

# Literary Analysis of ‘Kpaa’ Songs. A Didactic Legacy of Oral Performance. A Case Study of the People of Teshie, Accra, Ghana

Naa Korkor Leeyoo Watson-Nortey  
African University College of Communications, Adabraka, Accra

## Abstract

The unwritten literature of Africa is usually viewed by many as unrefined. The study focuses on an oral form of literature of Teshie among the Ga people in Ghana. The study dwelt on the literary analysis of ‘Kpaa’<sup>1</sup> Songs which is performed during ‘Kpaashimo’<sup>2</sup>. It throws light on how it can be merged into the context of literature by revealing the use of poetic devices such as proverbs, rhetorical questions, metaphor, personification, imagery, repetitions, allusions, alliteration and assonance. The study further reveals the immeasurable wisdom and knowledge found in ‘Kpaa’ songs as well as its importance in terms of teaching the culture of the people of the Ga in Ghana. It further reveals the didactic qualities of the songs. The focus of the study is on the performance and the songs that are used. The songs were recorded and analysed as poetry.

**Keywords:** Ga, Kpaa, Kpaashimo, Didactic, Performance

## 1.0 Introduction

The settlement of the Ga is flat grassland often very short of water. The sea is its southern boundary and on the north, the sharply rising scarp of the Akwapim Mountains separates the hungry plain from the well-rained-upon forest country with Twi-speaking tribes. Along the coast are series of lagoons of various sizes. These have always played an important part in Ga life. In the past they were often raided by inland people for their salt, and their easy fishing made them valuable before the Ga learnt the difficult sea-fishing which they practice to date.

To the town from west to east are Accra, Osu, Labadi, Teshie, Nungua, Tema and Kpong, all seven sea-side places. Each town owns a strip of territory stretching northwards, and each has its own independent government. Warfare with the Akwamu, Ashanti and others united the Ga towns into one army, but the alliance was purely military and their government are still essentially separate, though all of them are represented on the modern Ga State Council.

In the Ga community, the High Priest rules the community. Otherwise known as the Wulomo<sup>3</sup>, he relegates the duties of the High Priest to two lesser priests who are the Chief and the Queenmother, (Mantse and Manye respectively).

In August comes another set of ceremonies grouped around the reaping of the sacred corn and incorporating some of the features of the Homowo feast, a festival celebrated by all the people in the Ga Traditional Area. The various Ga towns, that is Accra, Osu, La, Teshie, Nungua, Kpong celebrate Homowo in series. The festival is celebrated to remember the exodus of the Ga people into the present location. The day is full of merry making. During the festival, various singing groups perform; an example of these performances is the singing of ‘Kpaa’ songs in the ‘Kpaashimo’. This form of performance by its nature is satirical because it praises right attitudes and customs in the society and ridicules the ills and wrong practices of people in the same community. Apart from this oral form, the Ga people take pride in other forms of oral art performances.

## 2.0 Statement of the Problem

Oral literature has been in existence among the Ga. Among the Teshie, *Kpaashimo* is the spice of the Homowo<sup>4</sup> festival. Apart from storytelling, ajenuoloo and others, Gas always enjoy listening to *Kpaa* song texts and occasionally, watching the performance as well. Although some people leave this performance to the preserve of the primitive and uneducated people, it will be seen and learnt later that, it is a misconception. Considering circumstances surrounding the performance, Finnegan (2007) takes on board the potentials of tonal languages and drumming, and the time factor, musical themes, interludes and contributions from audiences to prove that there are “no clear boundaries between composer, performer and audience, between analyst and artist, between the local exponent, the inscriber and the interpreter of texts” (p. 137). Most *Kpaa* songs contain messages which are taken with little or no recognition. In the light of the above, the study sought the need to investigate in order to identify and analyse the same song texts and recommend measures to promote *Kpaa* songs among the Ga as long as Oral Literature is concerned. On p. 200, Finnegan argues that “to understand what have in the past been

<sup>1</sup> A type of song performed by the Ga in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana

<sup>2</sup> The performance of Kpaa songs is termed as Kpaashimo

<sup>3</sup> He is the High Priest in Ga Tradition. He performs leading role in all traditional affairs. However, he is not the chief. Chieftaincy is hereditary but being a High Priest is not.

<sup>4</sup> The annual festival celebrated by the Ga. Literarily meaning ‘Hooting at hunger’.

regarded as ‘oral texts’, we have to go beyond just the ‘words’ and just the evanescent moment, into a host of multiplexities.’

### 3.0 Objectives of the Study

The performance of *Kpaa* songs popularly known as *Kpaashimo* is gaining recognition in several Ga communities and nationwide as a whole. It is therefore necessary to put it on a pedestal worthy of documentation and in effect protecting its performance. The objective of the study is to:

1. Unearth the manner with which language is used in this oral performance.
2. Identify the hidden meaning of words used in the song texts.
3. Expose the hidden didactic nature of these song texts.

### 4.0 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following questions:

1. What language is used in the oral performance of *Kpaa* songs?
2. Are there hidden meaning in the words used in the song texts?
3. Are there any moral lessons to be learnt in these song texts?

### 5.0 Literature Review

African Literature was mainly oral until the Twentieth Century when Written Literature became more common. In the olden days, when there was nothing like sound systems, ‘jama’ was used as a means of providing music during festivals and funerals. This aspect of culture was portrayed through singing.

Ruth Finnegan defines the term ‘Oral Literature’ by confirming the contradictions which exists within it. Finnegan (1970) argues that oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion- there is no other way in which it can be realised as a literary product.

Oral literature like Written Literature comes in different forms. These include stories, drama, riddles, histories, myths, fables, legends, songs, proverbs and other expressions used frequently to educate and entertain the society. Oral literature does not only entertain but it also educates at the same time. It was used to teach the younger generation to learn about culture and beliefs.

Field (1961), says that the Ga tribe is unique. Therefore, *Kpaa* songs and the *Kpaashimo* performance, an aspect of oral literature makes Teshie distinct from other tribes in the country, Ghana.

According to Finnegan (1970), Africa possesses both written and unwritten traditions. The former are relatively well known. The unwritten forms however are far less widely known and appreciated. Such forms do not fit neatly into the familiar categories of literate cultures, they are harder to record and present and also easier to overlook. The significance of performance in oral literature goes beyond a mere matter of definition: for the nature of the performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the particular form being exhibited.

Until recently, some scholars did not consider oral forms as literature (Okpewho, 1992). The etymological definition of literature lays emphasis on the written tradition and consequently neglects the oral tradition. Most African, particularly those at the south of the Sahara depended solely on the oral tradition since they did not acquire any form in the art of writing. Scholars therefore conclude that, these people had no literature. However, Angmor (1996) shares a different view. To him, ‘the indigenous counterpart of modern art of literary culture lies in the oral traditions of the people’.

An important feature of African oral traditions is their close link with music. Poetry exist almost exclusively in chanted forms as songs, and among West African people with tonal language (for example, Ga), much poetry is recited in musical form rather than spoken.

Literature, society and culture have something in common. Oral forms in Ga like ‘Adaawee’ and ‘Amejo’ involve performances; music and dancing, and the song texts can be analysed as folk-peotry. *Kpaa* songs and the *Kpaashimo* performance among the Teshie is no exception as it plays an important role in the lives of the people in Teshie. To these people, no occasion succeeds, especially their annual festival Homowo, without *Kpaa* songs and *Kpaashimo* performance can be described as the ‘soul’ of Homowo in Teshie.

### 6.0 Theoretical Framework

The study used the Rhetorical Theory by Aristotle and The Situational Theory of Publics by Grunig.

#### 6.1 Rhetorical Theory

All kind of usage of language comprises a certain amount of element of persuasion in them. The classic rhetoric theory was to know how this element of persuasion works and how it can be effectively utilized. In simple words classical rhetorical theory developed from the thought how the language works for people. The classical rhetorical theory does not have its universality like other theories, the major reason for that is people just

identified this theory. It existed since men began to speak. Aristotle identified that three elements are needed for an effective communication which are; The Speaker, The Speech, The Listener

And he spotted that some kind of change can be brought to the listener by the speaker through the speech. This is how the first theory of communication took its initiation.

Rhetoric is often considered as an art, which studies how the things that are said or wrote made changes in the person who reads or hears it. Thus it studies the effectiveness of language. The rhetoric was an important aspect in ancient western education, especially for the effective oratorical persuasion in fields of politics law etc.

The rhetorical education mainly focused on five canons which are *Inventio* (Invention), *Dispositio* (Arrangement), *Elocutio* (Style), *Memoria* (Memory), *Actio* (Delivery)

In Ancient Greek it was very important to have a good ability for persuasion through speech. They followed a system of democracy and in a democracy it is important that you are possessed with worthy communication ability because you need to talk and impress people for getting our rights. Whoever talks and impress more people will have the support of more people and whoever have the support of more people will be the leader and he can rule over others. Later all the great leaders in of the world are bestowed with ability of rhetoric and they made the people to persuade upon their ideology by knowing how the rhetoric theory works among people.

During the Middle Ages rhetoric was taught in universities as one of the liberal arts. By the 16th century people began to identify rhetoric as a field of social or human science. Thus classical rhetorical theory has its story as old as the story of any language that present today in the world. The history of rhetoric itself is the history of classical rhetorical theory. Rhetoric cannot be meaningful without understanding the classical rhetorical theory and to know about classical rhetorical theory we need to know about rhetoric. The reason is that both are more or less the same.

*Kpaa* song texts, though performed as songs come with some elements of persuasion. It embodies the three elements for communication. This is to say that, it has a speaker, the performer who calls out the song, the message which forms the lyrics of the song text and the listener who are the audiences listening and enjoying the performances.

The messages to larger extent, come with elements of persuasion and are arranged in an orderly manner. *Kpaa* songs and *Kpaashimo* performance has style. The songs are arranged in an order of call and response. The leader calls out and the refrain is the response.

## 6.2 The Situational Theory of Publics

James E. Grunig of the University of Maryland developed the Situational Theory of Publics to put meaning into the term 'public', which is one of the two key words in the phrase 'public relations'. Public mostly refers to the general public or the greater number of the population, other times, the plural term 'publics' refer to the groups for which public relations programs are planned especially journalists, employees, consumers, investors, governments, local communities and members of associations and non-profit groups.

In contrast, J. E. Grunig distinguished between stakeholders and publics and used the two concepts to segment the general population into categories that help communication professionals identify strategic publics and to plan and evaluate public relations programs. Grunig reserved the term 'stakeholder' for the general categories of people who are affected by the actual or potential consequences of strategic or important organisational decisions and for our study, community and society decisions.

Dewey and Blumer agree that, publics arise around problems that affect them. Having identified that problems affect them, publics organise into groups to persuade organisations that cause the problem. For the purpose of this study, publics put pressure and persuade leaders in the community and local government through *kpaa* song texts and the *kpaashimo* performance.

## 6.3 Application of Theory

Relating the Situational Theory of Publics to the study, as argued by Grunig and Repper, the STP conceptualises stakeholders as a way to describe relationships, the *kpaa* song texts similarly are aimed at building relationship by correcting the ills of the society. In identifying the ills of society, it further corrects and makes society better.

Groups are formed and managed by leaders to champion the cause of the community. This is done by chanting the songs which are mostly themed on community building, human nature, the lust for power and patriotism. Situational Theory of Publics, being a public relations theory states that practicing public relations would depend on a situation and how active a group's involvement builds publics and in this situation a community and a nation as a whole.

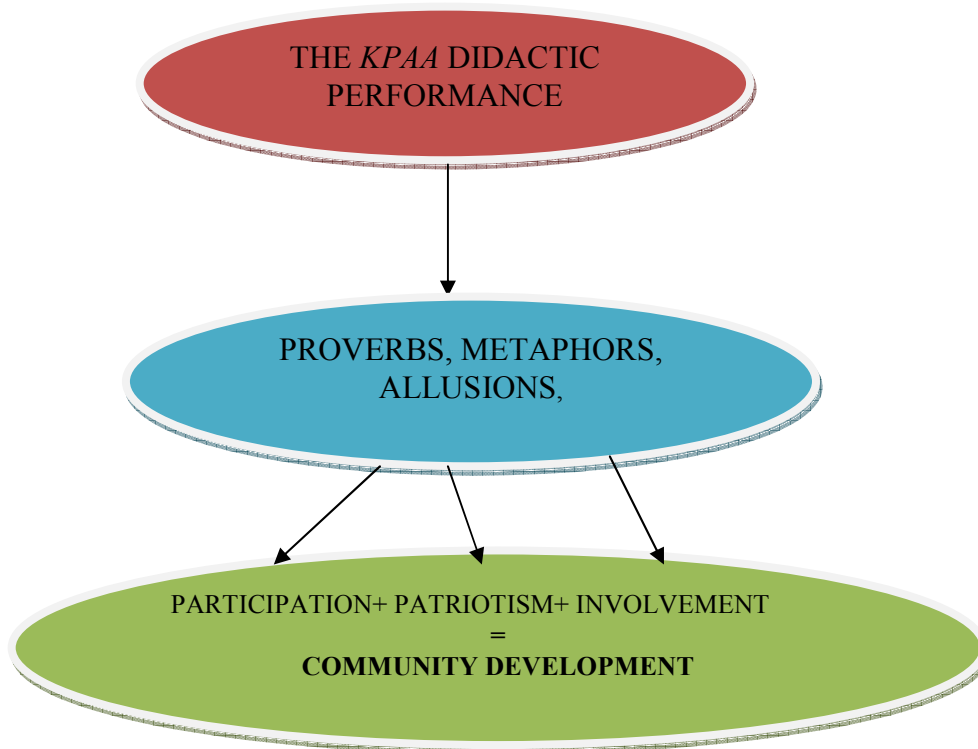
The lyrics of the words form the basis of persuasion as found in the Rhetorical theory by Aristotle. Lyrics are filled with metaphors, proverbs, allusion and more, all aimed at persuading individuals in the community not to relent on focusing on the benefits meant for the entire community.

A framework designed for the study, presents the *Kpaa* song text and performance as a didactic piece of performance. It further maps on to the contents being filled with proverbs, metaphors and allusions forming the

basis of the lyrics. As these song texts are performed, stakeholders, who are also the members of the community listen and identify and lapses in the development of the society. In effect, they are entertained and persuaded at the same time to resolve the ills and injustices in the society. This further inculcates participation, patriotism and involvement; all aimed at development.

Below is a framework for the study coined out of the Rhetorical Theory and the Situational Theory of Publics.

FIG 1: THE *KPAA* RHETORICAL/SITUATIONAL FRAMEWORK



## 7.0 Methodology

The research is field based so the interview method was used throughout the study. The interview was in a form of oral questionnaire. The study sampled five elders of the community purposively. They were sampled purposively because being elders of the community they have the history of the song text and how it came to stay with the people of Teshie. These elders were chosen to respond to questions based on the problem of the study. First of all, having identified the problem, it was necessary to learn the reason behind the choice of lyrics used in the song texts and why the sarcastic themes embedded in the song texts. There was then the need to establish relationship with the respondents and schedule a date and time for the interview. Respondents hailed from Nyonmo Tsawe Naa We in Teshie and were led by the eldest of the elders. Interviews were later transcribed and analysed thematically together with the song text compiled during the study. The song texts are in the local Ga language. The texts will be transcribed into English to ease the analysis of the song texts. The study will bear in mind not to remove the originality of the themes embedded in the song texts. However, there are some spellings of the words in Ga which have been modernised to suit the context and spelling due to the unavailability of the characters. The meaning thereafter is not altered due to the spelling.

## 8.0 Analysis and Findings

The study sought to answer the following questions and arrived at the following findings.

### 8.1 Research Question One

What language is used in the oral performance of *Kpaa* songs?

Most of the words used to compose these songs do not have English equivalence. The words are added to songs to create an effect which will add beauty and flow to the lyrics of the song texts. These words eventually make the songs pleasing to the ear. The songs can be put into groups according to the message they carry or the subject which is talked about in the song. Some of these words help in conveying messages which have unique themes which form the basis of the song texts. The themes include love, patriotism, kindness and the crave for vain power.

### 8.1.1 Song Text A

Call: Hello, My friend  
Response: Hello, My friend  
I love you so much and I would like to meet you in Paradise  
Be good always, I will also be good  
So that when we meet in Paradise  
We would hug each other and say, Hello!

Heinemann English Dictionary for Ghana, 1999, defines *Paradise* to be a place of complete happiness. It is the belief of the Ga people in Teshie that reciprocating love is complete happiness. By showing love, one shows kindness as well. The reward to this attitude of goodwill is that, when one dies, one spends life after death in Paradise which the Ga refer to as 'Paradiso'. This song text, above, entreats the listener to show attitude of goodness towards the fellow man.

Analysing this texts, it is clear that there is the use of an allusion. The use of Biblical Allusion where 'Paradise' is mentioned to be a place of reunion when all the toil of earth is done. Christians believe in paradise and liken it to the Garden of Eden. Here, one is taught a moral lesson of staying pure and living a gentle life with fellow man towards an eternal rest in paradise.

### 8.1.2 Song Text B

All: Are you not ashamed?  
You have made the chief's spokesman, a chief  
And he plays the role of the chief  
Our forefathers had a proverb which says:  
'The knee will never wear a hat when the head is idle'  
Do you know that? I am asking all the natives of Teshie  
Are you not ashamed?  
Certainly, you are ashamed!

In Song Text B, performers accuse the kingmakers for the mistake done in choosing a wrong person as a chief. In Ga Tradition, an 'Asafoatse', literarily is the leader of an 'Asafo' group and a chief's spokesman. In Teshie, chieftaincy is a preserve to three royal homes. They are the Ashitey We, Ashikwei We and Ashiboi We. It is a kind of circulation and each royal home gets it turn to be the chief of Teshie.

The performers do not see it as a right thing done, when in the absence of a chief, the elders sought the leadership of an 'Asafoatse'. They, the performers consider the action as one filled with embarrassment. Hence the Song Text B.

Song Text B, begins with a rhetorical question. It is evident that no one will answer the question in the first line but definitely, audiences will wonder the reason behind the question and later draw conclusion based on the rest of the lyrics of the song. Again, a proverb is used in the Song Text:

*The knee will never wear a hat when the head is idle.*

A proverb, being a short wise saying needs no further explanation to the wise. Here, in terms rhetoric, the performers persuade the audience to agree to the idea that, the wrong thing must be avoided. Hence, the use of the proverb above. The song text is arranged in an order in which there is a call through the use of a rhetorical question. The audience is then held in suspense as the message is presented in the form of proverbs and plain language.

## 8.2 Research Question 2

Are there hidden meaning in the words used in the Song Text?

Most *Kpaa* song make use of the expression /ee/, a long vowel. This has no meaning and it is just a long stretch of the vowel /e/. In fact, it is used to express emotions, and depending on the context in which it is used, it may express disgust, excitement and surprise. Most of the meaning is derived from the lyrics of the songs. For instance, in Song Text C, /ee/ expresses disgust. The performers warn those who take possession of things belonging to others to desist from doing so. The lyrics as seen in the Ga language is further translated into English. The effect of /ee/, is not present in the English translation. It is only seen in the lyrics of the Ga, since the performance itself is in Ga.

### 8.2.1 Song Text C

Asafo: Ene le mino, mino ni  
Notseme ye ee! Notseme ye ee!  
Ke oba pele je' ahe le  
Boaagbo obaashi fee ye je'  
Naanyo no ni doo mi le ji  
Nakai nii le, jee ono ni hu  
Abgo ashi eha wo, sani aja le pepεεε

Mi nno mi nno, notsemɛi yɛ eɛ!

English

All: This thing belongs to me by foul or fair means  
Well, the rightful owners are there  
If you fight over worldly things you would die  
You would leave everything behind in the world  
My friend, it hurts me that what you fight over is not yours  
It is a property which should be shared equally amongst everyone  
It belongs to me by fair or foul means  
Remember, the rightful owners are there.

### 8.3 Research Question 3

Are there any moral lessons to be learnt in these song texts?

The didactic nature of *Kpaa* song texts comes to light in the song text to be discussed below.

#### 8.3.1 Song Text D

All: If a fool carries your load, rain praises on him  
Else he would be discouraged  
Whilst he is carrying your load  
Remember to praise him  
'Oh sweet friend, what can I do without you?'  
Then you would be moving on along with him  
Then he would also be pleased and work for you  
Everywhere you go, he would with you.

In the song text above, performers educate everyone to learn to be appreciative. They liken this form of appreciation to a 'fool' and they explain that 'a fool' would need to be encouraged with praises. Literally, if someone is offering help, one must learn to be content and grateful. Comparatively, an Akan proverb says that 'one must not bite the fingers that feed him'. The song text above, like the advantages of oral literature is didactic in nature. It teaches a moral lesson showing appreciation to people.

Aside the moral lessons embedded in these song texts, *Kpaa* songs and the *Kpaashimo* performance have some themes based on historical narratives. This helps to tell about some past events that occurred and are phenomenal to the present generation. Notable among these is the Ga and Ashanti war; which narrates how the Ga strategically won the battle by using the festive food made of corn. In that song text, the Ga acknowledged the famous Ashanti slogan 'wo kum apen a, apem beba', literally meaning, 'When a thousand are killed, a thousand would appear to fight.' Below is the song text and its translation in English:

#### 8.3.2 Song Text E

Asafo: Wo yɛ kusum ko ni wo feo, wo Gamei  
Wo yɛ kusum ko ni wo feo, bemli ni woke  
Ashantemɛi yawu ta eɛ  
Wo yɛbaa ni kɛ woku lɛ woke yio amɛ  
Mɛni kusum wo fee?  
Woshwa kpokpoi ha amɛ ni etso  
Gbomei ni wokeye amɛ no  
Ni woye amɛ no amenuu shishi  
Amɛkɛɛ, kɛ ogbe akpe lɛ, akpe baaba  
Ana `mɛ anaa tɛ, Gamei ashikpo` lɛ, Gamei ano ni  
Woyɛ kusum ni wofeo wo Gamei  
Wo yɛ kusum ko ni wo feo, bemli ni woke  
Ashantemɛi yawu ta eɛ

English: We have a tradition that we perform  
We the people of the Ga Traditional Area  
We have a tradition that we perform,  
When we went into battle with the Ashantis  
We had herbs which we used to fight  
What tradition did we practice?  
We sprinkled 'Kpokpoi' for them, they ate and had stomach upset  
Then we defeated them  
They did not understand the defeat  
They said, 'if you killed a thousand, a thousand will appear to fight'

As mentioned earlier, the songs were used to tell of past historical events. One of the song texts briefly tells of

the earthquake that shook the Ga state, killing lives and destroying some properties in the process. Although, the performers could not tell the exact date of the event, they narrate how it happened and the havoc it caused.

### 8.3.3. Song Text F

Tsem4: Tsutsu blema ee!  
Tsutsu blema le  
Kukrudu bashi  
Du` bawo wo  
N4herem4: Tsutsu blema ee!  
Tsutsu blema le  
Kukrudu bashi  
Du` bawo wo  
Tsem4: Gamei!  
N4herem4: Egbe meikomei atsemei  
Efite nibii wujii  
Tsem4: Tsutsu blema ee!  
Tsutsu blema le  
Kukrudu bashi  
Du` bawo wo  
N4herem4: Tsutsu blema ee!  
Tsutsu blema le  
Kukrudu bashi  
Du` bawo wo  
English  
Call: In the olden days  
There was an earthquake  
This caused darkness  
Response: In the olden days  
There was an earthquake  
This caused darkness  
Call: My brethren  
Response: It killed so many people  
It destroyed properties  
It killed so many people  
Call: In the olden days  
There was an earthquake  
This caused darkness  
Response: In the olden days  
There was an earthquake  
This caused darkness

## 9.0 Conclusion

The study revealed that most people accept the *Kpaa* songs and the *Kpaashimo* performance. The elders who formed the primary respondents to the questions for the study testified that *Kpaashimo*, apart from it being didactic in nature, serves as a means of reconciling families and friends.

Also, it was found out that, the oral performance, *Kpaashimo* is a legacy of the Teshie people and cannot be neglected during the annual Homowo festival. To the people of Teshie, *Kpaashimo* is the soul of Homowo and it makes the festival come alive. To them, this form of oral art has shaped the corrupt behaviours in the society. It has, however, taught individuals to live worthy lives which are of great merit to others in the society.

*Kpaa* song texts and the *Kpaashimo* performance is not void of moral qualities as described by many people but rather it exhibits a degree of morality worthy of study which makes it a perfect match to written literature.

The style of the oral performance comes with a form of persuasion which makes it a form of rhetoric. It has literary devices such as repetition, allusion, metaphors, rhetorical question to mention the least. It calls and appeals to emotion, reason and language. In the sense that, issues of society are brought to bare and presented in the form of songs and performed to inform the society about the ills of the society and also correct them. An appraisal of the analysis has made it evident that *Kpaashimo* among the people of Teshie is very educative. It is a moral teacher which straightens the crooked ways of the society. It also brings out the history of the community through the songs which are sung by the performers.

### **Bibliography**

- Agyekum, K (1999) *Introduction to Literature*. Media Design: Legon, Ghana
- Chinweizu, et al (1980) 'Towards the Decolonization of African Literature'. *Fourth Dimension*. Vol.1 Enugu: Nigerian.
- Durosimi, J et al (1982) *African Literature Today. African, American and the Carribean*. Africana Publishing Company: USA.
- Field, M. J (1961) *History of Gas*. Dulverton
- Finnegan, R. (1970) *Oral Literature in Africa*. University Press: Dar es Salam, Nairobi
- Finnegan, R. (2007) *the Oral and Beyond. Doing Things with Words in Africa*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 258p
- Grunig, J. E (1989) 'Publics, audiences and market segments; Models of receivers of campaign messages'. In C. T. Salmon (Ed). *Information campaigns: Managing the process of social change*. (197-226) newbury park. Sage:CA.
- Grunig, J. E. & Hunt, T (1984) *Managing Public Relations*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston: New York.
- Grunig, J.E & Repper, F.C. (1992) 'Strategic Management, Publics and Issues'. In J. E. Grunig (Ed). *Excellence in Public Relations and communications management*. (117-158). Lawrence Erlbaum, Hilldale: NJ
- Jahn J (1969) *Neo- African Literature. A History of Black Writing*. Grove Press Inc:NY.
- Miruka, O (1994) *Encounter with Oral Literature*. University Press: London
- Miruka, O (1990) *A Dictionary of Oral Literature*. Heinemann: Nairobi.
- Okpewho, I (1992) *African Oral Literature, Background, Character and Continuity*. Indiana Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis.