

THE INTEGRATION OF WOOD CARVING SKILLS INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING OF WOOD CARVING

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ABSTRACT

Wood carving has been an integral part of many ethnic groups in Ghana and worldwide. Currently, Ghanaian wood carvers produce countless varieties of wooden sculptures for tourist trade or export. The wood carving business in Vakpo has provided employment for natives in the production of different wooden objects such as stools, umbrella tops, linguist staffs, walking sticks, human and animal figures/figurines, and many more. Unlike any other wood carving industry, one of the major challenges facing Vakpo traditional wood carving is less recognition by art lovers due to scanty literature in the town and insufficient art enthusiasts in Ghana. The study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive research method. The data was gathered through observations and interviews. The results indicate that wood carvers in Vakpo exhibit mastery in creativity, intricate cuts as well as finishing, and their quality wood carvings are by no means inferior to the wooden sculptures of other wood carvers from renowned towns such as Aburi, Ahwiaa, Foase, and others.

Keywords: wood; carving; creativity; tools; finishing

ABSTRAK

Ukiran kayu telah menjadi bagian integral dari banyak kelompok etnis di Ghana dan seluruh dunia. Saat ini pemahat kayu Ghana menghasilkan berbagai macam patung kayu untuk wisata atau ekspor. Usaha ukiran kayu di Vakpo telah menyediakan lapangan kerja bagi masyarakat adat dalam produksi berbagai benda seperti bangku, payung, tongkat ahli bahasa, tongkat jalan, patung manusia dan hewan dan masih banyak lagi. Berbeda dengan industri ukiran kayu lainnya, tantangan utama yang dihadapi ukiran kayu tradisional Vakpo adalah kurangnya pengakuan dari para pecinta seni karena kurangnya literatur di kota tersebut dan juga tidak tersedianya banyak penggemar seni. Penelitian ini mengadopsi desain penelitian kualitatif dengan metode penelitian deskriptif. Pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi dan wawancara. Hasilnya menunjukkan para pemahat kayu di Vakpo menunjukkan kepiawaian dalam kreativitas, pemotongan yang rumit serta finishing dan kualitas ukiran kayunya tidak kalah dengan pahatan kayu para pemahat kayu lainnya dari kota-kota ternama seperti Aburi, Ahwiaa, Foase dan lain-lain.

Kata kunci: kayu; ukiran; kreativitas; peralatan; finishing

1. Introduction

Over the years according to Okra (2002), wood carving has been used to promote tourism through exports since its one of the greatest government policies in Ghana. He further states that Ghanaians for many centuries have been engaging in wood carving with the practice being passed on from one person to another by means of apprenticeship or family inheritance.

Vakpo is a community located in the North Dayi District of the Volta Region, Ghana, where the indigenes are mainly traditional wood carvers. These groups of Vakpo traditional wood carvers are noted for their expertise in a variety of specialized wooden products such as stools, umbrella tops, linguist staffs, walking sticks, human and animal figures/figurines and many more with wood carving, as their sole business. The wood carving industry is highly popular in Ghana, but mostly centered in Ashanti, Greater Accra and Eastern region. One of the less recognized wood carving areas is Vakpo, with little literature and also not at the disposal of many art enthusiasts in Ghana, hence the need to embark on this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of wood carving

Generally, wood carving has been an essential part of culture of many ethnic groups around the world and for many years have occupied the daily activities of individuals. Presently, there are varieties of wooden sculptures produced by wood carving for the purpose of trade, tourist attraction, religious worship, utilization and many more globally. One of the most delicate arts derived from the work of wood carvers is wood carving which is mostly seen as an item for decorating buildings such as mosques, churches, house and others (Ismail et al., 2014).

Alfred Coleman states that wood carving is an act of shaping a piece of wood by the process of using sharp cutting tools such as knife or chisel (Coleman, 2016). He further states that the cutting tool in combination with a striking tool like mallet which result in the production of a wooden artwork or object. Irfan Ullah is of the view that wood carving is the art of combining the art of beauty with usefulness. Irfan Ullah also

suggests that the beauty in wood carving is performed through various kinds of techniques and well organized designs with the use of specific tools based on selected wood (Ullah, 2018). Meanwhile, Siti Najwa Nazuki and Zumahiran Kamarudin argues that wood carving is the producing of aesthetic work as a result of using different techniques and motifs organized in a particular order with specific tools based on the choice of wood (Nazuki & Kamarudin, 2017).

Hamdzun Haron et al. also state that wood carving is an act of tearing off the surface of a wood through the use of different types of tools like carving chisels and knives (Haron et al., 2014). In order for an individual to execute wood carving, one needs to acquire the necessary tools to be able to work effectively, therefore, without these appropriate tools wooden sculptures cannot be carved.

H. E. Offei outlines wood carving as an art of creating forms or objects in wood through the technique of chiseling or chopping off negative parts away. H. E. Offei further states that today's wood carvers depend on powerful equipment to produce sculptural objects in wood which include chainsaw, electric drilling device, wood router and lathe turning machines (Offei, 2002).

With regard to traditional wood carving, wood of different types is the main material suitable for making sculptural objects such as figures, plaques, drums, stools, doll, door panel and more. These wooden sculptures are produced by way of cutting off unwanted part of wood bit by bit until a desired form is achieved. The variety of tools needed for wood carving come in various sizes and shapes. Some of the common tools for wood carving are chisels, gouges, knife, mallet and adze. Unlike stones and bronze, wood is the commonest sculptural material available and to this effect wood carving has become a well-known art activity among many ethnic groups around the world.

2.2. Brief history about wood carving

Wood carving happens to be one of the earliest forms of man's culture and shows how it served man in his quest to survive and develop. From prehistoric era to date, wood carving has been used as a form of human expression and also one of the most

enduring and greatest form of sculpture used by mankind to survive as well as develop. In ancient times, the ability of the hand of mankind has advanced through working with wood positively for people to admit that controlling wood is a basic element in the history of the human body (Radkau, 2011). By far, wood carving is still the leading method of expressing and commemorating historical events. Many cultures around the world have attracted much recognition due to their involvement and enormous contributions in woodcarving. According to Alfred Coleman, traditional wood carving in Africa is an important practice which has contributed results to the origins and ancestry of many Africans (Coleman, 2016).

H. E. Offei states that Italy, Germany, Russia and France are some of the countries in the middle ages who showcased some of the finest and earliest wood carving used mostly for Christian iconography and still exist (Offei, 2002). In Ghana, wood carving is an ancient tradition practiced by different cultures in Volta, Western, Eastern and Ashanti (Amoh, 2009). Adu-Agyem et al. also suggest that traditionally, wood carving in Ghana is an old practice as a result of the availability of wood found in the forest zones in Ashanti, Eastern, Western and some parts of Volta region (Adu-Agyem et al., 2014).

Right from prehistoric era, mankind is still experimenting with wood through the carving process of using different tools and equipment to produce wooden artworks in order to survive and develop. Currently, wood carving has provided employment for a large group of individuals who execute carved wooden objects such as stools, drums, human figures, animal figures and entertainment artifacts.

2.3. Wood carving industry in Ghana

The wood carving industry in Ghana has been in existence for many years with the occupation being pass on from one person to another naturally through the family lineage (Amoh, 2009). Wood carving was basically a profession for men and an inherited art that was transferred from father to son. According to Makawa Newa

Laurent, millions of people settling in cities and villages in developing countries have earned a living through wood carving business for many years (Laurent, 2009).

Bodo (2020) states that one of the profit-making occupation of Ghanaians was woodcarving before the era of colonization. He again opines that in the Ghanaian community, wood carvers were accorded maximum respect due to great worth placed on their artworks. Yusuf U. Oladimeji, on the other hand also argues that the wood carving business is a second means of generating money in areas with high agricultural prospects like Vakpo (Oladimeji, 2013).

Fredrick Boakye-Yiadom et al. assert that among the ethnic groups in Ghana, traditional wooden objects are considered as a practice which play a key role in the daily lives of the people basically for financial support and aesthetic purposes (Boakye-Yiadom et al., 2022). The wood carving business in certain parts of Ghana has created job opportunity for countless number of individuals with different designs in different forms of carved sculptures such as stool, regalia, drums, human figures, animal figures and entertainment objects (Ibiene magazine, 2020). Today, these wooden sculptures are still being produced and exported to many countries.

E. Amoh asserts that wood carving has been the main source of job opportunity in the dry and less farming areas due to the availability of basic resources found from the natural environment (Amoh, 2009). Terry Sunderland and Ousseynou Ndoeye opine that wood carving is an unofficial profit-making occupation, which has engaged many individuals globally and these people depend on the industry to earn a living. Most of the people in Vakpo solely depend on the wood carving business in order to develop and survive (Sunderland & Ndoeye, 2004).

Moreover, Shedrack Mwendwa Muthini explains that one of the ancient arts bounded by myths is wood carving industry, besides it serves as a source of countless functional products. Shedrack Mwendwa Muthini further argues that the woodcarving industry in India has been properly distributed all over the country with the aim that the traditional wood carving activities will be largely practiced (Muthini, 2017).

2.4. Socio-economic importance of wood carving

In reality, wood carving has been used since prehistoric era by primitive man as a means to meet their needs in life. Moreover, wood carving plays a vital role in generating income and improving the livelihood of individuals in their various community.

One of the major means, according to Maingi Benard et al., of generating income to households in Kenya is woodcarving. Research findings of Maingi Benard et al. reveal that people living in some part of Kenya supplement farming with woodcarving in order to meet basic demands such as food, health-care and education (Maingi et al., 2017). Shedrack Mwendwa Muthini also adds that majority of wood carvers depend on woodcarving as a source of income which help them to take care of their relatives (Muthini, 2017).

In Ghana, wooden sculptures have gained a huge local and external trades and has made the wood carving industry become the highest exporter (Amoh, 2009). Individuals in Ghana who carve and produce a variety of wooden sculptures such as stools, regalia, drums, human figures, animal images and musical instruments depend on wood carving as a source of employment. The tourism sector is highly connected with wood carving and as a result benefit largely from the export of wooden sculptures all over the world (Muga et al., 2014) (Adu-Agyem et al., 2014). Thus, wood carving creates direct and continuous employment to wood carvers as well as dealers in raw materials for carving, resource owners, middlemen in the business, apprentices, transporters, hawkers, wholesalers, retailers and those who export wooden sculptures and other range of associated industry (Choge, 2000). Many developing countries have recognized the economic benefits of wood carving, previously identified as an act of expressing one's thoughts, beliefs and way of life by creating symbols meant to communicate a particular message (Okrah, 2002).

Wood carving has over the years become a paramount job opportunity and above all attracted individuals to partake in its business activities due to its economic and artistic value. It has become a cornerstone for many communities around the world as a means of supporting employment, generating government revenue and tourism.

Since employment is becoming scarce, it is imperative that traditional leaders, government officials and artists acknowledge the impact of woodcarving in the economic development of a country.

3. Method

The researchers adopted qualitative research design with descriptive research method which provided data in words for the study. The descriptive approach provided a clear picture of the phenomenon and helped the researchers to observe, describe and document aspects of this study as it naturally occurs.

The population for the study comprised of Vakpo traditional workshops together with the wood carvers. The study employed convenience and purposive sampling techniques to sample Vakpo traditional wood carving workshops along with their wood carvers. There are a lot of Vakpo traditional wood carving workshops according to field study, moreover, quite a number are in active practice and others geographically out of reach. The researchers, however used convenience sampling technique to sample Vakpo traditional wood carving workshops based on nearness as well as having easy access to their facilities at any given time to avoid future challenges.

Using the purposive sampling, the researchers purposely identified traditional wood carvers who were masters and other ranks of wood carvers with great skills, techniques, clear articulation and expression of issues of interest to the researcher. The choice of purposive sampling technique ensured that information obtained was from a very specific and skilled group of people.

4. Discussion

Beginning from April, 2022, the researchers visited two different Vakpo traditional wood carving workshops nearest to the study. The essence of the visit was to identify and document components of Vakpo traditional wood carving of indigenous wood carvers belonging to these two different workshops with regard to

the selection of wood for carving, different kinds of wooden sculptures produced, tools and equipment for carving, basic wood carving processes and finishing.

4.1. History of Vakpo traditional wood carving

Vakpo is a small town blessed with electricity, portable drinking water, schools, post office, clinic, market and magistrate court. The main occupation of these people are farming and woodcarving. According to the respondent, Vakpo traditional wood carving started in the early 1950s with a group of indigenes from Adum, Kumasi, after successfully undergoing wood carving apprenticeship. These wood carvers were Togbe Tefe (Vakpo Todzi), Togbe Aglanya (Vakpo Dzogbati) and forgotten names of many others. Most of their carved works were exported to Lome (Togo) and Cotonou (Benin) (Botsoe, personal communication, 10/04/2022).

Currently, Vakpo traditional wood carvers have advanced to greatness in executing wooden sculptures. The town can boast of over ten wood carving workshops and master carvers with few apprentices. On the other hand, only a handful of these wood carving workshops are in active service (Agbo, personal communication, 10/04/2022).

4.2. Wooden sculptures produced in Vakpo

One of the wood carving finishers, Biasa reports that most of the carved artworks are usually due to request by clients or dealers outside Vakpo township. The production of animal figures in different sizes such as giraffes, elephants, lions, hippopotamus and many more (see Figure 1) are currently in high demand by dealers.

Not all but also, some of the carved works are based on request by individuals within Vakpo township and such carved works are stools, walking sticks, abstract figures and many others (see Figure 2–4) (Biasa, personal communication, 10/04/2022).



Figure 1. Animal figures
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 2. Stools
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 3. Walking stick
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 4.
Abstract figures

4.3. Apprenticeship

Individuals are enrolled into apprenticeship in order to learn a particular skill by understudying a more experienced wood carver. Agbo, a master carver reported that apprentices first learn the finishing of carved works then later begin to carve simple wooden objects and gradually graduate into carving more difficult works. The master carver added by saying, the apprentices are charged to pay an amount before the commencement of the training and may last for some years depending on the acquisition of skills by the apprentice (Agbo, personal communication, 10/04/2022).

According to one of the senior apprentices, they were first made to sand and polish the carved artworks executed by the master carver. He again said that with time, they were gradually taken through the woodcarving process especially carving of masks and other simple forms (Avorwlanu, personal communication, 10/04/2022). The master carver has realized that the youth are not interested in the

occupation due to the introduction of visual art in second cycle schools in Vakpo and many other factors.

4.4. Benefits in wood carving

The introduction of wood carving in the town has equipped them with an employable skill and also has avoided people from becoming a burden on others as narrated by one of the master carvers. Through the act of woodcarving, they have also become popular and gained high recognition in vakpo township. He again said that the woodcarving has served as a source of income and need not to rely on any relative for financial support. Most of Vakpo traditional wood carvers have travelled within and outside Ghana through the wood carving business (Ernest Biasa, personal communication, 10/04/2022). According to one of the senior apprentices, he has travelled to many places to carve and earn more money (Avorwlanu, personal communication, 10/04/2022).

4.5. Wood carving processes in workshop A

The wood carving processes in workshop A began with falling of trees, seasoning wood, blocking out, defining shapes / detailing and finishing. The wood carving methods are outlined further in the following write up.



Figure 5. Wood carving workshop A
(Photo: Agyei et al.)

4.6. Types of wood used for carving/seasoning

The types of wood used for carving by wood carvers in workshop A are rose wood, teak wood, ebony, neem tree, mahogany and many more. However, the commonest hard wood used by these wood carvers are rose wood and teak due to their availability and durability (see Figure 6).

After the trees have been fallen and cut to different sizes, they are exposed to sunlight for some number of days to reduce moist, shrinkage, splitting, make the logs lighter, stronger and reduce insect damage. Besides the seasoning, Vakpo wood carvers sometimes carve fresh woods depending on the nature or characteristics of wood to be used.



Figure 6. Rose and teak woods left in the open air
(Photo: Agyei et al.)

4.7. Tools and equipment for wood carving

The master wood carver assembled various kinds of tools and equipment used for wood carving. Some of the tools displayed at the center were adze (different sizes and shapes) (see Figure 7a–b), set of chisels, set of gouges (different sizes and shapes), hack saw, half rounded files (rough and smooth), mallet, scraper and knife, sharpening stone, spoke shave, tape measure (see Figure 8–16). The equipment used include bench vice and drilling devices (see Figure 17–18). Most of the simple wood carving tools used by the traditional wood carvers in workshop A are locally made.



Figure 7(a). Adze
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 7(b). Adze ('U' shaped)
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 8. Set of chisels
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 9. Set of gouges
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 10. Hack saw
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 11. Half rounded files
(rough and soft)
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 12. Wooden mallet
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 13. Scraper and knife
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 14. Sharpening stone
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 15. Spoke shave
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 16. Tape measure
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 17. Bench vice
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 18. Drill device: used to create holes
(Photo: Agyei et al.)

4.8. Blocking out from the wood

The master wood carver used various tools such as adze ('U' shaped), large chisels and 'C' gouge in blocking out of form with a mental picture of the artwork to be produced (see Plate 19 – 20). The researcher observed the master wood carver's activities as he skillfully brings out the form from the wood. This wood carving process was done with a correct sitting position and great care in order to avoid any injuries.



Figure 19. Master wood carver
blocking out with adze ('U' shaped)
(Photo: Agyei et al.)



Figure 20. Master wood carver blocking
out with large sized 'C' gouge
(Photo: Agyei et al.)

4.9. Defining shapes and detailing

The master wood carver used the large chisels to remove various portions of the form to carve out the defined shape (see Figure 21). Marking to indicate some of the features on the wooden sculpture was done with a chalk by the master wood carver (see Figure 22). A set of chisels and gouges were further used to bring out details in the wooden sculpture (see Figure 23). After achieving the exact carved object, the master wood carver used spoke shave to further whittle the surface of the entire piece evenly in order to achieve roundness and curves in the artwork (see Figure 24).



Figure 21. Master wood carver defining shapes
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 22. Master wood carver using chalk to mark features
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 23. Master wood carver detailing artwork
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 24. Master wood carver using spoke shave to whittle
(Photo: Agyei et all.)

4.10. Finishing

The finishing processes started with the display of materials and tools such as shoe brush, painting brush, dark tan wax polish, cloth and sand paper of 60, 80, 120 & 240 grits (see Figure 25-27). The researcher observed the master carver use sandpaper to sand the carved wooden sculpture from course to fine (see Figure 28). Cloth was used to dust the sand artwork and after applied dark tan wax polish (see Figure 29–30). The polished work was allowed to dry (see Plate 31). The master carver then applied shoe brush on the entire surface of the polished wooden sculpture and after used the cloth to burnish (see Figure 32–33). The finished wooden sculpture was displayed (see Figure 34).



Figure 25. Shoe brush, dark tan wax
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 26. Cloth: used to
burnish polish & brush
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 27. Sand paper of 60, 80, 120 & 240 grit
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 28. Master wood carver sanding wooden sculpture from coarse to fine
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 29. Master wood carver using cloth to dust sand wooden sculpture
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 30. Master wood carver applying dark tan polish
(Photo: Agyei et all)



Figure 31. Polished wooden sculpture left to dry
(Photo: Agyei et all.)



Figure 32. Master wood carver using shoe brush to burnish polished wooden sculpture
(Photo: Agyei et all)



Figure 33. Master wood carver using cloth to burnish
(Photo: Agyei et all)



Figure 34. Finished wooden sculpture
(Photo: Agyei et al)

4.11. Wood carving Processes in workshop B

The processes in wood carving begun in workshop B with falling of trees, seasoning of wood, blocking out, defining shapes / detailing and finishing. The wood carving methods are outlined further in the following write up.



Figure 35. Wood carving workshop B
(Photo: Agyei et al)

4.12. Types of wood used for carving/seasoning

The traditional wood carvers in workshop B use woods such as Ebony, Rose wood, Teak wood, Neem tree, Agarwood (*Aquilaria malaccensis*) and ‘Avenya’ wood.

The commonest wood used by the traditional wood carvers is teak wood (see Figure 36). The choice of wood often depends on the kind of wooden object to be produced. After the trees have been fallen, the wood carvers season the wood by exposing them to sunlight for some number of days to reduce moist, shrinkage, splitting, make the logs lighter and stronger and reduce insect damage. They sometimes carve fresh woods depending on the nature or characteristics of wood to be used.



Figure 36. Types of wood for carving/seasoning (teak wood exposed to sunlight)
(Photo: Agyei et all)

4.13. Tools and equipment for wood carving

The master wood carver displayed a variety of wood carving tools and equipment at the workshop. Some of the tools are adze (different sizes), axe (different sizes), hack saw, sets of chisels, sets of ‘C’ & ‘U’ gouges, set of ‘V’ gouges, mallets, rough file, scraper and knife, sharpening stone, tape measure (see Figure 37-47). The equipment used was bench vice (see Figure 48).



Figure 37. Adze (different sizes)
(Photo: Agyei et all)



Figure 38. Axe (different sizes)
(Photo: Agyei et all)



Figure 39. Hack saw
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 40. Set of chisels
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 41. Set of 'C' & 'U' gouges
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 42. Set of 'V' gouges
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 43. Wooden mallets
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 44. Rough file
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 44. Scraper and knife
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 45. Sharpening stone
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 46. Tape measure
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 47. Bench vice
(Photo: Agyei et al)

4.14. Blocking out from the wood

To begin wood carving, the master wood carver used chainsaw and axe to block out forms from the fallen trees. These activities usually take place in the forest for easy transporting of the blocked wooden sculptures (see Plate 49) to the workshop. The blocking out of forms were executed without a sketch since the master wood carver already has a mental picture of the wooden sculpture to be produced.



Figure 48. Blocked wooden sculptures to be carved
(Photo: Agyei et al)

4.15. Defining shapes and detailing

First of all, the master wood carver used the axe and adze respectively to define various shapes of the wooden sculpture with a correct sitting position and great care in order to avoid any injuries (see Figure 49-50). A set of chisels and gouges were further used to bring out intricate details in the wooden sculpture (see Figure 51). After executing the final wooden sculpture, the master wood carver used rough file to obtain roundness and curves in the artwork (see Figure 52). The final carved wooden sculpture was displayed (see Figure 53).



Figure 49. Master wood carver defining shapes with axe (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 50. Master wood carver defining shapes with adze
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 51. Master wood carver
detailing with chisel
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 52. Master wood carver
using rough file to achieve
roundness and curves (Photo:
Agyei et al)



Figure 53. Carved wooden sculpture
(Photo: Agyei et al)

4.16. Finishing

The master wood carver displayed some of the tools and materials for finishing wooden sculptures which include sand paper of 60, 80, 120 & 400 grit, wax polish (brown, black and neutral), diluted potassium permanganate, brushes, kerosene (see Figure 54), dyes of different colours, cloth and sponge (see Figure 55–56). Sand paper was used to sand the entire wooden sculpture from course to fine and dusted with a cloth (see Figure 57–58). Later, a dye was used to create patterns on the wooden sculpture and left to dry (see Figure 59-60).



Figure 54. Sand paper (60, 80, 150 and 400 grit), brushes, wax polish (brown, black and neutral) kerosene and diluted potassium permanganate
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 55. Cloth and sponge
(Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 56. Dyes (red, yellow, blue, black, violet) (Photo: Agyei et al)

After some few minutes, the master wood carver applied brown polish to the wooden sculpture and left to dry (see Figure 61-62). After drying, a used sand paper of 400 grit was used to sand the polished wooden sculpture (see Figure 63). The master wood carver again applied brown polish to the artwork and allowed to dry (see Figure 64-65). Sponge and cloth were used respectively to burnish the polished wooden sculpture (see Figure 66 (a- b)). The finished wooden sculpture was displayed (see Figure 67).



Figure 57. Master wood carver sanding wooden sculpture from coarse to fine (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 58. Master wood carver dusting sand wooden sculpture (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 59. Master wood carver applying black dye to create a pattern (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 60. Dyed wooden sculpture left to dry (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 61. Master wood carver applying brown polish (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 62. Polished wooden sculpture left to dry (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 63. Master wood carver sanding polished wooden sculpture with used sand paper of 400 grit (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 64. Master wood carver applying brown polish for the second time (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 65. Polished wooden sculpture left to dry (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 66 (a). Master wood carver using sponge to burnish the wooden sculpture (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 66 (b). Master wood carver using cloth to burnish the wooden sculpture (Photo: Agyei et al)



Figure 67). Finished wooden sculpture
(Photo: Agyei et al)

4.17. Main Findings

In 1950, wood carving was introduced in Vakpo by indigenes from Kumasi after undergoing an apprenticeship in wood carving. The execution of wooden sculptures by Vakpo traditional wood carvers often follow similar procedures irrespective of the artwork to be carved. They all carved with a mental picture of the wooden sculpture to be produced. Moreover, these wood carvers have greatly mastered in the art of wood carving so well that they need not produce sketches on paper before carving.

The wooden sculptures produced by Vakpo traditional wood carvers are mostly based on request or demand of clients. Some of the wooden sculptures produced by request or demand are stools, walking sticks and animal figures such as elephants, lions, giraffes and others.

Vakpo traditional wood carvings begin with the falling of trees suitable for carving. These tree species suitable for carving are found within Vakpo township and the North-Dayi District. The types of woods are acquired through chainsaw operators, farmers and wood dealers. Some of the trees used for carving by Vakpo traditional wood carvers are Rose tree, Teak, Ebony, Neem tree, Mahogany and many more.

However, the commonest tree for wood carving are Rose wood and teak wood due to their availability. Also, Vakpo traditional wood carvers prefer using rose wood for carving because they are of the view that its characteristics are similar to Ebony wood. After the trees have been fallen, they expose them to sunlight for some number of days to reduce moist, shrinkage, splitting, make the logs lighter, stronger and reduce insect damage. In addition, Vakpo wood carvers sometimes carve fresh woods depending on the nature or characteristics of wood to be used.

Vakpo traditional wood carvers really make judicious use of simple and similar tools such as adze (different sizes), axe, gouges (different sizes and shapes), chisels (different sizes and shapes), knives, sharpening stone, scraper, knife, mallet, rip saw, hack saw, tape measure and many more. This is because most of these simple tools are very easy to handle and purchased from local blacksmiths. The equipment used include bench vice (different sizes), manual drilling devices and chainsaw. The simple wood carving tools used are mostly locally manufactured with the believe that they are better and durable as compared to the foreign tools. Obviously, it appears that Vakpo traditional wood carvers lacked modern technology needed to produce their artworks more time and energy efficient.

However, the researcher's findings indicate that Vakpo traditional wood carvers have similar processes in wood carving with regard to marking to indicate features of the form on the wood (not often), blocking out the form from the wood, defining shapes and detailing and finishing.

The quality of Vakpo traditional wood carvings are by no means inferior to the wooden sculptures of other carvers from renowned towns such as Aburi, Ahwiaa, Foase and others. The materials used in each part of the work are selected wood that has a beautiful pattern with superior quality (Saputri & Yuwono, 2022). Moreover, Vakpo traditional wood carvers exhibited mastery in creativity, intricate cuts and finishing of artworks.

Vakpo traditional wood carvings are no exception when talking of the most active and philosophical packed art forms in Ghana, because their produced wooden

sculptures carry the concepts of rich Ghanaian values such as proverbs, stories, aesthetics and purposes.

5. Conclusion

One of the greatest government policies to promote tourism has been the export of wood carvings, therefore, this study aims at bringing to light a clear picture of traditional wood carving practice in Vakpo with little recognition as well as scanty literature at the disposal of art lovers in Ghana and worldwide.

The traditional wood carving business in Vakpo has not been offered the needed recognition by the government and other relevant stakeholders. As a result, Vakpo traditional wood carving has lost its popularity, market value and displacement of many wood carvers with others not in active service. Vakpo traditional wood carvers find happiness in talking about their works since they are well abreast and experienced like any other highly recognized wood carvers in Aburi, Ahwia, Foase and others.

The evidence of this research should be studied by government and all other stakeholders in fostering wood carving activities in Vakpo township. It will also ensure proper documentation of wood carving business in the town and in the end, at the disposal of art many lovers worldwide.

It recommends that Vakpo traditional wood carvers owe the continuity of woodcarving and need practical support from corporate bodies such as tourism sector, District Assembly and others. This recommendation is relevant to the government, tourism sector and all other stakeholders responsible for the preservation of the Ghanaian cultural heritage.

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