



Sociology of Education: Perception of Witchcraft and Its Related Social Consequences on Learners' Schooling

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Abstract

This paper explored the ways in which witchcraft is perceived in the Ayeldu and Odompo communities in the Central Region of Ghana, and its social consequences on learners schooling. The study population was members of households with accused member(s), including learners, who are estimated to be 1025. Theoretical sample was used. Participants were selected using snowball sampling technique. The data were collected over a period of two months, and four focus group discussion at the household level were conducted. The data were transcribed and analysed manually in a reflexive manner using Braun and Clarke six-phase model of thematic analysis. The study revealed that the understanding of witchcraft varies from one person to another depending on their experiences and orientation. However, most participants perceived witchcraft as evil and claimed that it is mainly used to cause calamities or to be extraordinary at school. The study also showed that learners who exhibit extreme antisocial behaviours and more often, older women in the communities are accused as witches. The study concluded that participants' negative perception of witchcraftism has a negative influence on their socio-economic wellbeing, and also the schooling of their young ones. It was recommended that heads of household should ensure that their members are well familiarised with the Ghanaian family values and norms in order to appreciate the need to live in peace and harmony by not accusing or labelling learners wrongly as witches/wizards.

Keywords: Learners, Schooling, Social Consequences, Witchcraft

Introduction

Globally, countries are becoming multicultural in nature; a phenomenon that calls for high level of cultural diversity and inclusiveness. Ghana, being one of such countries in West Africa, has various beliefs (including witchcraftism). Witchcraftism, as

a concept, has suffered various definitional issues rising from differences in factors such as socio-culture and religious practices, geographical location, and economic status (Adinkrah, 2015). Conventionally, witchcraftism is seen as the practice and belief systems associated with the usage of alleged mystical powers to manipulate or control people or events to ensure expected positive or negative outcome (Igwe, 2016). However, witchcraft is the art of using allegedly magical and ritual powers. In developing countries such as Ghana, it is seen as the work of crones who meet secretly at night, indulge in cannibalism and orgiastic rites with the devil, and perform 'black magic' (Kakwata, 2018). Its practices are both eufunctional and dysfunctional to the society. While others use their supernatural prowess to kill and destroy, others use it to protect, heal and help others. It exists more in the imagination of contemporaries than in any objective reality.

Witchcraftism has become a 'hot topic' as evidence mounts on the critical role it plays in the social discrimination of girls and old women, and largely the dysfunctioning of modern multicultural society. The perception people hold on witchcraft makes them fear, hate, and even wish to eliminate from society those accused of it (Musah, 2013; Roxburgh, 2016). The existence of witchcraft as a personalised school experience among learners is seen as the illusion of their wild imagination (Mbhiza, 2021; Thomas, 2012). The menace of witchcraft is an everyday reality where most people in multicultural societies live in a state of mystical uncertainty, defenceless to supernatural attack from those around them (Adinkrah & Adhikari, 2014; Agyapong, 2021; Owusu, 2023).

The social functions or consequences of the belief of witchcraft in Ghana, and particularly in the schooling of the young in communities such as Ayeldu and Odompo is overbearing, but has received little attention, as the communities are undocumented (Action Aid, 2012). Residents of these communities are noted for peasant farming as their main source of income. Their belief in the existence and practice of witchcraft has placed much pressure on people accused as witches, who are mostly the aged women (Adinkrah, 2019). These women usually live with their children or grandchildren who, in most cases, are also branded with witchcraftism in school (Thomas, 2012).

According to the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE, 2010), the labelling of women and their children or grandchildren (in most cases their daughters/granddaughters) as witches/wizards is having significant negative social consequences on the schooling of such children. This is so because members of the school and the communities at large attribute their falls, failures and underachievement to the practice of witchcraft, rather than factors such as inadequate skills and technology, effective planning, and effective management of resources (Agyapong, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

There have been a number of studies on witchcraft in Ghana (Action Aid, 2012; Adinkrah, 2019; Igwe, 2016; Owusu, 2023; Thomas, 2012). Most of these studies largely focused on the ill-treatment of accused people who were mostly aged women, and the religiosity of the phenomenon. Also, most of the studies looked at the issues of witchcraft from a macro lens, and failed to conceptualise the phenomenon from a micro perspective within the context of schooling at the basic level of education. Igwe (2016) observes that in Northern Ghana, many (mostly young girls and older women), are killed or banished from their various communities after being accused of witchcraft. This phenomenon affects schooling of children who are related to these accusers. Also, these children are labelled as witches in the communities. These beliefs and practices of labelling learners with accused witchcraft parents/guardians have significant consequences on their academic, social and spiritual developments (Adinkrah, 2015; Thomas, 2012).

Deductions from the literature suggest that there are limited studies on the concept of witchcraft and its social functions on schooling, particularly within Southern Ghana communities such as Ayeldu and Odompo. Also, anecdotal reports show that there is a significant misconception and misunderstanding of witchcraft among basic school learners and citizens of Ayeldu and Odompo communities. This situation, if not explore, can have negative consequences on the academic and social development of learners in these communities. Therefore, it is appropriate for researchers and practitioners in the area of educational sociology, and guidance and counselling to pay scholarly attention to the challenges indicated in order to answer the many unanswered questions. These indicated lacunas motivated the researchers to examine the concept of witchcraft and its related social functions on the schooling of learners with accused witchcraft parents/guardians, focusing on the two communities.

The findings of this study will be used to educate and enlighten the people of Ayeldu and Odompo communities and beyond about their negative beliefs on witchcrafts that are detrimental to the schooling of their children. It will also help the people to understand and know whether witchcraft is real or not, to enable them see the need to link or delink the challenges they are facing as a result of their beliefs that are perceived to have affected not only their children schooling, but also their psychosocial behaviours.

Research Questions

The following research questions were framed to guide the study:

1. How is witchcraft perceived in the Ayeldu and Odompo communities?
2. What are the social consequences of witchcraftism on learners schooling in the communities?

Literature Review

Witchcraft can be seen as an exercise of allegedly magical powers or the art of using allegedly magical powers dysfunctionally or eufunctionally (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014). In Ghana and other West African countries, most people believe that witches possess mystical powers that can influence unusual negative phenomenon like accidents, deaths, losses of property, and sickness. It is a power that is real, different from hypnotism, trickery, obvious cheating, and manipulation of hidden means of communication or results of psychological conditions (Quayesi-Amakye, 2017). There is no society that does not hold belief in a mystical power of one type or another. According to Roxburgh (2016), it is a marginalised reality.

The argument of the study is underpinned by the assumption of observational learning theory, which indicates that whatever learners observe in their environment, they are able to imitate, identify themselves with what they observe and practise it. Thus, our conceptualisation and beliefs regarding witchcraft are largely based on what we observe (Example; what we see, hear, taste, feel, smell and so on) in the school and in the community at large.

For example, children's conceptualisation of witchcraft begins at home where their socialisation emerges. At the family level, some movies like 'Kyewaa', The Witch, 'Suspiria', The Wizard of Oz, and pictures portraying scenes of witchcraftism are constantly exposed to learners; which they end up imitating and believing in the concept (witchcraft) these media portray. These scenes or pictures that learners focus their attention on can cause them to learn unconsciously through vicarious learning. Also, parents are likely to socialise their children with witchcraftism if they believe in it (Agyapong, 2021). This shows that varying concepts of witchcraft can be transmitted to generations in the family and school socialisation process through observational learning.

The majority of Africans in contemporary communities, according to Kakwata (2018), view witchcraft with uncertainty, stating that supernatural power could also be used for good things. People in Ghana frequently describe the majority of witchcraft-related ferocity as oral or physical attacks on women and men who have been suspected of witchcraft (Igwe, 2016). It can likewise be viewed as the demonstration of going after others through heavenly means in order to help and protect them.

In general, witchcraft in Ghana and for that matter Ayeldu and Odompo communities is a reality, part of the world that truly occurs, is experienced and, though not seen, is demonstrated in its consequences. Witchcraft must, therefore, be understood as an aspect of the daily implicit lives of the people. According to Igwe (2016), the manifestations of this reality vary greatly and are often open to the interpretation of the individuals experiencing them. Though witches/wizards possess powers individually and collectively to create major devastations, the prime targets of witchcraft attacks are those

who are closest to the witches/wizards, the immediate family members (Adinkrah, 2019). This submission corroborates the Akan proverb, ‘Aboa bi beka wo a, na ofiri wo ntoma mu’ which literally means if an animal will bite you, it will be from your cloth. Thus, there is high likelihood that the people who will harm you are those that are close to you. In fact, it is those who are closest to you who can hurt you the most because they know how best to do it.

Many individuals in most Ghanaian communities perceive older people, in most cases women, as witches; and they identify witches as people who exhibit extreme anti-social behaviours (Thomas, 2012; Quayesi-Amakye, 2017). Unfortunately, this negative perception is usually extended to the children and grandchildren of accused witchcraft, particularly those that are girls. Most people practicing Christian, Islamic or traditional African religion in Ghana attribute evil things to the activities of witchcraft (Quayesi-Amakye, 2017). These people perceive learners accused of witchcraft to possess destructive powers, and are able to cause all manners of destructions to normal day-to-day activities in the school and the larger community.

Research Methods

In order to get an in-depth understanding of the people of Ayeldu and Odompo communities, including learners from the various households within the communities, with regard to witchcraft and its related social functions on schooling, a qualitative research method was employed. In relation to a design, a phenomenological design was used to better understand the lived experiences of households in the study areas (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which were Ayeldu and Odompo communities. These communities are located in the Central Region of Ghana. A typical house in these communities is constructed of mud (adobe), wood, or concrete blocks. People in these communities are primarily and predominantly dedicated to fishing, cocoa growing, and animal raising. Learners can attend school up to basic in the communities, but for secondary education, they must look elsewhere for it because there are no senior high schools in these communities.

The study population was made up of residents of the two communities, including learners. These communities are some of the least known communities in the Central Region, Ghana. The population in these communities is estimated to be 1025, largely dominated by women and children (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2022). The residents of these communities are noted for high involvement and belief in witchcraft practices in the region; the characteristics that motivated the researchers to consider them as their study area. However, the accessible population was made up of households, including learners from these households.

Theoretical sample was used for this study because the accessible population was

perceived to be undefined, and the issue of witchcraft was sensitive. Also, the researchers were interested in an in-depth understanding of witchcraft from all relevant sources within the communities; as a result, this sample method was employed to continue to collect relevant data till the point of saturation. Specifically, members of households with a member accused of witchcraft practices, including learners from these households were handpicked using snowball sampling. The snowball sampling technique created room for a selected household head with a household member accused of witchcraft to identify other households. This technique was used because it was difficult to identify households with a member accused of witchcraft. These households were considered because they were perceived to have similar backgrounds or experiences regarding witchcraft and its effects on learners schooling.

A focus group discussion guide was the instrument used to collect the data. The guide consisted of open statements that allowed participants to express themselves freely. This instrument allowed the researchers to stimulate an informal discussion on witchcraft, and also understand better household members' lived experience in more detail than is possible through a survey (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Heads of the selected households were trained to serve us group facilitators who introduced the topics for discussions. They also helped the group to participate lively and naturally in the household discussions on witchcraft. With explicit permission of all members of the discussion group, the activities of the group were recorded electronically and also manually using field notes and memos by the researchers.

The data were collected over a period of two months, and four focus group discussion at the household level were conducted, two from each of the communities. The discussion ended at the point of saturation. The researchers ensured an even participation and were able to maintain neutral attitude and appearance. In all, data were collected from 24 participants. The age ranged of the participants was from 14 to 63 years, with the older group being females. However, all the family heads were males. The parent category included grandparents. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants

Participant's category	Ayeldu community		Odompo community		Total
	Household 1	Household 4	Household 2	Household 3	
Family head	1	1	1	1	4
Learners	2	0	0	0	2
Accusers	2	1	1	1	5
Parents	1	1	2	2	6
Siblings	1	2	2	2	7
Total	7	5	6	6	24

Source: Field data, 2024

The data were transcribed and analysed manually using thematic coding system. Specifically, the data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of thematic analysis as cited in Byrne (2021, pp. 1399-1411) in a reflexive manner. Observations during the sessions were noted and included in the report. Each household was made up of six to ten members, including junior high school learners of the families. The recorded discussions were transcribed manually and categorised thematically in order to answer the stated questions. The recordings were replayed to participants and transcribed data were also shown to participants for them to validate their responses. This ensured the trustworthiness of the data.

Findings

The findings of the study were presented according to the households that participated in the focus group discussions. The discussions were guided by the themes that emerged from the research questions.

Household One

The first household consisted of seven participants as indicated in Table 1. Their age ranged from 14 to 60, with the older group being females. Their collated responses are as follows:

Definition of witchcraft

Here, most of the participants defined witchcraft as a spiritual activity 'sunsum', that is the use of spiritual powers to harm others or cause destructions. They all consider witchcraft to be dysfunctional to the well-being of the communities since practitioners use it to cause calamity.

Identification of a witch

Participants provided various means or physical characteristics of identifying a witch. Majority of the views centred on the individual being overly aggressive and strong sense of hyper-activity. The others included gossips, backbiting, and being extremely strange 'weirdo'. In the school environment witches/wizards are usually considered to be isolate and are very good academically. However, according to the participants, witches/wizards do not ask or answer questions in class. They are always quiet but dangerous when provoke. They punish their attackers viciously.

Existence of witches

The participants testified that witches/wizards exist, both in the school and in the community at large. According to them, this belief is based on the testimonies which

have been given by others over the years.

Acquisition of witchcraft

Participants stated that this evil spirit or magical power, witchcraft, does not die, and for this reason, it is transferred from one person to another. That is, the older individuals pass it on to younger people either for protection and prosperity of the family or to cause destructions. Also, they mentioned that witchcraft could be transferred through some media like food, especially prepared with palm oil and gifts. Again, they indicated that the older transfer the spirit to people they love and cared for most, in most cases their grandchildren.

Social consequences of witchcraft on learners' schooling

The participants stated that their social interactions with people were many times influenced by the activities of witchcraft. They further mentioned that witches engaged in gossip activities that tended to manipulate relationships between people. According to them, witches go about spreading false information about people and this act tends to mar the associations between people in the school. Again, some participants indicated that the activities of witchcraft and other evil spirits bring about shame to both the identified witches and their families, which usually leads to negative labelling of learners related to such accusers. However, one of the participants in this group asserted that learners who are witches/wizards are able to use their special powers to become the best in their class. They can also use the power to cause havoc and calamity to teachers who punish them.

From the participants' view, witches are the major causes of financial crises. They stated that their manipulations caused a great fall in production. They can cause natural disasters including fire tragedies. Again, they indicated that the majority of road accidents that lead to the loss of human lives are the results of the activities of witches/wizards. From them, witches/wizards tie ropes and other things on high ways, especially to cause accidents.

Another participant said that many student politicians go for enchantments for political power when they are contesting for political positions such as school prefects. She added that witchcraft manipulations are greatly used in times of political activities like elections and could be used to cause harm to other opponents.

As stated earlier, the activities of witchcraft are purely spiritual, that is not visible to the physical eye. The experiences of bad dreams, according to the participants, are as a result of the manipulations of witches. Witches attack other people in the spiritual realm, especially in their dreams. The interpretations of these bad dreams more often result in fears and accusations among relatives or strangers. Again, they stated that individuals like pastors and others consult witchcraft and other sources for powers to perform miracles.

They sometimes consult fetish priests for enchantment. This brings about the rise of false leaders and pastors teaching falsehood and misleading individuals in their faiths.

Household Two

The second household considered was made up of six participants.

Definition of witchcraft

The participants described witchcraft as an evil activity undertaken by some individuals to the detriment of others, both in the micro (school) and macro (community) environment. According to most of the participants, every activity of witches is evil throughout and nothing good comes from witchcraft. On the contrary, one of the siblings of an accused witch who is a learner stated that some learners use their evil powers either to heal the sick or protect themselves or the family against any spiritual attack and in some cases become academic geniuses in class/school.

Identification of a witch

Some participants, especially the females, stated that a learner is identified as a witch/wizard when she/he exhibits extreme anti-social school behaviours like carelessness and vandalism. Also, they are viewed as being controversial, extremely dirty or messy and many others. These behaviours make the learner to deviate from socially accepted school behaviours. However, the male participants stressed that in most cases learners who are malevolent are described as witches/wizards.

Existence of witches

According to the participants, their beliefs in the existence of witchcraft are based on past happenings within schools and the community. They indicated that there have been some instances where learners were identified as witches/wizards and ended up admitting that they were witches/wizards during a special church service.

Acquisition of witchcraft

The participants emphasised the fact that witchcraft is not an innate ability but rather, it is an evil spirit that could be passed on from older adults to younger people. The evil spirit can also be transferred to others through food and gifts from strangers.

Consequences of witchcraft on learners' schooling

The participants said that the manipulations of witches/wizards could bring about fear and restrictions on people. Individuals who find themselves in witch communities are unable to explore opportunities because of manipulations of witches. Learners who are witches/wizards can harm other learners who are better than them. This is because the

activities of witches lead to destructions and calamities.

One of the participants (parents) said: *I think witchcraft has a direct effect on learners. One of my sisters, for example, was labelled as a witch after her rival's son had mysteriously become deaf. Since that incidence her business has been going from bad to worse. She has been recording very low sales leading to low income and to large extent poverty in the home.* This situation brings about inability of such parents to cater for their young ones. It also affects the schooling of learners with parents who have been labelled as witches and wizards.

Another participant (accused learners) said: *Because I am a good student and I respect my teachers, most of them like me and I have a good learner-teacher relationship with them. Unfortunately, some of the learners said that I am using my witchcraft powers to manipulate the teachers for them to like me and to be in agreement with me at all times. But I know that I am not a witch.*

Household Three

The third household consisted of six participants; two of them were males and the rest females. Their ages ranged from 15 to 61, with the older group being females. Their collated responses are as follows:

Definition of witchcraft

Here, most of the participants defined witchcraft as a spiritual activity 'sunsum', and it can be subdivided into three separate forms. These forms of witchcraft include: 'Bayifo', 'Ayen', and 'Bayibosomfo'. According to them, bayifo refers to a magician, fetish priest, and others who involve themselves in enchantments. They are also noted for spiritual transactions 'exchange'. For example, they can exchange someone's destiny with another or/and purchase sickness for an individual. According to them, some 'bayifo' are good in the sense that, they use their powers to help others in healing and protecting. 'Ayen', on the hand, refers to individuals who possess evil spirits and the use of spiritual powers to harm others or cause destructions. They get a close contact with people who have less or no spiritual protection and they either work against them or cause calamities in their lives. They cause death, loss of properties and many others against individuals. For 'bayibosomfo', they are just like the 'bayifo'. Their activities are of no difference.

Identification of a witch

The participants provided various means of identifying a witch. Most of the views centred on individuals who are vulnerable in the school and the community at large. Usually learners with poor parents (who sometimes experience dementia), are overly prosperous and aggressive, have strong sense of hyper-activity, and sometimes do

not engage in religious activities are perceived to be witches/wizards. On the contrary, some stated that a witch cannot be identified by physical characteristics or by the 'physical eye', however, it is only a witch who can identify another witch. So students, who see other students as witches and wizards, may be labelled as such.

Existence of witches

The participants testified that witches exist, and have their various forms. They indicated that some of them are good while others are not, depending on their mission. One of the participants said: *Learners who are perceived to have some supernatural powers use it to harm bullies in school. They also help their school friends, especially when it comes to academic exercise.*

Acquisition of witchcraft

The participants stated that 'witchcraft' does not die and for this reason, it is transferred from one person to another. That is, the older individuals pass on their witchcraft spirit or magical powers to younger ones for them to protect themselves and the family from evil doers. Some learners also inherit witchcraft to cause destructions in the family and community at large. Also, they mentioned that witchcraft can be transferred through some media like food and gifts from either relatives or strangers. Again, they said that the older transfer the spirit to people they love and care for most. For example, a teacher who is a witch can transfer her supernatural powers to a student she likes. Similarly, grandparents can transfer their witchcraft to their cherished grandchildren.

Consequences of witchcraft on learners' schooling

The participants stated that students who are labelled as witches/wizards are usually isolated from their peers, both in the school and the community at large. This form of isolation influences the social interactions of these students negatively. This is because of the great stigma that is associated with accused witches/wizards. This stigma prevents people from going close or associating with others who fall within the physical characteristics coined for witchcraft. According to them, this limits the level of social interactions and transactions in the schools and communities. Again, some participants indicated that the activities of witchcraft and other evil spirits bring about shame to both the identified witch/wizard and his or her family members.

The participants, drawing from the social impact of witchcraft, stressed that this also affects them economically. This is due to the fact that individuals who are accused or identified as witches/wizards experience poor or no sales at the market places, a situation which affects the financing of their children's schooling significantly. This brings about difficulty in providing for the family if these individuals are bread winners.

Just like that of members of the first household, members of the third household also indicated that many road accidents that lead to the loss of human lives are caused by witches/wizards. According to them, witches/wizards use highways as 'slaughter houses' where they kill their victims through road accidents. Most of their victims are usually brilliant people in the communities with prosperous life ahead of them. These victims are usually perceived to be the people who will be the 'movers' and 'shakers' of the communities in the future

According to the participants, more often than not, enstoolment of leaders or even their appointments are characterised with manipulations, enchantments and spiritual cleansing. This, according to the participants, brings about great fear and that when the wrong individuals are being enstooled it makes it impossible to be removed from power. This situation is believed to cause severe damage to the community as a whole. Same situation happens in the case of school governance and students participation in the governance system; particularly regarding Students' Representative Council (SRC) election. One of the participants, who was a learner, said that *witchcraftism has entered students politics at the Junior High School (JHS) level. Contestants go for all forms of witchcraft and super natural powers to win school election. This practice largely affects these students because most of them carry that behaviour to the secondary and tertiary levels of education, and even national politics.*

As stated earlier, the activities of witchcraft being spiritual, places a sort of limitations on individuals. Revelations and meaning of dreams and unseen phenomenon are received with great importance in recent times and this either destroys relationships or causes destructions both in the school and the larger community. One of the learners, who have been accused as a witch, said: *my teachers have a good relationship with me because I respect them a lot and also I am a good student academically. However, most of the students do not have good relationship with me because of their wrong perception about me.*

Household Four

The fourth household consisted of five participants, out of which two were males and the rest females. Their collated responses are as follows:

Definition of witchcraft

In relation to this household, most of the participants perceived witchcraft as a spiritual activity that destroys the socio-economic well-being of individuals and families. The others however, stated that witchcraft is the use of magical powers to cause calamity.

Identification of a witch

Participants indicated that witches/wizards could be identified through dreams.

For example, people who chase or want to cause harm to others in their dreams are accused of being witches/wizards. Other behaviours like staring intensively or unflinchingly at others are considered traits of witches/wizards.

Existence of witches

In relation to the existence of witches in the school and the community, all the participants in this household concurred on the existence of witches. However, they indicated that it is very difficult to know them if you are not one of them or spiritually powerful.

Acquisition of witchcraft

Participants stated that older parents, like grandmothers, grandfathers, pass on their witchcraft spirit or magical powers to young ones either for protection of the family or to cause destructions. Also, they mentioned that witchcraft can be transferred through some media like food and gifts.

Consequences of witchcraft on learners' schooling

The participants stated that their knowledge of the manipulations of witchcraft and other evil forces causes them to overreact in some circumstances, like being overly protective and careful when dealing with others in the school and the larger society. This affects their decisions and their ability to create unique and appropriate bonds with others. According to the participants, witches are the major causes of poverty and worsening living conditions of people in the community; a phenomenon which creates room for parents not to finance their children schooling adequately and appropriately. One of the participants also said: *the experiences of bad dreams are as a result of the manipulations of witches/wizards who often cause sickness and attacks on others*. Victims are either strengthened in faith that is to seek protections against these manipulations, or remain spiritually weak as a result of constant spiritual attacks.

Discussion of the Findings

The first research question looked at how witchcraft is perceived in the Ayeldu and Odompo communities. The findings that emerged show that within the schooling and community systems stakeholders perceived witchcraft to be an evil and a spiritual activity that people manipulate to cause calamity, and it is real in the communities. Others, particularly learners, use their witchcraft powers to perform extraordinary in their academic activities.

The findings concur with that of NCCE (2010), Quayesi-Amakye (2017) and Agyapong (2021) who all concluded that in Ghana witchcraft is the use of spiritual

powers to harm or kill people, the act of seeing into a person's future and manipulating him or her negatively, the act of using spiritual powers to appear in a person's dream, and the exhibition of extreme anti-social behaviours. In relation to community belief in witchcraft, NCCE (2010) study revealed that majority (89.4%) of Ghanaians believes that witchcraft exists, whilst 10.6 percent thought otherwise. Deductions from the findings and the literature indicate that there is a high belief in the existence of witchcraft in schools and in Ghana as a whole. Furthermore, the findings regarding how witchcraft is perceived in the Ayeldu and Odompo communities are consistent with the assertion of Quayesi-Amakye (2017) who indicated that witchcraft is real in the society and it impacts negatively the social, economic, political and spiritual life of African communities.

With regard to social consequences of witchcraftism, the results showed that an individual is identified as a witch/wizard when he or she exhibits extreme anti-social behaviours and most often elderly women fall as victims. This finding is in line with studies conducted by NCCE (2010) and Adinkrah (2019). Both studies show that excluded people, in most cases aged women, who exhibit antisocial behaviours are those who are accused as witches in Ghanaian society. However, the belief that a witch is messy and careless, and has an unflinching stare is not reported in any of the related literature reviewed.

Furthermore, the finding that witchcraft in the community is associated with negative labelling of people and their economic activities show that it has social and psychological consequences. This is consistent with the assertion that women who are accused of witchcraft usually record low sales in their business leading to significant decrease in their living standards (Agyapong, 2021; Kakwata, 2018; Musah, 2013). This phenomenon will naturally affect the schooling of children whose parents have been accused of witchcraft because their parents will no more be in a better position to provide good social, economic and psychological supports for their children. Also, the findings from the works of Kakwata (2018) and Agyapong (2021) show that in most African communities witchcraft labelling is associated with multiple negative consequences that are social, cultural, financial, emotional, political and religious in nature. This implies that learners who are labelled as witches/wizards or learners whose parents are labelled as such are likely to face these negative consequences which in the long run may influence their educational outcomes in negative terms.

Conclusion

The study concludes that people of Ayeldu and Odompo communities see witchcraft as evil and also as a tool used by the practitioners to cause calamity. It is more idealistic than being realistic or pragmatic. Participants' knowledge and belief in witchcraftism have negative consequences on their economic, social, and spiritual

activities which in the long run influence the schooling of learners negatively. The study further concludes that the people of Ayeldu and Odompo communities perceive an individual who they believe to indulge in witchcraft, be it a student or non-student, to exhibit certain characteristics such as; hyper activeness, aggression, extreme poverty, and disability. Even though the lived experiences of participants seem to support these findings, it is not scientifically accurate to say that when individual exhibits one or two of these characteristics then he or she can be described as a witch/wizard. Every individual is unique in terms of their personality, hence we are expected to exhibit different characteristics.

The belief in witchcraft poses some significant challenges to the people of Ayeldu and Odompo. For instance, learners and even some community members attribute their academic and non-academic flaws and failures to external factors. This attribution affects their dealings with their social environment. Instead of working hard on themselves to overcome any possible challenges they face, they rather choose to attribute those challenges to the activities of witchcraft. This perception regarding witchcraftism has blinded most of them from diagnosing properly what the real challenges their learners and community members are going through. The study further concludes that witchcraftism in schools leads to learners stopping schooling, teachers failing to discipline learners who are perceived to be witches/wizards, and poor academic performance and general academic non-success of learners accused as witches/wizards.

Recommendations

Philosophically, as an idealist society, members of the Ayeldu and Odompo communities believe in what they do not know or what they cannot explain. This phenomenon is common in most Ghanaian communities. Therefore, their negative belief regarding witchcraftism can be eliminated or narrowed when they have adequate knowledge about it. It is recommended to the chiefs of the two communities that they should adapt the research report, authorise and support the researchers to offer community education on their findings. This will help in re-socialising the learners and other members of the two communities regarding their understanding and conceptualisation of witchcraft to ensure progress in their socio-economic development. Also, it is recommended to heads of the various households to ensure that the members of their household are well familiarised with the Ghanaian family values and norms in order to appreciate the need to live in peace and harmony. In addition, the heads of the various basic schools in the two communities and the chiefs should set a committee to constantly seek the help of Educational Sociologists, and School Counsellors to assist in tackling issues of witchcraft labelling in schools and the communities at large through social intervention programmes.

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