

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**



**THE DEVELOPMENT OF FANCY DRESS COSTUME DESIGNS IN GHANA  
FROM 1950 TO 2022**

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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF FANCY DRESS COSTUME DESIGNS IN GHANA  
FROM 1950 TO 2022**

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**Department of Art Education,  
School of Creative Arts  
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## DECLARATION

### Students' Declaration

I, Emmanuel Baffour Dwumah, declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references contained in published works, which have been identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own work, and it has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

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Date: .....

### Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised following the guidelines for supervision of Thesis/Dissertation/project as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

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Date: .....

PROF. Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel (PhD) (**Co-Supervisor**)

Signature.....

Date: .....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my father, Mr. Kwame Adomako, my mother, Mrs. Paulina Amoanimaa, my wife, Michelle Mensah, and my two children, Adepa Yeboah Dwumah and Obrempong Amoani Dwumah, for their enormous support and encouragement.

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Finally, I would like to give credit to all scholars and authors whose books, articles, and works I duly cited and referenced throughout this work.

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## ABSTRACT

Fancy Dress is a Ghanaian dress fashion art, performed by young men, women, and children, incorporating music, dance, costuming, and masking elements. Despite its existence in Ghana's early colonial and post-colonial eras, little attention has been given to the design history and trends of fancy dress costumes. Also, the design history and trends of fancy dress costumes have been overlooked over the years, making it complex to understand their evolution. The study explores the development of Fancy Dress costume design in Ghana from 1950 to 2022, analyzing trends, materials, techniques, and the impact on the Ghanaian fashion industry. The study utilized qualitative research methods, including descriptive, historical, and narrative, with 15 respondents selected through expert purposive sampling, supported by material culture and symbolic interactionism theories. The study reveals that Indigenous Asafo performances predate colonial Ghana, with a hybrid of European and Ghanaian styles that revive the Ghanaian fancy dress seen today. Fancy dress art in Ghana, originating in the mid-1900s, evolved into a local carnival after World War II, influenced by European dress politics and Hollywood movie characters. The study revealed that Fancy dressers in the early 19th century restricted their selection of textile materials to the availability of goods at coastal trading shores. Also, Fancy dress art showcases national identity and cultural heritage through designs, textiles, and costumes worn during performances. The study found that 21st-century Ghanaian Fancy Dress costumes address socio-political issues while maintaining the primary responsibilities of Asafo practices before the European Fancy Dress fusion. The study recommends that stakeholders in Ghana's fashion and creative industries, including Fancy Dress designers, makers, and performers, actively recognize and support the Fancy Dress tradition as a key contributor to economic growth, cultural preservation, and social cohesion.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Overview**

This chapter gives the general introduction to the research, the background to the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, the scope of the study (delimitation), limitations, and definition of terms, abbreviations, and acronyms, and the organization of the study.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Fancy Dress is a dress fashion art performed by both young men and women and children, dancing and parading in different characters and personalities in costumes and masks to mimic or portray the characters of their political, religious, or traditional authorities since the colonial era in Ghana. Fancy Dress as a visual culture is a secular carnivalesque masquerade (Micots, 2014) performed throughout the Southern part of Ghana, Western African countries, and parts of the European continents. Although the Art culture is a non-Ghanaian cultural tradition, however, historical accounts of the development of Fancy Dress punctuate that fancy dress was introduced in the African continent, especially in Ghana (Micots, 2014).

Slaves who returned from America, Europe, and the Black Caribbean countries embraced Western, Middle Eastern, and Asian visual culture as a result of the Transatlantic slave trade and colonialism; as a result, they (carnival and parading) created a hybrid culture that is fundamentally African (Kedjanyi, 1968; Cole & Ross, 1977; Micots, 2012; 2014). Fancy Dress Art, a blend of African traditional masquerade and foreign street parades, originated in Ghana due to the African slave trade during colonialism, giving it its name.

Contrary to popular belief, fancy dress has been popular in Africa since the late 1800. A fancy dress performance is a fashion art piece that incorporates dance, music, costumes, and masks. The introduction of fancy dress art has drawn significant scholarly attention from academics as well as locals, which has led to a myth that art has nothing to do with our traditional cultural values (Micots, 2014). She went on to emphasize that Ghanaians of the middle and upper classes sometimes disregard this kind of art, calling it ‘silliness performed by fishermen.’

Although both Western and local academics (Kedjanyi, 1968; Ross & Cole, 1977, Brown, 2005; Micah 2014; Micots, 2021) have recorded that fancy dress is generally among the origin, caretakers, and its linkages to the Ghanaian culture, this has had a significant impact on fashion art for a long time. However, when it comes to the trends and evolution of fancy dress in Ghana, including costume designs, masks, designers, and overall issues, none of the aforementioned experts or other dress fashion specialists or authors have spoken out.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Residents of Ghana's coastal regions, including Takoradi, Cape Coast, Swedru, and the Effutu traditional territory (Winneba), have come to appreciate and find fascinating the custom of dressing elaborately for cultural events (Micah, 2014; Safo-Ankama et al., 2022; Brown, 2005; Micah et al., 2021). According to Micots (2021), fancy dress festivities were held on Ghana's Independence Day in 1957, supporting the claim that fancy dress costumes date back to colonial times. Micots further asserts that President Nkrumah established a Federation Board on the Fancy Dress Festival nationwide, which has been perpetuated and commemorated to this day in several Ghanaian coastal cities.

More academic research on fancy dress (Cole & Ross, 1977; Brown, 2005; Nunley, 2010; Micah, 2014; Sarpong & Botchway, 2017; Micots, 2021) has confirmed that fancy dress culture is a performative art that was first practiced by young men in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. Today, women and children participate in fancy dress culture by dressing up in elaborate costumes, performing dances, and parading around communities with issues related to sociopolitical, economic, and religious concerns.

Available studies on fancy dress have predominantly captured different aspects of the celebration and the cultural elements; however, the design history of the fancy dress in Ghana remains unresearched. Brown (2005) discussed the politics and conflicts of Winneba's Aboakyer festival, revealing the celebration of the fancy dress culture as a key component amongst the Effutu people celebrating the festival. Brown, out of the historical foundations of fancy dress in Winneba, delved into the antecedents of the art and culture of the Effutu people. Concerning the study of Brown (2005), he touched on the historical antecedents of the fancy dress of the Effutu people. This clearly leaves a research gap to be explored.

Similarly, Cole and Ross's (1977) work explored the festivals and arts of Ghana with a specific emphasis on fancy dress culture. The study looked at the inception of the culture of fancy dress as a hybrid of local masquerade performance and the Eurocentric tradition of parading from the Europeans (Caribbean, Red Indians, Dutch, Portuguese, and British). They further established that the Ghanaian, due to the rootedness in her traditions and culture practiced the use of fancy dress with their arts to heal their socio-political issues. Also, their study revealed the transition of *Asafo* company's local performance into local Ghanaian fancy dress performance during the colonial and post-

colonial era. However, the study focused on festivals and arts of personal adornment leaving the trends in design and colour unresearched.

Sarfo-Ankama et al. (2022) also explored the innovative approaches of using masquerade costume designs with intricate fabric decoration techniques and the use of varied colour schemes in creating inspirational surface designs for textile designs and prints. Their study focused on the approach of rendering textile designs and prints with inspirations from fancy dress (masquerade) costume designs.

Similarly, Nunley (2010) studied the origins of fancy dress in Ghana and suggested that the art form began in the 1850s and continued until the 1870s. The study also examined the characteristics and practices of fancy dress culture, focusing on how Ghanaians living along the coast were influenced by European musical ensembles and costumes, which they then adopted and embellished for their festivities.

The study by Micots (2021), which examined the relationship between fancy dress and the "Asafo" group on the traditional and cultural bonds among the Effutu people, makes this clear. The study also looked at the generality of fancy dress, street parading, and competitions of masquerade groups. The study revealed how fancy dress has historically developed as a performing art form in Ghanaian society.

Akyeampong and Yankholmes (2016) analyzed the profiling of attendees to the 2014 masquerade festival based on their support for and past membership of the competing masquerade groups. Their study was solely based on the attendees' demographic characteristics, information sources, and levels of satisfaction with the services and facilities provided by the event organizers. However, the study's recommendation proffered that for the fancy dress festival to be sustained and enjoyed by future

generations, a similar study delving into the impact of fancy dress practices on the fashion industry should be conducted. The recommendation also raises the need to discuss the impact of fancy dress on the social, economic, cultural, and artistic aspects of fancy dress culture.

Given the aforementioned studies (Cole & Ross, 1977; Brown, 2005; Nunley, 2010; Micah, 2014; Akyeampong & Yankholmes, 2016; Micots, 2021; Sarfo-Ankama et al, 2022) of fancy dress celebrations and culture in Ghana, it is evident that the aspect of the design history of fancy dress among the celebrants' communities in Ghana has not been given much scholarly attention. Against this background, this study sought to trace the design history of fancy dress costumes in Winneba and Agona Swedru.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to systematically trace and analyze the development of fancy dress costume designs in Winneba and Swedru from 1950 to 2022. This investigation aims to uncover and elucidate the evolving trends in various aspects of costume production, including design aesthetics, fabric selection, colour palettes, and the tools and equipment utilized in the manufacturing process. Furthermore, the study sought to examine the significance of these developments concerning the sustained prominence of the fancy dress masquerade festival, a cultural event that plays a crucial role in the celebration of Ghanaian heritage. By exploring the interplay between fancy dress culture and the fashion industry, the research will provide insights into how these costumes have not only contributed to the cultural vibrancy of the festival but have also influenced broader fashion trends and economic activities within the region. Ultimately, this study aims to enhance the understanding of the dynamic relationship between cultural expression and the fashion industry in Ghana,

highlighting the importance of fancy dress as both an artistic and economic phenomenon.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study sought to:

1. trace the design history of fancy dress in Winneba and Agona Swedru from 1950 to 2022.
2. Examine the design trends of fancy dress costumes of Agona Swedru and Winneba.
3. discuss the impact of Agona Swedru and Winneba's fancy dress practices on the Ghanaian Fashion industry.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. How has the design history of fancy dress in Agona Swedru and Winneba evolved from 1950 to 2022?
2. What are the design trends of fancy dress costumes of Agona Swedru and Winneba?
3. How has the practice of fancy dress in Agona Swedru and Winneba impacted the fashion industry in Ghana?

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study holds several significant contributions in highlighting the history of costume designs in Agona Swedru and Winneba Fancy Dress culture. In exploring the evolution of Fancy dress costume designs, this study can contribute to preserving and documenting traditional Ghanaian cultural practices, symbols, and aesthetics. It sheds

light on how these designs have evolved, potentially reflecting broader shifts in Ghanaian society.

In the historical context, this study provides insights into the historical context of Ghana, including how political, social, and economic factors have influenced the development of fancy dress costume designs. Also, this perspective can help us understand the cultural significance of these designs today. Fancy dress costumes are usually worn during festivals, celebrations, and other cultural events, contributing to the social fabric of a community. The study examines the social and economic impacts of these designs, including their role in promoting cultural tourism, supporting local artisans, and creating economic opportunities. Delving into the development of fancy dress costume designs in Ghana has the potential to enrich scholarly discussions, highlight the cultural richness of Ghana, and contribute to interdisciplinary fields such as fashion studies, cultural anthropology, and art history. It also serves as a valuable resource for designers, researchers, educators, and anyone interested in the diverse and vibrant world of fashion and culture.

### **1.7 Delimitation**

This study is explicitly delineated in its scope to examine the evolution of fancy dress culture in Ghana from the year 1950 to 2022, with a particular emphasis on four strategically selected towns located along the coastal belt and within the southern inland regions of the country. The research specifically addressed various dimensions of this cultural phenomenon, including, but not limited to, the intricacies of costume design, the types of fabrics utilized, the selection of colors for costumes, as well as the tools and equipment employed in the production process. To comprehensively assess the impact of fancy dress production on the broader fashion industry, this study investigated

both the cultural and economic ramifications associated with this sector. By focusing on these elements, the research aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how fancy dress culture has influenced not only local fashion trends but also the economic dynamics within the region. The research was geographically confined to two towns, Winneba and Swedru, both of which hold established traditions of costume-making and celebratory practices. Although these towns are significant cultural hubs for fancy dress performances, the exclusion of other regions known for their unique approaches to costume design, such as Agona Swedru or Winneba, means that the findings may overlook regional variations and diverse design influences present in other parts of the country.

## **1.8 Study Setting**

### *1.8.1 An Overview of Winneba Township*

Winneba is traditionally known as ‘Simpa’ which was derived from the name of the leader of the Effutus ‘*Osimpa*’ who led the Effutus of the Guan ethnic stock from the Northern part of Ghana to the present location (GSS, 2010). The name Winneba originated from European Sailors who were often aided by the favorable wind to sail along the bay. Due to difficulty in pronouncing the ‘windy bay’ by the indigenes, the name Winneba was coined. Winneba town lying on the south coast, 35 miles (56 km) west of Accra and 90 miles (140 km) east of Cape Coast, is a high town that is visible from the Winneba Junction. The Municipality has one paramountcy located at Winneba. The Effutu Traditional Council has shrines and groves, with the most popular shrine being Penkye-Otu which is located at Penkye. It is known that it served as a pathfinder for the indigenous people when they migrated from the northern part of Ghana to their present-day location. Christianity is the dominant religion while other faiths include

Islam and African traditional religion (ATR). The famous Aboakyer Festival and Fancy Dress MasqueFest are two events that attract tourists and people to the town every year.



*Figure 1: Map of Effutu Municipality. Source: GSS (2010)*

### *1.8.2 An Overview of Swedru Township*

Festivals are important in the social life of the people in Agona West Municipality. The “Akwambo” festival is the most important traditional festival instituted for the spiritual reunion of the people. It is celebrated every year between August and October. As a social festivity, it is also an occasion where communities plan their developmental activities including strategies for mobilizing funds for project implementation.

## Map of Agona West Municipal



*Figure 2: Map of Agona West Municipal (Swedru)*  
*Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2010)*

### 1.9 Definition of Terms

- Asafo:** An Akan local military group that supervises the communal and cultural activities of the community.
- Art:** The process of creating beautiful items to satisfy human needs.
- Artefacts:** Works of art.
- Ancestors:** The spirits of the dead in the society who led exemplary lives.
- Celebration:** An occasion of giving joy
- Creativity:** refers to the imaginative and innovative capacity of costume designers and masquerade groups to conceptualize, adapt, and transform cultural, social, and material resources into distinctive costume designs that communicate identity, satire, and artistic expression.
- Costume:** Costume refers to all the clothing and accessories worn as an “out-of-everyday” social role or activity, that may include a

dress for the theatre, folk, or other festivals, ceremonies, and rituals.

**Costume Designer:** The person who in the past created costumes from concept to final product.

**Costume Design:** The act of creating clothing and accessories, for a specific character(s), that reflects the personality of the character created by the script of a production. Costume design may include designing the overall appearance of a character including the hairstyle, make-up, and facial hair.

**Costume Designer:** A costume designer creates the look of each character by designing clothes and accessories that the actors will wear in performance and oversees the construction of these items.

**Culture:** Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by our people through experience and reflection in an attempt to fashion a harmonious coexistence with the environment.

**Effutu:** The name of the people of Winneba.

**Fancy Dress:** Fancy dress is a dress code that is part of a continuum of clothing and fashion etiquette that has boundaries of expectation and acceptance.

**‘Fametu’:** A protruding puff design at the shoulder level of the Swedru Fancy Dress costume.

**Festival:** Religious or other celebrations.

**Masquerade:** A cultural or artistic practice involving the use of costumes, masks, and symbolic performances to convey themes, identities, or messages. It often integrates elements of dance,

music, and drama, serving as a medium for cultural expression, storytelling, social commentary, or ritualistic purposes within a specific socio-cultural context.

**Simpa:** The local or original name for Winneba

**Simple Dress:** A patchwork and appliqué costume of Fancy Dress

### **1.10 Organization of the Rest of the Text**

Chapter two presents a review of available literature relevant to the study. In chapter three, the research methodologies and strategies adopted for the study were discussed. The subsequent chapter deals with the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the data collected. Chapter five is the concluding chapter, which presents the summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Overview**

This chapter deals with a review of the literature related to the development of Fancy-Dress design history and designers in Ghana. The review is done under the following sub-topics.

- Theoretical Framework
- The Art of Fancy Dress
- Historical antecedents of Fancy Dress in Ghana
- Design history of Fancy Dress in Ghana
- Defining Fancy Dress
- Relationship between Fancy Dress Carnivals and Masquerades in Ghana
- Designing processes in Fancy Dress
- Impact of Fancy Dress in Ghana

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

In the field of research, various concepts and theories back or foundation on which the study relates and hinges to establish the validity, authority, and credibility of the study and its research work. The study adopted two distinct theories, namely Reillo's material culture theory and Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory.

##### **2.1.1 Material Culture Theory**

Material culture theory offers an interdisciplinary framework for understanding the dynamic relationship between humans and objects within their sociocultural contexts. It examines how material artefacts, beyond their utilitarian purposes, carry symbolic meanings and cultural values that influence human behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

According to Bartmanski and Woodward (2015), material culture theory transcends the concept of mere "things" by incorporating the meanings people attach to objects and how individuals interact with them. This theoretical perspective emphasizes that objects are not passive entities; rather, they are imbued with cultural significance and contribute to shaping social life. Woodward (2007) elaborates on the tangible nature of objects, asserting that material items are central to human interactions, as people engage with, manipulate, and interpret them in daily life. He argues that objects function as representations of material culture, embodying both physical and symbolic dimensions. In this sense, material culture includes artifacts that serve practical purposes while also acting as vehicles for the communication of ideas, values, and social identities. Furthermore, the material culture framework highlights the reciprocal relationship between humans and objects, whereby inanimate artifacts are not only acted upon but also play active roles in performing social tasks, facilitating interpersonal relationships, and assigning symbolic significance to human actions (Woodward, 2007).

Drawing on the insights of material culture theory, Rocamora and Smelik (2016) propose its applicability to fashion studies, where material artifacts and bodily practices converge. Fashion encompasses both the materiality of objects such as garments, accessories, and textiles, and the embodied practices of dressing, which reflect cultural identities and social dynamics. Rocamora and Smelik argue that material culture theory enables a deeper understanding of how fashion operates as a site of meaning-making, where objects like costumes are invested with cultural narratives and performative functions. By focusing on the materiality of things and human bodies, the theory situates fashion within broader sociocultural and historical frameworks, revealing its role as both an artistic expression and a form of social communication.

In the context of fancy dress traditions in Winneba and Swedru, material culture theory provides a critical lens for analyzing the significance of costumes as cultural artifacts. These costumes are not merely functional garments but are imbued with symbolic meanings that reflect local histories, values, and communal identities. Fancy Dress designers and makers interact with material fabrics, adornments, and masks to create costumes that serve performative and expressive purposes. As Woodward (2007) suggests, objects like these costumes embody the cultural values of the community, acting as both historical archives and mediums for contemporary storytelling. Additionally, the elaborate and innovative designs of fancy dress costumes align with Rocamora and Smelik's (2016) assertion that material culture theory bridges artistic practices, materiality, and social representation. The relevance of material culture theory in this analysis underscores how fancy dress costumes act as powerful vehicles of cultural memory and identity. For instance, the careful selection of materials, colours, and motifs reflects local traditions, while the intricate construction techniques such as appliqué, patchwork, and embroidery demonstrate the technical expertise of costume makers. The theory further highlights how the symbolic meanings of these costumes are negotiated through their performance in festivals, where they are displayed, interpreted, and celebrated within the community. Bartmanski and Woodward's (2015) emphasis on the interaction between people and objects resonates with how fancy dress participants and spectators assign cultural and emotional value to these costumes, transforming them into meaningful cultural symbols.

By situating fancy dress design within the framework of material culture theory, the tradition can be understood as a dynamic practice that connects the materiality of objects (costumes) with social, historical, and cultural narratives. This perspective not only highlights the artistry and craftsmanship of fancy dressmakers and designers but

also emphasizes the enduring cultural significance of the costumes in preserving and expressing collective identities within the Winneba and Swedru communities. In sum, the material culture theory offers a robust framework for examining how fancy dress costume design in Winneba and Swedru evolves as a result of interactions between people, materials, and cultural meanings. The materiality of the costumes not only anchors the practice in a shared historical context but also allows for the continuous negotiation of identity, creativity, and community memory through the design and performance of fancy dress.

### **2.1.2 Symbolic Interactionism Theory**

Symbolic interactionism provides a significant theoretical framework for understanding the development of Fancy Dress traditions in Winneba and Swedru by exploring how meanings, identities, and cultural expressions are constructed and sustained through social interactions. Rooted in the works of George Herbert Mead and later refined by Herbert Blumer (1969), the theory highlights the role of symbols, language, and shared meanings in shaping human behaviour and societal practices. Symbolic interactionism, therefore, becomes critical to examining how the fancy dress tradition functions as a platform for identity formation, cultural expression, and community cohesion. Central to this theory is the premise that individuals act toward objects, people, and events based on the meanings they assign to them. These meanings are not inherent but are derived and modified through social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Within the context of fancy dress in Winneba and Swedru, costumes, masks, and performances emerge as significant cultural symbols that hold deep meanings for both creators and participants. For instance, the adoption of specific costume characters such as warriors, animals, or historical figures reflects a shared interpretation of cultural values, historical memory, and artistic expression. These characters, rooted in both local and external influences,

are imbued with symbolic significance through the collective actions and interpretations of the community. Moreover, the Fancy Dress festivals serve as sites of social interaction where meanings are continuously negotiated and reinforced. Designers and dressmakers in Winneba and Swedru engage with materials, tools, and creative processes not merely as technical exercises but as opportunities to convey cultural narratives and personal interpretations. Through collaborative efforts, such as group performances and competitive displays, Fancy Dress participants construct and reaffirm communal identities while also asserting individuality within the tradition. This process aligns with Mead's (1934) concept of the "self" as a social construct that emerges through interaction with others. The theory further underscores the interpretative process through which meanings are handled and modified over time. In the development of Fancy Dress, new generations reinterpret costume designs and performance practices to reflect evolving social realities while maintaining core cultural symbols. For example, the costumes inspired by colonial influences or Hollywood films in the mid-20th century have been reimagined and adapted within the cultural framework of Winneba and Swedru. These adaptations signify the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, as Fancy Dress continues to act as a living medium for cultural dialogue and identity negotiation.

In conclusion, symbolic interactionism provides a valuable lens for analyzing the development of Fancy Dress in Winneba and Swedru. By emphasizing the role of symbols, meanings, and social interactions, the theory reveals how the practice of Fancy Dress fosters cultural expression, community solidarity, and identity formation. The costumes, performances, and creative processes are not static; rather, they are continuously shaped and redefined through the interpretative actions of individuals and communities, ensuring the tradition's relevance and vitality over time.

## **2.2 The Art of Fancy Dress**

The art of Fancy Dress has evolved as a multifaceted performance tradition rooted in historical practices from both international and local contexts. Today, it primarily involves dancing and parading through streets and towns during festive occasions such as Christmas and Easter. However, this was not always the case in its early history. Performance art, including the use of costumes and masquerading, has deep roots in European traditions dating back to the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (Holt, 1905; Micots, 2021). In its formative years, Fancy Dress began as elite social gatherings, such as costume balls and private parties, where strict invitations were issued based on adherence to elaborate dress codes (Walters, 2015). These events underscored the role of clothing as a form of status and cultural etiquette, positioning Fancy Dress as a continuum of fashion and societal norms (Walters, 2015).

Internationally, Fancy Dress was not merely an exercise in entertainment but a form of embodied activity with significant psycho-social implications for both participants and audiences. The performances often carried symbolic meaning, as participants used costumes and masks to mimic characters, satirize societal issues, or celebrate communal identities (Walters, 2015). Walters (2015) further emphasizes that Fancy Dress is a speculative performance art that combines fashion, music, and dance to engage with broader cultural themes. The performers, who often masked or disguised their identities, paraded through spaces in a manner that reflected mimicry, celebration, and cultural storytelling. This art form traveled across continents, flourishing in European, Caribbean, Indian, and West African diasporic communities, where it took on new meanings and stylistic interpretations. The Victorian era, in particular played a pivotal role in shaping the early aesthetics and conventions of Fancy Dress. The lavish balls and parties of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adhered to strict dress

guidelines that emphasized luxury, creativity, and craftsmanship (Mitchell, 2017; Knott, 2020a). Costumes were judged not only on their shininess and richness but also on their fit, structure, and accessorizing elements, which created an overall illusion of spectacle and fantasy (Holt, 1905 as cited in Knott, 2020). Mitchell (2017) underscores that the Victorian Fancy Dress tradition laid the groundwork for modern Fancy Dress practices, particularly in its combination of bespoke dressmaking and creative embellishment. Knott (2020b) further elaborates on the complexity of Fancy Dress as a cultural practice, describing it as a performance that is both "everyday and pervasive," yet deeply creative and guided by specific cultural and social expectations. This duality allows Fancy Dress to function as a craft ranging from intricate, tailored designs to more accessible and improvised interpretations. As such, the performance has been flexible enough to adapt to changing times while retaining its symbolic essence. The transatlantic and colonial movements of European powers played a significant role in disseminating Fancy Dress traditions to regions such as the Caribbean and West Africa. In these contexts, Fancy Dress took on local cultural influences, becoming deeply embedded in festivals, communal celebrations, and historical performances. For instance, in the Caribbean, Fancy Dress evolved into vibrant masquerade traditions like *Jonkonnu*, while in West Africa, particularly in Ghana, Fancy Dress became a performance medium for both colonial mimicry and local cultural expression (Micots, 2021). The use of masks, costumes, and accessories served as symbols for identity negotiation, community solidarity, and resistance against colonial structures. Locally, in Ghana, the development of Fancy Dress reflects a blending of indigenous practices and foreign influences. Before the formal introduction of European-style Fancy Dress, indigenous traditions such as Asafo warrior performances and masquerading had long utilized costumes and dance as expressions of cultural identity and spiritual significance

(Micots, 2021). The incorporation of European costume traditions into local festivals began during the colonial era and gained momentum in the early twentieth century. Tools, materials, and designs used in Fancy Dress costumes, including natural fibers, carved masks, and elaborate fabrics, highlight the influence of both local material culture and external inspirations (Knott, 2020b; Mitchell, 2017). In conclusion, the history of Fancy Dress both internationally and locally reveals its role as a dynamic and adaptive art form. Internationally, it emerged from elite Victorian social practices and evolved into broader public parades and performances. Locally, particularly in Ghanaian towns such as Winneba and Swedru, Fancy Dress has become a hybrid tradition that reflects both colonial legacies and indigenous cultural expressions. Drawing on material culture theory and symbolic interactionism, Fancy Dress continues to serve as a platform for storytelling, identity formation, and cultural preservation across generations. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to adapt, combining creative artistry, performance, and communal meaning (Knott, 2020; Walters, 2015; Micots, 2021).

### **2.3 General Worldview of the History of Fancy Dress**

The general worldview of Fancy Dress reflects its evolving role as a cultural, social, and artistic phenomenon, deeply influenced by both Western traditions and African masquerade practices. Although historical accounts of Fancy Dress remain limited, scholars have drawn connections between European, Caribbean, and African practices that highlight its dynamic trajectory across different regions (Knott, 2020c; Micots, 2014; Walters, 2015). The Victorian period is often credited as a transformative era for Fancy Dress, shaping its recognizable modern form, contrasting sharply with the Georgian masquerades that preceded it. Georgian masquerades were marked by their association with frivolity, indulgence, and anonymity, often relying on masks to obscure

individual identities (Jarvis & Raine, 1984; Jarvis, 1982; Mitchell, 2017, as cited in Knott, 2020d). In contrast, Victorian Fancy Dress became a more socially acceptable and structured practice, entertaining while preserving decorum. This shift reflected broader Victorian values of respectability and order. The emergence of Fancy Dress as an identifiable cultural practice in Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, can be traced to 18th-century masked balls, which were a significant part of elite social life (Drummond, 2011). During this period, participants wore costumes that represented historical figures, abstract concepts, and even inanimate objects. Women often portrayed characters such as Marie Antoinette and Queen Elizabeth I, while men took on figures like Napoleon and Robin Hood (Matthews, 2016). The symbolism embedded in these costumes reinforced hierarchical class structures while allowing participants to engage in creative self-expression.

The reigns of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II further influenced the trajectory of Fancy Dress, solidifying its role as a cultural tradition. During Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901), Fancy Dress reflected the grandeur and opulence of British imperial society, while Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 spurred a resurgence in Fancy Dress with patriotic themes of red, white, and blue (Wilson, 2020). However, post-World War II economic realities led to a decline in its popularity among adults, limiting its practice primarily to children's events. Fancy Dress re-emerged in the 1990s as a more inclusive practice, embraced by individuals across age groups and social classes, reflecting shifting cultural attitudes and increasing affluence in Britain (Wilson, 2020; Matthews, 2016). This period saw Fancy Dress evolve beyond elite spaces, becoming a site for both creative experimentation and social commentary. Internationally, Fancy Dress resonated in colonial and postcolonial contexts, particularly in the Caribbean and Africa. Masquerade traditions, long established in African societies, featured

prominently as antecedents to Fancy Dress, particularly in festivals and communal performances (Micots, 2014; Doris, 2005). In the Caribbean, British colonial practices such as masquerade balls were adopted and reinterpreted within local cultural frameworks, often as forms of mimicry and resistance (Wild, 2020). For example, *Jonkonnu* and carnival performances incorporated elaborate costumes, music, and dance, merging European influences with African cultural expressions to produce new hybrid traditions.

In West Africa, particularly in Ghana, Fancy Dress performances mirrored these developments while drawing from indigenous masquerade traditions. Micots (2021) identifies Ghanaian Fancy Dress as a cultural practice that combines colonial legacies with indigenous aesthetics. Performers utilized locally available materials, such as woven fabrics, raffia, and masks, to craft costumes that reflected both creative ingenuity and cultural symbolism. Similar to European Fancy Dress, Ghanaian iterations served as platforms for storytelling, mimicry, and the celebration of community identities. These practices were further elevated in towns such as Winneba and Swedru, where Fancy Dress festivals became prominent annual events, fostering intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and artistic expression (Micots, 2021; Knott, 2020b). The psycho-social dimensions of Fancy Dress have also been explored through Freudian concepts of the uncanny, where familiar objects and symbols assume a dreamlike and unsettling quality (Freud, 1913). Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, translated into English in 1913, highlights how costumes and masks allow for the subversion of identity, enabling participants to explore alternative selves. This sense of transformation aligns with contemporary understandings of Fancy Dress as a liminal practice that blurs the boundaries between reality and illusion (Walters, 2015). For participants, donning Fancy Dress often becomes an opportunity to challenge societal

norms, embody fantastical identities, and engage in playful or critical commentary on social realities. From the 1950s to 2022, Fancy Dress has continued to evolve as a global art form. In Britain and Europe, it transitioned from elite masquerade balls to inclusive cultural events, with themes ranging from historical reenactments to abstract and humorous portrayals (Matthews, 2016; Wilson, 2020). In the Caribbean and Africa, Fancy Dress became an essential part of festivals, carnivals, and communal performances, preserving cultural heritage while incorporating contemporary influences (Micots, 2021; Wild, 2020). The modern resurgence of Fancy Dress, particularly in the 21st century, reflects its enduring appeal as a site for creativity, identity exploration, and collective celebration across diverse cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the historical trajectory of Fancy Dress from its Victorian origins to its contemporary expressions highlights its complex interplay between tradition and innovation. While rooted in European masquerade practices, it has been reimaged in postcolonial societies as a form of cultural resistance, celebration, and artistic expression. Drawing from both material culture theory and symbolic interactionism, Fancy Dress remains a dynamic cultural practice that continues to adapt to shifting social, political, and economic landscapes (Knott, 2020b; Walters, 2015; Micots, 2021).

#### **2.4 Historical Developments of Fancy Dress in Ghana**

Fancy Dress, as a visual culture, is a colourful secular masquerade performed throughout Ghana. Fancy Dress culture in Ghana is celebrated at festivals and special occasions, particularly in Takoradi, Swedru, Cape Coast, and Effutu metropolis. Popular textile-fashion art is showcased in Takoradi and Winneba towns, attracting people from all walks of life. Fancy Dress events in towns like Winneba, Swedru, Takoradi, Cape Coast, Saltpond, and Accra city feature colorful costumes, brass band

music, and a procession. The history of the Fancy Dress festival, by wearing masks and costumes, has been customary in Ghana, especially in most of the coastal cities in the country, since the start of the art in the colonial era by the Europeans due to the early involvement with the coastal indigenes. A visual-performing art form (fancy dress) combines the simultaneous dancing and parading of groups of people in masks and costumes (masquerades) as they march through towns and cities in search of tips and dashes from onlookers.

According to Micots (2014), fancy dress is created expressly to appeal to the neighborhood with music, dance routines, and characters that both thrill and critique socio-political issues. The history of Fancy Dress in Ghana is deeply rooted in transnational cultural exchanges, stemming from European colonial influences, the Caribbean diaspora, and indigenous African traditions. Originally, Fancy Dress emerged as parties and masquerade events in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, where costumes, masks, and character performances were central to social entertainment (Knott, 2020c; Walters, 2015). This cultural practice gradually spread to the Caribbean and West Africa through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which played a pivotal role in facilitating cultural exchanges between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Scholars like Micots (2021) attribute this movement to the interconnected “Black Atlantic” world, a term coined by Gilroy (1993), which describes the circulation of cultural forms, ideas, and people across the Atlantic Ocean during and after the slave trade. The *Black Atlantic* framework, as Micots (2021) highlights, underscores the shared struggles of African descendants for emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship, contributing to the formation of hybrid cultural traditions. Carnival celebrations in the Americas, particularly in Brazil, Trinidad, and Haiti, became emblematic of this culture, integrating costume aesthetics, spiritual expression, and political resistance. These

carnivals laid the groundwork for the Fancy Dress traditions seen in West Africa, including Ghana. The return of freed and enslaved Africans from the Caribbean and the Americas to the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) during the 19th and early 20th centuries brought with them carnival-inspired performance art, which was embraced and adapted by local communities (Micots, 2021; Wild, 2020).

In Ghana, Fancy Dress took on a unique character, blending colonial influences with indigenous cultural practices. Costume and mask makers, choreographers, musicians, and performers played a key role in localizing this art form. These artisans drew inspiration from both African masquerade traditions and European costume aesthetics to create elaborate ensembles that were paraded during festive occasions. Early celebrations of Fancy Dress in Ghana can be traced to towns such as Saltpond, Cape Coast, Winneba, and Swedru in the Central Region. These coastal towns, with their history of colonial contact and exposure to returning diasporic Africans, became significant hubs for the development of Fancy Dress culture (Micots, 2021). By the late Gold Coast era, Fancy Dress had become more widespread, particularly during Christmas, New Year, and Easter celebrations, where it evolved into a vibrant community spectacle. Groups of performers, often referred to as *fancy dress companies*, competed in parades that showcased choreographed dances, music, and creatively designed costumes. The influence of indigenous masquerade traditions, such as *kakaamotobi* and other spiritual performances, added layers of symbolism and local meaning to the Fancy Dress art form. Scholars note that Fancy Dress in Ghana was not merely entertainment but also served as a medium for storytelling, political critique, and the reinforcement of social identity (Doris, 2005; Micots, 2014). The town of Winneba, in particular, emerged as a prominent center for Fancy Dress celebrations. Since 1958, Winneba has hosted annual Fancy Dress festivals that have solidified its

role as a cultural hub for this art form. These events are marked by elaborate performances, competition between groups, and enthusiastic community participation. The Fancy Dress festivals in Winneba have not only preserved the tradition but have also fostered innovation, as costume designs, music, and dance continue to evolve to reflect contemporary themes and influences (Micots, 2021; Wild, 2020). Similarly, Swedru and other towns in Ghana's Central Region have embraced Fancy Dress as a community practice that bridges the past and present, symbolizing cultural resilience and identity.

From a broader perspective, the history of Fancy Dress in Ghana reflects the interplay between local and global influences. It demonstrates how cultural practices can be adapted and reinterpreted within specific sociocultural contexts while maintaining connections to their diasporic roots. Drawing on material culture theory, the Fancy Dress tradition highlights the significance of costumes and objects as cultural symbols that embody both historical memory and contemporary expression (Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015; Rocamora & Smelik, 2016). The creative use of materials, including textiles, accessories, and masks, illustrates how Ghanaian artisans and performers imbue objects with meaning, linking the tangible (material culture) to the intangible (social identity and community values). Fancy Dress in Ghana is a dynamic cultural practice that emerged through trans-Atlantic cultural exchanges and evolved into a uniquely localized tradition. Its development reflects the complex history of the *Black Atlantic* and highlights the creative adaptation of European and Caribbean influences within Ghanaian cultural frameworks. Through festivals, performances, and costume artistry, Fancy Dress continues to serve as a powerful expression of community identity, historical memory, and artistic innovation in Ghana (Micots, 2021; Knott, 2020b; Wild, 2020).

Cole and Ross's (1977) account suggests that Fancy Dress in Ghana is a transcultural festival brought by Sierra Leone and West Indians in the late 19th century, although the exact location remains unknown, with other scholars concurring. Bakhtin (1984) argues that Fancy Dress is a carnivalesque culture adopted by locals after World War I, from sailors, travelers, and colonial soldiers. Scholars like Sarfo-Ankama and Micots agree that soldiers brought art to the Gold Coast after the war. Fancy Dress, a transcultural art performance globally, can convey socio-political or religious sentiments to the public, despite its geographical origin and appropriateness. Micots' account of Fancy Dress dates back to 1899, with a 'Fancy Dress Ball' held at T. Hutton Mills Sr.'s Cape Coast home. In the late 19th century, masquerade balls and theatre performances were held in the Gold Coast, including a 1917 Grand Masked Fancy Dress Carnival. Micots' account of Fancy Dress dates back to 1899, with a 'Fancy Dress Ball' held at T. Hutton Mills Sr.'s Cape Coast home. In the late 19th century, masquerade balls and theatre performances were held on the Gold Coast, including a 1917 Grand Masked Fancy Dress Carnival (Micots, 2021). She further added that Europeans and African elites attended a carnival in the Old Government House Garden, with details unspecified. The Gold Coast Leader reported event details in December. Micots' assertion shows that Fancy Dress (masquerade) predominated in the African Diaspora, Afrocentric art without Eurocentric influences, until colonization. European style was introduced, blending African fancy dress art (2021).

The history of Fancy Dress in Ghana, particularly in Winneba, can be traced back to the 19th century when Dutch and British traders introduced masquerade traditions, wearing masks and dancing in white-owned bars during Christmas festivities (Brown, 2005). Inspired by these performances, Janka Abraham from Saltpond established the *Nobles* group in the Alata Kokwado neighborhood. The *Nobles* would gather at the old

Rocoast warehouse, donning costumes that imitated local occupations and mocked Europeans, often wearing masks resembling white colonial figures (Brown, 2005; Wild, 2020). The popularity of Fancy Dress grew with the formation of subsequent groups. Nana Kow Sackey, a chief in Winneba, established the *Egyaa* group, financially sponsoring it, which led to tensions with the Gyakeh royal family. This controversy spurred the creation of a third group, *Tumus*, in 1930, primarily composed of uneducated Catholic youths and fishermen. European Catholic ministers offered financial support, helping *Tumus* gain recognition as the most fashionable Fancy Dress group of its time (Brown, 2005).

In 1933, A.W. Yamoah, a merchant, founded the *Red Cross* Fancy Dress group in Abasraba. This group introduced a formal structure, including entrance exams in English and Ghanaian Cultural Studies, monthly membership dues, and provisions for costumes and musical instruments. They also supported community welfare, such as funding children's school fees when families were unable to pay (Brown, 2005). Scholars remain divided on the cultural significance of Fancy Dress in Ghana. While some view it as a form of entertainment, others argue that it holds deep cultural and diasporic connections, reflecting traditional beliefs and societal values. Elderly residents in Winneba emphasize the role of Fancy Dress in honoring ancestral traditions, linking the practice to *asafo* groups and ceremonial performances during street parades. Thus, Fancy Dress combines entertainment, cultural reverence, and social commentary, cementing its place as a dynamic and evolving tradition in Ghanaian society.

## 2.5 Defining Fancy Dress

Through the lens of material culture, fancy dress as a social activity can be examined as it explores the symbiosis between the costumes, the people, and their cultural values, helping to construct a picture of fancy-dress practice (Walters, 2015). The term "fancy dress" itself dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was used to describe a costume that was fancifully embellished with accessories and occasionally represented a specific character (Walters, 2015). According to "Costume and Ideologies," dressing up is more than just wearing clothes. They assert that clothing covers the body, whereas a costume is an article of clothing that is different from what is normally worn (Wilson, 2022). Furthermore, Walters (2015) opined that fancy dress can refer to both the costume itself as well as the activity or occasion when it is worn. Consequently, there is a clear parallel between theatre costumes and other performance wear, particularly festival and music-hall apparel. Interestingly, these different expressions of clothes worn for specific occasions have some similarities with fancy dress (Wilson, 2020). It is still the case that fancy dress is meant to be an interactive kind of entertainment in which attendees are encouraged to express their sense of style while adhering to the party's theme. It's not free for all, even while there is a certain amount of pressure to adhere to the fundamentally non-conformity of fancy dress (Walters, 2015; Holt, 1998). According to Barcan (2004), as cited in Walters (2015), fancy dress is an elaborate and frequently humorous costume change with 'complex roles and actants' that carry with it expectations about appropriate behavior for the setting of the fancy dress event. According to Wild, most fashion designers don't think their designs should include fancy dresses; however, this devaluation most likely reflects the socialized belief that fancy dress is an ineffective, incompetent, and unreliable form of entertainment (Wild, 2019). The phrase purposefully implies that fancy dress has an emotive component, that

it alters the attitudes and behaviors of both the wearer and others around them. Academics are increasingly aware of the effect of costumes. Despite this, Lauren Boumaroun has enunciated the concept of ‘everyday cosplay’, a specific form of fancy dress costume through which consumers appropriate the visual identity of fictional characters for their self-expression through dress (Boumaroun, 2017 as cited in Wild, 2020). This viewpoint is consistent with the concept of "enclothed cognition" proposed by Hajo Adam and Adam D. Galinsky, which designates the systematic influence of clothing on the wearer’s psychological processes and behavioral proclivities (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). According to Bowman & Rathje (2014), clothing is a daily experience that draws a line between the private and public spheres and necessitates skills, knowledge, and aesthetics that are rarely discussed but have deep significance.

### **2.5.1 Fancy Dress Costume**

Wearing a fancy-dress costume at a formal event is a performative act that might cause a person's social and political standing to be disrupted. They can show historical figures, famous people, literary works, motion pictures, thoughts, animals, concepts, or eras. According to Wild (2020), fancy dress costumes can range from party clothing to cosplay and custom orders and are described as inventive and incongruous. They convey eras, locales, character qualities, concepts, and moods. Anglophone scholars and curators in the US and Europe refer to formal or sophisticated attire as fancy dress; however, the term can also be used to describe more casual attire. In the UK, partywear hire shops now describe their items as costumes, rather than fancy dresses. In former British colonies like West Africa, where costume traditions still exist, one can find Anglophone phrases related to dressing up. Scholars reevaluate the idea of costume, emphasizing how it helps people express who they are. For both wearers and onlookers, fancy dress garments with holistic tools, materials, and inventiveness have

philosophical connotations. The dress has the most direct contact with the human body and is therefore considered an integral part of the personality, thus, there is an assertion that dress or what an individual wears serves as a channel of non-verbal communication with others (Essel, Navei & deGraft-Yankson, 2021; Goedhart, 2020; Aris, Aris & Ba'ai, 2020; Warritay, 2017; Mamiya, 2016; Tijana, Tomaž & Čuden, 2014; Howard, Sarpong & Amankwah, 2012; Hasan, Subhani, & Osman, 2011; Akwetey, 2007; Rosenfeld & Plax, 1977 as cited in Navei & Donkoh, 2022). Dress provided an opportunity to experiment with ethnicity, and it also opened up a space to cross class. The costume is a specific system of elements, expressed by social, nationality, region, gender, age, and specialization, combined with a holistic idea and purpose. The costume is closely connected with everyday traditions, which reflect the customs of a particular region, a specific historical period, the social status of people or ethnic groups, the image of a particular person, and its uniqueness. The main functions of the costume include protective, utilitarian, and character functions, because the costume is a special type of communication; thus, it provides information about the person to others: their social status, attitude to politics, aesthetic taste, religion, culture (Essel, 2017; Essel & Amissah, 2015; Navei & Donkoh, 2022).

Wild (2019) highlights the importance of costume in the fashion industry and its non-normative aesthetic. Dress costume encompasses various garments, from comic to machine-made, reflecting diverse motivations. It delegates information about the wearer's economic and social situation, occupation, nationality, and individual properties and values, making it more useful in academic studies. Fancy clothing significantly influences social identity formation and self-information about the wearer's nationality, occupation, economic status, and personal characteristics. Fancy dress costumes and modern fashions have a beneficial association, with modern vogues

being commonly included in fancy dress entertainment during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

## **2.6 Designing in Fancy Dress**

A Fancy-Dress costume is just like any other costume designed purposely for characters, events, and scenes. In costume designing, there comes the need to plan and execute costumes or dress aesthetically to appeal to the physical, emotional, and psychological conscience of the wearer and their viewers. This is achieved through the well-planned composition of components combined to produce pleasing garment designs. However, arranging them well creates a feeling of completeness in a garment. Fashion design is the applied art, dedicated to clothing and lifestyle accessories created within the cultural and social influences of a specific time (Rajesh, 2009). Designers create original garments by appropriately using the components of design such that the outcome follows established fashion trends (Watson, 2003).

In designing, a design is represented in two folds: a process and a product. As a process, it is planning and organizing to meet a goal, being carried out to meet a particular purpose, and as a product, it is a result, an intended arrangement that is the outcome of that process or plan (Davis, 1996, as cited in Obinnim & Afi Pongo, 2015). The arrangements are done by using the elements and principles of design to create a visual image; however, this narrative is not far when it comes to designing costumes for Fancy Dress events in Ghana and beyond. The Elements and Principles of Design that form an integral part of every design work are aesthetically and creatively employed in the designing of such costumes, which denote visual interpretations and values to the wearer and the viewers. Davis (1996) posits that elements and principles have distinct roles; however, he sees the two components as tools used to create desired visual

effects. He narrates the elements to ingredients and the principles as strategies to organize the elements to hold awareness and command attention. Nevertheless, they are also employed in other creative media such as music, architecture, film, theatre, and writing. They also have a base deep in humanity, affecting values, attitudes, cultures, and ethnicities (JaneAnn, 2000, as cited in Obinnim & Afi Pongo, 2015). In designing, Anitha confirms that the understanding of how and why designers respond to the various elements and principles of design, and knowing how to control and use them effectively for a good design, is an important aspect that needs to be spotlighted (Anitha, 2005). Obinnim and Afi Pongo (2015) expressed that during the construction of costumes or garments, the structure, function, and decoration of the outfit should be considered in designing as the key characteristics. Thus, it should be structurally appealing and appropriate for the wearer's needs. Functionally, it should give the added value or function that the garment is expected to perform, and decoratively, it provides a psychological feeling of well-being through beauty. These three characteristics are present in a garment when the elements and principles of design have been defined as the fundamental components from which visual design is made (Anitha, 2005). Appreciating the effective use of the elements and principles of design is basic to any good design process in the field of art and fashion, in particular. Clothing substances are not only assessed by the senses but also by emotions and the mind. The aesthetic experience, which comes from a garment, addresses internal fulfillment, multi-sensory properties, emotional aspects, and the socio-cultural characteristics of the creator as well as the garment's appearance (Anitha, 2005).

### ***2.6.1 Elements of Design***

Elements of design are those components that an apparel designer employs in designing the garments. Amenuke et al also affirmed that elements of design are the basic parts or

qualities that are used in the design process (*Amenuke et al, 1999*). A design can be defined as an arrangement of lines, shapes, colors, and textures that create a visual image. Also, an effective design can be recognized by the wide range of elements of design considered with the skill and judgment used to select and combine the elements in a style.

#### *2.6.1.1 Lines*

Line, being the simplest and the most important of the design elements, refers to the edge of the outline of a garment and the style line that divides the space within a garment. Wolfe (2010) defined a line as a distinct, elongated mark as if drawn by a pencil or pen (p. 451). Roueche and Shirley (2012) opined that in clothing, lines can suggest movement or rhythm while directing the eye from one part of the body to another. Furthermore, lines can draw attention to a specific part of the body or emphasize a specific detail in a garment (Roueche & Shirley, 2012). It is an extremely useful and versatile realistic tool that is made to function in both visual and verbal ways.

Moreover, a line creates visual illusions such as height and width and also makes a figure look thin or thick if used adeptly (Tate, 1998). Lines in a costume provide a path of vision along which the eye travels, and divide the area through which it passes, thus providing a breaking point in space. Direction can be vertical, horizontal, diagonal, or curved, movement of the eye of an observer around and through an image (Nateman, 1994, as cited in Gbetodeme, Amankwa & Dzegblor, 2016). Vertical lines tend to slim down the body; thus, when an individual wears vertical lines, there is an illusion of added height and slimness (Roueche & Shirley, 2012). Also, Wolfe stresses that vertical lines are recommended if an individual is trying to communicate dignity, strength, self-confidence, or sophistication (Wolfe, 2010). On the contrary, horizontal lines can

suggest someone's shortness or wideness than what he/she is (Wolfe, 2010). He concluded that horizontal lines present a calm and relaxed look while suggesting rest and gentleness (p. 195). On the other hand, diagonal lines that are vertical lead to a slender visual, and horizontal diagonal lines create greater width to an individual's body (Roueche & Shirley, 2012). Diagonal lines suggest action and strength while coming across as dramatic and unconventional (Wolfe, 2010, p. 195).

Roueche and Shirley (2012) further posited that line is applied to clothing design in two components, thus, structurally, and decoratively. They continued to narrate that the instances where the line is used in the structural design of a garment are seams, darts, pleats, tucks, and edges, where each of these design features is used in the construction of the garment decided upon by the designer (Roueche & Shirley, 2012). Also, decorative lines are employed by the use of surface details on a garment. Samples of decorative lines are ruffles, braid, fringe, appliques, buttons, or accessories worn by the individual (Wolfe, 2010, p. 196).

#### *2.6.1.2 Texture*

Texture is the element of design that describes surface appearance and feel understood by sight as well as by touch. The texture of a clothing item is determined by the fiber content, yarns, and method of construction used (Roueche & Shirley, 2012). Texture is defined as the surface quality of a garment (Wolfe, 2010, p. 199). Texture is the appearance or characteristic structure as well as the surface quality of a material (Manmeet, 2008). Nateman (1994) as cited by Gbetodeme et al (2016) also describes texture as the perceived quality of a surface whether real or simulated. The texture of a fabric appeals to the eyes as well as the sense of touch. Texture refers to the surface appearance and feel of a fabric. This results from the type of raw material and the type

of weave used in producing the fabric (Vanderhoff as cited in Gbetodeme et al, 2016). The texture of a fabric may be described as soft, rough, shiny, dull, bulky, filmy, transparent, thick, and smooth. Constantly, the two types of textures; structural texture, which is created when fabrics or garments are manufactured such as the fiber type, mode of construction (weave type), or yarns, and added visual textures (finishes or decoration), which come when a design is printed onto the fabric surface. There are various components like fibers, yarns, fabrics, and finishes that determine texture. Gbetodeme et al (2016) stipulated that texture is determined when design and texture are closely related in that, at times the design of the weave determines the texture.

However, the determination of a texture is not only by the design found on the surface of the fabric but by the arrangement of the parts in the fabric such as; the fibre, the yarn, the weave, and the finish that make up a fabric. The degree of stiffness or softness and the weight of the fabric will influence the drape, which is the way it dangles on the wearer. Drape is an important factor that determines how well a particular fabric will move with the body and maintain the shape of the style (Gbetodeme et al, 2016).

Moreover, the quality or texture of a material (fabric) can change the general look or tone of the color of such material. The sheen of fabrics such as sateen, makes them more suitable for evening wear than any daytime wear because such fabrics reflect more light during the day than at night due to their smoothness (Vanderhoff, 1978 as cited in Gbetodeme et al, 2016).

#### *2.6.1.3 Shape*

Shape describes the outer dimensions or contour of a garment. Shape is defined as the silhouette, or overall outline of a garment or other item (Wolfe, 2010, p. 458). This is the most obvious visual element of the garment. It creates the initial impression before

any other specifics are perceived. The shape is a flat space closed by a line, and in clothing, it is a two-dimensional area enclosed by a line (Gbetodeme et al, 2106). When a designer is creating a garment, how it is cut out and the construction techniques used to impact the shape or form of the final product. Through clothing design, the shape of the human body is often revealed naturally but sometimes even distorted. The shape of clothing in a human body, communicates silently, the message about the wearer. Shapes have both physical and psychological effects based on the lines surrounding them; however, the space within the shapes and separating the shapes also affects the fabric and the wearer as well.

#### *2.6.1.4 Colour*

Colour, an artistic element, reflects sunlight's wavelength, exhibiting hue, intensity, and value, and influencing a person's psychological and emotional state (Cayton, 2009; Schneider Adams, 2002; Greider, 1996; Jackson, 1980; Appiah, 1979 as cited in Kwakye-Oppong, 2014). Colour allows individuals to express feelings, create illusions in appearance, and bring overall excitement to a personal wardrobe. Researchers have found that different colours can symbolize different moods, emotions, and cultural practices, or as a communication tool (Hemphill, 1996; Lang, 1993; Mahnke, 1996 as cited in Roueche & Shirley, 2012). It is the most universally appreciated element that helps to give form and meaning to a piece of art (costume) such that pleasant color rhythms and harmonies fulfill our aesthetic desires. Colour is the visual element that carries aesthetic, visual, and commercial value and may be arranged or employed to interpret a person's emotions, symbolize ideas, and create a mood. According to Cayton (2009) as cited in Kwakye-Oppong (2014) blue symbolizes dignity, serenity, reliability, loyalty, and honesty, while red signifies bravery, sin, passion, danger, or violence. Colour significantly influences a garment's visual impact (Burke, 2011). Colour is the

most exciting design element as it is the first thing noticed in a garment that attracts consumers. Colour is the major deciding factor in fabric designing, garment construction, and clothing or costuming. It is a property of light, a sensation, which occurs when light enters the eyes. Colour is a visual element that enables one to express themselves, affect the feeling, and reveal the wearer's personality.

### ***2.6.2 Principles of Design***

The desire to adorn or beautify the human body has existed since the Stone Age when early man painted his face and his body. Even though there has been a change in beauty standards, the quest remained constant. The principles of design help in creation, and expression of artistically and pleasingly. Designing is the process of combining known components in different ways to create new products or effects. The knowledge of how the elements and principles work, and how to manipulate them, enables the designer to create different visual effects and to analyze and appreciate all art forms. In the context of this, principles of design are guidelines for the use of the elements of design to create attractive garments, and different forms of expression artistically. They are used for creating, discussing & evaluating garment designs on and off the individual dress form. The principles of design are unity, balance, rhythm, repetition, emphasis, proportion, and scale. These are applied when one wants to create an aesthetically attractive design. Aesthetics involve the three-dimensional rules of construction called the elements and principles of design. The principles of design are the rules that govern how these elements are combined.

#### ***2.6.2.1 Balance***

Balance in garments is produced by structural parts and by adding decoration. Balance in clothing refers to a visual distribution of weight, from a central area. Balance in a

design has two main forms, either formal or informal, such that formal balance is known as symmetrical balance or equal balance. In an organization or group, costumes and designs that look the same on both sides of a garment have a formal balance or symmetrical balance. Symmetrical balance places style lines and details evenly on the garment (Burke, 2011). The average human body is visually symmetrical, which means that the body seems to be the same on each side of a central line. Nevertheless, the informal balance (asymmetrical) means unequal balance. This means that though each side of the design is equally interesting or important, it does not look exactly like the other side of the design; it involves the placement of objects in a way that will allow objects of varying visual weight to balance one another around a fulcrum point.

#### *2.6.2.2 Rhythm*

Rhythm is an important principle of art created by the repeated use of the design. It has a feeling of organized movement as the arrangement of the design elements makes the eye move easily over the apparel areas. Rhythm can be created in a garment with repetition, gradation, transition, opposition, or radial arrangement of various parts of the design, and also the fabric design. A design has rhythm when the line, colour, and texture have been arranged in an orderly way so that one's eyes move easily from one part of the design to another. In designing, rhythm is created through repetition or regular repeats of motifs of design, shapes, buttons, tucks, pleats, laces, edgings, color, textures, and fabric designs. Moreover, parts of the garment having the same shaped edges, like squared, rounded, or scalloped edges, also create repetition. Interestingly, when colors are used in repetition, a good effect can be created if the colors are distributed interestingly. A pleasing rhythm holds a design together, whereas a repetition of colour may also be used to create rhythm in either a dress or a costume.

### *2.6.2.3 Emphasis*

Emphasis involves the awareness of interest in the selected area of design, with other centers of interest subordinated. It could also be called a focal point. Designers often create emphasis partially through the careful arrangement of lines, texture, and colors. Each design needs some note of interest that catches the eye or attracts the attention of a specific area of the garment. Contrasting colour, for example, could be used to emphasize an area.

### *2.6.2.4 Unity*

Unity is also called harmony in design. A design is said to have unity if all the design elements and principles work together to produce a pleasing effect. However, it is a pleasing visual unity that interrelates among all parts within a whole design. Harmony between shape and form is necessary for a good design. When a design has unity, it gives an overall impression and a feeling of belongingness to the composition that attracts and holds the attention of the observer and gives a balanced look to the design. The agreement among functional, structural, and decorative design levels is essential to have harmony in the garment design. This means that occasion, climate, size, gender, age, personal taste, lifestyle, and personality of the wearer should be considered while designing the garments. Functional aspects of harmony suggest that a garment is comfortable, allows easy movement, breathes with the body, performs any specialized duties effectively, and fits well.

### *2.6.2.5 Proportion*

Proportion is the pleasing interrelationship between parts of a design, and the relationship in size between a part and the whole is defined as a proportion. Proportion includes planning the basic shape within a design. Proportion includes the relationship

of height, width, depth, and the surrounding space of each design. It may involve the scale of the forms within the design, like diversion of space to create attractive space relationships, where the variety of shapes, sizes, and the general idea of unity of principles of design are to be expressed. An optical illusion is created by changing partial arrangements to enhance the attractive portion that one wishes to enhance, for example, puffed in the shoulders or increased width in sleeves. When all the parts work well together, the garment is well proportioned; thus, a good proportion refers to the pleasing relationship between the sizes of various design details in a dress and between the garment itself and the design details.

### **2.7 Relationship between Fancy Dress, Carnivals, and Masquerades in Ghana**

Masquerading, a traditional African custom, has strong religious ties and is celebrated through performances and carnivals, where costumed performers impersonate fictive characters (Epochi-Olise & Osakue, 2022). Going forward, they expressed that masquerade is a common pursuit in African communities, and in the Caribbean, Europe, and the Americas. Masquerades are dramatic and captivating performances that are performed throughout Western and Central Africa, in both rural and urban settings, as acknowledged by Binkley and Ottenberg (2004). Masquerades are not only joyous and amusing, but they are also essential to the artistic representation of a community's identity, history, and culture. In addition to being one of the most remarkable forms of collective cultural expression or communication, it is a prevalent ritual of African culture that is being preserved (Epochi-Olise & Osakue, 2022). Furthermore, according to Omera, the masquerade tradition includes festivals, processions, music, dances, and cultural or religious ceremonies where masks and costumes are used. With the addition of costumes, makeup, and dance, these native performances have been turned into parades or public festivals that incorporate spectacle, masks, and street parties (Omoera,

2011). In the early years, Africans who voluntarily migrated to Europe, the Caribbean, and America brought their cultural practices, including masquerade acts and festivals, with them and adapted them to their new surroundings. This is how the term masquerade, which refers to the carnival, originated (Epochi-Olise & Osakue, 2022). However, several academics (Donnell, 2002; Nunley, 2004; Mauldin, 2004; Omera, 2011; Micots, 2021) believe that carnivals were part of the African diaspora's festival activities before the freedom of African slaves who were transported to the Caribbean, Europe, and America.

Donnell (2002) and Mauldin (2004) have also traced the history of European festivals back to the Roman era. The Latin phrase *carne vale*, which means "farewell to flesh" or meat-eating as well as to other more virtuous or immoral pleasures, is said to be the source of the name funfair. Reversal, or the turning of a low into a high, and regression are thus essential elements of the funfair, which was a pre-Lenten season of excesses. The upper classes do, however, occasionally take part as spectators. Occasionally, the lower classes imitate or make fun of the upper classes. This supports Micots's account of the history of fancy dress in Ghana, where, before 1950, fancy dress balls were exclusively hosted for African middle-class and elite individuals (Micots, 2021). Ehrenreich (2007) states that slaves in the Caribbean were celebrating the African festival of Jonkonnu as early as 1688, complete with costumes and dancing while wearing 'Rattles linked to their Legs and Wrists' (Ehrenreich, 2007 as referenced in Cumberbatch, n.d). Nunley links Africa to the steel drums utilized in the Caribbean version of Carnival that is played today. According to Nunley (2010), he went on, the playing of drums originated from slave plantations more recently, and it symbolizes the slave crews' pounding of iron in adoration of the African orisha spirits, Shango, the god of thunder, and Ogun, the deity of iron. As a result, part of the evidence appears to

support a stubbornness to reject any unique cultural imperatives. Nevertheless, it would appear that before the emancipation of the slaves in the diaspora, Europeans did practice many of their rituals and festivities brought from abroad, which had some influence on the Africans (Cumberbatch, n.d). African masquerades and Black Atlantic carnivals have historically played a significant role in Ghanaian fancy dress (Ross, 1977, as referenced in Micots, 2014). The first Black Atlantic carnivals emerged from the mingling of African and European theatrical traditions, thanks to the thousands of Africans who were brought to the Americas under duress in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Micots (2021), carnivals must be distinguished from other masquerades and performance events by their opposition to authority. To oppose the oppression of the European colonies, the main cultural performance of the masquerade was transformed into a funfair celebration by the operationalization of colonial power and the transatlantic slave trade (Micots, 2021; Donnella, 2004; Nunley, 2010; Marshall & Farrar, 2017). While enslaved Africans may not have brought with them a full array of tools, instruments, masks, and food, as adults, they did bring with them skills, memories, habits, predispositions, religious beliefs, cognitive orientations, musical inclinations, dance forms, and even language; these they consciously and subconsciously applied to their new environment (Shamail, 2021).

Shamail (2021) illustrates how carnival, as a cultural expression, has evolved as one of the pivotal societal events on the Caribbean islands, making it uniquely an Afro-Caribbean tradition. This is rightly inferred from Ross's (1977) assertion that the Fante were 'fighting with art'; thus, every object or implement used in the activities of African societies, especially Ghana, has an interplay in the religious and metaphoric aspects of their livelihood. Foreign politics, economic and religious imposition, and suppression of African customs led to the transformation of indigenous practices into hybrid forms

(Micots, 2021). Fancy Dress performances, aligned with other black Atlantic carnivals, aim to heal communities from cultural and political trauma caused by European colonial subjugation (Rea, 2008; Nunley, 2010; Micots, 2021). According to Micots (2021), Fancy Dress is a form of play that empowers disempowered classes and reflects modern culture, social mores, and politics, despite global economic and local authority pressures. In African societies, performance art such as play or drama in the form of dressing up and acting out reveals a society's culture, as revealed in many diverse black carnivals connected to the Atlantic, which had its inception from the African diaspora (Micots, 2021; Ross, 1977). African masquerades have become the foundation of black carnivals and Fancy Dress, reflecting the power shift from African to European supremacists during the colonial period, continuing to this day (Micots, 2021). During the Atlantic trade and colonialism, African slaves in Brazil performed traditional art to promote posterity, but it was incorporated into European culture and suppressed African religious beliefs (Micots, 2021; Cole & Ross, 1972; Nunley, 2008). Black Atlantic carnivals, influenced by colonialism, migrated to African ports in the late 19th century, forming a unique bond inherited from their socio-political world. Micots' identity politics underpin Black Atlantic carnivals, masquerades, Fancy Dress music, masks, choreography, and costumes, reflecting cultural materiality and the need to liberate and express individual dynamic cultural identity.

## **2.8 The Impact of Fancy Dress in Ghana**

Fancy Dress, a street art performance practiced since colonial times, has a significant impact on Ghanaian livelihoods. Held annually in the southern parts of the country, it is a wholesome entity that affects religious, traditional, and political festivals, making its significance unmissable.

### ***2.8.1 The Socio-cultural Impact of Fancy Dress Festival in Ghana***

Fancy Dress festivals attract thousands of locals and foreigners, fostering socialization, harmony, and unity among families, homes, and loved ones, and strengthening friendships through group experiences. Akyeampong and Yankholmes 2016 study on the Winneba masquerade festival in Ghana highlights the cultural heritage, harmony, and socialization it fosters among attendees (Akyeampong & Yankholmes, 2016). Also, scholars (Micots, 2021; Micah, 2014; Njoku, 2022) attest that Fancy Dress practices are like quasi-secret societies among indigenous African societies like ‘*Ntomo*’ and the ‘*Pororo*’ where the groups instill moral and cultural values in youth and adults, with leaders acting as cultural educators and teaching about community history and traditional festivals, preparing them for successful adulthood. On the contrary, deviant behaviors and practices by the members of the group, such as stealing, which is an offense punishable by sacking. Ghanaian masquerading, often part of religious ceremonies and social events, includes humorous and exciting costumes that bring excitement to individuals, spectators, and groups (Binkley & Ottenberg, 2004; Rea, 2008; Micots, 2014; Akyeampong & Yankholmes, 2016).

### ***2.8.2 The Educational Impact of the Fancy Dress in Ghana***

Masquerading, or fancy dress, in Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean was historically used to address enslaved Africans' oppressions, oppose colonial authorities, and seek social redress through imitating characters and their actions in costuming and dances (Cole & Ross, 1972; Nunley, 2004; Rea, 2008; Micots, 2021). According to Micots (2021), the kind of message presented through non-verbal forms of multi-sensory communication, like Fancy Dress, is more likely to reinforce educational efficacy. Fancy Dress events are public ceremonies that provide a vehicle wherein

moral values crucial to the community are expressed. Also, performances like dance, which present ideas in a summarized form by ordering and categorizing experiences, communicate several layers of meaning by manipulating space (Micah, 2014; Micots, 2021). Therefore, public expression of inappropriate behavior not only stimulates laughter from spectators but also reaffirms culturally meaningful behavior, and there should be reform or maintenance of societal norms. In 2012, the Red Cross, a Winneba masquerade group, performed an educational skit on illegal fishing practices during the MasqueFest competition. This event aimed to address issues like the use of chemicals and dynamites for fishing, which destroys aquatic habitats and also health, and lastly promotes unity and cultural awareness through masquerading traditions.



**Figure 3:** Red Cross No. 4 performed an educational skit regarding fishing practices in 2012 MasqueFest, Winneba.

Source: (Winneba Masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved from online on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2023).

### 2.8.3 Socio-economic Impact of Fancy Dress in Ghana

In a personal interview with Aidoo (personal communication, 2023), narrates that the festival in itself generates income for both the MasqueFest Federation in Winneba and individuals who come around to sell their goods and services. There are economic benefits in the organization of festivals, whether they are traditional or contemporary, of which Fancy Dress is included. He continued that, during the period of Fancy Dress, many indigenes, such as tailors, art and craft dealers, mask makers, instrumentalists, food and bar vendors, as well as fabric shops or firms' services are extensively patronized during the festival.

Bismark Odum-Sackey, a former organizing member of Winneba Fancy Dress Federation (2017-2019), narrated that Fancy Dress;

*...as a tourism event. We use it to bring variety to the events we have in the country. We think it's good for the cultural groups to have a place to perform and earn revenue, and we think it brings unity for all the people from all over the country to perform (personal communication, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

Thus, the event is used as a tool for social cohesion and to boost the local economy through tourism. In addition, fancy dress events have been among other festivals in Ghana that can draw tourists into the country and the towns where the art is practiced. On the other hand, Akyeampong and Yankholmes (2016) opine that, inasmuch as fancy dress festivals in one way or another provide economic gains to the hospitality industry, catering services, transport, and also artisanal activities. They continued that the entire planning of fancy dress events demands huge investments among the organizers in funding the event, fancy groups in hiring brass bands, and individuals acquiring their costumes. Brown (2005) and Akyeampong & Yankholmes (2016) affirm that fancy dress is a social event that brings about joy, peace, and social cohesion despite its conflict-related issues sometimes. Micots (2014) affirms that people always respond to

Fancy Dress as about enjoyment since the appearance brings the community “humor, it makes people happy and removes melancholy.”

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Overview**

The chapter outlines the techniques that were adopted by the researcher to solicit information to achieve the objectives of the study. It includes: the research method, research design, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, data collection instrument(s), method of data collection, data analysis plan, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

This study embraces the interpretivist research paradigm because it seeks to understand how Ghanaian costume-makers, masquerade performers, community stakeholders, and audiences have, over time, given meaning to fancy dress costume designs in Ghana from 1950 to 2022. An interpretivist paradigm rests on the premise that social realities are constructed, multiple, and context-dependent and that knowledge is generated through the interaction between researcher and participants (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Otani, 2020). Under this paradigm, it is assumed that the phenomenon of fancy dress costume design cannot be adequately captured through immutable objective measurements but must be explored through the actors' lived experience, their interpretations of material culture, and the symbolic dimensions of costume.

Ontologically, this paradigm assumes that the meanings of costumes are not singular or fixed but are contingent upon historical contexts, community practices, and individual interpretations. Epistemologically, it holds that knowledge arises from dialogue and reflexive engagement rather than detached observation. In applying interpretivism to the subject of fancy dress costume design in Ghana, the researcher enters communities,

interviews actors, examines archival images and memorabilia, and co-constructs meanings with participants who have contributed to that tradition over decades.

Methodologically, an interpretivist stance translates into qualitative, historically sensitive methods. For this study, semi-structured interviews with veteran masqueraders and costume-makers, participant observation of current parades, archival photographic and document analysis, and material culture inspection of extant costume artefacts form the core data collection. Material culture methods emphasize the objects' lifeworld: how fabrics, accessories, structural techniques, and motifs carry social meaning and evolve across time (Safo-Ankama & Sawyerr, 2023). Rather than reducing costumes to variables, this study treats them as artefacts imbued with meaning, memory, and agency.

The theoretical framework of material culture theory and symbolic interactionism aligns coherently with the interpretivist paradigm. Material culture theory draws attention to how objects mediate social relations, embody histories, and participate in meaning-making processes. Symbolic interactionism emphasises that humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them, and that those meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Hewitt, Mills, Hoare & Sheridan, 2022; Husin, Ab Rahman & Mukhtar, 2024). By combining these frameworks, the study investigates how fancy dress costumes function both as material artefacts with trajectories and as symbolic resources mobilized by actors in performative contexts, thereby capturing the intertwined material-symbolic nexus.

Analysis will proceed through iterative qualitative techniques. Data from interviews, field notes, visual records, and material inspections will be analyzed thematically with

analytic induction to identify recurring patterns, emic categories, and narrative constructions of change, identity, creativity, and community memory. Material analysis will trace construction techniques, fabric typologies, accessory assemblages, and repair or reuse practices to build comprehensive object biographies that intersect with oral histories. The interpretive researcher will attend to context, to divergent accounts, and to contradictions in participants' narratives, which allows a historically sensitive reconstruction of how fancy dress costume designs emerged, diffused, and transformed between 1950 and 2022.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study adopts the criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Prolonged engagement with knowledgeable participants, member-checking of interpretations, thick description of context, audit trails of analytic decisions, and triangulation across sources (interviews, archival documents, material inspection) will be employed. Reflexivity will also be found in a transparent account of the researcher's positionality, prior assumptions, and how field interactions may have shaped data production and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

In sum, the interpretivist paradigm is a fitting foundation for this research because it privileges meaning-making, contextual depth, and actor interpretive frames rather than detached generalization. The approach allows for a nuanced and historically grounded study of fancy dress costume designs in Ghana, revealing how costume form, materials, motifs, and performative roles have borne witness to changing social relations, creativity, community identity, and aesthetic material practice over more than seven decades.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine the evolution of fancy dress costume design in Ghana from 1950 to 2022. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration and interpretation of social and cultural phenomena within their natural contexts. As Creswell (2017) explains, qualitative research unfolds in real-life settings, enabling the researcher to engage closely with participants' lived experiences and to construct detailed understandings of the phenomena under study. Similarly, Creswell and Poth (2018) describe qualitative inquiry as a process of exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem, emphasizing the researcher's interpretive role in capturing participants' perspectives and contextual realities.

In the context of this study, the qualitative approach facilitated a descriptive and interpretive analysis of how fancy dress costume design has transformed across decades in Ghana, focusing on shifts in fabrics, colours, design patterns, tools, and materials used in costume production. The approach enabled the researcher to uncover the cultural, artistic, and historical dimensions underlying these design evolutions through detailed engagement with participants and documentary sources rather than through statistical or numerical analysis.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that qualitative research may take several research approaches; however, they all have two things in common. First, they focus on natural settings; life as it has existed in genuine situations. Secondly, they encompass studying those natural phenomena in all their complexity. Both researchers agree that qualitative

research focuses on understanding the accepted settings of a phenomenon within the physical world for a better understanding.

### **3.3 Research Design**

In alignment with the study, the research design serves as the architectural framework that guided the systematic collection, organization, interpretation, and presentation of data. Research design, according to Creswell (2018), provides a blueprint that directs the entire research process from the formulation of research questions to the choice of analytical procedures, ensuring coherence between the philosophical assumptions and the methodological execution of the study. Creswell (2007) further asserts that a research design encompasses the intersection of paradigmatic orientations, strategies of inquiry, and specific data collection methods, forming an integrated plan that shapes how the study is conducted and how meaning is derived from the findings.

This study adopted the historical research design, a qualitative design that situates inquiry within temporal and socio-cultural contexts. The historical design was deemed most appropriate because the development of Fancy Dress costume design in Ghana cannot be examined outside the continuum of its past, present, and evolving future. As Essel (2020) emphasizes, historical research within the Ghanaian cultural context enables the reconstruction of artistic and cultural realities through the interrogation of lived experiences, archival materials, oral narratives, and artefactual evidence. Thus, the historical approach provided a comprehensive framework for tracing the transformation of Fancy Dress costume design practices from 1950 to 2022, paying particular attention to changes in fabric selection, colour application, design motifs, and the tools and materials that have influenced the aesthetics and functionality of these costumes across time.

In applying this design, the researcher critically examined documentary records, photographic evidence, and oral testimonies from practitioners and cultural custodians to establish a coherent narrative of design evolution. This approach not only illuminated the stylistic and material transitions within the Fancy Dress tradition but also contextualized them within broader socio-cultural, economic, and artistic developments in Ghana. The historical design, therefore, served as both a methodological and interpretive lens through which the dynamic interplay between creativity, tradition, and modernity in the Fancy Dress culture could be explored and articulated with academic rigour and cultural sensitivity.

### **3.3.1 Historical Research**

In alignment with the study titled *The Development of Fancy-Dress Costume Design in Ghana from 1950 to 2022*, the historical research design was adopted as the principal methodological framework to trace the trajectory of design evolution within the Fancy Dress culture. Historical research is a systematic process that critically examines and interprets records, artefacts, and other remnants of the past to reconstruct and understand historical events, practices, and cultural transformations. Gottschalk (2005) defines historical research as the process of critically examining and analyzing the records and survivals of human societies, while Ary et al. (2010) emphasize that it involves a rigorous inquiry into past events to reconstruct a realistic representation of earlier times. Similarly, Wilson (2007) posits that historical research enables scholars to tell histories of phenomena, asserting that without historians, there can be no history. More recently, Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight that historical research within the qualitative paradigm seeks to contextualize experiences by situating them within specific temporal and cultural frameworks, thereby enhancing the understanding of how past developments shape contemporary realities.

In the context of this study, the historical research design was employed to systematically collect and interpret data concerning the evolution of Fancy-Dress costume design in Ghana from 1950 to 2022. This approach allowed the researcher to engage critically with archival materials, oral histories, photographic evidence, and artefacts to uncover patterns and transitions in fabric use, colour schemes, design motifs, and production tools over time.

Historical inquiry within Ghana's cultural and artistic landscape is vital for reconstructing the continuum of creative practices, enabling the interpretation of artistic growth through both material and immaterial cultural evidence. Through this design, the study not only documented the chronological transformation of Fancy Dress costume design but also situated these developments within their broader socio-cultural and aesthetic contexts. The adoption of the historical design was therefore instrumental in achieving the study's primary objective, which was to trace the design history of Fancy Dress costume design, illuminating how traditional creativity has evolved in dialogue with modern influences in Ghana's cultural space.

### **3.4 Population**

A clear understanding of a study's population is fundamental to any rigorous academic inquiry, as it provides the contextual foundation upon which valid and generalizable findings are built. The definition and delineation of a population not only guide the scope of data collection but also ensure that the research outcomes accurately reflect the characteristics of the people or phenomena under investigation. As the Ghana Statistical Service (2014) explains in the *2010 Population and Housing Census District Analytical Report* (as cited in Gyamfi, 2019), meaningful development and research efforts cannot be effectively undertaken without adequate knowledge of the

population's demographic, spatial, and socioeconomic attributes. Similarly, Best (1981) argues that the essence of research lies in establishing general principles that hold universal application, an endeavour that depends heavily on selecting a population that truly represents the phenomenon under study.

In research methodology, the term *population* refers to the entire set of individuals, events, or objects that share characteristics relevant to the research focus. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) note that defining the population accurately is critical to the validity and reliability of research findings, as it ensures that the right respondents are identified to provide meaningful data aligned with the study's objectives. Within the context of this study, the population comprises all communities in Ghana that participate in the Fancy Dress Festival, a longstanding cultural event known for its elaborate costume designs, artistic creativity, and social significance. However, due to the diverse and dispersed nature of Fancy Dress practices across the country, the study refined its scope to focus on a clearly defined target population to achieve depth and manageability.

The target population for this study consists of participants and stakeholders involved in the Fancy Dress Festival in two major practicing towns in Ghana: Agona Swedru and Winneba, both located in the Central Region. These towns were purposefully selected because of their historical and contemporary prominence in the performance and costume design aspects of the Fancy Dress tradition. They embody a rich continuum of artistic evolution and cultural identity, making them suitable case study locations for tracing the development of Fancy Dress costume design from 1950 to 2022.

The accessible population for the study included Fancy Dress group members, art and fashion experts, and local cultural custodians within Agona Swedru and Winneba who possess extensive knowledge and experience of the evolution of Fancy Dress costume

design. This accessible group provided first-hand insights into the artistic techniques, materials, tools, and design trends that have shaped the transformation of Fancy Dress costumes over time. The delimitation of the study to these two towns ensured a concentrated and contextually grounded exploration of the phenomenon, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how cultural creativity, historical continuity, and socio-economic factors have influenced the Fancy Dress costume tradition in Ghana.

### **3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

#### *3.5.1 Sample*

A sample is a part of the target population that has been selected to represent it (Oso & Onen, 2005). A sample is an informative part of a statistical population whose property is studied to get information about the whole. Sidhu (2003) explains sampling as the process of selecting a characteristic unit from the population. The way of attaining this sample is what is termed a sampling technique. The sample constituted all Fancy Dress practitioners and experts in fashion and Art such as fashion historians, Art educators, fashion practitioners, Fancy Dress designers, Fancy Dressmakers, and Fancy Dress performers from the practicing communities in Ghana, where the culture is displayed. The sample size selected from the target population is fifteen (15) participants. They include (1) fashion historians; thus, experts with general knowledge about the fashion dress history in the Ghanaian context and related in the context of Fancy Dress, (3) Fancy Dress costume designers, (2) Art educators, (4) Fancy Dressmakers, (2) fashion practitioners, and (3) Fancy Dressers/ performers.

#### *3.5.2 Sampling Techniques*

Sampling is a technique (procedure or device) employed by a researcher to systematically select a relatively smaller number of representative items or individuals

from a predefined population to serve as subjects (data source) for observation or experimentation as per the objectives of his or her study.

#### *3.5.2.1 Purposive Techniques*

The sampling technique used for the study is purposive sampling. This sampling technique was selected because the researcher believed it was the best way to get experienced participants for the study, where they (participants) all have similar characteristics. In the purposive sampling technique, the researcher deliberately chose subjects who, in their belief, are thought to be significant to the research topic (Sarantakos, 1997, as cited in Gyamfi, 2021). Leedy and Ormrod (2002) explain that, in purposive sampling, people or other units are chosen to suit the purpose of the study. Certain elements of the study are deliberately based on the judgment of the researcher. Thus, the researcher deems it fit to select participants whom the researcher thinks are eligible for the study and, thus, possess knowledge or information ideally relevant to the study undertaken. The researcher further selected the expert purposive sampling technique because the researcher needed to glean knowledge from individuals who have particular expertise. Expert purposive sampling was chosen for the expertise the respondents have, which may form the basis of the study. This made the researcher focus only on the individuals with such specific expertise in the Fancy Dress culture and fashion art industry. The method was used arbitrarily because the respondents have characteristics that are deemed important to the study, and this was used to select fifteen (15) participants for the study, based on the nature of the research objectives and questions.

### **3.6 Data Collection Instruments**

Baumgartner, Strong, and Hensley (2005) describe qualitative research as an overarching term encompassing a range of methodological approaches that emphasize broad observation, in-depth interviews, and other interpretive techniques aimed at generating non-numerical data to provide a rich contextual understanding of human experiences. In alignment with this perspective, the present study employed qualitative methods to elicit detailed and meaningful responses from participants. To enhance the depth and credibility of the findings, the researcher adopted a triangulation approach, integrating multiple data collection and analysis techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The primary data collection tools used in this study included semi-structured interviews, photography, and document analysis. These instruments were carefully selected to gather relevant and authentic information that aligns with the study's qualitative design and effectively addresses the research questions. This multi-instrumental approach facilitated the collection of diverse forms of evidence, thereby strengthening the interpretive and analytical dimensions of the research.

#### ***3.6.1 Interview***

Interviews have the advantage of being useful for collecting in-depth information; questions can be explained to make sure they are not misunderstood (Opoku-Amankwah, 2002). An interview is a two-person conversation, which is usually initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining relevant information for the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). An interview is in a context, an oral questionnaire during a face-to-face meeting with an interviewer and a respondent to solicit information about a particular phenomenon. According to Burnham (2004), semi-structured interviewing is interrelated to what he calls *elite interviewing*, which is

defined by the target group as well as the research technique. In the context of 'elite', the target group is seen as 'elite' because of the knowledge and experiences they have concerning the phenomenon. As the interview's purpose is to unthread information beyond data collection, the interviewees must be key targets.

A semi-structured interview guide (see *Appendix*) was formulated by the researcher based on the research objectives and questions, which sought to seek information from the respondents based on their knowledge of the subject matter. In this case, the technique enabled the researcher to collect personal reflections from each interviewee. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were therefore conducted to solicit respondents' sufficient views, perceptions, and valuable information. Fifteen interviews were conducted; five fashion and Art experts and ten members of the fancy dress culture. They were chosen for their relevance to the conceptual questions rather than their representativeness. Each participant was interviewed for thirty-five (35) minutes approximately. In the interview guide, there are two main sections constructed for the respondents; the first section (*Section A*) constitutes the personal data information about the respondents while the second part (*Section B*) constituted three (3) main-sub questions surfed under the research questions and also targeted to the groups sampled for the study as well.

### ***3.6.2 Document Review***

Document review is a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents. According to Ary (2010, p.457), document review is a research method applied to written or visual materials in the form of either hard copy or electronic to identify specified characteristics of the material. The materials analyzed were textbooks, newspapers, speeches, television programs, advertisements, musical compositions, or

any of a host of other types of documents. The document contains texts and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention. Using document review helped the researcher to review existing material, which aided the understanding of the history, philosophy, and operation of the fancy dress phenomenon for the validity of the data and evaluation of the study. To collect as much and as diverse data as possible that can help generate the best possible insights about the phenomenon of interest, the researcher also conducted a document review to complement the other methods. The purpose of documentary analysis was to enrich the literature and also to support the findings of the study derived from the respondents' responses. The researcher used this research instrument in soliciting data related to the design history of Fancy Dress through magazines, archival documents, journal papers, and books, which are relevant to the study.

### ***3.6.3 Photography***

Photography, as a qualitative data collection tool, offers researchers a powerful means of recording behaviour, objects, and environments within their natural contexts. It enables both immediate documentation and subsequent reflection on events as they unfold in their authentic settings. According to Basil (2011), photography allows researchers to capture behaviour within its situational context, engage with informants, and illustrate phenomena vividly for interpretive analysis. The photographic method thus facilitates the production of naturalistic, descriptive, and contextually rich data that contribute to a deeper understanding of social and cultural phenomena. Basil (2011) further argues that photographs allow qualitative researchers to move beyond surface descriptions, enabling deeper insight to emerge through reflective and interpretive synthesis.

In the context of this study, photography was employed as a key data collection instrument to document and analyze the design evolution of Fancy Dress costumes in Ghana from 1950 to 2022. Photographs served as visual evidence for tracing the transformation of costume features such as fabric choices, colour schemes, decorative motifs, and construction techniques across decades. Power (2003) contends that visual data often conveys information more powerfully than words, a notion that holds particular relevance in this study, where the visual and material dimensions of costume design are central to understanding artistic and cultural development. Without photographic documentation, the subtle transitions in design trends, production materials, and stylistic innovations within Fancy Dress culture might remain obscured. Moreover, Harper (2002) emphasizes that photographs evoke memories, emotions, and insights that might not surface during verbal interviews alone. In this study, photographic evidence stimulated reflective discussions among respondents, particularly designers, performers, and costume experts, enabling them to recall historical trends, articulate design choices, and interpret aesthetic changes with greater clarity. The combination of photographic data with oral testimonies and documentary sources allowed the researcher to reconstruct a more holistic and authentic narrative of Fancy Dress costume design. Photography thus became both a visual archive and an interpretive lens through which the historical and creative transformation of Fancy Dress costume design in Ghana could be examined and understood.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

Data represent information in its raw form and provide the basis for the researcher's inferences. Oso and Onen (2005) define data as actual or assumed facts used as a foundation for reasoning and analysis. In this study, primary data were employed, consisting of information directly obtained from participants with relevant expertise in

Fancy Dress costume design in Ghana. The sample was purposively selected from the target population to ensure that responses reflected the experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of individuals actively involved in the Fancy Dress tradition.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for guided yet flexible exploration of participants' insights while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. During the interviews, the researcher recorded responses and noted key points for accuracy. These recordings were later transcribed verbatim, converting oral data into text to facilitate comprehensive analysis. Before data collection, the researcher engaged with potential participants to provide an overview of the study and its objectives. Interview questions were shared not more than three days in advance, ensuring respondents were adequately informed while minimizing bias from extended preparation.

Three sets of interview guides were employed. The first and third sets of questions were directed at Fancy Dress experts, costume designers, and practitioners, whereas the second set targeted fashion historians and art educators to capture specialized perspectives on historical trends and artistic developments. Before administering the guides to the main sample, the instruments were piloted with a small group of respondents sharing similar characteristics to the target population. This piloting process enabled the researcher to refine question clarity, ensure logical flow, and identify potential ambiguities, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the instruments (Kallio et al., 2016). Following refinement, the interview guides were further validated through expert review by academics and practitioners in qualitative research and cultural studies, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and

appropriateness for eliciting detailed information on the evolution and trends of fancy dress costume design from 1950 to 2022 (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **3.8 Data Analysis Plan**

Hirsch et al. (2007) emphasize that the validity and depth of understanding derived from research data are more dependent on the methods of data collection and analysis than on the size of the sample. Supporting this view, Peshkin (1993), as cited by Leedy (2005), notes that qualitative research is particularly suited for description, interpretation, verification, and evaluation. Consequently, data analysis represents a critical and sensitive phase of any qualitative study, as it enables the researcher to systematically organize, examine, and make sense of the collected information. According to Ary et al. (2002, p. 465), data analysis is the process through which researchers search, arrange, and interpret data to enhance understanding and present findings coherently.

In this study, the researcher employed a triangulated approach to data analysis, utilizing thematic analysis and visual analysis techniques. Thematic analysis was used to identify, code, and categorize recurring patterns and themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the evolution and trends in Fancy Dress costume design from 1950 to 2022. Visual analysis, on the other hand, was applied to photographic data to interpret design features, materials, colors, and techniques used in Fancy Dress costumes across different periods. In Chapter Four of the study, the collected data will be systematically presented and analyzed through these methods. The chapter will include organized thematic narratives supported by direct excerpts from interview transcripts and visual illustrations, thereby providing a

detailed, contextualized, and evidence-based account of the historical development and contemporary trends in Fancy Dress costume design in Ghana.

### *3.8.1 Thematic analysis*

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data, i.e., patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and using these themes to address the research or say something about an issue (Clarke & Braun, 2015). It is a method mostly used for data description but also involves interpretation in its processes of selecting codes and constructing themes (Clarke & Braun, 2015). This is much more than simply summarizing the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a set of data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Themes are actively constructed patterns or meanings derived from a data set that answer a research question, as opposed to mere summaries or categorizations of codes. Themes can be generated inductively or deductively. Here, the researcher used this analysis tool to draw concepts, themes, and descriptions from the data gathered.

### *3.8.2 Visual analysis*

Visual analysis is a methodological approach that concentrates on the examination and interpretation of an artwork's visual elements, such as colour, line, texture, and scale, while also considering how these formal properties together convey meaning, intentions, or content (Johnson Museum of Art, 2024). In this study, visual analysis was specifically applied to the costume designs of the Fancy Dress tradition in the towns of Swedru and Winneba in Ghana. Through this method, the researcher scrutinized design features including fabric selection, colour application, motif composition, and

construction techniques across historical and contemporary examples of Fancy Dress costumes, thereby revealing how costume makers in these localities made deliberate visual choices to convey cultural symbolism, performance identity, and aesthetic innovation. By linking these visual elements to broader socio-cultural and historical contexts, the analysis permitted a deeper understanding of how the Fancy Dress designs evolved and how they reflect both continuity and transformation within Ghana's performative art tradition.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the conduct of people and guides the norms or standards of behavior of people and their relationships with each other (Blumberg et al, 2005). Research ethics is important in our daily life research endeavors and requires that researchers should protect the dignity of their subjects and publish well the information that is researched (Fouka & Mantzourou, 2011). In this regard, a consent form was served to various respondents before the actual interviews took place. An introductory letter from the University of Education, Winneba, supported this form. The respondents were assured of their anonymity, though it was written in the interview guide. The respondents were not allowed to disclose their names or photographs unless he/she wished at their discretion. Details of these documents were attached to the Appendices. After the interview, the transcribed document was sent back to the respondents to read through to make corrections or additions where applicable.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Overview

Data gathered from the field research has been presented for further discussion in this chapter. It also presents a keen representation of the gathered data in the form of themes, visuals (photographs), and descriptions to facilitate easier analysis of the data.

#### 4.1 Demographic Data of Respondents

The personal data of each respondent was collected to make the research more reliable and valid. This information includes age, gender, nationality, and educational background. Fifteen (15) respondents representing 100% were involved in the study. Respondents were further divided into two categories: Fashion and Art experts, and members of the Fancy Dress culture. Fashion experts and Art Educators, to the researcher, are made up of fashion historians and practitioners, both in academia and practice, while members of the Fancy Dress culture are Fancy Dress costume designers, Fancy Dressmakers, and Fancy Dressers in the towns. The division of respondents by their demographics is presented in *Table 1*. Each respondent was coded to ensure confidence in the data collected.

In *Table 1* below, fifteen (15) respondents sampled from the two practicing towns are captured under two main strata; thus, Fashion and Art experts and Fancy-Dress members. Under the Fancy Dress members, experts sampled were also grouped into Fancy dressers/performers, fancy dress designers, and fancy dress makers, of which one person was selected in the various towns to represent each group. Again, in *Table 1* below, their names were coded from the groups they were identified in; however, their real ages were revealed for the credibility of the study.

*Table 1. Demographic Data of Respondents*

<b>Divisions of Respondents based on the topic under study</b>	<b>Respondents engaged in the study</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Age (Years)</b>
Fashion and Art experts	Fashion historian	FH	50
	1 <sup>st</sup> Fashion practitioner	FP1	51
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Fashion practitioner	FP2	45
	1 <sup>st</sup> Art educator	AE1	37
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Art educator	AE2	44
Fancy Dressers/performers	1 <sup>st</sup> Fancy Dresser	FD1	25
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Fancy Dresser	FD2	34
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Fancy Dresser	FD3	30
	4 <sup>th</sup> Fancy Dresser	FD4	28
Fancy Dress Designers	1 <sup>st</sup> Fancy Dress designer	FDD1	36
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Fancy Dress designer	FDD2	32
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Fancy Dress designer	FDD3	35
Fancy Dress Makers	1 <sup>st</sup> Fancy Dress Maker	FDM1	40
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Fancy Dress Maker	FDM2	55
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Fancy Dress Maker	FDM3	28

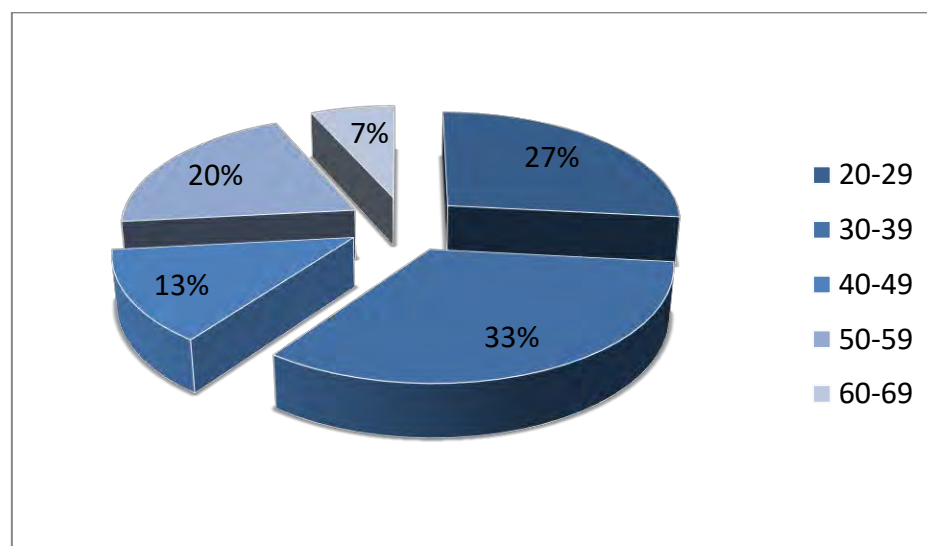
*Source: (Field Data, 2023).*

#### **4.1.1 Age of Respondents**

The data indicate that respondents aged 30–39 years comprised the largest share at 33 %, followed by those aged 20–29 years at 27 %, then 50–59 years at 20 %, 40–49 years at 13 %, and the 60–69 age group at just 7 %. This distribution suggests that the majority of people engaged in the fancy dress culture in the towns of Winneba and Swedru are relatively young, principally in the 20–39 age range, rather than older individuals who might have long-standing experience in this cultural practice. That pattern aligns with broader findings that younger age cohorts tend to exhibit higher levels of participation in a range of cultural and creative activities than older age groups (Scottish Government, 2019). For example, the Scottish Household Survey found that

participation (excluding reading) among 16-24 year-olds was 76 % compared to 44 % for those aged 75+ (Scottish Government, 2019).

The implication here is two-fold: first, that the fancy dress culture appears to be driven primarily by working-age adults rather than elders, which may mean that the tradition is more of a current-generation cultural phenomenon rather than one rooted in long-term custodianship. Second, the relatively low representation of individuals in the 60–69 age bracket suggests that older generations may be under-represented, possibly limiting opportunities for inter-generational knowledge transfer, continuity of traditional design trends, and mentorship. In turn, this could mean that cultural practices may evolve more rapidly, but also risk losing historical depth unless specifically supported. These findings, therefore, point to a need for conscious engagement efforts to bring older practitioners into the fold, encourage mentoring among age cohorts, and ensure that younger participants are connected to the tradition’s historical anchors. Such efforts would support both the vitality and continuity of the culture into the future.



**Figure 4:** *Age Distribution of respondents.*

Source: (field data, 2023)

#### 4.1.2 Sex Distribution of Respondents

Table 2 shows the sex distribution of respondents among Fashion and Art experts and Fancy Dress members. The table reveals that out of the fifteen (15) respondents, five (5) members of the Fashion and Art experts are males, while only two (2) members from the Fancy Dressers group are females, leaving the remaining nine (9) respondents being males.

Table 2. Sex distribution of members of the Fancy Dress and Fashion, and Art experts

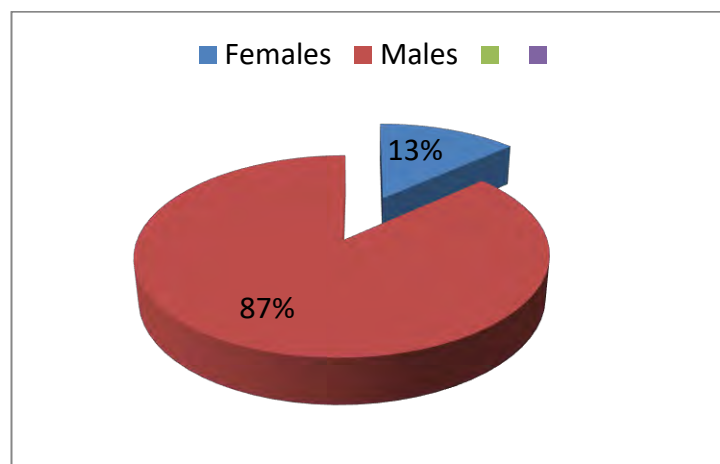
Division of respondents	Code	Sex
	FH	M
Fashion and Art experts	FP1	M
	FP2	M
	AE1	M
	AE2	M
Fancy Dressers/performers	FD1	F
	FD2	M
	FD3	F
	FD4	M
Fancy Dress Designers	FDD1	M
	FDD2	M
	FDD3	M
Fancy Dress Makers	FDM1	M
	FDM2	M
	FDM3	M

Source: (Field Data, 2023)

The data show that among the total of 15 respondents, 13 (87%) were male and only 2 (13%) were female. Specifically, of the 13 individuals classified as Fancy Dress members, 9 were male and 2 female, while the Art and Fashion expert category comprised solely 5 males.

This finding suggests a pronounced gender imbalance in participation, with male respondents overwhelmingly dominating these categories. Such an imbalance aligns with broader evidence of gender disparities in the cultural and creative sectors, where women frequently face under-representation in professional roles despite often constituting substantial proportions of educational entrants and consumers (UNESCO, 2023). Women's lower participation here could reflect barriers including limited access to certain roles, gendered expectations, or structural bias in creative fields (British Council, 2018; Szostak, 2022).

The implications of this skewed distribution are significant: the under-representation of women in these roles may limit diversity of perspective, reduce opportunities for female practitioners, and perpetuate gendered cultural norms that favour male participation. Addressing this disparity is therefore important, not only to ensure equitable inclusion but also to enhance the vitality and representativeness of the creative culture. Initiatives aimed at increasing female involvement, fostering inclusive policy and practice, and dismantling structural barriers could help rebalance participation and enrich the field. (Chzhu, 2021).



**Figure 5:** Sex distribution of Fancy Dress members and Art and Fashion experts  
Source: (field data, 2023)

#### 4.1.3 Educational Status Distribution of Respondents

This section illustrates respondents with or without educational backgrounds and those with lower and higher educational qualifications. *Table 3* shows that out of the fifteen (15) respondents, which comprised two strata, namely fashion & Art experts and Fancy Dress members, all five (5) respondents from the Fashion & Art experts have a tertiary education. And with the other Fancy Dress members, eight (8) out of the remaining ten (10) have second-cycle education, with the rest having basic education level certification.

*Table 3. Educational status of members of the Fancy Dress and Fashion, and Art experts*

<b>Division of respondents</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Educational status</b>
	FH	Degree
Fashion and Art experts	FP1	Degree
	FP2	HND
	AE1	Degree
	AE2	Degree
Fancy Dressers/performers	FD1	SSS/SHS
	FD2	Tech./Voc.
	FD3	JSS/JHS
	FDD1	SSS/SHS
Fancy Dress Designers	FDD2	SSS/SHS
	FDD3	Tech./Voc.
Fancy Dress Makers	FDM1	JSS/JHS
	FDM2	SSS/SHS
	FDM3	SSS/SHS
	FDM4	Tech./Voc.

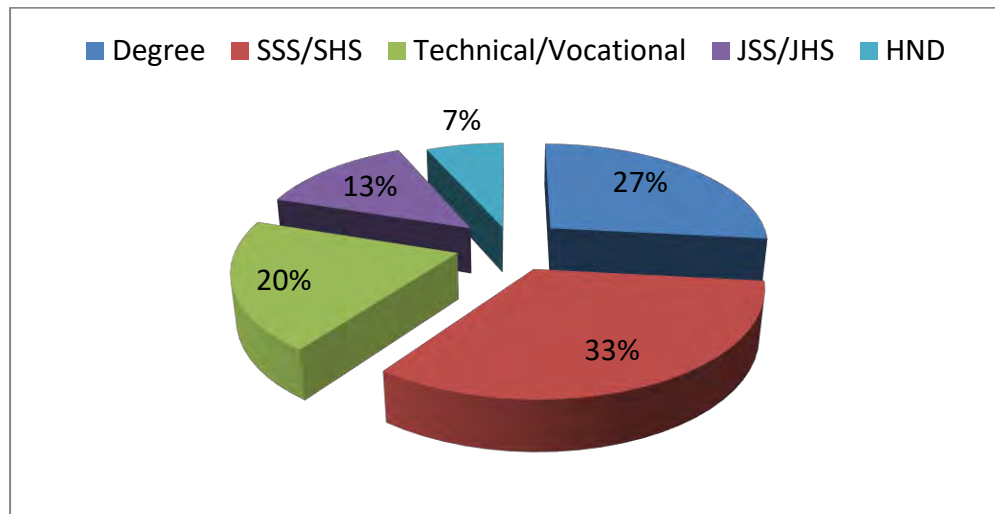
Source: (Field Data, 2023)

The data indicate that five respondents, representing 33%, had completed SSS/SHS education, four respondents (27%) held a university degree, three respondents (20%) possessed Technical or Vocational qualifications, two respondents (13%) had JSS/JHS education, and one respondent (7%) had obtained an HND. This distribution demonstrates that most respondents had attained at least a secondary or higher level of education, suggesting that the Fancy Dress members and Art and Fashion experts in the study area were relatively well-educated.

The dominance of respondents with higher educational attainment suggests that education may play a significant role in shaping engagement with creative and cultural practices. Studies have shown that individuals with higher education levels tend to exhibit greater participation and innovation in cultural and artistic activities due to increased exposure, skills, and critical awareness (UNESCO, 2023; British Council, 2018). Likewise, Amegbanu et al. (2023) highlight that vocational and technical training in Ghana's creative industries enhances professional competence and artistic expression, reinforcing the idea that education contributes meaningfully to cultural craftsmanship and innovative enterprise.

These findings imply that the relatively high educational background of respondents enhances the overall depth of expertise represented in the study. Their formal education, coupled with practical experience, positions them to critically appreciate and contribute to the evolution of the Fancy Dress culture, particularly in areas of design, presentation, and creative innovation. Moreover, the inclusion of participants with lower educational backgrounds, such as those with JSS/JHS and vocational training, adds practical insight rooted in lived experience and local tradition. This diversity of educational attainment therefore strengthens the study by combining academic knowledge with practical

artistry, providing a balanced understanding of how education influences participation and creativity within the Fancy Dress culture of Winneba and Swedru.



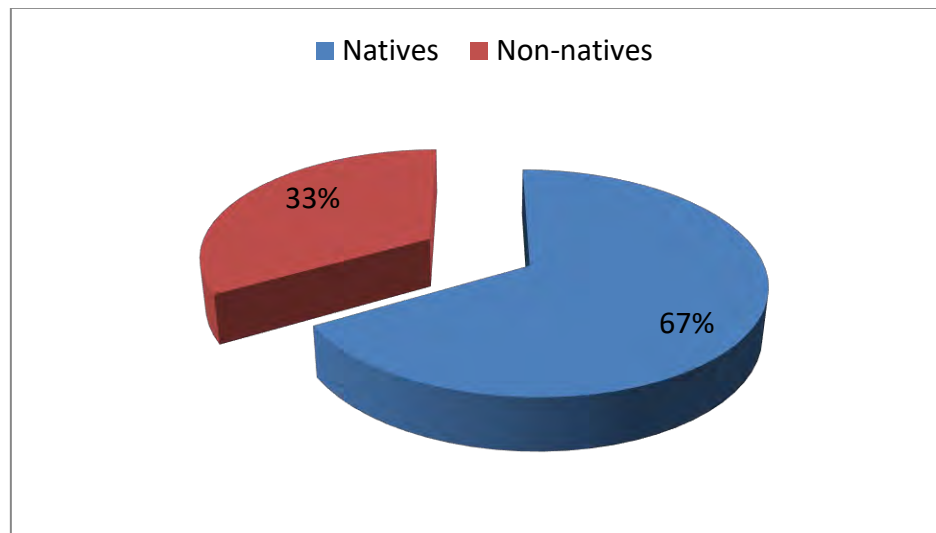
**Figure 6:** Education status distribution of Fancy Dress members and Art and Fashion experts.

Source: (field data, 2023).

Kothari (2004) is of the view that if data are not properly organized, the researcher may encounter difficulties while analyzing their meaning. Kothari further states that careless mechanical processing of data gathered has a great potential of distorting the findings. To arrive at reliable and valid data for thematic analysis, the researcher's observations and interview questions that relate to the research objectives were highlighted. The researcher asked whether participants selected for the study were natives of the town to be able to ascertain the validity and reliability of the data, as established by Guber & Lincoln (2002).

The researcher's experiences and observations based on the empirical data gathered show that Winneba and Swedru are towns occupied by people from different backgrounds due to the cosmopolitan activities (commerce, education, and administrative works); however, being a native and staying in the town for a long period makes respondents updated with the previous and current activities that take place in

the towns. Data collected proved that most of the respondents representing 73% are natives of the various communities under study, while 27% of the respondents are not, but are people who have stayed there to work. Seventy-three percent (73%) represents the highest assurance the researcher has of credible data.



**Figure 7:** Responses of respondents indicate whether they are natives of the town or not. Source: (field data, 2023)

The data above shows that Fancy Dress members from the practicing towns had the highest score, with locals representing seventy-three percent (67%). They include FDs, FDMs, and FDDs. Similarly, Art and Fashion experts had the lowest, with FH, FPs, and AEs making up 33% of non-natives in the town. Regarding the number of years each respondent has lived in the town, regardless of their background, the records indicate that FDs, FDMs, and FDDs have lived there since birth. Meanwhile, AE1 and FP1 have been in the town for over ten (10) years. FDM2, FDD1, and Fancy Dresser 3 have been involved in the Fancy Dress culture for 43, 13, and 10 years, respectively, in their towns. Fancy Dress Designer 2 said, *“I started performing here when I was around 17 years old. I used to dress up with my uncles to the Fancy Dress Festival”*.

A Fancy Dressmaker, who happens to be a pioneer for one of the Fancy groups in Swedru also said that;

*...I am a native of the town and have stayed in my entire life. I ventured into the designing and production of costumes 43 years ago with my uncles, who passed on the craft to me (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

Knowing the number of years each participant has stayed in the towns helped the researcher know how well-groomed respondents were with issues and activities that go on in the town. Respondents further responded to how long the Fancy Dress tradition has been practiced and the history of Fancy Dress designs in the towns under study.

#### **4.2 Document Review Analysis of the Evolution of Fancy Dress and Asafo Performance in Ghana.**

The historical evolution of Fancy Dress culture in Ghana, particularly in Winneba and Swedru, represents a dynamic process of cultural adaptation and hybridization rooted in pre-colonial Asafo traditions and later influenced by foreign carnival practices. A review of scholarly documents reveals that Fancy Dress performances have transitioned from traditional spiritual and militaristic displays to complex socio-political spectacles embodying creativity, identity, and resistance.

##### **4.2.1 Asafo Traditions and Pre-Colonial Foundations**

Asafo companies, the early Fante paramilitary and socio-religious groups, formed the indigenous base for collective performance traditions in southern Ghana. Scholars, including Micots (2021) and Ross (1979), indicate that Asafo performances employed elaborate costumes and symbolic displays to assert communal unity and spiritual protection. These displays combined warfare metaphors with religious symbolism, where costumes crafted from natural fibers, feathers, and animal imagery embodied ancestral power and moral authority (Ross, 1979; McCaskie, 2004). The Asafo performances were thus performative manifestations of social order and protection, an essential precursor to later masquerade traditions.

Further archival and ethnographic accounts, such as Freeman's (1967) colonial field notes, document the Sakrabundi masquerade among Akan groups in Odumase near Techiman, which involved performers wearing natural fiber garments and horned wooden masks. These masqueraders symbolized supernatural entities that expelled evil spirits and disciplined societal behavior. This early use of symbolic costume design foreshadowed the later evolution of Fancy Dress aesthetics, merging ritual purpose with performative spectacle (Micots, 2021).

#### **4.2.2 Colonial Encounters and Cultural Hybridization**

The colonial era introduced cross-cultural exchanges that transformed indigenous masquerade traditions. Scholars like Micots (2012, 2021) and Nunley (2010) note that British colonial presence, Afro-Brazilian returnees, and West Indian troops stationed along the Gold Coast introduced European Fancy Dress and Caribbean carnival elements between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These encounters stimulated new performative vocabularies. The Fante communities appropriated European theatrical skits, parades, and costumes, blending them with Asafo performative structures such as drumming, call-and-response, and processional formations. Forni and Ross (2017) explain that this creative adaptation functioned as a mechanism of cultural resilience and psychological release during the constraints of British colonial rule. It enabled communities to parody colonial authority and express social commentary under the guise of entertainment. Similarly, Micah (2014) observes that these performances mediated social tensions and fostered community healing. Thus, Fancy Dress served as both a subversive and therapeutic art form grounded in indigenous aesthetics yet responsive to colonial conditions.

#### **4.2.3 Transition into the Post-Colonial Era (1950s) and Institutionalization**

By the early to mid-twentieth century, Fancy Dress practices became increasingly organized, particularly in Winneba and Swedru. Documented evidence suggests that the first major public Fancy Dress parades took shape in coastal towns such as Cape Coast and Winneba throughout the 1910s and 1920s, reaching heightened institutionalization by the 1950s (Cole & Ross, 1977; Micots, 2014). A notable event occurred in 1917 when a Fancy Dress Carnival was held in Cape Coast to raise funds for King George's Fund, signaling elite acceptance of the masquerade form (Micots, 2021).

After World War I, Fancy Dress was adopted by working-class communities and local youth clubs, transforming into competitive and festive displays (Shamail, 2021). Scholars such as Anane-Frimpong (2022) and Safo-Ankama and Sawyerr (2023) document how, by the 1950s, Winneba's Kakaamotobi festival had emerged as a major cultural event, integrating brass band music, tailored costumes, and political satire. This transformation reflected Ghana's broader post-colonial identity formation, where Fancy Dress became a visual metaphor for independence, unity, and creative freedom.



**Figure 8:** An image of a fully costumed 'Sakrabundi' performer.  
Source: (Micots, 2021)

#### 4.2.3.1 Material Culture, Costume Design, and Symbolism

Document reviews highlight costume materiality as central to the evolution of Fancy Dress. Dennis and Opare Darko (2022) found that from 1958 onward, costume designers experimented with fabrics, plastic, leather, and natural fibers, signifying innovation rooted in material culture. The Asafo influence persisted in the continued use of symbols such as animal imagery, fiber costumes, and carved wooden masks, bridging pre-colonial ritual aesthetics with modern artistry (Ross, 1979; Micots, 2021). The persistence of Sakrabundi iconography across centuries illustrates this cultural continuity. Even after colonial suppression in the early twentieth century, the symbolic themes of purification and moral discipline embedded in Sakrabundi performance survived in Fancy Dress character portrayals. The masquerade's transformation from spiritual cleansing to entertainment reveals the adaptability of Asafo-derived visual language to new social contexts.

#### *4.2.3.2 Analytical Synthesis and Scholarly Consensus*

Across the reviewed literature, scholars converge on several key analytical points. First, Fancy Dress in Ghana cannot be viewed merely as a colonial import but as a creative synthesis of indigenous Asafo performance and transatlantic carnival aesthetics (Micots, 2012; Forni & Ross, 2017). Second, Asafo traditions provided the performative grammar, costume symbolism, processions, and communal identity that allowed Fancy Dress to evolve into an inclusive art form (Ross, 1979; Micah, 2014). Third, the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s represents the critical juncture where Fancy Dress transitioned from ritual to entertainment, from localized Asafo ritual practice to national festival expression (Anane-Frimpong, 2022).

Moreover, the reviewed sources collectively affirm that Fancy Dress performances serve not only as entertainment but also as socio-political commentary and instruments of cultural preservation. The blending of indigenous and foreign influences produced a resilient art form that continues to articulate Ghanaian creativity, identity, and community solidarity in the post-colonial era.

### **4.3 The Design History of Fancy Dress in Winneba and Agona Swedru from 1950 to 2022.**

The design history of fancy dress of Winneba and Swedru is a vibrant cultural art form that combines music, dance, costume, and performance, reflecting both indigenous and foreign influences. Rooted in historical practices and evolving through colonial and post-colonial eras, this art form has become a significant expression of cultural identity and creativity. This study focuses on the design history of fancy dress in Winneba and Swedru.

#### ***4.3.1 The design history of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba.***

The design history of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba demonstrates a dynamic evolution influenced by Ghanaian cultural identity and colonial legacies. Initially emerging before 1950 through the Nobles Group, Fancy Dress costumes served as a creative medium for satirizing colonial figures and local professions, using elaborate and symbolic attire. Over the decades, this tradition expanded into a prominent cultural festival featuring four main groups: Nobles, Egyaa, Tumus, and Red Cross. Each group cultivated distinctive costume styles, blending local Ghanaian aesthetics with European influences, and incorporating materials such as imported fabrics, appliqué, and lace (Micots, 2014; Gavor & Dennis, 2013; Brown, 2005).

In an interview with a respondent, a fancy dress designer, it was revealed that,

*This fusion of cultural elements highlights the adaptability and resilience of fancy dress as a form of artistic and cultural expression, maintaining its relevance in Winneba society while evolving alongside social and material advancements (personal communication, Fancy Dress designer, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023).*

The evolution of Fancy Dress costume designs in Winneba reflects the influences of both local traditions and foreign cultural exchanges. Around the mid-1930s, the Red Indian character became a significant feature in Winneba's Fancy Dress performances. According to Ward (1935), as cited by Micots (2022), the Red Indian costume, characterized by theatrical and warrior-like designs, was first performed in coastal towns such as Axim. The Red Indian troops and their dramatic performances had a strong influence on local artistic expression, as well as the soldiers of British expatriates who visited the Gold Coast for trade and military aid. The Red Indian-inspired costumes, which included accessories such as guns and swords, were often performed "in a threatening manner," mirroring the theatrical displays of the foreign troops (Micots, 2014). By 1935, this influence had spread across Gold Coast ports and towns,

laying a foundation for the integration of warrior-like imagery into the Fancy Dress costume tradition. In Winneba, the adoption of such designs became more prominent by the 1950s, as local fancy dress groups incorporated elements like fierce masks, symbolic props, and theatrical movements into their performances. The costumes and designs evolved to blend the Red Indian character with existing local artistic practices, including the use of vibrant textiles, appliqué work, and handcrafted accessories. The warrior symbolism introduced a sense of spectacle and theatricality to Winneba's Fancy Dress, which further amplified its competitive and performative nature. From 1960 to 1980, the Red Indian-inspired costume became a recurring feature within Winneba's Fancy Dress festivals. Groups strove to refine and localize these influences by integrating indigenous designs and materials into their costumes. The emphasis on bold colours, exaggerated patterns, and intricate accessories reflected the creativity and competitive spirit of the Fancy Dress tradition in Winneba. Thus, the period between 1950 and 1980 marked a significant phase in Winneba's Fancy Dress history, where global influences, such as the Red Indian theatrical arts, merged seamlessly with local ingenuity, shaping the vibrant costume designs that continue to define the festival. The emergence of fancy dress costume designs in Winneba traces back to the 1950s, a period marked by significant cultural influence from Hollywood movies. These films were introduced to children in Christian missions and shown to the local population in large cinemas. The visual narratives of Hollywood productions inspired local artists and Fancy Dress designers to create a variety of costumes modeled after prominent film characters, including Jesus Christ, Herod, Pontius Pilate, Roman Soldiers, Robin Hood, and Red Indians. These designs gained immense popularity between the 1950s and 1970s, shaping the creative expressions of the fancy dress tradition during this era. However, the historical accounts reveal challenges associated with some costume

portrayals. Brown (2005) narrates an incident involving Eygaa Kobina Amo, a member of the Tumus Fancy Dress group, who portrayed the Robin Hood character. During a performance in 1930, Amo mistakenly shot the nephew of a Catholic priest, Father John, in the eye with a bow and arrow, a key accessory of the Robin Hood costume. This unfortunate event prompted the Catholic mission to ban the Robin Hood costume in Winneba Fancy Dress, restricting its use to children under the age of seven. Despite this ban, the incident immortalized Eygaa Kobina Amo, who continues to be remembered in Winneba as “Robin Hood” (Brown, 2005). By the 1970s, although costume designs inspired by Hollywood characters such as Roman soldiers and Red Indians remained dominant, they gradually began to decline. Some of these earlier costume designs are now rarely seen in contemporary Fancy Dress performances in Winneba. Nevertheless, their historical significance remains profound, as they reflect the creative adaptation of foreign influences into local cultural expressions. The period from 1950 to 1970 marks a pivotal phase in the design history of Winneba’s Fancy Dress, demonstrating how global cinematic exposure catalyzed artistic innovation and costume creation. Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba not only showcase artistic creativity but also serve as a medium for expressing cultural narratives and social commentary, making them integral to the festival's enduring appeal. The competition aspect, formalized during Ghana's independence celebrations in 1957, further spurred innovation, leading to elaborate and symbolic designs that celebrated both individuality and collective heritage.

Similarly, in an interview with one of the respondents in Winneba, he stated that;

*In the early days of the 1960s, the Fancy dress performers dressed in various costumes, including those of doctors, nurses, teachers, ministers, pastors, farmers, fishermen, prostitutes, drivers, cowboys, sailors, and even angels. Some masks depicted the white colonial masters, mimicking the lifestyle and*

*profession of the Europeans and local elites (personal communication, fancy dressmaker, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

The above response of the respondent fancy dressmaker collaboratively supports a group photograph (see Fig. 9) depicting members of the Winneba Red Cross No. 4 group dressed in character, including a ship's captain, sailors, British officers, King George VI, Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh, an archbishop (possibly William Temple), men dressed as white women, and a cowboy from 1953 masquerade parades indicates that local Fancy dress performers dwelled heavily on the dress politics and professions of the British in creating their costume designs.



**Figure 9:** *Red Cross No. 4, c. 1953, Winneba, Ghana.*  
*Source: (Micots, 2021, retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2023).*

The design history of Winneba Fancy Dress from the 1950s to the 1970 highlights the influence of foreign cinematic and cultural elements, particularly from Hollywood and Indian films. These movies were shown to local audiences in Christian mission houses and cinema halls, introducing new aesthetic paradigms that inspired local artists and fancy-dress groups. The costumes of warrior characters from these films, such as Native American “Red Indian” figures and Cowboys, became significant sources of inspiration for local costume designs. These designs incorporated locally available fabrics and

accessories, creatively adapting foreign aesthetics to suit the cultural and material contexts of Winneba (Micots, 2012). The “Red Indian” costume design gained prominence during the 1950 to 1970, while the Cowboy costume rose in popularity from the 1970 onward and continues to be a key element in Fancy Dress. The Cowboy character has also assumed a symbolic role in the Fancy Dress hierarchy, often representing leadership within performance groups. These costumes may initially appear as mimicry; however, they reflect local interpretations of global warrior archetypes, negotiating power through dance and showcasing local aesthetic preferences. They also mirror the socio-political dynamics of the period, emphasizing themes of resistance and empowerment through artistic expression.



**Figure 10:** Left to right: Kweku Nyen as Cowboy, Kwesi Turkson as Robin Hood, Korsah Brown as a Woman, unknown as Robin Hood, and Akimpo as a Cowboy, January 1, 1974, Nobles No. 1, Winneba.

*Photo courtesy: (Micots, 2021, retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2023).*

Winneba Fancy Dress reflects an intricate interplay between cultural identity, global influences, and local creativity. One significant example is the Robin Hood character costume, which, as Micots (2021) suggests, was inspired by the 1938 American film

*The Adventures of Robin Hood* starring Errol Flynn. This character resonated with Ghanaian audiences in the 1950 due to its portrayal of Robin Hood as a warrior and a champion of the lower classes, aligning with themes of resistance and empowerment prevalent in post-colonial Ghana (Micah, 2014; Sarpong and Botchway, 2017; & 2019). The costume's key identifiers include a single dyed feather in a cap and the symbolic bow and arrow or sword carried by the performer. These elements not only signify the character but also reflect the creative adaptation of global cinematic imagery into local cultural performances. Such adaptations demonstrate how global influences were localized to enrich Fancy Dress traditions, allowing performers to engage audiences while preserving a sense of cultural relevance.



**Figure 11:** Fancy performers dressed as Robin Hood (left) and as a Roman soldier (right) holding the winning plaque from Masquefest c. 1975–77, Winneba, Ghana.  
Source: (Micots, 2021, retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2023).

In addition, one of the Fancy Dress Designers attested that;

*Winneba Fancy Dress Festival has witnessed numerous evolutions of costume designs produced from fanciful fabrics with bright colours, fierce fabrics with dull colours, and elaborate designs that reflect professional characters, colonial masters, or address societal issues. Costume designs reflected*

*characters like Scouts, Cowboys, Red Indians, Father Christmas, Devils, or Satan, among others, emerged long before masqueraders performed at the Independence Day event in 1957 (personal communication, fancy dresser, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023).*

The historical foundations of Winneba Fancy Dress reflect a transition from reliance on imported costumes to locally inspired creations, highlighting a blend of foreign influence and indigenous craftsmanship. In the 1960s, most Fancy Dress costumes were imported and sold in urban centers such as Takoradi and Accra. These designs were largely inspired by European fashion and Hollywood film characters, which shaped the aesthetic choices of the time. However, as local artisans began producing costume designs, they infused traditional and local creativity into the Fancy Dress tradition, marking a shift towards more Ghanaian-centered expressions (Micots, 2012; Gavor & Dennis, 2013). By the mid-1990s, the promotion of sponsors' products during the annual Fancy Dress festivals became a prominent feature. Fancy Dress performers incorporated advertisements for these sponsors into their costume designs, a practice endorsed by the Fancy Dress Federation. This approach not only contributed to the financial sustainability of the festivals but also introduced modern branding elements into the art form, showcasing its adaptability to contemporary influences.



**Figure 12:** *A photograph of a branded ABC bottle costume design worn by fancy dressers in the 1992 Winneba Masquerade Festival.*  
*Source: (Brown, 2005; retrieved from online on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2023)*

The design history of Winneba Fancy Dress includes the enduring popularity of fierce animal characters, which have played a central role in the tradition since its inception. According to informants and Micots' (2012) accounts, these characters have always been prominent in Fancy Dress performances. Though direct evidence of specific animal costumes from the 1950 and 1960 is limited, narratives from Fancy Dressmaker 1 and other sources indicate that such costumes were integral during this period. A significant example is the "Sasabonsam" (a devil or Satan figure) costume, which became highly popular between the 1950s and late 1960s. These costumes symbolized calamity or death, using visual cues such as red or black fabrics to evoke fear and awe. The early Sasabonsam masqueraders typically wore black or blue shorts paired with a horned mask. Additional accessories included long artificial fingernails, spears, or garden forks, further emphasizing their fearsome persona. The designs reflected the blending of spiritual symbolism with theatrical performance, embodying cultural beliefs and storytelling elements (Micah, 2014; Sarpong & Botchwey, 2017).

These costumes exemplify the role of Fancy Dress as a medium for cultural expression and social commentary, using visual storytelling to engage audiences while preserving local traditions. Over time, such designs have been refined, but the core themes of power, fear, and symbolism remain embedded in the Fancy Dress culture of Winneba.

The design history of Winneba Fancy Dress highlights a dynamic evolution influenced by cultural, artistic, and societal changes. Animal characters, once a dominant feature of the Fancy Dress festival, experienced a decline during the mid-1980s but were revitalized by the Red Cross group in 1992 under the thematic banner “The Great Animal Kingdom.” This resurgence not only reinvigorated interest in animal character costumes but also inspired other groups to reintroduce and adapt these designs for competitive performances (Micots, 2012; Micah, 2014).

By the early 2000s, the materials and design approaches for animal costumes had significantly diversified. Masqueraders began incorporating innovative materials to align with their creative visions and enhance the visual impact of their costumes. Traditional elements like black and red fabrics persisted, particularly in designs for characters such as Satan/Devil and certain fierce animals, reflecting their symbolic associations with power, fear, and the supernatural (Gavor & Dennis, 2013).

This continuous reinvention demonstrates the adaptability of Winneba Fancy Dress designs, balancing tradition with modern artistic expressions while maintaining cultural resonance. The cyclical resurgence of animal characters underscores the festival’s capacity to integrate historical themes with contemporary creativity, ensuring its enduring relevance in Ghanaian cultural heritage.



**Figure 13:** A performer dressed as 'Sasabosam'/Devil in the 2001 Winneba Fancy Dress Festival. (Photo courtesy Brown, 2005).



**Figure 14:** Devil, Nobles No. 1, Fancy Dress Festival 2011, Winneba. Source: (Micots, 2012; retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2023).



**Figure 15:** A photograph of a Fancy dresser adorned in the Devil costume in the Winneba Masquerade Festival 2021 (photo courtesy, EPG media, Facebook page retrieved on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2023).

From mid-2005 to the present, the costume designs of the Winneba Fancy Dress Festival have increasingly reflected Afrocentric themes and issues, marking a significant shift in aesthetic focus. These designs have explored a range of topics, including political, educational, religious, social, health, and security concerns, both

within Ghana and across Africa, occasionally incorporating global issues. Group leaders and masqueraders often select themes or skits, with specific costume designs crafted to complement the performance. Notably, some designs commemorate historical events, reinforcing the cultural and educational relevance of the festival.

This contemporary trend contrasts with the Eurocentric influences that dominated the fancy dress era from the late 1950s to the early 2000s. While a few traditional Eurocentric character motifs remain in use, there has been a dramatic transformation in costume design approaches, highlighting a broader shift towards Afrocentric identity and creativity. This evolution underscores the concept of cultural dynamism, reflecting how Winneba's fancy dress costumes continue to adapt to changing societal and cultural contexts.



**Figure 16:** *Fancy Dressers in Cowboy (character) costumes at the 2000 Fancy Dress Festival. (Photo courtesy, Brown, 2005, retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2023)*



**Figure 17:** Nobles No.1 Fancy Dressers in Cowboy Costumes in 2011 Fancy Dress Festival. (Photo courtesy Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)



**Figure 18:** Nobles No.1 Fancy Dressers in Roman Soldiers costumes at the 2012 Fancy Dress Festival. (Photo courtesy, Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)



**Figure 19:** *Fancy Dresser in Roman Soldier costume in MasqueFest 2017.*  
*Photo courtesy: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)*

The design history of Winneba Fancy Dress costumes highlights a continuous evolution influenced by cultural, social, and competitive dynamics. Throughout this period, Fancy Dress groups have consistently developed innovative and captivating costume designs, particularly for the Masquefest event, which often reflect and align with earlier Fancy Dress costuming aesthetics (Safo-Ankama et al, 2022). These designs also serve as a medium to promote themes of religious cohesion and tolerance, as well as to disseminate messages of civic responsibility, health awareness, and cultural education (Micah, 2014). Such multidimensional use of costume design underscores the interplay between artistic expression and societal values in the Winneba Fancy Dress tradition.



**Figure 20:** Fancy Dressers advocating teenage pregnancy and birth before marriage. Photo courtesy (Nyce Media Facebook page, retrieved online on 23rd June, 2023).

In 2017, masqueraders featured in Fancy Dress masqueFest adorned themselves with ‘white-wedding’ costumes (see Fig. 18), advocating marriage before sex, the performance showcased a teenager being arranged for marriage with two children before them, and a priest holding a bible in the process of officiating the marriage. This performance resonates well with the members of the community as teenage pregnancy became rampant among the coastal towns due to financial instability in homes. Also, the religious fraternity frowns against marriage out of wedlock, in this way the fancy dress costumes and performance assistance educate the public on social issues. In Figure 18 above, the image depicts a group of people in elaborate fancy dress costumes, each one designed with a distinct and vibrant visual aesthetic that draws on bold patterns, color contrasts, and exaggerated facial features. In a visual analysis focusing on the aesthetics of the costume design of the color scheme and patterns, the costumes in this image rely heavily on bold, contrasting colors, primarily blue, white, and red. The checkered pattern that appears on the costumes of both the adult and children figures creates a striking visual rhythm, adding a sense of cohesion among the costumes while also providing a playful, almost whimsical touch. These patterns serve to guide

the eye across the entire composition and connect the figures despite the varying costume designs. Also, the fabric choices appear intentional and are likely chosen to hold bold colors and shapes. The structured suits, along with the frilled, layered dresses, give the costumes a theatrical quality, emphasizing formality mixed with fantasy. The designs balance rigidity (in the structured jackets) with softness (in the layered skirts), creating a visually appealing juxtaposition. The costumes embody a theme of satire against giving birth out of wedlock or teenage pregnancy, with visual elements that may hint at cultural references or socio-political commentary, particularly through the choice of masks and exaggerated expressions.



**Figure 21:** Fancy Dress performers advocated for the ‘stop of illegal fishing’ in the 2017 Winneba Masquefest.

*Source: (Winneba Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2023).*

Figure 21 depicts performers clothed in school uniforms and masks, holding placards with the inscription “*stop illegal fishing*” who seem to advocate and educate fishermen on using wrongful chemicals in fishing. This menace has been in practice in most of the fishing towns in the country, which seems to threaten the very existence of the aquatic environment and poses a threat to human health.

The costume design in this image reflects the intersection of fancy dress culture with elements of material culture and symbolic interactionism, giving the attire (costumes) a dual role as both artistic expression and social commentary. In the context of this image, the costumes are simple, with the individuals dressed in school uniforms or practical clothing that includes backpacks, stockings, and gloves. This choice of costume reflects an everyday realism that contrasts with the elaborate costumes traditionally associated with fancy dress culture. The materials, including poster boards and painted signs, suggest a functional, grassroots approach to costume design, emphasizing accessibility over extravagance. These material choices indicate that the wearers' goal is to convey a message rather than display personal adornment. By using familiar materials and everyday clothing, the costumes in this image engage in a form of social activism within the fancy dress framework. The posters and signs with phrases like "STOP ILLEGAL FISHING" transform ordinary materials into symbols of protest, grounding the costumes in the material culture of environmental activism. This approach redefines fancy dress as a tool for public education and awareness, making the costumes a medium through which cultural values are communicated. Also, symbolic interactionism as a theory examines how people create meaning through social interactions and shared symbols. In this image, the signs and their messages, "STOP ILLEGAL FISHING" and other environmental warnings, act as powerful symbols of advocacy. The interaction between the costumed figures and the audience relies on the immediate recognizability of these symbols, which are intended to evoke an emotional response and awareness among viewers. The costumes' alignment with activism signifies a shift from personal expression to collective identity, where the individuals embody environmental advocates rather than distinct characters. The uniforms, which make them resemble school students, add a symbolic layer,

representing a call for educating the younger generation on important social issues. This is further reinforced by the minimalistic, practical clothing, which suggests that the costumes are not about individual identity but about the message they collectively represent. Fancy dress culture traditionally emphasizes transformation and escapism, often drawing on fantastical or exaggerated aesthetics. However, this image shows a reinterpretation of that culture, where transformation occurs through the adoption of an activist persona. Rather than using ornate costumes to create fictional characters, the individuals have chosen to embody advocates for real-world issues, using everyday materials and symbols associated with protest. In this way, the costume design is both an aesthetic choice and a performative act, rooted in the cultural tradition of fancy dress while expanding it to serve as a platform for social commentary. The symbolic meaning created through these costumes shifts fancy dress culture towards activism, making it a medium through which societal concerns can be communicated, understood, and hopefully addressed by the public.

#### ***4.2.2 Historical foundation of Fancy Dress costume designs in Swedru.***

The design history of Fancy Dress in Swedru reflects a vibrant and evolving cultural tradition that spans decades, rooted in the creative expressions of its participants. From its early beginnings in the mid-20th century to contemporary times, the Fancy Dress culture has undergone significant transformations influenced by social, political, and cultural dynamics. The designs of Fancy Dress costumes in Swedru have transitioned from simplistic motifs to intricate representations of social commentary and identity. Themes often incorporate historical events, Afrocentric narratives, and localized expressions, distinguishing Swedru's Fancy Dress tradition as a dynamic and adaptive art form. This evolution underlines the interplay between historical continuity and innovation in costume design, cementing Fancy Dress as a significant cultural practice

in Swedru. Central to this exploration are the accounts of key cultural practitioners, such as Fancy Dressmaker 2, a founding member of the 'Hide & Seek' masquerade group, who has provided detailed insights into the tradition's development over time.

According to Fancy Dressmaker 2,

*The fancy dress tradition is an inherited practice, passed down through multiple generations. He recalled that his great-grandfathers and fathers had engaged in this form of cultural expression long before his involvement, suggesting that the Fancy Dress practice has ancient roots within the community. This tradition, referred to locally as 'Motor' in the Agona dialect, a term synonymous with fancy dress, has been a persistent cultural fixture in Agona Swedru for centuries (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2023).*

The response of the fancy dressmaker 2 reveals how the longstanding lineage of the fancy dress tradition in Agona Swedru is deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of the Agona community. One respondent, a Fancy Dresser, noted that the tradition predates his birth, underscoring its historical roots and early introduction in Agona Swedru. The continuity of fancy dress practices within Agona Swedru reflects a significant cultural legacy, showcasing the resilience of this performative art form and its enduring role as a vital means of cultural expression and identity in the Agona Swedru municipality. According to Fancy Dressmaker 3, the Fancy Dress tradition has been upheld and passed down through generations, reflecting the community's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage. This enduring practice ensures that Fancy Dress remains relevant and vibrant, rooted in the customs and artistic expressions of ancestral figures. Similarly, Fancy Dressmaker 2 emphasized the connection between Fancy Dress evolution and broader socio-cultural changes in Ghana. He noted that while contemporary interpretations of Fancy Dress continue to emerge, these interpretations remain anchored in the cultural framework established by earlier generations. In this way, fancy dress in Agona Swedru functions not only as entertainment but also as a living archive of community history, values, and collective

identity, preserving historical memory through costume designs and performances. Fancy Dressmaker 2 further recounted the origins and historical progression of fancy dress in Agona Swedru that the first Fancy Dress group to be established in Agona Swedru was the “Red Indians” in 1941, marking the beginning of a formalized Fancy Dress culture in the town. This pioneering group laid the foundation for subsequent groups, such as “Hide & Seek,” which emerged as the next generation sought to build upon and enrich the tradition. The sequential formation of groups reflects the progressive entrenchment of Fancy Dress culture in Agona Swedru, with each generation contributing to its growth and vitality.

The origins of Agona Swedru's Fancy Dress tradition, as described by Fancy Dressmaker 2, trace back to Saltpond, a prominent coastal town in Ghana's Central Region. Saltpond served as a key point of influence, from where the Fancy Dress tradition spread to neighboring towns like Agona Swedru. This historical connection underscores the mobility and adaptability of Fancy Dress culture, which has traveled across regions, taking on new forms while retaining its core significance. According to Fancy Dressmaker 2, the Fancy Dress tradition first took root in Saltpond before spreading to Agona Swedru, where it was embraced with great enthusiasm. He further speculated that Takoradi may hold earlier ties to the tradition, recalling that in 1998, a group affiliated with Hide & Seek in Takoradi celebrated its 40th anniversary, suggesting that Fancy Dress practices in the city date back to 1930. This implies that Takoradi could have been a significant early center for Fancy Dress, potentially predating Saltpond as a foundational location.

Fancy Dressmaker 2 also emphasized Winneba's unique role in sustaining and popularizing Fancy Dress. Since 1958, Winneba has hosted grand annual competitions,

elevating the art form through organized events that combine performance and competitive spirit. These events have not only preserved the tradition but have also established Winneba as a key cultural hub for Fancy Dress, inspiring its growth and continuity in neighboring towns like Agona Swedru. Fancy Dresser 2 recounted a memorable moment in the history of fancy dress when the Red Indians group was awarded a prestigious prize by Dr. Nkrumah himself, who acknowledged their artistic excellence and cultural contribution. This official recognition not only solidified fancy dress as an integral part of Ghana's postcolonial cultural landscape but also established a legacy of competition and artistic display within the tradition.

According to one of the Fancy Dressers,

*In the mid-1950s, even before independence, fancy dressers from various parts of the country would converge at designated locations to exhibit their costumes and performance skills. These gatherings provided an opportunity for individuals and groups to showcase their creativity, while a competitive spirit led to the emergence of recognized winners, further enhancing the prestige and allure of Fancy Dress culture (personal communication, fancy dresser, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023).*

Over time, this tradition of convergence and competition became a hallmark of fancy dress, with groups like the Red Indians gaining prominence for their elaborate costumes and skillful performances, Fancy Dresser 2 added. The Red Indians Fancy Dress group in Swedru rose to local and national prominence through their participation in Ghana's national cultural festivals. Their distinct style, characterized by inventive costumes and masks (or fancy hats, where the mask and face are crafted as a single piece), captured the admiration of the Agona Swedru community and impressed audiences at competitive events. Known for their creativity, the Red Indians became a staple of fancy dress tradition in Agona Swedru, bringing innovative artistic expression to the tradition and contributing to its enduring legacy. In the 1960s, the Red Indians distinguished

themselves with theatrical performances that showcased uniquely crafted masks, setting them apart from other groups.

According to Fancy Dresser 2,

*An elderly artisan among the Red Indians was particularly skilled in mask-making. In 1959, this craftsman created a striking mask representing 'Asebu Amanfi', a legendary figure in Ghanaian folklore. The mask was an artistic feat that attracted spectators from distant regions, drawing them to Agona Swedru to witness the elaborate display of Fancy Dress (personal communication, Fancy Dresser 2, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023).*

In 1999, the Queen Mother of Agona Swedru, Ohemaa Abena Dzema, played a pivotal role in further institutionalizing Fancy Dress in Swedru. She called upon the Red Indians and conveyed her vision for a new group, the "Swedru All Blacks", which she intended to launch as a cultural symbol for the community. She commissioned the Red Indians to incorporate the institution's emblem, the "ozii ozaa" symbol, into a mask design for Fancy Dress. This royal endorsement not only enhanced the cultural significance of the Red Indians but also strengthened the bond between Fancy Dress and the Swedru community's heritage. This work underscored the group's dedication to pushing the boundaries of traditional mask-making, blending artistry with cultural storytelling to enrich the spectacle of Swedru fancy dress.

In an interview with respondent Fancy Dressmaker 2;

*The challenge we have in telling our history of 'motor' (Fancy Dress) is that our great-grandfathers who practiced the art and culture of masquerading died with their creations of fancy dress costumes because there were no places for preservation or heritage sites (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

Reflecting on the longevity of Fancy Dress culture, Fancy Dresser 2 projected that the Red Indians have now been active for over half a century, a timeframe that aligns with the oral histories passed down by Fancy Dressmaker 2, the 'father' of the 'Hide & Seek' group. This generational continuity affirms the resilience and enduring appeal of Fancy

Dress in Agona Swedru, sustained by the dedication of local figures and the support of community leaders. According to Fancy Dresser 2, a long-serving member of the Swedru Fancy Dress community, the Red Indians were the first masquerade group established in Agona Swedru, originating in the 1930s. This group was soon followed by the formation of the 'Hide & Seek' and 'Tumus' groups, marking the early foundation of Fancy Dress culture in the town. Fancy Dresser 2 emphasized the historical importance of these original groups, noting that they are among the oldest and most influential masquerade societies in Agona Swedru. Their longstanding presence reflects a deeply rooted tradition that has been passed down through generations, shaping the cultural landscape of Swedru and becoming an essential part of its identity. Fancy Dresser 2 highlighted the significance of these pioneering groups, which not only laid the groundwork for the Fancy Dress tradition in Swedru but also established standards of creativity, costume design, and performance that continue to influence the practice today. These groups set a precedent for both costume intricacy and mask craftsmanship, inspiring subsequent groups to adopt similar levels of artistic dedication. In the early 1960s, the design of fancy dress costumes in Swedru was significantly influenced by European professions and characters depicted in Hollywood films. This trend reflected a broader cultural exchange and a desire to emulate Western aesthetics in costume design. me, Fancy Dressmaker 2 added. This transformation was largely catalyzed by the political and cultural climate under Kwame Nkrumah's administration, which emphasized Pan-Africanism and encouraged a reevaluation of African identity and heritage. Nkrumah's policies and ideology played a crucial role in decentralizing cultural expression, prompting a resurgence of interest in indigenous motifs and representations within costume design. Consequently, this period marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of fancy dress costumes in Ghana, as designers sought

to reflect a more authentic and localized interpretation of cultural identity, moving away from Western influences. In the early 2000s, Fancy Dressmaker 2 further posited that Fancy Dress costume design in Agona Swedru traditionally centered around vibrant colour patterns, with each group showcasing a distinctive and visually striking Simple Dress. These costumes are characterized by elaborate patchwork in bold and contrasting colors, creating an overwhelming display of visual energy and unity. While the colour patterns form a cohesive aesthetic foundation across the different groups, it is the diversity in mask designs that enables clear differentiation and identity among them. Each group's mask serves as a unique emblem, embodying not only the creative identity of the group but also reflecting their interpretation of the fancy dress tradition. These masks, designed with meticulous detail and artistic variation, establish a symbolic identity for each group, enabling onlookers to distinguish one group from another amidst the sea of colorful costumes. Thus, while the colour patterns may resonate with a shared cultural symbolism and energy, it is the distinctive mask designs that truly set each group apart, providing an essential marker of belonging and differentiation within the broader Fancy Dress culture. This interplay between uniformity in costume and individuality in mask design highlights the balance between collective expression and group identity that is central to Fancy Dress in Swedru. Fancy Dresser 2 explained that the masquerade groups in Swedru have historically sought training and expertise from the more established masquerade groups in Winneba, known for their mastery in group dancing, marching, parading, and other performance elements that are central to the Fancy Dress tradition. Winneba, with its long-standing experience in organized Fancy Dress activities, particularly the Winneba MasqueFest, has become a crucial source of knowledge and inspiration for Swedru's groups. By learning from the Winneba masqueraders, the Swedru groups have enhanced their choreographic skills,

synchronized group movements, and overall presentation quality. This exchange underscores a cross-town collaboration that has elevated Swedru's Fancy Dress scene, infusing it with sophisticated performance techniques and a deeper level of professionalism. The competitive aspect of Fancy Dress in Agona Swedru has grown significantly in recent years, evolving into a highly anticipated event that now attracts substantial corporate sponsorship. Since its establishment as a formal competition, the Swedru Fancy Dress Festival has garnered support from prominent companies and media outlets, marking it as a key cultural event with regional and national significance. Corporations such as MTN and STAR Beverages have provided financial backing, enhancing the scale and prestige of the event. Additionally, media organizations like Skky Media have helped increase visibility and public interest, broadcasting the festivities and bringing the vibrant tradition to a wider audience. These sponsorships not only provide financial resources for the event but also contribute to its promotion and recognition, reinforcing Fancy Dress as a celebrated and culturally significant practice within Ghana. The Swedru fancy dress festival is held annually on December 26th, aligning with the holiday season and drawing large crowds of locals and visitors alike. However, preparations for the event begin well in advance, with group activities officially commencing in June. This six-month preparation period allows members of each Fancy Dress group to carefully plan, design, and rehearse for the carnival. During this time, groups engage in costume design, mask-making, and choreographic practice, ensuring that their performances are both visually striking and meticulously synchronized. The extended preparation time reflects the dedication and commitment of the groups, as well as the cultural importance of the festival within the Swedru community. In addition to costume and performance preparation, the months leading up to the festival are also marked by extensive fundraising efforts, as groups seek

additional support from local businesses, patrons, and community members. This community-driven approach highlights the collective investment in the festival, as Swedru's residents contribute time, resources, and enthusiasm to ensure the success of the event. The collaboration between the groups, sponsors, and the community creates a sense of shared ownership and pride in the Fancy Dress tradition, reinforcing its role as a significant cultural expression.



**Figure 22:** A member of the 'Hide & Seek' group was wearing a patched 'simple Dress' costume in Agona Swedru in 1980. Source: (courtesy of Mr. Anthony's Gallery, 2023)

The Fancy Dress costume in the image (Fig. 22) above exemplifies traditional design aesthetics in Agona Swedru's Fancy Dress culture, highlighting the elaborate and vibrant decorative patterns that define this artistic practice. This particular costume features a composition of geometric shapes, layered textures, and a strong emphasis on symmetrical design. The use of bright, contrasting colours, primarily red, green, and white create a visually dynamic look that reflects the celebratory and performative nature of Fancy Dress culture. The costume's design elements are organized in a structured yet flamboyant manner. The layered, ruffled textures around the shoulders,

arms, and legs add depth and volume to the costume, creating an impression of grandeur and movement. These ruffled details not only enhance the visual appeal but also amplify the dancer's physical gestures during the performance, aligning with the interactive and lively characteristics of Fancy Dress performance art. Central to the costume's aesthetics is its use of symbolic shapes and patterns, which are visually distinct and culturally significant. The geometric patterns, particularly on the torso and around the waist, emphasize a sense of order and unity, which may allude to the community-oriented spirit of Fancy Dress traditions. The costume's design draws on bold outlines and repetitive shapes, creating a cohesive look that is both individually striking and culturally resonant. Additionally, the mask resting at the feet of the wearer embodies the symbolic role of facial coverings in Fancy Dress costumes. The mask features a smiling face with colorful adornments, a common motif that blends playful and celebratory expressions. The mask's elaborate design, intricate detailing, and cheerful expression reinforce its role as a focal point of identity within the Fancy Dress costume. It serves as a visual and performative element, connecting the wearer to the cultural narratives embedded in the Fancy Dress tradition. The costume in the image reflects the aesthetic principles of Fancy Dress in Swedru, characterized by vibrant color schemes, layered textures, geometric symmetry, and symbolic adornments. These design choices underscore the cultural importance of visual identity, communal expression, and artistic innovation within the Fancy Dress practice. Through its intricate and expressive design, the costume serves as a testament to the rich heritage of Swedru's Fancy Dress tradition, celebrating both individual artistry and collective cultural expression.



**Figure 23:** A member of the Agona Swedru 'Hide & Seek' group wearing a patched 'simple Dress' costume in 1987. Source: (courtesy of Mr. Anthony's Gallery, 2023)



**Figure 24:** A photograph of Fancy dress performers at the Agona Swedru Masquerade Festival 2005. Source: (courtesy of Mr. Anthony's Gallery, 2023)

In affirming the development of fancy dress designs in Swedru, critical observations were made between Fig. 23 and Fig. 24 in terms of their design patterns, colour, and style. Using the visual analysis tool, the two Fancy Dress costumes depicted here reflect distinct design aesthetics and symbolic patterns, with notable differences in their artistic styles and approaches that likely correspond to their respective time frames 1987 and 2005. In the 2005 costume (fig. 24), we observe a more complex and colorful design structure that emphasizes visual impact through vibrant hues and intricate patterns. This costume employs a striking combination of yellow, black, white, and green, with ruffled, layered accents along the edges that give it a voluminous and dynamic appearance. The extended vertical structure of the ruffled design, particularly along the shoulders and sleeves, adds a dramatic flair, enhancing the performative aspect of the costume. Additionally, this costume incorporates patterned fabric with bold motifs, which are likely symbolic representations, possibly drawn from regional iconography

or cultural symbols that resonate within the Fancy Dress tradition. The use of synthetic fabrics and vivid colors is indicative of a contemporary approach to costume-making, reflecting the influence of modern textile availability and stylistic preferences in the early 2000s. In contrast, the 1987 costume (fig. 23) presents a relatively simpler aesthetic, characterized by a more restrained color palette and design structure. This earlier costume utilizes a combination of white, black, and red, with less emphasis on layered textures, and instead focuses on block color patterns arranged in a symmetrical layout. The ruffled elements are present but are less exaggerated, framing the costume without overwhelming the overall form. This design approach reflects a minimalist aesthetic compared to the 2005 costume, possibly due to limited access to diverse materials or a different stylistic preference within the Fancy Dress community at the time. The colours are more subdued, and the structure appears more cohesive and linear, suggesting a design that prioritizes harmony and symmetry over dramatic impact. The progression from the 1987 to the 2005 costume highlights a shift towards more elaborate and visually assertive designs in Fancy Dress culture. This evolution in costume aesthetics reflects broader cultural changes, including increased access to a wider range of materials, the influence of global textile trends, and the growing importance of visual spectacle in Fancy Dress performances. The 2005 costume, with its heightened complexity and color intensity, aligns with a modern preference for more elaborate and expressive designs, while the 1987 costume represents an earlier era's tendency toward simplicity and symmetry, focusing more on form and structure than on embellishment. These distinctions in design reflect the adaptive nature of Fancy Dress costume-making, responding to both the material conditions and aesthetic sensibilities of each era.



**Figure 25:** A display of Okomfo Anokye and the Golden Stool of the 2019 Swedru fancy dress festival. Source: (Swedru Facebook page, retrieved online on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)



**Figure 26:** A procession of the Swedru fancy dress festival in 2020. Source: (Swedru Facebook page, retrieved online on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)

The Fancy Dress costumes depicted (Fig. 26) above in the Swedru Masquerade Festival of 2020 illustrate a rich and multifaceted approach to aesthetic design, integrating visual vibrancy, cultural symbolism, and intricate craftsmanship. The ensemble of costumes in the image emphasizes a collective identity, while simultaneously allowing for individual expression through nuanced variations in the design. A primary aesthetic feature evident in these costumes is their use of color. The costumes incorporate a vivid

and harmonious palette, blending bright shades of red, blue, yellow, and white. This color scheme not only enhances the visual appeal but also aids in conveying a sense of festivity and celebration that is synonymous with masquerade traditions. The juxtaposition of these bright colors against the neutral background of the street magnifies their luminosity and helps draw attention to the performers as they parade, creating a spectacle that is engaging and visually dynamic. The design of these costumes showcases a sophisticated use of structural elements. The voluminous and exaggerated shapes, particularly in the shoulder and headdress regions, add grandeur and height to the figures. These features are further accentuated by the use of layered, ruffled materials, creating a three-dimensional effect that contributes to the overall dramatic impact of the costumes. The incorporation of such layered fabric techniques speaks to the meticulous craftsmanship involved in their creation, ensuring that the performers stand out in their elaborate attire.

Symbolic motifs are embedded within the aesthetic choices of the costumes, which may include references to traditional cultural themes or historical allusions. The masks worn by the performers are significant in themselves, contributing to the overall transformation of the wearer into a character that embodies the spirit of the festival. These masks, detailed with painted expressions and enhanced by the use of contrasting colour patches, function as both concealers of individual identity and conveyors of collective cultural narrative. The costumes also exhibit decorative elements such as appliqués and embellishments that enhance their ornate quality. The use of synthetic materials, likely chosen for their affordability and availability, suggests an evolution in the adaptation of costume design. These materials may not replicate the luxuriousness of traditional textiles like silk or velvet, but provide a feasible alternative that retains aesthetic richness through creative assembly and design techniques. The Fancy Dress

costumes seen in this image exemplify the dual goals of maintaining cultural heritage while adapting to modern material constraints. The aesthetic value lies not only in the costumes' visual splendor but also in their role as cultural artifacts that embody a historical and communal essence. The craftsmanship, use of colour, structural design, and decorative detail collectively create a vibrant and powerful visual experience that celebrates both the artistry and cultural identity central to the Swedru Masquerade Festival.



*Figure 27: A procession of the Swedru fancy dress group advocating for peace between Russia and Ukraine in the 2022 Masquerade festival. Source: (Swedru Facebook page, retrieved online on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)*

The Fancy Dress costumes depicted in Figure 27 above from the Swedru Masquerade Festival 2022 reflect a vibrant synthesis of cultural expression, artistic ingenuity, and social messaging. The aesthetics of these costumes are rooted in the elaborate use of colour, pattern, and structure, creating a visual tableau that serves both performative and symbolic purposes. The use of colour in these costumes is particularly striking. The dominant hues include bright and bold primary colors such as red, yellow, blue, and green, arranged in checkerboard and striped patterns. This choice of colors enhances the visual impact of the costumes, promoting an atmosphere of festivity and celebration that is central to masquerade traditions. The high-contrast palette also serves to draw

attention to the wearers, emphasizing the collective energy of the performers as they engage in the festival. The colours are not arbitrary; they are culturally resonant, evoking themes of joy, unity, and cultural pride within the Ghanaian context. The design elements of the costumes are characterized by their intricate construction and elaborate embellishments. The performers are seen wearing costumes with large, decorative panels extending from their arms and bodies. These panels, detailed with ruffles and appliqués, contribute to a sense of grandeur and movement as the performers navigate through the space. Such structural embellishments not only enhance the aesthetics but also add a dynamic component, as the costumes shift and sway with the performers' motions, creating a visually engaging spectacle.

Symbolically, the costumes reflect the adaptability and innovation of local artisans. The materials used, likely including synthetic fabrics such as polyester and satin, are chosen for their affordability and availability while maintaining a sheen that adds to the costume's opulent appearance. These choices reflect a shift from the traditional, more expensive fabrics to modern alternatives that balance practicality with visual appeal. The incorporation of ruffles and layered components showcases the meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail that are hallmarks of Fancy Dress costume design. Additionally, the context of the performance and the accompanying banner, which bears a political message advocating for peace in the 'Russia vs. Ukraine' conflict, adds a layer of significance to the aesthetic presentation. The juxtaposition of celebratory attire with a call for global awareness and harmony underscores the role of masquerade culture as not just an art form but as a medium for community expression and sociopolitical commentary. In conclusion, the aesthetic qualities of the fancy dress costume at the Swedru Masquerade Festival 2022 exemplify a complex interplay between color, structure, and cultural symbolism. These costumes are visually

appealing and serve as vehicles for storytelling and communal identity, showcasing the adaptability and creativity of Ghanaian artisans while embracing contemporary relevance through their thematic presentation.

#### **4.3 Trends in the design of fancy dress costumes from 1950 to 2022.**

This study aimed to illuminate the evolving trends in Fancy Dress costume designs, focusing on colour schemes, symbolic meanings, materials (primarily textiles), and design patterns, which encompass both aesthetic and metaphysical dimensions. This investigation aimed to explore the extent to which contemporary Fancy Dress costume production reflects shifts in fabric selection, tools and equipment, and design techniques over time, particularly the development of textile and fashion art in Ghana. The study also sought to understand whether new trends have emerged in textile choices and production methods, examining how these changes impact the cultural and artistic expression embedded within Fancy Dress costumes. Fancy Dress, as a performance art and festive tradition, has been practiced in Ghana since the early 20th century, notably flourishing along the coastal belt, including cities such as Accra, Tema, and other parts of southern Ghana. However, it is along the coast that the art form has maintained its most dynamic and enduring presence. This rich tradition, deeply woven into the social fabric of coastal communities, highlights the cultural significance and resilience of Fancy Dress celebrations, which blend performative spectacle with symbolic expression. To capture the regional and stylistic diversity within fancy dress costume designs, the study focused on two major towns where the fancy dress culture remains vibrant: Swedru and Winneba. These towns were chosen for their long-standing engagement with fancy dress festivals and their contributions to the artistic evolution of the tradition. By examining these key locations, the study aimed to document and analyze trends in costume design, particularly in terms of colour symbolism, material

choices, tools and equipment used, and the techniques involved in the costume-making processes. The focus on these aspects; colour schemes, textile materials, and design techniques serve to underscore both the tangible and intangible elements that constitute the fancy dress art form. Colours, for instance, carry specific cultural meanings that vary across regions and are often employed to convey identity, status, or mood. Materials, primarily textiles, not only reflect the availability of resources but also bear symbolic connotations that contribute to the wearer's persona during performances. Moreover, the tools and techniques involved in costume production highlight both traditional methods passed down through generations and the potential adoption of new methods influenced by technological advancements in textile arts. The study aimed to contribute to the understanding of fancy dress as a form of cultural expression that is continually evolving. By documenting the materials, colours, and designs used in the practicing towns, this study sheds light on the interplay between heritage and innovation within Ghana's Fancy Dress culture, demonstrating how this unique festival art has adapted to changing times while preserving its core elements. Although Fancy Dress is practiced in these towns, their costume designs vary from each other as well as the materials (fabrics) and techniques in the costuming processes.

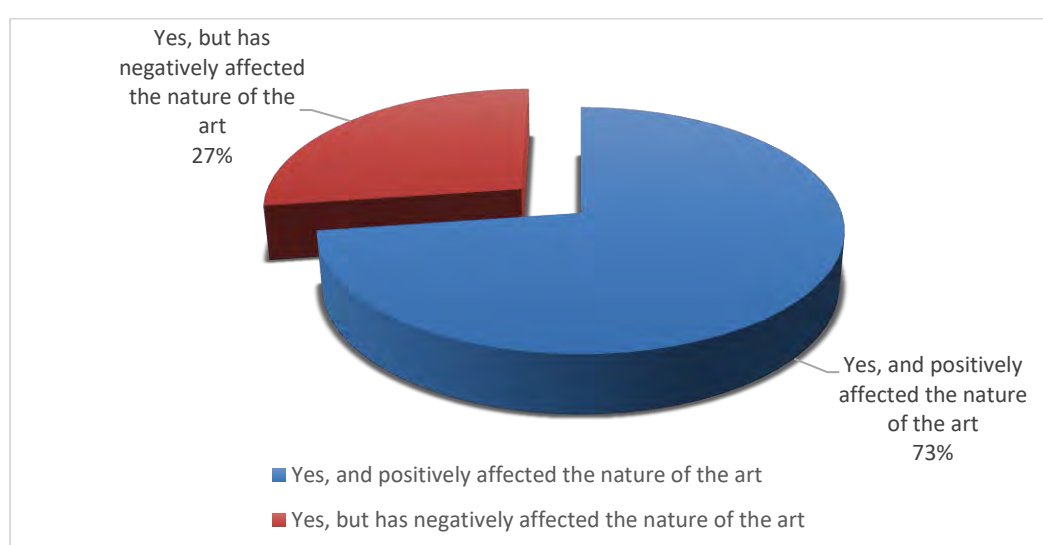
In exploring the trends in Fancy Dress designs, materials, tools/equipment, and techniques, the researcher sought insights from respondents representing the Fancy Dress fraternity. The data collected from interviews revealed that; out of the eleven (11) respondents, eight (8) participants, representing 73%, acknowledged the emergence of new trends in Fancy Dress costume designs. These respondents highlighted that the adoption of new materials, tools, and techniques has positively impacted the festival, enhancing the overall aesthetics, creativity, and appeal of the performances. The respondents emphasized that these developments have brought a dynamic and

innovative dimension to the festival, reflecting modern influences while preserving its cultural roots. Conversely, three (3) respondents, representing 27%, also admitted to the emergence of new trends but expressed concerns about the cost implications of these changes. They argued that the new trends, while innovative, have also negatively altered the traditional nature of the Fancy Dress festival, potentially diluting its original essence and accessibility. The analysis indicates that the Fancy Dress festival, as a vibrant cultural expression within the Ghanaian context, has demonstrated an openness to dynamism and innovation. These developments are evident in various aspects of the festival, including organization, performance style, and particularly costume design. The evolving nature of costume production not only aligns with contemporary influences but also serves as a reflection of socio-political issues within the community and historical narratives of the past. Furthermore, all eleven (11) respondents, representing 100% of the sample, confirmed their awareness of the new trends in Fancy Dress costume designs. This consensus underscores that the Fancy Dress culture has undergone significant evolution over the years, embracing modern techniques and materials while remaining a platform for cultural, historical, and artistic expression.

Table 4. “Yes” or “No” responses on whether respondents practice the new trends in the production Fancy Dress of costume designs

Experiencing New Trends in Fancy Dress Costume Designs	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, and positively affected the nature of the art	8	73
Yes, but has negatively affected the nature of the art	3	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: field data, (2023)



**Figure 28:** Pie chart showing responses of respondents on the new trends in Fancy Dress designs. Source: (field data, 2023)

#### 4.3.1 Trends in the textile fabrics used in the production of Fancy Dress costumes

Annual celebrations serve as communal observances, commemorating significant life transitions and cultural milestones. These rituals, rich in artistic and creative expression, reflect the deepest values and collective identity of a community, often manifested through a variety of aesthetic forms (Kwakye-Oppong, 2014). Among these, costume stands out as a prominent medium through which cultural narratives and symbolic meanings are conveyed. Costumes do not merely serve a decorative function; rather, they are integral to cultural performances, embodying layers of historical and social significance. The construction of these costumes involves the careful selection of textile

fabrics, materials, and additional accessories, all chosen with intentionality by skilled artisans. This selection process is imbued with cultural significance, as each material and design element contributes to the intended message and cultural symbolism of the costume. In this way, costumes operate as visual texts, communicating narratives that resonate with the community's collective memory and identity. They are crafted not only to be visually striking but also to invoke reflection on past events, honoring historical figures or significant cultural practices, thereby reinforcing the continuity of tradition. Through the aesthetic choices embedded in costume design, artists can impart "meaningful thoughts" that is, symbolic representations that speak to the values, struggles, and aspirations of the community. Each component of the costume, from the texture and colour of the fabric to the design patterns and embellishments, plays a role in evoking emotional responses and reinforcing the cultural heritage of the community. Costumes, therefore, function as powerful cultural artifacts that enable the celebration of heritage within the context of annual festivals or life-passage ceremonies.

#### *4.3.1.1 Trends in the textile fabrics used in the production of Winneba Fancy Dress costumes.*

Fancy dress costumes in Winneba transcend individual expression, serving as a collective visual language that embodies the community's identity and history. Through the symbolic use of textiles, adornments, and forms, costume designers contribute to cultural preservation, curating historical and traditional elements into contemporary celebrations. These costumes act as vessels of storytelling, reliving and transmitting shared memories across generations, thereby affirming the community's values and heritage in a dynamic cultural consciousness. The evolution of textile fabrics used in the creation of Winneba fancy dress costumes reflects significant cultural, economic, and technological changes over time. The popularity of fancy dress costumes surged in

the 1950s, despite the festival's earlier roots in the 1920s. This growth was influenced by colonial dress politics, depictions of 'Red Indian' characters by visiting troupes, and the impact of Hollywood films screened locally. Such influences inspired Ghanaian artisans to design locally-made costumes and masks, blending imported themes with indigenous creativity to reflect both external and local narratives.

One respondent, Fancy Dressmaker established that;

*In Winneba, early designs were inspired by colonial influences, Hollywood depictions, and local archetypes, showcasing a mix of imported materials and indigenous ingenuity (personal communication fancy dressmaker 3, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023).*

### **Material Use**

The use of materials in Winneba Fancy Dress costume design reflects a dynamic interplay of local ingenuity, global influences, and economic conditions. Historically, Fancy Dress costumes relied on readily available resources, including calico, brocade, and recycled items like rice sacks and agricultural products. As intimated in the account of another fancy dress designer, it was posited;

*Until advances in textile technology introduced printed and wax fabrics, enhancing creativity in design we were used to available materials inherited from our forefathers (personal communication, fancy dress designer, 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2023).*

These materials were creatively adapted to produce visually striking designs, emphasizing the performers' resourcefulness and connection to their environment (Micots, 2014; Gavor & Dennis, 2013). With increased access to imported fabrics during colonial and post-colonial periods, costumes began incorporating textiles like satin, lace, and appliqué. These additions introduced new aesthetic dimensions, blending local craftsmanship with European-inspired designs. For example, printed and wax fabrics gained popularity, adding vibrant colors and patterns that reflected

Ghanaian cultural identity while embracing global fashion trends (Micots, 2014; Micah, 2014; Brown, 2005). Economic factors also played a role in shaping material choices. During periods of scarcity, Fancy Dress groups innovated with cost-effective solutions, such as reusing household materials. Conversely, the introduction of industrially produced textiles enabled more elaborate and uniform designs, enhancing the visual appeal of performances and competitions. The evolution of material use in Fancy Dress costumes underscores its adaptability and resilience as an art form, showcasing a balance between preserving tradition and embracing modern influences.

In the 1950s and 1960s, costumes were primarily made from natural fibers such as calico, cotton, and jute, which were readily available and affordable. These fabrics were often dyed using basic methods to achieve vibrant colours, aligning with the community's resourcefulness and aesthetic traditions. However, in the mid-1950s, the choice of fabrics for fancy dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru reflected the influence of colonial fashion and the visual allure of Hollywood films. Costumes from this period featured opulent materials such as silky textiles and fine cotton, symbolizing prestige and elegance. These fabrics were often embellished with accessories like fringes, laces, and feathers, enhancing the flamboyant aesthetic and aligning with the grandeur of colonial-era styles. This approach to costume design marked a shift towards incorporating elements of luxury and sophistication, serving as both artistic expression and cultural adaptation. A synthesis of the data on the historical trends in fabric use for Winneba fancy dress costumes revealed that fabric has been a central material for constructing masquerade costumes by all masquerade clubs, even before 1958. The findings indicated that while practitioners experimented with various materials in costume construction, fabric consistently emerged as the most dominant and preferred choice. Based on the insights shared by one respondent (Fancy Dresser 3) regarding the

design history of trends in fabrics used for Winneba fancy dress costumes, it was revealed that jute bags were commonly employed in constructing masquerade costumes well before 1958. These bags were sometimes painted to enhance their aesthetic appeal. The respondent noted that this practice was particularly widespread during the early 1960s. However, the use of jute bags saw a decline in popularity starting in the late 1960s and continuing into the early 1970s. The primary reason for this decline was the discomfort caused by the jute material. The yarns in the bags often irritated the skin of the masqueraders, leading to itching and scratching, which ultimately prompted most clubs to discontinue their use in costume construction. Interestingly, this shift in material availability did not significantly alter the aesthetic principles of the fancy dress costumes, which remained vibrant and intricately designed. Between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, the Winneba fancy dress tradition was notably influenced by the large-scale importation of textiles from Europe, particularly from Manchester and the Netherlands (Clarke, 2002; Kriger, 2005; Sylvanus, 2007). These imported materials initially facilitated elaborate costume designs that reflected European-inspired aesthetics, allowing local artists to experiment with luxurious fabrics and embellishments. However, as the cost of these imported textiles increased over time, coupled with the difficulty of obtaining certain materials, there was a gradual shift in the resources used for costume production. One respondent (Fancy Dresser 3) revealed that a prominent example of this adaptation can be seen in the "Red Indian" costumes, which were traditionally crafted with imported peacock or ostrich feathers and seed beads. These materials were often sewn onto the costumes, headdresses, and boots, adding a distinctive flair that echoed both Western and African interpretations of indigenous American attire. However, by the mid-1970s, the economic hardships,

including the global economic depression, made it increasingly challenging to source these expensive materials.

One of the respondents, Fancy Dress Designer 1 intimated that;

*In the 1970s and 1980s, wax prints and appliqué fabrics gained prominence due to advances in textile production and the increasing availability of imported materials. These fabrics allowed for intricate designs and enhanced visual appeal, marking a shift toward more elaborate and colorful costume styles (personal communication, Fancy Dress Designer 1, 22 August 2023).*

The earliest ‘Simple Dress’ costumes were crafted from 100% cotton fabrics that were widely available in large markets during the post-colonial period. These fabrics, imported, provided a solid foundation for costume construction, allowing artisans to create vibrant and durable attire that aligned with the Winneba fancy dress aesthetic. By the 1990s and early 2000s, synthetic materials like polyester and nylon became widespread, enabling the production of lightweight and durable costumes. These fabrics facilitated innovative designs and incorporated additional embellishments such as metallic threads, sequins, and feathers.

One of the respondents, fancy dresser 3 added that;

*This period also saw the inclusion of upcycled materials like leather, plastic, cardboard, and bottle caps, demonstrating a blend of creativity and environmental consciousness (personal communication, Fancy Dresser 3, 21<sup>st</sup> August 2023).*

From 2010 onwards, the influence of globalization further diversified the material base, introducing imported fabrics and advanced techniques like digital printing. This era underscored the intersection of tradition and modernity, as costume makers integrated contemporary materials while preserving cultural symbolism. This evolution in costume design illustrates the adaptive nature of the Winneba fancy dress tradition, as local artists continuously balance historical influences with contemporary resources to sustain the festival’s aesthetic vitality. In examining the historical trajectory of fancy

dress costumes, it becomes evident that their evolution is closely tied to both global influences and local creativity. The shift from imported luxury materials to locally sourced alternatives is not merely a response to economic pressures but also an indication of the cultural resilience embedded within the fancy dress tradition. Despite changes in material availability, the underlying principles of grandeur, creativity, and cultural expression have remained consistent, underscoring the enduring relevance of fancy dress in Ghanaian cultural life. In recent years, rising material costs have driven many tailors producing Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba to shift towards more affordable fabrics such as thin cotton, polyester, and satin, which are predominantly imported from China. While these materials are cost-effective, they often lack durability, fraying easily and requiring more frequent replacement. This shift highlights the financial pressures faced by costume producers and the trade-off between affordability and material quality in sustaining the Fancy Dress tradition.

One respondent, fancy dressmaker 3 posited that;

*The expenses associated with creating Fancy Dress costumes remain significant, with costs ranging from approximately 1000 to 1500 Ghanaian cedis in Winneba, depending on the materials chosen and the complexity of the design (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 3, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

An element of secrecy characterizes the acquisition of materials within the communities practicing the fancy dress culture. Designers and performers may source their fabrics from distant markets or even import them from neighboring countries to keep their selections confidential, preserving a sense of exclusivity and uniqueness. Contemporary trends show a shift away from shiny materials towards simpler, non-reflective fabrics, emphasizing distinctive designs and enhancing the costumes' visual appeal. Additionally, in the Winneba Masquerade community, respondents highlighted that from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, a formalization of the masquerade practices

occurred. The establishment of structured rules and regulations, governed by the Masquerade Federation, brought new levels of organization and discipline to the fancy dress groups, influencing costume design and community engagement. This reform grants the leader of a fancy dress group, or godfather the authority to select and approve specific fabrics, designs, colours, and the number of participants who will portray certain characters, such as cowboys. Traditionally, the preferred fabrics for costume production were shiny and silky. Deviation from these norms could result in expulsion from the group or the confiscation of non-conforming costumes, underscoring the strict adherence to established standards in earlier times. However, the evolution of the fancy dress culture has led to the relaxation of many of these original rules.



**Figure 29:** A fancy dresser adorned in a costume produced from expensive polished cotton and satin fabrics with patterned Ghana flag colours at the sleeves and feet. Source: (Swedru



masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2023)  
**Figure 30:** A masquerader in Winneba adorned in a cowgirl pleather costume. Source: (EPG Media Facebook page, retrieved online on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2023)

#### ***4.3.1.2 Trends in the textile fabrics used in the production of Swedru Fancy Dress costumes from 1950 to 2022***

The design history of fancy dress in Agona Swedru, Ghana, from the 1950 to the 2000, reflects the evolution of cultural expression and material use within the community, particularly in connection with the annual fancy dress ('moto') Festival.

During the 1950s to 1970s, fancy dress in Swedru was characterized by using simple and accessible materials, often handmade or repurposed. Costumes primarily incorporated local textiles like Kente and batik and imported fabrics such as cotton and wool blends, which were considered luxurious. Mask designs and outfits drew heavily from African traditions but were also influenced by colonial-era European styles, highlighting the blend of cultural aesthetics emerging in post-colonial Ghana. Also, in the mid-1980 to the early 1990, when Swedru became more urbanized, the materials and designs used for fancy dress became more elaborate. Costumes included synthetic fabrics such as polyester and sequins, which added vibrancy and durability to the designs. Imported embellishments like beads, feathers, and metallic trims became popular, enhancing the overall spectacle. This era also saw greater participation in masquerade competitions, with creativity and material innovation becoming central to group performances. The evolution of materials used in Swedru Fancy Dress costume design reflects adaptations necessitated by modern trends and resource constraints. A respondent noted that the unavailability of traditional fabrics has driven groups to source contemporary materials with qualities resembling those historically used.

Fancy Dressmaker 2 posited that;

*The modern world's shifts have necessitated adaptations, especially as some of the traditional fabrics are no longer available. This change has encouraged groups to source new materials that possess qualities similar to those once used, maintaining the aesthetic integrity of the costumes while embracing*

*contemporary resources* (personal communication, fancy dressmaker 1, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023).

These shifts highlight the resilience and ingenuity of the costume-making tradition in adapting to changing times and material challenges. By the 2000s, the commercial influence and global inspiration in the fashion and garment industry, helped the fancy dress Festival gain international recognition, with costume designs reflecting global cultural exchanges. Costume materials expanded to include items like LED lights, reflective fabrics, and 3D-printed accessories. Groups such as Hide and Seek and New Edition became known for pushing creative boundaries, combining traditional African motifs with contemporary and futuristic elements to captivate audiences.

According to (Fancy Dressmaker 2);

*... today everybody selects his or her own preferred choice of fabric to be used to produce the costumes, yet, such fabrics have to be aligned with the particular group's choice of colours for the year's theme* (personal communication, fancy Dressmaker 2, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2023).

The evolution of fabric trends in Swedru Fancy Dress highlights both the cultural and structural changes within the tradition. While there has been an increased reliance on imported materials like polished cotton, silky fabrics, pleather, feathers, and foreign masks, these choices are influenced by both economic accessibility and evolving aesthetic preferences. Costumes now often incorporate ready-made clothes and modern materials such as fancy lace, fluorescent-colored fabric, plastic gems, and ornamental tinsel strips to create visually complex designs. However, the material trends are also deeply tied to the shifting dynamics of group governance within the Fancy Dress tradition. While many participants now independently purchase and choose their fabrics, reflecting a decline in collective decision-making, exceptions like the Red Indians group continue to enforce strict adherence to approved fabric choices and

character designs. Such adherence underscores the group's commitment to maintaining traditional standards and cultural integrity.

Fancy Dresser 4 revealed that;

*Members violating these rules face expulsion, demonstrating the group's effort to preserve the historical essence of the Fancy Dress practice (personal communication, Fancy Dresser 4, 20th July 2023).*

This duality of evolving material trends and governance practices highlights the tension between modernization and cultural preservation in the Fancy Dress tradition. The rivalry and secrecy intrinsic to Swedru's Fancy Dress tradition significantly influence the trends in fabric acquisition and costume design.

One of the respondents, Fancy Dressmaker revealed that;

*Due to the competitive nature of the masquerade groups, tailors and Fancy Dressmakers often source fabrics from distant locations, including Accra and even Togo, depending on the desired quality and exclusivity of the material. This practice ensures that designs remain unique and distinctive, avoiding replication by rival groups (personal communication, Fancy Dress Maker 2, 15th August 2023).*

Expensive and high-quality fabrics are often chosen to enhance the visual appeal and prestige of the costumes. These materials include imported textiles such as satin, and polished cotton, and decorative elements like pleather, feathers, and plastic gems. The secrecy surrounding sourcing and design processes reflects the broader cultural dynamics of Fancy Dress, where maintaining an edge over competitors is as important as upholding the aesthetic and symbolic integrity of the costumes. This competitive ethos drives costume aesthetics innovations, incorporating traditional elements and modern embellishments, such as feathers, pleather, and ornate tinsel strips, ensuring uniqueness and prestige within performances. The fancy dress tradition in Swedru illustrates a rich cultural legacy marked by adaptation, rivalry, and resilience, maintaining its relevance and vibrancy in contemporary celebrations.

#### *4.3.2 Trends in the designs of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru*

The history of fancy dress culture in Winneba and Agona Swedru reveals an evolving narrative in costume design, reflecting global influences while progressively addressing local societal concerns. This evolution reflects a blend of cultural adaptation and artistic ingenuity that has preserved the relevance of Fancy Dress in both communities. The design history of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba and Agona Swedru reflects a dynamic interplay between cultural traditions, external influences, and local creativity. In both towns, Fancy Dress costumes serve as a medium for artistic expression, cultural storytelling, and community identity. Trends in costume design have evolved in response to shifts in fabric availability, economic factors, and sociopolitical contexts. From the 1950s, the Fancy Dress tradition in these Ghanaian communities drew heavily from European dress fashions and popular movie characters, which were key references for conceptualizing costumes. The design of fancy dress costumes is characterized by fanciful and distinctive artistic styles, tailored to represent the character or persona the masquerader aims to emulate. These designs communicate specific themes and messages that spectators interpret, adding layers of meaning to the performances. Over time, incorporating new materials, techniques, and aesthetics has enriched the visual impact of costumes while maintaining the tradition's core values. In both Winneba and Swedru's fancy dress, the dynamic interplay of creativity and cultural storytelling within fancy dress costume design underscores its role as a living art form that continues to evolve while preserving its historical roots. Integrating global influences and local artistry ensures that fancy dress remains a vibrant and celebrated aspect of Ghanaian cultural heritage. The development of masquerading costume designs in Winneba and Swedru has consistently involved a philosophical approach that

intertwines predominantly European elements with relatively fewer African influences. This blend reflects a conscious effort to conceptualize forms and ideas that resonate with both cultural traditions.

In the case of Winneba Fancy Dress, Fashion Practitioner 1 highlighted that;

*The participants have maintained a balance between European and African design aesthetics, creating costumes that reflect their dual heritage. This approach is driven by an overarching objective to use performative fashion-textile art as a medium for addressing societal issues and conveying critical messages to the public* (personal communication, fashion practitioner 1, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

Similarly, Swedru Fancy Dress showcases a comparable trajectory, though the stylistic details often diverge due to localized influences and creative interpretations by group leaders and dressers. Across both traditions, the costume designs serve as dynamic tools of expression, reflecting social, political, and cultural narratives over the decades. From the 1950s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Fancy Dress designs evolved to incorporate more diverse materials and bold themes, influenced by globalization and changing societal norms.

In the early years of the 1950 to 1970, Fancy Dress designs in Winneba and Swedru showcased a strong adherence to European fashion trends. Inspired by Victorian and Edwardian styles, costumes often featured elaborate dresses, tailored suits, capes, and hats, which were seen as markers of sophistication and prestige. Historically, Fancy Dress performers in both communities showcased a diverse array of costumes inspired by professions, archetypes, and cultural figures. These included depictions of nurses, doctors, security personnel, and lawyers, as well as symbolic characters like "Red Indians," Roman soldiers, Father Christmas, and Robin Hood. Satirical impersonations of British colonial officials were also prominent, reflecting a nuanced commentary on colonial experiences. At this stage, the costumes were reflective of an aspiration toward

Western ideals, reinforced by colonial influences and exposure to European cultures through media and trade. Moreover, movie characters from the burgeoning Hollywood industry became significant inspirations during this period. Classic figures such as cowboys, knights, and fairytale princes and princesses frequently appeared in Fancy Dress performances. These designs often emphasized theatricality and fantasy, appealing to the audience's fascination with the exotic and glamorous imagery of the Western culture.



**Figure 31:** A fancy dresser in Winneba adorned in a Roman Soldier costume at the 2017 masquerade festival in Winneba. Source: (Charles Wobil's gallery, 2023)



**Figure 32:** Fancy dressers dressed in Cowboy costumes in the 2019 Winneba Masquerade Festival. Source: (Charles Wobil's gallery, 2023)

By the 1980, a noticeable transition began as Fancy Dress culture started incorporating more localized elements into costume designs. While European fashion and movie characters remained influential, there was an emerging trend of blending these with African motifs and textiles. This period saw the introduction of Kente patterns, batik prints, and other indigenous fabrics into costumes, reflecting a growing sense of cultural identity and pride. Costume designers (fancy dress designers and makers) and group

leaders began using Fancy Dress as a medium to comment on social and political issues. Characters representing colonial figures, politicians, and caricatures of societal archetypes became prevalent. The performance aspect of Fancy Dress evolved into a satirical commentary on governance, inequality, and communal life, creating a hybrid narrative that merged entertainment with critical discourse.

One of the respondents, Fancy Dressmaker 2, posited that;

*During those times, the eclectic themes demonstrated a creative fusion of local artistry with external cultural influences. While locally crafted costumes dominated, limited foreign ready-made costumes and masks were available for sale in some coastal cities such as Cape Coast, Takoradi, and Accra, contributing to the evolving diversity of the fancy dress tradition (personal communication, fancy dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2023).*

In recent times, the scope of Fancy Dress costume designs has expanded further, with greater thematic diversity and deeper integration of local contexts. Characters from global pop culture, such as superheroes, cartoon characters, and modern movie icons, were reinterpreted with local narratives. These costumes often carried subtle critiques or messages about social behaviours, global influences, and cultural preservation. An analysis of trends in costume designs within the Fancy Dress tradition reveals a significant emphasis on fabric selection, ornamentation, and design innovation. The materials and techniques used have evolved over the years, reflecting changing preferences, access to resources, and aesthetic priorities. During the 2000s, the use of fancy fabrics became a defining feature in costume production. According to a respondent, Fancy Dress Designer 1, these fabrics were particularly popular because of their inherent appeal and versatility. However, the designer acknowledged that not all fabrics could be effectively utilized for costume making, necessitating careful selection to ensure the desired impact.

Fancy Dress Designer 1 elaborated:

*When one opts for non-fanciful fabrics, then the designer has to work more designs on the fabric to make the costume stand out. But the aesthetic of a designed costume lies in how the various coloured fabrics and ornaments will be patterned within the costume (personal communication, Fancy Dress Designer, 24th July 2023).*

This statement highlights the critical role of craftsmanship and creative patterning in enhancing the visual appeal of costumes. The interplay of colours, fabric textures, and embellishments determines the overall aesthetic and distinctiveness of a Fancy Dress costume. Costume designers experimented with unconventional materials like recycled plastics, metal scraps, and local plants to highlight themes of sustainability and environmental awareness. This period marked a significant shift where Fancy Dress performances were increasingly seen as platforms for education and advocacy, addressing pressing societal issues like corruption, environmental degradation, and health awareness. In recent years, Fancy Dress designs have embraced innovation and technology while retaining their performative essence. LED lighting, modern synthetic fabrics, and augmented textures have been incorporated into traditional frameworks, creating visually striking costumes that captivate audiences. The findings reveal how designers continually innovate by balancing the use of materials with intricate design techniques, ensuring that costumes remain vibrant and captivating for performances and festivals. This adaptability in design reflects the dynamic nature of the fancy dress tradition and its responsiveness to both resource constraints and evolving artistic expressions.

One fashion practitioner addressed that.

*Today, the designs continue to evolve, reflecting modern concerns and themes while retaining their performative and festive essence. The integration of sustainability-focused materials, such as recycled fabrics and eco-friendly elements, is becoming a growing trend (personal communication, fashion practitioner 2, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2023).*

The societal relevance of Fancy Dress has also deepened, with groups using performances to comment on modern issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, illegal fishing, youth unemployment, and climate change. Designs inspired by local heroes, folklore, and contemporary Ghanaian life now dominate the landscape, reflecting a shift from mere mimicry of European and movie-inspired styles to a more grounded, contextually rich approach.

Adding to this, respondent, fancy dressmaker 3, posited that;

*...over the decades, costume designs have shifted from strict adherence to Western character prototypes to incorporating localized themes and materials. This trend reflects a broader cultural adaptation where global influences are harmonized with Ghanaian traditions. Today, the use of indigenous textiles, bold patterns, and motifs inspired by local folklore and societal issues has become increasingly prominent (Personal Communication, Fancy Dressmaker 3, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

Similarly, the fancy dress culture remains a vibrant and adaptive tradition, shaped by the creative ingenuity of its practitioners and their engagement with the broader socio-cultural environment. The analysis of informant responses reveals key insights into the evolution and trends of costume designs within the Fancy Dress traditions of Winneba and Agona Swedru. The trend heavily falls on the inspirations from character-based and non-character-based designs, rivalry and competitive creativity, and adaptation over the period. Costume designs have historically reflected a blend of creative ingenuity and cultural adaptation, shaped by both individual expression and the competitive dynamics within the Fancy Dress communities.

One respondent, Fancy Dress Designer 1 revealed that;

*Costume designs in the fancy dress culture often draw from specific characters, particularly those popularized in global media. Characters like Cowboys, Cowgirls, Red Indians, and Robin Hood have historically served as archetypes for dressers, reflecting the influence of Western pop culture and cinematic imagery. These designs emphasize theatricality and vibrancy, with intricate detailing that enhances the performative appeal (personal communication, fancy dressmaker 2, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

In addition to character-based costumes, some participants opt for non-specific designs, focusing instead on the aesthetic appeal and performative impact. These costumes feature a combination of colourful fabrics, patterns, and embellishments, merging inspiration from existing designs with innovative ideas to captivate audiences. This approach allows for greater creative freedom and often serves as a platform for experimenting with new materials and styles. Respondents from the Fancy Dress communities highlighted the role of rivalry and competition among masquerade groups in driving the evolution of costume designs. The competitive nature of the festival motivates groups to push creative boundaries, resulting in an ever-expanding repertoire of innovative designs. Collaborative efforts among group members, including designers, dressers, and leaders, further enhance the diversity and sophistication of costumes, ensuring each group's presentation stands out. The designs not only celebrate artistry but also serve as a medium for addressing broader societal concerns, reinforcing the cultural and social relevance of the Fancy Dress tradition.

During the 1990, most Fancy Dress groups in these communities adhered to a similar style known as the 'Simple Dress'. These designs were characterized by uniformity in structure but allowed for variation in colour patterns and minor details. Over time, some communities broke away from this uniformity, establishing distinct design trends that reflected their unique identities and messages. While Winneba continues to produce 'Simple Dress' costumes, the designs have evolved to incorporate varied colour patterns and symbols that align with specific themes of communication and cultural expression. In Swedru, however, costume designs have taken on more distinct features, integrating symbols of power and global connections, showcasing a broader conceptual approach. The responses from the informants highlight the presence of distinct and innovative

trends in costume designs among fancy dress groups in Winneba and Swedru. While the generalized ‘Simple Dress’ costume style is common across these communities, closer examination reveals unique elements that define and distinguish each group. These elements often include carefully crafted logos, symbols, and colour patterns embedded in their costumes, showcasing a high level of creativity and craftsmanship. Each community has cultivated specific trends in its costume designs, often evolving these designs into recognizable trademarks. This phenomenon underlines the competitive and identity-driven nature of Fancy Dress culture in these towns.

In Swedru, Fancy Dressmaker 2 disclosed that;

*“...costume designs of the Swedru Fancy Dress did not differ from other practicing towns like Saltpond, Winneba, Takoradi, and Cape Coast; however, as the Simple Dress costume design and other characters became familiar along the line, designers broke away to introduce new designs which distinguished them from others. The fact is that Winneba Fancy Dress costumes and Swedru are quite different from Takoradi and Cape Coast costume designs”* (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023)

A respondent, Fancy Dresser 4, emphasized the significance of these trends, stating:

*“Every community has the type of costume designs from which it is recognized. In Swedru, a costume design named ‘Fametu’ is the most popular of all costumes in the fancy dress tradition. Costume designs are the trademark of every Fancy Dress group, identifying them among others. Careful concepts like colour patterns, logos, and even the masks bring out the uniqueness of a group’s costume designs”* (personal communication, Fancy Dresser 4, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

This insight underscores the role of costume design as a key factor in group identity and competition. The meticulous attention to details such as logos, colour schemes, and even the design of masks contributes to the distinctiveness of each group, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. These elements not only serve as visual identifiers but also reflect the creative ingenuity that drives the Fancy Dress tradition in Winneba and Swedru. This evolving trend in the costume designs of Fancy Dress groups in Winneba and Swedru reflects both shared traditions and localized innovations. Both Fancy

Dresser 4 and Fancy Dressmaker 2 revealed that during the 1970s, the costume designs in Swedru Fancy Dress had three major costume designs. One of them is the ‘*Cape*’ (*Lapelle*), a costume design sewn to have its collar broader on the jacket widely known as a ‘*Simple Dress*’; the ‘*Fametu*’ costume design sewn to have its shoulders (puff) protruding flat on the shoulders, and the ‘*Tail coat*’, a jacket that has its backside longer than the frontside, this jacket was a typical dress style of the European men during the colonial era.

Fancy Dressmaker 2 disclosed that;

*In 1995, “I modified the existing ‘Fametu’ costume design where he made the protruding shoulders stand/raise upwards. He added that ever since the innovation, the design has been adopted by every masquerade group in Agona Swedru; however, groups distinguish themselves by the way their protruding flanks at the shoulders may appear and their choice of colour pattern”* (personal communication, fancy dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

The two prominent trends, the ‘Simple Dress’ design of Winneba and the ‘Fametu’ design of Swedru, highlight this evolution within the Fancy Dress culture. The ‘Simple Dress’ design, prominent in Winneba, serves as a foundational style in Fancy Dress history. Characterized by its straightforward structure, this design prioritizes uniformity while allowing for variation in colour patterns and symbolic motifs. Over time, Winneba fancy dress groups have maintained this traditional aesthetic, with modifications that align with the themes of their performances. These modifications often involve intricate patterns, the integration of group logos, and symbolic elements that communicate messages relevant to their audience. In contrast, Swedru’s Fancy Dress groups have developed a more elaborate and distinct style known as ‘Fametu’. This design emphasizes complexity and grandeur, integrating symbols of power, global connections, and local cultural themes. The ‘Fametu’ design often incorporates bold colour schemes, intricate ornamentation, and detailed craftsmanship, reflecting the community's emphasis on making a striking visual impact. This trend showcases Agona

Swedru's innovative approach, distinguishing its groups from others while maintaining ties to the broader Fancy Dress tradition. The coexistence of the 'Simple Dress' and 'Fametu' designs illustrates the duality of tradition and innovation within fancy dress culture. While the 'Simple Dress' remains a testament to the enduring legacy of the tradition, the 'fametu' design exemplifies the creative evolution driven by community identity and competitive spirit. Together, these styles demonstrate how Fancy Dress costumes continue to serve as both a medium for artistic expression and a vehicle for conveying cultural narratives and societal themes.



**Figure 33:** A photograph of Fancy dressers dressed in 'Fametu' costume designs in Swedru in 2005. Source: (Mr. Anthony's gallery, 2023)



**Figure 34:** A photograph of Swedru Fancy dressers in the 2016 fancy dress festival. Source: (Mr. Anthony's gallery, 2023).

The findings from the interviews with participants revealed that the sources of inspiration for Fancy Dress costume designs in Winneba and Agona Swedru align with the principles of symbolic interactionism theory. This theory suggests that human beings act toward things based on the meanings those things hold for them and that such meanings arise from social interactions with others and the environment. Respondents emphasized that social, cultural, historical, and environmental factors

serve as primary sources of inspiration for fancy dress costume designs. Designers often recreate costumes inspired by iconic historical and cultural figures, such as Roman soldiers, Red Indians, and Robin Hood, or characters depicted in biblical stories like Jesus Christ, Pontius Pilate, and King Herod. These inspirations date back to the 1950s–1970s, when Hollywood films and Christian missionary influences brought these characters to the forefront of local imagination. As established in historical accounts, interactions with British sailors, West Indian regiments, and Afro-Brazilian communities introduced external carnival traditions that inspired local costume makers. These influences remain evident in the incorporation of theatrical and elaborate costume styles. Respondents noted that natural elements, such as animals and plants, inspire designs like sakrabundi costumes, which feature carved masks, animal-like figures, and fibre-based materials. Such designs emphasize the symbolic connection to nature and traditional belief systems.

Fancy Dress Designer 1 admitted that;

*...designs are mostly perceived from various fashion styles in vogue, while others are inspired by costumes of characters seen in movies, magazines, or from the archives of old Fancy Dress costume catalogues in the past years. I have a background in Art, so I was always inspired through my creative world to bring new ideas when designing* (personal communication, Fancy Dress Designer, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2023).

Probing further, respondents agreed that Fancy dress costumes with characters such as cowboys, Father Christmas and the Roman Soldier remained in vogue in today's Fancy Dress celebration and believed that such characters celebrate the heritage of the 19th-century trend of Fancy Dress costume designs in Ghana.



**Figure 35:** A fancy dresser adorned in a costume made from leaves and leathered wrapper around the waist, holding a bow and arrow, depicting hunting warrior activities. Source: (Swedru masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2023).



**Figure 36:** Showing two fancy dressers dressed in coloured patterned smocks, wearing a horn-like headdress. Source: (Swedru masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)



**Figure 37:** A group photograph of four female dressers adorned in colourful costumes with headdresses. The costumes depict similar nature and colour traits of the peacock animal and also reflect on Trinidad and Tobago's carnival costumes. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)

With the rise of modern technology, global media and the internet have introduced new costume ideas and styles. Dressmakers have access to images, films, and online

platforms that expand their creative boundaries while still maintaining local cultural identity. The incorporation of traditional symbols into the Winneba Fancy Dress costumes reveals a profound connection between local cultural heritage and contemporary artistic expressions. For instance, as illustrated in Figures 38 and 39, the scorpion symbol associated with the Winneba Asafo company has been creatively integrated into Fancy Dress designs. This costume's scorpion character is particularly striking when viewed in three dimensions, emphasizing the symbolic and aesthetic significance of the design. Respondents highlight that such symbols embedded in Fancy Dress costumes often carry deep philosophical meanings. These symbols may serve as coded messages for the wearer or convey specific ideas to observers. The incorporation of symbolic elements, such as those derived from Asafo traditions, echoes the motifs found in appliquéd Asafo flags, which differentiate one Asafo company from another (see Fig 38). This stylistic parallel reinforces the enduring influence of Asafo symbolism in Fancy Dress costume design. These findings align with scholarly discussions (Rea, 2008; Nunley, 2010; Micots, 2014) suggesting that Fancy Dress costumes maintain intrinsic ties to indigenous Asafo practices, predating the influence of European fancy dress traditions. This hybridity blends local symbolism with external artistic influences and underscores the dynamic evolution of the art form, reflecting both cultural continuity and adaptation within the broader trends of design history.



**Figure 38:** *The Scorpion Flag (Scorpion Frankaa) Source: (Edukumah, 2012, retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2023).*



**Figure 39:** *John, the new Chairman of Red Cross in 2011, exhibits his fine costume as a scorpion in Masque Fest 2012. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)*



**Figure 40:** *A group of performers dressed in elaborate Fancy Dress costumes from the Winneba Fancy Dress Festival. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023).*

The image above showcases a group of performers dressed in elaborate Fancy Dress costumes from Winneba, Ghana. These costumes feature the prominently displayed BMW logo integrated into their design, accompanied by intricate embellishments, bold colour patterns, and symbolic motifs. This fusion of global brand imagery with traditional costume-making reflects the evolving nature of Fancy Dress culture, where local and international influences merge to create a visually striking and symbolic expression of identity. Using the BMW logo within the Fancy Dress costumes highlights an ongoing trend in costume design that blends indigenous cultural symbols with global and contemporary influences. In the context of Winneba Fancy Dress traditions, such incorporation serves multiple purposes. First, it emphasizes the performers' engagement with modernity and globalization, symbolized by the iconic logo of a luxury automobile brand. Secondly, it continues the tradition of using visual elements to convey messages, status, or affiliations functions that are deeply rooted in the historical Asafo company practices of the Fante people. In historical design trends, Asafo companies utilized flags and symbols to distinguish themselves and communicate specific meanings during ceremonies and parades. This practice is mirrored in fancy dress, where logos, symbols, and motifs are adapted to reflect both personal and collective identities. The inclusion of the BMW logo may also signify aspirations, prestige, or the interplay between tradition and modern consumer culture, reinforcing the hybridity that scholars like Nunley (2010), Micah (2014), and Micots (2014) have identified in the art form. Inclusively, this blending of local traditions with global design elements encapsulates the dynamic and evolving nature of Winneba fancy dress costumes. It highlights how the art form continues to adapt and innovate while maintaining its roots in the cultural history of the Fante Asafo traditions.



**Figure 41:** *Winneba masqueraders performing traditional regalia and procession of royal activities in the 2018 Fancy Dress Festival. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)*

The image above (Fig. 41) depicts a fascinating interplay of traditional Akan cultural elements and theatrical performance within the context of the Winneba Fancy Dress Festival. The scene features five young men costumed in a mix of traditional Akan regalia and dramatic masks, symbolizing a blend of cultural heritage and performative art. Their attire includes iconic elements such as a state umbrella, linguist staff, gold ornaments, beads, and animal skins. Each signifies prestige, leadership, and spiritual protection within the Akan cultural framework. The crossed brooms in front of the seated figure suggest symbolic protection or purification, potentially rooted in animistic beliefs common in sub-Saharan Africa. The composition portrays a staged reenactment of a royal court, with a central figure seated as a king and supported by others in traditional roles, such as a linguist, umbrella bearer, and palace secretary. The costumes and props not only emphasize the regal authority and cultural identity of the performers but also convey themes of leadership, community governance, and unity, which are

central to Akan and Ghanaian traditions. The use of masks to obscure the performers' identities adds a layer of mystique, reinforcing the idea that the performance transcends individual personas to represent collective cultural values. This image reflects the evolving trends in Winneba's fancy dress, where traditional Ghanaian aesthetics are reimagined through creative costume designs. By incorporating iconic Akan regalia into a theatrical presentation, the performers highlight the enduring relevance of traditional leadership and its symbolic role in contemporary society. The juxtaposition of traditional and performative elements also aligns with the hybrid nature of Winneba's fancy dress, which blends local cultural motifs with the dramatic and often exaggerated forms of masquerade. The attention to detail in the props and accessories showcases the influence of indigenous art forms in fancy dress design. Elements like the linguist staff and state umbrella underscore the connection to historical symbols of power, while the animal skin and crossed brooms evoke spiritual and protective connotations. The use of masks adds a modern, dramatic twist, resonating with broader global trends in costume design while maintaining a distinctly Ghanaian identity. This presentation not only celebrates cultural heritage but also serves as a commentary on the role of chieftaincy in modern governance and its importance in fostering social cohesion and development within local communities. Through these design choices, the Winneba Fancy Dress tradition continues to serve as a vibrant platform for cultural expression and dialogue, bridging historical practices with contemporary artistic innovation.

#### ***4.3.3 Trends in Colour of Winneba and Swedru's Fancy Dress Costumes***

The research findings on the trends in colour within the Fancy Dress traditions of Winneba and Swedru, spanning from the 1950s to 2022, highlight the critical role of colour as both a symbolic and aesthetic component in costume design. Colour, as a significant element of material culture, particularly in African communities, embodies

profound spiritual and physical philosophies that are deeply rooted in traditions, belief systems, and societal structures. In the context of fancy dress, colour transcends mere decoration to convey layered meanings tied to identity, status, spirituality, and community narratives. Over the decades, the choice of colours in fancy dress costumes has been influenced by several key factors such as; the type of costume chosen, emulation and leader's order, and group dynamics.

One respondent, a Fancy Dress designer posited that;

*certain costumes demand specific colour schemes to accurately depict characters, themes, or historical references. For example, traditional characters such as royalty or warriors often incorporate gold, red, and black to symbolize power, sacrifice, and protection* (personal communication, Fancy Dress Designer 3, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023).

In other perspectives, informants disclosed that colours play a crucial role when emulating specific characters. Whether representing indigenous leaders, European-inspired figures, or modern pop culture icons, the colours were chosen to align with the persona being portrayed, ensuring visual clarity and thematic authenticity. Fancy Dress groups, led by team leaders, rely on unified colour schemes to distinguish their identity and demonstrate cohesion during festivals and competitions. Leaders' directives may dictate colour choices to reflect group pride, loyalty, or align with larger themes such as national identity, victory, or spirituality. The responses indicate that designers carefully choose colours that align with the character or theme being depicted. For instance, royalty-inspired characters may feature gold and red to symbolize prestige and power, while ghostly or mystical characters might incorporate white or black to reflect spiritual connotations. Colours often serve as markers of group identity, helping to distinguish one Fancy Dress group from another during performances or festivals. While there may not be rigid rules relating colours to specific clans or groups, the selection process ensures cohesion and recognition.

One of the designers, fancy dress designer 1, posited that;

*Fancy Dress designers play a pivotal role in determining colour combinations and patterns. Their creative choices are central to achieving a balance of uniqueness, visual appeal, and thematic alignment. The deliberate arrangement of colours into intricate patterns not only enhances aesthetics but also contributes to the costume's distinctiveness (personal communication, Fancy Dress Designer 1, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023).*

Designers remain highly conscious of their colour schemes to create visually compelling, meaningful, and aesthetically appealing costumes, ensuring that the Fancy Dress culture continues to thrive as both an artistic and cultural tradition.

Fancy Dressmaker 1 explained that;

*The colour choice of Fancy Dress costumes does not have any laid down restriction, but it depends on the preferences of the designer, the group colours, and the dresser as well.  
...that every masquerade group changes its colour scheme annually to enhance its visual appearance to win the best costumes of the year during competitions (personal communication, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

Fancy Dressmaker 2 revealed that;

*colour patterns of every group have highly been held a secret to the extent that the tailor producing the costumes is not allowed to come out during the time for rival members to have chances of spying on the pieces of threads and fabrics anywhere around the designer to know the particular colour chosen for the group that year (interview with respondent Fancy Dressmaker 2, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

These findings highlight that, although there are no formalized colour associations tied to clans or groups, the thoughtful selection and innovative arrangement of colours are fundamental to the design process. Colour serves as a critical tool for storytelling, group identity, and artistic expression, reflecting both individual creativity and collective cultural traditions in Winneba and Swedru Fancy Dress. Throughout the design history of Fancy Dress, colours like red, gold, black, white, and blue have recurred with notable frequency, each carrying symbolic weight. Red, for example, often symbolizes strength, vitality, and sacrifice; gold connotes royalty, prestige, and wealth; black is associated with protection and ancestral connections, while white signifies purity and spiritual

harmony. The integration of bold and contrasting colour palettes over time reflects both indigenous aesthetics and external influences, showcasing the dynamic evolution of the art form. Ultimately, the deliberate selection of colours in fancy dress costume design underscores their deeper significance in articulating cultural values, community narratives, and creative expression. One respondent, *Fancy Dress Designer 2*, highlighted that the choice of colours in fancy dress costumes can sometimes be influenced by external symbols, such as national flags or political affiliations.

The respondent stated:

*In some instances, the choice of colours can represent the flag of a country. For example, one could use red, blue, and white fabrics to reflect the colours of the USA flag. Similarly, colours and elements associated with political parties can also influence costume design (personal communication, fancy dress designer 2, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023).*

This insight demonstrates that colour selection in Fancy Dress is not only a matter of aesthetics but can also carry symbolic meanings tied to national identity, political expression, or social commentary. By incorporating such colours, designers and performers connect their costumes to broader narratives, making the fancy dress tradition a platform for cultural and political dialogue within the community.



*Figure 42: A photograph of Winneba Noble's masqueraders, adorned in wax print cloth of the NDC in 2012. Source: (Micots, 2012, retrieved from online on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)*

The analysis of trends in colour within the Winneba Fancy Dress festival reveals that colours often serve as a medium for symbolic expression, extending beyond aesthetics to communicate affiliations, identities, and societal commentary. Designers and participants sometimes use colours to represent national identity, political ideologies, or other social narratives. A clear example of this phenomenon occurred during the 2012 Winneba Masquerade Festival, where the Noble Group paraded four troupes dressed in wax print cloth featuring the logo and colours of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The participants further emphasized their affiliation by carrying NDC-branded umbrellas, as shown in the image. This visual representation underscored the group's support for the party ahead of the then-upcoming general elections. The dominant **red, green, white, and black** colours reflect the branding of the NDC political party, showcasing a strong statement of allegiance. The use of matching costumes and branded umbrellas creates a unified and striking visual appeal, highlighting the group's identity. By incorporating political symbols, the group transformed their costumes into

a platform for engagement in political discourse, demonstrating how fancy dress can reflect current socio-political contexts.



**Figure 43:** A photograph of a masquerader costumed in the Ghana flag colors depicting nationalism through colours from the 2022 Winneba Masquerade Festival. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)



**Figure 44:** An image of a masquerader adorned in costumes made of Ghana Flag colours and a headdress of the 'Coat of Arms' displaying patriotism and nationalism in Winneba. Masquerade festival. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)

The images analyzed above (fig. 43 and Fig. 44) reflect the evolving trends in colour choices within the Fancy Dress festival in Winneba. Respondents indicated that colour is an essential element in costume design, often reflecting deeper social, cultural, and national symbolism. According to Fancy Dresser 1, colour choices for costumes are sometimes determined by group leaders, such as godfathers or presidents, to unify a team under a collective identity or theme. The images illustrate how fancy dress groups use national colours as a form of symbolic representation. Costumes designed with the red, yellow, and green colours of the Ghanaian flag, with the black star prominently displayed, underline a sense of patriotism and pride in Ghana's sovereignty. In fig. 40, the dominant use of red, yellow, and green, combined with large wings featuring the coat of arms, reflects the group's intention to celebrate the cultural identity of Ghana.

In Fig. 41, the inclusion of elaborate accessories, including headdresses and feathers in national colours, further emphasizes nationalism while showcasing artistic innovation. The trends in colour choice often extend beyond aesthetics. The adoption of colours to depict the Ghanaian coat of arms or the national flag represents a visual commentary on national pride and unity. Respondents also mentioned that these costumes are often used during special events or years of heightened nationalism, such as election years, independence anniversaries, or major festivals. Respondents noted that within Fancy Dress groups, leaders play a key role in deciding the colour scheme. Colours are not only used for character portrayal but also for creating distinct group identities that set them apart during competitions. The designs observed in the images combine both traditional materials and modern techniques, showcasing dynamic shifts in costume creation over time.

#### ***4.3.4 Trends in tools/equipment used in the production of Fancy Dress costumes***

The study revealed significant trends in the tools and techniques used for the production of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru, reflecting both traditional practices and modern technological advancements. Since its inception in the 1950s, Fancy Dress culture in Swedru and Winneba has witnessed remarkable transformations in costume design, including the tools, equipment, and methods used in production. Respondents emphasized that the creation of Fancy Dress costume designs has partially adopted tools traditionally used in conventional fashion design. These tools have remained consistent over the years but have also evolved to incorporate newer technological advancements. The primary tools identified by respondents include: measuring tape, used for taking body measurements to ensure the accuracy of costume fit. Scissors are essential for cutting fabrics, trimming edges, and refining design details. Safety pins for temporarily holding costume parts during construction before final stitching. Lastly, the sewing

machines are the main tool in the production process, used for stitching fabric pieces into complete costume forms. The respondents further noted that while the core tools remain unchanged, the sewing machine, a critical tool in costume production, has evolved significantly with technological advancements. Initially, manual sewing machines were widely used. However, recent developments have seen the introduction of electric and computerized sewing machines that improve precision, speed, and efficiency in stitching complex designs. These modern machines allow fancy dress designers to create more intricate patterns, finish costumes faster, and achieve higher levels of quality and durability. Alongside traditional tools, designers now incorporate specialized tools to enhance costume creation, particularly in decorative and structural elements. For instance:

- **Glue Guns** – Used for attaching embellishments such as sequins, feathers, beads, and other decorative materials.
- **Beading Tools** – Facilitate precise placement of beads to add intricate detailing.
- **Wire and Frame Structures** – Utilized for constructing large, elaborate designs like wings, masks, and headdresses that are prominent in Fancy Dress culture.

One respondent, Fancy Dressmaker 1, revealed that the use of tools and equipment in the production of Fancy Dress costumes has undergone gradual changes over the years. According to him, most Fancy Dress designers and makers relied heavily on the traditional ‘Singer’ sewing machine for nearly a decade. However, recent developments have seen some designers acquiring modern sewing machines, which are more efficient and precise for costume production.

He further emphasized that within the Fancy Dress tradition;

*“There is a strong generational transfer of craft. Many older Fancy Dress designers pass on their sewing skills, tools, and equipment to their family members, ensuring the continuation of the craft. These tools, such as the old ‘Singer’ machines, are often regarded as ancestral artifacts that hold significant cultural and historical value within the Fancy Dress practice (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 1, 12th September 2023).*

This finding highlights the duality of tradition and modernity in the production of fancy dress costumes, where older tools coexist alongside modern technological advancements, reflecting a balance between heritage preservation and innovation.

#### ***4.3.5 Trends in techniques in the production of Fancy Dress costumes***

The study's findings revealed that the production of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru involves a meticulous combination of creativity, skill, and hard work, reflecting the competitive nature of the Fancy Dress festival. Designers approach the creation of these costumes by integrating principles and techniques commonly used in conventional fashion design, such as pattern-making, stitching, and embellishment. The process demands a high level of artistry and innovation, as every Fancy Dress group aspires to stand out and win accolades for having the best costumes. This competitive drive fuels the exploration of advanced techniques and detailed craftsmanship, ensuring that each costume embodies uniqueness, vibrancy, and precision. Thus, the creation of Fancy Dress costumes is not merely about sewing garments but rather producing pieces of art that celebrate cultural identity and communal pride. Fancy Dress Designer 3 revealed during an interview that the competitive nature of the Fancy Dress festival fosters a sense of secrecy in the design and sewing of costumes.

He stated that:

*Due to the rivalry competitions among the Fancy Dress groups within the practicing towns, the designing and sewing of the costumes are done in secrecy. Each group has its designer or tailor, who may either be a group member or*

*someone specifically hired for the production of the costumes* (Interview with Fancy Dress Designer 3, 20th August 2023).

According to Fancy Dress Designer 3, designers often reside in the group's family house throughout the entire production period until the costumes are fully completed and ready for the carnival or competition. This practice ensures the confidentiality and timely completion of costumes, which are central to the competitive nature of the festival. Fancy Dressmaker 1 further recounted that the selection of colours and costume style is primarily determined by the group leader or godfather. The leader also dictates the number of performers who will wear the costumes. Failure to comply with these choices can lead to disciplinary actions, including expulsion or other forms of punishment imposed by the group leadership. The production process involves collaboration among three key players: the fancy dress designer, the group leader/godfather, and the fancy dresser. The designer, who often doubles as the dressmaker, is responsible for both designing and sewing the costumes. While the choice of colours is largely determined by the group leader or dresser, the designer utilizes creative skills to incorporate patterns, colour combinations, and decorative elements, resulting in unique and exciting costume designs.

Fancy Dressmaker 3 states that;

*The normal sewing knowledge is similar to the production of Fancy Dress costume design; the process is considered quite time-consuming and laborious as compared to the conventional style of sewing* (personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

The study revealed that the craft of designing Fancy Dress costumes has been a distinct and specialized talent within the Fancy Dress community for decades. According to Fancy Dressmaker 2, sewing Fancy Dress costumes requires familiarity with the culture and its dressing styles. He explained that individuals unfamiliar with the Fancy Dress

tradition often struggle to produce the costumes effectively, even if they possess conventional tailoring skills.

Fancy Dressmaker 2 further recounted that;

*...most conventional tailors and seamstresses say that they see the Fancy Dress costume production to be painstaking and laborious because a designer has to go through a lot of activities before producing one costume, which will even take 3-4 days to complete* (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 2, August 5, 2023).

This response aligns with Wild (2020), who asserts that Fancy Dress items are frequently hand-made and involve many hours of labor to produce. Wild emphasizes that the production process often incorporates a bricolage of materials, showcasing not only immense creativity but also a high degree of technical skill in their assembly and design. It also highlights how fancy dress designers and makers are highly esteemed within the practicing towns of fancy dress tradition due to the technical expertise and creativity required in producing the costumes. Their ability to integrate cultural elements, innovative designs, and meticulous attention to detail underscores their indispensable role in sustaining the Fancy Dress tradition in Winneba and Swedru. The respondents revealed that the techniques involved in the production of Fancy Dress costumes have evolved over the decades, becoming more elaborate and sophisticated to reflect the changing dynamics of design and creativity. The techniques utilized largely depend on the style of the costume being created, ranging from simple designs to highly intricate patterns. An observation of Fancy Dress costume designs indicates the widespread use of sewing techniques such as *pleating*, *appliqué*, *stitching*, and *patchwork*, which are essential in achieving the desired aesthetic appeal of the costumes. These techniques are employed to create vibrant and visually appealing designs that captivate both participants and spectators.

Fancy Dressmaker 3 recounted that:

*...the beauty of every costume (Simple Dress) is seen in how carefully the patchwork of coloured fabrics is done to be attractive to viewers and spectators. In designing the Simple Dress, one must employ a lot of techniques and styles to make the costume extremely beautiful since all groups are dressing up in the Simple Dress costumes (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 3, August 2023).*

From the 1950s to 2022, the production of Fancy Dress costumes has consistently relied on these core techniques. However, advancements in technology and the availability of diverse materials have allowed designers to refine these methods, enabling them to produce costumes with greater precision and creativity. While traditional hand-sewing techniques remain integral, contemporary tools like modern sewing machines have enhanced efficiency without compromising the rich artistic traditions. The combination of traditional craftsmanship and innovative techniques has positioned Fancy Dress costume production as a unique art form, requiring skill, patience, and a deep understanding of the culture's aesthetic values. This ongoing evolution underscores the dedication of Fancy Dress designers in Winneba and Swedru to maintaining the visual splendor of their craft. In the earlier decades, Fancy Dress costume production relied heavily on hand-sewing techniques and manual skill. Techniques such as *pleating*, *appliqué*, *stitching*, and *patchwork* were predominant in costume creation. These methods involved detailed handwork to combine colorful fabrics, producing vibrant and intricate designs. At this stage, the costumes were predominantly made by individuals who had acquired the craft through observation, practice, and generational knowledge transfer within their family or group structures.

Respondent Fancy Dressmaker 3 emphasized the importance of traditional elements in costume creation, stating:

...elements of a good costume must include the badge, zig-zag, pleats, stripes, appliqués, and machine-embroidered stitched lines to create movement and emphasis in the costume (personal communication, Fancy Dressmaker 15<sup>th</sup>, September 2023).

The use of *pleating* added texture and dimension to the costumes, while *zig-zag stitching* and *appliqué* helped incorporate detailed designs, giving each costume a unique aesthetic identity. Patchwork was particularly significant, as it allowed designers to combine multiple colors and fabrics to create patterns that symbolized group unity or creativity. From the 1990s onward, technological advancements gradually influenced the production of Fancy Dress costumes. Although the core techniques of *pleating*, *appliqué*, and *patchwork* remained central, there was an increased use of sewing machines to enhance efficiency and precision in production. Respondents noted that traditional ‘Singer’ sewing machines were widely adopted during this period, as they allowed designers to complete intricate stitching more quickly. In the current period, from the 2010s to 2022, Fancy Dress costume production has become even more sophisticated, blending traditional techniques with modern advancements. Designers now have access to modern sewing machines, embroidery machines, and a wider variety of materials such as synthetic fabrics, feathers, sequins, and reflective elements, which enhance the overall visual appeal of the costumes. Respondents revealed that contemporary costume designs emphasize movement, colour interplay, and group symbolism. Techniques such as *machine embroidery* allow for intricate detailing that adds texture and visual impact. Appliqué and patchwork remain critical, but their execution has been improved through modern tools, enabling faster and more precise production. Moreover, modern costume designs now incorporate structural elements like 3D embellishments, wings, and exaggerated headdresses to amplify the dramatic

effect during performances. The inclusion of *pleats* and *zig-zag stitching* has been refined, enhancing the flow and dynamism of the costumes as performers move.

#### **4.4 Impact of Fancy Dress on the Fashion Industry in Ghana.**

The study explored the views of respondents regarding the impact of Fancy Dress designs on the fashion industry and art education in Ghana, particularly in relation to the Winneba and Swedru Fancy Dress festivals. Findings revealed that Fancy Dress designs play a significant role in influencing both creative and educational spheres. The impact of these designs is multifaceted, encompassing positive contributions and challenges that affect the local fashion industry and art practices. Fancy Dress festivals represent a unique artistic convergence, combining elements of the visual arts and the performing arts. This fusion not only promotes creative expression but also inspires innovation in costume-making and fashion design. By showcasing elaborate and colorful costumes, the festivals have become platforms for artistic experimentation and skill development, fostering a distinctive cultural identity within the towns. The study established seven key impacted areas in the fashion industry, namely;

- Creativity and innovation
- Economic impact
- Market trends and Consumer Influence
- Diversification of Designs
- Intra Cross-cultural fertilization
- Self-expression and Identity
- Stimulation of nationalism

#### *4.4.1 Creativity and Innovation*

The practice, which involves individuals dressing up in colourful costumes and parading through the streets, showcasing their creativity, and celebrating their culture, with its ability has promoted creativity and innovation among individuals, especially the youth, since its inception in Ghana.

In an interview with one respondent, a fashion practitioner, he stated that;

*The introduction of fancy dress in Ghana has not only shaped the aesthetic aspect or path of the celebration in our community, but costume designers, due to the challenge of always emerging the best and first in ranking after display and performance are compelled to develop new and innovative designs all the time... so all the time, fancy costume designers are in search of innovative and creative ways of doing things (personal communication, Fashion Practitioner 1, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2023).*

The statement of respondent Fashion Practitioner 1 is in tandem with the assertion of Rajesh (2009) that Fancy Dress costume design requires intensive creative ability, just like any other costumes designed purposely for characters, events, and scenes. He further recounts that Fancy costume designing requires careful planning to execute aesthetically to appeal to the physical, emotional, and psychological conscience of the wearer and his viewers. The practice of Fancy dress creation provides an avenue for young people to express themselves creatively and develop their artistic skills. As revealed by respondent Fashion Practitioner 2, designers are always encouraged to design and make their costumes, which requires them to think outside the box, fostering creativity and pushing the boundaries of conventional fashion. This can lead to innovative designs and concepts in the fashion industry.

#### *4.4.2 Economic Impact*

The impact of Fancy Dress on the economic growth of Ghana was agreed consensually by all respondents. They asserted that the production of the fancy dress is a chain thus,

right from the acquisition of fabrics from merchandised shops to the final costuming by fancy designers contributes to the economic leverage of individuals and the country's GDP. Several people benefit from the chain through job creation and wealth creation that goes to a large extent to impact economic growth.

In an interview with the respondent, Fashion Practitioner 1 posited that;

*Production of fancy dress and growing an economy work hand in hand... every economic growth is pivoted on local economies, in simple terms, when local economies grow, the larger economy is boosted. Fancy dress design requires a lot of textile materials that are procured from the textile industries or retail outlets. The designers employ people who are paid to make a living. Most of these fancy dresses are sometimes exported to foreign countries, which generates income for these designers (personal communication, Fashion practitioner 1, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2023).*

This corroborates the assertion of Roberts (2023) that fashion designing, a creative realm where fabric and style intertwine, holds a profound importance beyond aesthetics. From embodying cultural heritage to catalyzing economic growth, fancy dress design extends beyond shaping trends, fostering global connections, and championing sustainability. Increased interest in fancy dress contributes largely to economic growth within the fashion industry. Fashion Practitioner 3 admitted that during the period of costume production in the various practicing towns, there is a higher demand for diverse materials, accessories, and styles, stimulating various sectors of the fashion market. Notwithstanding, the skills and services of tailors and designers are needed, creating job opportunities for people to gain income.

Fashion Historian mentioned that,

*...Fancy dress culture or festivals have created jobs for the youth. During the festive periods, dressers commission fancy dress costume makers and designers to create and bring out unique costume designs themed for the occasion. This aspect of the Fancy dress practice summons permanent or temporary full-time and part-time jobs for creative youths in most of the practicing towns and across the country (personal communication, Fashion historian, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023).*

Also, the fancy dress as a performative art pulls people from afar as a tourist attraction, which boosts the local economy. In this context, hotels, restaurants, car services, and rentals are positively affected by these occasions.

#### ***4.4.3 Market Trends and Consumer Influence***

The study revealed that Fancy Dress influences mainstream fashion trends in Ghana. Themes and styles popularized through fancy costume events find their way into everyday fashion practices, thereby impacting consumer choices. As shown in *Figure 39* below, it indicates that Fancy Dress has a great impact on the influx of fashion styles and consumer choices as designers blend past and present fashion knowledge in creating aesthetic ones into vogue.



*Figure 45 & 46: A comparative photograph of the fancy dress 'Fametu' costume design and a contemporary fashion dress style. Source: (researcher's field data, retrieved from online on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2023).*

#### ***4.4.4 Diversification of Designs***

The fancy dress allows designers to explore diverse styles and themes that may not be feasible in mainstream fashion. This diversification can attract a wider range of designers to the industry. Due to the rival competition within fancy dress designing, designers are always on the verge of creating diverse styles of designs to image the best

and most creative costume designers or costumiers annually; however, this gives birth to innovative and top-notch designs in the space of the fashion industry.

#### ***4.4.5 Intra-Cross-cultural fertilization***

Fancy dress culture in Ghana has silently crept into the tradition and fashion art of Ghana. Instituted festivals as a result of cultural-colonial links from past experiences have merged with their cultural beliefs and practices that have been passed down to generations to the present time. The respondents largely agreed that Fancy Dress plays a vital role in preserving Ghana's cultural heritage.

According to respondent Art Educator 2;

*The costumes worn during the parade often depict various aspects of Ghanaian culture, including traditional dances, textiles, traditional religious beliefs, music, and folklore. This helps to keep these cultural practices alive and pass them down to future generations (personal communication, Art Educator, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023).*

In terms of education, fancy dress provides an opportunity for teachers to incorporate cultural art philosophies and material cultural elements with symbolic concepts highly revered in their curriculum. Students can learn about the history and significance of different cultural practices and create their costumes based on what they have learned. This helps to make learning more engaging and interactive, enhancing students' understanding and retention of the material. This is evident in performances that were displayed in Winneba's 2018 fancy dress festival.



*Figure 47: A cultural display of royal tradition in the 2018 Winneba's Masquerade Festival. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023).*

As shown in (figure 47), the image portrays a display of traditional royalty and display of the material culture of the people of Ghana, precisely the Akans. The five men dressed in traditional regalia in a toga style, with other ornaments adorned on their bodies. The animal skin and the stool that both the King and the other masquerader sit on symbolize the authority of the chief and his royal family. Also, the linguistic staff represents an emblem of authority and the mouthpiece of the royal family. Also, among the Akan of Ghana, totem plays a significant role in the belief system and family lineage of the people. The linguistic staff represents the clan of the royal family and the philosophical traits of the people or community.

#### **4.4.6 Self-expression and Identity**

Fancy Dress is textile-fashion-performative art that exhibits a platform for individuals to express themselves freely and vocally through their dress styles, dances, and performances to address social, health, educational, political, and economic issues, cling to their identities as Ghanaians through the artifacts used within the community.

One of the respondents of the Art Educators recounted that;

*...designers craft pieces that permit wearers, allowing them to communicate unspoken emotions and affiliations. ...every outfit becomes a declaration of self, a proclamation of belonging, and an assertion of individuality in a diversely vast world (personal communication, Art Educator, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2023).*

This revelation affirms the assertion by academics (Barbieri 2017; Boumaroun 2017; Hann 2017 as cited in Wild, 2020) that reconsideration of the concept of costume demonstrates the various ways in which it is used performatively to articulate people's identities, supports analysis of the effect of fancy dress on wearers and spectators.



*Figure 48: A stilt walker costumed in a traditional woven Kente cloth performing in the Winneba masquerade festival to symbolize national identity through textiles. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023)*

Fancy Dress has played a pivotal role in shaping Ghana's cultural and fashion identity, particularly during the nation-building era under Kwame Nkrumah.

Fashion Historian posited that;

*As part of his broader strategy to establish a Pan-Ghanaian and Pan-African identity, Nkrumah promoted popular art forms, including Fancy Dress, highlife music, and the concert party, as unifying cultural practices. Nkrumah*

*positioned these art forms as “non-tribal” associations, transcending ethnic boundaries and fostering a sense of national cohesion. Fancy Dress, with its vibrant costumes and inclusive performance styles, reflected this vision by merging diverse cultural elements into a singular artistic expression (personal communication, Fashion Historian, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2023).*

This emphasis on a shared identity contributed to the evolution of Fancy Dress as both a cultural tradition and an artistic practice, which continues to influence the Ghanaian fashion industry today. Through its ability to blend tradition with modernity, Fancy Dress not only preserved Ghanaian heritage but also inspired contemporary fashion by promoting innovative designs rooted in collective cultural identity.

#### ***4.4.7 Stimulation of nationalism***

The Fancy Dress tradition in Winneba and Swedru significantly contributes to fostering cultural pride and a strong sense of national identity. By celebrating Ghanaian heritage through vibrant costumes, performances, and artistic expressions, the practice reinforces individual and collective pride in cultural identity. Additionally, fancy dress plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion and community building. The festivals bring together people from diverse backgrounds, creating a sense of unity and shared purpose. Through collaborative efforts in costume production, rehearsals, and performances, fancy dress fosters interpersonal connections and strengthens community ties. This unifying and celebratory nature of fancy dress not only enhances its cultural significance but also impacts the Ghanaian fashion industry by inspiring designs that reflect collective identity, creativity, and inclusivity.



*Figure 49: A masquerader adorned in colours of the Ghana Flag and a headdress designed 'from the Coat of Arms'. The costume symbolizes unity, togetherness, and a strong sense of national belonging that promotes national development. Source: (Winneba masquerade festival Facebook page, retrieved online on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023).*

Also, Fancy dress influences and shapes appearance with a significant impact on the construction of social identity (Arvanitidou & Gasouka, 2013), delegating to others Self-information about the economic and social situation of the wearer, occupation, and nationality, but also individual properties and values (Arvanitidou & Gasouka, 2013).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Overview**

This chapter provides an abridged version of the entire research write-up. It presents the summary of the research conducted, conclusions drawn, and recommendations, which are based on the main findings of the study.

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

This study investigates the evolution of Fancy Dress design in Ghana from 1950 to 2022, focusing on its historical foundations and development within key towns known for this craft. The primary objective was to trace the growth of Fancy Dress design, exploring the cultural and historical influences that have shaped its evolution in Ghana. The second objective aimed to analyze the key trends in design aesthetics, color schemes, techniques, and the tools used in creating fancy dress costumes over the period. By examining these elements, the study sought to provide a nuanced understanding of how both traditional and contemporary influences have shaped the design practices in the fancy dress industry. The third objective explored the impact of Fancy Dress design on the broader fashion industry in Ghana. This component examined how fancy dress has influenced local fashion trends and contributed to the cultural and economic landscape of the country's fashion sector. To address these objectives, the study employed a multifaceted data collection approach, including document review, photography, and structured interviews with 15 participants. The sample comprised 11 members of the fancy dress community, as well as two representatives each from the fashion and art industries, selected for their relevance to the topic. Data analysis was conducted using thematic and visual analysis

methodologies, which facilitated a comprehensive examination of the collected data. The findings were presented and discussed in alignment with the research objectives, and statistical tools, including pie charts and tables, were used to enhance the clarity and interpretation of the data.

### **5.1.1 Major Findings**

The design history of Fancy Dress in Ghana, with particular reference to Swedru and Winneba, reflects a dynamic synthesis of indigenous cultural traditions and transnational influences. Emerging between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Fancy Dress developed as a performative street spectacle characterized by masked dancers, elaborate costumes, and brass band accompaniment, serving both recreational and socio-political communicative functions. Rooted in Fante Asafo traditions and Akan Sakrabundi performances, the practice integrated symbolic elements associated with communal protection, moral regulation, and spiritual mediation. Colonial encounters further shaped its evolution, as European carnival aesthetics, introduced by British sailors, Afro-Brazilians, and West Indian troops, were appropriated into local contexts. Early costume designs drew on Victorian and Edwardian fashions, portraying colonial figures and mythic characters as subtle forms of satire and social critique. Over time, these Western forms were indigenized through the incorporation of African motifs, materials, and symbolism, culminating in distinctly localized design traditions such as Winneba's structurally restrained 'Simple Dress' and Swedru's elaborate 'Fametu' style. By the twenty-first century, Fancy Dress had evolved into a competitive and highly expressive art form that combines Afrocentric identity, modern materials, and global influences, using costume and performance to articulate historical memory, cultural values, and contemporary social concerns.

The design history of fancy dress in Ghana, particularly in Swedru and Winneba, represents a unique and dynamic blend of local cultural heritage and global influences. Originating in the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, this vibrant performance art features masked performers in elaborate costumes who parade through the streets accompanied by brass band music. These events serve as both entertainment and platforms for addressing socio-political issues. The Fancy Dress tradition has deep historical roots tied to local Fante Asafo performances, paramilitary groups with religious and communal roles. The tradition also drew international influences from British colonial sailors, Afro-Brazilians, West Indian troops, and other foreigners who introduced European-style carnivals and comedic skits to the Gold Coast. These influences were seamlessly integrated into local cultural practices, creating a hybrid form of performance art.

Initially, the design history of fancy dress in Swedru and Winneba reflected Victorian and Edwardian styles, influenced by European fancy dress traditions. Performers dressed as colonial officials, doctors, nurses, and fictional characters like “Red Indians” and Roman soldiers, symbolizing sophistication and offering subtle critiques of colonial rule. The Sakrabundi tradition, rooted in Akan culture, has been a significant influence on Fancy Dress designs. Characters inspired by Sakrabundi, such as wild animals or bush spirits, symbolized the untamed and served to drive away evil spirits while compelling societal conformity. These themes were carried into Fancy Dress performances, with costumes featuring carved wooden masks, natural fibers, and bold animalistic imagery. However, as the tradition matured, it incorporated African motifs and symbols, including kente patterns and batik prints, blending Western aesthetics with local cultural identity. By the 21st century, Fancy Dress in Swedru and Winneba had fully embraced Afrocentric themes while incorporating modern materials and

global influences. Distinct design styles emerged, such as Winneba's structurally uniform 'Simple Dress' and Swedru's bold and ornate 'Fametu' designs. Modern performances now emphasize cultural storytelling, aesthetic appeal, and social commentary, reflecting a dynamic interplay of tradition and innovation. Costume designs often carried symbolic roles, addressing societal tensions, appeasing ancestors, or celebrating historical events. The tradition's evolution highlights its ability to adapt, using costume and performance to comment on governance, inequality, and social issues. By the 20th century, Fancy Dress in Swedru and Winneba had become a competitive art form, with groups showcasing intricate designs and technical creativity to captivate audiences.

The trends in fancy dress costume designs in Ghana, particularly in Winneba and Swedru, have undergone significant transformations in their costume designs since their emergence. Initially influenced by European fashion and movie characters, early Fancy Dress costumes (1950–1970) reflected Victorian and Edwardian styles, incorporating tailored suits, elaborate dresses, capes, and hats. Performers often depicted archetypes such as colonial officials, professionals (e.g., doctors, nurses), and fictional figures like "Red Indians," Roman soldiers, and Father Christmas. These designs symbolized sophistication while offering subtle commentary on colonial experiences. From the 1980s onward, the Fancy Dress tradition began to incorporate localized cultural elements alongside global influences. African motifs, including kente patterns and batik prints, were blended with Western aesthetics to reflect a growing sense of cultural pride and identity. Costume designs evolved into platforms for social and political commentary, addressing themes such as governance, inequality, and community life through symbolic characters and performances. Hollywood's influence also introduced characters like cowboys, knights, and superheroes, adding theatricality

and fantasy to Fancy Dress displays. By the 21st century, Fancy Dress costume designs expanded significantly, integrating modern themes, global pop culture, and local contexts. Designs now balance character-based portrayals (e.g., superheroes and movie icons) with non-character-based creations that emphasize aesthetic appeal, cultural storytelling, and societal commentary. Innovations in fabric selection, ornamentation, and techniques such as intricate stitching, bold color palettes, and creative embellishments have driven this evolution. Designers increasingly experiment with materials like synthetic fabrics, sequins, feathers, and reflective elements to enhance visual impact. Distinct design styles have emerged in Winneba and Swedru over time. Winneba's "Simple Dress" design, rooted in structural uniformity, incorporates group logos, symbols, and patterns to align with cultural themes and performance messages. In contrast, Swedru's 'Fametu' design is characterized by elaborate craftsmanship, bold ornamentation, and symbols of power, reflecting its innovative approach and emphasis on visual grandeur. Additionally, historical designs such as the 'Cape' or 'Lapelle', the 'Fametu' shoulder style, and the 'Tail Coat' of the 1970s highlight the blend of European influences and localized creativity. The evolution of Fancy Dress designs reflects a dynamic interplay of tradition, innovation, and competition within the Fancy Dress community. Rivalry among groups motivates continuous experimentation and the exploration of new styles and materials. Over time, the integration of local and global influences, combined with artistic ingenuity, has transformed Fancy Dress costumes into vibrant cultural expressions that embody identity, creativity, and societal narratives. The coexistence of Winneba's 'Simple Dress' and Swedru's 'Fametu' designs underscores the balance between preserving tradition and embracing modern innovation, ensuring the tradition's continued relevance and appeal.

The fabric trends in Fancy Dress costumes from Winneba and Swedru provide a compelling narrative of cultural ingenuity, global influence, and economic adaptation. Over the decades, the materials used in costume production have undergone significant transformations, reflecting a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernization. This evolution underscores the creative resilience and cultural pride embedded in the Fancy Dress tradition. Historically, early Fancy Dress costumes relied on readily available and repurposed materials. Local ingenuity was evident in the use of calico, jute bags, rice sacks, and agricultural products to create striking designs. Jute bags, for instance, were widely used in costume construction before the late 1960s, though they were eventually abandoned due to the discomfort caused by their rough texture. Despite these challenges, early costume makers demonstrated exceptional resourcefulness, crafting vibrant and expressive costumes that reflected their environment and cultural identity. The mid-20th century saw significant changes with the introduction of imported fabrics, largely influenced by colonial and post-colonial exchanges. Materials such as satin, lace, brocade, and fine cotton became prominent in costume designs, blending local craftsmanship with European aesthetics. This period also marked the rise of wax prints and appliqué fabrics, which became celebrated for their vibrant colors and intricate patterns. These textiles allowed for a fusion of Ghanaian cultural motifs with global fashion trends, creating costumes that were both culturally resonant and visually captivating. Economic conditions played a crucial role in shaping material choices. During times of scarcity, such as the global economic depression, Fancy Dress designers turned to cost-effective solutions, repurposing household materials or using simple, accessible textiles. Conversely, periods of economic stability enabled the use of luxurious imported fabrics, enhancing the grandeur of the costumes. Advancements in textile production during the 1970s and 1980s introduced more affordable and

versatile options, such as wax prints and synthetic materials, which supported elaborate and colorful designs. By the 1990s and 2000s, technological innovation and globalization significantly influenced the materials used in Fancy Dress costume production. Synthetic fabrics like polyester and nylon became widespread, offering lightweight and durable alternatives to traditional textiles. Embellishments such as metallic threads, sequins, feathers, and reflective fabrics were increasingly incorporated, adding visual complexity and theatrical appeal to the costumes. Recent innovations, including LED lights and 3D-printed accessories, have pushed creative boundaries, blending traditional motifs with futuristic elements. Cultural and aesthetic shifts have further shaped the evolution of Fancy Dress materials. While traditional African motifs like kente patterns and batik prints remain central to the designs, contemporary influences have introduced new dimensions to the art form. Modern Fancy Dress costumes now balance heritage with innovation, reflecting the communities' ability to adapt to changing times while maintaining their cultural essence. Despite growing individualization in fabric selection, many groups still adhere to cohesive themes and color schemes that align with their identity and annual festival themes. The competitive and secretive nature of Fancy Dress traditions in Winneba and Swedru has also influenced material trends. Rivalry among groups has driven designers to source fabrics from exclusive markets in Accra, Togo, and other regions, ensuring uniqueness in their designs. Expensive and high-quality materials, such as polished cotton and imported satin, are often chosen to enhance the costumes' visual impact and prestige. The secrecy surrounding fabric sourcing and costume design underscores the importance of maintaining a competitive edge while upholding the artistic and symbolic integrity of the tradition. Groups like the Red Indians exemplify the tension between modernization and cultural preservation. While many participants now independently

choose their materials, the Red Indians enforce strict adherence to approved fabric choices and design standards, emphasizing the importance of tradition. Violations of these rules can result in penalties, demonstrating the group's commitment to preserving the historical essence of Fancy Dress.

Colour trends of fancy dress in Ghana play a significant role in fancy dress costume design, serving as a key medium for character representation, group identity, and artistic expression. Whether depicting indigenous leaders, European-inspired figures, or modern pop culture icons, the careful selection of colours ensures visual clarity and thematic authenticity. Fancy Dress groups, often led by team leaders, adopt unified colour schemes to emphasize cohesion, pride, and distinctiveness during festivals and competitions. These colour choices reflect broader themes such as national identity, victory, spirituality, or cultural symbolism, while enhancing the storytelling aspect of the performances. The findings revealed that while there are no formalized colour associations tied to specific clans or groups, certain colours, such as red, gold, black, white, and blue, have consistently appeared throughout the history of Fancy Dress design. Each of these colours carries symbolic significance: red represents strength, vitality, and sacrifice; gold signifies royalty, prestige, and wealth; black conveys protection and ancestral connections; and white symbolizes purity and spiritual harmony. Bold and contrasting colour palettes not only reflect indigenous aesthetics but also external influences, illustrating the evolving nature of Fancy Dress Art. Additionally, the use of colour is sometimes influenced by external symbols, such as national flags or political affiliations, showcasing the broader cultural and societal narratives embedded in costume design. The recurring and innovative arrangement of colours underscores their vital role in reinforcing group identity, artistic creativity, and cultural storytelling within the fancy dress tradition in Winneba and Swedru. These

findings highlight how colours are integral to expressing both traditional and contemporary themes, while maintaining the visual splendor and cultural significance of the practice.

***What are the trends in tools/equipment used in the production of fancy dress costumes?***

The production of fancy dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru has undergone significant transformations since its emergence in the 1950s, blending traditional craftsmanship with modern innovations. Initially rooted in manual techniques, such as hand-sewing and simple stitching, costume creation relied heavily on tools like scissors, measuring tapes, safety pins, and basic 'Singer' sewing machines. Over time, advancements in tools, equipment, and materials have significantly refined production processes, enhancing precision, speed, and creativity. The evolution of techniques reflects a shift from manual methods to the adoption of electric and computerized sewing machines, which improved efficiency and enabled intricate designs. Specialized tools, such as glue guns for attaching decorative elements like sequins and feathers, beading tools for embellishments, and wire frames for constructing elaborate structures like wings and headdresses, have expanded the creative possibilities for designers. By the 2010s, the introduction of embroidery machines and access to a broader range of materials such as synthetic fabrics, reflective elements, and sequins further refined costume designs, enabling vibrant and visually striking creations. Driven by the competitive nature of Fancy Dress festivals, designers constantly innovate, pushing the boundaries of artistry and craftsmanship to produce standout costumes. The practice fosters creativity, skill, and cultural expression, reflecting a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. The evolution of techniques highlights the adaptability and dedication of Fancy Dress designers, ensuring the enduring visual appeal and cultural

significance of the tradition while contributing to the broader Ghanaian fashion industry.

The trends in techniques used in the production of Fancy dress costume designs from the 1950s to 2022 in Winneba and Swedru have evolved significantly while maintaining their foundational techniques. Core methods such as pleating, appliqué, stitching, and patchwork have remained central to the craft, reflecting its deep-rooted traditional essence. These techniques, emphasizing detailed handwork and vibrant patterns, have been passed down through generations, symbolizing group unity and cultural identity. In the earlier decades, costume production relied heavily on manual methods, with hand-sewing and intricate craftsmanship being the primary techniques. Designers utilized patchwork to combine colorful fabrics, while pleating and zig-zag stitching added texture and movement to the costumes. Appliqué further enhanced the visual complexity, enabling the creation of bold and intricate designs. From the 1990s onward, technological advancements influenced costume production. Modern sewing machines were introduced, increasing efficiency and precision while preserving the artistic integrity of traditional methods. The integration of machine embroidery and other contemporary tools allowed designers to refine their craft further, enhancing the quality and aesthetic appeal of costumes. This evolution reflects the adaptability and creativity of Fancy Dress designers, who skillfully combine traditional craftsmanship with innovative techniques. Their dedication ensures the continued vibrancy and cultural significance of Fancy Dress costume production, positioning it as both a unique art form and a dynamic expression of cultural heritage.

The impact of fancy dress on the Ghanaian fashion industry, marked by its vibrant costumes and festive parades, has played a pivotal role in fostering creativity and

innovation within the Ghanaian fashion industry, particularly among the youth. The competitive nature of the tradition drives designers to continually develop unique and intricate costumes, demanding exceptional creativity, meticulous planning, and attention to detail. This artistic process ensures that costumes resonate both emotionally and visually with audiences and wearers. By serving as a platform for artistic expression, Fancy Dress encourages designers to explore unconventional ideas, think innovatively, and push the boundaries of traditional fashion. Consequently, the practice has contributed to the emergence of novel designs and concepts, enriching Ghana's broader fashion landscape and positioning Fancy Dress as a catalyst for design innovation and creative growth. The Fancy Dress tradition plays a significant role in Ghana's economic growth by supporting a dynamic production chain. From fabric acquisition through merchants to the final costume creation by designers, each stage stimulates economic activity, contributing to both individual livelihoods and the country's GDP. This process generates employment opportunities for textile suppliers, tailors, designers, and artisans, while also fostering wealth creation and supporting local economies. Respondents unanimously highlighted the Fancy Dress industry as a key driver of job creation and economic empowerment, underscoring its broader economic impact beyond its cultural and artistic significance. The study revealed that Fancy Dress significantly influences mainstream fashion trends in Ghana. Themes, styles, and design elements showcased during Fancy Dress events often inspire everyday fashion, shaping consumer preferences and trends. Designers incorporate both traditional and contemporary fashion knowledge to create aesthetic designs that appeal to modern tastes. This blending of past and present styles highlights the dynamic role of Fancy Dress in driving innovation and influencing the evolution of fashion in Ghana. The fancy dress tradition provides designers with the opportunity to explore diverse styles

and themes that may not be achievable within mainstream fashion. This creative freedom fosters innovation and attracts a broader range of designers to the industry. The competitive nature of fancy dress events drives designers to continually develop unique and cutting-edge designs to distinguish themselves as the most creative costume makers. This constant push for originality and excellence results in the emergence of innovative, high-quality designs that enrich the Ghanaian fashion industry and expand its creative landscape. The Fancy Dress culture in Ghana has become an integral part of the nation's tradition and fashion arts, blending cultural-colonial influences with indigenous beliefs and practices that have been passed down through generations. The fancy dress tradition plays a vital role in preserving Ghana's cultural heritage. The costumes showcased during parades reflect key elements of Ghanaian culture, including traditional dances, textiles, music, religious beliefs, and folklore, ensuring these practices remain relevant and are transmitted to future generations. Additionally, Fancy Dress contributes to education by providing a platform for teachers to incorporate cultural art philosophies and symbolic material elements into their curriculum. Students gain a deeper understanding of Ghanaian history and cultural practices through hands-on learning experiences, such as designing and creating costumes. This interactive approach enhances engagement, fosters creativity, and strengthens cultural awareness among the youth. Fancy Dress, as a textile-fashion-performative art, provides a dynamic platform for individuals to express themselves creatively and address various social, health, educational, political, and economic issues. Through vibrant costume designs, dances, and performances, participants engage in storytelling and social commentary while maintaining their Ghanaian cultural identities. The artifacts and symbols integrated into the costumes reflect the community's heritage, reinforcing a sense of identity and pride. This fusion of art,

fashion, and performance underscores Fancy Dress as a significant contributor to Ghana's cultural expression and fashion innovation. The Fancy Dress tradition in Winneba and Swedru plays a crucial role in fostering cultural pride and national identity. It has showcased Ghanaian heritage through vibrant costumes, performances, and artistic expressions, and the tradition strengthened both individual and collective pride in cultural identity. Furthermore, Fancy Dress promotes social cohesion and community building by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, fostering unity and shared purpose. Collaborative efforts in costume production, rehearsals, and performances create interpersonal connections and strengthen community ties. This unifying and celebratory nature of Fancy Dress inspires designs that reflect collective identity, creativity, and inclusivity, significantly influencing and enriching the Ghanaian fashion industry.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

The design history of Fancy Dress in Swedru and Winneba is a testament to the dynamic interplay between local traditions and global influences, creating a vibrant and evolving cultural expression. Rooted in the Fante Asafo paramilitary performances, which carried religious and communal significance, Fancy Dress incorporated foreign elements introduced by British colonial sailors, Afro-Brazilians, and West Indian troops during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. These external influences blended seamlessly with local practices, establishing a hybrid performance art that reflects the ingenuity and adaptability of the communities involved. In its early stages, Fancy Dress costumes mirrored Victorian and Edwardian styles, portraying officials, professionals, and fictional characters. These designs served both as entertainment and as subtle critiques of governance. The integration of the Sakrabundi tradition further enriched the performances, introducing symbolic representations of wild animals and spirits,

which embodied societal values and spiritual themes. Over time, Fancy Dress costumes evolved to incorporate Afrocentric motifs such as kente patterns and batik prints, celebrating African heritage while maintaining a connection to global influences. By the 21st century, the tradition had embraced modern materials, innovative techniques, and diverse themes, balancing character portrayals with cultural storytelling and social commentary. Distinct design styles emerged, with Winneba favoring the structured ‘Simple Dress’ and Swedru showcasing the bold and elaborate ‘Fametu’ designs, each reflecting the unique artistry and creativity of their communities. Today, Fancy Dress in Swedru and Winneba stands as a competitive and celebrated cultural festival, combining heritage with innovation. It continues to serve as a platform for addressing social and political issues, preserving cultural identity, and fostering community cohesion. The enduring appeal and adaptability of Fancy Dress highlight its significance as a vibrant expression of Ghanaian culture, history, and creativity.

The trends in fancy dress costume designs in Ghana, particularly in Winneba and Swedru, initially inspired by European Victorian and Edwardian fashion, early fancy dress costumes (1950–1970) reflected tailored sophistication, often portraying colonial archetypes and fictional characters. From the 1980s onward, Fancy Dress began to embrace localized cultural elements alongside global influences, blending African motifs like kente patterns and batik prints with Western aesthetics. Hollywood-inspired characters, including superheroes and cowboys, added theatrical and fantastical dimensions to the tradition, broadening its appeal. By the 21st century, Fancy Dress costume designs had become a dynamic fusion of modern themes, global pop culture, and local storytelling. Innovations in materials, techniques, and embellishments, such as the use of sequins, feathers, and synthetic fabrics, enhanced the visual impact and complexity of the costumes. Distinct regional styles emerged, with Winneba’s ‘Simple

Dress' emphasizing structural uniformity and cultural messaging, while Swedru's 'Fametu' design highlighted elaborate craftsmanship and bold ornamentation. The evolution of Fancy Dress costume designs reflects a dynamic interplay of tradition, innovation, and community rivalry, driving continuous experimentation and creativity. This vibrant art form embodies the cultural identity, resilience, and creativity of its communities, balancing the preservation of historical influences with the embrace of contemporary innovation. Through its transformative journey, Fancy Dress remains a powerful expression of societal narratives, artistic ingenuity, and cultural pride.

The evolution of fabric trends in Fancy Dress costumes from Winneba and Swedru reflects a remarkable journey of cultural preservation, adaptability, and innovation. From the reliance on local and repurposed materials like calico and jute bags in the early years to the adoption of imported and synthetic fabrics, this progression highlights the resourcefulness and creativity of Fancy Dress designers. Economic conditions and global influences have shaped material choices, with periods of scarcity fostering ingenuity and times of prosperity enabling more elaborate and luxurious designs. The seamless integration of traditional African motifs with contemporary fabrics and embellishments underscores the dynamic nature of Fancy Dress costume production. Advancements in textile technology, such as the use of LED lights and 3D-printed accessories, have pushed creative boundaries while maintaining the cultural essence of this vibrant tradition. Furthermore, the competitive and secretive nature of Fancy Dress has driven innovation and exclusivity in fabric selection, ensuring costumes remain distinctive and impactful. Despite modernization, many Fancy Dress groups continue to uphold traditional standards, demonstrating a delicate balance between heritage and innovation. This adaptability has not only sustained the artistic vibrancy of Fancy Dress but also reinforced its significance as a cornerstone of cultural identity and pride in

Ghana. Ultimately, the evolution of fabric trends exemplifies the resilience and ingenuity of the Fancy Dress tradition, ensuring its enduring relevance in a rapidly changing world.

The trends in the use of colour in Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru reveal its profound significance as a medium of character representation, group identity, and cultural storytelling. Over time, colour has emerged as a powerful tool for conveying themes of national pride, spiritual harmony, and artistic expression. Unified colour schemes adopted by Fancy Dress groups reflect their cohesion and distinctiveness during festivals and competitions. Colours such as red, gold, black, white, and blue consistently appear in costume designs, each carrying symbolic meanings deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual narratives. Red signifies strength and sacrifice; gold, royalty and wealth; black, protection and ancestral connections; and white, purity and spiritual harmony. These colours are used creatively to enhance the visual impact of performances while honoring indigenous aesthetics and embracing external influences. The bold and contrasting palettes demonstrate the evolving nature of Fancy Dress art, blending traditional symbolism with modern influences from national flags, political themes, and global trends. The strategic use of colour reinforces group pride, artistic ingenuity, and the storytelling essence of performances, bridging the past and present of Fancy Dress traditions. The findings underscore the integral role of colour in maintaining the visual splendor and cultural significance of Fancy Dress, while enabling performers to express both timeless and contemporary themes. Through innovative arrangements and symbolic associations, colour remains a vibrant and essential element in preserving and evolving this unique cultural practice.

The production of Fancy Dress costumes in Winneba and Swedru has experienced a dynamic evolution, transitioning from traditional manual techniques to advanced, innovative processes. This transformation reflects a balance between preserving cultural craftsmanship and embracing modernity to meet the artistic and competitive demands of Fancy Dress festivals. In the early days (1950s–1970s), costume production relied on basic tools like scissors, measuring tapes, safety pins, and manual 'Singer' sewing machines. The methods centered on hand-sewing, simple stitching, and patchwork, demonstrating the ingenuity of early designers despite limited resources. As technology advanced, electric and computerized sewing machines became integral to the process, allowing for greater precision, efficiency, and complexity in costume design. Specialized tools, such as glue guns, beading tools, and wire frames, have expanded the creative scope of costume-making, enabling the incorporation of intricate details like sequins, feathers, and elaborate structural components. Techniques such as pleating, appliqué, and embroidery remain foundational, enriched by the use of modern embroidery machines and a diverse range of materials like synthetic fabrics and reflective elements. The competitive nature of Fancy Dress festivals has spurred continuous innovation, pushing designers to experiment with tools and techniques that enhance visual impact and storytelling. This adaptability ensures the tradition's relevance while contributing to the broader Ghanaian fashion industry. The trends in tools and equipment reflect the dedication and ingenuity of Fancy Dress designers. Their ability to blend traditional craftsmanship with modern technologies has sustained the cultural significance and artistic vibrancy of Fancy Dress, showcasing the enduring legacy and evolving creativity of this unique performance art.

The evolution of Fancy Dress costume production in Winneba and Swedru from the 1950s to 2022 highlights a remarkable balance between tradition and innovation. While

core techniques such as pleating, appliqué, stitching, and patchwork have remained integral, the incorporation of modern tools and technologies has enhanced efficiency and precision without compromising the cultural and artistic values of the craft. This fusion of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary advancements underscores the creativity and adaptability of Fancy Dress designers, enabling them to produce costumes that are both visually stunning and culturally meaningful. By preserving foundational techniques while embracing new methods, the designers ensure the enduring relevance and vibrancy of Fancy Dress costume production as a unique art form and a dynamic representation of cultural heritage. Their work continues to celebrate group identity, unity, and artistic excellence, solidifying the Fancy Dress tradition's role as a cornerstone of Ghanaian cultural expression.

The Fancy Dress tradition has significantly influenced the Ghanaian fashion industry by fostering creativity and innovation. Its competitive nature compels designers to push the boundaries of traditional fashion, leading to the emergence of unique and cutting-edge designs that enrich the industry's creative landscape. The fancy dress tradition supports a dynamic production chain that stimulates economic activity and generates employment for various stakeholders, including fabric merchants, tailors, and artisans. This ecosystem contributes to Ghana's economic growth, emphasizing fancy dress as both a cultural and economic driver. Themes, styles, and design elements from fancy dress costumes frequently inspire everyday fashion trends in Ghana. By blending traditional aesthetics with contemporary designs, fancy dress bridges the gap between cultural heritage and modern fashion, shaping consumer preferences and driving the evolution of Ghanaian fashion. Fancy dress plays a pivotal role in preserving Ghanaian cultural heritage by incorporating traditional textiles, dances, folklore, and music into costume designs and performances. Additionally, it serves as an educational tool,

fostering cultural awareness among the youth through hands-on experiences in costume creation and cultural storytelling. Fancy dress serves as a dynamic platform for self-expression and storytelling. Through costumes and performances, participants address social, political, and economic issues while celebrating Ghanaian cultural identity. This fusion of art, fashion, and performance reinforces community pride and individual identity. The collaborative nature of fancy dress production and performances fosters social cohesion by bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds. This shared effort promotes unity, inclusivity, and collective identity, strengthening community ties and enriching the cultural fabric of Ghana. Fancy dress reflects a seamless integration of traditional craftsmanship and modern innovation. By preserving foundational techniques while embracing new technologies and materials, the tradition maintains its cultural authenticity while driving fashion innovation in Ghana. Through vibrant costumes and performances, fancy dress showcases Ghanaian heritage and promotes national identity. The tradition strengthens cultural pride and highlights Ghana's unique artistic contributions, solidifying its influence on both local and global fashion narratives.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

To preserve the cultural heritage of Fancy Dress masquerading, fancy dress groups at Winneba and Swedru should advocate for dedicated heritage sites, museums, or archives to be established to safeguard costumes and related artifacts. This will ensure that the tradition is preserved for future generations. Art and Fashion historians should consider documenting fancy dress costume design in other parts of Ghana where the art and practice of fancy dress is prevalent. The research further recommends that fancy dress devotees and other stakeholders should collaborate to document the evolution of fancy dress costumes, capturing the history, techniques, and cultural significance

behind each design and performance before 1950. This will ensure the preservation of the craft for future generations and solidify its historical importance. Also, Fashion and Art educators should support research initiatives that connect fancy dress with contemporary fashion and performance art, ensuring its relevance in modern-day creative industries.

In line with research objective two, the study recommends that fancy dress designers explore new themes, materials, and designs through research and collaboration with experts in the fashion and cultural sector. This will help elevate fancy dress costumes as not only a local tradition but also a creative force that contributes to global fashion trends.

Furthermore, fancy dress groups should prioritize the preservation of traditional fabric styles and techniques, ensuring the cultural essence of the tradition remains intact. Incorporating historical materials and motifs alongside modern innovations can maintain a balance between heritage and contemporary appeal. Also, stakeholders should promote the use of sustainable and locally sourced materials to support environmental consciousness and foster community-driven production practices. Upcycled and recycled materials, combined with traditional methods, can reduce costs and highlight creativity. Highlighting the Fancy Dress tradition through collaborations, exhibitions, and fashion shows can amplify its visibility on global platforms, creating opportunities for cultural exchange and economic growth.

Designers should experiment with bold and unconventional colour combinations that reflect contemporary themes and incorporate global trends, such as metallic or reflective colours, into traditional palettes to create visually striking costumes. These elements can modernize the aesthetic while retaining cultural roots and traditional

symbolism. Also, fancy dress devotees must consider the inclusion of colour symbolism in performance scripts to enhance the storytelling element of performers' skits during the fancy dress festival. The study further recommends that the stakeholders use colour schemes to brand Fancy Dress festivals, promoting them as unique cultural tourism attractions. Also, designers should embrace advanced tools such as computerized sewing machines, embroidery machines, and specialized equipment like beading tools and wire frames to enhance precision and creativity. Stakeholders must invest in training programs to pass down foundational techniques such as pleating, appliqué, and patchwork to younger generations. Also, organize workshops and seminars on advanced costume production techniques, modern design trends, and storytelling through costume design.

Owing to the impact of fancy dress on the Ghanaian fashion industry, fancy dress can be marketed as cultural and fashion tourism attractions. Fashion industry players and stakeholders should collaborate with tourism boards to showcase the artistry and craftsmanship of Fancy Dress, attracting global audiences and boosting Ghana's creative economy. Also, stakeholders of fancy dress costume practice in Swedru, Winneba, and Ghana at large should work with educational institutions to integrate fancy dress traditions into art and design curricula. This fosters a deeper understanding of Ghanaian heritage among the youth and nurtures the next generation of creative talent. The study further recommends that fashion designers and brands incorporate Fancy Dress-inspired elements into mainstream collections. By blending traditional motifs and contemporary aesthetics, designers can create unique offerings that appeal to both local and international markets, highlighting Ghana's cultural identity.

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## APPENDIX

### UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA DEPARTMENT OF ART EDUCATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Your views are kindly solicited in this study in providing much-needed information that can lead to making a scholarly attempt on Fancy dress development in Ghana and how it has contributed to global fashion culture. Such a study, the researcher strongly believes would be enriched by your voluntary participation. The researcher appreciates your time and values the information you will provide in this study and all your responses will be treated confidentially.

*Note: The interview guide is in two sections which are further divided into parts. The first section deals with the personal data of respondents. The second section answers the research questions stated. The first part (of the second section) answers research questions 1 and 2 which are to be responded to by both members of the Fancy Dressers or performers, Fancy Dress costume designers, and Fancy Dress makers while part two is to be responded to by Art Educationists, and Fashion experts which answers research question 3.*

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FANCY DRESS PERFORMERS, FANCY DRESS COSTUME DESIGNERS, FASHION HISTORIAN, FASHION PRACTITIONERS AND ART EDUCATIONISTS

#### SECTION A: PERSONAL DATA OF RESPONDENT

Name: .....  
Age: .....  
Gender: .....  
Educational Background: .....  
Occupation: .....

## SECTION B: ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Part 1

#### UNIT OF ANALYSIS 1: QUESTIONS TO BE RESPONDED TO BY BOTH MEMBERS OF THE FANCY DRESSERS, FANCY DRESSMAKERS AND FANCY DRESS COSTUME DESIGNERS

*Research Question 1: What is the design history of Fancy Dress from 1950 to 2022 in Ghana?*

1. Please are you a native of the town? Yes/No. If yes, how long have stayed in the town?
2. Have you witnessed Fancy Dress before in this town?
3. How long has Fancy Dress been practiced in your town?
4. How did the Fancy Dress costumes worn by performers look like in the past years?
5. Were there Fancy Dress designers or Fancy Dress makers producing the costumes in the past years?
6. Did/Do you knew/know any of the designers producing Fancy Dress costumes either past or present?
7. Do you have any knowledge of or about the costumes worn by the performers during Fancy Dress festivals?
8. How is designing done during the production of Fancy Dress costumes?

*Research Question 2: How can the trends in designs, colour, textile materials, techniques, and tools/ equipment used in the production of fancy dress costumes be examined?*

1. Have there been factors influencing the choice of design (costumes) worn for Fancy Dress festivals?
2. Has there been a shift in paradigm in these factors affecting the choice of designs in current years?
3. What type of material (fabric) was mostly used for the production of Fancy Dress (costumes) in the past years?
4. Has there been a revolution in the material used?
5. What type of tools/equipment used by the designers and fancy dress makers in producing Fancy Dress costumes?
6. Have there been changes in tools/equipment used?

7. Are there inspirations behind designers' knowledge of producing Fancy Dress costumes?
8. How is designing done during the production of Fancy Dress costumes?
9. What were the trends of Fancy Dress designs in the past years?
10. What are the effects of the new trends on Fancy Dress designs?

## **Part 2**

### UNIT OF ANALYSIS 2: QUESTIONS TO BE RESPONDED FASHION HISTORIANS, FASHION EXPERTS, AND ART EDUCATORS

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of Fancy Dress on the Fashion industry in Ghana?

1. Is there any impact of Fancy Dress costume design on the fashion industry in Ghana?
2. Is there any impact of Fancy Dress costume design on Art education in Ghana?
3. What is the impact of Fancy Dress on the cultural, social, and economic aspects of the Ghanaian people?