. The attire, instruments, and movements are key to preserving the Iteso identity.

Aesthetically, Ajosi and Akogo showcase rich symbolism and beauty, blending movement, music, and storytelling. Ajosi emphasizes community strength through powerful foot-stomps, while Akogo invites introspection with delicate motions and soothing sounds. These dances facilitate emotional connections, transcending entertainment as highlighted by Schechner (2002).

Politically, Ajosi and Akogo communicate vital cultural and socio-political ideas, acting as forms of resistance during Uganda's colonial rule, affirming Iteso identity (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005). Akogo performances often address contemporary social issues, serving as figureforms for community dialogue (Barber, 1997). National cultural events featuring these dances enhance the Iteso's visibility and advocacy for representation (Appiah, 1992; Asante, 2003).

The combination of aesthetic appeal and political significance in Ajosi and Akogo demonstrates how their beauty is linked to cultural and political expressions. They embody the Iteso's legacy

and negotiate moral and political dynamics, making them symbols of tradition and change in contemporary Uganda.

Traditional African dance reflects the values and beliefs of its culture. This section examines how cultural symbols, rhythm, social roles, and spirituality shape movements in dances like Ajosi and Akogo.

2.2.1 Cultural Symbolism in African Dance

African dances are deeply rooted in cultural symbolism, using movement to convey moral lessons, historical stories, and social values. As noted by Peggy (n.d.), these dances include symbolic gestures that express messages such as blessings and respect for ancestors. This is exemplified in Iteso dances like Ajosi and Akogo, where costumes like Kitambi, kitenge with animal print, and rhythmic patterns closely align with Iteso spiritual beliefs.

Still, Akas (2020) explains that it's becoming harder to understand the true meaning behind these dance gestures because much of the cultural knowledge is fading, and there isn't enough proper documentation. Today, many Ajosi and Akogo performances have shifted away from their original meaning, making it difficult for people, particularly the younger generation, to fully appreciate their value. It shows just how important it is to keep these dances alive and true to their origins, so future generations can understand and value where they come from.

Rhythm plays a pivotal role in African dance, guiding movement and storytelling. According to Kubik (2010), rhythms, often produced by drums, are vital for signaling social and spiritual events. In Iteso dances, instruments like the Akogo and small drums Itelelei create complex polyrhythms that reflect the intricacies of life.

This is supported by Demostop (2023), who observes that preserving traditional rhythms is increasingly difficult due to the loss of indigenous instruments and the rising preference for modern music styles. The younger generation now prefers international music and their dance styles. Therefore, this study supports the idea of including traditional rhythms in community

festivals and school programs, to help people, especially the youth, understand their role in Iteso history and spirituality.

2.2.2 Dance as a Social Function and Cultural Cohesion

African Traditional dances play a crucial role in fostering social unity and reinforcing community values. For instance, the Yoruba Egungun masquerade celebrates community identity and honors ancestors, while the Ajosi and Akogo dances unite the Iteso people during festivals and significant life events, as seen at the Akogo festival established in 2018.

However, modernization has profoundly impacted traditional African dance forms, including the Iteso dances, leading to alterations due to urbanization and global cultural exchanges. Nevertheless, community-led initiatives, such as local dance troupes and cultural festivals, are actively working to preserve these traditions.

Participating in this study and witnessing the community's efforts to maintain their culture has been inspiring. The ongoing practice of dances like Ajosi and Akogo demonstrates the resilience of Iteso cultural identity. This research aims to support preservation efforts through artistic representations and partnerships with cultural institutions in the Teso region, highlighting that Ajosi and Akogo are vibrant expressions of identity deserving recognition and support.

2.2.3 Dance Informed by Spiritual Beliefs

In many African communities, dance acts as a powerful medium connecting the physical and spiritual realms. Victor and Edith Turner (1969) describe *communitas* with spiritual dances, such as the *Zar* in North Africa, as deeply rooted in mystical and ancestral communication. This spiritual dimension is similarly evident in the *Ajosi and Akogo* dances of the *Iteso*, which incorporate rituals designed to connect performers with ancestral spirits and deities (*refer to chapter 4 and chapter 2 figuree 2*). These practices help to sustain spiritual beliefs while reinforcing collective identity.

This study also aligns with Kealiinohomoku's (2001) view that traditional dances function as living repositories of cultural history and spiritual life. However, external influences and shifting cultural dynamics present a growing threat to the continuity of these spiritual traditions among the *Iteso*. Thus, documenting these dances visually through various Artistic forms and involving

community members in their preservation is essential to safeguard their sacred and cultural significance.

The importance of protecting such heritage is echoed in UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which advocates for the preservation of practices like traditional music and dance. For instance, Simmaly discusses the *Ingoma Ya Mapiko*, a dance recognized globally for its elaborate costumes and energetic choreography. Nevertheless, less widely known, the *Ajosi* dance of the *Iteso* shares similarities with *Mapiko* in terms of costume and spatial arrangement. Yet, unlike *Mapiko*, *Ajosi* has not achieved the same level of international recognition and risks being overshadowed or forgotten without dedicated preservation efforts, thus making this study vital.



Figure 5: Ajosi dance of Iteso with the adornments similar to the Ingoma Ya Mapiko dance, photo by researcher



Figure 6: Adornments and Headgears (UNESCO n.d.) Ingoma Ya Mapiko, dance, 2018, [photograph], Retrieved from [https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/ingoma ya mapiko 01996](https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/ingoma%20ya%20mapiko%2001996).

The Iteso dancers of Ajosi and the Ingoma Ya Mapiko highlight the importance of adornments, particularly the symbolic ostrich feather headgear, which signifies status among the Samburu and Maasai communities in Kenya. The ‘Olwaru’ headdress, worn by warriors who have slain a lion, holds great cultural value during rituals, especially among the Samburu, where young men wear them after circumcision while isolated from women until marriage. This is similar to the Rendile community, where women craft these headdresses for significant ceremonies, and Kadodi dancers in Uganda who wear headgear during their circumcision rites.

In contrast, the Turkana people prefer subtle decorations; men use natural soil for hair dye, while women adorn themselves with jewelry symbolizing social status. Despite both Ajosi and Akogo showcasing vibrant costumes, Ajosi has not achieved the same recognition as Mapiko (UNESCO, 2003).

These dances face challenges from modernization and the decline of traditional rituals, risking their vibrancy. Owaraga (n.d.) notes that while Ajosi maintains a lively rivalry through foot

stamping, younger generations often feel disconnected from its cultural significance. Similarly, the courtship elements of Akogo are at risk as societal priorities shift.

This research underscores the need to recognize and preserve cultural expressions like Ajosi and Akogo, which are vital to Iteso identity and heritage. Documenting these dances aligns with UNESCO's (2003) call for cultural preservation and forms a basis for revitalization. Efforts such as artistic archiving, educational initiatives, and inclusion in cultural festivals can help restore Ajosi's status as a cultural emblem.

Ultimately, African dances serve as living records of history and values, providing insights into societal structures. The rhythmic stamping of Ajosi and the flirtatious gestures of Akogo reveal profound cultural meanings. With globalization posing significant challenges to these traditions, intentional efforts are needed to safeguard them. By fostering intergenerational connections, we can sustain the Iteso cultural identity. This research advocates for further academic inquiry and community involvement to preserve these dances as vital components of Iteso heritage for future generations.

2.3 Documenting Traditional Dances Visually

The visual documentation of traditional dances through illustrations, photographs, videos, and digital art is essential for preserving their cultural richness. Christidis (2018) emphasizes that these dances can be transmitted to future generations using diverse methods, including visual imagery and text documentation.

Artists like Henri Matisse (1909) and Edgar Degas (1871–1874) have shown how drawing and painting can capture the cultural and emotional nuances of dance, thereby helping to preserve and celebrate its heritage. For instance, the painting by Edgar Degas reflects the traditional dance of his era, demonstrating the profound connection between art and cultural expression.

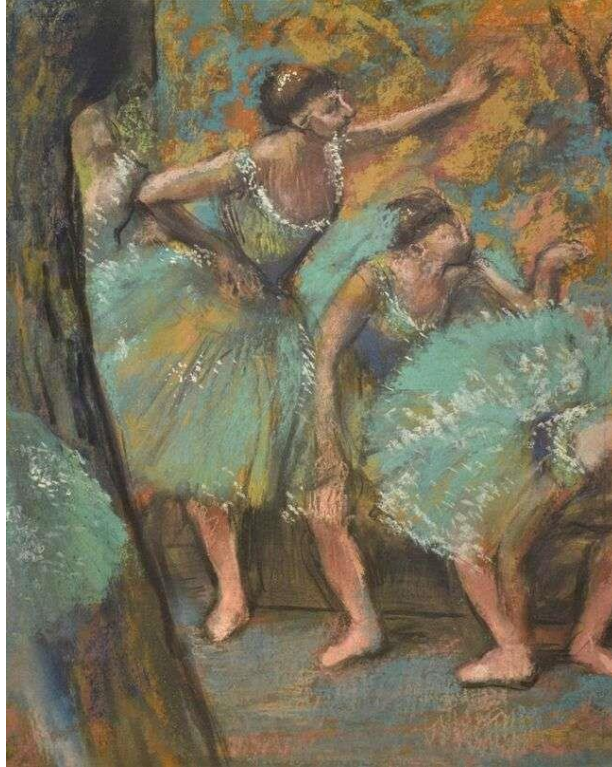


Figure 7: *The Dancers*, painting inspired by dance, Edgar Degas (1834–1917), 1898 [Photograph]. Photograph by Light Bender. Retrieved from Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

Visual documentation holds great promise but also faces significant challenges. Kico Iris (2018) points out that while digital technologies can effectively document motion, they struggle to capture the sensitive aspects of cultural heritage, such as music and performance environments. For instance, documenting dances like Ajosi or Akogo may reference movements but fails to convey the ritual significance of costumes and props.

Muhamand (2023) suggests that modern technologies like annotations and augmented reality can enhance viewers' understanding, while Grammalidis (2018) argues that while text and video share knowledge, they lack the immersive depth of audiovisual formats. Combining these documentation forms leads to a richer understanding of the dances.

As a researcher, I found these limitations substantial but manageable through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates traditional and digital art. Whether capturing the rapid stamping of Ajosi or the craftsmanship of Akogo's headdress, high-definition graphics helped convey deeper

narratives. This research aimed to blend dynamic illustrations with digital resources to celebrate the activism and cultural vibrancy of Iteso dances.

Visual anthropology reinforces this integrated thinking. Fadwa (2004) asserts that media like photography and film provide a deeper understanding of the social meanings behind rituals and dances. Events like the Akogo Festival (2018) demonstrate how visual media can showcase the richness of Iteso dance costumes and choreography.

The research emphasizes the importance of documenting and celebrating native traditional dances as invaluable cultural expressions. By highlighting both tangible aspects like costumes and intangible elements like rhythm, it argues that audiovisual documentation not only preserves cultural treasures but also rejuvenates them, aligning with UNESCO's mission to preserve intangible cultural heritage (2003). The influence of dance on artistic expression is exemplified in figures 10, 11 & 13, showcasing how artists have captured these dances over generations.



Figure 8: *Spiritual dance*, Matisse, H. (1909). Dance performance (I) [Benson] Fifth Wave Production Retrieved from <https://eu.blochworld.com>

Matisse's oil paintings of minuet dancers from 1909 closely echo Iteso dances, especially the Ajosi & Akogo styles a woman dances with bare breasts to entice men. Like Matisse's works, Iteso dances take root in a celebration of joy and community, their exuberant figures communicating freedom and vitality. Iteso dances are culturally important for their function in rituals and festivals

to appease ancestors and strengthen community ties. This common focus on kineticism and cultural representation binds the two art forms closely, highlighting their roles in raising up the majesty of life and community.



Figure 9: Courtship Dance by William Blake (c. 1786) features Oberon, Titania, and Puck amidst fairies dancing.

This watercolor and graphite piece, measuring 47.5 × 67.5 cm, is housed in Tate Britain, London. Blake's captivating illustration of fairies dancing in moonlight draws inspiration from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, evoking an enchanting atmosphere that mirrors the Iteso courtship dance known as Akogo. In Akogo, movement and rhythm, often highlighted by dancers' exposed chests, play a crucial role in attracting potential partners. Much like the fairies in Blake's artwork, Akogo dancers convey cultural messages through their expressive movements, blending aesthetic appeal with social significance.

Henri Matisse's *Dance (I)* (1909) also showcases the vibrant energy of dance, employing bold colors and simplified shapes to depict communal joy. The works of both Matisse and the Iteso dancers highlight dance as a powerful form of emotional expression and connection. In essence, Blake's mystical fairies resonate harmoniously with the ritualistic nature of Akogo, illustrating

how dance serves as a universal language of desire, courtship, and celebration across diverse cultures (Kaepler, 2000).



Figure 10: The dance costumes, Edgar Degas (1871- 1874), Ballet Class – Retrieved from eu.blochworld.com.

Through drumming, the figure becomes infused with the vibrant energy of Iteso dances like Akogo and Ajosi , serving as a dynamic retelling of cultural inheritance. The research team aims to evoke cultural identity and connect younger generations to their heritage through these artistic expressions. Much like Degas’s The Ballet Class, which captured movement and interaction, portrayals of Iteso dances draw audiences into the rich textures of culture and community, inspiring pride and strengthening ties to Iteso ancestry.

By centering artistry and storytelling in these dances, the work deepens the understanding of their cultural significance. Showcasing Akogo and Ajosi cultivates cultural pride, affirming these dances as vital expressions of identity. This project bridges Iteso history with the present, creating space for renewed celebration of cultural practice.

However, critiques like those from BLOCH Dance EU (2018) highlight the challenges of translating traditional dance into art. While works such as Dance (I) or The Ballet Class evoke

strong emotion, they may overlook the detailed nuances preserved in digital motion or archival recordings, potentially missing the spiritual depth found in Degas's work.

Both artistic interpretation and contemporary documentation are crucial for preserving culture and history. Visualizing the stories of Akogo and Ajosi in creative forms protects their legacy and educates future generations. Whether through animation that highlights Ajosi's communal rhythm or Akogo's gestures, bringing these dances to life enhances their relevance.

Currently, she is developing a collaborative heritage documentation framework that balances artistic interpretation with modern tools to record traditional dances. This dual approach aims to protect the physical and cultural legacy of these national treasures. Ajosi and Akogo are living elements of Iteso heritage that require multidimensional preservation efforts, a conversation advanced by contemporary artists like Xavier Ifee Francis, featured in the *Different but One* exhibition at Makerere University.



Figure 11: Amagunju the Baganda Royal Dance, oil painting by Xavier Ifee Francis, 2024. Photo by researcher.

In a painting of the Amagunju dance, Xavier Ifee Francis's lush painting recreates the regal splendor of Baganda culture, showing how dance can be a powerful form of cultural expression and identity. The traditional garments, Enaaga for men and kitambi for women, reflect similar symbols found in Iteso dances like Ajosi, where costumes and choreography pay homage to communal leaders and social structure.

While Ajosi holds significant cultural importance for the Iteso people, it often lacks the representation in visual arts that dances such as the Amagunju and Bakisimba enjoy. Artists like David Kigozi and Muwonge Kyazze have brought these other dances to the forefront (2024; see related figures). Displays such as Francis's art highlight the capacity of visual media to preserve and elevate these traditions, providing emotional depth regarding their ceremonial importance (Kaepler, 2000).

By exploring the aesthetic connections between Ajosi and Amagunju, this study reveals shared cultural themes in African dance. Here, movement, attire, and leadership converge, fostering social unity and expressing pride in cultural heritage.



Figure 12: Bakisimba Dance by Kigozi (2024), showcased in Two Men's Show. Image published by The Independent Magazine. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.ug/tag/dance/>

Kigozi's work, Bakisimba Dance, as described by Muwanguzi (2024), reveals how Ugandan artists express cultural identity through the combination of traditional and modern aesthetics in their work. Works like "Born in Africa" and "Bakisimba Dance" highlight music and dance as essential aspects of Ugandan culture, celebrating both heritage and modern expression.

In contrast to "Bakisimba," which has been widely recognized, Iteso dances such as Ajosi and Akogo remain less visible. Each of these dances has its unique characteristics—Ajosi is known for its communal rhythm and participatory spirit, while Akogo incorporates stylized gestures and attire that relate to courtship, differing from the more regal representations found in Baganda traditions.

While some critics argue that visual art cannot match the precision of photography or video in capturing dynamic movements, like the Kadodi dance of the Bagisu during the Imbalu ceremony, artistic imagery often conveys an emotional depth and cultural subtleties that technical media may overlook (Kaepler, 2000). This emotional connection underscores art's role as a vital medium for preserving intangible cultural heritage.

Just as artists like Kigozi and Kyazze (2024) are showing, visual artistic works can really transcend generations and cultures. This research supports the preservation and greater visibility of Iteso dances such as Ajosi and Akogo, raising awareness about the beauty of these traditions and culture and the need for preservation through innovative artistic approaches and creative archiving methods. Public installations and sculptures could help further embed these dances within the national visual narrative.



Figure 13: Sculpture of the Mbalu dance of the Bagishu, Photo by researcher 2023 at Mbale city.

The Mbalu dance is a testament to the incredible artistry of the clan sculptors, whose artistic work was able to reproduce and wrap itself around the quick and agile movements and poses of the dancers into the art itself. Through stereoviews, paintings, and prints these multidimensional works arrived in households across North America, awaking imaginations to the beauty of customary

attire and the symbolism sewn into each dance ceremony. These stunning artistic creations offer powerful profoundly transformative experiences, drawing audiences into intimate encounters with the rich cultural traditions that feed these dances. The artistic vision and immersive quality of these installations tap into the joyous energy that comes with large scale, collective dance parties.

Representations of Iteso dances seem a bit thin by contrast to other cultural expressions, such as the Kadodi Ibalu dances of the Bagishu or the Amagunjju dances among central/western tribes. Stephen G.'s doctoral research emphasizes the Arakaraka and Embola dances from the Acholi community, as documented by Stephen Gwoktcho.

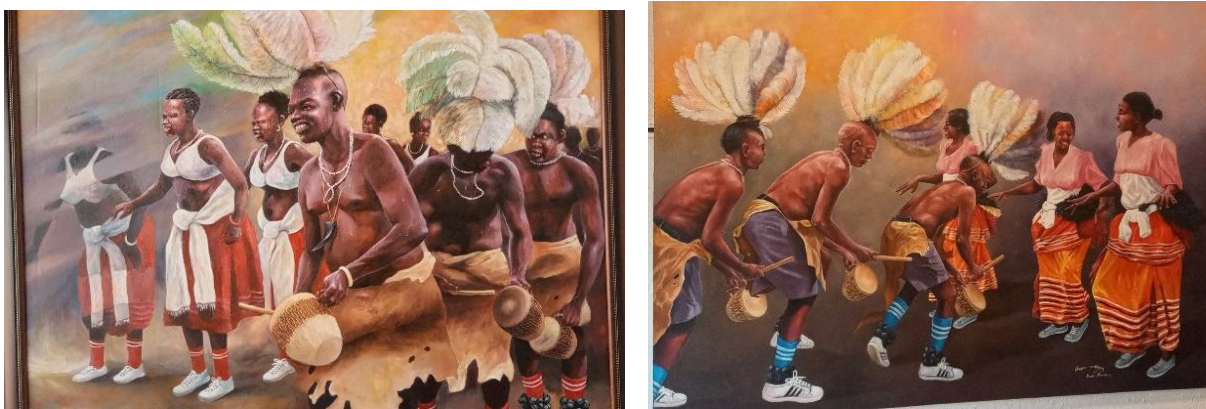


Figure 14: Embola and Arakaraka dances by Stephen G 2022 featured in his PHD exhibition.

Credit Photo by researcher

Through unearthing traditional Acholi dances and creatively embedding them within urban contexts, citizens continue reinforcing culture's role as a tool for celebration and preservation of cultural heritage, lending city dwellers an opportunity to reconnect with their roots. Ongoing attempts to popularize Iteso social dances like Akogo or Ajosi in urban contexts are few, leading to their glaring underrepresentation.

Speaking on the tour of Akogo Festival in November 2023, Edulu Emmanuel from the Iteso culture community, highlighted the critical importance of photographers and their work in protecting culture and traditions. He was adamant that photography was critical in capturing spontaneous moments and intricate body movement that could really be key to an Iteso dance in order to preserve the essence of the dance for years to come (Edulu, 2023, Personal communication).

It is true that depending on photography as a sole medium of documentation can never truly communicate the full range of symbolic meanings that these performances hold. As powerful as this approach is in providing striking visual documentation, it too often ignores the storylines that make these dances culturally meaningful. This indicates a necessity for other approaches, including narrative storytelling and visual artistic imagery (VAI), to better support the long-term cultural preservation of the Iteso dance's cultural importance.



Figure 15: Depicts animals in a cohesive population structure. Area girl during the fashion show on the final day Traditional maker's market & a demonstration of traditional weaving to create the bus shelter.

Fine art has played an essential role in deepening the preservation of Iteso cultural heritage by focusing on symbols and themes that photos or video recording could overlook. For example, creative depictions of granaries and adere (drinking calabashes for Ajono) can highlight their importance (Okiror, 2020/2021). Nevertheless, the diminishing practice of traditional dances like the Akogo dance presents a challenge in making them culturally and educationally relevant, although they do speak to issues of loss of granaries and climate change sustainability (Okiror, 2020/2021).

The Teso Vibes team's engagement with the cultural and spiritual significance of Iteso dances, as seen in Ajosi (Teso Vibes, 2024), has gone on to deepen historians' and anthropologists'

understanding. Increasingly immersive artistic mediums, such as murals in public spaces including the Soroti Museum, offer a longer-term method to safeguard and communicate cultural narratives (Okiror, 2020/2021).

The proliferation of digital and mixed media art present new opportunities for cultural preservation. Celebratory events like the EYOTAB graduation ceremony and the Akogo Festival illustrate how arts, both old and newly created, can bridge the past to today, still captivating and inviting exploration by present-day audiences (Akogo Festival, 2023).



Figure 16: Display of mixed media art alongside traditional performance.

The lovers of traditional performance and contemporary art are prominently reflected in the Iteso culture, resulting in hybrid creations that blend rich historical traditions with modern elements, exemplified by aesthetic enhancements like white bollards and decorative balloons. As the cultural landscape evolves rapidly, preserving these artistic forms in tangible ways is becoming increasingly challenging. Okiror (2020/2021) highlights that the shift to new media technologies by African artists brings forth discussions about more advanced documentation strategies.

This policy shift poses significant risks; while the push for accessibility and innovation is commendable, it often undermines the authenticity and substance of traditional art forms, threatening to dilute their rich cultural heritage. Beyond their playful aspects, these artistic

expressions encompass profound themes of identity, community, and human emotion, facilitating conversations and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

By utilizing various art forms, including painting, sculpture, photography, and digital media, this ongoing project seeks to protect the Iteso culture, weaving its legacy into vibrant and engaging threads to ensure its survival and dynamism for the future.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological framework through which these traditional dances of Ajosi and Akogo among the Iteso people in Eastern Uganda were explored and visually illustrated. The study took a qualitative, ethnographic and arts-based approach, integrating fieldwork, participatory interviewing and visual art practice. This chapter details the research design, study area, population of interest, sampling methods, data collection process, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations of the research study.

3.1 Research Design and Methodological Framework"

By making a decision to pursue an interdisciplinary qualitative ethnographic research design, the study was able to provide for greater in-depth immersion with Iteso communities and more dynamic participant observation of traditional dance practice in cultural contexts. Ethnography is particularly suitable for studying lived experiences, beliefs, and rituals, as it allows the researcher to interpret meaning within specific cultural heritages (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This was then juxtaposed with arts-based research (ABR), a methodological framework that employs creative practices such as drawing and painting as exploratory and expressive tools (Leavy, 2009). This dual process-oriented design allowed the study not only to preserve the dances but to translate and visualize them artistically, sculpting creators' reminders from ephemeral cultural practices.

3.1.1 Justification for Research Design Selection

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** grounded in ethnographic and arts-based research (ABR) methodologies. The qualitative paradigm was selected for its capacity to explore complex cultural phenomena through in-depth, context-sensitive inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Unlike quantitative approaches that prioritize measurability and generalizability, qualitative research emphasizes understanding lived experiences, meanings, and cultural practices from participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethnography was chosen as the primary methodological approach because it enables prolonged engagement with cultural communities, facilitating deep understanding of rituals, beliefs, and embodied practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Pink, 2013). Ethnographic methods are particularly appropriate for documenting intangible cultural heritage such as traditional dance, where meanings are embedded in performance contexts, social relationships, and sensory experiences (Sklar, 2001). As Conquergood (1991) argues, performance ethnography recognizes that cultural knowledge is not merely spoken but enacted, requiring researchers to witness and participate in cultural events to grasp their full significance.

Arts-based research (ABR) complements ethnography by positioning creative practice as a legitimate mode of inquiry and knowledge production (Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2008). ABR acknowledges that artistic processes—drawing, painting, visual interpretation—can generate insights that exceed the limitations of verbal or textual representation (Sullivan, 2005). For this study, visual art serves both as a method of data collection (through observational sketching) and as a form of research output that communicates embodied, affective dimensions of dance (Barone & Eisner, 2012). This dual function aligns with what Gray and Malins (2004) term "practice-based research," where creative work itself constitutes a scholarly contribution.

The integration of ethnography and ABR creates a **methodological synergy** particularly suited to documenting Iteso dances. Ethnographic fieldwork provides cultural context, historical narratives, and performer perspectives, while arts-based methods translate kinetic, spatial, and emotional qualities of dance into visual form. This complementarity addresses the challenge that dance, as an ephemeral embodied practice, resists comprehensive capture through any single documentation method (Pakes, 2003).

3.2 Study Area

This research was conducted in the Soroti district, although participants came from all over the Teso sub-region, including Ngora, Amuria, Kumi, Katakwi, and Pallisa. Soroti acted as a meeting ground where different groups could come together for festival preparation and Atekere reunions.



Figure 17: Map of Uganda showing regions and a magnified view of the Teso subregion.

The small map was redrawn by the author based on UBOS data (2022), while the magnified Teso map was illustrated by the researcher in January 2024.

These districts were chosen for their cultural diversity and their robust, school-based, traditional dance culture. Within this identified specific study area, the researcher concentrated specifically on the following groups: Chemuka Akogo group, Nyero Rock Paintings (Kumi district), Akogo group, Kobuin Fire Fire (Ngora District), Modukul Akogo group, Kamurojo Group, Orungo Akogo group, Awoja Akogo group, Okalebwo Chelekura (Pallisa District, Agule).

These teams were selected because they have an active membership that continues to practice the dances under the study, elders too, tools, and they are passionate and always dance to Ajosi and Akogo ceremonial, festival, cultural, and community events. The prevalence of veteran dancers, culture bearers, DJs & elders with direct lineage and experience of traditional practice, their communities became ripe targets and host environments for both data collection and cultural immersion. That rich social fabric of the sub-region provided alternative contexts in which the

dances were performed, which afforded a wealth of rich data and comparatively rich context, as elaborated in Chapter Four.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised individuals and groups with intimate knowledge or involvement in the Ajosi and Akogo dances. These included traditional dancers, elders, cultural leaders, local artists, radio presenters, and art educators. In particular, elders and cultural custodians provided oral histories and explanations of the dances’ origins, meanings, and evolution. Dancers within the traditional cultural groups and local artists contributed insights into performance techniques, choreography, and musical accompaniment. Radio presenters gave insight into the promotion. Additionally, art educators provided perspectives on visual representation and the role of art in cultural preservation.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Participant Selection Documentation

3.4.1 Detailed Selection Criteria and Documentation

Participant selection followed explicit criteria to ensure the collection of rich information while respecting cultural sensitivity. The documentation below details the selection process:

Table 1: Selection Criteria Matrix:

Participant Category	Primary Selection Criteria	Secondary Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Elders (EI)	Age 60+ Experience in pre-1980s dance. Community knowledge holder	Willingness to be recorded. Fluency in Ateso	Cognitive impairment. Unwillingness to discuss spiritual aspects
Cultural Leaders (CL)	-Formal position in Atekere -Community authority	Experience with tradition-modernity tensions	Recent appointment (< 2 years)
Akogo Group Leaders (AGL)	-Lead performance group.	Intergenerational teaching experience	Groups performing solely for tourists

	- Minimum 5 years of leadership.		
Group Performers (AGP)	-Active for 2+ years - Ages 18-65	Mixed gender and backgrounds	Children under 18
Radio Presenters (RP)	Reach the Teso sub-region -Regular cultural programming	Personal performance experience	Presenters focused exclusively on contemporary music

Recruitment Process Documentation:

Phase 1: Community Entry (January 2023), Introductions via letters to Atekere Council and at the Atekere Reunion Festival; verbal permission documented.

Phase 2: Elder Identification (February-March 2023), List of elders provided by a Cultural Leader; final selection based on geographic distribution, gender balance, and specialized knowledge.

Phase 3: Performance Group Recruitment (May-October 2023)- Moved with Akogo festival organizers to rehearsals, attending across 15 Akogo groups; selected 8 groups representing diverse characteristics.

Phase 4: Snowball Sampling for Specialized Knowledge (September-October 2023), Participants recommended two radio presenters and a master instrument maker, enhancing the knowledge base.

3.4.2 Evidence of Selection Process: Sample Recruitment Documentation

Example 1: Elder Recruitment

Field Note Excerpt - February 15, 2023

Location: Ngora District, Kobuin Village

Potential Participant: Elder identified as an "Ekiryakirya knowledge keeper"

Preliminary visit with clarity on research purpose led to initial reluctance.

Follow-up visit resulted in agreement with conditions: no photographing sacred objects, approved transcripts, and compensation of 20,000 UGX per session.

3.4.3 Sampling Techniques

This study used a combined sampling strategy to engage participants knowledgeable about Ajosi and Akogo dances. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015) was the primary method, targeting 32 participants from an initial pool of 50, selected until data saturation was reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Selection criteria focused on three areas: depth of knowledge from years of practice or cultural leadership, active involvement in performance preservation, and the ability to articulate cultural insights. Snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008) further aided recruitment, especially for accessing elders in remote areas with crucial oral traditions (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

The final sample included 5 Elders (3 male, 2 female), 2 Cultural Leaders, 8 Akogo Group Leaders, 15 Active Dance Practitioners, and 2 Radio Presenters, reflecting maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015). This diverse composition across age, gender, and cultural roles prioritized depth of understanding over statistical representation (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Mason, 2010). The gender balance among elders provided insights into both Ajosi and Akogo dance forms, while radio presenters highlighted contemporary cultural transmission. Table 2 outlines the rationale for each participant category and data collection methods.

Table 2: showing the sample size, category rationale and the data collection methods used

Category	Number	Gender	Rationale for Selection	Data Collection Method(s)
Elders (EI)	5	3 Male, 2 Female	Custodians of oral traditions, origins, and spiritual meanings of dances; gender balance ensured both Ajosi (male) and Akogo (female) perspectives.	In-depth interviews; participant observation
Cultural Leaders (CL)	2	1 Male, 1 Female	Represent Atekere organization; provide knowledge on preservation protocols and governance of ceremonies.	In-depth interviews

Akogo Group Leaders (AGL)	8	Mixed	Leaders of distinct cultural groups; ensure regional variations and group-specific knowledge.	In-depth interviews; participant observation
Group Performers (AGP)	15	Mixed	Active practitioners; provide embodied knowledge of movements, costumes, and gender-specific roles.	Focus Group Discussions (FGD); participant observation; visual documentation
Radio Presenters (RP)	2	2 Male	Offer insights on cultural promotion, transmission, and contemporary relevance.	In-depth interviews

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data were analyzed using thematic and visual content analysis. Transcribed interviews and field notes were read repeatedly to identify recurring themes: identity, continuity, ritual, gender roles, and cultural transformation. Codes were grouped into categories to develop interpretive insights. Observational data were reviewed alongside photographic and video evidence to understand choreography, music-dance relationships, and contextual meanings.

Visual analysis examined artworks and recordings for symbolism, motif recurrence, emotional tone, and compositional structure. A reflective sketch journal documented decisions, inspirations, and connections to cultural data. The artworks became both outputs and sites of analysis, embodying the researcher's evolving understanding.

3.5.1 Interview Protocol and Audio Recording Procedures

Recording Equipment and Procedures: All in-depth interviews were audio-recorded using a Samsung smartphone with a voice recorder app and an external lapel microphone for better audio quality outdoors.

Recording Protocols:

- Verbal consent for recording obtained before each session (documented)
- Test recording conducted for audio quality
- Participants informed of their right to request the recorder be turned off at any time
- Backup device ran simultaneously to prevent data loss
- Recordings transferred to a password-protected laptop within 24 hours
- Original files backed up to an encrypted external drive

Interview Guide Development: Semi-structured guides were created for each participant category (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Interview Conduct:

- Language: Primarily Ateso (researcher's native), some English with younger participants
- Location: Participant's choice (homes, community centers, group rehearsal spaces)
- Duration: 45-90 minutes (longer for elders; group leaders typically 60 minutes)
- Setting: Private or semi-private for comfort discussing sensitive information
- Interpreter: Used for 2 elderly participants speaking the Kumam dialect, briefed on confidentiality

Field Notes: Observational notes complemented audio recordings, detailing non-verbal communication, contextual information, and the researcher's reflexive notes.

Example Field Note Entry: Interview EI-2, February 22, 2023, Location: Participant's home, Muria District, Duration: 87 minutes, Language: Ateso, Audio files: EI-2_Interview_022223_Part1.wav, Part2.wav

Contextual Notes: The interview was conducted under a mango tree in the participant's compound with family members present but maintaining distance. The participant, in traditional attire (otorobo), became emotional discussing the loss of dance knowledge among youth and demonstrated Akogo movements despite being 73 years old. The recorder was paused for about 10 minutes to discuss spiritual aspects off-record.

Key Observations:

Emphasized material changes (bark cloth- printed fabric) but insisted movement vocabulary was unchanged

Distinguished between "core" elements (cannot change) vs. "surface" elements (may adapt)

Repeatedly referenced "the old people" who taught her - a chain of transmission across 4+ generations

Expressed worry: "When we old ones die, who will correct the young people?"

Emerging Themes:

Preservation anxiety (consistent across elders)

Core-periphery distinction (potential analytical framework)

Intergenerational knowledge transmission concerns

Follow-up Questions for Next Interview:

Ask about specific criteria for determining "core" vs. "surface" elements

Explore more about spiritual/ancestral dimensions (with appropriate cultural protocols)

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion Protocol

FGDs with performance group members followed structured protocols: 8-15 participants per group, mixed-gender when culturally appropriate, ages 18-65, minimum 2 years dance experience.

Audio and video recorded with collective consent; research assistant documented group dynamics; seating arranged in circles to capture all voices. (Sample questions: Appendix 2)

Example FGD Documentation (AGP-Chemuka, April 3, 2023): Location: Busitema University ground, Pallisa; 12 participants (7 women, 5 men; ages 22-58); Duration: 95 minutes

Group Dynamics: Elder male (58) initially dominated; researcher intervention prompted younger female (24) to share contrasting perspectives on costume adaptations. Group demonstrated collaborative knowledge construction with members correcting/supplementing accounts. Lively debate about synthetic fabrics yielded no consensus, indicating internal diversity.

Key Findings: Disagreements on costume materials (3: must remain natural; 4: synthetic acceptable if symbolism maintained; 5: contextual/undecided) and performance venues (traditional outdoor vs. modern stages). Consensus: core movement vocabulary must be preserved; frustration with lack of government support; emphasis on intergenerational teaching. Artifacts collected: traditional Akogo instruments photographed; performance flyers (2018-2023) documenting costume evolution.

3.5.3 Participant Observation Documentation

Systematic observation at: (1) Akogo Festival (September 28-30, 2023, Soroti), (2) Atekere Reunion Festival (January 28, 2024), (3) MDD Festival (March 8-10, 2024), (4) weekly rehearsals with 3 groups (April-August 2023).

Protocol: Arrived early for pre-performance documentation; observed performers and audiences; captured field notes on spatial arrangements, costumes, audience reactions, improvisation vs. choreography; video/photo documentation with permissions; post-performance informal interviews documented in field notes.

Example (Akogo Festival, September 29, 2023): Nyero Rock Paintings Akogo Group performed 3:45-4:30 PM before ~800 attendees. Pre-performance warm-up showed elder leader (AGL-3) demonstrating foot positioning to younger members. Performance sequence: slow, grounded opening movements (ancestral reverence theme); transition to faster courtship section (4:05 PM) with enthusiastic audience response; tail dance finale (4:25-4:30 PM) with two standout performers. Costumes mixed bark cloth and printed kitenge; all wore esimana (ankle bells); ostrich feather headgear size correlated with status/age. Youth recorded on smartphones, demonstrating digital-age engagement. Elder leader noted: "stage performance different from village performance, adjusted movements for visibility," confirming contextual adaptation theme from interviews.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed qualitative research protocols (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016), employing systematic procedures to transform raw data into thematic findings.

3.6.1 Audio Recording Transcription

All 36 audio files (32 interviews + 4 FGDs; ~42 hours) transcribed verbatim by researcher (native Ateso speaker) using Express Scribe software (September-November 2023). Transcription followed simplified Jefferson notation: [pause] = silence >2 seconds; [laughs] = paralinguistic; [demonstrates] = non-verbal; [inaudible] = unclear speech; [Ateso term] = untranslatable cultural terms retained.

Quality Control: All transcripts reviewed twice; 10% independently verified by Ateso-speaking research assistant; discrepancies resolved through consensus; 12 participants reviewed transcripts, approved with minor clarifications (sample: Section 4.2.4).

Translation: Ateso interviews transcribed in original language; key excerpts translated to English focusing on meaning; cultural terms retained in Ateso with bracketed explanations; back-translation performed on 20% to ensure preservation.

3.6.2 Coding and Thematic Analysis

Followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach:

Phase 1 (Familiarization): Read all transcripts twice; reviewed field notes chronologically/thematically; examined visual documentation; generated analytical memos noting patterns.

Phase 2 (Initial Coding): Using NVivo 12, applied descriptive codes identifying dance-specific information (choreography, costumes, instruments), cultural meanings (symbolism, spiritual dimensions, gender roles), social functions (courtship, ritual, politics), change narratives, and preservation concerns. (See Section 4.1.1b and Appendix 6 for code development leading to themes)

3.6.4 Analytical Memos and Reflexivity

Maintained memos documenting: (1) observational reactions, (2) methodological decisions/challenges, (3) theoretical connections, (4) researcher positionality/bias.

Example (August 12, 2023): AGL-5 challenged: "You come, write papers, get degrees. What do we get?" This confronted my positionality—though Iteso and fluent in Ateso, I occupy different social position (urban, university). Current reciprocity: printed photographs, visual archives, community exhibitions, local employment. Decision: Co-author popular article with AGL-5 for local newspaper, combining his knowledge with my research skills (see Section 4.1.1).

3.6.5 Validation Strategies

Participant Review: 12 participants reviewed transcripts, provided minor clarifications.

Community Presentations: Three presentations (Soroti, Kumi, Ngora, January 2024) in Ateso with visual aids; community members confirmed findings resonated; Q&A provided additional insights.

Expert Review: Two cultural leaders reviewed draft Chapter 4, confirmed cultural accuracy, requested terminology clarifications, and endorsed publication use.

3.6.6 Establishing Trustworthiness

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985): **Credibility:** Prolonged engagement (18 months); triangulation (multiple data sources, methods, participant categories); member checking; peer debriefing.

Transferability: Thick description providing detailed context; purposive sampling prioritizing depth.

Dependability: Comprehensive audit trail (field notes, memos); transparent methodology enabling replication.

Confirmability: Ongoing reflexivity examining researcher influence; triangulation reducing bias; raw data preservation (recordings, transcripts, field notes) for potential external audit.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Research adhered to indigenous methodologies (Smith, 2012; Chilisa, 2012) and visual anthropology guidelines (Pink, 2013). Ethical approval was obtained from the Makerere University Research Ethics Committee, along with formal permissions from Atekere leaders and district cultural officers.

Informed consent was secured from all 32 participants using culturally appropriate methods: written forms for literate individuals and audio-recorded verbal consent for others (in English/Ateso). Participants received detailed explanations of the study and explicit withdrawal rights.

Site-specific approval was sought prior to ceremonies, and participants identified sacred elements (ancestral invocations, initiation movements, ritual objects) that were inappropriate for external dissemination, adhering to indigenous intellectual property principles (Brown, 2003; Janke, 2003). Visual documentation followed ethical protocols with signed photograph permissions. Reciprocity was prioritized through printed photographs, digital artwork copies, and three community exhibitions (Soroti, Kumi, Ngora). Transcripts used pseudonyms/category codes (EI, CL, AGL, AGP, RP) to protect identities. As an Iteso insider-researcher, ongoing consultation with the Atekere Council ensured interpretations aligned with community perspectives, mitigating risks of cultural appropriation (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

3.8 Limitations of the Study

The study area includes two language groups, Ateso and Kumam. The researcher's Ateso fluency but Kumam limitations necessitated translators, potentially affecting local expression capture. Seasonal/event-based performance nature limited witnessing diverse dances within the available time. Artistic interpretation subjectivity may reflect the researcher's stylistic biases despite cultural grounding efforts. Logistical challenges (poor road access, limited rural technological infrastructure) occasionally hindered data collection and documentation.

3.9 Mitigation of Study Limitations

Language gaps were managed through local translators and verification with cultural leaders. Limited performance access was addressed using repeat visits, participant accounts, and archival references. Artistic bias was minimized through field grounding and elder validation. Logistical constraints were handled with flexible scheduling and mixed documentation methods.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the qualitative and arts-based methodology employed to explore and visualize Ajosi and Akogo traditional dances among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. Combining ethnographic fieldwork with creative studio practices, the study documented and artistically interpreted these cultural expressions. Multiple data sources and methods integration ensured a holistic understanding of the dances as both cultural heritage and artistic phenomena. Chapter Four presents' findings derived from this methodology, reflecting on implications for cultural preservation and visual art practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings, guided by research objectives and interpreted through performance theory, embodiment, and visual culture. Ajosi and Akogo are explored as culturally rich social performances, with meanings that extend beyond entertainment into ritual, identity, and collective memory. As noted by Schechner (2002) and Turner (1982), such dances serve as “restored behaviors” that reconnect communities to shared cultural roots.

The study adopts a practice-based analytical approach informed by Visual Culture Theory and Remix Theory. Drawing on Gray & Malins (2004) and Sullivan (2005), practice-based research treats artistic creation as knowledge production, while Navas (2012) emphasizes remixing to generate new meanings from traditional forms. Visual representation plays a crucial role in capturing embodied knowledge that may not be fully conveyed through text alone (Pink, 2013; Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

Findings are presented thematically, with Ajosi and Akogo analyzed separately for clarity. Digital painting, pencil drawing, and illustration were chosen to highlight different cultural dimensions: digital work emphasizes movement and color symbolism, pencil drawings focus on adornment and detail, and illustrations convey narrative and community context (see Section 4.5). These media also support Objective 3, which aims to document performance using traditional drawing techniques.

4.0.1 Definition of Traditional Drawings in This Study

“Traditional drawings” refer to hand-rendered visual documentation created through field sketching and studio-based interpretation. Following Grimshaw & Ravetz (2005) and Taussig (2011), drawing functions both as observation and analysis.

Traditional drawings include:

Observational sketches capturing gestures, movement, and spatial arrangements.

Studio interpretive drawings refined from field notes, memory, and photographs.

Hand-drawn compositions using graphite, charcoal, and ink to retain tactile immediacy.

This definition situates the research within arts-based methodologies and clarifies that “traditional” refers to technique rather than indigenous visual style. These drawings provided analytic insight into embodied performance elements that text alone could not convey (Kara, 2015).

4.1 Analysis of the Cultural Heritage, Purpose, and Significance of Ajosi and Akogo

4.1.1 Cultural Heritage of the Dances

(a) Historical Background of Akogo

The Akogo dance, named after the thumb piano central to Iteso musical identity, holds significant cultural importance, as emphasized by respondent CL. Elders have differing views on its origins—some consider it indigenous, while others link it to Congolese workers at Kakira Sugar Works in the 1930s. Respondents RP and QR noted that Iteso youth adopted the instrument after observing Congolese performances, highlighting broader cultural exchanges in colonial East Africa (Ogot, 1999; Tosh, 1978). This reflects Nketia’s (1974) concept of “selective incorporation,” where foreign elements are adapted when culturally compatible.

The Iteso embraced the Akogo for its similarity to existing lamellophones, rhythmic compatibility, and suitability for courtship-related performance. Returning workers introduced the dance in village contexts, where competitions helped young men attract partners perhaps it’s the reason as to why it was adopted only Iteso community.



Figure 18: Akogo Dance Performers, Both Men and Women Dancing to the Tunes of Akogo (2023). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

The digital painting uses warm tones to convey the energy of Akogo performances. The composition reflects mixed-gender participation and the courtship function highlighted in interviews. Blurred motion effects visually communicate rhythmic movement, capturing elements that written descriptions alone cannot. The artwork also evokes Turner’s (1969) concept of *communitas*, showing dance as a unifying social act.

(b) Historical Background of Ajosi

Oral histories trace Ajosi to gatherings organized by the Emorimor, where evening ajono drinking served social, judicial, and political purposes. Respondents from the cultural council explained that singing, stamping, and the introduction of a stick gradually formed the basis of the dance. This evolution reflects “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), where spontaneous practices become formalized over time.



Figure 19: The Iteso Taking Ajono at the Chief's Place in the Evening (2023). Medium: Graphite drawing on paper. Size: A1. Artist: Agama Peter.

This graphite drawing emphasizes spatial hierarchy within the chief’s homestead, with the chief centrally positioned. Women, though placed peripherally, are shown as essential facilitators of the ritual—echoing field data and scholarship on gendered labor (Obbo, 1980; Tamale, 2020). The medium foregrounds material culture details such as the ajono pot and drinking straws, which grounded the analysis of Ajosi ’s origins.



Figure 20: Depiction of Women Joining the Dance and Choosing the Best Dancer (2024).
Medium: charcoal drawing on manila. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2025.

Respondent CL described how men competed through stamping and singing, while women participated as both dancers and evaluators. The artwork's composition, men in expressive poses and women forming a semi-circle, reflects these social dynamics. This aligns with Hanna's (1988) argument on dance as a site of gender negotiation. The hand-drawn medium preserves the observational quality of fieldwork.



Figure 21: Depiction of Men Taking Ajono After Dancing Ajosi While the Best Dancer Continues (2024). Medium: Charcoal on paper. Size: A1. Artist: Agama Peter.

This drawing illustrates the transition from group participation to individual performance, capturing the “flow state” of the best dancer (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Charcoal enhances the dramatic contrasts typical of evening performances, while the circular formation reflects ethnographic descriptions of African performance spaces (Drewal, 1992). Details like stools, clothing, and ajono vessels support contextual accuracy, addressing concerns about situating artworks within cultural settings. Contemporary observations confirm the ongoing connection between music, dance, and ajono gatherings, highlighting Ajosi as a meaningful cultural practice.

(c) Cultural Heritage Significance of Akogo and Ajosi

This analysis positions Akogo and Ajosi as vital expressions of Iteso cultural heritage, described as “heritage productions” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) that communities actively maintain as markers of collective identity. Both dances reflect Iteso social life, including identity formation, courtship, leadership, gender relations, and communal rhythm.

Their significance goes beyond aesthetic value; following Geertz’s (1973) idea of culture as “webs of significance,” Akogo and Ajosi serve as symbolic systems that transmit cultural knowledge

across generations. Their persistence amid colonial disruption, religious shifts, and modernization underscores their role in Iteso cultural resilience and adaptability (Ranger, 1975).

(b) Cultural Heritage of the Akogo and Ajosi Dance

This qualitative study examines the Akogo courtship dance and the Ajosi royal dance as central expressions of Iteso cultural heritage. Both serve as what Buckland (2006) describes as “embodied archives”, living repositories of cultural knowledge transmitted through performance rather than written text. Their preservation aligns with UNESCO’s (2003) definition of intangible cultural heritage, comprising practices and expressions that communities regard as part of their legacy.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, and triangulated for credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The responses below highlight participants’ perspectives on the cultural significance of the dances.

Participant Response Summary

Dance	EI	CL	AGL	QR	RP	Total Sampled	Total Positive Reactions
Akogo	5	2	8	15	2	32/45	32
Ajosi	4	1	7	14	1	27/45	27

Cultural Heritage of Akogo

Out of 45 participants, 32 (71%) recognized Akogo’s cultural importance, showing strong community awareness of its heritage value. EI2 emphasized the dance’s lively movements and its link to *esupane* (courtship), reflecting broader East African youth performance traditions where rhythm and physical display foster attraction (Ranger, 1975; Coplan, 1994).

From the sampled Coding of (EI-3, March 5, 2023) as transcribed below: *"When I was young, maybe 15 years [1967], Akogo was performed only in villages, in the evening, after harvest. Young men would come from neighboring villages to compete for our girls. The elders would sit and judge who danced best. That person would get respect, maybe even a wife. Now [pause] now they perform on stages, in the daytime, for tourists who take photographs. It's different. I don't know if the young people understand what it meant before."*

EI3 highlighted how elders historically organized courtship gatherings, underscoring Akogo's regulatory role in guiding youthful sexuality, consistent with Hanna's (1988) observation that African courtship dances help channel social and moral expectations. Similarly, CL noted that public performance, mutual attraction, and later family evaluation formed a structured pathway to marriage, echoing East African marriage customs (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1950). Dance mastery was therefore a valued form of cultural capital within the community (Bourdieu, 1986).

CL also distinguished between traditional Akogo gatherings and *Akware kiya*, the chaotic, trans-night dances, contrasting them with modern youth groups like Owokiwoki. This reflects Mbembe's (2001) notion of ongoing negotiation between inherited cultural norms and modern pressures. Despite disruptions during Idi Amin's regime (Kasozi, 1994), Akogo has remained a unifying tradition among the Iteso.

AGL raised concerns about commercialization and modifications for tourism, warning that such changes may dilute the dance's authenticity, highlighting the Ndere cultural dance troupes who dilute other tribal cultural dances to fit their commercialized interest. This aligns with heritage debates on preserving cultural meaning amid adaptation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Smith, 2006) and the broader postcolonial negotiation between authenticity and hybridity (Bhabha, 1994).

Participant observation at the Akogo Festival (28–30 September 2023, Soroti District) demonstrated the dance's continued role in courtship and intergenerational unity. With over 500 attendees from various Iteso sub-regions, the festival affirmed Akogo's resilience and enduring cultural significance despite modernization.



Figure 22: *Idegudegu, Abyeese, and Aduuma Akogo of Different Sizes* (2023). Medium: photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter.

With reference to Figure 21, the above photograph documents the complete instrumental ensemble used in Akogo performances, featuring the *idegudegu* (large lamellophone), *abyeese* (medium lamellophone), and *aduuma Akogo* (small lamellophones) of varying sizes. Each instrument plays a unique melodic and rhythmic role, creating the polyrhythmic texture characteristic of Iteso music (Nketia, 1974).

The inclusion of multiple instrument sizes reflects what ethnomusicologist Chernoff (1979) identifies as the African musical principle of "interlocking parts," where individual instruments contribute discrete rhythmic patterns that combine to create complex collective soundscapes. Respondent RP emphasized that "each instrument plays a unique role, creating a harmonious rhythm that performers actively respond to," illustrating the call-and-response relationship between musicians and dancers fundamental to African performance aesthetics (Agawu, 2003).

The visual documentation of these instruments serves a critical preservation function. As noted by Barz and Cooley (2008), organological research, the study of musical instruments, provides material evidence of cultural practices that might otherwise be lost as oral traditions decline. The varying sizes of the lamellophones visible in this photograph demonstrate craft specialization and the sophisticated musical knowledge required to construct instruments that produce precise tonal relationships.



Figure 23: Nyero Akogo Dancers on Stage Performing During the Akogo Festival (2023).
Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm. Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

the above photograph documents the Nyero cultural group performing at the 2023 Akogo Festival, illustrating the contemporary staging of Akogo. The formal stage setup, with amplified sound and structured lighting, marks a shift from the traditional outdoor evening performances described by elder informants. This reflects what Erlmann (1996) calls the “theatricalization” of African performance, where cultural practices move into formalized, commodified venues.

The performers’ attire combines traditional elements (bark cloth, beads) with modern adaptations (printed fabrics, contemporary jewelry), echoing Jules-Rosette’s (1984) argument on the negotiation between authenticity and modern aesthetics. Despite the staged environment, the dancers maintain traditional male–female spatial positioning, indicating cultural continuity.

However, the festival context raises questions central to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998): Does staging preserve or transform cultural meaning? Field observations suggest that although choreographic patterns remain intact, festival performances lose the spontaneous courtship functions described by elders, shifting Akogo from a lived social practice to a curated cultural display.



Figure 24: *Akogo Instrumentalist (2023)*. Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

This photograph documents an Akogo instrumentalist in performance, capturing the embodied technique of lamellophone playing. The player's hand position, body posture, and facial concentration visible in the image reflect what Sudnow (1978) describes as "ways of the hand", the tacit, embodied knowledge that cannot be fully articulated verbally but is transmitted through demonstration and practice.

The photograph serves as ethnographic evidence of performance technique, documenting details that written descriptions alone cannot capture: finger positioning, instrument holding angle, and the performer's physical engagement with the musical process. As argued by Frishkopf (2001), visual documentation of musical performance captures the "kinaesthetic dimension" of music-making, the physical movements and bodily knowledge that constitute musical competence.

The solo instrumentalist depicted here also highlights the specialized role of musicians within Akogo performances. While the dance is communal and participatory, musical accompaniment requires trained expertise, creating a division of labor between performers and accompanists. This specialization reflects broader patterns in African musical organization documented by Nketia (1974), where communal participation coexists with recognized virtuosity.



Figure 25: Adult Boys and Girls in the Stage of Courtship Performing Akogo (2023).
Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm. Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

The above photograph shows young adults engaged in a courtship performance, illustrating Akogo's ongoing role in youth socialization. The participants' estimated ages (18–25) align with traditional courtship ages noted in interviews, indicating continuity in how the dance functions across generations.

The mixed-gender spatial arrangement reflects structured interaction patterns described by respondents: young men and women dance near each other while maintaining culturally regulated distance until attraction is signaled. This demonstrates Hall's (1966) concept of *proxemics* and shows how Akogo manages youthful sexuality within accepted social boundaries.

The dress and setting reveal modern influences alongside traditional elements, highlighting the negotiation between heritage and contemporary identity common among Iteso youth, an interplay Mbembe (2001) links to evolving African youth cultures.

Artistic Representation Through Painting and Digital Drawing

The artworks that follow offer interpretive representations of Akogo performance developed through practice-based research. Unlike the documentary photographs, these creative works foreground symbolic meanings, compositional structures, and cultural dynamics identified during fieldwork. As Sullivan (2005) notes, artistic production generates unique forms of knowledge that emerge through the act of making.



Figure 26: Akogo/Akebe Dance, Performed During Evening Hours (2023–2024). Medium: Acrylic on canvas. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024. Analysis of Figure 28

This painting captures the evening atmosphere of Akogo performances, traditionally held after agricultural work. The contrast between light and dark tones evokes the transitional dusk period noted by respondents, reflecting the culturally significant liminal time when social and courtship activities occur (Turner, 1969).

The warm ochres and deep blues recreate the golden-hour lighting observed during fieldwork. The use of chiaroscuro directs focus to the central dancers while implying the presence of a surrounding community. This approach applies classical techniques to African subject matter, aligning with the “remix” method discussed in Section 4.0 (Navas, 2012).

Layered brushstrokes add texture and motion, allowing the artwork to convey rhythmic energy beyond the static limits of photography. The softened edges around limbs visually suggest sustained movement, echoing Bergson’s (1911) idea of “duration.”

The composition also reflects the flow states described by performers and observers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), addressing Objective 3’s focus on capturing experiential qualities through visual means. The proximity and synchronized movement of male and female dancers portray the social choreography of courtship, supporting Hanna’s (1988) view of dance as nonverbal communication of attraction and status.

Respondent QR’s account of Congo-influenced Akogo variants provides context for the hybrid instruments and rhythms depicted, such as the *Akoomat*. This illustrates processes of cultural borrowing and indigenization, forms of transculturation (Ortiz, 1995) shaping contemporary Akogo practice.



Figure 27: Seductive Akogo Movements Demonstrated by Women towards Men (2024).
Medium: Graphite and charcoal on paper. Size: A3. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

Analysis of Figure 29

This drawing illustrates the structured courtship ritual within Akogo, highlighting women’s central role in selecting partners. Field observations show a deliberate formation: a “main girl” stands at the center while other women line up behind her, and male dancers approach in two parallel lines to display skill, strength, and attractiveness.

Graphite and charcoal were chosen to emphasize body positioning, gesture, and spatial composition. The monochrome palette focuses attention on structure and movement rather than decorative detail, aligning with the study’s aim to analyze choreographic form and social meaning.

The artwork foregrounds female gaze and evaluative gesture, visually confirming respondents’ descriptions of women’s agency in mate selection. As Nnaemeka (1998) notes, African women’s sexual autonomy is often overlooked; here, the centered female figure exercises clear decision-making power. This arrangement—men moving toward a stationary central woman—contrasts with Western conventions of male pursuit (Hanna, 1988) and reflects broader Iteso gender dynamics where women hold significant influence in courtship.

The drawing also conveys the competitive nature of male performance, where dancers must “seduce through rhythm” to stand out. This aligns loosely with theories of sexual selection (Miller, 2001), though the specific aesthetic criteria and social outcomes shown in Akogo underscore Geertz’s (1973) argument that cultural contexts fundamentally shape how such displays are performed and understood.



Figure 28: *Seduction During Akogo Dance: Male Dancers Make Advanced Moves to Seduce the Main Girl (2024).* Medium: charcoal drawings: A3. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

This mixed-media drawing illustrates the sequential courtship process central to Akogo performance. It captures the moment a male dancer steps forward to impress the central female

performer while other men wait in two orderly lines, reflecting the turn-taking structure repeatedly described by respondents.

In Iteso practice, a male dancer approaches, performs his display, and awaits the woman's response. If she shows no interest, through specific gestures, diverted gaze, or continued dancing, he retreats respectfully to the sidelines as the next dancer steps forward. This sequence continues until the female performer selects a partner based on strength, skill, and aesthetic presentation.

The combination of bold ink outlines and softer graphite shading creates a visual hierarchy: the interacting pair appears most prominent, while surrounding dancers fade into a supportive context. This mirrors phenomenological attention patterns (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), where perceptual focus aligns with the main social interaction.

The drawing highlights the gendered dimensions of performance: men employ expansive, high-energy movements, while the central woman maintains composed, evaluative gestures. This reflects broader human courtship patterns (Buss, 1989), though the specific aesthetic criteria remain culturally defined (Brown, 1991).

As noted by respondent AGL, the courtship display functions as both artistic expression and social negotiation, aligning with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of *bodily capital*. Dancing ability, physical presentation, and rhythmic prowess directly influence social status and marriageability in Iteso culture.

The selection process depicted here illustrates how Akogo balances individual choice with communal oversight: young people initiate partner selection through performance, while families later confirm unions. This reflects wider African negotiations between personal autonomy and collective authority (Gyekye, 1997).

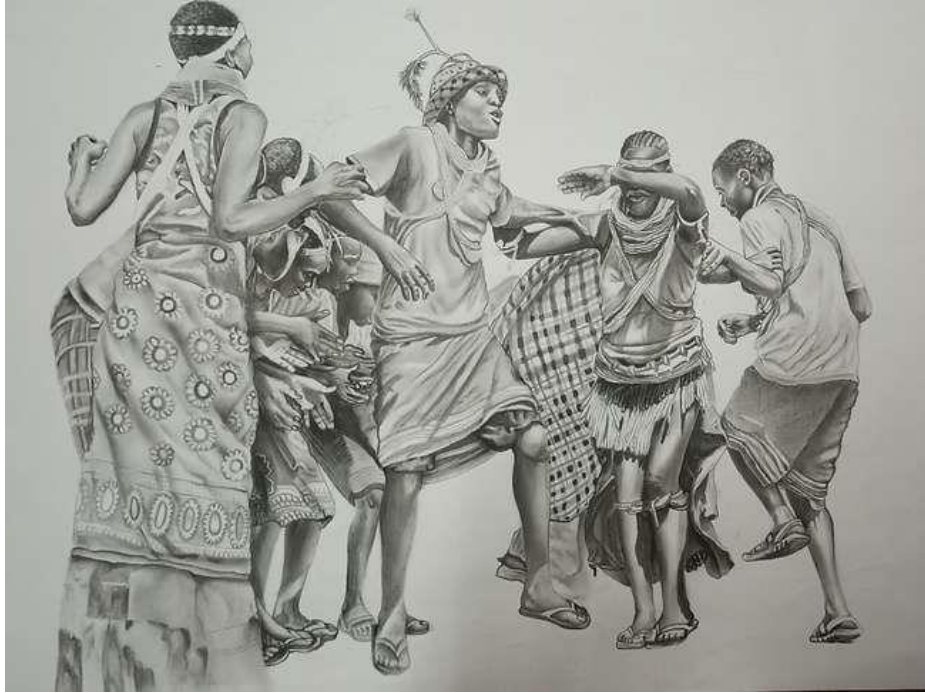


Figure 29: *The Pairing Up with a Special Admired Partner During Akogo Dance (2024).*
Medium: Colored pencil on paper. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.

This drawing illustrates the moment mutual attraction is established as dancers form pairs, transitioning from competition to collaboration. Observations noted that after selection, the dancers engaged in synchronized movements, highlighting their connection. This shift from distance to intimacy symbolizes the relationship-building aspect of Akogo.

Using colored pencils, the artist captured subtle tones and detailed fabric, with a warm palette of earth tones and vibrant colors, reflecting the joyful atmosphere described by participants. In contrast to previous black-and-white works, this use of color conveys emotional warmth and social harmony, emphasizing the affective dimensions of courtship.

The composition centers on paired figures to suggest mutual responsiveness, embodying Goffman's concept of "interaction ritual," where coordinated behaviors forge relationships. Each pair's synchronized movements serve as a metaphor for compatibility.

The artwork also highlights gestures that captivate both partners and spectators, revealing the dual audience in Iteso courtship, characterized by intimacy set against public performance, as discussed

by Parkin and Nyamwaya. Observations noted that paired dancing culminated in impressive displays, reflecting the complex social negotiation of cooperation and competition among couples.



Figure 30: *Akogo Tail Dance* (2024). Medium: Charcoal and white chalk on toned paper. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

This charcoal drawing documents the climactic "tail dance" performed by the winning couple selected through audience applause. The choice of charcoal and white chalk on mid-toned paper creates striking tonal contrasts, emphasizing the theatrical quality of this final performance segment, mirroring the heightened social attention focused on the winning couple.

The "tail dance" represents advanced and intricate movements that set the lead pair apart. The drawing's depiction of extended limbs, arched backs, and dynamic spatial positioning demonstrates virtuosity requiring years of practice (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The composition, a tightly framed pair isolated against negative space—directs all attention to the central couple, mirroring the concentrated social attention they receive during performance.

The tail dance serves multiple cultural functions: it provides public recognition and social prestige to skilled performers, converting performance competence into social capital (Bourdieu, 1986); demonstrates aesthetic ideals valued within Iteso dance culture; and reinforces courtship outcomes validated through the competitive process. This structure emphasizes the social dynamics of admiration, competition, and skill vital to Iteso courtship tradition, functioning as what Schechner (2002) terms "cultural performance", events that actively construct and maintain social structures through repeated enactment.

Cultural Heritage of Ajosi

In exploring Ajosi royal dance, 27 out of 45 participants (60%) from groups AGL, EI, RP, and QR shared insights regarding its cultural heritage, purpose, and significance. While fewer participants demonstrated detailed Ajosi knowledge compared to Akogo, respondents emphasized movements deeply rooted in tradition, indicating strong cultural transmission among those engaged with royal cultural practices.

Dance EI CL AGL QR RP Total Sampled Total Positive Reactions

Ajosi 4 1 7 14 1 27/45 27

Exchanges indicated collaborative understanding of Ajosi 's traditional significance, suggesting royal dance knowledge concentrates among cultural specialists and elders rather than distributed broadly. This reflects Ajosi 's hierarchical nature: as a royal dance historically performed at chiefly events, detailed knowledge remained confined to those with direct connections to traditional authority structures (Southall, 1953).

Respondents from AGL emphasized that "Ajosi is typically performed during royal events led by the Iteso cultural chief, known as the Emorimor." This association with paramount chiefly authority situates Ajosi within political and ritual contexts distinct from Akogo's courtship functions. African royal performances legitimize political authority, create collective memory, and establish social hierarchy through ritual enactment (Vansina, 1990).



Figure 31: Digital Painting Depicting Ajosi Dancers Performing While Presided Over by Emorimor Sipping Ajono (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

This digital painting captures a traditional Ajosi performance context: a royal gathering led by the Emorimor (paramount chief), who observes dancers while drinking ajono. His elevated central placement, surrounded by performers, visually conveys the hierarchical social structure that Ajosi both mirrors and reinforces.

The digital medium enables rich color harmonies and atmospheric depth. Warm golden tones evoke royal event prestige, while detailed renderings of regalia, architecture, and performance space provide ethnographic documentation. Visual records capture spatial and material dimensions that textual accounts cannot (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

The painting integrates key cultural elements: the Emorimor's attire and centrality, circular performance arena, ajono containers signaling ceremony, and dancers' traditional costumes and implements, reflecting visual anthropology's "observational" function (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). Positioning the Emorimor centrally echoes Geertz's (1980) "theater state" concept, where authority is enacted through spectacle. By presiding over Ajosi, the Emorimor embodies cultural custodianship and political leadership (Mbembe, 2001).

Field data indicate that while Ajosi remains vital to Iteso cultural life, its context has shifted from exclusive performances under the Emorimor to public settings such as ajono joints and political rallies, signaling democratization of formerly restricted traditions. However, some QR respondents "expressed concerns that the dance's significance may be waning," reflecting wider declines in traditional authority across postcolonial Africa (Mamdani, 1996; Ranger, 2005).



Developmental sketch



Figure 32: A Big Drum Known as Atenus, Always Drummed by a Woman While Standing, Signifying the Respect for Division of Roles and Elevated Values of Women (2024). Medium: Graphite drawing on paper. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

The drawing was developed from the 'Field Notes': "Female atenus player positioned center stage, elevated on figureform. Male itelelei players flanking, seated, lower positioning." This drawing captures a key gendered element of Ajosi performance: the *atenus* (large drum), played exclusively by a high-status woman who performs while standing. The preliminary sketches illustrate the research process through which this cultural detail was visually examined. As Ingold (2011) argues, drawing generates knowledge through sustained observational engagement. The digital illustration/drawing (Figure 31): Emphasizes the drummer's vertical posture, elevated positioning, and central placement

The drawing was developed after the Integrated Analysis: *'All sources converge: Ajosi drumming embodies complex gender relations where women occupy elevated musical-ritual roles despite marginalization in other contexts, demonstrating complementary gender systems with context-specific power inversions.'*

The composition highlights the drummer's elevated posture and central placement. Respondent RP noted that "a high-status woman performs on the *Atenus*, while a man plays the smaller *Itelelei* from a seated position on the *Edapala* stool," reflecting both women's valued roles and a defined division of labor.

This gendered arrangement, woman standing/man sitting, large drum/small drum—complicates assumptions about musical authority. While women may be marginalized in some ritual contexts, the *atenus* player holds acoustic and visual prominence, illustrating the nuanced gender relations discussed by Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997).

Detailed rendering of the drum's construction, playing technique, and stance provides organological documentation essential for cultural preservation. As Barz and Cooley (2008) warn, African musical traditions face increasing erosion; visual records help safeguard endangered performance practices.

The observation that "the player stands to signal her elevated status" reflects a system of complementary, rather than hierarchical, gender roles. This aligns with African feminist scholarship emphasizing balance and mutual respect.

Instrumentation described by CL, including *atenus*, *itelelei*, *aluti*, *ebilo*, *etuwoi*, and *ecimana*, creates the interlocking rhythmic textures characteristic of African music (Chernoff 1979; Agawu 2003). Respondent EL added that this unified sound fosters a powerful sense of belonging, exemplifying Durkheim's "collective effervescence," where coordinated performance strengthens communal identity and shared heritage.



Inspirations behind traditional painting and digital illustration



Initial Concepts sketches of Digital artwork representing the rhythmic movements of the Ajoso dance. Created using Krita



Refinement Stages, Final Adjustments Digital artwork representing the fighting scenes of Ajoso dance. Created using Krita



Development sketches



Figure 33: Explanation of the Term "Ajosi " Coming from "Ejos," Representing the Sticks Used in the Dance (2024). Medium: Ink drawing on paper. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

This developmental sketch and the oil painting on a wooden board illustrate the etymological link between “Ajosi ” and *ejos* (sticks), showing how material implements shape performance identity. By focusing on the sticks’ material properties, holding techniques, and gestural use, the drawing

offers precise ethnographic documentation. Emphasizing material culture aligns with anthropological work on the agency of objects (Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 2005).

In Ajosi , sticks are not passive props but active performance tools that shape movement, produce rhythmic sound, and carry symbolic meanings tied to authority, masculinity, and tradition. The clean ink linework provides clear documentation of stick morphology and handling. As Taussig (2011) notes, drawing can reveal details photography overlooks, encouraging close observation and analysis.

The sketch shows how sticks function as extensions of the body, amplifying gesture and adding rhythmic layers, an insight resonant with phenomenological theories of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), in which tools become integrated into the body schema.

The conclusion that “the dance and its instruments are deeply intertwined” reflects broader African performance scholarship (Nketia, 1974), where music, dance, and material objects form an integrated expressive whole, and separating them analytically risks obscuring this holistic cultural logic.



Figure 34: Digital Drawing Showcasing the Unique Role of Animal Tails in Dance (2024). Medium: Digital drawing. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

This digital drawing illustrates the symbolic role of animal tails in Ajosi performance, where they serve as communicative tools for dancers to express preference and initiate social connections.

The flowing movement and textures of the tails are emphasized, reflecting the Iteso identity as traditional cattle pastoralists and linking performance to their historical and economic life.

The digital medium captures the dynamic nature of movement, translating embodied experiences into a static image, which resonates with discussions in visual anthropology about representing temporal practices. Incorporating animal materials reflects Lévi-Strauss's concept of “totemic” symbolism, where tails signify social values related to wealth and spirituality in Iteso culture.

Moreover, the finding that tails facilitate partner selection introduces a courtship aspect to Ajosi , blurring the lines between Ajosi as “royal” and Akogo as “courtship,” highlighting the multivocal nature of ritual symbols discussed by Turner



Figure 35: Depiction of Ajosi Being Performed on Stage (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm) Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

This digital painting documents contemporary Ajosi performances in formal stage settings, illustrating a shift from dances performed solely under the cultural chief to more public presentations. The raised figureform and audience separation signal significant changes in social function and performance context. The composition highlights the atenus drummer, emphasizing the organized instrumentation of Ajosi and the high-status role of women playing the large drum, with lighting directing attention to her cultural authority.

This staged context reflects broader processes of cultural “theatricalization” (Erlmann, 1996), relocating traditions from specific social settings to formal venues. While such transformations increase visibility, they risk detaching practices from their original meanings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Vibrant colors and dynamic composition convey the continued vitality of Ajosi . Despite concerns about declining significance, detailed costumes, full instrumentation, and engaged performers indicate active cultural transmission.

The assertion that Ajosi “remains a significant expression of Iteso identity” reflects its resilience. As Ranger (1975, 2005) argues, African traditions creatively adapt, maintaining continuity through reinvention. The painting captures the negotiation between tradition and modernity, combining traditional materials (animal skin, beads) with contemporary fabrics and staged lighting, showcasing cultural agency rather than loss (Bhabha, 1994).

Digital drawing enables precise control of light and color, effectively depicting nighttime ambiance and emphasizing subtle elements like reflective snail shells, which hold ritual significance (Drewal & Mason, 1998). Layering and glowing effects convey the mystical quality of the dance (Pink, 2009), supporting claims that digital media can express cultural essence even in transformed formats (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

Driberg’s (1919) note on the absence of bells in rainmaking initiation provides historical context, suggesting that sonic restraint carries ritual meaning (Blacking, 1973). The interpretation of Ekiryakirya as a weather-invoking ritual reflects broader African cosmologies where humans engage spiritually with natural forces (Mbiti, 1969; Peek, 1991).



Figure 36: *Ekiryakirya Rainmaking Dance Also Used for Cleansing People from Bad Luck* (2024). Medium: graphite and charcoal drawing. A2 paper size, Artist: Agama Peter.

This mixed-media artwork, using ink, watercolor, and digital elements, reflects Ekiryakirya’s roles in rainmaking and spiritual cleansing. Its layered technique emphasizes the dance's complex meanings, highlighting art as a research medium (Sullivan, 2010). The varied interpretations of Ekiryakirya within the community challenge notions of cultural consensus (Barth, 1993). In Akisim, Pallisa, the dance's ties to witch doctors and “night dancers” reveal region-specific spiritual connections, resonating with broader African concerns about malevolent forces (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Geschiere, 1997).

The potential extinction of Ekiryakirya raises important discussions on cultural preservation and UNESCO’s mission to safeguard intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Archival art plays a crucial role in this preservation (Kathy C, 2020), aligning with Taylor's (2003) concept of the “repertoire” as embodied cultural memory.

The Etida dance, alongside Ekuma and Ekiryakirya, showcases the adaptability of Ajosi traditions and how core forms evolve into new rituals and social functions.



Developmental sketch



Figure 37: Digital Drawing of Etida Dance (2024) by artist Agama Peter, created in A3 size (29.7 × 42 cm) using the medium of digital drawing, is sourced from the author in 2024.

This digital drawing, built from visible preliminary sketches, documents the healing context of Etida. The digital medium enabled precise rendering of ritual elements while allowing artistic interpretation that conveys spiritual dimensions beyond what photography can capture. The note that “traditional healing practices in Teso weave together music and dance to connect with ancestors and invoke spiritual energies” reflects broader medical-anthropological patterns where ritual performance contributes to therapeutic efficacy (Feierman & Janzen, 1992; Kleinman, 1980).

Etida’s rhythmic movements, clapping, and singing mirror those of Ekiryakirya, creating sonic environments believed to attract helpful spirits and dispel harmful ones (Friedson, 1996). Respondent AGL’s comparison to Xhosa healing dances situates Iteso practice within wider African traditions of ritual healing (Peek, 1991).

Cultural leader CL’s remark that performers may undergo spirit possession, guided by healers, highlights possession as a therapeutic mechanism common across African societies (Boddy, 1989; Lambek, 1993). Respondent EI further emphasizes dance’s combined therapeutic, spiritual, and social roles, reflecting holistic African frameworks where medicine, ritual, and performance remain intertwined (Janzen, 1978).

Finally, the finding that ceremonial sticks “attract blessings, ward off negative spirits, and honor ancestors” underscores the spiritual agency of objects in ritual life, aligning with Gell’s (1998) notion of art objects as active participants rather than passive symbols.



Figure 38: In 2023, Agama Peter captured "Ekuma Dance Performed Without Loud Instruments Specifically for Birth Rites," a digital photograph measuring 20 × 25 cm (print size) (Author, 2023).

This photograph documents Ekuma's distinctive sonic character, performed "without loud instruments," contrasting with the percussive intensity typical of Iteso dances. Its sonic restraint reflects beliefs about infants' vulnerability to overstimulation and spiritual danger, necessitating gentler ritual approaches (Sargent, 1982). The image captures an intimate, small-group performance appropriate for birth contexts. Unlike public festival dances, birth rites typically occur in domestic spaces with a small number of participants, underscoring the private, family-centered nature of early childhood rituals (Van Gennep, 1909/1960).

Costumes and Symbolic Meanings in Ajosi -Related Dances

The analysis reiterates the cultural value of costumes: "Costumes and adornments are equally important, as all respondents noted their significance. Akogo costumes, shared with Ajosi , feature men with open chests and women with exposed waists, adding an element of allure." This costume overlap suggests aesthetic continuities across dances with different functions, courtship (Akogo)

and royal performance (Ajosi), reflecting shared values around bodily beauty and appropriate display (Schneider & Weiner, 1989).

The observation that "the elegance of these costumes enhances the dance and represents Iteso culture" frames costume as a metonym of cultural identity. The historical note that women in Emorimori courts wore attire like the Otorobo and ananga, which exposed parts of the body, links contemporary practices to long-standing court traditions, illustrating cultural continuity despite colonial and postcolonial change (Allman, 2004).

4.1.2(c) Instruments of Akogo and Ajosi Dance and Cultural Symbolism

Musical instruments emerged as a central theme, with 27 of 35 respondents (77%) from AGL, QR, and CL groups demonstrating detailed knowledge of traditional instruments and their symbolism. This high engagement underscores instruments' importance in performance traditions and their role as markers of identity and continuity.

Respondent Group Sampled Reacted Engagement Rate

AGL	8	7	87.5%
QR	25	18	72%
CL	2	2	100%
Total	35	27	77%

The engagement patterns show that knowledge of instruments is widely distributed among cultural leaders, performers, and community members, reflecting the instruments' visibility and audibility in everyday life (Nketia, 1974). Field discussions showed "lively debate" with varied opinions, illustrating that instruments operate as sites of cultural negotiation rather than fixed traditions. Tensions around tradition versus innovation mirror broader postcolonial cultural dynamics (Erlmann, 1996; Turino, 2000).

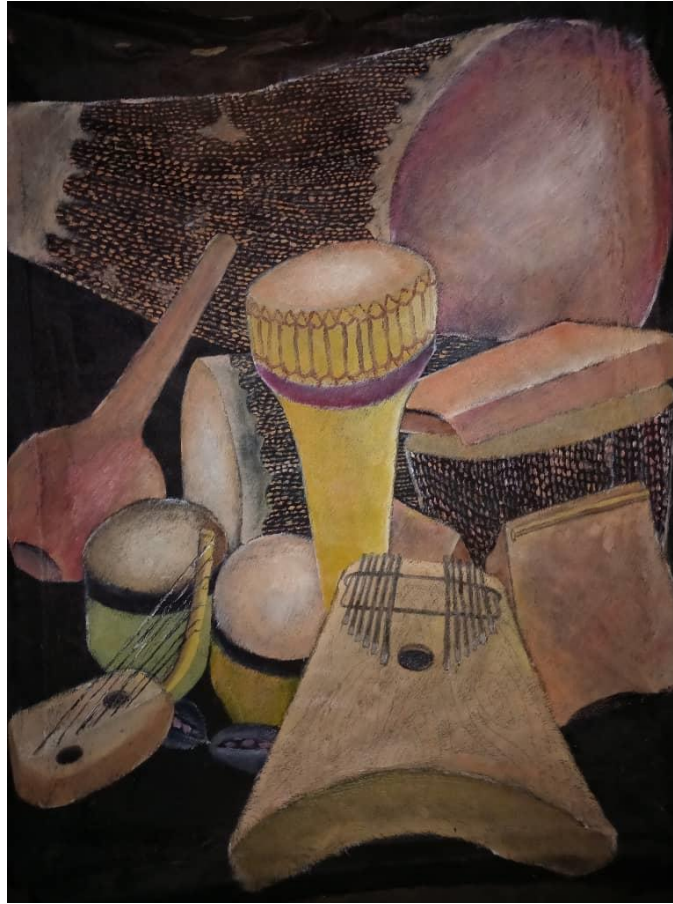


Figure 39: Oil Painting on Animal Skin Showing Iteso Traditional Musical Instruments Used During Performance of Traditional Dances (2024). Medium: Oil on treated animal hide. Size: 60 × 45 cm. Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

This oil painting on animal skin marks a methodological innovation, using traditional Iteso materials (animal hide) instead of canvas. This choice reinforces continuity with historical material culture and creates a tactile link to pastoral traditions. The painting documents the full instrumental ensemble used in Iteso dance, arranged to reflect typical performance positions, functioning both as documentation and artistic interpretation.

The theoretical grounding cites Atoh (2017), who notes that performers and their instruments are "necessary and complementary," and that indigenous performances rarely separate music, dance, and song. Following Banks and Zeitlyn (2015), the artwork serves as ethnographic evidence, capturing material details, spatial arrangements, and aesthetics that written descriptions alone cannot convey.

Akogo Instruments and Cultural Debates

"The Akogo dance prominently features the Akogo instrument, which directly influences its name." As respondent AGL1 explained, the Akogo (also called Akebe) holds deep significance and appears in ceremonies such as Ibingin (twin births) and Ogeski (political gatherings), highlighting its broad ritual utility (Chernoff, 1979).

Debates arose around cultural change. Respondent QR4 noted the introduction of drums (etenus) and flutes from neighboring groups, viewing this exchange as potentially diluting Akogo traditions and advocating for revival of original practices. Such tensions echo broader African debates over innovation versus preservation (Waterman, 1990; Turino, 2000).

Conversely, respondent CL argued that integrating newer instruments "enriches the rhythmic texture," framing adaptation as musically beneficial (Erlmann, 1996). AGL2 stressed that Akogo's unique sound should remain unaltered and warned against incorporating "foreign" dance styles and instruments, reflecting anxieties about cultural loss amid globalization (Ranger, 1983).

AGL2 also emphasized preserving traditional Akogo naming conventions, Idegudegu, Abyeese, Aduume, which encode distinct cultural roles (Berlin & Kay, 1969; Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Despite divergent views, respondents agreed on Akogo's centrality to Iteso identity and emphasized balancing heritage safeguarding with modern influences a form of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1988).

Adungu: Borrowed Instrument Becoming Indigenous

"Though not originally an Iteso instrument, the Adungu has become integral to Akogo performances, enriching their rhythmic complexity." This observation demonstrates cultural borrowing and indigenization processes central to African cultural history (Vansina, 1990; Ranger, 1975).

According to Okirior (2021), this instrument represents a modern adaptation of the Iteso Adeudeu (bow harp), influenced by Acholi and Alur traditions. The Adungu features an arched neck and

wooden resonating box, traditionally covered with animal skin, equipped with at least ten strings and a sound hole that enhances its resonance.

Its versatility is impressive; it performs Iteso melodies effectively in major keys and has been adopted by contemporary pop bands. This adaptability to both traditional and modern contexts explains the instrument's successful reintegration.

The historical note about missionary attitudes is significant: previous views from missionaries, who saw its pentatonic tuning as pagan, have shifted. The Adungu's diatonic tuning is now recognized, especially within Catholic Church music, allowing for triadic harmonies. This transformation demonstrates how colonial religious institutions initially suppressed African musical practices before later incorporating them into Christian worship (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; Bediako, 1995). This evolution underscores the Adungu's role in connecting traditional cultural expressions with modern musical identities (Turino, 2000).



Figure 40: Group from Tororo (Iteso Tororo Kenya United) Playing Adungu During Performance in Soroti Akogo Festival (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

This photograph documents Adungu in contemporary festival performance, providing visual evidence of its reintegration into Iteso musical practice. The image captures multiple players coordinating their performance, demonstrating the instrument's capacity for ensemble playing. The

transnational context—Kenyan group performing at Ugandan festival—documents the cross-border circulation of Iteso cultural practices (Karp & Maynard, 1983).

Magarait a Leejat: Endangered Instrument Revival

Once common in Ekuma and Etida dances, the Magarait a Leejat is nearly forgotten. Musician Daniel Okiror recently revived it after researching similar instruments among the Baganda and Luo. This revival narrative demonstrates how endangered cultural practices can be recovered through ethnographic research and comparative study.

The instrument consists of a bowl-like wooden base covered with animal skin, two horn-like sticks connected by a tuning plank, and eight nylon strings. A bamboo bridge beneath the strings creates a distinct percussive sound when plucked. Recently, the instrument has been reintroduced into Akogo performances, signaling renewed interest in preserving unique aspects of Iteso musical tradition (Ranger, 2005; Vail, 1989).

Ajosi Instruments and Royal Symbolism

Atenus (Drums): The Atenus drum holds deep symbolic meaning in Iteso culture, particularly in Ajosi performances. Traditionally played by respected women, it is often accompanied by the Itelelei and Idegudegu drums, typically handled by men. This gendered instrumental division reflects broader patterns in African musical performance where specific instruments carry gender associations (Stone, 1982).



Figure 41: Atenu and Itelelei of Moto Moto Akogo Wera Used for Royal Dance (Ajosi) and Communication in the Community (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

This photograph documents the physical characteristics and relative sizes of Atenus and Itelelei drums, providing comparative visual reference. The image captures material details, including the hide covering, wooden construction, and rope tensioning, which are valuable for organological documentation. The drums' dual functions for royal dance and community communication highlight their multiple social roles beyond music-making, serving as long-distance messaging systems (Carrington, 1949).

According to Rhythm2 Recovery (2024), drumming practices vary widely across cultures. In Indigenous communities especially, hand drumming carries sacred significance, protected by strict cultural protocols. Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms the right to safeguard such traditions, positioning drum preservation within global indigenous rights discourse (UNESCO, 2003; Coombe, 1998).

The caution about cultural appropriation is significant: many sacred practices have faced erosion due to colonization and cultural appropriation, where traditional instruments are used out of context, often without recognition or permission. This awareness reflects growing African concern about cultural extraction and misuse (Brown, 2003; Coombe, 1998).

Participant AGL explained that Atenus drums are more than musical tools—they serve as a social language. These drums traditionally announce events such as births, deaths, weddings, and homecomings, while also being central to rituals and serving as means of honoring ancestors. This positions drums within what McLuhan (1964) termed "media ecology"—technologies that structure social communication and community consciousness.

Cultural leader CL emphasized that Atenus, also referred to as 'talking drums,' were historically used for long-distance messaging across villages and clans. This aligns with Donald (2025), who describes drums as powerful information conveyors within African societies, creating sonic networks that integrated dispersed communities.

Respondent EI highlighted drums' affective power: royal drums often stir emotions, awaken courage, and sometimes induce trance-like states in performers and audiences. This capacity to alter consciousness positions drums within technologies of ecstasy (Eliade, 1964; Rouget, 1985). EI's observation that 'Iteso royal drums serve as an alarm or call to arms' highlights their role in

war-time mobilization and spiritual ceremonies, demonstrating drums' political functions (Lamphear, 1976).

The note about ritual restrictions—these sacred drums are guarded in special locations and are not to be touched by young girls—reflects gendered and age-based access restrictions common in African ritual systems. These prohibitions reflect beliefs about spiritual danger and the need to protect ritually powerful objects from contact with categories of persons believed to carry spiritual pollution (Douglas, 1966/2002).

Bells/Esimana (Isimana)



Figure 42: Ngora (Fire Fire Atooto Akogo Group) with Body Paint, Wearing Isimana for Performing Ekiryakirya and Etida Dance (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

This photograph documents multiple performative elements simultaneously: ankle bells (Isimana), body paint, and ritual attire. The visual documentation captures the integrated aesthetic system where sound (bells), vision (body paint), and movement (dance) combine to create a multisensory ritual experience.

Isimana refers to ankle bells worn by dancers to accentuate rhythm and motion. Their jingling sound blends with songs and instrumental arrangements, creating a dynamic auditory layer. Traditional instruments such as the Amoti and Ketwo (also called Akirama Komoti), consisting of

an earthenware pot and split gourd, are used to accompany songs. When gently struck, these tools produce soft, percussive tones that harmonize with dance movements, demonstrating the resourcefulness of African musical technologies (Chernoff, 1979; Agawu, 2003).

Ebilo, Aluti or Alamaru (Wind Instruments)

The Ebilo, also called Aluti or Alamaru, is a key wind instrument found in many Iteso performances, particularly in Akogo and increasingly in Ajosi . It is commonly paired with whistles to add a distinct melodic layer.



Figure 43: Various Groups Depicted Using Ebilo as a Musical Instrument, Played by Skilled Musicians (2023). Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

This photograph documents Ebilo in performance contexts, showing multiple players across different groups. The visual evidence demonstrates the instrument's widespread adoption and the skill required for effective performance. Traditionally, Ebilo was crafted from bamboo stems (abole), producing sounds based on a pentatonic scale. However, contemporary musicians have adapted, using hollow electrical wiring pipes as alternatives.

This material substitution—bamboo replaced by electrical conduit—demonstrates adaptive innovation, maintaining sonic function despite material change. The adaptation reflects practical

problem-solving where traditional materials become scarce or when modern materials offer superior acoustic properties (Impey, 1998).

Researcher Daniel Okirior documented a plastic version developed by Gabriel Odeke of the Odoko Chan jazz band. This flute measures 23 cm in length and 1.5 cm in diameter, with four evenly spaced holes. The mouthpiece to the first hole is 11.7 cm, and the final hole is positioned 3.6 cm from the flute's end. This precise documentation demonstrates organological research methodology, enabling future reconstruction and comparative analysis (Barz & Cooley, 2008).

Despite its modern material, the instrument retains its cultural function and resonance in traditional and modern performances, demonstrating that cultural authenticity resides in social function and aesthetic effect rather than material composition (Bendix, 1997).

Conclusion: Cultural Significance of Atenus and Akogo

Within the Iteso community, the Atenus and Akogo carry meaning far beyond their function as instruments—they are woven into the very fabric of social and cultural life. The Atenus, often heard during Ajosi performances, accompanies key life moments such as births, funerals, marriages, and spiritual gatherings. Its association with ancestral rituals and royal customs speaks to its sacred place in Iteso identity, creating sonic continuity across biographical discontinuities (Van Gennep, 1909/1960).

The Akogo brings to life the rhythm and spirit of the Akogo dance. Its sound is not just musical but deeply expressive of communal pride and tradition. Through their use in dance, both instruments help communicate values, roles, and shared memory within society as cultural technologies—material means for transmitting intangible knowledge, values, and identities (Nketia, 1974; Agawu, 2003).

The gestures, rhythms, and adornments tied to these dances are not performed for art's sake alone—they are acts of cultural continuity. This rejects Western "art for art's sake" aesthetics, insisting instead on African performance's embeddedness in social life (Hanna, 1979; Drewal, 1992). Even as modern trends influence performance styles, the Atenus and Akogo maintain a unique significance unmatched by similar instruments in other regions. They continue to speak for a

people rooted in heritage, yet adaptable in a changing world, serving as "invented traditions"—practices continually recreated to serve contemporary needs while maintaining connections to historical forms (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

4.1.3 Recognition and Social Roles in Ajosi and Akogo Dances

Among the Iteso, traditional dances like Ajosi and Akogo function as complex systems of social recognition and mobility rather than mere cultural performances. Both dances celebrate exceptional talent with tangible rewards that carry profound social consequences, often serving as gateways to elevated status, economic opportunity, and marital prospects. This intersection of artistic excellence and social advancement reflects broader patterns in African performance traditions where aesthetic competence translates directly into social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Hanna, 1988).

The artworks presented in this section employ varied visual techniques to serve distinct analytical purposes. Digital illustrations capture complex ceremonial scenes with multiple simultaneous activities, providing comprehensive documentation of reward ceremonies and their social contexts. Line drawings isolate specific interactions and gestures, directing attention to the interpersonal dynamics of recognition and courtship. This methodological diversity aligns with practice-based research approaches that use artistic medium selection as an investigative tool (Sullivan, 2005; Gray & Malins, 2004).



Figure 44: Best Dancers Receive He-Goats and Women as Awards During Ajosi Performances. Medium: digital painting, Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

This drawing documents the traditional reward system within Ajosi performances, where exceptional dancers receive public recognition through material gifts. The composition captures the moment of reward presentation, with the winning dancer accompanied by their supporter receiving a he-goat from the chief. The choice of digital drawing or painting as a medium allows for detailed rendering of the participants' body language, facial expressions, and spatial relationships that constitute this ceremonial transaction.

The drawing emphasizes the communal nature of recognition: the reward is bestowed publicly, witnessed by the assembled community, transforming individual achievement into collective celebration. This public dimension reflects what Goffman (1959) terms "presentation of self"—the dancer's excellence is validated through ritualized acknowledgment before the community, converting performance skill into recognized social status.

According to respondents AGL and CL, in royal Ajosi ceremonies, the best dancer receives this public honor as part of a broader social transaction. The he-goat gift carries multiple symbolic meanings: it represents wealth (livestock being traditional currency in pastoral societies), provides material for communal feasting (reinforcing social bonds), and serves as bride-price contribution

(facilitating the dancer's marriage prospects). This multivalent symbolism demonstrates what Turner (1967) describes as the "multivocality" of ritual symbols, single objects carrying layered meanings across economic, social, and spiritual registers.

The gesture of gifting is followed by communal feasting, symbolizing unity and collective participation in the dancer's success. Communal meals in African societies function as more than nutrition; they create and reinforce social bonds, transform individual achievement into shared celebration, and redistribute resources in ways that maintain community cohesion (Douglas, 1972). The feast transforms the dancer's personal victory into communal benefit, preventing individual success from creating social division.

Cultural figures such as Solomon Enyimu have played key roles in reviving these customs in recent decades, recognizing their value in preserving Iteso cultural identity and providing contemporary youth with culturally grounded pathways to recognition and status (Kasul, 2005).

In contrast to Ajosi 's formal, chiefly-organized recognition system, respondent CL noted that the Akogo dance traditionally functioned through more informal mechanisms of courtship and partner selection. A skilled male dancer could attract potential partners through demonstrated physical prowess, rhythmic coordination, and aesthetic presentation, qualities valued as indicators of fitness for marriage and family life.

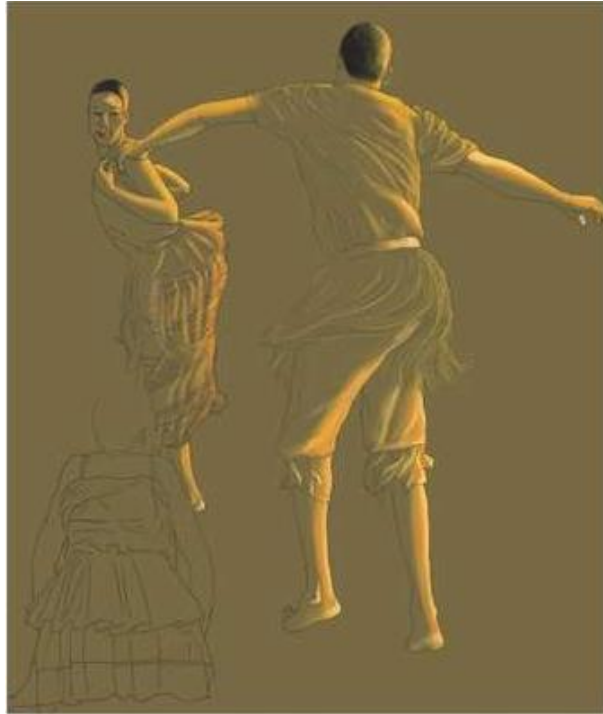


Figure 45: Best Dancer Rewarded with a Girl During Akogo Dance Performance. Medium: Digital illustration. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

The Akogo and Atenus instruments embody the rhythmic essence of the Akogo dance, expressing communal pride and tradition. They serve as cultural technologies for transmitting values and identities (Nketia, 1974; Agawu, 2003). The dances are acts of cultural continuity, highlighting the integration of performance with social life, contrasting with Western notions of "art for art's sake" (Hanna, 1979; Drewal, 1992).

Blessing and Protection in Birth Rituals

Another prominent theme centers on blessing and spiritual protection, particularly evident in ceremonies welcoming newborns. A notable variation of Ajosi, known as Ekuma, is specifically performed during such events with significant modifications to protect the infant's sensitive hearing and spiritual vulnerability.



Figure 46: Performance of Traditional Dance Used to Welcome Newborns without Musical Instruments, Variation Called Ekuma. Medium: Digital photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

Political Commentary and Social Critique

Celebration and communal pride feature centrally in Ajosi dances held during visits from dignitaries or to mark community achievements. Praise songs performed in these contexts unite audiences in collective celebration and affirm shared values, creating what Durkheim (1912/1995) termed "collective effervescence", heightened emotional states where individual identity temporarily dissolves into communal consciousness.



Figure 47: Drawing Process for Ajosi Dance Meant to Communicate Messages to the Community. Medium: digital line art illustration, Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.



Figure 48: Depiction of Ajosi Dancers with Spears, Meant to Convey Messages About Desertification to Leaders (2024). Medium: Digital painting and cross-line sketching. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

This artwork documents Ajosi 's politically charged dimension, where celebration transforms into social critique. In certain contexts, dancers substitute spears or shields for dancing sticks, creating visual symbolism signaling protest rather than festivity. One documented performance expressed community frustration over environmental degradation, specifically desertification caused by poor land management and inadequate governmental protection.

This strategic use of performance for political communication reflects traditional dance's capacity to criticize leadership while maintaining ritual protection subtly (Kasule, 1998). The symbolic, indirect critique, conveyed through implements rather than explicit verbal accusations, allows communities to express dissent while maintaining plausible deniability. As one elder explained, "We dance not only to celebrate but to speak to those who don't listen," articulating dance's power to command attention through spectacle while conveying serious messages symbolically.

These performances support Merriam's (1964) characterization of dance as both social action and reflection, actively intervening in social processes rather than merely representing conditions. The analysis aligns with Nketia's (1974) framing of performance as "cultural dialogue", an ongoing conversation between community members, leaders, ancestors, and spiritual forces about proper social arrangements and responses to contemporary challenges.

4.1.4 Performance Style, Communal Pride, and Gender Dynamics

Ajosi 's performance style evokes complex, sometimes contradictory responses, revealing tensions between tradition and individual expression. Respondent AGL described movements as "graceful and grounded," with dancers maintaining low centers of gravity symbolizing strength, stability, and ancestral connection, reflecting pastoral Iteso identity.

However, respondent EI critiqued the "strict synchronization," arguing it feels overly rigid and constraining, limiting personal expression. EI suggested allowing dancers more freedom to interpret rhythms individually while maintaining choreographic structure, balancing communal coordination with creative space. This tension reflects broader debates about tradition versus innovation in African performance studies (Erlmann, 1996).

Respondents QR and PR emphasized that synchronized rhythmic stepping—coordinated foot patterns executed in unison—functions as Ajosi 's most powerful communal element, creating both visual spectacle and sonic impact that fosters profound unity and shared identity. This coordinated movement embodies what Turner (1969) terms "communitas", the temporary dissolution of social hierarchies into egalitarian collective experience. Respondent AGL noted potential exclusionary dimensions of competitive Ajosi performances, particularly mock battles that may inadvertently marginalize less physically confident community members, raising questions about accessibility in cultural preservation.

Gender Symbolism in Costume: Costume choices carry significant gendered meanings. Respondent AGL highlighted animal tails worn by male Ajosi dancers, symbolizing "masculinity, virility, and pride" connected to cattle-keeping traditions where male status derived from livestock ownership. The tails function as what Schneider (1987) terms "material metaphors"—physical objects standing for abstract social concepts.

However, respondent QR questioned why male symbols dominate visual representation, arguing that women's contributions deserve equivalent recognition. QR noted that women's garments—particularly ekoiyi (decorated bark cloth) and atabi (beaded wrapper)—carry rich symbolic meanings worthy of celebration. This critique aligns with feminist scholarship on African performance (Nnaemeka, 1998; Oyěwùmí, 1997) and Butler's (1990) argument that cultural performances actively construct gender relations through repeated enactment, suggesting need for more gender-balanced analysis.

Accessibility and Cultural Display: Respondents agreed on the importance of accessibility to Ajosi performances at cultural festivals. Respondent RP noted that vibrant costumes effectively showcase cultural richness but cautioned that physical accessibility doesn't automatically translate into meaningful cultural engagement. Without adequate interpretive context, performances risk becoming "spectacle without meaning", visually impressive displays that entertain but fail to communicate cultural knowledge (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

Respondent EI suggested that contemporary festival presentations, while visually vibrant, often lack educational components necessary for genuine cultural transmission, producing what Handler (1988) describes as "staged authenticity"—performances that look traditional but lack historical social embeddedness.

Cultural leader CL emphasized Ajosi 's etymological connections to community narratives and material culture (ejos sticks), noting these connections remain opaque to contemporary audiences, including many young Iteso. Respondent QR advocated for enhanced educational programming, interpretive signage, program notes, discussions, providing contextual information for deeper appreciation. Without such infrastructure, QR warned, cultural display risks becoming an entertainment commodity, stripped of cultural meaning (Smith, 2006; Bendix, 1997).

4.2 Analyzing Culturally Informed Movements and Adornments

Movements and adornments in Ajosi and Akogo constitute sophisticated embodied language communicating identity, values, and worldview. Rather than isolated aesthetic elements, gestures, costumes, and musical roles integrate to narrate lived experiences and articulate shared beliefs, creating what Hanna (1988) terms "kinetic codes", systematic movement patterns carrying culturally specific meanings.

Methodological Note: The artworks employ varied media for distinct analytical purposes: photographs provide documentary evidence of performance contexts; traditional drawings (graphite, ink) isolate movements and adornments for detailed analysis; digital paintings render atmospheric qualities and symbolic dimensions difficult to capture photographically. This multi-modal approach reflects practice-based research methodologies where medium selection functions as analytical tool (Sullivan, 2005; Gray & Malins, 2004).

a) Contrasting Movement Vocabularies:

Akogo: Slow, intentional movements, kneeling, swaying, grounded postures, signify ancestral reverence and humility. Dancers adopt low centers of gravity symbolizing earth connection and respect for spiritual forces (Mbiti, 1969). These deliberate, controlled motions contrast with

everyday movement, marking performance as ritually bounded space where ordinary social rules are temporarily suspended (Turner, 1969).

Ajosi : Accelerated tempo features male dancers executing energetic jumps, vigorous leg stamps, and rapid stick movements embodying strength, masculinity, and protective capability. These movements demonstrate physical prowess essential for defending family, land, and community honor, central to Iteso masculine identity construction (Nnaemeka, 1998). The contrast between Akogo's restraint and Ajosi 's vigor reflects divergent social functions: Akogo facilitates courtship through measured, aesthetically refined display; Ajosi asserts dominance through explosive, powerful gestures. Both movement vocabularies are culturally encoded, their meanings legible to Iteso observers but potentially opaque to outsiders unfamiliar with cultural frameworks (Geertz, 1973).

b) Gendered Gestures and Their Meanings

Gendered gestures in Ajosi performances hold deep cultural meaning. Women wiping sweat from male dancers' faces is a romantic and symbolic act, honoring male labor and signaling interest, with the public nature inviting collective validation (Hanna, 1988). Mock fight scenes dramatize masculine responsibility for protection, functioning as "restored behavior" that channels aggression into controlled, aesthetic performance (Schechner, 2002).

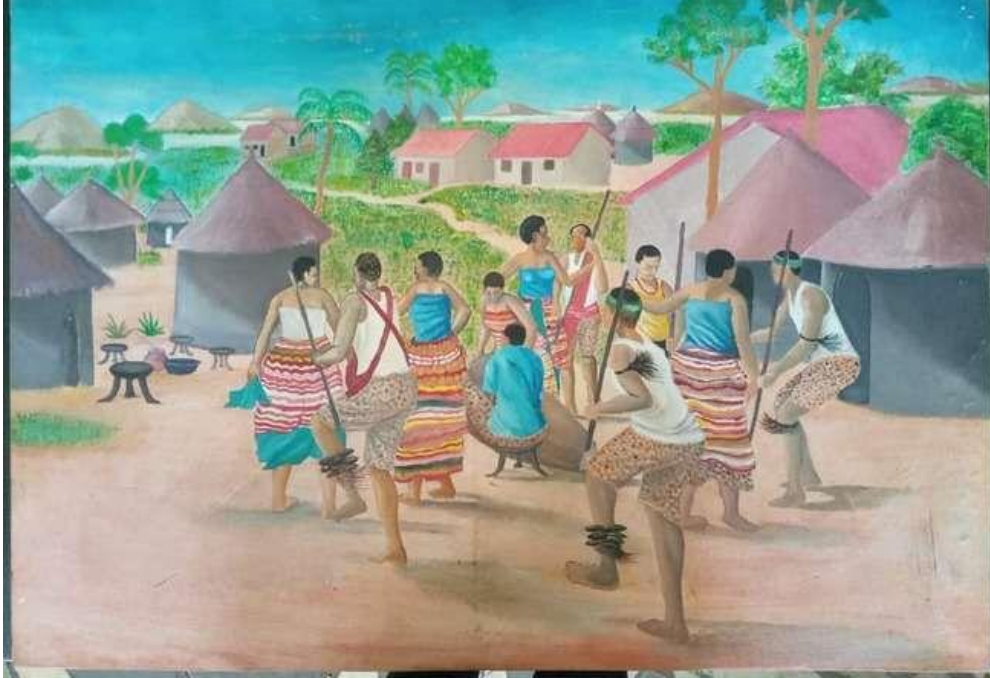


Figure 49: Male Dancers with Dancing Sticks and Women with Itambalan (Handkerchiefs). Medium: Oil painting on canvas. By Author, 2023.

This artwork documents gendered implements: men's dancing sticks (ejos) amplify gestures and sound, while women's handkerchiefs (itambalan) serve as symbolic courtship tools, visually representing complementary gender roles, male assertiveness paired with female nurturance (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Women typically beat the large Atenus drum, occupying prominent acoustic and visual roles, while men play smaller Itelelei drums, creating polyrhythmic textures and reflecting broader patterns of complementary gender roles (Chernoff, 1979; Amadiume, 1987).



Figure 50: Dancer Adorned with Animal Hides, Ankle Bells, Ostrich Feathers, and Animal Tails. Medium: Oil paintings on a wooden board by Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2023.

Layered adornments transform dancers into walking cultural texts: animal hides reference pastoral identity, ankle bells (*esimana*) link movement to rhythm, ostrich feathers signal warrior heritage, and animal tails extend gestures while symbolizing virility (Schneider & Weiner, 1989). Synchronized stomping demonstrates communal strength, while improvisational flourishes allow personal storytelling within shared frameworks (Nketia, 1974). Small gestures—spinning, shoulder twitches, head tilts, communicate contextually specific meanings, operating as systematic body motion communication ("kinesics") parallel to verbal language (Birdwhistell, 1970).

4.2.1 Adornments in Akogo and Ajosi

Adornments ground performance in material culture and visual storytelling. Beads, feathers, skins, and metal bells carry layered meanings referencing history, spirituality, status, and economic foundations, functioning as "indexes of agency" that actively participate in social relationships (Gell, 1998).



Figure 51: Inspiration for Traditional Dance Attire of Iteso. Photos by Edulu Emmanuel (2023). Source: Facebook post.



Figure 52: Adornments for Akogo Traditional Dancers. Medium: Traditional and digital painting. Artist: Agama Peter.

These artworks document complete adornment assemblages, rendered traditionally and digitally to capture different cultural dimensions (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015). Dance sticks wrapped in bull tails function as both performance implements and symbolic weapons. Ankle bells amplify footwork, linking individual dancers to collective rhythm and highlighting skilled performers (Agawu, 2003). Costumes like sisal skirts and animal skins embody the Iteso's relationship with nature, embedding environmental knowledge and cultural values (Ingold, 2011). Beads and clan-specific colors highlight social status and marital readiness, functioning as "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1986).

Headgear decorated with feathers preserves warrior heritage, while cow horns and whistles punctuate climaxes and spotlight standout dancers, transforming ordinary objects into performance-specific communication technologies (Nketia, 1974).

Gender-Specific Adornment Functions

In Ajosi , attire plays a symbolic courtship role. Women wear ekitambi (bright cloth wraps) emphasizing waist movement, while men wear animal hides and carry whistles to attract attention, competing for female regard (Hanna, 1988). Respondent CL views these outfits as markers of community pride, while RP cautions against focusing only on visual appeal, emphasizing deeper cultural significance (Schneider, 1987).

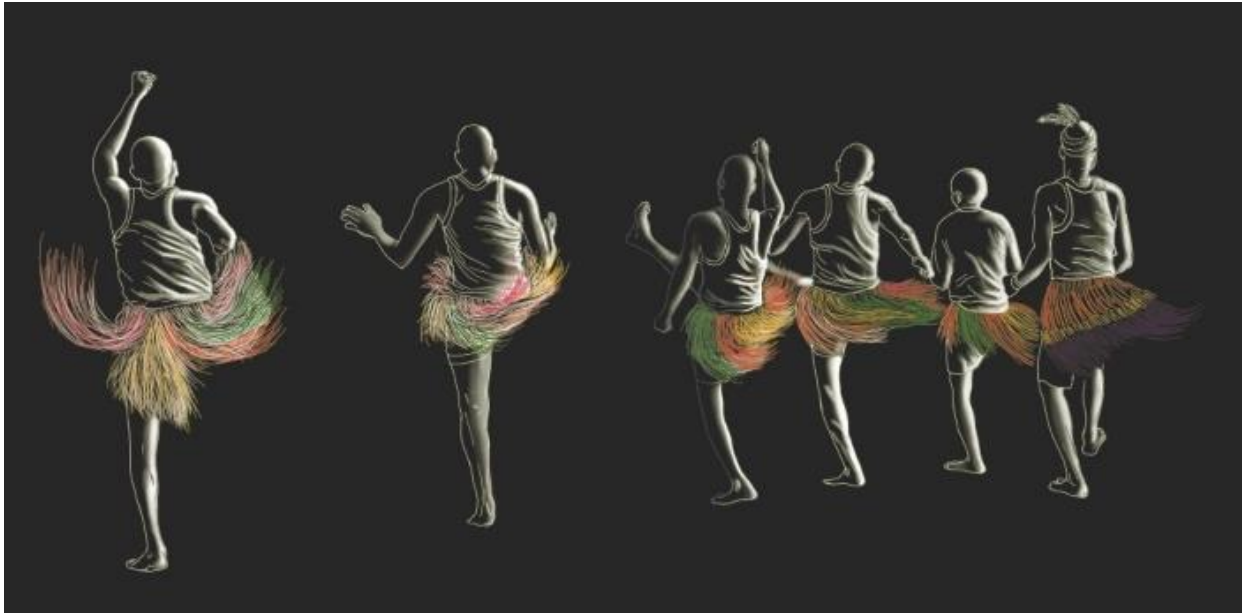


Figure 52: Akogo Dancers Adorned with Colored Sisal Dancing Props. Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.

Bright colors attract attention; sisal skirts create distinctive rustling sounds, enhancing the multisensory performance (Chernoff, 1979). Waist beads made from animal skin symbolize heritage and pastoral livelihoods.

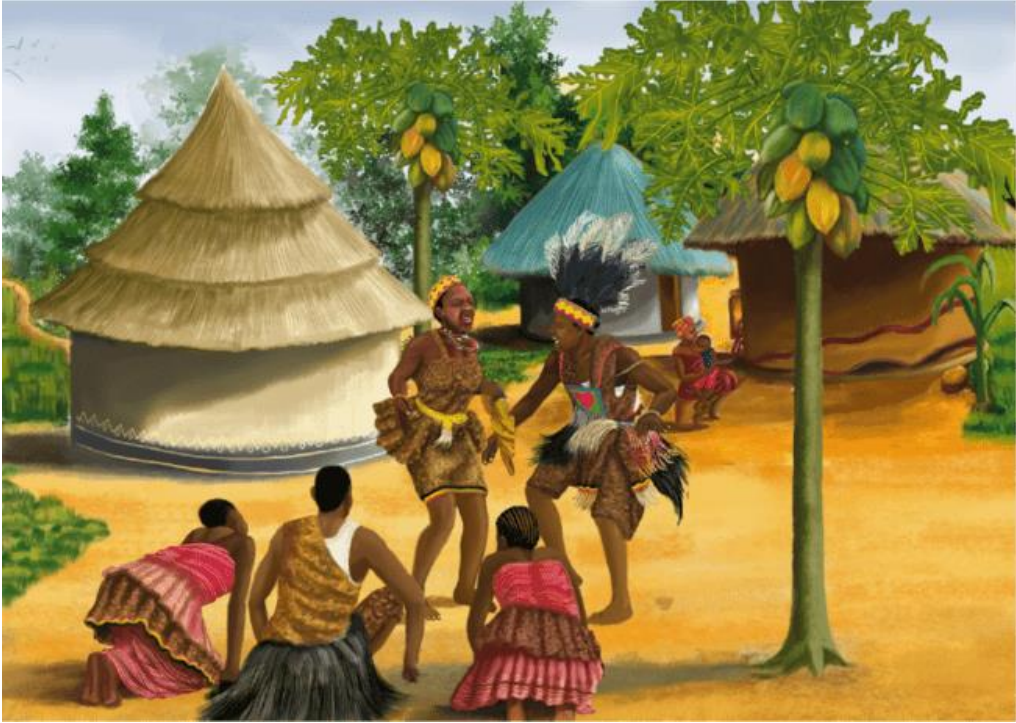


Figure 53: Depiction of Dancers and Dance Adornments of Akogo. Medium digital painting. Artist: Agama Peter.



Figure 54: Akogo Dancers Adorned with Beads as Jewelry, Ekitambi, Apatirisi, Specific Cloth (Abei Lolo Ai), and Other Props. Medium: Charcoal Drawing. Size: A1, Artist: Agama Peter.



Figure 55: Akogo Dancers Wearing Sisals, Skins, Kitambi, Animal Tails, Vests, and Animal Prints. Medium: Oil painting on animal skins. Artist: Agama Peter.

Figures 67–69: Depiction of Dancers and Adornments. Medium: Oil painting, digital painting, charcoal drawing, oil painting on animal skins. Artist: Agama Peter. These artworks document the progression from individual adornment elements to fully assembled costumes, reflecting ethnographic documentation practices (Pink, 2013). Beads attract attention and signal marriageability, while specific cloth types (ekitambi, apatirisi, abei lolo ai) carry meanings related to status and clan, though detailed knowledge is fading among younger generations (Kasule, 2005).

4.2.2 Contemporary Adaptations and Debates

Modern adaptations spark debate: elders favor traditional animal materials, while younger respondents advocate for ethical alternatives like synthetic fabrics, preserving symbolic meanings while addressing ecological and animal welfare concerns (Erlmann, 1996). Color symbolism guides costume selection for different events, red for vitality, white for purity, blue for spiritual wellness, creating visual codes for ceremonial contexts (Turner, 1967). Adornments function as

storytelling tools, reinforcing themes, communicating status, invoking spirituality, and preserving memory, embodying dance's capacity for symbolic behavior that transmits societal values (Merriam, 1964).



Figure 56: Inspiration for Digital Drawing on the Use of Sisal in Iteso Traditional Dance. Photo by author.



Figure 57: Drawing Process Toward Drawing of Akogo Dances and Their Adornments. Medium: digital painting - developmental sketch, Artist: Agama Peter. Size: A3



Figure 58: Sisals Worn as Dancing Costumes During Performance of Akogo, Ekiryakirya, and Etida. Medium: digital painting, Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.

These developmental works document the transformation of cultural observations into visual representations. Figure 56 shows initial inspiration and planning, Figure 57 captures iterative refinement, and Figure 58 presents finished artwork depicting sisal costumes across multiple dance contexts. Including process documentation reflects Sullivan's (2005) argument that practice-based research generates knowledge through making, positioning the artistic process as a form of inquiry. Despite modern influences, the meanings embedded in body movements remain rooted in Iteso tradition. Dance steps, gestures, and symbolic motions in Ajosi and Akogo continue to express identity, emotion, and communal values, persisting despite changing material circumstances.

a) Beaded Jewelry and Headgear

Beaded ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, and anklets play a key role in Iteso dance, signaling beauty, attracting suitors, and indicating social standing as forms of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986). Elaborate beadwork demonstrates technical skill and family wealth, requiring significant investment and craftsmanship (Schneider & Weiner, 1989).



Figure 59: Jewelry Meant to Attract Suitors During Akogo Dance, Worn by Girls. Medium: Painting, Artist: Agama Peter (2022-2024)

This painting highlights the aesthetic labor invested in self-presentation for courtship, with bright colors and detailed beads emphasizing visual appeal and the transformation of human forms into culturally valued displays (Gell, 1998). Headgear, such as ostrich feathers, beads, and animal skins, marks spiritual strength, social maturity, and marriage readiness. The vertical emphasis of tall headdresses creates a spatial metaphor for social distinction and achieved status (Turner, 1969).



Figure 60: Headgear (Ostrich Feathers), Animal Skin, Beads Used as Adornments for Ajosi . Medium: Photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter (2023)

This photograph documents headgear construction and materials, combining feathers (spiritual ascent), animal skins (pastoral identity), and beads (wealth) to communicate multiple aspects of Iteso identity and values.

b) Symbolic Materials

Beadwork and animal skins appear on garments, symbolizing environmental harmony and pastoral identity. Animal skins, especially in Ajosi , reference livestock farming—the economic foundation of Iteso livelihoods (Schneider, 1987). Similar practices among Nigerian Ajun Kpa dancers suggest widespread African patterns linking performance costumes to economic foundations and environmental relationships (Drewal, 1992).

c) Bead Adornments and Animal Skins

Bead adornments are embedded in costumes, signifying harmony with nature and integrating aesthetic labor with everyday culture. Bead colors, patterns, and arrangements follow clan-specific codes, making costumes readable as markers of lineage and social belonging (Turner, 1967).

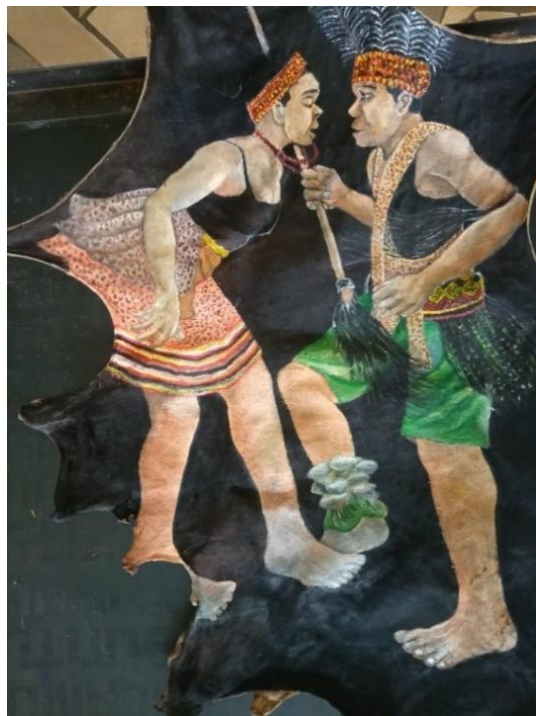


Figure 61: Painting of Ajosi Dancers with Headgear and Other Adornments Having Symbolic Meaning in Iteso Society. Medium: Oil painting on animal skins, Artist: Agama Peter.

This artwork documents the complete symbolic assemblage of Ajosi performers, emphasizing how individual elements combine into comprehensive cultural statements and visually elevate wearers above ordinary community members (Turner, 1969).

d) Body Painting

Body painting, executed with natural dyes, enhances storytelling in dances like Ekiryakirya, communicating spiritual messages, tribal identity, and ancestral pride through visual codes legible to cultural insiders (Drewal & Mason, 1998). Patterns reference clan totems, invoke protective spirits, or mark ritual status, transforming the painted body into a text inscribed with cultural meaning.



Figure 62: Painted Dancers with Ankle Bells. Medium: Photo and digital painting by Agama Peter (2023)

This artwork documents declining body painting practices, once essential for marking ritual transformation and belonging. Visual documentation preserves patterns and meanings, supporting potential cultural revival amid modernization (Van Gennep, 1960; Ranger, 2005)

e). Bells and Rattles

Ankle and wrist bells are vital sonic and symbolic elements in Iteso dances, representing rhythm, collectivity, and individual skill. The layered soundscape created by coordinated bell chimes embodies communal synchronization and social harmony (Chernoff, 1979).



Figure 63: Bells Worn on Legs by Ajosi Traditional Dancers. Medium: Photograph. Size: 20 × 25 cm (print size). Photographer: Agama Peter.

This photograph documents the material construction and attachment of ankle bells (*esimana*), emphasizing their acoustic prominence. Each dancer's movements produce distinctive rhythms, contributing to complex collective soundscapes (Agawu, 2003). The bells' visibility and audibility highlight skilled performers and fuse celebration with identity.

f) Traditional Footwear

Historically, dancers wore *akalabatan* (wooden sandals) for percussive effect. Material scarcity led to *alugabiren*, open shoes from recycled tires, demonstrating adaptive innovation (Turino, 2000; Impey, 1998). Respondent QR noted *alugabiren*'s comfort and broader use among neighboring groups, reflecting practical adaptation and cross-ethnic adoption.



Figure 64: Alugabiren Traditionally Worn During Cultural Dances by Performers and Cultural Leaders in Teso. Photo by author (2023).

This photograph documents contemporary footwear adaptations, illustrating creative resourcefulness and continuity of cultural practice through material substitution.



Figure 65: Performers Dancing Using Alugabiren. Medium: Charcoal Drawing. Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.

This artwork illustrates how material substitution affects movement and aesthetic presentation in Akogo performance, serving as a visual archive for evolving practices (Taylor, 2003).

g) Costumes as Cultural Archives

Traditional Iteso costumes are more than decoration; they express identity, pride, and heritage, functioning as "storytelling tools" that embody lived experiences and values (AGL, CL, EI, QR, RP). Patterns and motifs stem from clan myths, victories, and moral lessons, encoding cultural knowledge in material form (Taylor, 2003). Color choices, such as red for vitality, white for purity, and blue for spiritual wellness, reflect communal energy and serve as a visual communication system (Turner, 1967).

Costumes also serve an educational role, with children learning about social roles and status through observation (Hanna, 1988). Accessories like necklaces and headpieces symbolize livelihood, courtship, and clan structures, providing a compressed visual representation of social organization (RP, QR). Visual documentation through drawings and photographs helps safeguard cultural narratives amid the decline of oral traditions (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

h) Winners and Losers in Traditional Dance

Ajosi and Akogo dances, rooted in Iteso heritage, express divergent social functions. Ajosi performances historically reflected inter-clan rivalry, with chiefs composing provocative lyrics to challenge opponents and transform the dance floor into a symbolic battleground for measuring strength, wit, and spiritual favor (CL, Ranger, 1975). Akogo, by contrast, emphasized harmony and courtship, with synchronized movements signaling interest and respect, and dance serving as a silent courtship ritual (CL, Hanna, 1988).

4.2.3. Studio Methodology

Artworks in this section use digital illustrations for complex scenes, line drawings to isolate interpersonal dynamics, and grayscale digital paintings to emphasize mood and symbolic meaning. This methodological diversity reflects practice-based research principles, where medium selection serves analytical rather than purely aesthetic purposes (Sullivan, 2005).



Figure 66: Digital Illustration Depicting Use of Dancing Sticks During Ajosi , Used for Fighting. Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

This digital illustration documents the dual function of dancing sticks (ejos) as both performance implements and potential weapons. The vibrant color palette and dynamic composition convey the energetic, competitive atmosphere characteristic of Ajosi performances. Respondent CL shared memories of clans hiding additional sticks beforehand to ambush rivals if losing, demonstrating how symbolic aggression sometimes escalated into physical confrontation. This pattern reflects what Turner (1969) describes as "social drama"—ritualized conflict that normally remains contained within performance boundaries but occasionally breaches into actual violence when tensions exceed ritual capacity for management.



Figure 67: Drawing Depicting a Fight Between Losers and Winners. Medium: Graphite and charcoal drawing on normal paper. Size: A2, Artist: Agama Peter.

Analysis: This line drawing strips away contextual elements to focus on interpersonal dynamics of conflict. The simplified visual language, bold outlines, and minimal shading direct attention to body positions, aggressive postures, and defensive gestures, defining competitive encounters. The choice of monochromatic graphite medium reflects ethnographic illustration traditions that isolate specific behaviors for analytical study (Pink, 2013).

Victors often seized opponents' royal drums and female dancers as trophies, affirming superiority. These seizures carried profound symbolic weight, drums embodied clan identity and spiritual power, while female dancers represented fertility and social reproduction. Capturing both demonstrated comprehensive dominance over defeated rivals (Vansina, 1990).



Figure 68: Line Art Depicting Winning Team with Opponent's Royal Drum and Women.
Medium: digital illustration, A3 size by Agama

This artwork documents the symbolic victory display following competitive Ajosi performances, highlighting the captured drum as the central trophy. The inclusion of female figures reflects historical practices where victorious clans symbolically claimed defeated groups' female dancers, representing dominance rather than literal captivity. Bold ink lines convey the clarity of competitive outcomes.

Respondents AGL and QR explained that the dance sticks (ejos) symbolized satirical mockery or glory depending on who wielded them and the results. Celebrations peaked when top dancers were lifted shoulder-high and rewarded, often with a he-goat, as recounted by respondent EI, who noted these victories sparked long celebrations and courtships leading to marriage. Mabingo (2015) observes African dances serve as memory sites and status performances, aligning with Ajosi's role in preserving inter-clan conflict history while establishing social hierarchies (Ranger, 1975). Material culture also evolved: metal ankle bells replaced wooden or stone ones for louder sounds,

and chiefs used raised figureforms to identify exceptional dancers, blending traditional authority with political leadership (Kasozi, 1994).

In contrast, Akogo expressed harmony and courtship. Respondent CL described synchronized rhythms where movements signaled interest and respect, with dance serving as silent courtship showcasing masculine grace for admiration and potential spouses (Hanna, 1988). Ajosi 's defiance and dominance contrast with Akogo's unity and affection, together reflecting Iteso values of protection, honor, harmony, and continuity (Geertz, 1973)



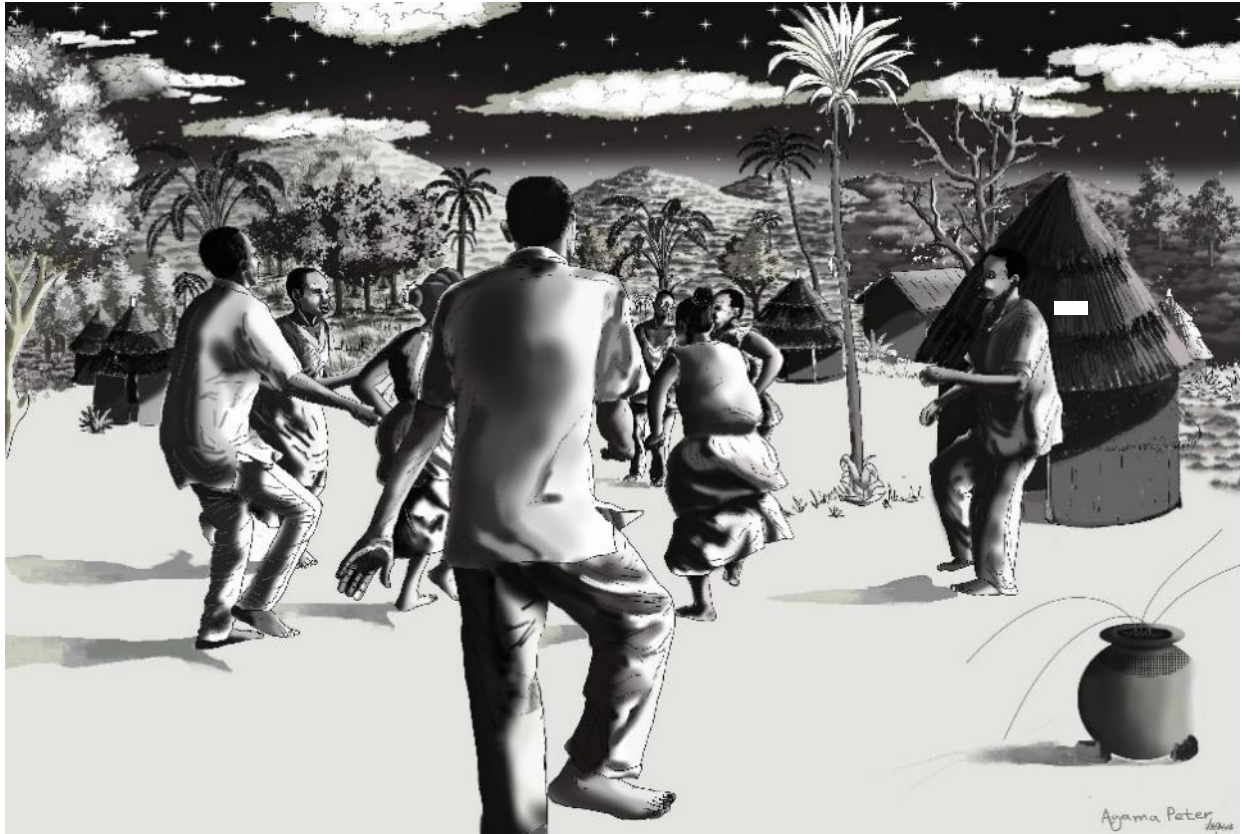


Figure 69: Akogo Male Dancers Making Impressive Moves to Female Dancers, with Pot of Ajono Visible. Medium: Digital illustration. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

This digital illustration captures Akogo's celebratory, intimate atmosphere. Unlike Ajosi's confrontational energy, this composition emphasizes coordinated movement, mutual regard, and communal participation. The pot of ajono (millet beer) visible in the composition signals a ceremonial drinking context, alcohol consumption functioning as a social lubricant, facilitating courtship interactions and communal bonding (Douglas, 1972).

When organized by chiefs, Akogo culminated in bull slaughter and communal feasting accompanied by ajono drinking, transforming individual courtship into a collective celebration. Performance was less about dominance and more about relational bonding and community cohesion.



Figure 69: Digital Grayscale Painting Depicting Joyous Akogo Occasion Accompanied by Ajono Drinking. Medium: Digital grayscale painting. Size: A2 (42 × 59.4 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

The grayscale treatment in this painting serves specific analytical purposes. By removing color, the artwork directs attention to compositional structure, spatial relationships, and emotional

atmosphere rather than surface decoration. The monochromatic palette invites contemplative engagement, encouraging viewers to consider the social dynamics and emotional qualities defining Akogo celebrations (Berger, 1972). The choice of grayscale reflects the examiner's observation about black and white photographs being more engaging because they "reveal and conceal simultaneously", the absence of color creating interpretive space for the viewer's imagination.

Respondents QR and EI highlighted Akogo's role in transitional rites. The dance accompanied in-laws bringing dowry and escorted brides to marital homes, strengthening kinship ties and building familiarity between extended families (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1950).

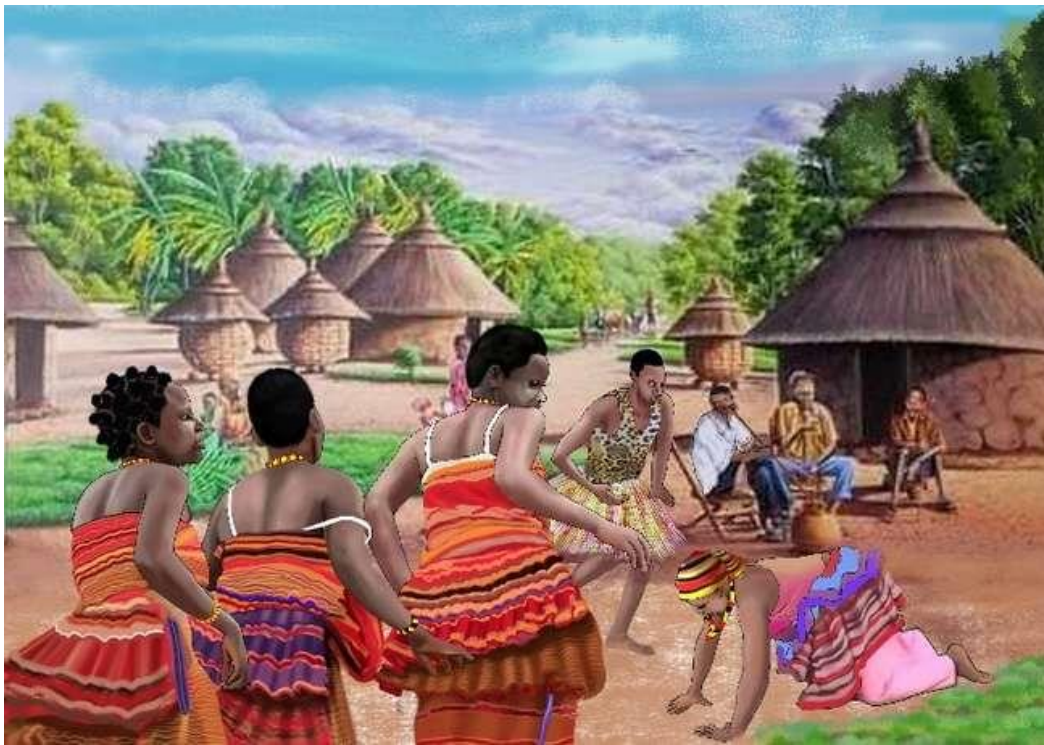


Figure 70: Akogo Used to Welcome In-Laws to Girl's Home with Dowry. Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

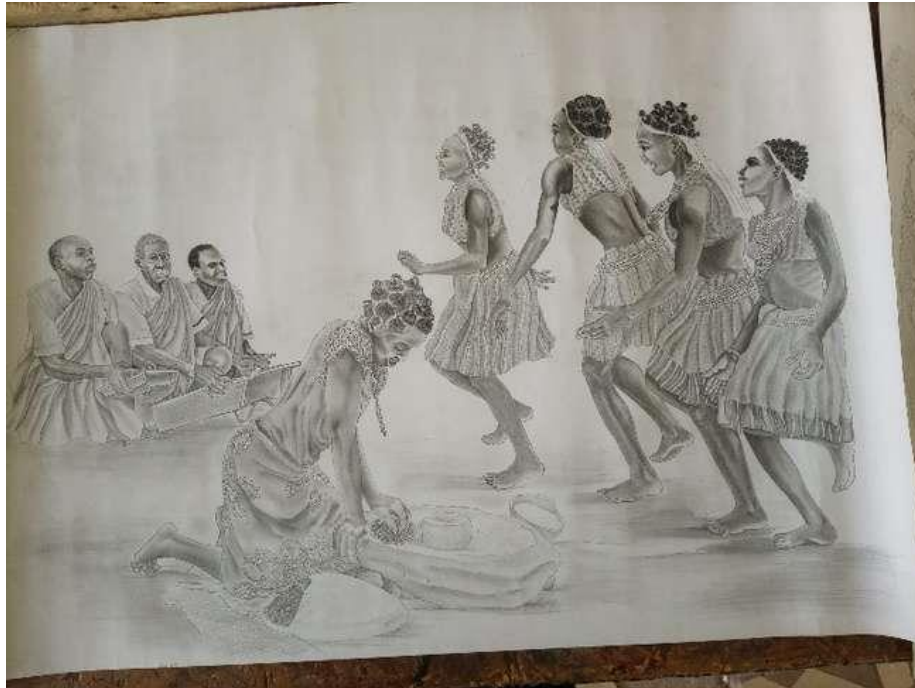


Figure 71: Escorting Girl to Her Marital Home and Passing Tests. Medium: Drawing. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

These sequential artworks document Akogo's role in marriage ceremonies, where dance facilitates kinship formation and alliance building. AGL noted that such events often strengthened family ties, occasionally leading to intermarriages between linked families, weaving social networks beyond immediate households (Parkin & Nyamwaya, 1987).

Akogo performers gained esteem beyond the performance context. AGL observed that dancers who impressed at ceremonies were frequently invited to perform elsewhere, especially at weddings and clan events. In families with substantial cattle wealth, exceptional dancers could attract multiple marriage proposals. Their fame depended not only on rhythmic skill but also social standing, reflecting Kaepler's (2000) insight that traditional African dance intersects aesthetics, kinship, and economic influence.

In sum, while Ajosi emphasized rivalry, prestige, and ritual contest, Akogo highlighted harmony, intimacy, and communal joy. Both dances demonstrate the Iteso's use of movement to preserve memory, express emotion, and transmit values across generations (Kaepler, 2000; Mabingo,

2015). The researcher's artworks contribute to this preservation, transforming lived traditions into visual archives for current and future generations.

4.2.3.1 Strategies for Integrating Traditional Dances into Contemporary Contexts

This research addressed the balance between cultural preservation and innovation in traditional dances, emphasizing that integration does not require a binary choice between preserving traditions and adapting them. The findings illustrate how Iteso dances adapt while maintaining cultural core values.

a). Integration Strategies Identified:

Core-Periphery Model: Essential Elements: such as Fundamental movements (e.g., stomping patterns, courtship gestures), Symbolic adornments (ostrich feathers, ceremonial sticks), Traditional musical instrumentation, Gender-specific performance roles, Adaptable Elements: Venues (traditional settings- formal stages), Costume materials (apatirici and otorobu- printed fabrics), Technologies (acoustic- amplified sound), Documentation (oral transmission- digital archiving)

Contextual Differentiation: Dances vary by context (rituals maintain tradition; festivals allow accessibility adaptations; educational settings prioritize simplified versions).

Youth-Led Innovation with Elder Supervision: Groups like Were Moto Moto Akogo showcase intergenerational collaboration, combining modern elements with traditional oversight to maintain cultural authenticity.

Hybrid Performance Formats: Contemporary performances often blend traditional and modern elements, using a "sandwich structure" to honor tradition while showcasing cultural vitality.

b). Addressing Modern Adaptations:

Material Adaptations: Communities use substitute materials due to resource scarcity, framing this as pragmatic continuity.

Temporal Adaptations: Performance timings are modified for modern schedules, enabling broader participation while keeping ceremonial intentions.

Spatial Adaptations: Traditional settings are supplemented by formal and digital figureforms, increasing accessibility despite some elders' concerns about lost intimacy.

c). Moving Beyond Conventional Representations:

The research's artistic methods emphasize dynamic representation, such as Charcoal sketches capture immediacy, Digital paintings explore hypothetical scenarios, Abstract representations convey spiritual dimensions, and Sequential series track choreographic evolution. These approaches honor tradition while allowing for contemporary interpretations devoid of rigid nostalgia. The artworks serve as interpretive engagement rather than definitive representations of "authentic" forms, and can be contemporary used in integrating traditional dances into contemporary performances

4.2.4. Movements and Timing of the Dances

Based on the transcribed data that was recorded, Transcript Excerpt (EI-2, February 22, 2023): where a researcher asked, *“You mentioned that the movements have not changed. Can you explain?”* The response from ‘EI-2: *The steps [pause 3 sec], the way we stamp our feet [demonstrates stamping], that is Ajosi . That never changes. If you change that [pause], it is not Ajosi anymore.*’

Researcher: And the costumes? Have those changed?

EI-2: Ehhh [sighs], the clothes, yes. Before, we used otorobo [bark cloth]. Now [pause] the young people wear kitenge [printed fabric]. But [emphasizes] the pattern, the way it wraps, that stays the same. The material changes, but the meaning [touches chest] stays here, in the heart.

[Field note: "Core-periphery" distinction emerged in multiple elder interviews]

Visual documentation, both hand-drawn and digital, interpreted the flow and timing of Iteso dances. Digital drawings captured time-specific features like evening ambiance, while traditional sketches highlighted emotion, symbolic posture, and community presence, together showing how dances educate, entertain, and reinforce cultural identity (Sullivan, 2005). Ajosi is mainly performed in the evenings (ajotet). EI explained that historically, it was reserved for elders but is now widely performed by youth in schools and public events. Outdoor settings accommodate large groups, though competition or budget constraints sometimes limit participation.



**Figure 72: Depiction of Ajosi Being Performed in the Evening. Medium: Digital painting
Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.**

This artwork captures the temporal specificity of Ajosi 's performance, twilight hours when agricultural labor concludes, and communities gather for social activities. The evening timing creates what Turner (1969) terms "liminal" space, a transitional period between day and night, work and leisure, where ordinary social structures temporarily suspend and ritual activities occur.

Akogo's structure and timing differ significantly. Unlike Ajosi , with typically two key instrumentalists (one male, one female), Akogo involves several musicians arriving sequentially with instruments. They kneel in stylized posture as part of a ritual rhythm. The lead female dancer follows, entering with deliberate, sensual steps. Her pauses and stillness at the center stage create a ceremonial opening rich in symbolism (Hanna, 1988).



Figure 73: Instrumentalist Kneeling While Playing Akogo. Medium: Typographic drawing, a3 size by agama peter. 2024

This image captures the performer mid-performance, adorned in Kitambi and sisal decorations. The dim lighting, bold compositional elements, and sharp visual contrasts convey not just dance's visual style but its spiritual gravity. The frozen moment reflects energy drawn from ancestral memory, underscoring how dance transcends mere movement to become ritual enactment (Schechner, 2002).

a). **Akogo Courtship Sequence**



Figure 74: Main Girl Takes the Stage. Medium: charcoal drawing, Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.

This artwork documents the central female performer's entry—a ritually significant moment establishing her as an evaluative authority whose choices will determine courtship outcomes. Male dancers approach sequentially, attempting to impress through skilled display and verbal seduction framed as marriage proposals.



*Figure 75: Seductive "Hooing" Dance Moves During Akogo Dance. Medium: Charcoal drawing
Size: A2. Artist: Agama Peter.*

This artwork captures the specific movement vocabulary employed by male dancers attempting to attract female attention. The term "hooing" refers to distinctive hip movements and rhythmic gestures understood as courtship signals. One by one, male dancers display skills until the central female begins responding through dance, signaling acceptance of particular suitor.



Figure 76: Boys Pairing Up to Dance with Girls on Stage. Medium: Charcoal drawing on normal paper. Size: A2, Artist: Agama Peter. 2023

The Analysis of the above figure reveals that, based on the respondent AGP, once initial pairings form, other dancers join, seeking their own partners from assembled female dancers. This transition from individual courtship display to collective paired dancing marks a shift from competitive evaluation to collaborative celebration.



Figure 77: Leader with Whistle Signaling Dance Move Changes During Akogo.
Medium: Charcoal drawing on manila paper Size: A2, Artist: Agama Peter.

The leader's whistle functions as performance regulation technology, coordinating transitions between dance sections and cueing formation changes. This centralized control ensures coherent collective performance despite individual improvisations.

b) Dance Formations

Responses from AGL, CL, EI, RP, and QR revealed that Ajosi is traditionally organized in concentric circles men occupying the outer circle, encircling women in the inner ring. This spatial formation symbolically reflects protection themes, gender complementarity, and communal order (Hall, 1966).

With reference to figure 97, the concentric circle formation creates a visual and spatial metaphor for gender relations, masculine protection surrounding feminine social reproduction. This spatial arrangement reflects broader Iteso social organization, where complementary gender roles create integrated wholes rather than hierarchical dominance (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Dancers typically enter in straight lines, led by the chief performer signaling with a dancing stick. This cues lively, rhythmic response, sparking communal energy. Performance follows a call-and-response pattern alternating between male and female voices, gradually building toward a mock battle (ejus) climax where dancers showcase strength and grace.



Developmental sketch



Figure 78: Signaling with a Dancing Stick and Mock Fight During Ajosi Dance. Medium: Digital Illustration, Size: A3, Artist: Agama Peter.

This developmental sketch documents the research process, preliminary drawings capturing live performance dynamics before refinement into finished artworks. The inclusion of process documentation reflects Sullivan's (2005) argument that artistic practice generates knowledge through making iterative refinement, revealing insights emerging only through creative engagement.

In the sketch, a leader raises a dancing stick to command attention, followed by dancers raising theirs in celebration. A soloist initiates singing in high pitch, joined rhythmically by others in a call-and-response pattern. As the song reaches its peak, mock fighting begins, with dancers demonstrating skillful footwork and improvisation. Women cheer enthusiastically while some male participants chant rhythmically, reinforcing the communal and performative nature of Ajosi .

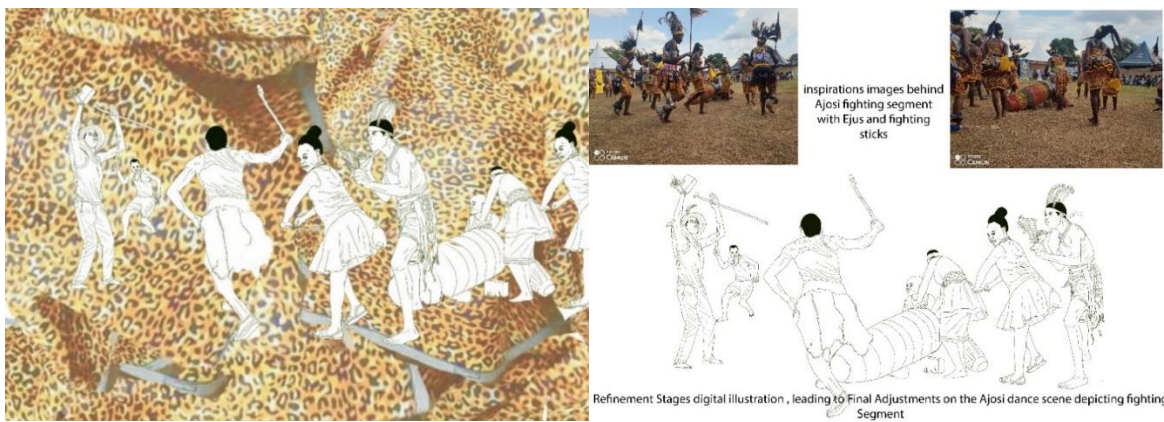


Figure 79: Ajosi Dancers Entering Fighting Segment. And Figure 99: Initial Digital Drawing Sketches of Ajosi Dancers in Fighting Segment. Respectively, Medium: Digital drawing. Size: A3 by Author

These sequential artworks document the progression from preliminary sketches to refined digital compositions. The comparison demonstrates how digital media enables iterative refinement, adjusting compositions, clarifying gestures, and enhancing visual impact through multiple revisions impossible with traditional media (Gray & Malins, 2004). The dance sequence continues with another solo-led chant. As the group exits, a final stage termed *tail* commences. Outstanding dancers return to the center, performing the most intricate movements for an audience seeking recognition or courting admiration.



Figure 80: Ajosi Best Dancers Showing Best Dance Strokes in Atail Stage. Medium: Charcoal drawing, A2 by the Author.

The *atail* (tail dance) marks the performance conclusion, celebrating individual excellence within the collective ritual structure. This final virtuosic display converts performance skill into social capital, with audience recognition translating into enhanced marriage prospects and community prestige (Bourdieu, 1986).

c). **Akogo Formations**

Formation and movement within Akogo carry symbolic meaning tied to courtship purposes. According to respondents, the dance originally began in a line or letter-shaped formation chosen to match conveyed messages. Over time, this shifted into a dynamic circular flow, allowing dancers to alternate turns at the center.



Figure 81: Akogo Dance Originally Performed in Letter Formation, Later Transitioning to Circular Flow. Medium: Charcoal drawing, Size: A1 by the author.

Analysis reveals that in circular formation, male dancers typically form the outer ring surrounding women in the center. Each performer took turns entering the middle, showcasing individual moves to attract admiration. This alternating pattern between male and female dancers creates a structured courtship context where individual displays occur under communal observation.



Figure 82: Performers Taking Turns to Perform in the Center, Surrounded by Women as They Alternate. Digital art in A3 size

This digital artwork highlights how choreographed arrangements support courtship functions. Formation isn't merely aesthetic, it provides a structured setting for social evaluation where dance becomes a language of attraction (Hanna, 1988).



Figure 83: Women Form Inner Ring While Men Dance on Outer Edge, Facing Admired Partners.
Medium Digital art. A3 size by the author 2023

At certain moments, dancers transition from circular formation into linear arrangement, reflecting energy and coordination shifts.

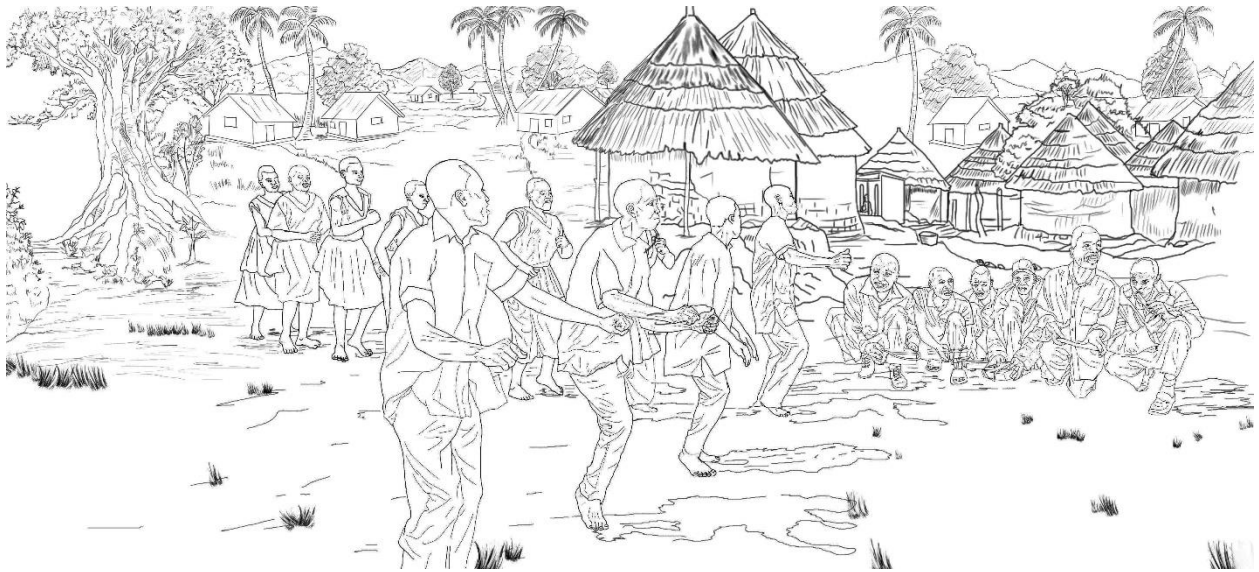
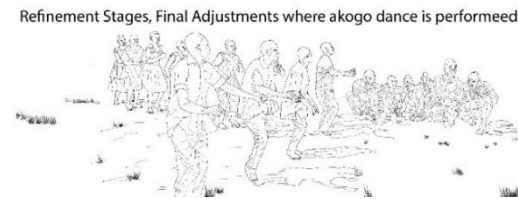


Figure 84: Akogo Performers Change from Circle into Straight-Line Formation.



Figure 85: Dancers Change Form to Separate Lines for Boys and Girls. Medium: digital illustration. Size: A3, by the author.

These formation transitions demonstrate Akogo's dynamic choreographic structure—spatial arrangements constantly shifting to create varied visual compositions and different social proximities between potential partners. As rhythm builds, dancers' alternate positions again, forming two straight lines facing each other. Men face chosen female counterparts while continuing synchronized dancing.

To signal climax, the leader blows whistle, prompting each dancer to pair with chosen partner. Dancers then exhibit most vigorous and creative movements, vying for attention and admiration.



Figure 86: Climax of Akogo, Where Dancers Display Strongest Moves to Attract Partners. Medium: Charcoal drawing. A1 size by the author.

As dance concludes, each dancer exits alongside their partner, leaving only top two performers. These finalists engage in an extended display of unique techniques, the *Akogo tail dance*, meant to leave lasting impression.



Figure 87: Best Dancers Showing Best Dancing Moves in the Tail Dance Stage.
Medium: charcoal on manila A2 size by the Author.

The tail dance functions similarly to Ajosi's *atail*, providing a virtuosic conclusion that celebrates exceptional skill. The winning couple's extended solo performance converts competitive success into public recognition and enhanced social status.

The researcher explored various art forms to highlight unique formations and movements of Ajosi and Akogo. Ajosi's circular arrangement symbolizes traditional gender roles and masculine protection. Akogo captures courtship nuances through alternating performances. Digital drawings and sketches clarify how adornments and movements carry rich cultural meanings and social functions.

d). The Levels of the Dance

In Ajosi , performance is categorized into three vertical levels: low, middle, and high. At a low level, dancers squat or kneel, postures signifying humility and spiritual connection to earth and ancestors (Mbiti, 1969).



Figure 88: Ajosi Levels, Left Shows Getting to Stage, Right Shows Middle Dance Level.

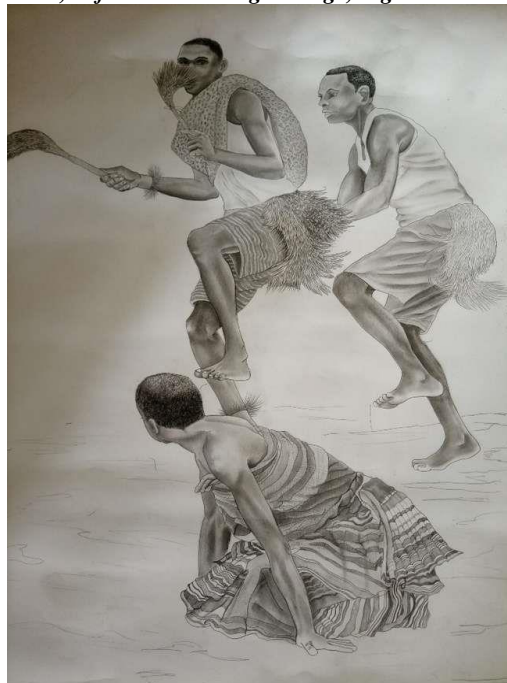


Figure 89: Girl Dancer Kneeling During Low Level of Ajosi Dance. Medium: acrylic painting on wooden board, charcoal drawing on manila paper by the author, 2024

At the middle level, dancers stand while slightly bending forward, maintaining moderate energy while preparing for climactic elevation. At a high level, dancers jump, with some lifted to dance on people's shoulders, literal elevation representing social elevation of exceptional performers (Turner, 1969). Akogo similarly consists of three levels. During low level, dancers form a circular arrangement, taking turns performing in the center, establishing foundational choreographic structure.



Figure 90: Akogo Levels of the Dance. Digital painting by the author 2023 A3 size



Figure 91: Dancers Forming Circle as They Take Turns Performing in the Middle with Dancing Partners. Charcoal drawing by author 2022

In middle level, dancers partner to showcase various moves in lines building intensity while maintaining structured formations. At a high level, dancers break from lines to traverse stage with partners, culminating in tail dance the performance's energetic peak demonstrating virtuosity and earning maximum audience admiration.

The artworks in this section encapsulated these celebrations' spirit. Digital paintings and illustrations highlighted key moments including crowning of best dancers and joyous communal gatherings during ajono drinking, underscoring profound connections between dance, courtship, and social bonding in Teso culture.

4.2.5. Changes and Evolution

Interviews with AGL, CL, and EI revealed that Iteso traditional dances have undergone notable changes influenced by social, cultural, economic, and technological factors. AGL highlighted shifts from traditional costumes made from local materials—amujej (sisal) and animal skins—to Western-style skirts and leather shoes, reflecting broader modernization and globalization trends affecting indigenous African dances (Utoh-Ezeajugh & Akunne, 2020).

Several participants expressed concern that these changes risk diluting performance authenticity. CL noted that Christianity and Islam prompted modifications aligning dances with contemporary religious values, echoing historical suppression of African dance forms by colonial missionaries (Ikibe, 2021; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991).

Conversely, EI emphasized positive contributions of education and cultural revival initiatives in sustaining traditional dances. Schools and cultural organizations conduct workshops fostering cultural pride, while interactions with neighboring communities—Acholi, Bagwere, Karamojong—have enriched local expressions. These efforts are crucial for preserving and revitalizing traditional dances (Gonye & Moyo, 2015).

Technological advancements in media and audiovisual tools have transformed dance documentation and dissemination, enabling innovative interpretations. Economic factors, such as

tourism and cultural festivals, have spurred preservation investments. Technology's role in safeguarding dance traditions is increasingly recognized (Green, 2019; Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015). Overall, despite adaptations, Teso dances continue to embody Iteso cultural identity, cohesion, and creativity, illustrating resilience as the community navigates modernization while preserving its heritage.

4.2.6 Preservation and Promotion of Iteso Traditional Dances

Preserving and promoting Iteso Traditional Dances (ITD) requires strategies integrating documentation, education, community participation, and institutional support (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; UNESCO, 2003).

Documentation and Archiving: AGL emphasized meticulous documentation through visual recordings and written descriptions, supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer and bridging gaps between elders and youth (Pink, 2013; Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Hennessy, 2009).

Educational Integration: CL advocated including ITD in school curricula to reinforce cultural and historical awareness, reflecting successful African models where indigenous performance strengthens youth identity (Mabingo, 2015; Nzewi, 2007).

Community Participation: EI highlighted community involvement via workshops and cultural events, aligning with participatory heritage management principles (Smith, 2006; Alivizatou, 2012). However, overemphasis on individual artists risks commodifying sacred traditions (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).

Institutional Support: RP stressed government backing funding, policies, and recognition of economic value through cultural tourism as vital for postcolonial African contexts where colonial disruption weakened traditional cultural authority (Throsby, 2001; Ranger, 2005).

Media and Technology: CL recommended leveraging television, radio, and social media to promote ITD, extending reach beyond local communities to national and diasporic audiences (Basu & Macdonald, 2007).

Instrument Preservation: Preserving traditional instruments, Akomai, Akogo, Akebe, Atenus, Ebilo, is essential, as material culture and performance practices are inseparable (Nketia, 1974).

Artistic Innovation: EI emphasized creative reinterpretation, citing historical precedents like N Gore Rock paintings, demonstrating that preservation can coexist with innovation (Erlmann, 1996).

Intergenerational Challenges: QR noted younger generations experience a disconnect due to modern influences, though selective retention of cultural practices, such as traditional foods and attire, indicates resilience (Mbembe, 2001).

Cultural Advocacy: RP discussed how dances historically educated communities on nutrition, reclaiming indigenous knowledge devalued during colonialism (Feierman & Janzen, 1992). AGL highlighted youth engagement in Akogo music training as key to survival, preventing traditions from becoming museum artifacts (Nketia, 2005).

Systemic Challenges: EI noted Western cultural dominance undervalues local Iteso artists, reflecting colonial legacies (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ashcroft et al., 2002). CL encouraged elites to use audiovisual documentation, publications, and exhibitions to protect heritage, while RP stressed community mobilization to uphold respect for cultural leaders (Mamdani, 1996).

Conclusion: Safeguarding Akogo and Ajosi ensures cultural identity, historical memory, and communal solidarity persist amid modernization. Youth participation in documentation, education, media, festivals, and artistic reinterpretation sustains tradition, enriching Uganda's cultural landscape (Nannyonga-Tamusuza & Weintraub, 2012).

4.3 Artistic Visual Imagery of Ajosi and Akogo Traditional Dances

4.3.1 Introduction to Studio Experimentation and Artistic Reinterpretation

This section transitions from ethnographic analysis to practice-based visual research, exploring how artistic production generates cultural knowledge (Sullivan, 2005; Gray & Malins, 2004). The studio investigation employs charcoal, digital illustration, and painting on animal hide to reveal aspects of Ajosi and Akogo inaccessible through text or photography alone. This multimodal approach captures the dances' complex, spiritual nature, reflecting visual ethnography's emphasis

on image-making as knowledge production (Pink, 2009; MacDougall, 2006; Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009).

4.3.2 Rationale for Using Diverse Artistic Forms

Cultural Authenticity: Charcoal and hide painting maintain continuity with indigenous Iteso art forms (Vogel, 1991), embodying “cultural translation” (Bhabha, 1994).

Contemporary Accessibility: Digital media facilitates reinterpretation for youth and global audiences, addressing preservation challenges where younger generations engage primarily through digital figureforms (Basu & Macdonald, 2007; Castells, 2010).

Representational Depth: Multiple media capture qualities—movement, texture, emotion, symbolism, difficult to convey through photography alone (Taussig, 2011; Ingold, 2013; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1994). This approach supports Objective 3: developing artistic representations of Ajosi and Akogo, positioning art-making as both preservation and analysis (Barrett & Bolt, 2007).

4.3.3 Visualizing the Dances: Techniques and Artistic Painting on Animal Hides

(a) Charcoal Sketches – Capturing Motion and Rhythm

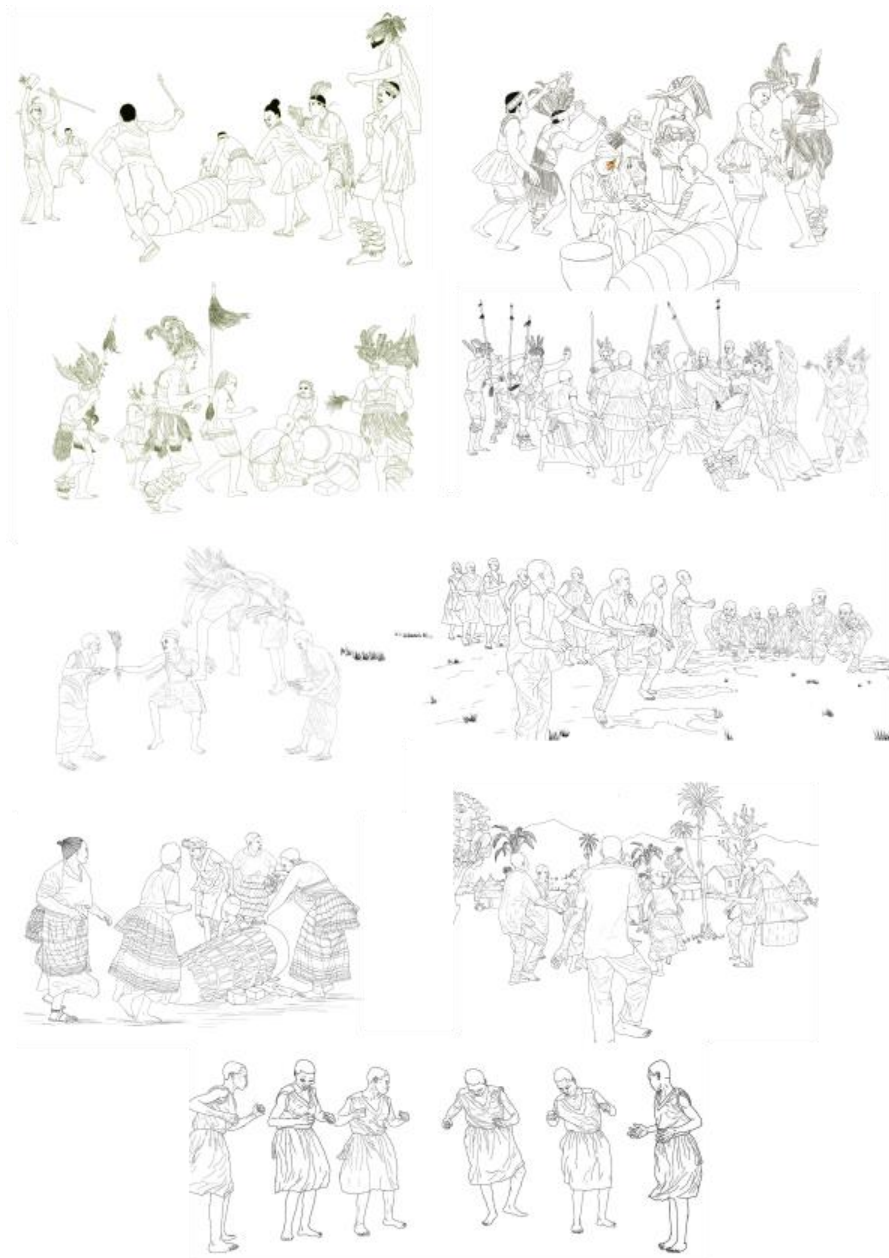


Collage 1, *Use of Charcoal “sticks” Sketches to Capture Movement and Flow* (2023-2024).
Medium: Charcoal on paper (multiple studies). Artist: Agama Peter.

Analysis: Rapid charcoal sketches created during live performances documented "fleeting dance movements," functioning as a "visual diary, capturing the pulse and group energy of Ajosi as well as the delicate, often solitary motions found in Akogo's courtship elements." This observational sketching reflects established ethnographic drawing practices where hand-rendering fosters sustained attention and embodied understanding unavailable through mechanical recording (Taussig, 2011; Kara, 2015).

Charcoal's capacity for "spontaneous, energetic representation" proves "ideal for conveying live motion," aligning with traditional Iteso artistic approaches while providing "a tactile method of visual storytelling." The medium's immediacy captures what Lepecki (2006) terms dance's "temporal thickness," the layered, durational quality of movement that static images typically flatten.

(b) Digital Line Drawing – Expressing Movement and Form



Collage 2, Clean Digital Line Work for Expressive Yet Modifiable Illustrations (2023-2024).
Medium: Digital drawing. Artist: Agama Peter.

Analysis: Digital sketching offered "flexibility to adjust compositions and experiment with dance poses, formations, and gestures." Layered lines and controlled compositions provided clarity for "depicting recurring patterns in Ajosi or stylized gender dynamics in Akogo," enabling iterative refinement unavailable with traditional media (Manovich, 2001).

Digital tools' modifiability supports what Sullivan (2010) terms "studio thinking"—the experimental, iterative process through which artistic inquiry generates insights. The capacity to rapidly explore "multiple variations" enables systematic visual analysis of choreographic structures and symbolic gestures.



Developmental sketches and inspiration



Figure 92: Akogo Upper Body Dance Movement for Girls in the Courtship Stage (2024). Medium: Digital line drawing. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.

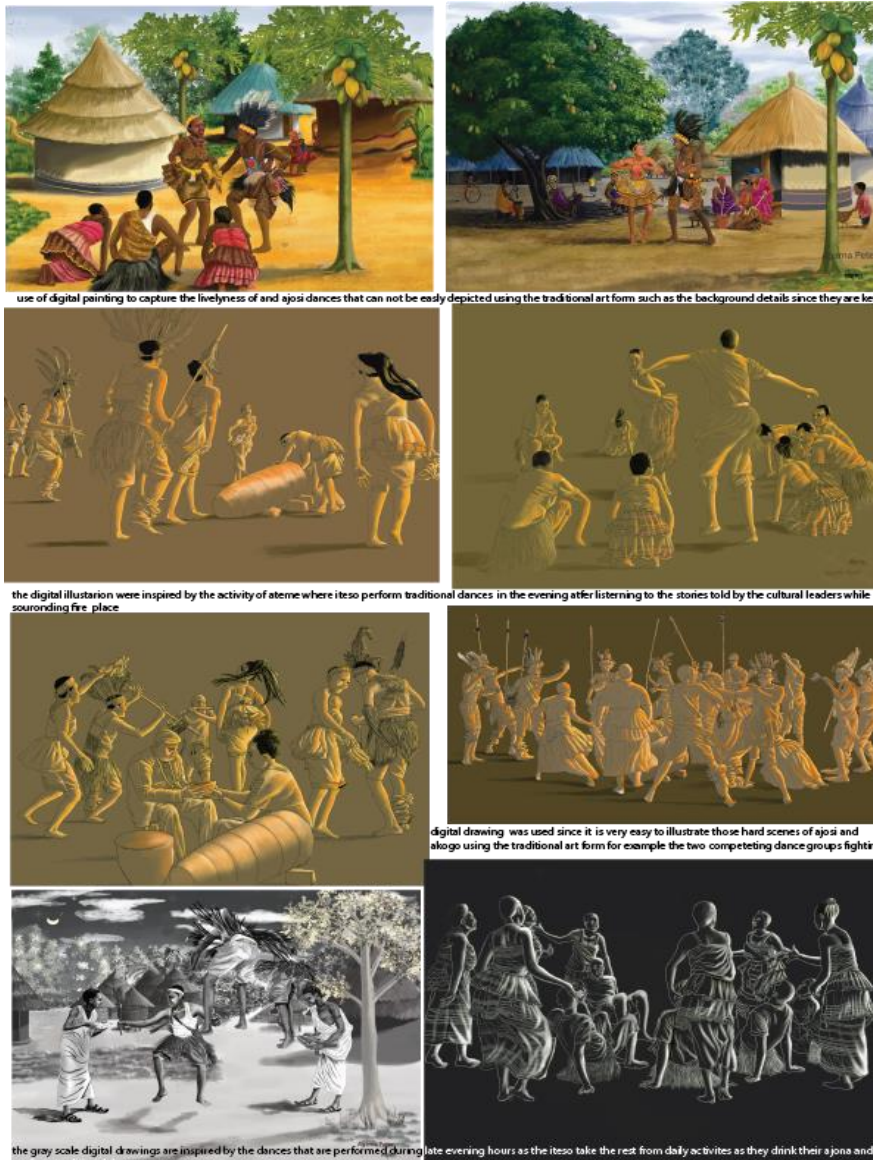
Analysis: This digital drawing isolates specific movement qualities, upper body positioning, gestural vocabulary, and postural alignment, characteristic of female courtship performance in Akogo. The reductive, line-based approach emphasizes formal qualities over decorative details, functioning as movement notation that could guide performance reconstruction (Hutchinson, 1970; Farnell, 1999).



Figure 93: Evening Dance Scene Painted Digitally, Capturing Twilight Mood (2024).
Medium: Digital painting. Size: A2 extended. Artist: Agama Peter. Digital drawing inspired by German Artist Christian Meiboom.

Analysis: Digital painting captured atmospheric qualities, twilight lighting, and environmental context, establishing temporal and spatial specificity. The technique's layering capacity enabled integration of "dramatic lighting, symbolic overlays, and layered textures," revealing "spiritual energy, mood, and ritual importance" invisible in documentary photography (Pink, 2009; MacDougall, 2006).

(c) Digital Painting – Revealing Symbolic and Spiritual Layers



Collage 3 *Digital Painting to Depict Symbolic and Spiritual Dimensions* (2023-2024).
 Medium: Digital painting (multiple works). Artist: Agama Peter.

Analysis: Digital painting proved vital for "visualizing Ajosi 's spiritual undertones and Akogo's emotionally charged courtship narrative." The medium enabled "atmospheric effects, symbolic overlays, and lighting shifts" that are unavailable through traditional technique, functioning as what Banks and Zeitlyn (2015) term "analytical images"- representations that embody research insights rather than simply documenting observations.

These paintings "reveal what the camera often cannot: the internal world of ritual, desire, and identity," positioning visual art as a phenomenological research method accessing subjective, experiential dimensions of performance (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1994). The artworks function as "cultural commentaries, bringing out layers of meaning embedded in these dances" through symbolic visual language.

(d) Charcoal Pencils – Emphasizing Ornamentation and Detail



Collage 4 *Charcoal Pencil Details on Material Culture* (2023-2024). Medium: Charcoal pencil on paper (multiple studies). Artist: Agama Peter.

Analysis: Charcoal pencil renderings focused on "material culture—costumes, shells, ankle bells, beads, and skins integral to the identity of the dances." The medium's tonal range enabled detailed documentation of textile textures, beadwork patterns, and material surfaces, serving organological preservation functions (Barz & Cooley, 2008).

The observation that "costumes vary even within the region" demonstrates regional diversity requiring careful documentation. Akogo's "chest-revealing attire to signify courtship" contrasts with Ajosi's "communal dress," reflecting functional and symbolic differentiation. Charcoal pencil's "ability to show tone and texture" proves ideal for capturing these material distinctions.

(e) Painting on Animal Hides – Cultural Materiality and Symbolism



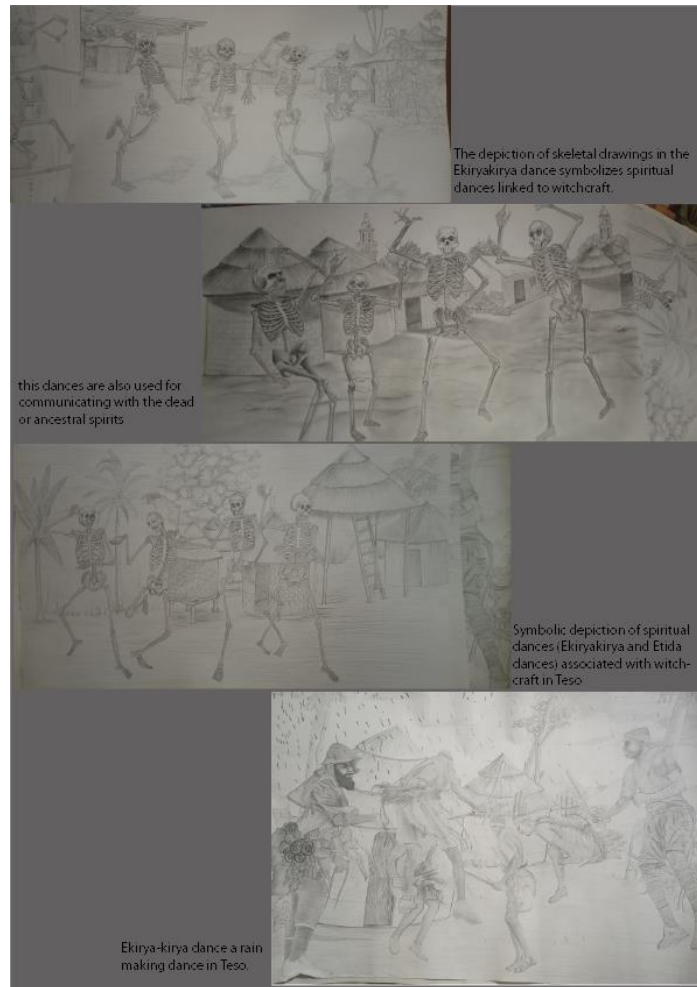
Figure 94: Painting on Animal Hides Symbolizing Traditional Dance Costumes (2024).
Medium: Acrylic on treated animal hide. **Size:** 50 × 40 cm. **Artist:** Agama Peter. **Source:** Author, 2024.

Justification for Painting on animal hides represents significant methodological innovation, merging "form with content" by using materials symbolizing "Iteso's pastoral identity, underscoring the interconnectedness of cattle, dance, and community identity" (Schneider, 1987). This choice was "both an artistic and anthropological," creating "material continuity between art and culture in Iteso society."

Unlike canvas, hides carry "embedded cultural meaning," functioning as what Gell (1998) terms "art objects with agency", materials that actively participate in social processes rather than

passively representing meanings. The tactile, olfactory, and visual qualities of hide ground the artwork in pastoral material culture, creating sensory connections to livestock-based livelihoods.

(f) Abstract and Symbolic Drawings – Representing the Spiritual Realm



Collage 5 *Abstract Depictions of the Ritualistic Nature of Iteso Traditional Dances* (2023-2024).
Medium: Mixed media (ink, charcoal, digital). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

Analysis: Dances like Ekiryakiryra and Etida "include elements of spirituality and ritual that defy literal representation." Abstract drawings portrayed "skeletal figures or symbolic motifs referencing witchcraft, rainmaking, or purification," employing visual language appropriate to spiritual dimensions. "Abstraction opens space for interpretation, aligning with how the Iteso themselves may view these dances, as layered, symbolic acts rather than mere performances" (Turner, 1967). This representational strategy recognizes that spiritual experience resists literal

depiction, requiring symbolic vocabularies that gesture toward ineffable dimensions (Eliade, 1964).

4.3.4 Studio-Based Visual Interpretation of Dance Formations and Movement

This subsection documents Akogo's choreographic structures through sequential visual analysis:



Figure 95: Akogo Dance Line Formation Transitioning to Circular Flow (2024). Medium: Digital drawing. Size: A3 Artist: Agama Peter.

Analysis: Initial line formation transitions to circular arrangement where "each performer takes turns at the center, often with men's circles surrounding female dancers," reflecting courtship ritual's spatial dynamics. This choreographic structure creates what Hall (1966) terms "sociofugal" space, arrangements facilitating focused interaction between selected individuals within larger group contexts.



Figure 96: Performers Alternate Center-Stage Roles, Surrounded by Women (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.



Figure 97: *Inner Ring Features Female Dancers, Men Encircling Them* (2024).
Medium: digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

Analysis: Spatial arrangement where "each faces their admired partner, dancing in place, a symbolic gesture of interest and emotional offering" demonstrates courtship's choreographed nature. The concentric circle formation creates multiple audience perspectives, dancers observe both their partners and the surrounding community, reflecting courtship's simultaneously private and public character (Goffman, 1959).

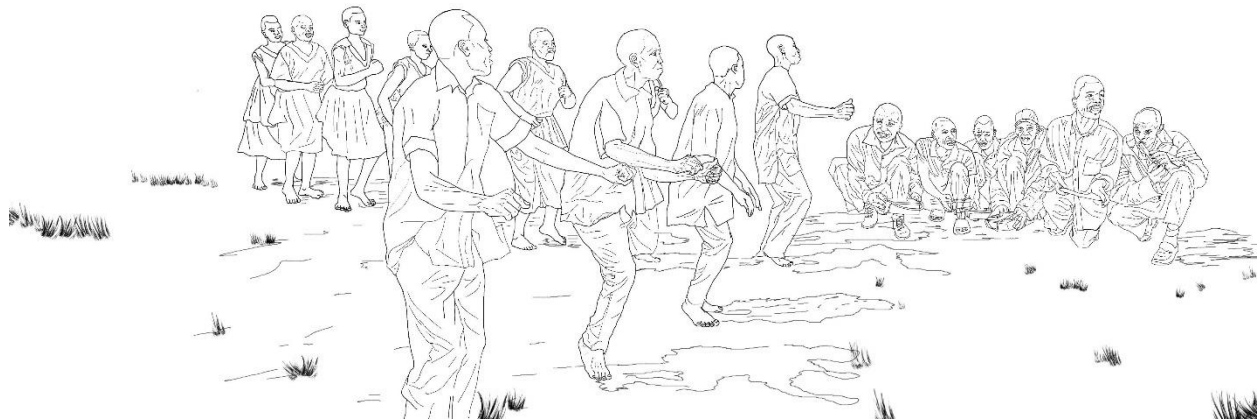


Figure 98: *Performers Shift Back into Linear Formations* (2024). Medium: Digital illustration.
Size: A2 Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.



Figure 99: Dancers Reposition While Instrumentalists Kneel (2024). Medium: Charcoal and graphite. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). **by** Agama peter, the Author

Analysis: The reformation into "two parallel lines, one male, one female, each dancer facing their intended partner" establishes dyadic focus while maintaining communal context. This spatial structure balances individual courtship negotiations with collective oversight, embodying Iteso social organization's tension between personal agency and communal authority (Fortes, 1969).



Figure 100: Group Separates into Distinct Gendered Lines (2024). Medium: Digital line drawing. Size: A4 (21 × 29.7 cm). Artist: Agama Peter.



Figure 101: Climax of Akogo: Vibrant and Creative Moves to Captivate Partner (2024). Medium: Digital painting. Size: A3 (29.7 × 42 cm). Artist: Agama Peter. Source: Author, 2024.

Analysis: The climactic phase, where "each dancer showcases their most vibrant and creative moves to captivate their partner," represents peak performative intensity. This display of virtuosity serves what Miller (2000) terms "costly signaling", energetically expensive displays that honestly communicate performer quality, ability, and commitment.

The final "Akogo Tail Dance" performed by "two most outstanding performers" who "remain" after others exit establishes public recognition of excellence, converting performance competence into social prestige and marriageability (Bourdieu, 1986; Hanna, 1988).

4.3.5 Conclusion

This studio-based exploration demonstrates how diverse artistic techniques contribute to "richer and more faithful representation of Iteso cultural traditions." By leveraging traditional and digital media, the research: **Preserves** endangered traditions in accessible, engaging forms, **Bridges** generational and technological gaps in cultural transmission. **Highlights** nuanced differences (costume, purpose, gender roles) between dances. **Reinforces** art's role as cultural archive and interpretive lens.

This process shows that preservation encompasses both documentation and reinterpretation, "translating living traditions into forms that can be understood, respected, and passed on in both

local and global contexts" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Smith, 2006). The artworks function as what Taylor (2003) terms "repertoire", embodied cultural knowledge stored in performance and visual representation that supplements the written "archive."

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes findings from research exploring Ajosi and Akogo traditional dances within the Iteso community of Eastern Uganda. The study's objectives focused on understanding these dances' cultural heritage, purpose, and significance while generating visual artistic representations fostering cultural appreciation and preservation. The chapter presents: (1) a summary of findings, (2) theoretical and practical conclusions, and (3) strategic recommendations.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Objective 1: Cultural Heritage, Purpose, and Significance

Ajosi and Akogo function as what Schechner (2002) and Turner (1982) term "cultural performances", structured events through which communities enact and transmit identity, values, and cosmology. These dances serve multiple interconnected functions:

Lifecycle rituals: initiations, marriages, funerals

Agricultural ceremonies: harvest celebrations, rainmaking

Courtship mechanisms: particularly Akogo's role in mate selection

Royal/spiritual occasions: Ajosi 's association with traditional authority and ancestral veneration. These performances constitute "living expressions of identity and shared values" (Hanna, 1979), functioning as "figureforms for storytelling, spiritual reflection, and communal bonding" embedded within daily life rather than separated as "art" distinct from social practice (Geertz, 1973).

Objective 2: Culturally Informed Movements and Adornments

The research documented distinct movement vocabularies and symbolic adornment systems:

Ajosi : "Slow, grounded steps, synchronized stomping, and measured gestures" convey "respect, spiritual connection, and authority," reflecting the dance's royal and ritual associations (Kaeppeler, 1978; Hanna, 1979).

Akogo: "Lively and expressive, with swift, flirtatious motions" appropriate to courtship functions, demonstrating how choreographic style encodes social purpose (Coplan, 1994; Hanna, 1988).

Adornment functions as "visual language, deeply embedded in Iteso cultural identity," with specific items, beaded jewelry (atipe), bells (esiman), animal hides, ostrich feathers (ajulo), patterned fabrics, serving as "coded messages that signal gender, age, social roles, and event nature" (Schneider & Weiner, 1989; Hendrickson, 1996). These material elements provide "a solid foundation for artistic visual interpretation," demonstrating clothing's semiotic functions (Barthes, 1967; Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992).

Objective 3: Artistic Visual Imagery

The study translated cultural richness into visual artworks through multiple methodologies:

Live sketches and observational illustrations: captured "real-time nuances and emotional undertones."

Paintings: highlighted "rhythm, mood, and key moments."

Digital renderings: reimagined traditions in "stylized formats suitable for educational and cultural advocacy."

These artworks serve triple functions: (1) **archiving** heritage, (2) **reinterpreting** for contemporary relevance, and (3) **engaging** modern audiences, particularly youth responding to visual storytelling (Pink, 2013; Sullivan, 2005). The visual materials "preserve, communicate, and breathe new life into cultural traditions within both local and global contexts" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

5.2.1 Conclusion

Study Achievements and Cultural Significance

This research engaged Ajosi and Akogo "not simply as performances but as ceremonies, rites, rituals, as living expressions of identity, culture, and community." Findings demonstrate that these dances embody "an important aspect of Iteso people's cultural identity" (Iduwe Oduk in Ateso language), with significance extending "far beyond entertainment" into spiritual life, social structure, and historical memory (Ranger, 1975; Vansina, 1985).

The dances function at lifecycle events, ceremonies, harvest festivals, and derivative forms (Ekuma, Ekata, Ekiryakirya, Etida documented in Chapter 4), "bring[ing] communities together while maintaining cultural beauty and transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next" (Blacking, 1973; Nketia, 1974). This intergenerational transmission proves critical for cultural continuity amid modernization pressures (Mbembe, 2001).

Symbolic Systems and Cultural Codes

Movement vocabularies and adornment systems constitute "iconographic language excessively abundant" in meaning. Specific examples documented:

Atenus drum (played by women) / **Itelelei** (played by men): signifies "respect for status in family" and gendered divisions of ritual authority (Stone, 1982; Amadiume, 1987)

Sweat-wiping gesture: women wiping male dancers' faces "signify[ing] love," representing "woman's role in honoring male labor and sacrifice" (Okirior, 2021). **Itipe (beads):** "meant for attraction of suitable marriage suitors," functioning as courtship signaling (Bourdieu, 1986)

Ichiman (bells): "portray[ing] ability to live in harmony with neighboring tribes and do trade," reflecting regional exchange networks (Karp & Maynard, 1983)

Ajulo (ostrich feathers): "carry symbolic meaning of honor for ancestors, invoke spirits, , relevance in society, clan status, and express deep religious or cultural values" (Turner, 1967; Fernandez, 1982)

These symbolic systems encode "age, gender, status, and the deeper cosmology of the Iteso," demonstrating that "understanding these cultural codes puts us on a unique pedestal where we can create creative, culturally relevant artistic visual imagery manifestations" (Geertz, 1973; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997).

Methodological Contributions: Practice-Based Visual Research

The study's methodological innovation lies in employing "traditional hand-drawn sketches, digital illustrations, and painted interpretive art" to make "ephemeral art of dance feel tangible and

lasting" (Sullivan, 2005; Gray & Malins, 2004). This practice-based approach demonstrates that artistic production constitutes a legitimate research methodology generating insights unavailable through conventional ethnographic methods (Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Candy & Edmonds, 2018).

The artworks transcend documentation, functioning to "interpret and communicate, depicting and animating Iteso cultural practices in a more vibrant and visually stimulating manner," particularly engaging "younger generations who are more prone to engage through visual mediums" (Basu & Macdonald, 2007; Castells, 2010). This addresses critical preservation challenges where youth disengage from participatory cultural transmission (Nannyonga-Tamusuza & Weintraub, 2012).

Cultural Preservation through Artistic Reinterpretation

The research demonstrates that "arts can be an incredible sword in the war to reclaim, honor, and restore cultural expressions often found hanging from the threads of a cultural erosion noose." While live performances remain "temporary," their "aesthetic animating spirit and cultural energy can be captured through modes of artistic expression, allowing these short-lived, sacred acts to be viewed, remembered, and glorified outside of their specific place and space in time as part of an ongoing, ever-growing, ancestral indigenous legacy" (Taylor, 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

5.2.2 Navigating Preservation and Innovation: A Tripartite Framework

This study outlined a tripartite framework for effective cultural preservation that integrates three vital dimensions.

Dimension 1: Archival Preservation (Guarding Heritage)

The research documents endangered practices, creating permanent records of traditional costume construction, ritual meanings, and choreography to safeguard cultural heritage against threats like aging practitioners and declining youth engagement.

Dimension 2: Adaptive Documentation (Acknowledging Change)

It also highlights contemporary adaptations, showing that Iteso dances are dynamic traditions. By depicting modern performances and innovations, the study emphasizes the importance of adaptive continuity for cultural survival.

Dimension 3: Methodological Innovation (Experimental Representation)

The diverse artistic methodologies used, such as charcoal and digital painting, offer innovative ways to represent culture and provide insights not captured by traditional ethnography.

Strategic Integration: Sustainable preservation requires an integration of these dimensions: preserving traditional forms in specific contexts while allowing adaptations elsewhere and experimenting with representation. This framework serves as a model for heritage practitioners facing similar challenges worldwide.

5.3 Recommendations

Grounded in the study findings, the following recommendations target institutions with direct responsibility for cultural preservation, education, and representation of Ajosi and Akogo dances:

Cultural Institutions; Cultural centres, museums, and archives should prioritise structured documentation of Ajosi and Akogo through recorded performances, oral histories, and artist-generated visuals. They should further develop curated exhibitions and community programmes that present these dances in culturally grounded and educational formats.

Educational Institutions; Schools and universities should integrate elements of Iteso traditional dance into arts and culture curricula. This can be supported through partnerships with cultural elders and through the development of digital learning resources that make movement and adornment accessible for teaching and research.

Visual Artists and Cultural Practitioners; Artists working with Iteso cultural material should employ multimodal documentation for example, animation while engaging directly with performers and elders to ensure culturally accurate and respectful representations.

Government and Policy Bodies; Government institutions should strengthen policy and funding frameworks for safeguarding indigenous dance traditions and support national dissemination of culturally informed performances and educational content.

In a nutshell, therefore, Cultural institutions, educational bodies, and performing groups can effectively balance preservation and innovation by adopting structured approaches. Cultural institutions should create documentation hierarchies and "living tradition" exhibitions that highlight dance evolution, while supporting both traditionalist and experimental groups.

Educational institutions can teach dances in various versions and invite diverse guest instructors to expose students to multiple perspectives. Performing groups should designate performances as either "traditional format" or "contemporary interpretation" and document their decision-making processes regarding innovations. Finally, visual artists and documentarians should produce varied representational formats, clearly labeling their works by function and collaborating with communities to determine appropriate public representations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Interview Guide Development

Semi-structured interview guides were developed for each participant category:

Elder Interview Guide:

1. "Can you describe the first time you participated in/witnessed [Ajosi /Akogo]? What do you remember most clearly?"

.....

2. "How has the dance changed since you first learned it? What has remained the same?"

.....

3. "What do the specific movements mean? Can you demonstrate and explain?"

.....

4. "What adornments are essential? Why? What materials were traditionally used?"

.....

5. "Are there aspects of the dance that should not be shared with outsiders? Why?"

.....

6. "How do you feel about young people performing these dances today?"

.....

Cultural Leader Interview Guide

1. "What is the Atekere Council's role in preserving traditional dances?"

.....

2. "How do you decide which adaptations are acceptable and which aren't?"

.....

3. "What are the biggest threats to these traditions? What preservation strategies work?"

.....

4. "What protocols should researchers follow when documenting sacred dances?"

.....

Akogo Group Leader Interview Guide

1. "How did your group form? What motivated its creation?"

.....

2. "How do you teach new members? What's most important to transmit?"

.....

3. "How do you balance traditional forms with contemporary innovations?"

.....

4. "What challenges does your group face? What support do you need?"

.....

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Iteso Traditional Dances (ITD) Questionnaire

Dear respondent,

I kindly request your participation in a research study on the traditional dances of Iteso. The Questionnaire is for collecting research data on the traditional dances among the Iteso people merely for academic Purposes. This questionnaire aims to gather information about your knowledge, involvement, and perceptions of traditional dances. Your contribution to this research will significantly contribute to my understanding of traditional dances and their cultural significance.

Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire by providing your honest opinions and experience. I appreciate your time and effort in completing this questionnaire. Your response will be treated confidentially and will only be used for academic/ research purposes.

Demographic Information:

- (A). Age: (b). Gender:
(c) Ethnicity: (d). Occupation:
(e). Location: (f). Name

Familiarity with Iteso Traditional Dances:

(a) Are you familiar with Iteso traditional dances?

(b) Have you participated in any Iteso traditional dances before?

.....

(c) If yes, please specify the names of the dances you have participated in.

.....

Cultural Context, Purpose/Importance, and Significance of Iteso Traditional Dances:

(a) How important do you think Iteso traditional dances are to your culture?

.....

(b) Do you believe that Iteso traditional dances help preserve cultural heritage? Why or why not?

.....

Types of Iteso Traditional Dances:

(a) Can you name some traditional dances that are unique to the Iteso community?

.....

(b) Are there any specific dances that are performed during particular occasions or celebrations?

If yes, please provide details.

.....

Culturally Informed Dance Techniques/Styles

(a) What are the typical dance techniques and styles used in Iteso traditional dances?

.....

(b) Are there any specific dance moves or gestures that hold symbolic meanings?

.....

Culturally Informed Adornments (Costumes and Attire):

(a) What types of costumes or attire are worn during Iteso traditional dances?

.....

(b) Do these costumes vary depending on the type of dance or occasion?

.....

Musical Instruments:

(a) What are the traditional musical instruments used during Iteso traditional dances?

.....

(b) How do these musical instruments contribute to the overall performance?

.....

Role of Iteso Traditional Dances in Society:

(a) In what ways do Iteso traditional dances play a role in social gatherings or community events?

.....

(b) Are there any specific dances that are performed during rites of passage or other important life events?

.....

Changes and Evolution:

(a) Have you noticed any changes in Iteso traditional dances over the years?

.....

(b) If yes, what aspects of the dances have changed? How do you feel about these changes?

.....

Preservation and Promotion:

(a) Do you think enough is being done to preserve and promote Iteso traditional dances?

.....

(b) What suggestions do you have for preserving and promoting these dances for future generations?

.....

Personal Experience and Opinions:

(a) Have you personally participated in Iteso traditional dances? If yes, please share your experiences.

.....

(b) How do you feel when you see Iteso traditional dances being performed?

.....

Additional Comments:

Please provide any additional comments, insights, or stories related to Iteso traditional dances.

.....

Appendix 3: Focus group discussion guide

1. "What does participating in this dance mean to you personally?"
2. "How does performing in front of outsiders/tourists feel different from performing for the community?"
3. "What would you change about how the dance is taught or performed today?"
4. "Demonstrate specific movements - what do they mean?"
5. "How do you resolve disagreements about 'correct' ways to perform?"

Appendix 4: Purposive Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling to select participants based on specific characteristics, knowledge, experiences, accessibility, availability, and willingness. A total of 50 individuals were approached, with 32 agreeing to participate. The sample included:

5 elderly individuals from the Teso sub-region with knowledge of traditional dances.	3 male and 2 female
2 cultural leaders CL from the Atekere organization. (ICU)	1 Male (Spaeker of Atekere/ICU), 1 female
8 leaders from various Akogo groups/ local artists: AGL	Chemuka Akogo, Nyero Rock Paintings Akogo, Kobuin Fire Fire, Modukul Akogo, Kamurojo, Orungo Akogo, Awoja Akogo, Okalebwo Chelekura, Adoku Akogo, and Amora Ican Akogo.
25 questionnaires QR distributed among the Akogo group performers	With 15 completed and returned from both male and female
2 radio presenters RP are known for their interest in traditional music and dance.	Voice of Teso radio station (Roberto), Mama Bukedea FM (Manasi Polycup Engole)

In summary:

Total approached: 50

Total participants: 32

Total declined: 18

Appendix 5: Glossary of terms in Ateso

Iteso	:	people who speak Ateso and come from the Teso sub-region
Akogo	:	a traditional dance performed at functions
Ajosi	:	a traditional dance performed in courtship
Akembe	:	a traditional dance performed with the help of drums
Ajiosi	:	meaning they were fighting
Emuria koliyia:		a slang in Iteso meaning let the grass grow
Ekirikira	:	a ritual dance performed by the witch called night dancers
Eduwe oduku	:	the children of a cultural leader who formed the clan
Epesuru	:	a girl child
Isapat	:	a boy child
Ipolok	:	elderly men
Aderutu	:	a stick used for voting/ in a coronation
Etida	:	Advance to the musical Instrument called the Drum
Arigirigi	:	a musical instrument made out of a string like a guitar
Adugu	:	a musical instrument called a bow hurdy-gurdy
Ajono	:	local brew, the Iteso call it their drinking culture
Efulano	:	vest
Kitambi	:	dancing prop
Apatirici	:	dancing Scaff
Esiman	:	bells
Imukule	:	animal hides
Egeye	:	prop
Atipe	:	beads
Ajulo Ekulu/Akopirot:		feathers
Amujeju	:	sisal
Kikoyis	:	a fabric made with animal print
Ebilo,	:	Flute
Eula Ayolai	:	Animal Tail

Appendix 6: Introduction Letter

MAKERERE

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COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, DESIGN, ART & TECHNOLOGY (CEDAT)

The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art
Department of Industrial Arts and Applied Design

July 02nd, 2023

Re: INTRODUCTION LETTER FOR AGAMA PETER

Reference is made to the above.

This is to introduce to you candidate Agama Peter who is our Master's Student at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (**MTSIFA**), College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (**CEDAT**), Makerere University.

Peter is a second year student pursuing his Graduate and as a requirement he is supposed to go out into the field to research, investigate and analyse various aspects in the community that may be relevant for his study.

Therefore purpose of this letter is to kindly request you to avail him with any necessary information that he seeks that you deem necessary to his studies.

I will be grateful if he is able to accomplish this task and also conduct himself in the best behaviour and incase of any challenges kindly refer back to me for any more information as the masters coordinator at the unit.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Ronald Mpindi Kibudde (Ph.D.)
Head, Dept. of Industrial Arts and Applied Design.
MTSIFA - CEDAT
Master's Coordinator
Makerere University.
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Appendix 7: Coding Development and Thematic Analysis Process

This appendix illustrates the systematic coding process employed to develop themes from raw interview data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The example demonstrates the progression from initial descriptive codes through pattern codes to final themes.

Stage 1: Raw Data Extract

Participant: EI-3 (Elder Informant 3)

Interview Date: March 5, 2023

Context: Discussion of changes in Akogo dance practice

Transcript Excerpt:

"When I was young, maybe 15 years [1967], Akogo was performed only in villages, in the evening, after harvest. Young men would come from neighboring villages to compete for our girls. The elders would sit and judge who danced best. That person would get respect, maybe even a wife. Now [pause] now they perform on stages, in the daytime, for tourists who take photographs. It's different. I don't know if the young people understand what it meant before."

Stage 2: First Cycle Coding (Descriptive)

Initial codes applied to data extract:

Code Category Specific Code		Data Reference
Historical Context	Historical_context: Akogo_1960s	"When I was young, maybe 15 years [1967]"
Performance Context	Performance_timing: evening_post-harvest	"in the evening, after harvest"
Social Function	Social_function: courtship_mate-selection	"compete for our girls... maybe even a wife"
Gender Dynamics	Gender_dynamics: male_competition_female_evaluation	"Young men... compete / elders... judge"
Cultural Change	Change_venue: village_to_stage	"villages... now... on stages"

Code Category Specific Code		Data Reference
Cultural Change	Change_audience: community_to_tourists	"elders would sit and judge... tourists who take photographs"
Cultural Change	Change_meaning: loss_of_understanding	"I don't know if the young people understand what it meant before"
Preservation Issues	Preservation_concern: intergenerational_knowledge_gap	"young people... what it meant before"
Emotional Response	Emotional_tone: nostalgia_uncertainty	"It's different... I don't know"

Note: This coding process was repeated across all 32 interviews and 4 focus group discussions, generating 347 initial descriptive codes.

Stage 3: Second Cycle Coding (Pattern Codes)

Initial codes collapsed into broader pattern codes representing recurring concepts:

Pattern Code	Constituent Initial Codes	Conceptual Definition
CORE-PERIPHERY	Historical_context, Performance_timing, Change_venue, Change_audience	Distinction between essential dance elements (unchangeable) vs. adaptable surface features
PRESERVATION-INNOVATION-TENSION	Change_meaning, Preservation_concern, Emotional_tone	Community debates about maintaining tradition vs. permitting adaptation

Pattern Code	Constituent Initial Codes	Conceptual Definition
INTERGENERATIONAL-TRANSMISSION	Preservation_concern: intergenerational_knowledge_gap, Change_meaning: loss_of_understanding	Challenges in passing cultural knowledge from elders to youth
GENDER-SYMBOLISM	Gender_dynamics: male_competition_female_evaluation, Social_function: courtship_mate-selection	Gendered performance roles and courtship functions
CONTEXTUAL-ADAPTATION	Change_venue, Change_audience, Change_timing	Strategic modifications based on performance setting

4: Theme Development

Pattern codes organized into three overarching themes:

Theme 1: Ajosi and Akogo as Embodied Cultural Archives

Contributing Pattern Codes: Historical_context codes, Performance_timing codes, Social_function codes, Gender_dynamics codes

Sub-themes:

- Movement vocabularies as encoded knowledge
- Material culture as cultural text
- Performance as pedagogy

Definition: Both dances serve as repositories of Iteso cultural knowledge, encoded in movement vocabularies, adornments, and performance practices, relying on participatory transmission rather than textual study.

Research Objectives Addressed: Objectives 1 (cultural heritage, purpose, significance) and 2 (culturally informed movements and adornments)

Saturation Point: Interview AGL-6 (no new codes emerged in subsequent interviews)

Theme 2: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

Contributing Pattern Codes: CORE-PERIPHERY, PRESERVATION-INNOVATION-TENSION, CONTEXTUAL-ADAPTATION

Sub-themes:

- Core-periphery model of cultural change
- Contextual performance strategies
- Innovation with accountability

Definition: Communities navigate tensions between cultural preservation and contemporary adaptation by distinguishing between essential and peripheral dance elements, adjusting performances while maintaining cultural integrity.

Research Objectives Addressed: All three objectives, especially Objective 3 (artistic visual imagery reflecting contemporary practice)

Saturation Point: FGD-3 (focus group discussion with third performance group)

Theme 3: Threats and Resilience

Contributing Pattern Codes: PRESERVATION-INNOVATION-TENSION, INTERGENERATIONAL-TRANSMISSION, Change codes (venue, audience, meaning)

Sub-themes:

- External pressures (colonialism, Christianity, modernization)
- Internal challenges (knowledge concentration, youth disengagement)
- Community-led preservation strategies

Definition: Iteso dances face threats from colonial disruption, religious transformation, urbanization, and declining youth participation, yet show resilience through community-led preservation initiatives.

Research Objectives Addressed: Objective 1 (cultural significance) and implications for Objective 3 (preservation through visual documentation)

Saturation Point: Interview AGL-7 (subsequent interviews confirmed rather than expanded theme).

Stage 5: Theme Validation

Themes were reviewed against Braun and Clarke's (2006) quality criteria:

- Internal Homogeneity: Data within each theme demonstrated coherence—Theme 1 focused on knowledge transmission; Theme 2 on adaptation strategies; Theme 3 on preservation challenges.
- External Heterogeneity: Themes remained distinct—Theme 1 on what is transmitted; Theme 2 on how transmission adapts; Theme 3 on threats and strategies for transmission.

Thematic Saturation Matrix:

Theme	Supporting Data Sources	Contradictory Data	Saturation evidence
Theme 1	EI (5/5), CL (2/2), AGL (8/8)	None	No new aspects emerged after AGL-6
Theme 2	EI(5/5),CL (2/2), AGL (8/8), AGP (4/4 FGDs)	Minor disagreements on adaptation acceptability	No new sub-themes after FGD-3
Theme 3	All participant categories	2 younger respondents less concerned about threats	Core theme confirmed by AGL-7; variant perspectives enriched rather than contradicted

Stage 6: Application to Findings

Final themes structured the dissertation findings chapter (Chapter 4):

Section 4.1 (Cultural Heritage, Purpose, and Significance): Primarily Theme 1, with elements of Theme 3

Section 4.2 (Culturally Informed Movements and Adornments): Themes 1 and 2, demonstrating both encoded knowledge and strategic adaptation

Section 4.3 (Artistic Visual Imagery): All three themes, plus methodological innovation in visual documentation as a preservation strategy

Note: This appendix presents one illustrative example from a larger coding dataset. Complete codebook with all 347 initial codes and definitions available upon request from the researcher.