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**Reincarnation Beliefs Among the Ewe of Ghana: Negotiating  
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## Reincarnation Beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana: Negotiating Tradition, Modernity, and Cultural Change

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study examines reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana, focusing on how traditional cosmological understandings of death are being reshaped through cultural change. Specifically, the study explores Ewe beliefs about death and reincarnation, examines how reincarnated individuals are identified and socially validated, analyses the influence of Christianity, formal education, and urbanization on these beliefs, and investigates how individuals negotiate between traditional and modern worldviews.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, conversational interviews, and informal discussions with participants purposively selected from three Ewe sub-cultural zones—Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu—in the Volta Region of Ghana. The study employed purposive and stratified sampling techniques to select eighteen participants, including elders, spiritual leaders, parents of reincarnated children, and individuals believed to be reincarnated. Data were analysed thematically using Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Change Theory as analytical frameworks.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that Ewe cosmology conceptualizes death as a transition rather than a final end, with reincarnation (Gbugbordzo) understood as a cyclical return within the lineage. Reincarnated individuals are identified through behavioural resemblance, birthmarks, childhood experiences, dreams, and divinatory consultation. The study further found that Christianity, formal education, and

urbanization have significantly reshaped reincarnation beliefs, resulting in reinterpretation rather than complete abandonment. While some individuals reject reincarnation due to Christian doctrine, others maintain syncretic belief systems that combine indigenous cosmology with Christian practices. The findings also demonstrate that reincarnation beliefs remain socially meaningful and culturally resilient despite modern socio-religious transformations.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends the documentation and preservation of indigenous Ewe cosmological knowledge through academic and cultural institutions. It further recommends the integration of indigenous belief systems into educational curricula to promote cultural literacy and identity preservation. The study also advocates interfaith dialogue between Christian and traditional religious institutions to foster religious tolerance and mutual understanding. Finally, further research is recommended on the psychological, gendered, and urban-rural dimensions of reincarnation beliefs in Ghanaian society.

**Keywords:** *Reincarnation; Ewe Cosmology; Cultural Change; Symbolic Interactionism; Indigenous Religion; Syncretism; Ghana*

**JEL Classification Codes:** *Z10 – Cultural Economics: General, Z12 – Religion, Z13 – Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology; Language; Social and Economic Stratification, Y80 – Culture; Religion; Race, Ethnicity, and Social Structure*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Death occupies a central place in human thought and cultural systems, yet its meaning varies significantly across societies. While biomedical and modernist perspectives often define death as the irreversible end of biological existence, many African societies conceptualize it as a transition into another ontological realm. Among the Ewe of Ghana, death is not interpreted as a final cessation of life but as a passage from the physical world (Kodzogbe) into the spiritual or ancestral realm (Tsiefe), where continued existence and interaction with the living are believed to persist (Tudukpor, 2019; Gyekye, 1996). Within this worldview, human existence is understood as cyclical rather than linear, allowing for the possibility of reincarnation, locally conceptualized as Gbugbordzo.

However, the Ewe are not a culturally homogenous group, and cosmological beliefs such as reincarnation are shaped by varying historical, political, religious, and socio-economic experiences across different Ewe sub-cultural zones. The major Ewe sub-groups—Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu—have historically developed under distinct socio-cultural conditions that continue to influence their engagement with indigenous belief systems.

The inland Ewe communities commonly referred to as Eweme, including areas such as Ho, Hohoe, and surrounding settlements, experienced early missionary penetration and colonial educational influence, particularly through the activities of the Bremen Mission during the nineteenth century (Meyer, 1999; Greene, 2002). These missionary encounters introduced Christianity, literacy, and Western education into inland Ewe communities earlier and more intensively than in some other Ewe regions. Consequently, many inland Ewe communities became important centers of Christian conversion and formal education, creating prolonged interaction between indigenous cosmology and Christian doctrine. This historical exposure has contributed to complex negotiations between traditional spiritual beliefs and Christian theological frameworks within Eweme communities.

By contrast, the Anlo Ewe of the southeastern coastal belt developed within a socio-political environment strongly influenced by coastal trade networks, migration, fishing economies, and interaction with European commercial activities along the Gulf of Guinea (Amenumey, 1989). The Anlo traditional political system historically maintained strong ritual authority centered on clan structures, shrines, and ancestral institutions, which reinforced indigenous cosmological practices. Coastal mobility and commercial interaction exposed the Anlo to external cultural influences; however, traditional ritual systems and ancestral practices remained deeply embedded within social organization. As a result, reincarnation beliefs among the Anlo may reflect stronger ritual continuity and communal ancestral integration compared to some inland communities where missionary Christianity gained earlier dominance.

Similarly, the Tongu Ewe communities located along the Volta Basin occupy a geographically and historically distinct environment shaped by riverine livelihoods, migration histories, and extensive kinship integration across neighboring ethnic groups. The Tongu areas historically served as important interaction zones linking inland and coastal Ewe populations, resulting in flexible cultural exchanges and hybrid religious experiences (Nukunya, 2003). The construction of the Akosombo Dam and subsequent displacement of several communities further transformed social structures, ritual practices, and community identities within Tongu areas. Such historical experiences may influence how reincarnation beliefs are maintained, adapted, or interpreted within changing socio-economic realities.

These historical and socio-cultural differences suggest that reincarnation beliefs among the Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu cannot be approached as a single, uniform cultural system. Although all three sub-groups share broader Ewe cosmological foundations, their distinct encounters with Christianity, colonialism, trade, migration, urbanization, and modernization have likely shaped different patterns of negotiating Gbugbordzo in contemporary society.

Within Ewe cosmology generally, reincarnation is not merely a metaphysical idea but a socially embedded belief system that connects the living, the dead, and future generations within a continuous lineage framework. Ancestors are perceived not as passive spiritual beings but as active participants in family life who may return through rebirth within the same lineage. This belief reinforces funeral rites, naming practices, ancestral veneration, and divinatory systems that regulate spiritual continuity.

However, the Ewe worldview does not exist in isolation. Colonialism, missionary activity, formal education, urbanization, globalization, and Pentecostal Christianity have increasingly reshaped indigenous cosmologies in Ghana. Christianity, in particular, promotes linear understandings of life, salvation, death, and resurrection, which frequently conflict with cyclical African notions of existence and ancestral return. These competing epistemologies have produced varying forms of acceptance, reinterpretation, resistance, and syncretism across Ewe sub-cultural groups.

As a result, reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe cannot be assumed to be static, uniform, or universally accepted. Rather, they are continuously negotiated within specific historical and socio-cultural contexts. Some individuals strongly maintain indigenous cosmological interpretations, others reject reincarnation through Christian doctrine, while many adopt hybrid systems that combine traditional spirituality with modern religious identities.

Despite growing scholarship on African cosmology and reincarnation, relatively little comparative attention has been given to how these beliefs are differently experienced and negotiated across the major Ewe sub-cultural zones. Existing studies often generalize “the Ewe” as a singular cultural category, thereby overlooking internal historical variations that may significantly shape belief transformation and continuity. This study therefore examines reincarnation beliefs among the Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu as historically situated and culturally negotiated systems of meaning shaped by distinct encounters with religion, colonialism, education, and modernization.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Reincarnation beliefs (Gbugbordzo) remain a significant aspect of Ewe cosmology, where existence is traditionally understood as cyclical rather than linear. Within this worldview, death is not perceived as a final end but as a transition from the physical world (Kodzogbe) to the ancestral realm (Tsiefe), with the possibility of spiritual return within the lineage through reincarnation. This cosmological system reinforces ancestral continuity, family identity, ritual obligations, and communal understandings of existence.

However, contemporary Ewe society is increasingly shaped by Christianity, formal education, urbanization, and globalization, all of which introduce alternative metaphysical frameworks that often conflict with indigenous cosmological thought. Christianity, particularly in its orthodox and Pentecostal forms, promotes a linear eschatological model in which human existence follows a singular trajectory from earthly life to divine judgment and eternal destiny in heaven or hell. This contrasts fundamentally with the cyclical ontology of traditional Ewe cosmology, where spiritual existence is continuous, recursive, and relational between Kodzogbe and Tsiefe.

Consequently, many contemporary Ewe individuals occupy a complex ideological and spiritual space characterized by dual religious identities. On one hand, they participate in Christian worship, affirm biblical teachings, and embrace modern religious identities; on the other hand, they remain socially and culturally connected to ancestral rituals, funeral practices, divination, and reincarnation beliefs inherited through family and community structures. This coexistence of competing metaphysical systems creates significant cultural and cognitive dissonance regarding death, identity, ancestry, salvation, and spiritual continuity.

The problem, therefore, is not merely the absence of literature on reincarnation among the Ewe, but the insufficient scholarly understanding of how contemporary Ewe individuals negotiate the friction between these two incompatible ontological systems: Christian Cosmology and Ewe Cosmology.

While existing studies often describe reincarnation as a traditional cultural belief, they pay limited attention to the lived tensions, interpretive negotiations, and identity conflicts experienced by individuals attempting to reconcile Christian eschatology with indigenous cyclical cosmology. As a result, reincarnation among the Ewe is frequently oversimplified either as a declining traditional practice or as a static indigenous worldview, without adequately examining the internal contradictions, hybrid religious identities, and everyday negotiations that characterize contemporary Ewe spiritual life.

This study therefore addresses the need for a deeper phenomenological and interpretive understanding of how contemporary Ewe individuals experience, negotiate, reinterpret, and reconcile these competing metaphysical systems within rapidly changing religious and socio-cultural environments.

### **Research Objectives**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine traditional Ewe beliefs about death and reincarnation within Ewe cosmology.
2. To investigate how reincarnation beliefs are identified and socially validated among the Ewe.
3. To analyse the influence of cultural change (Christianity, education, and urbanization) on reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe.
4. To explore how individuals within Ewe society negotiate and reconcile traditional and modern belief systems regarding reincarnation.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the Ewe conceptualize death and reincarnation within their traditional cosmology?
2. What processes and indicators are used to identify reincarnated individuals among the Ewe?
3. In what ways have Christianity, formal education, and urbanization influenced reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe?
4. How do individuals within Ewe society reconcile traditional reincarnation beliefs with modern religious worldviews?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualizing Reincarnation

Reincarnation is broadly defined as the belief that the essence or spiritual component of a person survives physical death and returns to the world in another body or form. In philosophical and religious studies, it is often associated with cyclical theories of existence, where life is not linear but continuous across multiple states of being (Eyetsemitan, 2002; Anyanwu, 1990).

Within African cosmological thought, reincarnation is not simply a metaphysical speculation but a relational process embedded in kinship structures, ancestry, and moral continuity. Unlike Western dualistic frameworks that separate body and soul, African ontologies often emphasize the unity and continuity of personhood beyond physical death (Mbiti, 1990). Thus, reincarnation is understood as a social reality that reinforces family identity and intergenerational belonging.

Eyetsemitan (2002) further explains that in many African societies, death represents a transformation rather than termination, where the deceased continue to participate in the moral, spiritual, and social life of the community. Reincarnation, therefore, becomes an extension of ancestral existence rather than an isolated rebirth event.

### African Philosophical Foundations of Reincarnation

African philosophical thought emphasizes relational ontology, where existence is understood through interconnectedness, ancestry, kinship, and communal continuity. Mbiti's (1990) famous assertion, "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am," captures the fundamentally communal basis of personhood in African cosmology. Within this framework, identity is not conceived as radically individualistic but as socially embedded within lineage, ancestry, and collective existence.

This relational understanding of personhood has profound implications for reincarnation beliefs among African societies, including the Ewe. Reincarnation is not simply the return of an isolated soul into another body; rather, it represents the continuation of relational existence within the lineage. Among the Ewe, Gbugbordzo reinforces the belief that ancestral presence remains active within the family structure, ensuring continuity between the living, the dead, and the unborn.

However, Mbiti's communal ontology raises an important ontological question regarding the nature of reincarnated identity: if personhood is fundamentally collective rather than individual, does a reincarnated ancestor return as the same singular identity, or merely as a fragmented extension of the lineage's collective spiritual continuity? This question complicates simplistic interpretations of reincarnation as literal personal rebirth.

Within Ewe cosmology, evidence suggests that reincarnation operates less as the exact return of an autonomous self and more as the re-emergence of ancestral essence within communal lineage structures. Thus, reincarnated individuals may display behavioral resemblance, physical marks, or personality traits associated with deceased relatives, yet they are not necessarily perceived as complete replicas of the dead. Rather, they embody relational continuity between generations.

Anyanwu (1983) similarly argues that African metaphysics does not sharply separate the individual from the community because existence itself is relational and spiritually interconnected. Reincarnation therefore functions not merely as biological rebirth but as the cyclical regeneration of communal identity, memory, and ancestral presence within the lineage.

In this sense, Gbugbordzo may be understood as both personal and collective: the ancestor “returns,” yet does so through the continuing spiritual fabric of the family rather than through fully autonomous individuality.

This ontological ambiguity is particularly significant within contemporary Ewe society, where Christian notions of singular salvation, individual judgment, and eternal destiny increasingly intersect with indigenous communal understandings of cyclical ancestral continuity.

### **Reincarnation in Ewe Cosmology**

Among the Ewe of Ghana, reincarnation (*Gbugbordzo*) is deeply embedded in cosmological and moral structures. The Ewe conceives of existence as cyclical, linking the physical world (*Kodzogbe*) with the ancestral realm (*Tsiefe*) (Tedukpor, 2019). Within this system, the dead are not absent but remain active participants in the lives of the living.

Tedukpor (2019) notes that ancestors function as guardians of moral order, intervening in human affairs through protection, punishment, and guidance. Similarly, Rosenthal (1998) argues that Ewe cosmology is structured around continuous interaction between the visible and invisible worlds.

Salakpi (2003), focusing on the Anlo Ewe, emphasizes that proper funeral rites are essential for ensuring successful transition into ancestral status. Without appropriate rituals, the deceased may fail to reincarnate or may become spiritually unstable, affecting family wellbeing.

### **Comparative Perspectives on Reincarnation in Africa**

#### **Igbo Cosmology (Nigeria)**

Among the Igbo, reincarnation is strongly lineage-based and often identified through physical resemblance, behavioral traits, spiritual signs, and divinatory confirmation. Stephenson (1989) and Matlock (2021) observe that deceased ancestors are believed to return within their own family lineage, frequently carrying recognizable marks, temperaments, or social characteristics associated with the deceased. In this context, reincarnation reinforces continuity of kinship and ancestral presence across generations.

#### **Yoruba Cosmology (Nigeria)**

In Yoruba cosmology, reincarnation is embedded within a highly structured spiritual system. Concepts such as *abiku* and *akudaya* illustrate cyclical understandings of existence, where certain individuals repeatedly transition between spiritual and physical realms (Akinpelu & Mkhwanazi, 2024). Yoruba metaphysics therefore conceptualizes reincarnation not only as ancestral return but also as a spiritually regulated process shaped by destiny, ritual, and metaphysical agency.

#### **Zulu Cosmology (South Africa): A Conceptual Contrast**

Unlike the Igbo and Yoruba cases, the Zulu practice of *ukubuyisa* does not constitute reincarnation in the strict sense of biological rebirth. *Ukubuyisa* refers to ritual ancestral invocation, where the spirit of the deceased is ritually reintegrated into the family through ceremonial communication and symbolic return. The practice emphasizes ancestral presence, protection, and spiritual continuity rather than literal rebirth into another human body.

Its inclusion here therefore serves as a conceptual contrast rather than a direct example of reincarnation. Distinguishing *ukubuyisa* from biological or lineage-based reincarnation is important because conflating ancestral invocation with reincarnation risks blurring important ontological boundaries within African cosmological studies. While both systems emphasize continuity between the living and the dead, reincarnation specifically involves the perceived

return of ancestral essence through birth, whereas ukubuyisa primarily reinforces ongoing ancestral relationship without implying physical rebirth.

This distinction is analytically important for the present study because Gbugbordzo among the Ewe is fundamentally concerned with cyclical ancestral return through lineage reproduction rather than symbolic ancestral invocation alone.

### **Cosmology, Death, and Spiritual Continuity**

Cosmology refers to the worldview through which societies interpret the universe and their place within it (Darvill, 2008). In cultural anthropology, cosmology is understood as a structured belief system that organizes meaning, existence, and human experience (Campion, 2017).

Ewe cosmology is characterized by a multi-layered spiritual universe inhabited by Mawu (Supreme Being), lesser deities, and ancestors. Humans exist simultaneously in physical and spiritual dimensions, making death a transition rather than a rupture in existence (Fiawoo, 1976; Rosenthal, 1998).

Fiawoo (1976) further explains that ancestors act as intermediaries between the divine and human realms, offering protection and guidance. This reinforces the belief that death does not sever social bonds but transforms them into spiritual relationships.

### **Destiny, Personhood, and Reincarnation**

Ewe conceptions of reincarnation are closely linked to destiny (*dzorgbese*). Individuals are believed to pre-exist spiritually before birth and to negotiate aspects of their earthly life before entering the physical world (Tedukpor, 2019). This reinforces the idea that human life is preordained but still partially shaped by moral and social choices.

The concept of *gbetsitsi* (life path) further emphasizes that individuals enter the world with a defined purpose. This cosmological structure ensures that reincarnation is not random but follows lineage and spiritual order.

### **Cultural Change and Transformation of Belief Systems**

Cultural Change Theory explains how societies transform their beliefs, values, and practices in response to internal and external influences (Herskovits, 1995; Kottak, 2017). Culture is not static; it is dynamic and adaptive, shaped by diffusion, acculturation, innovation, and syncretism.

Herskovits (1995) argues that African cultural systems have historically adapted to external influences such as Christianity and colonialism without completely losing indigenous structures. Instead, they undergo reinterpretation and hybridization.

Kottak (2017) further emphasizes that cultural change is multidirectional, meaning that traditions may persist, transform, or merge with new belief systems depending on social context.

Varnum and Grossmann (2017) also highlight that ecological conditions, education systems, and globalization significantly influence cultural stability and change. In the context of Ghana, urbanization and Christianity have reshaped indigenous cosmologies, including beliefs about reincarnation.

## **Syncretism and Religious Negotiation**

Religious syncretism refers to the blending of different belief systems into a new, hybrid form. In many African societies, individuals combine Christian beliefs with indigenous cosmologies, resulting in dual religious identities (Agboada, 2025).

Mbiti (1990) notes that African religious life is inherently pluralistic, allowing individuals to participate in multiple spiritual systems simultaneously. This is evident among the Ewe, where belief in reincarnation coexists with Christian doctrines of resurrection

### **Empirical Review**

Empirical studies on reincarnation and death-related cosmologies in Africa and beyond provide important insights into how societies conceptualize continuity between life and death. Although research on reincarnation among the Ewe of Ghana remains limited, several related studies from African contexts offer useful comparative evidence for understanding how reincarnation beliefs are experienced, interpreted, and transformed.

### **Empirical Studies on Reincarnation in African Contexts**

One of the most cited studies on reincarnation in African societies is Stephenson's (1989) investigation among the Igbo of Nigeria. Stephenson found that reincarnation is widely accepted within Igbo cosmology, where children are often believed to be returned ancestors. These children are identified through physical resemblance, birthmarks, behavioral traits, and divination practices. The study revealed that reincarnation is not only a spiritual belief but also a socially validated process reinforced through family and community recognition. Matlock (2021) supports these findings, noting that reincarnation in African contexts often involves a combination of physical, psychological, and spiritual indicators that are interpreted within cultural frameworks.

Similarly, research by Eyetsemitan (2002) on death perceptions in African societies highlights that reincarnation beliefs play a critical role in maintaining emotional and social continuity after death. The author argues that such beliefs reduce the fear of death and strengthen the perceived ongoing presence of ancestors within the family system.

In Yoruba cosmology, Akinpelu and Mkhwanazi (2024) observe that reincarnation is closely linked to the concepts of *abiku* and *akudaya*. Their study demonstrates that Yoruba beliefs about reincarnation are complex and structured, involving spiritual cycles in which individuals may repeatedly return to the physical world. The findings further show that reincarnation beliefs are deeply embedded in moral and metaphysical interpretations of untimely death, child mortality, and ancestral influence.

### **Empirical Studies in Ghanaian Contexts**

In Ghana, empirical work on reincarnation has largely focused on broader Akan and Ewe cosmologies rather than detailed ethnographic analyses of reincarnation practices. Nukunya (2003) provides foundational ethnographic insight into Ewe social organization and belief systems, noting that the dead are believed to remain active within the family lineage and may return through reincarnation within the same kin group.

Similarly, Tedukpor (2019) highlights that among the Ewe, reincarnation (*Gbugbordzo*) is closely linked to funeral rites and ancestral veneration. The study shows that proper burial practices are essential for ensuring the peaceful transition of the deceased and their potential return to the living world. Failure to perform appropriate rites is believed to disrupt spiritual harmony and may prevent reincarnation.

Salakpi's (2003) study among the Anlo Ewe provides further empirical evidence that reincarnation beliefs are strongly associated with ritual performance. The author found that families often consult diviners to determine whether a deceased relative has reincarnated and to guide subsequent rituals. This reinforces the idea that reincarnation is not an abstract belief but an actively practiced cultural system.

### **Identification of Reincarnated Individuals**

Empirical research across African societies consistently shows that reincarnated individuals are identified through a combination of spiritual and physical indicators. Stephenson (1989) reports that among the Igbo, children believed to be reincarnated ancestors often display recognizable physical traits or behavioral patterns that resemble the deceased.

Matlock (2021) expands this observation by identifying several common indicators of reincarnation across African cultures, including:

- birthmarks and physical resemblance
- behavioral similarity to deceased relatives
- dreams and spiritual visions
- divination and oracle consultation

These findings align with Ewe practices documented by Tedukpor (2019), where reincarnated individuals are often identified through behavioral anomalies, spiritual experiences, and divinatory confirmation. In some cases, families interpret unusual childhood behavior or illness as signs of ancestral return, prompting ritual investigation.

### **Reincarnation, Christianity, and Lived Religious Negotiation**

Empirical studies increasingly demonstrate that the relationship between Christianity and indigenous reincarnation beliefs in African societies is not simply characterized by coexistence, but by ongoing negotiation, compartmentalization, tension, and situational adaptation. In many African contexts, individuals simultaneously participate in Christian institutions while continuing to rely on indigenous spiritual systems during moments of existential uncertainty, illness, death, infertility, or family crisis.

Among the Ewe, this dual religious orientation often operates through practical compartmentalization. Individuals may participate fully in church activities, affirm Christian doctrines of salvation and resurrection, and publicly reject reincarnation beliefs, yet privately consult diviners, observe ancestral rituals, or interpret unusual events through indigenous cosmological frameworks. Thus, Christian and indigenous systems are not always harmoniously merged; rather, they are selectively activated depending on social context and spiritual need.

Agboada (2025) observes that many Ghanaian Christians continue to maintain underlying indigenous cosmological assumptions despite formal Christian affiliation. Similarly, Meyer (1999), in her work on Pentecostalism among the Ewe, demonstrates that conversion to Christianity does not automatically erase indigenous cosmological consciousness. Instead, traditional beliefs frequently persist beneath Christian language and practice, particularly in relation to death, spiritual causality, witchcraft, ancestral influence, and misfortune.

This lived negotiation becomes especially visible during family crises. For instance, individuals who publicly affirm Christian doctrine may still seek traditional divinatory consultation when unexplained illness, repeated child mortality, strange dreams, or behavioral anomalies occur within the family. In such situations, indigenous cosmology often functions as an interpretive resource for explaining suffering and restoring spiritual balance.

The coexistence of Christianity and reincarnation beliefs therefore should not be interpreted as passive religious pluralism alone, but as evidence of deeper cognitive and cultural negotiation between competing metaphysical systems. On one hand, Christianity promotes a linear eschatological framework centered on singular earthly existence, divine judgment, and eternal destiny. On the other hand, Ewe cosmology maintains a cyclical ontology grounded in ancestral continuity, relational personhood, and recurring spiritual return.

Rather than fully abandoning one system for another, many contemporary Ewe individuals navigate these tensions pragmatically by adopting hybrid spiritual identities that accommodate both Christian faith and indigenous cosmological logic. This demonstrates that modern religious identity among the Ewe is often fluid, situational, and context-dependent rather than doctrinally fixed.

### **Urbanization, Education, and Religious Change**

Empirical evidence also shows that modernization processes such as urbanization and formal education significantly influence traditional belief systems. Varnum and Grossmann (2017) argue that urban environments tend to promote individualism and scientific rationalism, which can reduce reliance on traditional cosmologies.

In Ghana, this is reflected in the growing skepticism toward reincarnation beliefs among urban populations, particularly those exposed to formal education and Christian doctrines. However, empirical findings also suggest that belief persistence remains strong in rural areas, where traditional institutions and kinship systems remain influential (Nukunya, 2003; Tedukpor, 2019).

### **Synthesis of Empirical Literature**

The empirical literature reveals three major patterns relevant to this study:

1. **Persistence of belief:** Reincarnation remains widely accepted in many African societies, particularly in rural and traditional settings (Stephenson, 1989; Nukunya, 2003).
2. **Ritual and social validation:** Identification of reincarnated individuals is socially constructed through ritual, divination, and behavioral interpretation (Matlock, 2021; Tedukpor, 2019).
3. **Cultural transformation:** Modern influences such as Christianity, education, and urbanization reshape but do not eliminate reincarnation beliefs (Herskovits, 1995; Kottak, 2017; Agboada, 2025).

Despite these insights, there remains a significant gap in empirical research focusing specifically on comparative analysis across the three Ewe sub-cultural zones (Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu). Additionally, limited studies have explored how individuals actively negotiate conflicting religious worldviews in relation to reincarnation beliefs. This study addresses these gaps by providing an interpretive, lived-experience-based analysis of reincarnation among the Ewe of Ghana.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic Interactionism, developed by Mead (1934) and later expanded by Blumer (1969), is a sociological theory that explains how individuals construct meaning through social interaction. According to Blumer (1969), meaning is not inherent in objects or events but is created through interpretive processes grounded in interaction.

Carter and Fuller (2015) further explain that symbolic interactionism focuses on micro-level social processes, particularly how individuals interpret symbols, gestures, and shared meanings in everyday life.

In the context of this study, reincarnation beliefs are understood as socially constructed meanings that emerge through interaction within families, communities, and religious institutions. For example, interpretations of birthmarks, dreams, or behavioral traits as signs of reincarnation are not biologically determined but socially negotiated within cultural frameworks.

Symbolic Interactionism is particularly relevant because it explains how individuals:

- assign meaning to reincarnation experiences
- interpret spiritual signs within cultural contexts
- negotiate conflicting religious identities (traditional vs. Christian beliefs)
- construct shared understandings of death and rebirth

Thus, reincarnation is not treated as an objective metaphysical fact but as a meaning-making process embedded in social interaction.

### **Cultural Change Theory**

Cultural Change Theory provides the second analytical lens for this study. According to Herskovits (1995), cultural change occurs through processes such as diffusion, acculturation, innovation, and syncretism. Culture is therefore continuously reshaped through contact with other cultural systems.

Kottak (2017) emphasizes that cultural systems are adaptive and flexible, responding to new social, economic, and religious realities. This means that traditional beliefs such as reincarnation do not disappear but are reinterpreted in response to modern influences.

In the Ewe context, Christianity, formal education, and urbanization function as major agents of cultural change. Christianity introduces linear eschatological models (heaven/hell), which often conflict with cyclical African cosmologies. Education introduces scientific rationalism, while urbanization reduces exposure to traditional ritual systems.

However, rather than replacing indigenous beliefs, these forces often produce syncretism. Individuals may simultaneously identify as Christian while maintaining belief in ancestral return and reincarnation (Agboada, 2025).

### **Theoretical Integration**

This study integrates Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Change Theory to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana. The integration of these theories is necessary because reincarnation within Ewe cosmology operates simultaneously at the micro-level of everyday symbolic interaction and at the macro-level of broader socio-cultural transformation.

Symbolic Interactionism, developed by Mead (1934) and expanded by Blumer (1969), explains how individuals construct meaning through interaction, interpretation, and shared symbols. Within classical sociology, interaction is generally understood in relation to communication among living social actors. However, within Ewe cosmology, social reality extends beyond the physically living community to include ancestors (Togbegāwo), spirits, and the ancestral realm (Tsiefe). Ancestors are not perceived as distant or inactive beings but as living members of the

kinship structure who continue to guide, protect, discipline, and communicate with the living through dreams, omens, divination, illness, visions, and spiritual mediums.

Consequently, this study adopts an expanded interpretation of Symbolic Interactionism in which interaction with ancestors is treated as socially meaningful interaction within the Ewe worldview. Symbols such as birthmarks, unusual childhood behavior, recurring dreams, spiritual possession, and divinatory revelations become culturally intelligible because members of the community collectively interpret them as communicative signs from the ancestral world. In this sense, reincarnation is socially constructed through interpretive interaction not only among living persons but also between the living and the spiritually present dead.

For example, a child displaying behavioral resemblance to a deceased relative may be interpreted by family members as an ancestral return. However, that interpretation does not emerge automatically from the behavior itself; rather, meaning is assigned through communal interaction, storytelling, ritual consultation, and collective validation. Thus, reincarnation identity is socially negotiated within shared symbolic systems.

At the same time, these micro-level symbolic interpretations do not exist independently of broader social forces. This is where Cultural Change Theory becomes analytically significant. Cultural Change Theory explains how belief systems are reshaped through external institutional pressures such as Christianity, formal education, urbanization, globalization, and scientific rationalism (Herskovits, 1955; Kottak, 2017). These forces increasingly influence how individuals interpret spiritual signs, ancestral presence, and reincarnation experiences.

The integration of both theories therefore allows the study to explain how macro-level transformations directly reshape micro-level meaning-making processes. For instance, behavioral patterns or birthmarks that may once have been interpreted straightforwardly as evidence of Gbugbordzo within traditional Ewe cosmology may now be questioned, suppressed, or reinterpreted through Christian theology, biomedical reasoning, or modern educational frameworks. Similarly, dreams previously understood as ancestral communication may increasingly be framed as psychological experiences or spiritual deception within Pentecostal Christian discourse.

Urbanization and Christianity further alter the social environments in which symbolic interpretations occur. In urban settings, reduced participation in traditional rituals and weaker kinship cohesion may limit communal validation of reincarnation claims. Pentecostal Christianity may also discourage divination and ancestral consultation by categorizing them as spiritually dangerous or demonic. As a result, individuals may internalize conflicting interpretive systems in which traditional cosmological meanings are simultaneously retained, hidden, modified, or publicly denied.

The theoretical integration therefore demonstrates that reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe are neither static traditions nor purely individual spiritual experiences. Rather, they are dynamic symbolic realities continuously reconstructed through the interaction between indigenous cosmological meanings and changing socio-cultural institutions. While Symbolic Interactionism explains how meaning surrounding reincarnation is socially produced through everyday interaction, Cultural Change Theory explains how those meanings are transformed, hybridized, contested, or suppressed within broader processes of religious conversion, modernization, and cultural transition.

Together, these theories provide a multidimensional explanation of how contemporary Ewe individuals negotiate competing metaphysical systems while continuing to construct culturally meaningful understandings of death, ancestry, identity, and spiritual continuity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that seek to understand how individuals construct meaning from lived experiences within their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe are examined not as objective phenomena but as socially constructed meanings embedded in cultural, religious, and cosmological systems.

The interpretivist paradigm assumes that reality is multiple, subjective, and socially constructed (Bryman, 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant for studying reincarnation, as beliefs about death and rebirth vary across individuals, families, and communities. The goal of the study was therefore not to test hypotheses but to interpret meanings participants attach to reincarnation within their socio-cultural context.

A phenomenological approach was further adopted to capture the lived experiences of individuals who identify as reincarnated persons or who have encountered reincarnation beliefs in their families. Phenomenology seeks to describe how individuals experience a phenomenon as it is consciously perceived, without imposing external theoretical explanations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lester, 1999). This approach allowed the researchers to explore reincarnation as experienced, narrated, and interpreted by participants themselves.

### **Study Area**

The study was conducted in selected communities within the Volta Region of Ghana, which is the traditional homeland of the Ewe people. The study covered three major Ewe socio-dialectal zones: Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu. These zones were selected to capture cultural variation within Ewe cosmology and ensure representativeness of reincarnation beliefs across different Ewe subgroups (Capo, 1991).

The selected communities included Ho, Hohoe, and Hlefi (Eweme zone); Keta, Dzodze, and Agbozume (Anlo zone); and Adidome, Mepe, and Tefle (Tongu zone). These areas were chosen because they are culturally significant centers where traditional belief systems remain actively practiced alongside modern religious influences (Nukunya, 2003).

### **Target Population**

The target population consisted of Ewe-speaking individuals across the three sub-cultural zones. Participants included:

- Traditional elders and clan heads
- Spiritual leaders and diviners
- Parents of children identified as reincarnated
- Individuals identified as reincarnated persons
- Community members with experiential knowledge of reincarnation beliefs

This selection aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritize information-rich participants rather than large representative samples (Patton, 2015).

### **Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

The study employed a combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Stratified sampling was used to divide the population into the three Ewe sub-cultural zones (Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu), ensuring regional representation. Within each stratum, purposive sampling

was used to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge or lived experience of reincarnation beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Etikan et al., 2016).

Purposive sampling is appropriate in phenomenological studies because it enables the selection of participants who can provide rich, detailed, and relevant information (Patton, 2015). In total, eighteen (18) participants were selected—six from each sub-zone, comprising both males and females.

The sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, where data collection continues until no new themes emerge (Guest et al., 2006).

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, conversational interviews, and informal discussions. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research because they allow flexibility while maintaining focus on research objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Conversational interviewing was particularly useful in this study because it enabled participants to narrate their experiences in a natural and culturally appropriate manner. This approach is consistent with indigenous knowledge research methods, where meaning is often expressed through storytelling and dialogue rather than rigid questioning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Interviews were conducted in both English and Ewe, depending on participants' preference. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and reliability of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a flexible and widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows researchers to interpret meanings across a dataset while maintaining connection to participants' lived experiences.

The analysis followed a structured process:

1. Familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts
2. Initial coding of meaningful segments of text
3. Generation of preliminary themes
4. Review and refinement of themes
5. Definition and naming of final themes
6. Interpretation in relation to research objectives and theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Codes were developed inductively from participants' narratives, ensuring that findings remained grounded in empirical data rather than imposed categories. Themes included perceptions of death, reincarnation identification, ritual practices, and cultural transformation.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure the credibility and reliability of findings, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

- Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with participants and member checking.

- Transferability was achieved through thick description of contexts and participants.
- Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of research procedures.
- Confirmability was maintained through reflexive recording of researcher bias and use of verbatim quotations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by using pseudonyms such as Ametsitsi (elderly participant), Amedzordzor (reincarnated individual), and Nukporla (spiritual intermediary). Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Given the spiritual sensitivity of reincarnation beliefs, the researchers exercised cultural respect and avoided interpretations that could stigmatize participants or their beliefs.

### **DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Theme 1: Traditional Ewe Beliefs about Death and Reincarnation**

##### **Findings**

The study established that among the Ewe, death is fundamentally understood as a transition rather than termination of existence. Participants consistently described death as a journey from the physical world (Kodzogbe) to the ancestral realm (Tsiefe), where the deceased continue to exist and interact with the living.

An elderly participant explained:

*“Among us, death is not the end. When someone dies, the person only moves to the other world. They still see us, hear us, and can even protect the family.”*

Another participant emphasized the cyclical nature of existence:

*“If someone dies properly and the funeral is well done, the person can come back again into the same family. That is how life continues.”*

The study also found that reincarnation (Gbugbordzo) is closely tied to ritual performance. Improper burial rites are believed to disrupt the spiritual journey of the deceased, preventing reincarnation or causing spiritual unrest.

A respondent noted:

*“If the funeral is not properly done, the spirit cannot rest. Sometimes the person becomes a wandering spirit and does not return as a child.”*

In addition, participants indicated that ancestors remain active in family life, influencing decisions, protecting lineage, and responding to libations and prayers.

##### **Discussion**

These findings align with Nukunya (2003) and Tedukpor (2019), who argue that Ewe cosmology is cyclical and relational. Death is not final but a transformation into another existential state.

From a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, death is meaningful because society continuously defines and redefines it through rituals such as funerals and libation (Blumer, 1969). The belief

that ancestors “see and respond” illustrates how meaning is socially constructed and sustained through interaction.

## **Theme 2: Identification and Social Validation of Reincarnated Individuals**

### **Findings**

The study found that reincarnated individuals (amedzordzor) are identified through a combination of behavioral, physical, and spiritual indicators, validated through family interpretation and divination.

A participant narrated:

*“When I was a child, I cried every night and got sick often. My parents went to the oracle, and they were told I was my great-grandfather who had returned.”*

Another participant provided physical evidence-based identification:

*“My son had the same mark on his thigh as my late father. When the priest saw it, he said the ancestor has come back.”*

The study also revealed that behavioral resemblance is a key indicator:

*“The child speaks like the dead person. Even the way he walks and jokes is exactly like him.”*

In some cases, identification is confirmed through spiritual consultation (megbe kporokpor):

*“We did not just assume it. The oracle confirmed it after consultation. That is when we accepted the child as reincarnated.”*

A significant finding was that identification is collectively validated, not individually assumed. Families, elders, and spiritual practitioners jointly construct meaning around reincarnation.

### **Discussion**

These findings support Stephenson (1989) and Matlock (2021), who argue that reincarnation identification in African societies is based on interpretive cultural systems rather than empirical science.

The process illustrates Symbolic Interactionism clearly: meaning is not inherent in birthmarks or behavior but is assigned through social interpretation. A child becomes “reincarnated” only when the community agrees on that interpretation.

This demonstrates that reincarnation is a socially negotiated identity, not merely a spiritual claim.

## **Theme 3: Cultural Change and Transformation of Reincarnation Beliefs**

### **Findings**

The study revealed that reincarnation beliefs are increasingly influenced by Christianity, formal education, and urbanization, leading to reinterpretation and selective acceptance.

A participant expressed religious conflict:

*“My parents said I am a reincarnated child, but my pastor told me it is not true. So I am confused between church and tradition.”*

Another participant highlighted Christian influence:

*“Since I became born again, I no longer believe in reincarnation. Only Jesus can bring someone back to life.”*

However, not all participants rejected the belief. Some maintained dual systems:

*“I go to church, but I also believe my ancestors are still around us. They guide us in life.”*

Urban participants reported reduced engagement:

*“In the city, we don’t really do those traditional consultations. Life is different here.”*

The study also found that modernization has led to reinterpretation rather than total abandonment of beliefs.

### **Discussion**

These findings support Herskovits (1995) and Kottak (2017), who argue that cultural systems adapt rather than disappear under external pressure.

Christianity introduces a linear cosmology of life and resurrection, while Ewe belief systems maintain a cyclical cosmology, resulting in interpretive tension.

This confirms Cultural Change Theory: culture evolves through syncretism, resistance, and adaptation, not replacement.

### **Theme 4: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity**

#### **Findings**

The study found that individuals actively negotiate between traditional beliefs and modern religious frameworks.

A participant stated:

*“I pray in church, but I also pour libation to my ancestors. Both are important to me.”*

Another explained identity tension:

*“Sometimes I don’t know what to believe. Church says one thing, my family says another.”*

Some participants adopted selective cultural practice:

*“I believe in reincarnation, but I will not go for all the traditional rituals because I am now living in town.”*

Others demonstrated full syncretism:

*“My healing gift comes from my ancestor, but I use it to serve people in church too.”*

### **Discussion**

These findings strongly confirm Symbolic Interactionism, where individuals actively construct meaning in everyday life (Blumer, 1969).

Reincarnation is not passively accepted or rejected—it is actively interpreted depending on context, experience, and social environment.

The coexistence of belief systems demonstrates that modernity does not eliminate indigenous knowledge but produces hybrid spiritual identities.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Across all themes, the study demonstrates that:

- Reincarnation is a lived and socially validated belief system
- Identification is based on interpretation, not biological proof
- Cultural change leads to reinterpretation, not disappearance
- Individuals actively engage in belief negotiation and syncretism

The findings demonstrate that reincarnation among the Ewe is neither disappearing nor static. Instead, it is a dynamic cultural system shaped by negotiation, reinterpretation, and adaptation. The study confirms that cultural change does not lead to total replacement of traditional beliefs but results in hybrid systems of meaning.

Both Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Change Theory effectively explain how individuals assign meaning to reincarnation and adapt it within changing religious and social environments.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study on reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana has several important theoretical, cultural, educational, and policy implications, particularly in relation to how indigenous knowledge systems interact with modern religious and socio-cultural transformations.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

The study contributes to anthropological and sociological theory by reinforcing the relevance of Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Change Theory in explaining indigenous belief systems. It demonstrates that reincarnation among the Ewe is not a fixed metaphysical doctrine but a socially constructed meaning system that is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted through interaction.

The findings further challenge linear models of cultural change that assume traditional beliefs are replaced by modern ones. Instead, the study supports theories of cultural hybridity and syncretism, showing that belief systems often coexist, overlap, and transform rather than disappear. This adds empirical weight to Herskovits' (1995) argument that cultural systems adapt rather than collapse under external influence.

#### **Cultural and Anthropological Implications**

Culturally, the study highlights the resilience and adaptability of Ewe cosmology. Reincarnation remains a central belief system that continues to structure identity, kinship, and ritual life, even in the face of modern influences.

The study also shows that cultural meaning is actively negotiated within families and communities. Practices such as divination, funeral rites, and ancestral veneration are not merely traditional remnants but living cultural mechanisms that continue to organize social life.

Importantly, the findings caution against simplistic assumptions that modernization leads to cultural loss. Instead, they demonstrate that Ewe spiritual beliefs are being reinterpreted rather than abandoned, particularly in urban and Christian-influenced contexts.

#### **Religious and Social Implications**

The study reveals increasing religious pluralism and tension between Christianity and traditional Ewe cosmology. Many individuals experience ideological conflict when attempting to reconcile Christian doctrines of resurrection with indigenous beliefs in reincarnation.

However, the study also shows that syncretism is common, with many individuals maintaining dual belief systems. This has implications for religious institutions, suggesting the need for greater tolerance and dialogue between Christian and traditional spiritual systems.

Socially, reincarnation beliefs continue to reinforce family cohesion, lineage continuity, and social responsibility, as individuals are still perceived to be connected to ancestral identities.

#### **Educational Implications**

The study has significant implications for education in Ghana and similar multicultural societies. It demonstrates the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems into formal education curricula to promote cultural awareness and identity preservation.

Educators should recognize that students may simultaneously hold both scientific and traditional worldviews. A culturally responsive curriculum can help reduce stigma associated with indigenous beliefs and promote critical cultural literacy rather than cultural rejection.

### **Policy Implications**

From a policy perspective, the study highlights the need for cultural preservation policies that protect intangible heritage such as belief systems, oral traditions, and ritual practices.

Policy makers in the areas of culture, education, and religion should encourage:

- Documentation of indigenous belief systems
- Support for traditional authorities and cultural institutions
- Promotion of interfaith dialogue between Christian and traditional religious leaders

Such policies can help maintain cultural diversity while promoting peaceful coexistence of belief systems.

### **Practical Implications for Communities**

At the community level, the study emphasizes the importance of handling reincarnation-related beliefs with sensitivity. Misinterpretation or stigmatization of individuals believed to be reincarnated can lead to social tension or psychological distress.

Community leaders and family heads should therefore ensure that interpretations of reincarnation are managed in ways that preserve social harmony, respect, and cultural dignity.

Overall, the study demonstrates that reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe are not relics of the past but dynamic cultural systems that continue to influence identity, spirituality, and social organization. The implications show that rather than disappearing under modern influence, these beliefs are being reshaped into hybrid forms that reflect both tradition and modernity.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study on reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana contributes to existing scholarship in several significant ways, particularly within the fields of African cosmology, anthropology of religion, and cultural change studies.

### **Empirical Contribution to Ewe Cosmology Studies**

First, the study provides a systematic and comparative empirical account of reincarnation beliefs across the three major Ewe sub-cultural zones—Eweme, Anlo, and Tongu. Previous studies have largely focused on isolated communities or generalized African cosmological perspectives (e.g., Nukunya, 2003; Tedukpor, 2019). This study fills that gap by offering a multi-sited ethnographic perspective, showing both similarities and subtle variations in how reincarnation is understood and practiced within Ewe society.

### **Expansion of African Reincarnation Scholarship**

Second, the study extends African reincarnation scholarship by moving beyond descriptive accounts of belief systems to examine how reincarnation is actively experienced, interpreted, and socially validated in everyday life. While earlier works (e.g., Stephenson, 1989; Matlock, 2021) emphasize identification of reincarnated children, this study broadens the discussion to include:

- adult reincarnation experiences
- ritual negotiation processes
- family decision-making dynamics
- and lived experiential meanings

This provides a more holistic and process-oriented understanding of reincarnation in African contexts.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

Third, the study strengthens the application of Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Change Theory in African indigenous belief systems. It demonstrates that reincarnation is not simply a metaphysical doctrine but a symbolically constructed reality maintained through social interaction, ritual practice, and collective interpretation.

The study also contributes to Cultural Change Theory by providing evidence that cultural transformation among the Ewe is non-linear and adaptive, challenging modernization assumptions that predict the disappearance of indigenous beliefs. Instead, it shows that belief systems undergo reinterpretation, hybridization, and negotiation, rather than replacement.

### **Contribution to Understanding Religion and Modernity in Africa**

Fourth, the study contributes to broader debates on religion and modernity in Africa by showing how Christianity does not completely displace indigenous cosmology. Instead, it coexists with traditional beliefs in reincarnation, producing syncretic and dual-belief systems.

This finding adds nuance to existing literature that often frames African societies as moving from “traditional” to “modern” belief systems, by demonstrating that individuals frequently maintain simultaneous belief frameworks.

### **Methodological Contribution**

Fifth, the study contributes methodologically by applying a phenomenological qualitative approach across multiple cultural zones within a single ethnic group. This allows for a deeper understanding of reincarnation as a lived and interpreted experience, rather than a purely doctrinal or theoretical concept.

The use of conversational interviews and narrative accounts also demonstrates the value of indigenous storytelling methods in academic research, particularly when studying spiritual and culturally sensitive topics.

### **Practical and Cultural Knowledge Contribution**

Finally, the study contributes practical knowledge by documenting how reincarnation beliefs influence:

- funeral practices
- family decision-making
- child upbringing and naming practices
- spiritual interpretation of life events

In doing so, it preserves valuable indigenous knowledge systems that are often under-documented or misrepresented in mainstream academic discourse.

Overall, this study advances knowledge by providing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional understanding of reincarnation among the Ewe, bridging gaps in empirical research,

strengthening theoretical applications, and offering a culturally grounded explanation of how indigenous beliefs persist and transform under modern influences.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study on reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana, the following recommendations are made to address cultural preservation, religious coexistence, education, and social development concerns arising from the study.

### **Documentation and Preservation of Indigenous Beliefs**

There is the need for systematic documentation of Ewe reincarnation beliefs, rituals, and oral narratives to safeguard them from gradual erosion due to modernization and religious change. Cultural institutions, universities, and research bodies such as the Centre for National Culture should collaborate to record these practices in written and audio-visual formats. This will ensure that indigenous cosmological knowledge is preserved for future generations.

### **Integration of Indigenous Knowledge into Education**

The study recommends the incorporation of indigenous belief systems, including Ewe cosmology and reincarnation concepts, into Ghana's educational curriculum, particularly in social studies, religious studies, and anthropology courses. This will promote cultural literacy, reduce cultural alienation among students, and encourage respect for indigenous knowledge systems alongside modern scientific perspectives.

### **Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Tolerance**

Given the observed tensions between Christianity and traditional Ewe beliefs in reincarnation, there is the need for structured dialogue between Christian institutions and traditional religious authorities. Such dialogue should aim at fostering mutual understanding, reducing doctrinal conflict, and promoting peaceful coexistence of belief systems. Religious leaders should be encouraged to adopt more culturally sensitive approaches when addressing indigenous spiritual practices.

### **Strengthening the Role of Traditional Authorities**

Traditional leaders, elders, and spiritual custodians should be empowered to continue their roles in guiding reincarnation-related rituals and family consultations. Government and local assemblies should formally recognize their role in cultural governance, as they remain key custodians of indigenous cosmology and moral order within communities.

### **Cultural Sensitization in Urban Areas**

Since urbanization has been identified as a factor reducing engagement with reincarnation practices, cultural sensitization programs should be introduced in urban communities. These programs should educate urban populations on the importance of cultural heritage and promote balanced understanding of traditional beliefs in modern contexts.

### **Ethical Handling of Reincarnation Claims**

Families and community members are advised to handle cases of suspected reincarnation with care, sensitivity, and responsibility. Misinterpretation or mismanagement of such cases can lead to stigma, psychological distress, or family conflict. Therefore, consultations with both elders and qualified spiritual practitioners should be encouraged before drawing conclusions.

### **Further Academic Research**

The study recommends further research in the following areas:

- Psychological implications of being identified as a reincarnated person

- Gender differences in reincarnation identification
- Urban-rural comparative studies of Ewe cosmology
- Longitudinal studies on the transformation of reincarnation beliefs over time

Such studies will deepen understanding of how indigenous belief systems evolve in response to modern pressures.

Overall, these recommendations emphasize that reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe should not be dismissed as outdated, but rather understood as a living cultural system that continues to shape identity, spirituality, and social relations. The goal should therefore not be elimination, but preservation, respectful integration, and informed adaptation within contemporary Ghanaian society.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana, with particular attention to how these beliefs are understood, practiced, and negotiated within the context of cultural continuity and change. The findings demonstrate that reincarnation (Gbugbordzo) remains a deeply rooted component of Ewe cosmology, where death is perceived not as an absolute termination of life but as a transitional passage into the ancestral realm, with the possibility of return within the family lineage.

The study further shows that reincarnation beliefs are sustained through ritual practices such as funeral rites, divination, naming systems, and ancestral veneration, which collectively reinforce the cyclical understanding of existence. Reincarnated individuals (amedzordzor) are identified through culturally meaningful indicators including behavioral resemblance, birthmarks, dreams, and spiritual consultations. These processes highlight the socially constructed nature of belief, where meaning is generated through collective interpretation and shared cultural knowledge.

However, the study also reveals that these long-standing beliefs are undergoing transformation due to the influence of Christianity, formal education, urbanization, and globalization. While some individuals fully reject reincarnation on doctrinal grounds, others adopt a hybrid worldview that accommodates both Christian teachings and indigenous cosmology. This indicates that cultural change among the Ewe is not characterized by total replacement of beliefs but by reinterpretation, negotiation, and adaptation.

Theoretically, the study confirms the relevance of Symbolic Interactionism in explaining how individuals construct meaning around reincarnation through social interaction, as well as Cultural Change Theory in demonstrating that cultural systems are dynamic and continuously evolving rather than static. Empirically, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how indigenous African belief systems persist while adapting to modern influences.

In conclusion, reincarnation beliefs among the Ewe of Ghana remain a vital and resilient aspect of cultural identity, spiritual life, and social organization. Rather than disappearing under modern pressures, these beliefs continue to evolve through ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity, reflecting the adaptive strength of Ewe cosmology in a changing world.

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