

**THE RELIGIOUS CONNOTATION OF EDUKONE AMONG THE ITESO OF  
EASTERN UGANDA. A CASE STUDY OF USUK SUB COUNTY KATAKWI  
DISTRICT.**

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**22/U/GMARS/O83/PE**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH  
AND GRADUATE TRAINING IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER  
OF ARTS DEGREE IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
OF KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY**

**NOVEMBER, 2025**

## DECLARATION

I Atai Christine do declare that this Dissertation titled “**The Religious Connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A Case Study of Usuk Sub County Katakwi District.**” is my original work and has not been submitted to any other academic institution as a partial fulfillment for any award.

Sign.....

Date .....

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## APPROVAL

This is to confirm that this dissertation, titled “**The Religious Connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A Case Study of Usuk Sub County Katakwi District.**” has been prepared under our supervision and is now ready for submission and examination with our approval as supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my family for the unconditional love and support they rendered to me during my course of study.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Kuloba Robert Wabyanga, the Head of Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, without forgetting my research supervisors Dr. Prosperous Nankindu and Dr. Margaret Ssebunya. I assure you, your unwavering dedication and hard work have been instrumental in helping me to finish this dissertation. In an identical way, my gratitude also extends to the principal Bishop Willis Core PTC who gave me an opportunity to sometimes be off duty. This gave me time to concentrate on my studies. I sincerely thank each and every respondent for their willing disclosure of the data required for this study, without whose participation my acknowledgement would be lacking. Without my classmates and family, I could not have studied and advanced to this point. For that, I am equally grateful. Your generosity will always be remembered.

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## ABSTRACT

This study titled “The Religious Connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A Case study of Usuk sub County Katakwi District” was focused in Usuk sub-county, Katakwi district, Teso Sub region, Eastern Uganda. The background to this study justifies that specifically studying the intersection between cultural identity and religious connotation of *Edukone* contributes to a more holistic understanding of traditional marriage rituals among Iteso. The problem statement of the study was: Iteso participate in the rites of passage like traditional marriage (*Edukone*). However, those experiences have been richly subjected to academic study on a profane stance. The religious connotation is limitedly researched which is a threat to erosion of the religious implications of *Edukone* rituals. The objectives of the study were; to describe the traditional rituals embedded in Edukone, to establish the relevance of Edukone among the Iteso and to explore the religious implications of Edukone among the Iteso. The study is significant in that it seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature and promote a deeper understanding of how traditional beliefs inform spiritual life, social identity and community cohesion in a complex contemporary world. The study used Durkheim's theory of religion and Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy. Literature reviewed showed a gap that scholarship in existence focuses more on the secular dimension of marriage rituals, leaving religious aspect scanty and wanting. This study employed the interpretivist research paradigm which provided a frame work for exploring the rich subjective experiences of Iteso. The design was qualitative and it allowed use of open ended interviews, focus group discussion and observation to collect data. Data was analysed thematically, presented using descriptive narratives and direct quotations. Key findings included Edukone rituals of *Agolokin apese*, *Aiwom Apese*, *Etube*, and *Eitane* among others. On the relevance of Edukone rituals; social cohesion, preservation of religious values, and preservation of cultural identity were established and on the religious implications of Edukone the findings were; fertility blessings which bestow productivity and safety on the family and descendants, protective blessings which repel bad omens from couples and children, and rituals to cleanse marital infidelity and incest to appease the ancestors and restore sanctity in marriage and the clan. From the findings, it was deducible that modernity has conflicted with the traditional practice of *Edukone*. The study recommends Documentation and Preservation, Cultural Awareness Programs, Integration of *Edukone* in Education, Interfaith Dialogues, Community Workshops, Ritual Adaptation and Modernization; offering counseling services is key and deeper ethnographic and historical studies to be conducted so as to uncover the correlation between modernity and tradition in relation to trends of rites of passage among Iteso.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

A.D:	Anno Domini
ATR:	African Traditional Religion.
BC:	Before Christ
etc.:	et cetera
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
i.e.:	that is
LC:	Local Council

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This study is based on the Religious Connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A Case Study of Usuk Sub County Katakwi districts”. It is qualitative in nature. Chapter one gives the general introductory information to the study. It comprises of elements that include; background to the study, problem statement, and objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study and significance of the study. Chapter two is the literature review. The literature is reviewed basing on the specific objectives of this study. The content is arranged thematically following the objectives. Chapter three comprises of the research methodology which was used to conduct this study. Its unique elements are explained in that very chapter. Chapter four contains the analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings of objective one. Chapter five analyses, presents and discusses findings of objective two. Chapter six contains analysis, presentation and discussion of findings of objective three. Then chapter seven has the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study that are all based on the findings of the study.

Much as those chapters form this study, it is key to note that the Iteso exhibit a rich cultural tapestry that is deeply intertwined with their spiritual beliefs and practices. Central to this cultural identity is Edukone, which embodies uncountable religious meanings and connotations. Edukone is not merely a social construct but a vital aspect of the Iteso's worldview, encompassing their understanding of life, community, and the divine. This dissertation seeks to explore the religious connotation of Edukone among the Iteso, investigating its significance

within traditional practices, its interaction with contemporary religious beliefs, and its role in the identity formation of the Iteso people.

While previous studies, such as Owaraga (2023, p. 3), in her article; marriage bill 2022 versus Iteso customary marriage have examined secular aspects of Iteso culture, there remains a significant gap in the literature specifically addressing Edukone and its multifaceted religious implications. By delving into the rituals, symbols, and narratives associated with Edukone, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that illuminates how the Iteso interpret their spiritual realities and how these beliefs are sustained or transformed in the face of globalization and modernization. This investigation is not only crucial for understanding the Iteso culture but also contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of religion, culture, and identity in contemporary Uganda.

Edukone, as a pivotal element of Iteso spirituality, presents a unique opportunity to analyze the interplay between traditional beliefs and modern influences. In an era marked by rapid sociocultural change, especially with the encroachment of Western religions and globalized ideologies, it is essential to understand how such traditional concepts are reinterpreted or maintained by indigenous populations.

Moreover, exploring the religious connotation of Edukone offers insights into the resilience and adaptability of Iteso culture in a rapidly changing world. By examining how the Iteso navigate their spiritual landscape, this study aims to highlight the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge systems, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural heritage and its relevance in contemporary society.

This study on the religious connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda is both timely and significant, as it seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature and promote a deeper understanding of how traditional beliefs inform social identity, community cohesion, and spiritual life in a complex world. Chapter one as hinted above gives background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, and significance of the study as seen below:

## **1.1 Background to the Study**

This research intended to understand the religious connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. The study approach to understand the religious connotation of Edukone among Iteso of Eastern Uganda was qualitative in nature such that the researcher interacted with Iteso so as to get information out of them. The study gives the full background to the current study of the religious connotation of Edukone among the Iteso. Specifically, it describes the research site, historical background of Iteso and the description of Edukone and briefly understanding religion.

### **1.1.1 Historical Background**

The study of marriage rituals across various cultures reveals complex practices that often intertwine with religious beliefs. Historically, marriage has served as a fundamental social institution, and its rituals reflect the values and norms of the societies that practice them. In many cultures, including those in non-African contexts, marriage rituals encompass both secular and sacred dimensions. It is on record that around 2350 BC, Mesopotamia documented the first marriage rituals, which included hand fasting and dowry exchanges based on culture and religion (Staff, 2015, p. 56). Hand fasting involved binding the couple's hands together with ribbon or cord to symbolize their union, while dowry exchanges were gifts given by the groom to the bride's family as a sign of his commitment (Barajas, 2023, p. 16). These rituals were meant to

solidify the bond between the couple and their families, ensuring a strong foundation for their future together (Mackey, 2023, p. 72). Religious leaders or community elders usually establish traditional marriage rituals to bless a marriage. Many communities copied these ceremonies and added their own customs and traditions to the occasion (Adamu & Elabo, 2022, p. 48).

For instance, the Hebrews in 2000 BC first detailed the religious significance of marriage rituals. They believed marriage is holy and instituted by God. In the book of Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:18 in the Old Testament, it is believed that God authored marriage at the creation of man and woman. This idea that marriage has a divine beginning and sacred importance has spread worldwide, influencing marriage rites and traditions across communities (Quinlan, 2023, p. 63). For instance, in the Jewish culture and many other societies, marriage is seen as a spiritual relationship sanctioned by a divine entity, setting a precedent (Jackson, 2011, p. 17). This belief has shaped and continues to shape how different societies across the globe view marriage and its importance.

However, in the 1800s the Europeans began to rethink marriage as a holy relationship (Vorster, n.d.). Individualism and romanticism shifted marriage's focus from divinity to personal fulfillment and happiness. This transition has had a major impact on marriage; with some saying it has harmed the bond between the marrieds, while others argue that it is vital to reflect on changing society ideals (Robinson, 2018, p. 26). Nonetheless, many societies still follow the Hebrew patriarchs' view of marriage as holy, despite these modifications.

For example, in India, the traditional Hindu wedding is steeped in religious symbolism, with rituals that invoke blessings from deities (Nanda, 2016, p. 88-90). Similarly, in Japan, Shinto wedding ceremonies emphasize spiritual purification and ancestral veneration, underscoring the religious significance of marriage (Yamaguchi, 2015, p. 41-42).

Therefore, in the experiences above, it is clear that the documentation of both the secular and religious connotations of traditional marriage is rich, which ought to be the case across all societies including Africa, and yet in some African societies traditional marriage rituals are not popular due to limited specialized scholarship covering such communities for example the Karamojong and Iteso communities in Uganda.

#### **1.1.1.1 Marriage in an African Context**

In Africa, traditional African marriage ceremonies were initially religiousized from time immemorial. However, Donati argues that by early 19<sup>th</sup> century the religious aspect of marriage was more evident among the Maasai tribe. It was started by their spiritual leader, Ole Sempeyo, who felt marriage should be divinely blessed. The initiative emphasized spiritual connection and supernatural blessings in Maasai marriages (Donati, 2019, p. 16). The Maasai believe that the ancestors shape a couple's existence and therefore, the couple must perform various rites and ceremonies during marriage to honor their ancestors and seek their advice and protection. This spiritual link strengthens the couple's relationship and emphasizes Maasai culture and customs (Kipkalum, 2018, p. 35).

In West Africa, the interplay between marriage and religion is evident in the practices of the Yoruba people, where rituals are deeply embedded in their spiritual beliefs. Scholars have noted that these rituals facilitate connections with ancestors and deities, illustrating how religious connotations permeate marriage (Adebanwi, 2013, p. 44). In North Africa, the Berber communities have also demonstrated the integration of Islamic practices into their marriage rituals, highlighting the dual influence of indigenous customs and religious beliefs (Mokhtar, 2018, p. 82).

Moving to Southern Africa, the Zulu wedding ceremony exemplifies the blend of cultural and religious elements, where rituals not only signify the union of two families but also invoke ancestral spirits for blessings (Mkhize, 2017, p. 23). In East Africa, particularly in Tanzania, the Chaga people incorporate Christian elements into their traditional marriage practices, reflecting the syncretism of indigenous people and missionary influences (Kisaka, 2020, p.18-19). These examples underscore that the religious dimensions of marriage rituals are often overlooked in favor of secular interpretations, which dominate much of the scholarly discourse.

In Uganda, the focus on secular aspects of traditional marriage rituals, particularly the *Edukone* among the Iteso, has led to a gap in understanding the religious implications embedded within these practices. Previous studies have largely addressed the economic and social functions of marriage, neglecting the spiritual significance that these rituals hold for the Iteso people. This oversight is problematic, as it diminishes the richness of the cultural heritage and the role of spirituality in shaping social practices.

This study intended to fill this gap by exploring three key themes: the rituals embedded in *Edukone*, the relevance of these rituals to contemporary Iteso society, and the religious implications that have been largely absent from current scholarship. By examining these themes, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how *Edukone* rituals function not only as social contracts but also as spiritual ceremonies that reinforce community identity and cultural continuity.

The relevance of this research extends beyond academic discourse; it has practical implications for cultural preservation and policy development. By highlighting the religious dimensions of *Edukone* rituals, this study aims to influence policymakers and community leaders to recognize and support the spiritual aspects of traditional practices. This recognition can foster greater

appreciation for cultural heritage and encourage the integration of traditional values in contemporary societal frameworks.

So, this research will add to the ongoing debates about the interplay between religion and cultural practices in marriage rituals, emphasizing the need for a holistic understanding that incorporates both secular and religious dimensions. By doing so, it aims to enrich the existing body of knowledge and contribute to the preservation of valuable cultural practices among the Iteso people

### **1.1.2 Conceptual Background**

It provides a detailed conceptualization of the core terms underlying this study—Edukone and Religious Connotation grounded in ethnographic and religious studies of the Iteso community. This understanding situates the study within the intertwined cultural and religious realities of traditional Iteso marriage as explained below:

#### **1.1.2.1 The Iteso Community**

Uganda has a total population of 45,905,417 persons with sixty nine ethnic groups. The Iteso are among the sixty nine ethnic groups with the population of 3,146,079 out of the 45, 905,417 (UBOS, 2024), specifically the Iteso community falls part of the Nilo-hamites ethnic group. To understand the cultural world view of Iteso who belong to the Karamojong cluster, it is worth understanding their origin first. Friis-Hansen (2017, p. 21)), asserts that according to anthropologists, the Karamojong were originally known as "Itunga," a group that exiled itself from Abyssinia in modern-day Ethiopia between 1600 and 1700 A.D. They split into two branches as they approached the region that is now the border between Kenya and Ethiopia. One branch relocated to modern-day Kenya, where it became the Maasai cluster and the Kalenjin

group. The other branch, which went by the name "Ateker," moved westward. Ateker further divided into a number of groups, including the Kumam, Iteso, Dodoth, Jie and Karamojong in modern-day Uganda as well as the Turkana in modern-day Kenya. Ateker also covers the Southern regions of what is now Southern Sudan, including Jiye and Toposa/Topotha.

Ateker's main group went southward. A few of them made their home in what is now Southern Karamoja, eventually giving rise to the three major clans that currently reside there: The Matheniko in the East, near Moroto Mountain; the Pian in the South; and the Bokora in the West, within the Karamoja sub region.

Due to harsh climatic conditions, the other clans wished to continue West wards. They disagreed with those who were tired of further movements and had settled. Williams (2020, p. 36), observed that the Karamojongs were originally known as the Jie. He further explains that the clans that continued to the West coined the name Karamojong. The capable ones used the phrase "*Ekar Ngimojong*" to ridicule the ones that remained, meaning "elders are tired and cannot walk any further" hence the name "Karamojong/Karimojong". According to Emorut (2020, p. 73), much as elders were ridiculed, they were worried of this young people breaking away from them. When they insisted, the elders uttered a word "*atesia*" to curse the young *itunga* who refused to listen to them. "*Atesia*" means "Dead bodies or graves". This meant that the ones who continued to move would become dead bodies. Therefore, the elders (Karamojong) also coined the name, Iteso. Much as these groups have their differences and uniqueness, all of them are known as "Karamojong Cluster".

Stites et al. (2007, p. 48) and Quam (1996, p. 26) set Iteso apart from other Karamojong communities. They claim that in terms of how they interact with formal education, their financial standing and representation and the dynamics of language and culture, Iteso people are

exceptional and extremely civilized. They are found in Eastern part of Uganda. Emorut (2020, p.73), clarifies that, currently Iteso occupy the following districts in Uganda: Amuria, Bukedea, Butebo, Kaberamaido, Kapelebyong, Katakwi, Soroti, Kumi, Ngora, Serere, Pallisa, as well as some areas in Tororo and Busia.

Another interesting account of Iteso's way of life is being strong adherents of their tradition. Much as they are highly civilized. The most common cultural practice but severely getting modified due to modernity is marriage (Edukone). Barber, (1962, p. 13); Quam, (1996, p. 26) and Stites et al., (2007, p. 48), confirm that there is partial scholarly confirmation definitely addressing the theme of cultural marriage practices among the Iteso and the level of particular scholarship on this issue. However, based on the existing literature, researchers have noted the complications in obtaining comprehensive and up-to-date data on marriage customs and trends within the Iteso community, as much of the information remains localized and undocumented.

It is also observable that scholarship done on Iteso has only focused on capturing the secular cultural connotation of these rituals, leaving the religious connotation according to the experience of the natives. It is against that background that the researcher was compelled to examine the religious connotation of traditional marriage rituals (Edukone) among Iteso in order to establish and document those traditional rituals, explore their significance and ascertain their religious implication in the world view of Iteso.

However, Iteso have a unique cultural heritage characterized by distinct language, customs, and traditions. The Edukone rituals are pivotal in their social structure, representing not only the union of two individuals but also the convergence of families and clans, thereby reinforcing communal ties and identity.

### **1.1.2.2 Religious Connotation**

Religious connotation is the meaning and association that link cultural acts, symbols, or practices to a belief system or divine order, influencing how people experience and interpret their world (Mbiti 1990). It signifies that certain rituals although cultural possess deeper sacred elements understood to invoke supernatural powers, ancestral blessings or moral order. Within African societies including the Iteso, cultural practices are often inseparable from religious worldviews thus rituals serve both social and spiritual functions.

### **1.1.2.3 Edukone (Iteso Traditional Marriage)**

Edukone is the series of traditional marriage rituals that mark the formal union of two individuals has husband and wife to make a family. Edukone is culturally understood as “aiduk” or “adukokin” which means to build. This emphasizes that marriage is regarded as constructing a household and securing social stability through land ownership and mutual responsibilities (Owaraga, 2021). The rituals are done throughout the entire process of Edukone. They include; booking the girl, picking the girl from her parents, negotiating for the bride price, traditional marriage, bidding farewell, initiating the woman to the man’s clan, granting full membership in the man’s clan, cleansing marital infidelity in case unfaithfulness between the couples arises. These rituals are essential to Iteso because they reinforce collective identity, social norms embedding values such as family unity, social cohesion and continuity of the lineage amid changing societal contexts (Mauma, 2020).

Edukone is both a cultural practice and sacred (religious). It is a cultural practice in that it involves traditional rituals such as dowry negotiations where the groom’s family initiates negotiations with the bride’s family typically involving discussions on dowry and marriage terms. The dowery payment is cultural and profane and it includes; cattle, goats, and other goods . Also the music and feasting which brings together both families and the community is cultural

and profane, it strengthens family bonds and alliances between clans (extended families). This reflects how Edukone is a vibrant celebration of culture, community and family values.

On the religious stance of Edukone, the religion evident is African Traditional Religion (ATR). Edukone has rituals such as protective blessings which involve prayers, yodeling, chants and the use of blessed articles like the symbolic stick called Esas and blessed butter, fertility blessings where the woman's chest, waist, laps, face are anointed with raw butter and star grass (Emuria) is tied around her waist. These rituals are meant to invoke God (Edeke) and the ancestors to bless the couple with fertility, prosperity, protection and harmonious family relations.

The involvement of spiritual elders such as initiated elderly women and clan leaders who act as intermediaries in the performance of prayers and sacrifices during marriage ceremonies also highlight the sacred (religious) dimension of Edukone for instance, practices like sprinkling of traditional beer (Ajon) and other invocations symbolize seeking divine favor upon the couple.

Edukone is still practiced in Teso, it is performed on both men and women who are joining as husband and wife but most rituals are performed on women.

Edukone according to the Iteso world view is said to be complete culturally when all the cultural rituals are followed but in the case where some couples decide to omit certain cultural rituals, Edukone will not be considered as a traditional Iteso marriage for example, some couples opt to neglect the ritual of initiating the woman to the man's clan and go for church marriage which is not traditional in this case, their marriage will not be regarded as Edukone according to the Iteso.

#### **1.1.2.4 Religion (Ediini)**

Religion is a complex of culturally situated beliefs, practices and institutions centered on ultimate concerns involving transcendent realities or sacred values (Christian Smith, 2017). In

Usuk village, religion is the social glue that coheres a community and gives way to understanding of how the world works and what morality is. Core areas of Religion in Usuk include the following:

**Means of spiritual Connection:** Religion is avenues for people to stay connected with the complex mysterious realm of divine and also connect their spirits down here among humans maintaining that inherited bond. Rituals, prayers and sacrifices are the ways to achieve this connection.

**Cultural Identity:** The religious activities in Usuk are so inherently connected to cultural practices that they entangle with them from festivals to team sports, rites of passage and family reunions. These events represent both spiritual beliefs and cultural inheritance of Iteso.

**Moral Framework:** In Usuk religion is perceived to provide the guidelines to live life as better and responsible people in society by giving values such as humanity, humanism or charity. Villagers believe that these principles are essential to keep the village-line going on smoothly.

**Community Cohesion:** Religious festivals and other gatherings held in both communal and personal shrines help people in Usuk and Teso generally to build a community. This is because they foster the sense of belongingness among natives. Shared beliefs and rituals strengthen social bonds & a group identity as Iteso.

**Adapt and Survive:** The religious world in Usuk is a mix between the local intellectual thoughts (African Traditional religious beliefs) with Christian traditions, representing how adaptive this community can be and expressing their evolving spiritual life time after time. In a nutshell, religion in Usuk Village is multi-dimensional and it informs individual convictions, community traditions and cultural sentiments realizing the symbiotic relationship between belief and life.

Much as the African experience of religion is rich in Usuk, it has not been academically exposed. While existing scholarship extensively examines secular aspects of marriage, the religious implications of the *Edukone* rituals remain underexplored. These ceremonies often invoke blessings from ancestors and spiritual entities, emphasizing their sacred dimensions. The neglect of these spiritual elements in studies diminishes the understanding of how deeply intertwined religion and culture are in the Iteso context. Many scholars have focused on the social and economic functions of marriage, overlooking the spiritual elements that underpin these practices. This study aimed to bridge that gap by exploring how *Edukone* rituals embody both secular and sacred meanings, enriching the understanding of their role in the Iteso community.

So, the significant gaps in the existing body of knowledge concerning *Edukone* rituals among the Iteso people warrant further investigation. By examining the intersection of cultural identity, religious connotation, and social functions, this study aimed to contribute to a more holistic understanding of traditional marriage rituals. Addressing these gaps not only enriches academic discourse but also fosters greater appreciation for the spiritual dimensions of cultural practices, thereby enhancing efforts for cultural preservation in a rapidly changing world.

### **1.1.3 Contextual Background**

The Iteso people of Eastern Uganda possess a rich cultural heritage, characterized by unique traditions and practices, among which *Edukone* ritual stands out. This ritual is not merely a social contract between individuals but a significant cultural event that reinforces communal ties and reflects the values and beliefs of the Iteso community. However, much of the existing scholarship surrounding marriage rituals has predominantly focused on their secular dimensions, often neglecting the underlying religious connotations that enrich these practices.

The *Edukone* ritual encompasses a series of ceremonies and customs that embody both social and spiritual significance. For the Iteso, these rituals serve as a means of invoking blessings from ancestors and spiritual entities, thereby connecting the living with their cultural heritage. Despite this, the religious implications of *Edukone* rituals remain underexplored in academic literature, creating a gap in understanding the role spirituality plays in shaping cultural identity and community cohesion.

In a rapidly modernizing world, traditional practices like *Edukone* face challenges from globalization and changing societal norms. The neglect of the spiritual dimensions in discussions of these rituals risks undermining their significance and may contribute to the erosion of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is essential to examine how these rituals function not only as social events but also as expressions of spirituality that reinforce the Iteso's cultural identity.

Conducting this study is crucial for several reasons. First, it aims to bridge the existing gap in scholarship by exploring the religious connotations of *Edukone* rituals, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of their significance. Second, by highlighting the spiritual dimensions, the study seeks to influence cultural preservation efforts, encouraging the Iteso community to maintain and celebrate their traditions in a way that honors both their social and spiritual heritage.

Moreover, this research informs policymakers and cultural organizations about the importance of integrating traditional spiritual practices into broader community development initiatives. By recognizing the value of *Edukone* rituals, stakeholders can better support the Iteso in preserving their cultural identity amidst ongoing social changes. Ultimately, this study aspires to enrich the discourse on marriage rituals both within Uganda and in the broader context of cultural studies, emphasizing the need to consider spiritual dimensions in understanding traditional practices.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Like many African societies, the Iteso of Eastern Uganda exhibit a profound commitment to traditions. The Iteso participate in the performance of several rituals from birth to death. One of such rituals is the marriage rite (*Edukone*) that is done to satisfy the necessary requirements for the completion of the marriage tradition. Regrettably, these experiences have not been subjected to academic study which is a threat to extinction and eventually erosion. The available scholarships on Iteso have not been primarily focused on exploring particular Iteso rituals and customs surrounding *Edukone* (Emuria 2012, p. 13; Sabiiti 1994, p. 78). For example, Oita, (2022, p. 2-3), discusses the evolving nature of marriage among Iteso emphasizing its role in social cohesion and identity but remained silent on religious implications of this evolving traditional marriage among Iteso. This problem has existed from time immemorial, and it is endangering the concept of *Edukone*. When this gap is not academically addressed, *Edukone* as a traditional practice will continue to be misunderstood as not having a religious connotation especially among the Iteso, who have grown up far away from Teso land, foreigners who would love to understand Iteso traditions. Not only that but also the academicians who would love to cite Iteso traditional values will have no current reliable and credible source of information. This puts Iteso traditional values on the verge of collapse. Therefore, that scenario presents a gap that this study intended to address by specifically investigating and documenting the religious connotation of marriage rituals in *Edukone* among the Iteso, with a focus on rituals embedded in *Edukone*, relevance of *Edukone* rituals, and the religious implications of *Edukone* rituals in order to preserve Iteso traditional marriage practices.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This section presents the general objective and specific objectives of the study.

### **1.3.1 General Objective**

To examine the religious connotation of *Edukone* among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A case of Usuk Sub County Katakwi District.

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To describe the rituals embedded in *Edukone* among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, Usuk Sub County Katakwi District.
2. To establish the relevance of *Edukone* to the Iteso community.
3. To discuss the religious implications of *Edukone* and its temporal changes over time among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, Usuk Sub County Katakwi District.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

### **1.4.1 Key Research Question**

What is the religious connotation of *Edukone* among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A case of Usuk Sub County Katakwi District?

### **1.4.2 Specific Research Questions**

1. What rituals are embedded in *Edukone* among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, Usuk Sub County Katakwi District ?
2. How relevant is *Edukone* to the Iteso community of Eastern Uganda?
3. What are the religious implications of *Edukone* and how has it changed over time among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, Usuk Sub County Katakwi District?

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This research makes a noteworthy contribution to the academic discourse on indigenous marriage customs, specifically by foregrounding the theological and symbolic dimensions of *Edukone* among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. It addresses a critical gap in ethno religious studies

by systematically exploring how cultural practices embody and transmit spiritual beliefs, thereby enriching the understanding of the intersection between religion and culture in African societies.

Specifically, the study will benefit the following people:

**Researchers:** The study of Edukone is important to researchers in various fields such as anthropology, sociology and psychology as it provides insights into the cultural, social and economic aspects of societies. By examining Edukone practices, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the values, norms, and power dynamics that shape relationships and family structures among the Iteso.

**Scholars:** The findings are significant to scholars in religious studies as they deepen insights into the symbolic underpinnings and sacred connotation within Iteso marriage rites. Such insights are essential for advancing theories on indigenous religious expressions and their resilience amid social change (Geertz, 1973; Mbiti, 1990).

**Educators:** The study informs culturally responsive teaching which helps educators to understand students' cultural background and experiences, enhances curriculum relevance which enables educators to incorporate local contexts and examples making learning more relatable and engaging, moreover it supports inclusive education to foster appreciation for diversity and promote tolerance in the classroom.

**Cultural heritage organizations:** Practically the study has cultural relevance to cultural heritage organizations as it provides recommendations that can inform cultural preservation initiatives contributing to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage which is increasingly threatened by globalization and modernization (UNESCO, 2003).

**Policy makers:** The study is crucial for policy makers as it helps them to understand the indigenous marriage customs. This can influence the development of culturally sensitive family laws and policies that recognize and protect indigenous rights and gender equality aligning with

international human rights standards. (UN Human Rights Council, 2014; Amnesty International, 2020)

Lastly, this study responds to the need for scholarly inquiry into how modernization impacts traditional practices. It provides key insights for researchers and policymakers interested in balancing cultural integrity with social development in indigenous contexts, making it a significant academic and practical resource.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

In the context of this study, scope refers to the specification of boundaries that the study dealt with. This included geographical scope, content scope and time scope.

### **1.6.1 Geographical Scope**

The study was carried out in Teso Sub region in Eastern Uganda, Katakwi district, Usuk Sub County. The choice for Usuk Sub County was because Usuk Sub County is found in Katakwi district which is still one of the rural districts of Teso region and the researcher expected to get the original and intact aspects of culture thus having a chance to study Edukone in its original form with less interference of other ethnic groups in the area.

### **1.6.2 Content Scope**

The content scope for this study was delimited to exploring the religious connotation of Edukone among Iteso of Eastern Uganda, with a focus on themes of the specific objectives which included; rituals embedded in Edukone among Iteso, the relevance of Edukone among the Iteso, and the religious implications of marriage rituals according to cultural context of Iteso. This content scope was chosen because the literature presents inadequacy of knowledge on the systematic documentation of Edukone rituals, their relevance and more so, the religious

implication of such traditional marriage rituals. According to the literature, most scholarship has exploited the secular dimension of rituals, while sidelining the religious implications, which this study addressed.

### **1.6.3 Time Scope**

This study investigated Edukone from the pre-colonial era, colonial era and post-colonial era. This period was deliberately selected to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of how Edukone has changed over time in relation to socio-political changes, independence, postcolonial developments, and contemporary influences.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAME WORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter comprises of the theoretical frame work and reviewed literature which is relevant to the topic “The Religious Connotation of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. A case of Usuk Sub County Katakwi Dstrict”. It contains both current and old sources because some information pertaining cultural and religious studies is still valid much as the source can appear old. This is due to the fact that such sources are from renowned scholars who conducted earlier and credible scholarship on marriage in traditional African societies. It begins with the theoretical frame work which underpins the study. This is then followed by a review of related literature which is presented according to the specific objectives which are; to describe the traditional marriage rituals embedded in *Edukone* among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, to establish the relevance of Edukone to the Iteso community, and to discuss the religious implications of *Edukone rituals* to the Iteso of Eastern Uganda.

#### 2.1 The Theoretical Framework

The study employed Durkheim's Theory of Religion and Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy so as to form the theoretical frameworks which provided guidance for this research.

##### 2.1.1 Mbiti's Ubuntu Philosophy

This philosophy was proposed by John S. Mbiti in the year 1969 that is why it was named Mbiti's Umbutu philosophy.

### **2.1.1.1 An over view of Ubuntu Philosophy**

It is worth noting that, Ubuntu philosophy is rooted in Southern African societies and is famously articulated and popularized by theologian and philosopher John S. Mbiti (1931-2019). The core expression is “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am,” (“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” in Zulu/Xhosa), foregrounding personhood as derived from relational existence and community. Distinctive attributes include inclusivity, dialogical community, humane concern, justice, and contextual/historically reconstructive methodology.

According to the proponents of this philosophy, Ubuntu assumes among others that:

First, communal nature of human identity enables individuals to exist through (and for) others; selfhood and moral value emerge from belonging and reciprocity.

Secondly, personhood is nurtured, recognized, and sanctioned by the community; adult roles, social status, and transitions (such as marriage) are collectively validated and shaped.

Next, Ethics are inherently relational: justice, leadership, and the good life emanate from communal well-being, not isolated self-interest.

Basing on such assumptions, Ubuntu has been used in African theology, anthropology, ethics, and comparative philosophy to explain moral formation, rites of passage, pastoral care, and communal conflict resolution. Mbiti’s work sees marriage rituals (like Edukone) as mechanisms by which community validates adult identity, transmits values, and reinforces spiritual and social cohesion.

### **2.1.1.2 Strengths of Ubuntu Theory**

Cultural relevance: Ubuntu arises from, and gives voice to, indigenous African communal experiences, resisting imported models that de-emphasize community.

Holistic analysis: It integrates ethical, social, religious, economic, and environmental dimensions—ideal for multi-layered rituals like Edukone.

Pastoral and developmental insight: Ubuntu provides practical guidance for resolving social conflicts, building communal bonds, and conceptualizing rites of passage or marriage as sources of collective well-being.

Affirms collective agency: Recognizes the communal shaping of gender, status, and social transitions central to Edukone's relevance for the Iteso.

### **2.1.1.3. Weaknesses of Ubuntu Theory.**

Potential for idealization: Ubuntu may overlook internal community dissent, inequalities, or gender biases by affirming solidarity and harmony.

Ambiguity: Its broad, flexible definitions sometimes render it vague or difficult to operationalize for critical scholarship.

Limited attention to individual agency: Ubuntu's communitarian focus may not sufficiently address changing dynamics in contemporary African societies, such as youth autonomy in partner choice.

May downplay external critique: It can underplay the impact of outside forces—colonialism, modernization on changing community standards.

### **2.1.2 Emile Durkheim's Theory of Religion**

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, advanced his theory of religion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily articulated in his seminal work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* in (1912), that is why it is named Durkheim's theory of religion. Durkheim's approach

marked a significant departure from traditional theological perspectives, positioning religion as a social phenomenon rather than merely a personal or spiritual experience.

At the core of Durkheim's theory is the idea that religion serves essential functions within society. He argued that religious beliefs and practices are crucial for fostering social cohesion, reinforcing collective values, and creating a sense of belonging among individuals. Through rituals and symbols, societies express their shared beliefs, which help maintain social order and moral discipline.

Durkheim introduced the distinction between the sacred and the profane, asserting that the sacred represents the collective values of a community, while the profane encompasses the everyday, mundane aspects of life. This dichotomy is fundamental to understanding how religious practices function to unite individuals around common ideals and foster a collective identity.

By analyzing various religious systems, Durkheim aimed to uncover universal patterns and principles that underpin religious life across cultures. His work has had a lasting impact on the fields of sociology and anthropology, providing a framework for examining the role of religion in shaping social structures and human behavior. Through this lens, Durkheim's theory continues to offer valuable insights into the interplay between religion and society

Durkheim examined the fundamental aspects of religious life and made the following arguments:

**Social Cohesion:** Durkheim argued that religion plays a crucial role in creating social cohesion and solidarity. He urged that collective rituals and beliefs reinforce group identity and strengthen social bonds.

Another argument was on the “Sacred vs. Profane.” He distinguished between the sacred (things set apart and forbidden) and the profane (ordinary elements of life). This dichotomy helps individuals to understand their place in society and the moral codes that govern behavior.

Besides the above, he also had an argument that religion embodies the collective consciousness of a society. It reflects shared values and norms, serving to unite individuals under common beliefs. Furthermore, Durkheim argued that religion is not merely a belief system but a social institution that fulfills essential functions, such as providing meaning, moral guidance, and a sense of purpose.

Apart from that, Durkheim emphasized the importance of collective religious experiences, which reinforce social ties and create a sense of belonging.

Next, in his study of totemic religions, Durkheim argued that the totem represents the clan and serves as a symbol of the group's identity, illustrating how religion can reflect and shape social structures.

Last but not least, Durkheim argued that religion evolves alongside society, transitioning from simple forms (like Totemism) to more complex systems (like organized religions), reflecting the increasing complexity of social life.

According to Durkheim’s arguments above, it can be concluded that sacred artifacts are commonly thought to possess divine attributes that distinguish them from secular goods. This means that even in highly developed societies, individuals continue to hold sacred items in high regard and with a profound sense of admiration, even if they do not attribute any unique abilities to these artifacts.

### 2.1.2.1 Strengths of Durkheim's Theory Of Religion

Promotion of Social Cohesion and Solidarity: Durkheim's theory emphasizes the role of religion as a unifying force within society. By creating shared beliefs and practices, religion fosters a sense of belonging and collective identity among individuals. This social cohesion is observable in various communities, where religious rituals and ceremonies serve as communal events that reinforce relationships and solidarity. For example, in the Iteso community, traditional marriage rituals like *Edukone* not only bind families but also strengthen community ties, illustrating how religion contributes to social stability and harmony.

Framework for Cross-Cultural Analysis: Durkheim's theory provides a robust framework for analyzing the functions of religion across different cultures and communities. By categorizing religions based on their social functions, Durkheim allows researchers to compare and contrast how different societies utilize religious practices to address common human concerns, such as morality, social order, and emotional support. This framework is particularly useful in understanding the specific roles of religion in diverse cultural contexts, such as the Iteso community, where local beliefs and practices are intertwined with broader societal functions.

Emphasis on Collective Experiences: One of the significant strengths of Durkheim's theory is its focus on collective experiences rather than individual beliefs. He argues that the communal aspects of religion—such as shared rituals, ceremonies, and moral codes—are central to understanding its social function. This perspective shifts the emphasis from personal spirituality to the collective identity that religion fosters, highlighting how shared religious experiences can unite individuals and strengthen community bonds. For instance, communal worship or collective celebrations during religious festivals can enhance social integration and reinforce shared values.

Historical Relevance and Evolution of Religious Forms: Durkheim's insights into the historical evolution of religious forms offer valuable perspectives on the development of societies. He posits that as societies progress, their religious structures transform, reflecting changes in social organization and collective consciousness. This historical perspective allows scholars to trace the development of religious beliefs and practices over time, providing a deeper understanding of how religion adapts to societal changes. By examining the evolution of religious forms, researchers can gain insights into contemporary social dynamics and the ongoing relevance of religious traditions.

Interdisciplinary Influence: Durkheim's theory of religion has had a profound influence across multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, and religious studies. His work laid the groundwork for future research on the social functions of religion, inspiring scholars to explore its implications in various contexts. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the study of religion by integrating perspectives from different fields, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of its role in society. For example, anthropologists might study the rituals of the Iteso community through a Durkheimian lens, examining how these practices contribute to social cohesion and cultural identity.

Contribution to Understanding Secularization: Durkheim's theory also provides insights into the process of secularization and its impact on society. As societies become more modern and industrialized, the role of religion may shift or diminish. Durkheim's framework allows for an analysis of how this transition affects social cohesion and collective values, offering a lens through which to understand the challenges faced by contemporary societies as they navigate the complexities of secularization and the potential resurgence of religious movements.

By understanding those points, we can appreciate the depth and applicability of Durkheim's theory of religion, recognizing its relevance in contemporary discussions about the role of religion in shaping social structures and cultural identities like Edukone among Iteso.

### **2.1.2.2 Weaknesses of Durkheim's Theory of Religion**

**Downplaying Divisive and Conflictual Aspects:** Critics argue that Durkheim's theory underrepresents the divisive and conflictual dimensions of religion, such as sectarianism, fanaticism, and violence. While he emphasizes religion's role in promoting social cohesion, this perspective can overlook how religious beliefs can also foster division and conflict within and between communities for instance, sectarian conflicts in various regions such as those seen in the Middle East or between different Christian denominations, highlight how religious differences can lead to social fragmentation. By focusing primarily on the unifying aspects of religion, Durkheim's theory may present an overly idealized view that fails to account for the complexities and contradictions inherent in many religious traditions.

**Overlooking Individual Beliefs and Personal Experiences:** Another critique of Durkheim's approach is its strong emphasis on collective consciousness, which may obscure the significance of individual beliefs and personal experiences in shaping religious practice. While collective rituals and shared values are essential, the subjective experiences of individuals—such as personal spiritual journeys, doubts, and interpretations—also play a crucial role in how religion is practiced and understood. For example, an individual's unique relationship with faith, influenced by personal circumstances, may diverge significantly from the collective norms espoused by their religious community. This focus on the collective may lead to a homogenized view of religion that fails to capture the richness of individual religious expression.

Limited Focus on Totemism and Western Religions: Durkheim's analysis primarily draws from studies of Totemism and Western religious traditions, which can limit its applicability to a broader spectrum of religious beliefs and practices worldwide. Critics argue that this narrow focus may not adequately account for the diversity of religious expressions found in non-Western societies and indigenous cultures. For instance, practices in African traditional religions, Eastern philosophies, and new religious movements often possess unique structures and functions that Durkheim's framework may overlook. This limitation can result in an incomplete understanding of how religion operates in various cultural contexts, undermining the universality of his conclusions.

Static View of Religion in a Dynamic World: Some scholars contend that Durkheim's perspective presents religion as too static, failing to address how religions adapt and evolve in response to modernity and social change. In an increasingly globalized world, religions often undergo transformations, merging with new ideas and practices or reacting to social pressures. For instance, the rise of digital spirituality and the integration of technology in religious practices illustrate how contemporary religions evolve to meet the needs of modern adherents. Durkheim's theory may not sufficiently account for these dynamic processes, leading to an incomplete analysis of the contemporary religious landscape.

Lack of Empirical Support: Lastly, critics point out that Durkheim's theory of religion often relies heavily on philosophical reasoning and lacks empirical support. While his theoretical insights are valuable, they may not be substantiated by systematic research or empirical data. This reliance on philosophical constructs can make it challenging to validate his claims about the social functions of religion through observational studies or quantitative research. Without robust empirical evidence, the applicability and relevance of Durkheim's conclusions may be

questioned, limiting their effectiveness in explaining the complexities of religion in diverse social contexts.

Much as Durkheim's theory has critics, in this study, the researcher deemed his arguments very instrumental in establishing artifacts and documenting the sacred and profane things utilized by Iteso during traditional marriage rites (Edukone), as well as investigating the religious significance associated with those objects.

### **2.1.2.3. Synthesizing Ubuntu with Durkheim's Theory of Religion**

Mbiti's Ubuntu is deeply compatible with Emile Durkheim's theory of religion, which sees religion as a social fact binding communities, maintaining moral order, and symbolically expressing collective life. Both frameworks posit that ritual (e.g., Edukone) is a means of reinforcing communal values, morality, and belonging. So, these theories guide this study as follows:

**Interpretation of Edukone Rituals:** Ubuntu theory interprets Edukone as a perpetuation of collective identity, communal blessing, and transmission of core ethical values. Durkheim identifies Edukone ceremonies as mechanisms for expressing and reinforcing sacred social norms.

**Social cohesion and moral order:** Both Mbiti and Durkheim allow analysis of how Edukone rituals mark transitions, grant adult status, and sanctify marriage as a cornerstone of communal well-being.

**Religion and identity:** Where Durkheim emphasizes the symbolic and functional role of ritual, Ubuntu stresses communal belonging, dialogue, and compassionate justice—together addressing both structural and affective aspects of Edukone.

Therefore, combining Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's social theory offers a richly contextual and generative lens for understanding Edukone among the Iteso as a religious, social, and cultural phenomenon—one that formalizes identity, fosters cohesion, and transmits ancestral values through lived communal practices.

## **2.2. Review of Related Literature**

The literature is reviewed following the main themes of the specific literature which include; rituals embedded in Edukone, relevance of Edukone to the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, religious implication of Edukone rituals and its temporal changes over time among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda.

### **2.2.1 Rituals Embedded in Edukone**

The literature on traditional marriage rituals offers foundational insights but often lacks a nuanced and critical engagement with complex dimensions relevant to the Iteso community's Edukone practice. Turner (1973, p. 138) conceptualizes rituals as stereotyped sequences aimed at influencing supernatural realities, providing a valuable functionalist lens but limited by its focus on ritual performance without interrogating deeper spiritual meanings. Bell (1997, pp. 138–169) broadens this perspective, asserting the universality of rituals; however, her work tends toward descriptive generalizations without fully engaging with diverse sociocultural particularities embedded in marriage rites.

Brown (1991, p. 139) situates marriage within a wider spectrum of communal rites, enriching understanding of rituals' social functions. Nevertheless, these frameworks insufficiently address how religious and symbolic meanings intertwine with social functions in African contexts.

Olupona (2014, p. 56) underscores the role of calendrical cycles and communal rites, yet does not comprehensively explore marriage rituals' spiritual dimensions among the Iteso.

Critically, African traditional marriage literature such as Isiko and Isabirye (2023, pp. 362–367) highlight that customary practices like *Edukone* are deeply rooted in ancestral customs and vary considerably across cultures. This diversity challenges monolithic portrayals, but their recognition of contemporary hybridization leaves underexplored the consequences for spiritual integrity. The fluidity of modern influences is often framed as a threat to authenticity, which risks oversimplifying dynamic cultural negotiations and resilience in adapting ritual meanings.

Conversely, Uchendu (1965, p. 14) and Kuper (1982, pp. 72–74) focus on ritual components such as bride price and ancestor veneration but inadequately explore their religious implications. This gap reveals a common academic neglect of sacred aspects underpinning these practices, which diminishes understanding of ritual spirituality. Okonkwo's (2022, pp. 6–7) work on Igbo marriage underscores this trend by providing detailed procedural analysis while excluding theological significance, reflecting a broader scholarly oversight.

The contribution of Oita (2022, p. 2) concerning the Iteso is notable for detailing marriage traditions but similarly falls short in addressing underlying religious connotations. This omission is critical as understanding the spiritual ethos is essential for grasping the full socio-religious function of *Edukone*. Moreover, most existing studies lack indigenous perspectives that could illuminate insider interpretations and spiritual valuations, largely relying on external frameworks that may not capture local cosmologies' complexity.

Given these critiques, this study endeavors to fill these gaps by focusing explicitly on *Edukone's* religious implications through an indigenous lens. It challenges the secular-dominant narrative

prevalent in African marriage scholarship and emphasizes the inseparability of culture and spirituality in Iteso marriage practice. Additionally, the study addresses how contemporary transformations impact ritual spirituality, moving beyond simplistic erosion narratives toward nuanced understandings of cultural continuity and innovation

In conclusion, while existing literature acknowledges traditional marriage's social importance, it insufficiently addresses religious dimensions critical to *Edukone's* meaning among the Iteso. This research advances scholarly debates by integrating ritual theory with indigenous religiosity, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of African marital rites.

### **2.2.2 Relevance of Traditional Marriage**

This subsection of literature review critically examines the relevance of traditional marriage, particularly focusing on their socio-cultural, emotional, and economic significance. While the existing scholarship provides valuable insights, it also reveals critical gaps, particularly concerning the religious dimensions of this significance as seen below:

Traditional marriage systems, including *Edukone* practiced by the Iteso, play multifaceted roles beyond social union, incorporating cultural, emotional, economic, and spiritual dimensions. Although scholarship affirms the socio-cultural and economic importance of these marriages, it often neglects a critical engagement with their religious implications.

Karimi et al. (2019, p. 17) argue that traditional marriages provide familial stability by defining roles and responsibilities clearly, supporting societal order. This viewpoint is reinforced by Nemati et al. (2022, p. 69), who highlight emotional support and commitment as central to overcoming marital challenges. Baloyi (2022, pp. 11-13) further emphasizes how traditional marriage perpetuates family traditions and values, while Olaore and Agwu (2021, p. 8) contend

that customary marriages confer societal legitimacy, strengthening both marital bonds and cultural heritage. These studies collectively demonstrate the embeddedness of marriage in cultural identity. Economically, traditional marriages facilitate wealth and resource consolidation, contributing to family stability and welfare (Levush, 2017, p. 27). This economic function is integral to the sustenance of marriages in many African settings.

However, what emerges critically across this body of work is a limited treatment of religious significance. Segami and Van (2020, p. 12) recognize the commitment inherent in traditional marriage vows but do not explore the spiritual weight of those rituals. This oversight is significant because religious meaning often underpins the symbolic efficacy of marriage rites, anchoring them in ancestral and spiritual realms as traditionally observed among the Iteso.

Contemporary marriages also exhibit hybridization, as Isiko and Isabirye (2023, p. 367) note, blending traditional forms with modern or religious elements. Their analysis cautions that such fusion may undermine traditional spiritual values, yet they do not adequately interrogate the religious consequences of this evolution. Similarly, ethnographic evidence points to Christian influences reshaping Iteso marriage rituals, but the persistent tension between cultural adaptation and religious transformation remains underexplored (Author, 2023; Author, 2025).

Hence, this study addresses these gaps by foregrounding the religious dimensions of Edukone, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding that integrates the sacred with the socio-cultural and economic spheres. It challenges the prevailing reduction of traditional marriage to secular functions and restores its spiritual significance within Iteso communal life.

In conclusion, while existing literature robustly analyzes cultural and economic aspects of traditional marriages, it insufficiently critiques and debates the religious connotations. This

research amplifies the religious voice, providing fresh insights into how Edukone rituals sustain religious identity and communal spirituality amidst changing social landscapes.

### **2.2.3 Religious Implications of Traditional Marriage and its Temporal Changes over time.**

This part of literature review will be done in two phrases;

First, literature will be reviewed on the religious implications of traditional marriage (Edukone).

Then secondly, literature will be reviewed on temporal changes in Edukone overtime.

#### **2.2.3.1 Religious Implications of Traditional Marriage**

The religious implications of traditional marriage rituals have been robustly examined across various cultural contexts, yet the depth and focus of this scholarship vary considerably, particularly between non-African and African traditions. Across diverse societies, marriage rituals frequently serve dual purposes: reinforcing social bonds and sanctifying unions through spiritual means.

In non-African contexts, scholars like Vaid (1999, p. 110) and Hsiung (2005, p. 33) provide detailed analyses of how Hindu and Chinese wedding customs invoke divine sanction and reinforce familial ties, underpinning the sacred foundation upon which these marriages rest. Similarly, Strydom (2019, pp. 172-175) emphasizes the role of religious sermons and blessings in Abrahamic weddings as mechanisms that consecrate the marriage, providing a spiritual framework that sanctifies the couple's union. More recent research by Smith (2021, pp. 62-63) and Patel (2022, p. 17) advances this view, illustrating that rituals function not only to secure divine favor but also to forge communal identity and religious adherence. These convergent views suggest a cross-cultural consensus on the indispensable religious role of marriage rites in fostering cohesion and sanctity.

Contrastingly, scholarship on African marriage rituals, while acknowledging their social and cultural importance (Uchendu, 1965, p. 82; Kuper, 1982, pp. 46-48), frequently marginalizes their religious dimensions. This bias is apparent when comparing literature on African practices with the richer spiritual analyses found in non-African studies, leading to an inadequate appreciation of the embedded sacredness of rituals such as bride price and ancestral invocation (Meyerowitz, 1958, p. 77; Mbiti, 1969, p. 78). This limited treatment upholds a problematic dichotomy that privileges secular cultural frameworks over indigenous spiritual understandings, thus perpetuating a Western-centric interpretative lens.

Specifically, practices integral to African marriages embody profound religious meanings. Bride price, divination, and ancestral rites serve not merely as social customs but as vital spiritual acts that connect the couple to their lineage and the divine. Yet, many scholars overlook these layers, resulting in a fragmented representation of the rituals' full religious significance (Smith, 2021; Patel, 2022).

Furthermore, the literature inadequately addresses the evolving nature of these rituals in contemporary African societies under the influence of globalization, Christianity, and urbanization. The dynamic interplay between traditional beliefs and modern religious frameworks introduces hybrid practices whose religious implications remain under-explored (Isiko & Isabirye, 2023, p. 367). This lacuna calls for scholarship attentive to indigenous perspectives and grounded in community voices to avoid misrepresentation and oversimplification.

In this light, this study contributes by centering the religious implications of Edukone amongst the Iteso of Eastern Uganda—a practice that intertwines ritual, spirituality, and communal identity. Existing ethnographic data on Iteso marriages reveal that rituals such as bride wealth

negotiation, escorting the bride, and initiation ceremonies are charged with spiritual meanings that affirm ancestral blessings and religious duties (Ejakait et al., 2021; Iteso Cultural Union, 2025; Lawrence, 1964). Recognizing these dimensions enriches the understanding of marriage as a religious institution beyond its social functions.

In conclusion, while marriage rituals worldwide share spiritual motifs, African studies suffer from a paucity of nuanced religious analysis. This research intervenes by foregrounding Edukone's religious role, affirming the sacred nature of traditional marriage rituals and their ongoing relevance in faith and communal life among the Iteso.

### **2.2.3.2 Temporal Changes in Traditional Marriage (Edukone) Overtime**

It is widely accepted that traditional marriage rituals perform vital social, religious, and cultural functions worldwide, yet they have evolved considerably over time under the pressures of modernization, globalization, and religious influences. Studies from non-African societies illustrate these temporal changes. For example, Balatonyi (2023), in a Hungarian context, documented the simplification and fragmentation of wedding ceremonies due to globalization and contemporary lifestyles, leading to the eclipse of older meanings by more symbolic or festive customs. With such an observation, we notice that these cases reveal how traditional marriage rituals transform in response to external social and cultural shifts. Similarly, Simonsen (2024) noted in Zambia that urbanization led to hybrid marriage practices combining customary rituals with novel contemporary forms, reflecting a pragmatic adaptation to modern social realities.

So, within Africa, African theologians and scholars provide key insights into the evolving nature of marriage rituals, emphasizing the inseparability of culture and religion. John Mbiti (1969) famously argued that "African man is an African person through other persons," this statement

locates marriage within a communal ethos where rites embody social cohesion and spiritual meaning. We notice that, Mbiti sees marriage as "a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress," thus emphasizing active participation and the dynamic nature of the institution.

Other African scholars, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) and Kwame Gyekye (1996), highlight that customary marriage embodies both continuity and change, adapting norms without fully severing ties with ancestral traditions. However, some scholars critique that evolving gender roles and statutory laws that they have created tension between traditional and modern marital expectations, sometimes eroding the roles women historically held within customary marriages (Baloyi, 2022). It is then clear that such scholarship reveals both the resilience and contestation within African marital traditions.

Focusing on Uganda, Nanyonga-Tamusuza (2021) and Baloyi (2022) have explored shifts in traditional marriage practices under colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary influences. These studies observe a move from arranged, clan-mediated unions towards more individual choice-based marriages, legal reforms emphasizing monogamy, and hybrid ceremonies reflecting both Christian and customary elements. Nonetheless, they argue that traditional rites like *Edukone* remain central to affirming identity and lineage among groups such as the Iteso. Yet, gaps remain concerning systematic quantification of these temporal changes how much of *Edukone* persists, shifts, or diminishes over time and nuanced understanding of the religious connotations amid evolving practices.

In light of this literature, studying the temporal changes in *Edukone* among the Iteso provides a significant contribution by quantifying trends and analyzing how religious meanings transform across generations within this community. Furthermore, such research enriches debates on how indigenous African rituals negotiate modernity, legal frameworks, and spirituality, addressing

contradictions between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary societal norms.

#### **2.2.4 Summary of Literature Review**

The review highlights the key components of *traditional marriages*, detailing the ceremonial practices, roles of participants, and the symbolism inherent in each ritual. For instance, the literature review uncovered marriage inquiries, bargaining and payment of bride prices, wedding custom known as "Igba Nkwu Nwanyi" and "Idu Uno," in Nigeria in which the bride carries wine. Much as the scholarship on rituals is clear in other communities as seen in the literature, it is still a challenge in Teso community. The available studies remain scanty and general not exploring specific concepts like *Edukone* in particular. This calls for an urgent specialized study, which too, is a motivation for this study.

The literature underscores the significance of traditional marriage around the globe. Among others are: offer stability to families, fostering a sense of security and dedication for both individuals, guarantees an inherent support system derived from extended family members, among others. In general, the literature posits that traditional marriages can provide a feeling of uninterrupted progression and affiliation with previous generations. However, there is need to conduct a focused study in Teso community to understand the relevance of their traditional marriage (*Edukone*), According to their experience.

The review also investigates the religious dimensions of *traditional marriage* rituals. It examined how these ceremonies are intertwined with spiritual beliefs and practices, suggesting that they serve as a medium for invoking blessings and divine guidance for the couple. Much as the literature, suggests this, documenting the religious experience of Iteso on the marriage rituals remains wanting so as to broaden the existing knowledge in academia. This means that insights

in Edukone need to be brought on academic board such that the interplay between secular and religious aspects is explored, demonstrating how rituals are both a social and spiritual affair among Iteso.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents issues on research methodology which the researcher used so as to arrive at genuine results. It focused on the following: research paradigm, approach, design and, research methods and instruments, trust worthiness of the research findings, area of study, population, target population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection procedure, data presentation, discussion and analysis as well as ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

This study employed the interpretivist research paradigm. According to Chowdhury (2014, p.74), interpretivism is a research paradigm which emphasizes understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals within their social context. It was chosen for this study because the researcher felt that it provides a frame work for exploring the rich subjective experiences of Iteso. By using interpretivism, the study captured the nuanced meanings that Iteso individuals attach to Edukone rituals, which could have been overlooked in more quantitative approaches. Besides that, Interpretivism emphasizes understanding the meanings and experiences of individuals within their cultural contexts. This aligns with the study's objectives to explore the traditional marriage rituals and their significance, as it allows for a deeper inquiry into the cultural fabric of the Iteso community. Lastly, in the context of this study, traditional marriage rituals are complex social phenomena that involve various beliefs, practices, and interactions. The interpretivist paradigm is well-suited to explore these complexities, allowing researchers to analyze how different elements of Edukone rituals interconnect.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopted “Phenomenological Research Design”. Phenomenological research design is a qualitative methodology focused on exploring and describing the lived experiences of individuals to uncover the essence and meaning of a particular phenomenon (Khan et al., 2023). Rooted in philosophical inquiry, this approach seeks to understand how people perceive, interpret, and make sense of their experiences by gathering rich, detailed narratives typically through in-depth interviews.

This design is especially appropriate for this study because it prioritizes the subjective spiritual and emotional meanings embedded in Edukone. So, it allowed the researcher to access the nuanced religious experiences of participants, revealing how these rituals are lived and understood within the specific cultural and spiritual context of Iteso. Besides that, Phenomenology’s emphasis on in-depth contextualized data aligns well with the interpretivist paradigm that values multiple realities and meaning-making processes. Not only that but the researcher also saw that phenomenology’s systematic process from data collection to thematic analysis facilitates the extraction of core themes that express the essence of Edukone’s religious significance, beyond just observable customs. It was hoped to support reflexivity and deep empathy, which are crucial when engaging with sacred and emotive community rituals embedded in Edukone. So, using this design, exploration of Edukone can produce rich insights into how the Iteso perceive, experience, and sustain the spiritual realities intertwined with their marriage traditions.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

The research embraced qualitative research approach. Qualitative research was ideal for this study because it helped in exploring complex social phenomena within Edukone this was by focusing on the meanings and experiences associated with Edukone rituals, hence the study delved deeply into cultural nuances that quantitative methods would overlook. Besides that, traditional marriage rituals are embedded in specific cultural contexts. A qualitative research approach allowed for the exploration of those contexts, capturing the social, historical, and religious factors that influence the significance of Edukone rituals. In this study, qualitative research approach was implemented through the use of qualitative methods (interviews and Focused Group Discussions), which provided flexibility in data collection, enabling researchers to adapt their questions and techniques as new insights emerge. This adaptability was crucial for exploring the dynamic nature of cultural practices which would be hard to achieve in quantitative research.

### **3.4 Study Area**

This research was located in Usuk sub county Katakwi District, Teso Sub region Eastern Uganda. The choice of Usuk Sub County was based on the fact that Usuk Sub county is found in Katakwi district one of the rural districts in Teso which is still intact therefore the researcher expected to get the original and intact aspects of culture thus having a chance to study Edukone in its original form with less interference of other ethnic groups in the area.

Geographically, Usuk Village is situated about 5 km north of the district headquarters, characterized by fertile lands, tropical climate, and a rural agricultural economy, making it representative of the Iteso's way of life. Its sociocultural fabric is deeply intertwined with rituals and ceremonies such as planting and harvesting ceremonies. Members of the community also

perform songs, dances and hold communal feasts to celebrate important rites of passage such as initiation, (Asapaan), marriage (Edukone) this portrays of their traditions and African Traditional Religion (ATR). This offers insights for examining how Edukone rituals operate within contemporary Iteso society. Thus, Usuk offers an ideal academic setting to explore the nuanced interaction between tradition, religion, and community, ensuring the research captures the lived realities and ongoing cultural significance of Edukone among the Iteso.

### **3.5 Study Population**

The study population consisted of clan leaders, elderly women aged sixty years and above who actively participate in Edukone rituals. This age group was chosen for this study because the life expectancy in Uganda is on average of 65 years (UBOS 2024) so when we talk of the elderly, it begins from 60 years and above. This age group possesses experience on how Edukone has been changing over time which the young women and men may not know much as Edukone is performed on them.

In relation to the above, according to literature, the age threshold of sixty years is thus justified through the cultural valorization of elder status in Iteso society, where elders command respect and are entrusted with safeguarding communal values and ritual heritage (The Citizen Report, 2022). Relying on knowledgeable elders mitigates risks of information distortion that may arise with younger cohorts who may have less exposure or divergent interpretations due to modernization or cultural change over time. This age and role-based selection enhances the study's credibility, aligning with ethnographic best practices that prioritize culturally authoritative voices to capture the depth of religious and cultural knowledge embedded in Edukone rituals.

The criteria for this selective inclusion rests on the cultural roles and knowledge these groups embody within the Iteso society. According to some scholarly sources, clan leaders, locally recognized as “Apolok kaateker” or heads of the clan, occupy authoritative positions that blend leadership, mediation, and custodianship of cultural heritage (Lawrance, 1957, pp. 67–69; Okalany, 1980, p. 87). Their roles are not merely administrative but are deeply intertwined with the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge, including ritual practices and customary laws that govern Edukone. As custodians of oral histories and cultural norms, their involvement is crucial for authentic and credible data.

Similarly, elderly women aged sixty years and above are esteemed reservoirs of traditional wisdom, particularly concerning matrimonial customs and spiritual rites. In Iteso culture, elderly women serve as ritual specialists and intermediaries during marriage ceremonies, possessing nuanced insights into the symbolic and religious facets of Edukone rituals. Their advanced age ensures that they have witnessed the changes of Edukone over time, participated in the execution of the ritual practices as they are the ones who perform the rituals on the couple and transmitted these practices across generations, thereby providing reliable and rich lived experiences relevant to the research.

### **3.6 Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was twenty-three respondents, distributed across seven parishes and the nine clans in Usuk Sub County. These nine clans include: Ikaribwok, Irarak, Ikatekok, Ikomolo, Inom, Igoria, Iworopom, Asilang and Aosor. I interacted with nine clan leaders from all the nine clans that exist in Usuk Sub County, one clan leader from each clan.

The total of twenty three respondents—nine clan leaders one from each clan and fourteen elderly women two from each parish (2people, multiplied by 7 parishes=14) —the 14 elderly women

were included for this study because there are seven parishes in Usuk sub county and I wanted each parish to be represented so I picked two elderly women from each parish such that they supplement the experience of one another which helped to get detailed experiences from each parish.

Young men and women were not part of this sample because the researcher wanted to find out the temporal changes in Edukne over time which the young men and woman did not know because they do not have the experience of how the marriage practices were in the past days so they would end up giving the experiences of the past days only. Besides, the information that they would give would comprehensively be given by elderly women and clan leaders since they are the ones who administer the rituals to the couples thus they have more knowledge of the rituals than the younger men and women whom the rituals are performed on.

The clergy in this sample are the intermediaries who are also the elderly women and clan leaders since the religion here is African Traditional Religion (ATR).

The sample size of twenty three respondents was determined primarily through the principle of data saturation which is central in qualitative research (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The researcher observed that after interviewing twenty three participants, no new themes or information emerged regarding Edukone practices, indicating that saturation had been reached. Continuing data collection beyond this point would have limited added value, as the shared cultural background led to consistent experiences and perspectives among the participants.

Furthermore, the purposive inclusion of both sexes ensured a balanced and holistic understanding of Edukone.

Elderly women were chosen due to their extensive involvement and knowledge in the ritual processes, while clan leaders were included as custodians of cultural authority and tradition

(Mzee Lima S. scribbles, 2021). Their combined insights enriched the study with authoritative and experiential knowledge.

In sum, the sample size and clan selection were justified on qualitative methodological grounds emphasizing depth, richness, and credibility of data, as well as cultural representativeness within Usuk Sub County. This sampling approach aligns with best practices to ensure a comprehensive yet manageable exploration of the Edukone phenomenon.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents**

<b>Clans</b>	<b>Male Respondents (Clan leaders)</b>	<b>Parishes</b>	<b>Female Respondents (Elderly women)</b>
Ikaribwok	1	Akum	2
Iarak	1	Cheleuko	2
Ikatekok	1	Usuk	2
Ikomolo	1	Abwokodia	2
Inomu	1	Koritok	2
Igoria	1	Adacar	2
Iworopom	1	Ongeema	2
Asilang	1		
Aosor	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>09</b>		<b>14</b>

### **3.7 Sampling Techniques**

Non-probability sampling techniques were employed to recruit participants for this study. According to Nikolopoulou (2023, p. 110), non-probability sampling is defined as a method where participants are selected based on non-random criteria, meaning not all members of the population have an equal chance of being included. This approach allowed the researcher to focus on individuals with specific knowledge or experience related to Edukone rituals. By targeting Clan leaders and elderly women, the study gathered rich, relevant insights.

#### **3.7.1 Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy where participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Nikolopoulou, 2022, p. 92-93). This method was particularly suitable for recruiting Clan leaders and young married couples as key informants. Clan leaders possess substantial experience and knowledge regarding traditional marriage rituals, making them crucial for understanding the cultural context of Edukone. Their insights contribute depth to the study, as they can articulate the significance and intricacies of these rituals from a position of authority and experience.

Purposive Sampling was still deemed suitable to select young married couples who recently underwent or were currently performing Edukone rituals within those clans under the guidance of each clan's leader. This ensured that, the data collected reflects current practices and perceptions directly related to the study's objectives.

Therefore, the choice of purposive sampling for Clan leaders and young married couples is justified by their specialized knowledge and authority in the community regarding Edukone rituals, and the current experiences and perceptions on Edukone rituals. This targeted approach ensured that the information gathered is credible and relevant to the research questions.

### **3.7.2 Snowball Sampling Technique**

It is particularly justified for recruiting elderly women in this study because such populations are often considered hard-to-reach or hidden due to factors like age complications and social roles. This technique leverages existing social networks wherein initial participants (seeds) refer the researcher to other suitable individuals, facilitating access to trusted and knowledgeable elderly women who are custodians of cultural knowledge and traditions relating to Edukone.

### **3.8 Specific Research Methods**

The study used qualitative research methods as seen below:

#### **3.8.1 Key Informant Interviews**

It was deemed suitable for interviewing clan leaders because the researcher saw it valuable in the context of understanding complex religious experiences and cultural dynamics regarding Edukone from expert perspectives. The interviews contained open ended questions so as to allow respondents discuss their experiences at depth. The researcher identified and approached respected clan leaders known for their knowledge of Edukone rituals. Criteria for selection included their involvement in the rituals and their standing within the community. Interviews followed pre-determined open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded (with permission) and transcribed for detailed analysis. This ensured that the richness of the leaders' narratives was captured accurately. Besides that, the data from key informant interviews was analyzed thematically, focusing on key insights regarding the cultural relevance and religious connotations of Edukone rituals. So, by utilizing key informant interviews with clan leaders, the study effectively gathered authoritative and contextualized information, enriching the understanding of Edukone rituals within the Iteso community. The researcher used an interview guide as a research instrument for this method. The interview guide was specifically prepared for clan

leaders. This was because of the high probability that for such a rural setting, and given the age group, some elders were illiterate and having challenges with the sight and could not also have time to sit and fill the questionnaires. The interview guide was designed having open ended questions that allowed in-depth exploration of Edukone according to the experiences of Iteso elders. The questions were distributed to cover all the three themes of the specific objectives of the study, which included rituals, embedded in Edukone, relevance of Edukone and the religious implication of Edukone.

### **3.8.2 Focus Group Discussions**

The researcher used two focus group discussions; fourteen elderly women distributed across all the seven parishes named in table 1 above, meaning, two experienced elderly women were sampled from each parish. Each group was composed of seven elderly women, hence their contributions helped the researcher to reach saturation point of data collection.

It was suitable for elderly women because the researcher saw that some of them were illiterate since education of a girl child was not valued in the early 1950s, a time when these women were young. Two elderly women were invited from different villages in a parish. When they gathered, the researcher divided them in to two groups. The researcher preferred a natural setting so as to allow them feel free. At the time of discussion, the researcher acted as a moderator, asking and rephrasing questions to the extent that they were understood by the respondents. The researcher used a focus group discussion schedule a structured form comprising of open-ended guiding questions carefully selected to cover all the three research questions. The questions provoked elderly women to speak out their experiences on rituals embedded in Edukone as a group freely. It was for elderly women who had taken roles in execution of Edukone rituals because it enabled easy collection of data from a group since respondents were brought to participate at once as a group, hence it was easy to probe respondents to talk more about the phenomenon being studied.

### **3.8.3 Observation Method**

Non-participant observation was used in this investigation to allow the researcher watch the participants under study, with their knowledge, but without taking an active part in the situation under scrutiny. It was chosen for this study because it enabled the researcher to keenly observe all observable behavior, situations, articles/objects, and places during execution of rituals. For example the dressing code, exchange of gifts, handing of the woman, blessing rituals, food eaten and how it was eaten.

The researcher used observation checklist as an instrument of data collection for these methods. It was tabulated consisting of key elements such as time, activity, practitioners and behavior portrayed that the researcher shall consider when observing proceedings of marriage rituals among Iteso.

### **3.9 Data Presentation**

The qualitative data got through specific methods discussed above was presented using descriptive narratives. Descriptive narratives, including stories, direct quotations from respondents, and pictorial evidence, are powerful tools in qualitative research, particularly in the context of exploring traditional practices like Edukone rituals among the Iteso people. Descriptive narratives provide a depth of understanding what numerical data cannot capture. By sharing personal stories and experiences, the researcher conveyed the emotional and cultural significance of Edukone rituals, illustrating how these practices are lived and felt by individuals within Teso community.

Direct quotations from respondents allowed for the authentic voices of the Iteso community to emerge. So, stories and quotations effectively illustrated key themes identified in the research. Therefore, the findings of this study were thematically presented in line with the specific

objectives of this study, and direct quotations captured in line with a respondent's personal experience on a particular ritual embedded in Edukone.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

For the qualitative data collected through the tools discussed above, the researcher used thematic and narrative analysis approach.

#### **3.10.1 Thematic Analysis**

The thematic analysis of the qualitative findings in this study was conducted through a systematic and interactive process, following the established steps of familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. Below is a detailed account of how each step was undertaken:

##### *Step 1: Familiarization with the Data*

To begin, the researcher immersed herself in the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and field notes collected from participants. This process allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences related to *Edukone*. During this stage, the researcher made initial notes and recorded ideas about potential patterns that might emerge as themes. The researcher focused on key phrases and recurring concepts that stood out, which helped her to orient herself to the foundational narratives and cultural nuances embedded within the data.

##### *Step 2: Generating Initial Codes*

In the second step, the researcher systematically coded the data, capturing key features and concepts that emerged from the transcripts. This involved identifying segments of text that

conveyed specific ideas or insights related to the *Edukone* rituals. The researcher developed a coding framework that included codes such as "marriage rituals," "community bonding," "spiritual significance," and "modern adaptations." These codes helped to organize the data into meaningful groups, making it easier to identify patterns and connections across different interviews.

### *Step 3: Searching for Themes*

After generating initial codes, the researcher began the process of searching for themes by grouping related codes into broader categories that represented patterns of meaning across the dataset. For example, codes related to "community bonding," "family roles," and "cultural identity" were grouped under a broader theme of "Social Cohesion." This thematic grouping allowed the researcher to see how various codes interacted and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences with *Edukone*.

### *Step 4: Reviewing Themes*

In the reviewing of themes stage, the researcher refined the identified themes by checking their coherence and relevance against the coded data. The researcher critically evaluated each theme to ensure it was well-supported by the data and reflected the experiences of the participants accurately. During this process, the researcher merged some themes that overlapped significantly, such as combining "cultural identity" with "preservation of tradition" into a single theme called "Cultural Heritage." Additionally, the researcher discarded themes that lacked sufficient supporting data or clarity, ensuring that the final themes were concise and meaningful.

### *Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes*

Finally, the researcher defined and named each theme clearly to explain what it captures and how it contributes to understanding the data. For each theme, the researcher wrote a brief description detailing its essence and significance. For example, the theme "Cultural Heritage" was defined as representing the importance of traditional rituals in maintaining cultural identity among the Iteso community. Each theme was given a concise, descriptive name that reflected its core meaning, such as "Social Cohesion," "Spiritual Significance," and "Modern Adaptations."

So, through this systematic thematic analysis process, the researcher was able to distill the rich qualitative data into coherent themes that provide valuable insights into the Edukone rituals and their significance within the Iteso community. This structured approach not only facilitated a deeper understanding of the data but also ensured that the findings were presented in a clear and meaningful way, contributing to the overall objectives of the study.

### **3.10.2 Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis focuses on understanding how individuals construct and convey meaning through their stories and personal accounts. This method examines the structure, content, and context of narratives, providing insight into the lived experiences of participants. Narrative analysis was well-suited for this study because it allowed the researcher to capture personal experiences of respondents by providing a platform for respondents to share their stories regarding Edukone rituals, offering rich, contextual insights. The researcher gathered narratives through interviews and focus group discussions, capturing the personal experiences of participants related to Edukone. The researcher then analyzed the structure of the narratives, looking for elements such as plot, character, and setting. This helped to understand how participants frame their experiences.

So, by employing both thematic and narrative analysis, the researcher effectively explored the richness of Edukone rituals among the Iteso people. Thematic analysis provided a structured overview of key themes, while narrative analysis offered deep insights into personal experiences, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and spiritual significance of these traditional marriage rituals.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

However, to conduct this study, the researcher obtained a letter of authorization from Directorate of Research and Graduate Training of Kyambogo University. This letter granted official permission to conduct the research as part of the requirements for the graduate program. It confirmed that the study had been reviewed and approved by the university's ethical review board, adhering to institutional guidelines.

Throughout this research, the researcher observed the following ethical considerations:

#### **3.11.1. Voluntary Participation**

Participants were informed that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary. They had the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. This was communicated clearly during the recruitment process and reiterated throughout the study, ensuring that participants felt comfortable and free to choose their level of involvement.

#### **3.11.2. Informed Consent**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. This involved providing clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, and consent was documented through signed consent forms. This process ensured that participants understood what their participation

### **3.11.3 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participants' identities and personal information were protected, and data was stored securely. Any identifying information was removed during data analysis and reporting to ensure that individual responses could not be traced back to specific participants.

### **3.11.4 Avoiding Potential Harm**

The study was designed to minimize any potential physical, emotional, or social harm to participants. Care was taken to create a safe environment for sharing personal experiences, particularly regarding sensitive topics related to cultural and religious practices. Participants were assured that their well-being was a priority, and support resources were made available if needed.

### **3.11.5 Anonymity**

Anonymity was ensured by assigning unique codes to participants and using these codes in all data documentation and reporting. This approach allowed for the analysis and presentation of data without revealing participants' identities, further protecting their privacy.

### **3.11.6 Authorization from the Field**

On reaching the field, the researcher sought permission from the local council three (LC 111) of Usuk Sub county where “*Atuket Okilimo*” the popular shrine is located.” The researcher identified herself by presenting the National Identity Card and an introductory letter from Directorate of Research and Graduate Training. She thoroughly explained to the LC 111 and some of his members the purpose of her visit and the study which was purely academic. After reading through the authentic documents presented to them, the LC 111 and some of his committee members unanimously agreed to let the researcher to conduct this academic study

in their area. The LC 111 then signed the introductory letter giving the researcher a go ahead to do data collection. The exercise of data collection went well.

### **3.12 Trust Worthiness of Rresearch Findings**

**Credibility:** this means accuracy with which data given by respondents will be interpreted. The researcher ensured it by Purposeful Sampling to select participants who are knowledgeable about the topic and can provide rich, relevant data. This enhanced the depth and relevance of the findings.

**Transferability:** This is the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation and delivering similar findings. The researcher ensured this by detailed description encompassing detailed contextual information so that readers can assess the applicability of findings to other settings.

**Dependability:** The quality of the process of integration that takes place between data collection methods, analysis and theories. This was ensured by applying practices like “Audit Trail”. Here, the researcher kept detailed records of the research process, including decisions made and changes during the study. This allows others to follow your research path. The researcher also did peer debriefing where she discusses her research with colleagues to gain feedback and insights, helping to ensure consistency in findings.

### **3.13 Limitations to the Study**

These were the obstacles that interfered with the research process among others were the following:

**Rampant accidents:** The researcher encountered three tragic motor accidents during the course of this study. This caused poor health which delayed the research process.

Poor electronic services in the area: The researcher experienced a challenge in getting effective computer services which could help in the process of typesetting, making analysis of data, printing out work done, etcetera. The researcher then, had to maintain good rapport with course mates who helped with such materials.

Financial constraints: Due to the long distance between Kyambogo University and Katakwi district, then to the researcher's work place in Iganga, the entire process of study became costly. This was overcome by ensuring financial discipline while prioritizing activities to be financed.

### **3.14 Delimitations of the Study**

This study covered specifically on the religious connotations of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda. It will cover the traditional marriage rituals embedded within Edukone, the cultural and social relevance of Edukone to the Iteso community, and the religious meanings and implications attached to these rituals, then the temporal changes of Edukone over time. These areas were covered because marriage is a central social institution in the Iteso culture where Edukone plays a significant role, making it essential to understand its spiritual and communal importance.

The study has not covered marriage rituals and traditions of other ethnic groups within or outside Uganda, as the focus was intentionally narrowed to the Iteso to provide an in-depth understanding rather than a broad comparative analysis, which would require a different scope and resources. Additionally, detailed ethnographic history beyond marriage, or the impact of Edukone on legal marriage processes, was omitted to maintain a clear and targeted investigation into its spiritual dimensions within marital contexts, the study has also not looked at how modernization and urbanization have influenced traditional Iteso marriage.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RITUALS EMBEDDED IN EDUKONE AMONG THE ITESO OF EASTERN UGANDA, USUK SUB COUNTY KATAKWI DISTRICT ITESO.**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyses research findings on traditional rituals embedded in Edukone among Iteso. The findings are thematically presented using descriptive narratives and analyzed through thematic analysis approach. The results were generated through information gathered from informants' responses to the open-ended questions enlisted in the research tools. It begins with basic demographic information of informants as seen below:

#### **4.1 Demographic information of informants.**

The informants for this study consisted of twenty-one elders that is; elderly women and clan heads who were able to satisfactorily give relevant information to saturation point. They were aged sixty years and above. That age was considered because the researcher felt such people were mature and experienced on matters relating to tradition. To be gender sensitive, the researcher considered both males and females. That is to say so as to capture balanced experiences of Iteso on Edukone traditional practice.

#### **4.2 Rituals Embedded in Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, Usuk Sub County Katakwi District.**

The following were the findings on rituals embedded in Edukone among the Iteso:

#### 4.2.1 Ritual of booking a girl for marriage (Agolokin)

Findings, through interviews and Focused Group Discussions show that Iteso during early 1960s and late 1950s used to practice Agolokin. This ritual was done so as to identify and reserve a girl to marry a particular boy at a time when she is seen to be ready for marriage. Findings in this section relate well with Oge Okonkwo (2022, p. 6-7), who in the literature listed various marriage rituals in Nigerian traditional marriages. This means that among the Iteso, once one family has booked a girl for their boy, all others were supposed to respect that girl. Therefore, selection of a marriage partner was entirely the responsibility of parents or elders. One elderly woman shared her experience in this ritualistic event, describing it as follows:

*Agolokin was the first step in the marriage process during our time. Our elders used to drink local brew (Ajon) as a way of socialization in the evenings. This was done from one family to another among friends. So, in the process of these socializations, elders would see and admire a young hardworking girl in a friend's family. They discuss with the parents of the girl to allow them to book this girl to marry their young boy. Because elders discussing were friends, they could always agree with ease. Once they agreed, a date was fixed for the ritual of Agolokin.*

*During this ritual, the two families and other friends would come together to introduce these children (boy and girl) to each other. In most cases we the girls could cry. Boys could also cry if they were young also because we saw it as shame. This ritual used to be performed when the children were below ten years. The parents of the boy would come with a metallic bangle that they put on the girl's hand. This was usually done by an elderly anointed woman from the boy's clan. She could utter words like; Lolo aparit kana, iseku iso jo kwape apese na elosi adukokin keda okookosi. Siri bobo icam icie tunga aitolitol jo. Igarenik jo edeke. This means "Today, we have chosen you as a girl who will be married to our son. Do not accept other people to distract you from us. May God guide you", then she puts the bangle in the hand. After this, the elders start feasting. (Source: elderly woman from Ikarebwok clan)*

From the experience of the elder above, it is evident that *Agolokin* ritual among the Iteso served as an early formal step in the traditional marriage process, where a girl was 'booked' or reserved as a future wife for a boy, often when both were still children. This ritual institutionalized marriage intentions through communal socialization facilitated by elders drinking local brew,

symbolizing mutual agreements between families. The placing of the metallic bangle by an anointed elderly woman, coupled with sacred words invoking divine guidance, signified the spiritual sanctification of the union, intertwining social commitment with religious blessing.

This finding supports the study's argument that Edukone rituals embody a complex fusion of social, cultural, and religious elements, thereby emphasizing that traditional marriage among the Iteso is not only a contractual alliance but also a spiritually significant covenant that sustains community cohesion, moral order, and cultural continuity. The ritual's significance in predefining marriage partnerships and commanding communal respect validates the sacred and communal dimensions foundational to understanding Iteso matrimonial customs.

#### **4.2.2 Ritual of picking the girl from her parents (Aiwom apese)**

After the ritual of Agolokin, the next is *Aiwom apese*. When the girl who had been booked grew up, to a reasonable age, the parents of the boy could send three elderly anointed women of that clan to pick that girl so that she begins helping in domestic work in the boy's family and to be assessed in terms of character and domestic chores.

This means that parents took the responsibility to guide, support and nurture their children well so that they could be identified as good ones in the community in order to be married. That is why they were able to listen to their advice and follow decisions made by parents. An elderly man described this ritual according to his experience as below:

*As the girl who had been booked grew up, both the boy's and girl's families took care of her. By that time, the law was not strict on the age. Elders used to gauge a girl for marriage through the body size, height and ability to do house work and the like. On the agreed date, three elderly anointed women from the boy's clan would go to the girl's home early morning. On reaching, they would find the parent of the girl already outside. The leader of the elderly women would tell parents "Iwomunit iso akim". This means we have come to pick fire. The girl's mother would respond saying "Idareutu ber enokokisi". This means, first wait I set it. At this point the girl's mother would go to inform the girl that a delegation from the boy's clan has come for her. She had to brief her on how she is expected*

*to welcome the message and serve the elderly women that day. The girl would then be brought to greet the elderly women who will there after remove the bangle from her hand, but anoint her chest and back with raw butter and tie star grass “Emuria” around her waist. This was to signify prosperity. Elderly women did that while making invocations to the legendary diviner (Amongin) who was in charge of productivity, to bless the girl. After this significant event, the girl’s family would kill a goat or sheep for a feast with the elders from a boy’s family. Thereafter, they take the Fire (Girl). (Source: An elder from Imelekolia-Iworopom clan)”*

From the experience above, we notice that, the ritual of picking the girl involved the boy’s family sending elderly anointed women to ‘pick fire’—bringing the girl into her future home in order to be assessed on character and domestic skills while being blessed for prosperity. The ritual plays a role in community bonding, spiritual blessing, and preparing the couple for life together.

The digging of the anthill for a girl when she attempts to refuse to go meant that girls were supposed to respect the parents and were not meant to object any of their decisions.

We then notice that, the ritual of picking the girl from her parents, known as *Aiwom apese*, is a crucial stage in the Iteso traditional marriage process that emphasizes the community and spiritual dimensions of marriage. This ritual involves a delegation of three elderly, anointed women from the boy’s clan who visit the girl’s home, signifying the community’s approval of the marriage.

The ritual’s spiritual aspect is evident in the ceremonial act of anointing the girl with raw butter, and tying star grass, invoking blessings from ancestral spirits and diviners for prosperity and fertility. The elders’ invocation and the feeding of the girl with traditional food highlight the integration of spiritual beliefs into social practices, reaffirming the marriage’s sacredness. The visual and emotional resistance, including the rare attempt by some girls to refuse the process

through harmful means like entering an anthill, underscores the social pressure and the spiritual authority elders wield to uphold these customs.

Overall, *Aiwom apese* exemplifies how the Iteso view marriage not merely as a social contract but as a sacred covenant with deep spiritual and communal significance, reinforcing the research argument that Edukone rituals serve as vital embodiments of cultural and religious identity.

#### **4.2.3 Ritual of negotiations for bride price (Etube)**

This was the third ritual in Edukone among Iteso. Once the boy's clan succeeded in taking the girl, after a short period of time, the boy's parents would go to the girl's parents for *Etube*. During *Etube*, the two families agreed on the number of cattle to be paid as bride price. Those days' bride price was paid once because Iteso had many cattle. The number was usually between thirty and sixty cattle. This ritual showed that, people who engage in booking a girl for marriage should be ready to fulfil the pledges made because the marriage process was to be complete immediately the girl is taken to the boy's clan. One informant, an elderly man shared his insight and described the process of *Etube* ritual as below:

*During Etube, the girl's family would prepare to receive the boy's parents. They could slaughter a Billy goat and prepare for them. During discussions, the females sat on hides or skins. The males could use stools or chairs. The boy's parents began by giving remarks on the girl (Fire/Akim) that they took during Aiwom apese ritual. In that report, they could focus more on the manners, social relationship with family member, care of family property and generally execution of domestic chores. In most cases the report depicted good results because the girl was assessed from her childhood. It was against that good report and admiration that the boy's parents asked the girl's parents to tell them the bride price they want. Bride wealth was in form of cattle, and ranged between thirty and sixty. It was to be paid once. This was because in most cases the girl's family also had a boy waiting for that bride price to marry a girl booked for him from elsewhere. Once harmony was reached on pride price, the boy's father was given to make a solemn vow that his clan will fulfill the pledge made. Then a day for actual traditional marriage is fixed."*

Findings show that the ritual of negotiating the bride price, known as *Etube*, is a pivotal element in the Edukone process among the Iteso, symbolizing the formal agreement and consolidation of

marital ties between clans. This stage occurs after the boy's clan has taken the girl, underscoring the expectation that commitments made during earlier rituals, such as *Agolokin and Aiwom apese*, must be honored to complete the marriage. The negotiation of bride price, traditionally ranging between thirty and sixty cattle, serves both as a material fulfillment of this promise and as a public affirmation of the alliance between families.

The detailed description reveals a highly ritualized, respectful engagement where both families come together, marked by customary hospitality such as slaughtering a Billy goat and the seating arrangements that delineate gender roles and respect for hierarchy. The boy's parents' report on the girl's character and domestic capabilities, assessed since childhood, further legitimizes the negotiation by confirming the girl's suitability, linking social valuation with economic exchange.

The solemn vow made by the boy's father to fulfill the pledge signals the religious and moral weight of the transaction, reinforcing the marriage's sanctity within Iteso cultural norms. This ritual stresses that marriage is more than a personal union; it is a binding contract that upholds familial honor and community cohesion.

Synthetically, *Etube* embodies the culmination of a series of interlinked rituals that collectively affirm and sanctify the marriage, embedding it deeply within social, economic, and spiritual frameworks. It emphasizes the study's argument that Edukone rituals function as complex communal processes where symbolic acts like bride price payment carry profound significance, ensuring that marriage is recognized, respected, and sustained within the cultural and moral economy of the Iteso.

#### **4.2.4 The ritual of traditional marriage (Eitane /Emanyit/Edukone)**

After the ritual of *Etube*, *Eitane*, would follow. It is also known as Emanyit in some parts of Teso. Eitane is a ceremonial event where the boy's clan legitimately hands bride wealth to the

girl's family. Therefore, *Eitane* is a ritual that confirms the commitment of the boy's clan in fulfilling pledges made during the ritual of *Etube* which is described above. Female elders in a focus group discussion shared their experience and described the process of this ritual as below:

*“Eitane or Emanyit, was between a boy's clan and a girl's clan. It is beyond a family issue. The boy and the girl had nothing to do in this event, till they were summoned for blessings. Eitane started by the boy's clan inviting the girl's clan to receive the bride wealth on the date which was agreed during the ritual of Etube. When the girl's relatives reached the boy's home, they would be directed by the boy's father to the kraal. At the kraal, two boys would be standing at the entrance locally called (Erute). The selected relatives of the girl would meet a delegation from the boy's clan, which already is at the kraal's erute. The clan head of the boy's clan would order one boy to enter the kraal, count and drive out the number of animals which was agreed earlier. One of the girl's relatives would assess and confirm the number. He would then yell in a chant, signifying that the girl's clan is satisfied with the number, size and health of the cattle. The chant was full of appreciation and invocation of divine powers and ancestors (Ipaara) to grace Edukone (traditional marriage) of their children (Source: Informant from Atekok clan)”*

Findings also uncovered that *Eitane* ritual is a meaningful and respectful confirmation of marriage commitments between clans.

From the experiences above, it is noticeable that the ritual of traditional marriage, known as *Eitane*, *Emanyit*, or *Edukone* in some parts of Teso, represents the culmination of the *Edukone* process where the boy's clan formally hands over the bride wealth to the girl's family, thereby solemnizing the marital commitment. This ritual transcends familial boundaries, involving the wider clan communities of both the bride and groom, which highlights marriage as a socio-political alliance rather than merely a private affair. The ceremonial handing over at the kraal, overseen by clan elders and marked by specific rituals such as the counting and inspection of cattle at the *Erute* (entrance), serves as a public confirmation of the bride price agreement reached at *Etube*. The chant invoking divine powers and ancestors (*Ipaara*) to bless the *Edukone* underlines the ritual's deep spiritual resonance, enshrining the marriage within sacred communal values and ancestral approval.

This ritual underscores the collective responsibility and social validation inherent in Iteso marriages, reinforcing the sacred bond and collective identity that marriage fosters within the clan system. It confirms the researcher's argument that Edukone rituals are multifaceted, deeply embedded cultural practices that integrate social, economic, and religious dimensions. The public and ceremonial nature of *Eitane* manifests how traditional Iteso marriage is upheld by communal consensus, ritual sanctity, and ancestral endorsement, reflecting the intricate fusion of spiritual and social life central to Iteso identity and continuity.

This analysis synthesizes the finding by showing how *Eitane* operationalizes communal recognition and spiritual sanctioning, supporting the argument that Edukone rituals consolidate more than individual unions—they sustain cultural and spiritual cohesiveness among the Iteso.

#### **4.2.5 The ritual of bidding farewell to the married girl (Aikor apese)**

*Aikor apese*, is when the family of the girl recognizes the commitment of the boy's family to marry their daughter. In this ceremonial event, the girl's clan through the girl's family organizes a big party in which they publically declare their appreciation and confirm that the girl is fully married and belongs to the boy and his clan. The two clans gather in the girl's family and feast.

One male elder described this ritualistic event as follows:

*During Aikor apese, the two clans and friends meet in the girl's home where a powerful party is organized. The girl's father will pick a big bull. The bull will be slaughtered for feasting. The climax of the ritual is where the girl's mother blesses the girl before the two clans. She makes utterances like; "Akokosi! Edeke loinakini iso jo. isirereng jo! ouriar ido itopol ateker na ayanga ijo kotoma oinonosio kec". This means, "Our daughter, the God who gave you to us; bless you. Be productive and develop the clan that we hand you to their tradition". Then the gathering will yell the response, "Edeke, kiirarai". Meaning, "God hear us!" This is followed by yodeling, chanting and all expressions of joy. Then the girl is handed to an elderly woman from the boy's clan who will lead her to sit together with the boy at a place set for them. (Source: an elder from Irarak clan).*

Findings uncovered *Aikor apese* ritual as a joyous and meaningful farewell marking the bride's official transition to her husband's clan. The public declaration of commitment and the communal celebration where families unite through feasting, blessings, and

joyful expressions such as chanting and yodeling are very interesting according to the respondent.

This affirms that despite changes in practices, the ritual remains a cherished cultural bridge linking past traditions with contemporary marital life. On top of that, it is seen that *Aikor apese* ritual marks a formal recognition by the girl's family and clan of the boy's clan's commitment to the marriage, serving as a public affirmation that the girl is now fully married and belongs to the boy's family. The ceremony, characterized by a large feast and communal celebration, reinforces the social and spiritual bonds joining the two clans. It culminates in the girl's mother blessing her daughter with words invoking divine favor and productivity "*Akokosi! Edeke loinakini iso jo. isirereng jo! ouriar ido itopol ateker na ayanga ijo kotoma oinonosio kec*", which means "Our daughter, the God who gave you to us; bless you. Be productive and develop the clan that we hand you to their tradition." The communal response "*Edeke, kiirarai*" meaning "God hear us!" the yodeling, chanting, and joyous expressions highlights the ritual's religious and collective nature. The girl is then symbolically led to join the boy by an elderly woman from his clan, completing her transition into marital status. This finding underlines the dual social and sacred significance of Edukone rituals, emphasizing community endorsement, ancestral blessings, and the girl's integration into her new clan, all of which sustain Iteso cultural and spiritual continuity.

#### **4.2.6 The ritual of initiating a woman to the man's clan (Etal)**

This ritual of Etal is when the woman is initiated to a man's clan. It is done when the woman is fully married, accredited by the boy's clan as a woman of good character and productive. This means that it is not a hurried event. The elders in the man's clan have to closely assess the actions of the woman, indoctrinate her in to the culture of that clan and when she produces a

child then she becomes suitable for initiation. Initiation of a woman is done in two phases. The first phase is giving a woman a test in the man's clan and the second phase is to end the test and fully recognizing the woman in the man's clan. Informants from a focus group discussion shared their experience and described the process of this ritual in the first phase as below:

*Once a woman is deemed suitable for initiation (Etal), elders from the boy's clan inform the girl's family that, they have liked the girl and are now ready to initiate her to their clan. Usually, the girl's family has to support the idea by offering a big bull to the boy's clan in approbation.*

*This process begins with elderly women closely monitoring the girl. Once she is identified to have conceived, one day, in the early morning, they go to the man's door way before that woman and her husband come out. From there, they call out the name of the girl. When she responds, in rude voices, they (elderly women) will tell her to come out immediately. This was meant to annoy her and check how she controls the temper. When she comes out, they begin to make false accusations on her. Like; "You thief! What have you been stealing in our clan?" As the girl begins to explain, she is made to sit down and ordered to keep quiet. The elderly women pull out a stick cut from a totemic tree locally called "Esas". This tree is rear and grows from hilly places. At this moment, leader of these women lays the stick (Esas) down. She anoints Esas, with butter. She uses the same butter to anoint the woman as well. She anoints her forehead, the chest and waste as she tells her the regulations of the clan. For instance, "Lolo aparit na, itateleoro ijo anyam iboro-akoik lu ibaasit. Mam bobo aikony akoit ne inyamia ijo akiring, toni ne ipoere etal anukon. Ingarakisi ijo apolok luabutok lu ateker kana." This means, today, the clan forbids you from eating the offal of any animal or biting a bone while you are eating meat, till a ritual to fully recognize you as a woman of this clan is performed. May the ancestors of this clan guide you.*

*From that moment, the woman ceases eating the offal and biting a bone while eating the meat. The elderly women after anointing the woman at the door way will take Esas to the girl's family. They hand it to the girl's mother. This signals to the girl's parents that their daughter has become pregnant and so, they have to prepare to have her granted full recognition as a woman of the boy's clan when she delivers." (Source: Focused Group Discussion with elderly women of Okulunyo village)*

when we look at the experience of the elders above, it becomes clear that, *Etal* ritual serves as a significant rite of passage wherein a married woman is gradually inducted and accredited into her husband's clan through assessment, indoctrination, and spiritual anointing. This ritual's phased approach—beginning with testing the woman's character and behavior (such as temper control) and culminating in her full recognition—represents a deliberate process of cultural integration

rather than a hurried ceremony. The use of symbolic elements like the anointing stick made from “*Esas*” tree and the specific prohibitions articulated by elders reflects the ritual’s function to instill clan norms and spiritual values into the woman, marking a transformative passage from outsider to insider. This process not only validates the woman’s membership but also reinforces the community’s cohesion by ensuring conformity to shared moral principles. The involvement of the woman’s family, especially through the offering of a bull, emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between clans and communal endorsement of this transition. This ritual underscores marriage as a social and spiritual contract binding both individuals and kinship networks, reflecting deep respect for tradition and ancestral guidance.

#### **4.2.7 Ritual to grant full membership in the man’s clan (*Aitokony akoit*)**

*Aitokony akoit* is a ritual which is the second phase of Etal. It marks the end of the man’s clan test to the newly married woman, and fully recognizing the woman as a member of the man’s clan. This ceremonial event is attended by both the man’s and girl’s clans with a lot of feasting. This means that, the ritual of *Aitokony akoit* marks the end of testing and the beginning of the woman’s real journey of womanhood in the man’s clan. At this point, the man’s clan wholly binds the woman according to their regulations. One informant shared his experience on this ritual and explained it as follows:

*“I witnessed the process of this ritual when both my senior and junior wives were initiated to my clan called Ikarebwok. This ritual is to conclude the initiation process. Once the woman gives birth, after the naming rituals (*Asuban nuamaikin ekiror*), the man’s family will send the message to the woman’s family that they are ready to end the test the woman is going through and recognize the woman as a full member of their clan. On an agreed date, the girl’s clan through their family will offer a big fat bull locally known as “*Ekony koit*” and a lot of local brew (*Ajon*) to the man’s clan. The woman will be sent back to their home that day. The girl’s clan hand the bull to the man’s clan. At that point, the man’s clan will kill the bull. It can be killed through spearing it to death or tying it then women cover all the openings on the bull so as to suffocate it. As some women cover the openings, others will be throwing themselves on the bull while yodeling. When it dies, the men skin the animal, cut it into pieces ready to carry the meat to*

*the man's home. The elderly women from the woman's clan will undress the woman's modern dress and dress her in Teso cultural wear for this ritual called "Arob". It is made of a cow's skin. It covers only the private parts of a woman, more so the breasts, and the genital area. The rest of the body is exposed to allow anointing. They also hang the chest bone of the bull at the chest of the woman. She is also made to carry some local brew in a pot, and then she leads the procession out of their home to the man's home where cooking will be done. On their way, the woman is intentionally insulted with vulgar utterances so as to check her ability to control temper. In case, she fails to control the temper then throws the pot of brew, the procession turns to the girl's home to demand for another bull to first cleanse the girl. So, the girl has to be firm to avoid their family getting fined.*

*On reaching the man's home, vulgar language ceases, the elderly women appraise the woman, and then the cooking begins. The meat is prepared with other local food items in the same container using local objects and ingredients. For example, pots and calabashes as utensils. Pasting with groundnuts, simsim or roasting is allowed. Frying is not allowed. Other local foods include cucumbers (Ikolil), peas; butter (Emuna), etc.*

*When the meat is ready, the soup is poured into another pot. Its put on fire again and used to mingle bread (Atap), popularly known as Kalo in most Ugandan communities. The bread was made of sorghum or millet flour only. When food is ready, the woman to be initiated is made to sit at her door way. Food items are served in calabashes. At this point, the leader of the elderly women anoints her chest with raw butter. She makes utterances of plea to the ancestors to accept the woman as one of the family and clan members. She also makes a pronouncement that from today, the woman is free to bite the bone while eating meat or eat the offal. She then picks meat from the calabash and feeds the woman. The purpose is to witness the biting of the bone (Akony akoit). This is accompanied by a lot of yodeling and chanting. Then the feasting spreads to all members. This marks the end of the test and full membership of the woman in the man's clan." (Source: Interviews with a male elder of Ikarebwok clan).*

According to elders as seen from above, the successful completion of *Etal*, *Aitokony akoit* ritual signifies the conclusion of a probationary period and the full incorporation of the woman into the man's clan. The ritual's ceremonial elements—such as the offering and ritual slaughter of a bull (*Ekony koit*), the wearing of symbolic cultural attire (*Arob*), and communal feasting conducted with strict adherence to traditional culinary practices—demonstrate the importance of material and symbolic acts in affirming social status. The symbolic removal of modern dress and redressing in clan attire visually signals the woman's new role and identity within the clan, while the blessing and feeding

ceremonies invoke ancestral favor and mark her acceptance. The ritual also tests the woman's temperament and resilience to insults, reinforcing cultural values of patience, endurance, and respect essential for clan harmony. Overall, *Aitokony akoit* consolidates the marriage union as a sacred and communal bond, illustrating how traditional Iteso marriage rituals intricately weave personal, social, and spiritual dimensions into an integrated cultural practice.

#### **4.2.8 The ritual to cleanse incest (Aelo Aluejenasi/Aicud)**

Much as choice of a marriage partner entirely depended on the parents and relatives in the past, in the contemporary society things have changed. It is each person to get the marriage partner and introduce to the family. This reveals that, changes have increased because the youth feel, their parents violate their rights and have no influence on the choice of whom they want to love. As a result, some of these youth end up in courtship with their relatives since they don't have full know how of their clans and relationships. This practice is a taboo among Iteso. In case of such, the clan will summon the relatives dating each other and organize a cleansing ritual. In the focus group discussion, the elderly women revealed the following details on the process of cleansing incest:

*“When relatives engage in a love affair and elders learn about it, it is stopped immediately because it is a taboo. The elders will gather in the family of the male victim. Two forms of executing the ritual are available. One, the elders can decide to break the boys house from behind to create an exit opposite the door. The victims are made to enter the house, then when an elder yells; “Okereunete kinga!” which means “Get out!” Victims are expected to run out. At the exit, two capable men await with strong sticks to beat the victims. The victims have to endure beatings. They get out and run to different directions. This means locally that “Aremor esirani awai” That is to say “the bad omen has been chased away.” The elder victim is fined a Billy goat that elders will roast and eat but the two victims are not allowed to eat it.*

*The second option is that; the elders will take the victims to a nearby swamp. The youth will be ordered to construct something like a hut. It is thatched with totemic grass locally known as “Emaa”. Just as in the first case, in the swamp also, the victims will be ordered to enter this grass thatched hut. The hut is set on fire and*

*the victims are to run out. As they get out, they are beaten as they run to different directions. After a distance of about 200metres, they are summoned back to vow that they won't continue then counseling is done by the elders. They will always demand for a Billy goat from the elder victim. This goat will be eaten in the male's home.” (Source: FGD with elderly women)*

So, the ritual of cleansing incest, known as Aelo Aluejenasi/Aicud, addresses a serious taboo within Iteso society relating to the avoidance of consanguineous relationships in marriage. This finding reveals a shift from traditional parental control over partner selection to youth autonomy, which inadvertently increases the risk of unknowingly forming forbidden relationships within close kin. When incestuous relationships arise, the community's response is swift and symbolic, aiming to expel the associated bad omen and reconcile the social order. The described rituals involve publicly humiliating and physically disciplining the involved parties—either by forcing them to escape through a newly created exit receiving beatings with sticks or by burning a grass-thatched hut while escaping and then enduring similar physical reprimand. These actions symbolize the purging of impurity or misfortune from the community, thereby restoring spiritual and social balance.

The ritual also involves social penalties, including a fine paid by the elder victim and restrictions on participating in communal feasts, reflecting the seriousness of the transgression and the communal investment in maintaining cultural purity. The counseling and oath-taking after the ritual emphasize rehabilitation and the commitment to uphold community norms going forward.

Synthesizing this finding, the incest cleansing ritual demonstrates the Iteso's profound commitment to preserving moral and spiritual boundaries in marriage, utilizing dramatic symbolic actions to reinforce social norms and prevent taboo transgressions. This ritual evidences the community's resilience in adapting to changing social dynamics—such as increased youth autonomy—while maintaining mechanisms for cultural and spiritual purification, thus supporting the researcher's thesis on the intricate blend of social, moral, and religious dimensions within Iteso marriage practices.

#### **4.2.9 Ritual to cleanse marital infidelity (*Egelit lo Eluk*)**

Some times in marriage, infidelity may crop in. It is a taboo among Iteso for a fully married woman who has gone through initiation to get involved in marital infidelity. Such an action is believed to attract curses to the woman this would in turn negatively impact on her health and productivity. To cease such torment, the woman would reveal what she did then a cleansing ceremony is organized. This means that from the time of initiation, women ought to abide by the clan's regulations so as to be free from the wrath of the ancestors of that clan hence confirming that marriage rituals have a religious connotation. In a focus group discussion, elderly women revealed that:

*“Once you are initiated to the man's clan, follow the regulations of that clan. Among the regulations was never to sexually cheat on the man. Once an initiated woman takes another man, ancestors would punish that woman by making her sickly, emaciating badly and having a cute confusion. For instance, taking recklessly, sitting carelessly before people, touching her private part constantly, and many other ridiculous things to the extent that she could be suspected to have acted against the clan rules. If this was noticed in the woman, at a time when she is of sound mind, elderly women would talk to her gradually till the woman reveals the truth. The man with whom she committed adultery was summoned and fined. The fine usually was six big cattle and a big black Billy goat which was used during the ritual.*

*To cleanse the woman, two options were available. One, if they had sexual intercourse in the bush, which was the most common, the woman was to show the elderly women the crime scene. Elders surround this place using fiber from a tree locally called “Etobocon”. The woman is tasked to inform the man whom she*

*committed the crime with to be available at that scene the following morning. The following day, early morning, they were expected to sit inside the ring-fenced place then elderly women anoint them using a mixture of cud and blood from the Billy goat which that man paid as part of the fine. They are expected to make vows never to repeat marital infidelity. In case that man refused to show up, the woman's parents were tasked to give their daughter a big Billy goat which will be used in this ritual.*

*The second option was that in case the man ran away, elders tasked the woman's parents to give a Billy goat which was used in the ritual. The woman would be made to sit at her door way with bear chest then leader of elderly women anoints her with a mixture of cud and blood from the Billy goat. She would make a vow before elders never to breach the clan regulations. The elder made utterances of plea to ask the ancestors to forgive the woman. After that, the woman would lead elderly women to the scene where sexual intercourse was done. The elders would spread the skin of an antelope across that spot and peg it there. As it rots, the termites and worms begin decomposing it. At this point, the man who ran away would begin feeling the wrath of the great ancestors. Ancestors could punish that man by giving severe body aches, emaciation, confusion and death if the skin completely decomposes without him showing up and organizing a cleansing ritual. A majority of such stubborn men would show up when their health deteriorates. Once they show up, the husband's clan would make him pay the fine but instead of a Billy goat, he was to give a black big bull then the elderly women proceed with the ritual as discussed above.” (Source: Elderly women from a FGD).*

According to the findings, young couples today are aware of the ritual of cleansing marital infidelity (*Egelit lo Eluk*) and appreciate its role in restoring harmony in marriage. They recognize the spiritual and communal significance of confessing infidelity and participating in the cleansing ceremonies to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. However, some express a cautious stance, influenced by modern values and Christian teachings, preferring to navigate such issues through counseling and church guidance. One young wife shared, *“We respect the cleansing rituals as part of our culture, but today we also rely on faith and communication to heal our marriage.”* It is noticeable that, according to the elders' experience above, *Egelit lo Eluk* ritual for cleansing marital infidelity among the Iteso vividly depicts the community's strong socio-religious sanctions against adultery, especially for women who have undergone initiation. Infidelity is considered a grave taboo believed to invoke ancestral curses that

harm the woman's health and productivity, demonstrating the deep intertwining of spiritual belief and social order in Iteso marriage. This ritual involves confession, communal recognition of the transgression, and a purification process that symbolically removes the spiritual contamination caused by adultery.

The two cleansing options demonstrate the seriousness accorded to restoring moral and spiritual balance. The first involves the woman and the man repeatedly demonstrating repentance and reconciliation at the infidelity site, anointing with a mixture of cud and blood from a Billy goat, signifying sacrifice and purification. If the man absconds, spiritual pressure is exerted through symbolic acts such as pegging a decomposing antelope skin at the transgression site, believed to cause severe ancestral punishment, compelling his eventual reparation with an even greater offering. This spectacular plea *to* ancestral justice underscores the community's commitment to uphold marital fidelity as essential for spiritual harmony and social stability.

In synthesis, the *Egelit lo Eluk* ritual reveals how Iteso marriage norms are policed through ritualized confession, collective sanction, and spiritual cleansing, reflecting a worldview where individual morality significantly impacts communal wellbeing. This finding powerfully reinforces the study's premise that Iteso marriage is not only a social contract but also a sacred covenant subject to religious laws that regulate behavior and preserve clan integrity and ancestral favor.

#### **4.3 Discussion of Rituals Embedded in Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda, Usuk Sub County Katakwi District**

The discussion of the rituals embedded in Edukone has been done following the order in which rituals were presented as seen below:

#### **4.3.1 The ritual of booking a girl for marriage (Agolokin)**

The ritual of *Agolokin*, or booking a girl for marriage, among the Iteso is deeply embedded in the community's communal and spiritual worldview, as reflected through the lens of Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes that "a person is a person through other persons," underscoring the communal nature of human existence (Mbiti, 1969). This ritual embodies Ubuntu by fostering interconnectedness and mutual responsibility between families, linking individual identity to the collective well-being of the community. The early involvement of families in booking and nurturing the girl within the boy's household reflects the Ubuntu principle of communal nurturing, cooperation, and shared moral development. Marriage here is not merely a private contract but a community venture that binds not only two individuals but extended families, ancestors, and future generations in a continuous social fabric, reinforcing solidarity and mutual care. Through *Agolokin*, the community collectively ensures social harmony by carefully cultivating the moral character and readiness of the couple, an act that resonates with Ubuntu's core values of dignity, respect, and humanity expressed in relational terms.

Durkheim's theory of religion complements this understanding by framing the *Agolokin* ritual as a social fact that reinforces collective conscience and social cohesion. The ritual functions as a sacred social mechanism that regulates moral behavior and nurtures social order by controlling sexual relations and preventing deviance like incest or premarital sex, thus maintaining the community's moral fabric. It transmutes personal relationships into sanctified collective acts, whereby the marriage becomes a symbol of society's continuity and shared values. Durkheim's concept of rituals generating collective effervescence is evident as these practices produce solidarity and reaffirm communal norms and expectations surrounding marriage.

However, the discussion of Agolokin also reveals tensions between tradition and modernity. While the ritual aligns with Ubuntu in reinforcing communal bonds and collective moral responsibility, it is critically challenged by contemporary human rights perspectives that emphasize individual autonomy, especially the rights of girls to freely choose partners and mature independently. This critique points to the patriarchal undercurrents embedded within the tradition, where girls are commodified and their agency constrained, which contradicts the ethical aspirations of Ubuntu that emphasize dignity and mutual respect among persons. From a critical sociological perspective, this tension reflects the dynamic process through which traditional religious and social practices are contested and re-negotiated in modern contexts.

In sum, integrating Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion enriches the analysis of the Agolokin ritual by framing it as both a communal, relational practice vital for social cohesion and spiritual continuity and a contested site where cultural, ethical, and gender values are negotiated. This dual theoretical framing situates Edukone rituals within broader African philosophical and sociological understandings of religion, marriage, and community, thereby deepening the scholarly interpretation beyond descriptive narrative to critical theoretical engagement.

#### **4.3.2 The ritual of picking the girl from her parents (Aiwom apese)**

It should be noted that this ritual is not actual marriage among Iteso but the girl is first taken to the boy's place to assess her character. There is no transfer of assets at this stage but this ritual was done when the girl who was booked grows up to a reasonable age. According to the experience of Iteso elders, during that time the law was not serious on the age for marriage, education of girls was also not valued. She was taken to the boy's family purposely to expose her to various tests by elderly women in the boy's clan and indoctrinate her on some rules of the

boy's clan but she was not supposed to sleep with the boy. The girl could sleep with the boy's sisters or grandmother.

From the Ubuntu perspective, this ritual exemplifies the interconnectedness of persons— “I am because we are”—signifying not only the union of two individuals but the merging of two extended families and communities into a cohesive social entity. The bride's transition into the groom's clan is a communal event that reflects shared responsibility, collective identity, and moral engagement, affirming that individual identity is fundamentally embedded within social relationships.

Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane further illuminates this ritual's social function. The moment of picking the bride is set apart from everyday life—it is a sacred event imbued with meaning, symbolism, and ceremonial acts that mark a definitive separation from the profane mundane world of family life. This sacred status elevates the ritual to a collective representation, fostering social solidarity and reifying community values.

United States Agency for International Development (2016, p. 115), in the article “New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage”, opposes this ritual much as the study uncovered it. To them, marriage should be between adults. They add that the practice of elders imposing on a girl's choice of a marriage partner below the legal age is forced marriage much as parents convince the girl.

Much as United States Agency for International Development condemns such rituals that negatively impact on a girl child, Iteso Elders, who were informants of this study continued to share their experience that, those days, elders could look at the girl's size, height and ability to do domestic chores diligently. The boy's family would follow procedures described under presentation so as to pick this girl from their family then subject her to several tests before she is

married. For example, she would be taken to weed millet, threshing millet or sorghum, smearing houses with cow dung, brewing local drinks (*Ajon keda Ewaragi*), bathing children in the family, cooking for a large number of people, etc. At this point the girl is not yet married. Therefore, she will not share with the boy the same house. She was taken to the boy's family so that the boy's mother trains her further on how to manage some specific domestic activities and acquaint her with the environment of that family before actual marriage. What was much in this step was indoctrination into the family norms which the girl was to confirm to the boy's parents that she is ready to abide by before a step is taken for actual marriage. When the girl passes these tests and confirms to the boy's parents that she is ready, the boy's family organizes a delegation that will go and discuss with her family on bride wealth.

However, in rare cases, when the girl refuses to marry the boy, elders had to force her because it was so common that even before marriage, the girl's parents could have received many gifts from the boy's family. Therefore, the girl had no autonomy to let the deal down.

However, from late 1990s to date, this practice has become silent. The issue of gender equality has lessened the patriarchal powers in Teso. The people intending to marry are free to choose whom they want to marry from any part of the world. It is observed that intermarriages are on a rise because parents/elders are no longer in control of marriage affairs of the youth. Modern developments like education, trade and formal employment have exposed youth to various cultures and so, their marriages don't follow all the traditional stages. So, stages are seen as barbaric and so, the youth shun them and go by modern style. Since culture is dynamic, most of the modern trends of marriage are accepted in Teso as the traditional ones are getting eroded. This is in line with the literature review especially, Isiko and Isabirye (2023, p. 367) who state in their article "Fluidity and Hybridity of Customary Marriage Traditions in Contemporary

Uganda.” that, the contemporary African traditional marriages are just dramatization of the ancient African traditional marriages.

#### **4.3.3 The Ritual of negotiating on bride price (Etube)**

The *Etube* ritual, marking the negotiation of bride price between the boy’s and girl’s families, holds profound communal and sacred significance when examined through Mbiti’s Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim’s theory of religion. In line with Ubuntu's axiom that "a person is a person through other persons," the ritual emphasizes the relational dimensions of marriage, highlighting how marital unions are communal contracts that connect not only individuals but their extended families and clans. The negotiation process reflects mutual respect, reciprocity, and the maintenance of social harmony, as the boy’s family demonstrates its ability and willingness to uphold communal expectations by fulfilling bride wealth obligations. This shared responsibility affirms the collective identity and moral fabric of the Iteso society, where marriage consolidates social ties and embodies communal values.

Durkheim’s theory contributes by distinguishing the sacred from the profane within this ritual. The bride price negotiation and subsequent feasting constitute sacred rites, ritualized actions that symbolize and reinforce social cohesion, moral order, and cultural continuity. The bride price a culturally sanctioned exchange, typically involving cattle transcends mere economic transaction; it is a sacred symbol of the bond between clans, sanctifying the marriage contract. The ritual’s rules and prohibitions such as the avoidance of chicken before marriage due to its symbolic association with purity and chastity mirror Durkheim's concept of the sacred as set apart, protected and venerated, evoking collective effervescence among participants. This sacredness upholds communal norms, delineates moral boundaries between the profane everyday sphere and the ceremonially charged space, and reaffirms communal consensus on gender roles, family obligations, and ethical conduct.

Together, Ubuntu and Durkheim's perspectives reveal Etube as a multifaceted ritual that integrates social relations, spiritual symbolism, and communal ethics. It is a culturally embedded practice that not only secures social alliances but actively sustains the moral and spiritual order of Iteso society. However, shifts in modern practices such as couples initiating arrangements indicate evolving negotiation dynamics, reflecting ongoing dialogue between tradition and contemporary values, a process that merits further investigation within these theoretical frameworks.

#### **4.3.4 The ritual of giving out bride wealth (Eitane /Emanyit)**

Literature confirms that marriage payments, as well as dowry or bride price, are still in use in 75% of countries globally (Nyyssölä, 2022, p. 52).

Therefore, according to Iteso, "*Eitane*" is a critical ritual in Iteso traditional marriage. This event is attended by a large number of people that include relatives, friends, in-laws and neighbors. It is in this ritual where the actual transfer of assets from the boy's clan to the girl's clan is done. During this event, the girl's relatives will base on the agreement made during the ritual of *Etube*, where discussion on bride wealth was done. However, due to cultural dynamics, certain changes have occurred in this event. During early 1950s to 1980s, Iteso used to marry with cattle only. This is because it was a rich community that kept a lot of cattle just like other Karamojong communities. The number of cattle used to vary between thirty and sixty heads of cattle. This bride price was given once so that the man's clan proceeds with other rituals on the girl.

The experiences above agree with Owaraga (2023, p.125). She explained that bride price is key in Iteso traditional marriage. She adds that in Teso culture, bride wealth is to be received by the clan of the girls' father not the mother, so as to allow the marrying man's clan to have full authority over the woman they married, just as Adjeketa, had explained in the previous ritual.

Though it is so, in the mid 1980's Teso witnessed catastrophic experiences such as rebelism, internal displacements, political instability, etc. all such unfortunate situations birthed cattle rustling by the Karamojong which weakened the economic structure of Iteso. As a result, the cultural practice of marriage was negatively affected. It reached a point where people were unable to raise cattle for bride wealth because almost all cows were taken by the Karamojong. Coupled with modernity, at around early 1990s, Iteso started using money, goats and a small number of cattle for bride wealth. Currently, the average bride wealth of Iteso stands at five heads of cattle, eight goats and at least two million shillings accompanied by some other gifts. The popular gifts include a Billy goat (*Auk-ikiyal*) for the girl's clan to eat, a Billy goat for the grandmother (*Ekori-atata*), four hundred thousand for the mother and the father locally called (*isirigin apapa ka luatoto*), attire for the father, mother and all the aunts, etc. So, *Eitane* demonstrates the commitment of the man's family to fulfil marriage pledges which is a value cherished among Iteso.

So, by integrating Ubuntu's relational ethics with Durkheim's sacred-profane dichotomy, this analysis reveals *Eitane* as a multifaceted cultural institution that sustains Iteso identity, moral order, and spiritual harmony. It embodies a communal world where marriage is a sacred covenant invoking ancestral presence and social responsibility. However, contemporary shifts, including possible re-interpretations of taboos and roles, point to an evolving dialogue between tradition and modernity within the community, signaling areas for ongoing critical examination.

#### **4.3.5 A ritual of bidding farewell to the married girl (Aikor apese)**

This ritual is organized by the girl's family. Once they receive the last part of pride wealth, locally known as (*Airikakin Emanyit*). They have to officially appreciate the boy's clan. This is done through "*Aikor apese*". This ritual marks the final hand over of the girl to the man. The girl's family will organize a big ceremony which is attended by very many people from both the

girl's and boy's clans. Traditionally, the girl's family would offer a big bull which would be speared till it dies. Its meat was supposed to be cooked in the pot and served in calabashes. Only local food items accompanied the meat. For example, butter (*Emuna*), cucumbers (*Ikolil/akobokob*). It was to be boiled or pasted but not fried. Frying food at this stage was associated to making family life of the new couple hot and problematic to the extent of divorce.

So, it is evident that the above ritual can be meaningfully explored using Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu's principle of relational personhood— "I am because we are"—is embodied in this ritual as it symbolizes not only the girl's transition from one family to another but also the affirmation of mutual respect and interdependence between the two clans. The collective celebration and formal handover emphasize that marriage is a community-sanctioned covenant that involves shared responsibilities, solidarity, and the continuity of kinship ties, reinforcing the Iteso's communal values of harmony and collective belonging.

Drawing on Durkheim's sacred-profane distinction, *Aikor apese* can be regarded as a sacred rite that demarcates ordinary life (profane) from ceremonially charged experience (sacred). The rituals of spearing the bull, the ceremonial dances with three groups of women of different ages, the symbolic hiding and identifying of the bride, and the exchange of blessings and gifts transform the occasion into a transcendent social event. These acts create collective effervescence, intensifying social solidarity and reinforcing the moral order. The specific taboos associated with food preparation—such as forbidding frying, which is believed to cause marital strife—highlight the sacred nature of the ritual and its role in maintaining the symbolic boundaries necessary to preserve the marriage's purity and social harmony.

Furthermore, the contemporary modifications—such as the cessation of spearing the bull, inclusion of Muslim slaughterers, introduction of modern foods and monetary gifts—illustrate the dynamic negotiation between tradition and modernity. These changes do not diminish the ritual's sacred significance but reflect Ubuntu's recognition of evolving communal realities and Durkheim's notion that religion and rituals adapt to uphold social cohesion amidst change.

Thus, integrating Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory reveals *Aikor apese* as a ritual that sustains the Iteso's shared identity, moral values, and social framework by consecrating the bride's passage into her new community. It situates marriage not solely as a personal affair but as a sacred social institution integral to the collective life of the Iteso people.

#### **4.3.6 The ritual of initiating a woman to the man's clan (Etal)**

Several studies in the literature confirm that female initiation into a man's clan is one of the oldest and most important rituals in the process of traditional marriage. For example, Kuoppala (2021, p. 18); Munthali, A. C (2018, p. 112) explain that female initiation ceremony in to the man's clan serves as a cultural bridge, preparing a girl for her future role within the man's clan and ensuring that she has the knowledge and skills necessary for her new life.

So, in relation to the above literature; among the Iteso, this study found out that the ritual of initiation of a woman to a man's clan (*Etal*) is only done when full bride wealth is paid, the girl's family has bid farewell to their daughter and that woman is seen as productive in the man's clan. At this point, the girl is bound by the regulations of the man's clan. To solemnize her position in the man's clan, initiation ceremony is done. This process is a gradual one because various events are done on particular stages till it is concluded. Initiation is in two phases. The first phase involves assessing the girl and once elderly women confirm that she is pregnant, a ritual is performed to signify to the girl's family that their girl is pregnant. As discussed under

presentation, the symbolic stick locally called *Esas* is taken to the girl's family by the elderly women of the boy's clan that anointed the girl at first. This symbolic stick is handed to the girl's mother or female guardian to signify that their daughter is pregnant and she is to be subjected to various tests as deemed necessary by the man's clan. The elderly women were accompanied by some men.

On receiving the symbolic stick (*Esas*). The girl's parents were supposed to offer a Billy goat to that group in appreciation. The goat was to be speared to death not slaughtered in the girl's family. It is skinned and all the good parts carried to be cooked in the man's family. The girl's family would be left with the neck, head and legs of the goat.

On seeing the meat, the girl is certain that her family has got news of her pregnancy. It is at this point that the girl begins to abide by the clan's regulations. As said under presentation, among the tests, the girl was not supposed to eat the offal or bite the bone while eating meat. She would only be allowed to bite when she delivers then her parents offer a bull (*Ekonyo-koit*) to the man's clan. This bull was meant to end the test the woman is going through such that she begins to eat normally like other women.

At this point, we are ushered in to the second phase of initiation where the woman is allowed to bite the bone and eat offal which is called Ritual to grant full membership in the man's clan (*Aitokony akoit*). In this ritual, a celebration is done. The man's clan goes to the girl's home to pick the symbolic stick (*Esas*) which was left there when the information about the pregnancy was delivered. It is a funny ceremony where the women of the man's clan kill the bull that the girl's family offers to them.

The women kill this bull by covering any opening on the bull's body so as to suffocate it. When it dies, the men will skin the animal. The best parts of the animal will be taken by the man's clan

then girl's family is left with the neck, head and legs of the animal. The celebration is done by the man's clan alone but the girl's family and clan will also rejoice because their girl has come to the end of the test and has been confirmed a full member of that clan. So, they can also slaughter another animal to top up what they were given.

In conclusion, the ritual of initiation of the woman into the man's clan, locally termed *Etal*, holds critical cultural and spiritual significance in the Iteso traditional marriage process and can be meaningfully analyzed through Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu philosophy highlights the interconnectedness and communal nature of personhood, expressing that an individual's identity is inseparable from their community— "I am because we are." In this light, *Etal* symbolizes the woman's formal integration into the social and moral fabric of her husband's clan, confirming her new relational identity and responsibilities. This initiation marks the transition from a daughter of her birth family to a full member of the husband's clan, reflecting shared communal membership and reinforcing mutual accountability essential to Ubuntu's ethical framework.

From Durkheim's perspective, the initiation ritual constitutes a sacred rite that delineates the transition from profane everyday existence to the sacred status of clan membership. The symbolic acts such as delivering the *Esas* stick by elderly women, the offering and ritual killing of the Billy goat, and the observance of food-related taboos (such as forbidding the girl from eating offal or biting bone until initiation is complete) enshrine this process with sacredness and collective meaning. These symbolic boundaries and ceremonies foster collective effervescence, reinforcing social cohesion and moral order within the clan. The ritual's progressive phases reflect a measured socio-religious affirmation of the woman's new status, stabilizing clan structure and perpetuating ancestral traditions.

Furthermore, the modification of ritual practices in the modern context—such as communal celebrations and different arrangements of symbolic gifts—demonstrates the dynamic interplay between tradition and contemporary cultural realities. These adaptations preserve the ritual's core values of community integration and sacred affirmation, even as they negotiate changing social conditions.

Thus, by integrating Ubuntu and Durkheimian insights, *Etal* is understood as both a communal and sacred institutional rite that solidifies kinship ties, upholds moral continuity, and affirms the woman's identity in her new clan, exemplifying the enduring cultural philosophy and social function of Edukone practices among the Iteso.

#### **4.3.7 The ritual to cleanse incest (Aelo Aluejenasi/Aicud)**

Incest is frowned upon in Iteso society as well as other cultures across the globe. However, because young people don't know all of their relatives, they typically become victims of incest during courtship. In customary African society, the selection of a son or daughter's marriage match was left to the elders, making incest uncommon. But it is becoming more common in Teso and other contemporary African civilizations as parents are no longer the ones who decide who gets married. The young adults start dating when their parents are unaware, having met in a variety of far-off educational institutions.

Daily Monitor. (Wednesday, March 8, 2023, p. 25), a Ugandan Newspaper in the article, "Cousins flogged during incest cleansing ritual" uncovered a live scenario where two cousins, who were involved in incest and belonging to Inomu Ikomion clan based in Kumi District, were flogged in a cleansing ritual aimed at shielding them from generational curses. This implies that the practice is unaccepted, just as findings of this study reveal.

Since incest is based on social and cultural taboos, the Iteso strongly detest it. It is regarded as unethical and morally repugnant. Incest is frequently regarded as a type of sexual abuse or deviance, particularly when it affects both adults and children in the same family. Teso elders' experiences indicate that incest has the power to overturn family institutions. The regular relationships and functioning of a family might be upset by incest. It may result in arguments, trust issues, and the disintegration of wholesome family bonds. As a result, it is still frowned upon among Iteso. Incest is not only forbidden in Teso but also in modern communities due to legislative restrictions. Incestuous relationships especially those involving minors are expressly forbidden and illegal in a number of nations. These regulations have been put in place to check incest.

Basing on the discussion above, it is noticeable that, the ritual to cleanse incestuous relations highlights the Iteso community's cultural abhorrence of incest, understood deeply through Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's sacred-profane framework. Ubuntu stresses that individual identity and well-being are inseparable from the collective good, and incest violates the communal harmony and moral fabric essential to shared existence—hence it is considered unethical and destructive to community cohesion. The ritual cleansing, involving public flogging, symbolic sacrifices, and purifying acts, functions as a social mechanism restoring relational balance and reaffirming collective norms that protect the community's integrity.

Durkheim's theory explains that incest is a profound breach of the sacred boundaries distinguishing pure (sacred) kinship relations from forbidden (profane) ones. The ritual's dramatic enactments such as beatings, fines, and cleansing flames serve to expel the impurity and re-sanctify the social order, generating collective effervescence that reinforces group solidarity. The legal and cultural sanctions against incest reflect the community's commitment to uphold

these sacred norms, preserving ethical conduct and preventing generational curses feared to arise from incestuous acts.

Thus, integrating Ubuntu and Durkheim shows that the incest cleansing ritual functions not only as punishment but as a vital sacred process for restoring communal harmony and moral order in Iteso society.

#### **4.3.8 Ritual to cleanse marital infidelity (*Aigel eluk*)**

It's crucial to remember that in traditional Teso society, a woman must go through purification rites after discovering she has been unfaithful to her husband, especially if she is an initiated member. If she isn't cleansed, she will always be sick, appear malnourished, and eventually die. The fundamental goal behind the cleansing ritual is frequently the restoration of equilibrium, the healing of the social and spiritual fabric, and the creation of a path for the person or couple to proceed with marriage after the act of infidelity.

In addition, Iteso view infidelity as a violation of social norms and can result in loss of social standing or community acceptance; therefore, through the rituals of cleansing the individuals regain their social status and reintegrate into the community after the transgression. Iteso believe that infidelity, as a moral and social transgression, can "pollute" or "taint" the individual or the relationship. Rituals of cleansing and purification are seen as a way to symbolically remove this "impurity" and restore the individual or the marriage to a state of purity and wholeness. This agrees with the research by O'Neil (2017) who explained that in most cultures, married women are expected to go for marriage when they are virgins and remain faithful to their husbands much as it is not the case with men.

So, the ritual of cleansing marital infidelity (*Aigel eluk*) among the Iteso is a critical process that restores social and spiritual equilibrium disrupted by unfaithfulness. From Mbiti's Ubuntu

perspective, this ritual embodies the communal nature of personhood, emphasizing that infidelity not only harms the individual but disrupts communal harmony and interconnectedness— “I am because we are.” The cleansing ceremony symbolically purges the impurity caused by the transgression, facilitating reintegration of the couple into the community and reestablishing relational balance essential to Ubuntu ethics.

Durkheim’s theory further clarifies this as a sacred ritual distinguishing the profane realm, marred by the moral breach of infidelity, from the sacred, restored through purification. The ritual’s enactment, often involving spiritual leaders and symbolic acts, generates collective effervescence that reaffirms moral order and social cohesion. It demonstrates the community’s collective conscience in preserving ethical conduct and preventing spiritual contamination, vital for marital and communal stability.

Thus, integrating Ubuntu and Durkheim elucidates the cleansing ritual as a vital cultural and sacred mechanism for healing, moral renewal, and sustaining Iteso social and spiritual continuity.

## **CHAPTER FIVE PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANCE OF EDUKONE TO ITESO COMMUNITY**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the relevance of Edukone to Iteso as it was sought for by objective two. Marriage customs are ingrained in Iteso's cultural, economic, and religious worldviews, as seen by the significance of Edukone among the Iteso people in Eastern Uganda. According to Iteso's experience, families and clans are still extremely significant and meaningful. Using the experiences of Teso elders who have lived for more than two generations, the findings show the following relevance which present common relationship with what Karimi et al. (2019, p. 17) and Baloyi (2022, p. 11-13) present in their articles "Protective factors of marital stability in long-term marriage globally: a systematic review" and "Marriage and Culture within the Context of African Indigenous Societies: A Need for African Cultural Hermeneutics" respectively.

### **5.1 Relevance of Edukone to Iteso Community**

The findings on relevance of Edukone to the Iteso have been presented as seen below:

#### **5.1.1 Respect and social status**

The finding on respect and social status through the completion of Edukone rituals among the Iteso fundamentally aligns with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu asserts that personhood and social identity are realized through communal relationships— "I am because we are." *Edukone* rituals symbolically and publicly affirm a couple's transition into mature, responsible members of the community. This communal recognition confers status, reinforces social roles, and strengthens collective belonging, thus actualizing Ubuntu's principle of interconnectedness.

From Durkheim's perspective, the *Edukone* ceremonies function as sacred rituals that elevate marriage beyond private union into a socially sacred institution. By publicly sanctifying the couple's commitment through rituals, the community reaffirms its moral order and collective conscience. The rituals generate collective effervescence, fostering cohesion and reinforcing the norms of responsibility, respect, and maturity essential for social stability.

Together, these theories illuminate *Edukone's* role in conferring social legitimacy and sustaining Iteso cultural values, demonstrating how traditional marriage integrates individual life courses with communal and sacred social structures.

Findings uncovered that *Edukone* is a vital cultural tradition that confers respect and social status within the Iteso community. The rituals are a public affirmation of transition into responsible, mature members of society.

### **5.1.2 Persistence of ancestry**

The findings on the persistence of ancestry through *Edukone* rituals among the Iteso deeply align with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu emphasizes communal personhood—the idea that identity and existence are realized through relationships within a collective (“I am because we are”). In *Edukone*, the emphasis on reproductive rights transfer and the continuation of the groom's lineage through childbearing reflects this communal interconnectedness. Marriage is seen as an alliance not just between individuals but between families and clans, sustaining lineage and cultural heritage (Lawrence, 1957). The bride price symbolizes these enduring obligations central to communal survival and identity.

From Durkheim's perspective, *Edukone* rituals serve as sacred rites that demarcate and uphold the continuity of ancestry as a sacred communal value. These ceremonies affirm the social and spiritual order, reinforcing collective conscience and cultural legacy through symbolic acts that

bind generations. Thus, integrating these theories highlights Edukone as a vital cultural mechanism embedding genealogical relevance and sustaining the Iteso social structure and cosmology

### **5.1.3 Monetary security**

According to some informants, marriage has economic significance in addition to social benefits.

An elder highlighted this point by analyzing it as follows:

*“The man's clan's great commitment to honoring the clan that reared their girl is demonstrated by the bride price payments.” A large-scale financial transaction and the transfer of assets give the bride's family access to riches. Due to the importance placed on the idea of sharing resources between the two families, this helps to raise the level of life for such a family and guarantee the financial security of both families.” (Source: an elder of Ikarebwok clan*

The analysis following the elder’s quotation on the economic significance of Edukone rituals above can be enriched through the integration of Mbiti’s Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim’s theory of religion. Ubuntu emphasizes that personhood is realized within a web of communal relationships, asserting “I am because we are.” The bride price transaction within Edukone thus transcends a mere economic exchange, symbolizing communal recognition and interconnectedness. It functions as a formal public acknowledgment of mutual obligations between families, reinforcing social bonds and collective identity through resource sharing. This communal dimension actualizes Ubuntu’s principle of shared humanity, where the economic security of both families is intertwined with social harmony and respect (Moyo & Kamwendo, 2022; Ndlovu, 2023).

Durkheim’s theory situates the bride price as a sacred ritual act that ritualizes economic exchange to uphold the community’s moral order. The payment and ceremony create a sacred reality that reinforces the collective conscience, fostering social cohesion across kin groups. The culturally sanctioned transfer of assets such as cattle embodies the sanctity of marriage, which is

elevated from a private contract to a communal institution preserving lineage and social stability. This sacred-economic interplay reinforces Edukone as a culturally embedded mechanism safeguarding social welfare and intergenerational continuity.

Together, these theories deepen understanding of Edukone's dual social and economic relevance, framing bride price as a vital symbolic and practical institution within Iteso marriage

#### **5.1.4 Spiritual and religious significance**

Besides the above, some respondents disclosed that Edukone has religious and/or spiritual significance among other things. Elderly women highlighted during a focus group discussion that:

*“Many Iteso marriage ceremonies involve calling on ancestral spirits and deities to bless the relationship. For instance, in the eyes of spiritual forces, the rites sanctify the marriage. It is thought that rituals like purification rites rid the pair of unfavorable spiritual forces.” (Source: Focus group conversation with older women).*

The finding underscores the profound spiritual and religious significance of Edukone rituals among the Iteso, clearly resonating with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu's relational personhood concept—“I am because we are”—illuminates how these rituals embed the couple within a web of ancestral and divine relationships that reinforce communal harmony and shared identity. Edukone ceremonies invoke ancestral spirits and deities as active participants in sanctioning marriage, expressing collective responsibility and spiritual interdependence, essential to Ubuntu's holistic worldview (Ocitti, 1973; Nakibuuka, 2022).

Durkheim's theory further explains how Edukone functions as a sacred ritual, separating the profane from the sacred by sanctifying marriage through spiritual blessings and purification rites. These rites generate collective effervescence that reaffirms the moral order, ensuring protection and spiritual harmony for the couple and community. The invocation of ancestral spirits sustains

cultural continuity by linking present unions to cosmological heritage, preserving ethical norms that uphold social cohesion (Selden, 1976; Waweru, 2023).

Together, the theories reveal Edukone as a lived spiritual experience that integrates Iteso cosmology with social order, validating marriage as a sacred covenant essential to communal well-being.

### **5.1.5 Preserving cultural identity and principles**

The majority of informants indicated that the customs and rituals associated with Edukone frequently contribute to the transmission and preservation of significant cultural values and identity. This means that long-standing customs, icons, and culturally significant beliefs are incorporated into marriage ceremonies in Teso. Therefore, the findings clearly demonstrate that Edukone rituals among the Iteso are pivotal for transmitting and preserving core cultural values and collective identity. Through the incorporation of long-standing customs, symbols, and beliefs, these marriage ceremonies provide a shared historical narrative and worldview that unify the community. Consistent with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy, the rituals emphasize relational personhood and communal belonging, reinforcing the notion that individual identity is inseparable from collective heritage— "I am because we are." Edukone thus acts as a living repository of Iteso culture, sustaining interconnectedness across generations and nurturing a sense of communal pride and continuity (Nakibuuka, 2022; Ocitti, 1973).

Durkheim's theory further explicates Edukone's role as a sacred institution preserving cultural identity through ritual. By sacralizing marriage ceremonies, the community enshrines cultural principles within collective rites that generate social solidarity and reaffirm moral order. The rituals connect present familial unions with ancestral legacies, reinforcing ethical norms and communal cohesion essential for cultural survival (Selden, 1976; Waweru, 2023).

Together, these perspectives highlight Edukone not simply as a tradition but as a dynamic cultural mechanism embedding Iteso identity and principles within communal and spiritual frameworks.

#### **5.1.6 Social cohesion**

Furthermore, the results of focus groups and in-depth interviews show that all the elders acknowledge the strengthening of communal relationships through Edukone ceremonies. The findings on social cohesion within Edukone marriage ceremonies among the Iteso reflect the intertwined social and cultural fabric that these rituals uphold. According to the elders, Edukone ceremonies strengthen communal bonds by integrating the bride into the groom's family, clan, and society, thus enhancing social cohesion through shared responsibilities and mutual belonging. This aligns with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy, which posits that identity and humanity are realized through communal relationships— "I am because we are." The rituals publicly affirm the bride's acceptance into her new social context, reinforcing interconnectedness and collective solidarity.

#### **5.1.7 Gender-specific duties and roles**

Informants claim that Edukone rituals assist in defining gender roles and obligations, which puts pressure on couples to be involved. This means that Edukone rituals clearly demarcate distinct roles and obligations for men and women, reflecting traditional understandings of family and societal order. These rites articulate the wife's subservience and responsibilities within the husband's family, while reciprocally defining the husband's duties, thereby maintaining gendered social hierarchies essential for social stability. Durkheim's theory contextualizes these roles as part of the sacred order established through marriage rites, which sanctify social structure and reinforce collective conscience. By ritualizing gender roles, Edukone sustains moral norms and cultural continuity vital to communal well-being.

Together, these perspectives underscore how Edukone operates as a social institution that fosters cohesion and stabilizes gendered social roles within Iteso culture.

## **5.2 Discussion of Relevance of Edukone to the Iteso Community**

The relevance of Edukone among the Iteso of Eastern Uganda has been discussed as seen below:

### **5.2.1 Spiritual and religious significance**

The finding underscores the profound spiritual and religious significance of Edukone rituals among the Iteso, clearly resonating with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu's relational personhood concept "I am because we are" illuminates how these rituals embed the couple within a web of ancestral and divine relationships that reinforce communal harmony and shared identity. Edukone ceremonies invoke ancestral spirits and deities as active participants in sanctioning marriage, expressing collective responsibility and spiritual interdependence, essential to Ubuntu's holistic worldview (Ocitti, 1973; Nakibuuka, 2022).

Durkheim's theory further explains how Edukone functions as a sacred ritual, separating the profane from the sacred by sanctifying marriage through spiritual blessings and purification rites. These rites generate collective effervescence that reaffirms the moral order, ensuring protection and spiritual harmony for the couple and community. The invocation of ancestral spirits sustains cultural continuity by linking present unions to cosmological heritage, preserving ethical norms that uphold social cohesion (Selden, 1976; Waweru, 2023).

Together, the theories reveal Edukone as a lived spiritual experience that integrates Iteso cosmology with social order, validating marriage as a sacred covenant essential to communal well-being.

### **5.2.2 Respect and social status**

The findings on respect and social status from completing Edukone rituals among the Iteso resonate deeply with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu's core tenet—"I am because we are"—highlights that individual identity and social maturity are realized through communal relationships. Completing the Edukone rituals publicly affirms the couple's passage into responsible, mature adults fully integrated into the Iteso social fabric. This communal recognition confers status and reinforces social roles, reflecting the African cultural paradigm where marriage is a vital institution validating social identity (Nowaraga, 2021).

Durkheim's theory frames the Edukone ceremonies as sacred rituals that elevate marriage beyond a private event into a collective social institution. By sanctifying the union through ritual, the community reaffirms its moral order and collective conscience. These ceremonies generate collective effervescence, fostering social cohesion and reinforcing traditional norms of responsibility, respect, and maturity essential for societal stability.

### **5.2.3 Persistence of ancestry**

In many cultures, traditional marriage customs have long been associated with the maintenance and continuation of ancestry. Rituals in Edukone among Iteso are frequently crucial means of passing down cultural legacy, ancestors' lineages, and familial identities from generation to generation. Formalizing familial relationships and kinship networks is one of the main ways that traditional marriage rites in Teso contribute to the continuation of heritage. This finding is in line with Sam, M. A (2009); Okechukwu, H. O (2025), who stated that while Christian-influenced White weddings have introduced new social norms often associated with status and modernity, traditional marriage rites have remained central to communal identity, inheritance systems, and kinship alliances. The study concludes that the coexistence of both forms of marriage has created a hybrid culture that both preserves Igbo heritage and adapts to globalized influences.

Besides the above, findings on the persistence of ancestry through Edukone rituals among the Iteso deeply align with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu emphasizes communal personhood the idea that identity and existence are realized through relationships within a collective ("I am because we are"). In Edukone, the emphasis on reproductive rights transfer and the continuation of the groom's lineage through childbearing reflects this communal interconnectedness. Marriage is seen as an alliance not just between individuals but between families and clans, sustaining lineage and cultural heritage (Lawrence, 1957). The bride price symbolizes these enduring obligations central to communal survival and identity.

From Durkheim's perspective, Edukone rituals serve as sacred rites that demarcate and uphold the continuity of ancestry as a sacred communal value. These ceremonies affirm the social and spiritual order, reinforcing collective conscience and cultural legacy through symbolic acts that bind generations. Thus, integrating these theories highlights Edukone as a vital cultural mechanism embedding genealogical relevance and sustaining the Iteso social structure and cosmology.

#### **5.2.4 Monetary security**

The analysis following the elder's quotation on the economic significance of Edukone rituals can be enriched through the integration of Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion. Ubuntu emphasizes that personhood is realized within a web of communal relationships, asserting "I am because we are." The bride price transaction within Edukone thus transcends a mere economic exchange, symbolizing communal recognition and interconnectedness. It functions as a formal public acknowledgment of mutual obligations between families, reinforcing social bonds and collective identity through resource sharing. This communal dimension actualizes Ubuntu's principle of shared humanity, where the economic

security of both families is intertwined with social harmony and respect (Moyo & Kamwendo, 2022; Ndlovu, 2023).

Durkheim's theory situates the bride price as a sacred ritual act that ritualizes economic exchange to uphold the community's moral order. The payment and ceremony create a sacred reality that reinforces the collective conscience, fostering social cohesion across kin groups. The culturally sanctioned transfer of assets such as cattle embodies the sanctity of marriage, which is elevated from a private contract to a communal institution preserving lineage and social stability. This sacred-economic interplay reinforces *Edukone* as a culturally embedded mechanism safeguarding social welfare and intergenerational continuity.

Together, these theories deepen understanding of *Edukone*'s dual social and economic relevance, framing bride price as a vital symbolic and practical institution within Iteso marriage.

### **5.2.5 Preserving cultural identity and principles**

The findings clearly demonstrate that *Edukone* rituals among the Iteso are pivotal for transmitting and preserving core cultural values and collective identity. Through the incorporation of long-standing customs, symbols, and beliefs, these marriage ceremonies provide a shared historical narrative and worldview that unify the community. Consistent with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy, the rituals emphasize relational personhood and communal belonging, reinforcing the notion that individual identity is inseparable from collective heritage—"I am because we are." *Edukone* thus acts as a living repository of Iteso culture, sustaining interconnectedness across generations and nurturing a sense of communal pride and continuity (Nakibuuka, 2022; Ocitti, 1973).

Durkheim's theory further explicates *Edukone*'s role as a sacred institution preserving cultural identity through ritual. By sacralizing marriage ceremonies, the community enshrines cultural

principles within collective rites that generate social solidarity and reaffirm moral order. The rituals connect present familial unions with ancestral legacies, reinforcing ethical norms and communal cohesion essential for cultural survival (Selden, 1976; Waweru, 2023).

Together, these perspectives highlight Edukone not simply as a tradition but as a dynamic cultural mechanism embedding Iteso identity and principles within communal and spiritual frameworks.

### **5.2.6 Social cohesion**

It is acknowledged that customary marriage rites are essential in promoting social cohesiveness in local communities. These ceremonial customs are effective means of reaffirming shared ideals, fostering social ties, and fortifying a group's collective identity.

Iteso claim that the fundamentally communal aspect of the activity is what forms the basis of this relationship. Edukone usually includes the community's collective witnessing of the marital union and active participation in it. The idea that the union being celebrated is not merely a personal matter between two people but rather a momentous occasion with meaning and significance for the entire social fabric of Iteso is furthered by this communal feature of Edukone.

Community members can reaffirm their common values, customs, and beliefs by actively participating in and adhering to rituals in Edukone. The Iteso are able to jointly commemorate and confirm their collective heritage and identity through the incorporation of cultural or religious aspects, such as the chanting of blessings from their ancestors, the performing of traditional dances, or the invocation of deities. Consequently, this strengthens the social ties that bind the Iteso together by fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose among them.

Traditional marital customs still have value in fostering social cohesion, but there are drawbacks as well. The development or even interruption of these ceremonial activities can be caused by a variety of factors, including growing cultural diversity, the impact of globalization, and the disintegration of old social structures.

Therefore, the findings on social cohesion within Edukone marriage ceremonies among the Iteso reflect the intertwined social and cultural fabric that these rituals uphold. According to the elders, Edukone ceremonies strengthen communal bonds by integrating the bride into the groom's family, clan, and society, thus enhancing social cohesion through shared responsibilities and mutual belonging. This aligns with Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy, which posits that identity and humanity are realized through communal relationships— "I am because we are." The rituals publicly affirm the bride's acceptance into her new social context, reinforcing interconnectedness and collective solidarity.

### **5.2.7 Gender-specific duties and roles**

Gender-specific roles and responsibilities have long been established and reinforced within a society through traditional marriage rites. The socialization and maintenance of cultural norms and expectations regarding the roles and social standings of men and women in marriage and family life are frequently facilitated by these ceremonial acts.

Among the Iteso, symbolic components that highlight the different obligations and social identities of the husband (*Ekilokit*) and wife (*Aberu*) are one of the main ways that Edukone reflects and enforces gender-specific duties and functions. This is evident in the different ceremonial components, such as dressing in particular ways, carrying out rites that are gendered, or calling upon mythology or goddess characters that represent different genders. For instance, at Edukone, Iteso dresses the *Aberu* (wife) in traditional clothing called "Arob," adorns her with

*Emuria* (star grass), and uses raw butter (*akinyet akituk*) to anoint her waist, face, and breast. All of these represent her shift into a wife and homemaker, while older men compliment and bless males to represent their roles as the head of the household and family guardian. Traditional marriage customs still have value in promoting gender-specific responsibilities and tasks, but there are drawbacks as well. The strict gender-based rituals ingrained in these ceremonial traditions may come under increased scrutiny and pressure to reform as civilizations change and social attitudes towards gender roles and identities shift.

We then notice that regarding gender-specific duties, Edukone rituals clearly demarcate distinct roles and obligations for men and women, reflecting traditional understandings of family and societal order. These rites articulate the wife's subservience and responsibilities within the husband's family, while reciprocally defining the husband's duties, thereby maintaining gendered social hierarchies essential for social stability. Durkheim's theory contextualizes these roles as part of the sacred order established through marriage rites, which sanctify social structure and reinforce collective conscience. By ritualizing gender roles, Edukone sustains moral norms and cultural continuity vital to communal well-being. Together, these perspectives underscore how Edukone operates as a social institution that fosters cohesion and stabilizes gendered social roles within Iteso culture.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF EDUKONE AND ITS TEMPORAL CHANGES OVERTIME AMONG THE ITESO OF EASTERN UGANDA, USUK SUB COUNTY KATAKWI DISTRICT.**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The religious implications of Edukone radiate from categories of rituals. For example, unity rituals, fertility blessings, protective blessings, ritual of cleansing the home and ritual of cleansing after marital infidelity. Such categories of rituals when deeply analyzed, present religious' implications as the findings revealed them and they are backed up by the literature by Spurles (2004, p. 155) who explored religious implications of traditional marriage in Abrahamic religions. Below are the religious implications of Edukone among Iteso according to the experience of respondents.

#### **6.1 The Religious Implications of Edukone**

The religious implications of Edukone is presented and analyzed as seen below:

##### **6.1.1 Unity rituals**

For Iteso community, rituals like the couples feeding each other and drinking from the same cup publically symbolize the merging of the two individuals into one. This is consistent with the biblical teaching in the book of Genesis which asserts that the man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The unity rituals during Edukone, such as the couple feeding each other and sharing a calabash, symbolically mark the transition from the profane individuality to a sacred communal bond.

These acts create a collective representation of oneness, sanctifying the marriage covenant as a sacred institution beyond mundane existence.

Innovatively, the shared pot or calabash used in these rituals transcends mere physical objects and becomes sacred symbols embodying unity, love, and spiritual nourishment. Water's common symbolism of purity and cleansing reinforces the sacredness of the marital bond, reflecting the community's collective conscience and shared moral values. Through these rituals, Edukone enacts Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, where communal participation in sacred rites renews social solidarity, reaffirms cultural values, and sustains communal identity.

Thus, Edukone rituals are not only social ceremonies but vital religious acts that demarcate the sacred from the profane, forging a profound spiritual union and sustaining the societal fabric of the Iteso community.

### **6.1.2 Fertility blessings**

Results revealed that according to Iteso, *Edukone* customs involve anointing the woman's waist, chest laps and face with raw butter and tying *Emuria* (star grass) around her waist. Followed by ancestral invocations, prayers from an initiated elderly woman, dances, and rituals aimed at blessing the couple with children. This is seen as a sign of petitioning for divine favor. One elder summed it up saying:

*“As Iteso, we view marriage as a sacred covenant instituted by God. The rituals are meant to sanctify the union and invoke divine blessing and commitment. Prayers and libations are often offered to the couple's ancestors, who are believed to bless and guide the union.” (Source: Male elder from Ikosobwa clan).*

So, the prayers and ancestral invocations are seen not only as cultural practices but as spiritual petitions vital for family growth and blessing. The fertility blessings in Edukone rituals among the Iteso can be critically understood through Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane, providing a rich religious implication of these cultural

practices. Durkheim distinguishes the sacred as elements set apart and forbidden, representing the extraordinary aspects of social life—in this case, the marital union sanctified by ritual—and the profane as every day, mundane reality (Durkheim, 1912). The anointing of the woman’s waist, chest, laps, and face with raw butter and the tying of *Emuria* (star grass) around her waist serve as sacred symbols that separate her from the profane world, marking her consecration and spiritual readiness for fertility and motherhood.

The invocation of ancestors and prayers by initiated elder women is a ritual act that intensifies the sacredness of the union, reflecting the community’s collective conscience and moral order. These rites are performative expressions of collective effervescence, where communal participation renews social bonds and reaffirms shared values. Fertility is thus not merely a biological event, but a sacred social imperative connected to lineage continuity and cosmological harmony.

Therefore, Edukone fertility blessings manifest Durkheim’s sacred-profane dichotomy by demarcating marriage as a holy covenant that transcends profane existence, weaving together physical, spiritual, and communal realms to sustain Iteso cultural and religious identity.

### **6.1.3 Protective blessings**

The findings reveal that Iteso rituals involving prayers, yodeling, chants, and the use of blessed articles such as the symbolic stick Esas, oils, butter, food, or rings serve a critical religious function of invoking divine protection and blessings upon the marital union. Durkheim’s theory of the sacred and the profane illuminates the deep religious implications of these practices. The sacred encompasses objects, rituals, and symbols that are set apart from everyday profane life and are imbued with reverence and spiritual power (Durkheim, 1912). In this context, the blessed

articles and ritual acts serve as sacred mediators between the profane world and the divine, marking the marriage as a holy covenant requiring divine oversight.

These protective blessings constitute ritual mechanisms through which the community reaffirms its collective conscience and moral order, guarding the marriage from harmful spiritual forces while reinforcing social cohesion. The prayers and ritualized chants function as performative expressions of collective effervescence moments when communal participation heightens shared beliefs and renews social solidarity around the sacred institution of marriage. Therefore, *Edukone's* protective blessings are vital religious acts that demarcate and safeguard the sacred space of marriage, sustaining the spiritual and social fabric foundational to Iteso communal life.

#### **6.1.4 Ritual of cleansing the home**

The ritual of cleansing the home before *Edukone* among the Iteso can be insightfully analyzed through Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane. Durkheim posits that societies distinguish between the profane—the ordinary, everyday aspects of life—and the sacred, which encompasses what is extraordinary, set apart, and revered (Durkheim, 1912). In this context, the cleansing and preparation of the marital home with blessed butter, candle lighting, and symbolic purification practices transform the space from profane household to a sacred venue. This sacred space is where the couple's new life begins, free from past spiritual impurities and aligned with ancestral powers.

The involvement of anointed women and elders as custodians of ancestral authority signifies the mediation between the sacred and profane worlds. Their guidance and rituals are performative acts that renew social solidarity and moral order, expressing collective conscience through ritual cleansing. This process echoes Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, where communal ritual participation reinforces shared beliefs and facilitates social integration.

Therefore, the cleansing ritual not only sanctifies the physical environment but also symbolically inaugurates the couple's sacred covenant, embedding the marriage within the spiritual and social fabric of Iteso society.

### **6.1.5 Ritual of cleansing after marital infidelity**

Findings show that elders attach religious importance to cleansing a couple in case of marital infidelity as discussed under an elder shared her experience that:

*“For us the Iteso, elaborate cleansing and purification rituals (Aigel eluk) are performed for a victim of marital infidelity, often involving anointing with cud or blood from an animal and prayers. This is to prepare her (victim) spiritually to continue in marriage. We believe these actions shed past burdens, sins, or negative energies and therefore, reconcile the victims with ancestors”. (Source: An elderly woman from Focused Group Discussion).*

The experience of elders presented reflects their respect for the religious gravity of Edukone cleansing rituals while recognizing their contemporary relevance in sustaining marriage.

The ritual of cleansing after marital infidelity (Aigel eluk) among the Iteso carries deep religious significance as it serves to restore spiritual harmony and social order within the marriage and the wider community. Infidelity by a woman, considered a serious transgression, is believed to attract ancestral curses manifesting as ill health and misfortune, highlighting the strong moral and spiritual framework governing Iteso marital relations.

Therefore, *Aigel eluk* cleansing ritual after marital infidelity among the Iteso can be understood through the combined lenses of Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion, highlighting its profound religious and social implications. From the Ubuntu perspective, this ritual reflects the communal nature of personhood, where social harmony and relational interconnectedness are paramount “I am because we are.” The cleansing serves to restore the woman's spiritual and social standing within the family and community, reintegrating her into the collective and reaffirming shared moral values. It exemplifies communal responsibility in

healing relational ruptures caused by infidelity and reestablishing unity through reconciliation (Mbiti, 1969; Ngihbi & Elechi, 2024).

Durkheim's framework situates the *Aigel eluk* as a sacred rite that distinguishes the profane breach of marital fidelity from the sacred order of marriage. The ritual's symbolic acts anointing with animal cud or blood, prayers by elders function to expel spiritual impurities, renew the sacredness of the marital bond, and invoke ancestral authority. This reinforces the collective conscience and social cohesion by revalidating moral norms concerning sexual conduct and marriage sanctity. The gendered asymmetry in ritual practice also exposes socially embedded patriarchal structures reflected in the collective response to infidelity (Durkheim, 1912).

Thus, *Aigel eluk* embodies the intertwined religious and sociocultural functions of Edukone, serving as both spiritual restoration and social regulation that safeguards Iteso marriage, lineage continuity, and communal values.

## **6.2 Temporal changes in Edukone rituals**

The following temporal changes have occurred in Edukone over time:

### **6.2.1 Involvement of ancestral spirits in marriage**

The researcher also interacted with elderly women in FGD. A majority emphasized that;

*"In our days, Edukone was a solemn spiritual event, a sacred covenant between families witnessed by the community and ancestors. The rituals called for respect, obedience, and deep reverence to ancestral spirits. While today some of these aspects are less emphasized or blended with Christian ceremonies, many of us elders still view Edukone as a vital religious practice. It protects the marriage from spiritual harm and ensures blessings from our ancestors. We encourage youth to appreciate and uphold this spiritual connection between the living and the ancestors."*

The above experience shows that elderly Women provide a narrative steeped in the solemnity and sacredness of traditional Edukone practices, highlighting the profound spiritual covenant

between families witnessed by ancestors. They note the dilution or blending of these traditions with Christian ceremonies, highlighting a tension between maintaining ancestral spiritual obligations and adapting to new religious norms.

The differences across these respondent groups highlight key themes in contemporary religious anthropology: continuity versus change, indigenous spirituality versus introduced religions, and cultural preservation versus modernization. The clan leaders and elders stress preservation of the core religious essence of ancestral involvement, while the youth adapt practices to fit modern lifestyles and beliefs. This multigenerational variance underpins the evolving religious landscape of Edukone, underscoring the importance of contextualized understanding of tradition in flux (Mbiti, 1969; Durkheim, 1912).

### **6.2.2 Community involvement**

Findings from elderly women and clan heads disclose that, in the past Edukone was a communal ceremony not a family issue. The entire community was always involved in the performance of all the rituals throughout the entire process of Edukone. According to them, this has changed greatly, today Edukone is conducted between the family of the bride and the groom only. At times, all the decisions concerning Edukone depend on the couple.

### **6.2.3 Length of ceremonies**

Clan leaders confirmed that some components of Edukone that used to happen are no longer practiced. If they are practiced, they have greatly changed. An outstanding detailed response from elders asserted that;

*“Over the years, many aspects of Edukone have undergone noticeable changes. Traditionally, the initiation rites would last several days with elaborate ceremonies, including multiple feasts and strict observances of cultural taboos. However, nowadays, we see shortened ceremonies as families are coping with economic challenges and the influence of Christianity, which encourages simpler celebrations.*

*Some rituals like extended periods of seclusion for the bride or tests of endurance have been reduced or replaced with symbolic acts. The communal participation, especially in big feasts and dances, has diminished because younger people are less interested or unable to dedicate so much time and resources due to work or education.*

*Despite these changes, we as clan leaders strive to preserve the spiritual essence of Edukone, ensuring that the rituals that connect couples to their ancestors and the community remain intact. These adjustments reflect the need to adapt while respecting our heritage.”*

So, that clan leader’s responses highlight a pragmatic adaptation approach, acknowledging the shortening of ceremonies and the reduction of earlier elaborate rites such as prolonged initiation and large feasts. This is explained primarily by economic constraints and the influence of Christianity encouraging simpler celebrations. This viewpoint emphasizes a concerted effort to preserve the ritual’s spiritual essence connecting couples to their ancestors and the community aligning with scholarly observations that African traditional communities exhibit adaptive resilience by maintaining core meanings while modifying observable practices (Ekeya, 1984; Durkheim, 1912). The pragmatic balance between preservation and change reflects ongoing negotiation of cultural identity in the face of modern pressures.

#### **6.2.4 Testing the bride’s patience and endurance**

The responses of elderly women in the FGDs corroborated with the clan leaders. A key informant from one group explained that;

*“In the past, Edukone was a very elaborate ceremony that involved many days of rituals and community participation. We used to prepare the bride with long initiation processes that tested her patience and endurance. Today the tests have been violated because the couples feel it is a violation of their rites.*

From the response above we realize that, there has been change in some rituals like the testing of the bride’s patience and endurance because the couples are negative about it viewing it as a punishment. This can be attributed to the influence of modernization and some policies like the human rights which advocate for respect for individual rights. Also Christianity discourages some rituals and the youth prefer simpler church oriented weddings to ancient rituals.

### 6.2.5 The dressing code of the bride

There were also important rites such as the dressing of the bride in traditional cowhide garments and ritual dances that are rarely observed fully today (an elderly woman from a focused group gave an experience as follows;

*Today young people do not accept the dressing code which used to be in the past where the bride was dressed with cowhide garments. They consider the attire to be backward so they opted for modern clothes which are factory made.*

Elderly women's accounts express a sense of loss concerning shortened or skipped traditional elements, such as the lengthy preparation of brides and rituals with symbolic attire like cowhide garments. They attribute these changes to modernization and economic challenges. Their narrative underscores a tension between valuing tradition and confronting the realities of contemporary life, reflecting Mbiti's (1969) argument that African religion and culture are inseparably linked yet naturally evolving. Their concern about youth's diminishing engagement indicates anxieties over cultural continuity and the potential weakening of ancestral spiritual bonds.

Collectively, the responses reflect the dialectical process of cultural persistence and transformation within the Iteso community. The interplay between elders' calls to preserve full rituals, clan leaders' role in managing adaptation, and youth's pragmatic modifications underscores a dynamic cultural negotiation.

In conclusion, the data manifests a balance between continuity and change in Edukone, where spiritual significance remains paramount even as ritual forms evolve. This has critical implications for understanding how Iteso marriage traditions sustain identity and religious meaning amid socio-cultural transformations.

## **6.3 Discussion of the Religious implications of Edukone among the Iteso**

### **6.3.1 Unity rituals**

Within their marriage ceremonies, the Iteso people of Uganda have a rich cultural heritage of union rituals that have profound religious and spiritual meaning. These customs are seen to be crucial for sanctifying the marriage and granting the newlyweds a heavenly blessing. This finding correlates with the literature where Coriden, (2000, p. 195), affirms that Jewish weddings include practices like breaking the glass, which serve to emphasize unity of the couple and dedication to maintaining Jewish traditions and values.

So, unity rituals during Edukone, such as the couple feeding each other and sharing a calabash, symbolically mark the transition from the profane individuality to a sacred communal bond. These acts create a collective representation of oneness, sanctifying the marriage covenant as a sacred institution beyond mundane existence.

Innovatively, the shared pot or calabash used in these rituals transcends mere physical objects and becomes sacred symbols embodying unity, love, and spiritual nourishment. Water's common symbolism of purity and cleansing reinforces the sacredness of the marital bond, reflecting the community's collective conscience and shared moral values. Through these rituals, Edukone enacts Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, where communal participation in sacred rites renews social solidarity, reaffirms cultural values, and sustains communal identity.

Thus, Edukone rituals are not only social ceremonies but vital religious acts that demarcate the sacred from the profane, forging a profound spiritual union and sustaining the societal fabric of the Iteso community.

### **6.3.2 Fertility blessings**

The fertility blessings in *Edukone* rituals among the Iteso can be critically understood through Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane, providing a rich religious implication of these cultural practices. Durkheim distinguishes the sacred as elements set apart and forbidden, representing the extraordinary aspects of social life in this case, the marital union sanctified by ritual and the profane as every day, mundane reality (Durkheim, 1912). The anointing of the woman's waist, chest, laps, and face with raw butter and the tying of *Emuria* (star grass) around her waist serve as sacred symbols that separate her from the profane world, marking her consecration and spiritual readiness for fertility and motherhood.

The invocation of ancestors and prayers by initiated elder women is a ritual act that intensifies the sacredness of the union, reflecting the community's collective conscience and moral order. These rites are performative expressions of collective effervescence, where communal participation renews social bonds and reaffirms shared values. Fertility is thus not merely a biological event, but a sacred social imperative connected to lineage continuity and cosmological harmony.

Therefore, *Edukone* fertility blessings manifest Durkheim's sacred-profane dichotomy by demarcating marriage as a holy covenant that transcends profane existence, weaving together physical, spiritual, and communal realms to sustain Iteso cultural and religious identity.

### **6.3.3 Protective blessings**

Iteso people have *Edukone* practices that place great religious and spiritual value on protective blessings. These customs are thought to be crucial for preserving the couple's happiness, their marriage, and the future well-being of their offspring. These blessings are considered to have significant spiritual ramifications and are essential components of the marriage rite. According to

Muleka (2023, p. 243), he explains that protective blessings are thought to be a way to call on supernatural intervention and protection. The ceremony aims to protect the new couple's union from any evil forces and to ensure their well-being and prosperity through prayers, offerings, and the invocation of supernatural forces.

Correlating to the above, Iteso rituals involving prayers, yodeling, chants, and the use of blessed articles such as the symbolic stick *Esas*, oils, butter, food, or rings serve a critical religious function of invoking divine protection and blessings upon the marital union. Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane illuminates the deep religious implications of these practices. The sacred encompasses objects, rituals, and symbols that are set apart from everyday profane life and are imbued with reverence and spiritual power (Durkheim, 1912). In this context, the blessed articles and ritual acts serve as sacred mediators between the profane world and the divine, marking the marriage as a holy covenant requiring divine oversight.

These protective blessings constitute ritual mechanisms through which the community reaffirms its collective conscience and moral order, guarding the marriage from harmful spiritual forces while reinforcing social cohesion. The prayers and ritualized chants function as performative expressions of collective effervescence—moments when communal participation heightens shared beliefs and renews social solidarity around the sacred institution of marriage. Therefore, Edukone's protective blessings are vital religious acts that demarcate and safeguard the sacred space of marriage, sustaining the spiritual and social fabric foundational to Iteso communal life.

#### **6.3.4 Ritual of cleansing of the home**

The Iteso people believe in two deities; spirits of the dead known as *Ipara* and a divinity named *Edeke*. Religious rituals are frequently connected to changes in life, such as marriage. Domestic ceremonies, which include marriage-related ceremonies, are held within the home and entail

customs that summon the deceased person's whole network of social relationships. This shows that Iteso marriage rituals are heavily influenced by the spirits of the ancestors.

Therefore, ritual of cleansing the home before *Edukone* among the Iteso can be insightfully analyzed through Durkheim's theory of the sacred and the profane. Durkheim posits that societies distinguish between the profane—the ordinary, everyday aspects of life—and the sacred, which encompasses what is extraordinary, set apart, and revered (Durkheim, 1912). In this context, the cleansing and preparation of the marital home with blessed butter, candle lighting, and symbolic purification practices transform the space from profane household to a sacred venue. This sacred space is where the couple's new life begins, free from past spiritual impurities and aligned with ancestral powers.

The involvement of anointed women and elders as custodians of ancestral authority signifies the mediation between the sacred and profane worlds. Their guidance and rituals are performative acts that renew social solidarity and moral order, expressing collective conscience through ritual cleansing. This process echoes Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, where communal ritual participation reinforces shared beliefs and facilitates social integration.

Therefore, the cleansing ritual not only sanctifies the physical environment but also symbolically inaugurates the couple's sacred covenant, embedding the marriage within the spiritual and social fabric of Iteso society.

### **6.3.5 Ritual of cleansing after marital infidelity**

In Iteso culture, the rite of purification following marital adultery has important theological and spiritual ramifications. According to the Iteso worldview, adultery between spouses is a sin with wider spiritual implications than just a personal transgression. This finding correlates with studies by Monger (2013, p. 38), who clarified that;

“Purifying the impacted household and re-establishing spiritual harmony are the goals of the cleansing ceremony for marital infidelity. Atonement and purification are two of the ritual's most significant theological ramifications.”

In relation to the above literature, in the context of Iteso, the purpose of the cleaning ritual after infidelity is to get rid of the house and its occupants of the spiritual toxins brought about by the adulterous act. It is viewed as a way of atonement, enabling the one who committed the offense to heal and regain their spiritual position.

In addition, the *Aigel eluk* cleansing ritual after marital infidelity among the Iteso can be understood through the combined lenses of Mbiti's Ubuntu philosophy and Durkheim's theory of religion, highlighting its profound religious and social implications. From the Ubuntu perspective, this ritual reflects the communal nature of personhood, where social harmony and relational interconnectedness are paramount—“I am because we are.” The cleansing serves to restore the woman's spiritual and social standing within the family and community, reintegrating her into the collective and reaffirming shared moral values. It exemplifies communal responsibility in healing relational ruptures caused by infidelity and reestablishing unity through reconciliation (Mbiti, 1969; Ngihbi & Elechi, 2024).

Durkheim's framework situates the *Aigel eluk* as a sacred rite that distinguishes the profane breach of marital fidelity from the sacred order of marriage. The ritual's symbolic acts— anointing with animal cud or blood, prayers by elders—function to expel spiritual impurities, renew the sacredness of the marital bond, and invoke ancestral authority. This reinforces the collective conscience and social cohesion by revalidating moral norms concerning sexual conduct and marriage sanctity. The gendered asymmetry in ritual practice also exposes socially embedded patriarchal structures reflected in the collective response to infidelity (Durkheim,

1912). *Thus, Aigel eluk* embodies the intertwined religious and sociocultural functions of Edukone, serving as both spiritual restoration and social regulation that safeguards Iteso marriage, lineage continuity, and communal values.

#### **6.4 Discussion of the Temporal Changes in Edukone**

The current religious significance of Edukone rituals in the Iteso community, as articulated by clan leaders, reflects a complex interplay of continuity and adaptation, deeply rooted in the community's indigenous cosmology while dynamically engaging with external religious influences such as Christianity. This enduring spiritual core aligns with Durkheim's theory of the sacred, which conceptualizes rituals as essential acts that consecrate social institutions, in this case, marriage, by connecting participants to the divine and the collective conscience (Durkheim, 1912).

Clan leaders emphasize that despite modifications to ceremonial form often influenced by economic pressures and Christian doctrinal simplicity the spiritual functions of prayer, offerings, and blessings remain central. This preservation of ritual essence while allowing adaptive change reflects the resilience of Iteso cultural identity. The rituals function not only as symbolic affirmations of union but as moral frameworks binding individuals to their community and ancestors' spiritual presence, reinforcing social cohesion and collective responsibility, consistent with African religious thought on the inseparability of religion and community life (Mbiti, 1969)

##### **6.4.1 Involvement of ancestors**

In traditional African societies, ancestors played a significant role in marriage ceremonies, they were often invoked to bless and legitimize the union. However, over time the involvement of ancestors in traditional marriage ceremonies have undergone significant changes for instance; in Teso the invocation of ancestors and seeking their blessings is no longer a central aspect as

people tend to incorporate Christian or Islamic elements reducing the emphasis in traditional ancestral involvement. While ancestors may still be acknowledged, their role has become more symbolic with less direct involvement in the ceremony as people are in favour of modern and secular approaches to marriage.

Historical beliefs of the Iteso, including reverence to a supreme being, Edeke, and veneration of ancestral spirits, inform the ritual landscape of Edukone (Gorillatrekking.org, 2024; Ekeya, 1984). Ancestors are considered active agents in the well-being of the living, a concept foundational to the ritual practices seen in Edukone, where invoking their blessings ensures continuity and protection. The modification of ritual practices whether shortening ceremonies or blending them with Christian rites illustrates a syncretic religious environment, illustrating how indigenous African spiritualities maintain relevance by engaging with introduced faiths without total assimilation.

Furthermore, clan leaders' narratives illustrate an understanding that adaptation is necessary for the survival of tradition in a modern context, preserving the sacred while endorsing change in forms. This balance supports the view that African traditional religions are not static relics but living systems that evolve in dialogue with social changes and religious pluralism (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). Thus, Edukone rituals today remain valid religious acts imbued with deep symbolic meaning, sustaining the Iteso's communal identity even as some external forms shift.

In sum, the clan leaders' perspectives demonstrate that Edukone rituals function as crucial liminal rites that sanctify marriage within the Iteso worldview, linking the present to the ancestral past and divine authority. The ritual's adaptive transformations showcase cultural resilience and highlight the dynamic nature of African religious practices that negotiate modernity while upholding profound spiritual significance.

Further, the elders' perspective aligns with observations across various African communities where indigenous marriage rituals are deeply embedded with ancestor worship and spiritual protection. Such rituals are believed to shield the marital union from spiritual harm and ensure blessings functions crucial to the social stability and moral fabric of the community. The elders' regard for these rituals reflects a desire to uphold these protective and sanctifying functions despite contemporary religious pluralism.

This stance also reveals challenges in religious syncretism where African traditional practices co-exist or merge with dominant world religions such as Christianity. African scholars like Kwame Gyekye (1996) and Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) note that syncretism can both enrich and complicate indigenous rituals, sometimes leading to selective retention or reinterpretation of traditional elements. Thus, the elders expressed concern captures a broader discourse on the negotiation between cultural preservation and religious reform.

In summary, elderly women's responses highlight the enduring religious significance of Edukone rituals as sacred covenants deeply tied to Iteso spirituality and social order. They illustrate the tensions of adaptation amidst religious change, mirroring academic debates on the fragile balance between maintaining ancestral religious integrity and accommodating new religious identities. Their perspective reaffirms the importance of Edukone not merely as a cultural festivity but as an essential spiritual institution binding families to their ancestors and communal values.

#### **6.4.2 Community involvement**

The sample response from elders indicates a palpable shift from the elaborate, community-wide, and spiritually centered rituals of the past to more simplified, often privatized ceremonies. These modifications such as reduced communal participation are predominantly driven by

socioeconomic pressures, changing religious outlooks (notably Christianity), and the influence of Western cultural norms (Web: 474, Web: 397).

Scholars observe that this part of a broader phenomenon of ritual adaptation. As noted by Simonsen (2024) and others, African marriage rituals are evolving from communal ceremonies to secretive culturally specific ceremonies often Westernized. These changes often reflect broader social shifts, such as increased female education, economic independence, and the rise of modern state laws governing marriage, which modify the traditional landscape but do not necessarily eradicate its significance (Rudwick & Posel, 2014; Shope, 2006).

### **6.4.3 Length of ceremonies**

The responses from clan leaders reflect a pragmatic and adaptive approach to temporal changes in Edukone rituals among the Iteso community. The leaders acknowledge noticeable modifications such as shortened initiation rites, replaced tests of endurance with symbolic acts, and diminished communal participation in feasts and dances. These changes are primarily attributed to economic pressures and the influence of Christianity advocating simpler celebrations.

This perspective demonstrates the community's capacity for cultural resilience, maintaining the spiritual core of Edukone connecting couples to ancestors and instilling moral responsibilities while adapting ritual forms to contemporary social and religious contexts. Such an approach is consistent with Émile Durkheim's theory of the sacred, which posits that rituals function fundamentally to sanctify social institutions like marriage and uphold collective conscience, even if the outward ceremonial expressions evolve (Durkheim, 1912).

Moreover, clan leaders' emphasis on preserving the spiritual essence despite material changes highlights the negotiation between tradition and modernity, a common theme in African

anthropology of religion (Ekeya, 1984). By focusing on the ritual's invocative aspects prayers, offerings, blessings they strive to sustain the symbolic effectiveness of Edukone while acknowledging practical realities such as time constraints and youth engagement.

In sum, clan leaders' reflections on Edukone's temporal changes reveal a balanced stance: one that respects the heritage and religious gravity of the rituals, yet embraces necessary adaptations ensuring continuity and relevance in a rapidly changing cultural and religious landscape. This aligns with broader scholarly understandings of how indigenous African rituals remain vibrant and meaningful through flexible cultural negotiation.

The responses from elderly women regarding changes in Edukone rituals reflect a deep-seated understanding rooted in the cultural and spiritual essence of the traditional ceremonies. They express a sense of loss concerning the richness and solemnity that once characterized the rituals such as the lengthy initiation processes.

#### **6.4.4 Testing the bride's patience and endurance**

In Teso communities, the bride herself would undergo test and trials to prove how worth, skills or endurance as part of the marriage ceremony. This test would include; insults, accusing her of a certain practice or activity falsely. These tests have largely moved away from the contemporary marriage practices focusing more on celebrations and partnerships. Reduced emphasis on testing reflects shifts in societal views on gender equality and partnership in marriage. Therefore, practices like testing the bride are seen as outdated and a punishment leading to their decline as people emphasize mutual respect, love and partnership over test for endurance.

#### **6.4.5 The dressing code of the bride**

Clan leaders' emphasis on preserving the dressing code highlights the negotiation between tradition and modernity, symbolic attire like cowhide garments which have been replaced by factory made clothes is an influence of modernity and contemporary change in lifestyle.

This tension between preservation and change is well-explored within the framework of African religious and cultural resilience. Mbiti (1969) argued that African religions are inherently fluid, capable of adaptation while maintaining core spiritual meanings. Their concerns about the erosion of traditional practices reflect broader debates about cultural continuity in postcolonial African societies facing rapid social change.

Historically, African rituals have shown remarkable flexibility; rites of passage and marriage ceremonies often evolve in response to external pressures without losing their foundational significance (Ekeya, 1984; Web:473). In the case of the Iteso, modifications such as symbolic clothing do not necessarily negate the ritual's sacredness but represent a form of cultural negotiation an attempt to sustain spiritual integrity within contemporary societal realities.

The responses also reveal a generational divide. The elders view these changes as potentially weakening the spiritual efficacy of Edukone, which they associate with societal stability and moral virtue. Their narrative underscores the importance of respecting tradition's deeper spiritual and moral functions, which periodically face adaptation in the face of modernity, but must be preserved to ensure cultural and religious integrity.

The responses from various sources highlight a common theme: African traditional marriage practices are undergoing significant transformations in response to modernization, economic development, religious influences, and globalization, yet they continue to serve vital social and cultural functions.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study. The summary of this study is based on the specific objectives of the study. Therefore, the summary is presented according to the themes implied in the objectives. The conclusion and recommendations are drawn from the findings of the study.

#### 7.1 Summary

This study established and described the following rituals embedded in Edukone among Iteso:

- i. Booking a girl for marriage (*Agolokin apese*) Iteso used this ritual to reserve some girl that elders had identified as being disciplined and was nurtured well to marry a friend's son who was also disciplined.
- ii. The ritual of picking the girl from her parents (*Aiwom apese*). It was done by a boy's parents when the girl had grown up to a reasonable age. This was meant to allow the boy's mother to indoctrinate the girl earlier on that clan's norms before marriage.
- iii. The study also found negotiations on bride price (*Etube*) where relatives of the boy and those of the girl met to agree on the amount of bride wealth to be paid.
- iv. There is also a ritual of giving out bride wealth (*Eitane /Emanyit*). It is at this point when the boy's clan fulfilled their pledge to marry the girl.
- v. The ritual of bidding farewell to the married girl (*Aikor apese*). This ritual is meant to show that the parents are willingly handing the girl to the boy.

- vi. The Iteso proceed to the ritual of initiating a woman to the man's clan (*Etal*). It is meant to grant full membership of a woman to the man's clan.
- vii. The studies also found out that some Iteso in the contemporary setting don't initiate women. In that scenario, such a couple engages in the ritual of church marriage (*Aiwen epata*). This is meant to solemnize marriage in the church before other people of that religious faith.
- viii. Iteso engaged in cleansing rituals. That is to say ritual to cleanse incest and ritual to cleanse marital infidelity (*Eluk/ ailingar Esirani Adotew/Esadaka*). These cleansing rituals help to restore harmony in marriage and sanctity of culture.

On the theme of relevance of Edukone among Iteso, the study established the following: Spiritual and religious significance, respect and social status, persistence of ancestry, monetary security, preserving cultural identity and principles, social cohesion, Gender-specific Duties and Roles. This relevance of Edukone keeps this tradition alive among Iteso.

The study lastly explored the theme of religious implication of rituals embedded in Edukone that can be grouped as below: Unity rituals. Here, the couple, their communities, and the deity are brought together in an everlasting covenant through the sacred. Next are the fertility blessings. They are meant to ensure the couple's capacity to produce, the elder acts as an intermediary and calling on the assistance of the ancestral spirits and fertility-related deities. Besides that, there are "Protective Blessings." Iteso believe in the unity of the material and spiritual worlds, as well as the significance of preserving a peaceful relationship with the heavenly and ancestral forces that influence their lives. Others include the religious implication of the ritual of cleansing of the home which is regarded as a necessary step in starting a new household that is blessed, cleansed, and consecrated for a happy future. Last but not least, is the ritual of cleansing after marital

infidelity, Iteso have the religious worldview that this ritual helps to restore harmony faith and trust between the couples, and sanctity of marriage in the spiritual realm.

## **7.2 Conclusions**

The findings demonstrate that *Edukone* rituals are deeply embedded in the Iteso way of life, serving as vital expressions of social cohesion, respect for ancestry, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Moreover, the study has illuminated the contemporary relevance of these rituals, showcasing how they adapt to modern realities while maintaining their core values.

According to the findings, the spiritual implications associated with these ceremonies further emphasize the Iteso belief in the interconnectedness of the material and spiritual worlds, highlighting the importance of rituals in fostering unity, blessings, and harmony within marriages.

However, the study also recognizes the challenges facing the institution of marriage, including issues of marital infidelity and cultural adaptations in a rapidly changing society. By addressing these challenges through community engagement and education, the Iteso can navigate the complexities of modernity while preserving their rich cultural traditions.

The findings also show that *Edukone* rituals stand as a testament to the Iteso community's resilience and commitment to their cultural identity. As they continue to uphold and adapt these practices, it is crucial for the community to foster understanding, respect, and dialogue around their traditions. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on cultural practices but also serves as a call to action for the Iteso to embrace their heritage with pride, ensuring that the values and teachings embedded within *Edukone* endure for future generations.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

The study recommends that:

Iteso community should prioritize documentation and preservation of Edukone rituals as a communal responsibility that reinforces African identity spirituality. The communal responsibility in the preservation and documentation is drawn from Mbiti's assertion that African man is an African person through other persons. This assertion emphasizes togetherness among the Iteso and therefore they have to do the preservation and documentation of the rituals together as a community.

Workshops and storytelling by elders to educate the youth about the importance of the rituals in Edukone pass knowledge throughout generations. This helps the young generation to understand and appreciate their cultural identity.

Lessons on Edukone and its relevance should be incorporated into local school curricular. Teaching children about their cultural heritage at an early age can enhance their appreciation and understanding about their culture. This aligns with Mbiti's emphasis on the integration of culture and religion.

On the side of further research; collaborative interdisciplinary research is encouraged to explore the sociocultural dynamics of Iteso marriage customs, with a focus on generational, gender, and power relations. Emphasis should be placed on including marginalized voices, reflecting Mbiti's view of the African person as inherently relational and communal.

The study further recommends Comparative studies with other African cultures as it can situate Iteso practices within Pan-African frameworks, fostering shared learning and preservation of indigenous knowledge.

Additionally, the study recommends conducting, detailed ethnographic history review beyond marriage, or the impact of Edukone on legal marriage processes

The study also recommends enhancement of advocacy for protecting Edukone rituals within human rights frameworks. This ensures cultural practices are respected while promoting communal well-being and cultural dignity. Advocacy work should highlight Edukone as a vital African institution that sustains social cohesion, religious identity, and cultural continuity amid modern challenges. This recommendation has been made in relation to Mbiti's perspective on the inseparability of culture and religion in African life.

This reworked set of recommendations firmly roots the study's suggestions in seminal African thought, reinforcing the value of Edukone within an authentic African worldview and its contemporary relevance.

#### **7.4 Research Dissemination**

Finally, the researcher highlights knowledge sharing and dissemination. Here, the researcher feels that the death of literature on Iteso cultural practices will be filled by making sure that research findings are promptly shared with the Iteso community, pertinent stakeholders, and the larger academic community through publications, conferences, workshops, and other suitable channels.

#### **7.5 General Conclusion**

In a general conclusion, this study has provided an in-depth exploration of the *Edukone* rituals among the Iteso community, revealing their profound significance in cultural, social, and spiritual contexts through a detailed examination of the various rituals involved in the marriage process from booking a girl for marriage to the initiation into the man's clan. The study has

highlighted how these practices not only formalize marital relationships but also reinforce community bonds and cultural identity.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX ONE: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Dear Participant, I am Atai Christine, a tutor in Bishop Willis PTC, Iganga and a student of Kyambogo University. I am currently conducting an academic research study on “The religious connotation of *Edukone* among Iteso.” I am glad to meet you. You have been identified to be having useful information to make this study successful. However, let me clarify on the following ethical issues surrounding our participation.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to explore the religious connotation of *Edukone* rituals among the Iteso community. Your insights and experiences as a clan leader or elderly woman are valuable to understanding these practices.

#### *Voluntary Participation*

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

#### *Informed Consent*

By signing this form, you agree to participate in the study. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences and perspectives on *Edukone* rituals. The interview will be conducted in a respectful and confidential manner. Some photos will also be taken where necessary.

#### *Confidentiality*

Your responses will be kept confidential. Any identifying information will be removed, and data will be stored securely. The findings will be reported in a way that does not identify you personally.

***Potential Risks***

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, you may choose to skip questions or withdraw from the study.

***Contact Information***

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact the researcher on 0784453115. You may also contact the Directorate of Graduate Training and Research at Kyambogo University for any ethical concerns.

**Consent Statement**

I have read and understood the information provided above. I agree to participate in this study voluntarily and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participant's identifier/ Pet name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX TWO: AN INTRODDUCTORY LETTER**

**KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY**

P.O. BOX 1 KYAMBOGO  
KAMPALA-UGANDA  
Tel: 041 - 288896/285001  
Fax: 041 - 270464 222643  
E-Mail: [info@kyu.ac.ug](mailto:info@kyu.ac.ug)

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

18<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

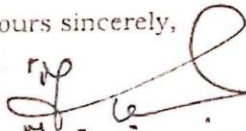
**RE: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

The bearer of this letter ATA CHRISTINE is a student of Kyambogo University pursuing a Master's Programme.

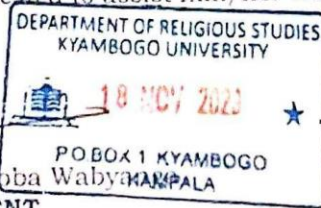
He/She is conducting a research which is part of the requirements for the fulfillment of the award.

You are therefore requested to assist him/her with data collection.

Yours sincerely,




Assoc. Prof. Robert Kuloba Wabya  
**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**



c.c. Academic Registrar



She has been permitted  
Collect Data in Usuk etc  
She is the best in Cultural  
events

  
0782153681

### APPENDIX THREE: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MALE ELDERS

Dear elder, I am Atai Christine, a tutor in Bishop Willis Core PTC, Iganga and a student of Kyambogo University. I am currently conducting an academic research study on “The religious connotation of *Edukone* among Iteso.” I am glad to meet you. I would like you to share with me briefly your experience on the above topic. All information will be kept confidential. Are you willing to discuss with me? .....

Thank you.

1. How old are you?
2. What is your level of education?
3. Have you ever conducted, taken part in, or observed any ritual related to the rite of *Edukone*?
4. Could you describe the ceremonial components of the Iteso's rite of *Edukone* based on your experience?
5. According to your experience, do rituals in *Edukone* have significance?
6. If yes, kindly explain them
7. Dear elder, during ancient times and even in the current situation, do marriage rituals have a religious implication?
8. If yes, may you explain the religious implications of rituals in Iteso's *Edukone*.
8. Are there changes that have taken place in *edukone* when u compare now and past.
9. If yes mention some of those changes

**Thank you for your cooperation.**

#### **APPENDIX FOUR: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ELDERLY WOMEN**

Dear elder, I am Atai Christine, a tutor in Bishop Willis PTC, Iganga and a student of Kyambogo University. I am currently conducting an academic research study on “The religious connotation of *Edukone* among Iteso.” I am glad to meet you. I would like you to share with me briefly your experience on the above topic. All information will be kept confidential. Are you willing to discuss with me? .....

How old are you?

2. Have you ever conducted, taken part in, or observed any ritual related to the rite of *Edukone*?
3. Could you describe the ceremonial components of the Iteso's rite of *Edukone* based on your experience?
4. According to your experience, do rituals in *Edukone* have significance?
5. If yes, kindly explain them.
6. Dear elder, during ancient times and even in the current situation, do marriage rituals have a religious implication?
7. If yes, may you explain the religious implications of rituals in Iteso's *Edukone*.
8. Are there changes that have taken place in *edukone* when u compare now and past.
9. If yes mention some of those changes

**Thank you, dear elders,**

## APPENDIX FIVE: OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

The researcher will pay close attention to the following crucial areas: recognizable behavior, the employment of both traditional and contemporary instruments and artifacts, warning signs during practice, the basic information on the table below is then summarized based on the body language and facial expressions of the practitioners and responses, the setting and organization of the venue and activities, and the events as they occur this will allow effective making of conclusions.

<b>Ritual</b>	<b>Practitioners</b>	<b>Observable Behavior</b>
Ritual of booking a girl for marriage (Agolokin apese)	Elders, family members	Negotiations, exchange of gifts, expressions of approval or disapproval
Ritual of picking the girl from her parents (Aiwom apese)	Groom's family, bride's family	Ceremony of handover, emotional reactions from both families, traditional greetings
Ritual of negotiations for bride price (Etube)	Groom's family, bride's family	Dialogue exchanges, agreement on bride price, expressions of satisfaction or contention
The ritual of traditional marriage (Eitane/Emanyit/Edukone)	Couples, officiants, community	Vows exchanged, communal participation, rituals performed (e.g., blessing).

The ritual of bidding farewell to the married girl (Aikor apese)	Bride's family, community	Emotional farewells, traditional songs, gifts presented to the bride.
The ritual of initiating a woman to the man's clan (Etal)	Clan elders, groom's family	Ceremonial acceptance, rituals performed, symbolic acts (e.g., anointing)
Ritual to grant full membership in the man's clan (Aitokony akoit)	Clan elders, groom's family	Formal declaration, expressions of welcome, communal celebrations
The ritual of church marriage (Aiwen epata)	Clergy, couple, witnesses	Religious vows, blessings, participation of community members in prayers
Ritual to cleanse incest (Aelo Aluejenasi/Aicud)	Elders, community leaders	Ceremonial cleansing acts, community involvement, expressions of remorse.
Ritual to cleanse marital infidelity (Egelit lo Eluk)	Elders, involved parties	Apologies, rituals for forgiveness, communal support or judgment.