



## Preserving indigenous knowledge for development in northern Ghana: Exploring the views of artisans in the art and craft industry in the Upper East Region

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### ABSTRACT

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) plays a crucial role in revenue generation and local economic development in Ghana. This paper explores the strategies and challenges in preserving indigenous knowledge within the arts and crafts industry, particularly in Northern Ghana. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the cultural sustainability theories underpinned the study. With a constructionist approach through qualitative methods, the study explored local views on the preservation practices of artisans in the art and craft industry. Sixty-nine (69) participants (artisans) were purposively sampled from six production centres in the study area. Out of this number, nine consisted of in-depth interviews with retired artisans serving as key informants, while ten in each production centre participated in focused group discussions (FGDs). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected using interview guides. The results demonstrate the significant contribution of traditional arts and crafts to the social, economic, cultural, and spiritual lives of indigenous people within the local communities in the Upper East Region. However, the following were identified as challenges in the preservation of IK: loss of interest by the younger generations, lack of support from governmental institutions and agencies, and access to markets for finished products. Based on the findings mentioned above, the study recommends integrating IK into the formal educational curriculum to serve as a conduit for intergenerational knowledge transfer, which should include practical steps for engaging youth and enhancing the involvement of governmental agencies and institutions in the tourism and arts sectors to support access to markets for finished products. Also, policies targeted towards preserving IK must be economically beneficial, culturally sensitive, and locally informed. This paper contributes to the paucity of academic literature by focusing on preservation in the art and crafts industry in Northern Ghana, which is often neglected despite its immense contribution to the economic growth of the informal sector.

**Keywords:** Art, Artisans, Craft, Indigenous Knowledge, Northern Ghana, Preservation, Upper East Region

### I. INTRODUCTION

The arts and crafts sector has become essential to the Ghanaian economy. According to Vencatachellum (2019), the relevance of this industry is seen in the high rate of employment it creates for the economic growth of the country. A report by the Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA, 2020) indicates that the industrial art and craft sub-sector in Ghana generated US\$14,524,610 demonstrating its huge potential for revenue generation. Records also show that in 2020, Ghana's industrial art and craft sub-sector contributed \$30,630,413, making up 1.08% of the country's non-traditional export (NTEs) earnings (GEPA, 2020). Given the significant income generated from arts and crafts exports, it is essential to give this sector focused attention, as it is often neglected.

Among such ways are the preservation and promotion of this traditional knowledge to ensure that they continue to prosper and ultimately leads to an increase in cultural vibrancy, particularly among communities in the Upper East Region [UER] of Ghana. This calls for the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge of the arts and crafts industry. This

has been recognized as an important factor in promoting cultural tourism because it highlights the unique cultural heritage of indigenous communities, as discussed in academic literature (Van Chat, 2024; Wasela, 2023).

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) could be viewed as a body of knowledge developed over generations of lived experiences, often called a trial-and-error problem-solving approach by communities working to address the challenges while drawing upon the resources they have at hand (Chantamool et al., 2024). It is an intangible asset central to the development of every country (Gubová & Richnák, 2016).

Wasela (2023) posits that the conservation of IK leads to cultural tourism, providing tourists with special experiences since it is linked to practices of traditional groups, which are different from mainstream societies. Exhibiting such practices helps tourists to deeply appreciate global cultural diversity. Besides being a significant source of income for indigenous communities of tourist destinations, the subsector also emphasizes traditional knowledge preservation and sustainable tourism practices (Ryan & Aicken, 2010). Furthermore, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2021), highlighting the relevance of indigenous knowledge in cultural tourism promotion, regards it as an essential part of cultural heritage that can be adopted as cultural products for tourism.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Though Indigenous Knowledge is important for sustainable development, it risks obliteration due to factors including lack of interest from younger generations, low life expectancy limiting intergenerational knowledge transfer and knowledge documentation (Afful-Arthur et al., 2022; Asamoah & Ngulube, 2023). Given IK's role in development as aforementioned, its preservation in Northern Ghana has gained wide acceptance, particularly in the Upper East Region, where art and crafts have become contributors to local economic development (Wemegah, 2014). However, rapid modernization and globalization threaten to erode the unique cultural heritage and traditional knowledge that underpins this industry, potentially depriving local communities of their cultural identity and economic livelihoods.

Though research into the preservation of IK is not novel, studies focused on the art and crafts industry in Northern Ghana are scarce, despite their immense contribution to the growth of the informal sector in Ghana. The importance of this sector lies in the quality of individuals who operate in this space (Wemegah, 2014). It is the norm in Ghana that people engaged in these sectors are usually classified as 'school dropouts' who can barely read or write (Yangben & Seniwoliba, 2014). The call to explore strategies for IK preservation in the art and crafts industry has become rife since such practices can be used to solve the changing needs of the modern world. Thus, exploring the challenges faced in preserving indigenous knowledge and practices in the art and craft industry in the Upper East Region for sustainable development in the region is apt.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To explore local community perspectives on the cultural significance of traditional arts and crafts in Northern Ghana.
- ii. To examine the current methods and practices used to preserve Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in traditional arts and crafts in the Upper East Region
- iii. To identify the key challenges confronting the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge in the traditional art and craft industry in the Upper East Region.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

The study used two theories, namely Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the Cultural Sustainability Theory (CST). IKS provides the lens for understanding traditional knowledge systems, their mode of transfer, and the ways local communities preserve them. Secondly, IK is also described as the observed interactions between indigenous communities and their environments and emphasizing its potential in sustainable development and cultural preservation (Battiste, 2018; Magni, 2017).

The relevance of IKS lies in the fact that it is aligned with our research objectives in clarifying how knowledge of traditional art and craft can be passed to generations yet unborn. The IKS framework is also particularly suitable for critically evaluating how the influence of modernization, limited institutional support, and a lack of interest amongst the youth affect the sustainability of this knowledge.

The Cultural Sustainability Theory (CST) also hinges on the preservation of cultural practices, traditions and values as a critical component of sustainable development (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). Accordingly, the theory posits that cultural sustainability encapsulates the conservation and transmission of tangible and intangible aspects of culture. These include indigenous skills, oral traditions, and social practices. This view is particularly relevant in the face of globalization and socio-economic changes that undermine the existence of traditional crafts and knowledge networks.

The IKS and CS theories offer a robust lens in understanding how indigenous knowledge of art and craft is perceived, preserved, and even revived. Whereas the IKS framework places the study at the centre of lived experiences of local knowledge holders, the Cultural Sustainability Theory provides a broader dimension in the study of such practice to place them in the current discourses of heritage preservation and cultural tourism. The hybrid theories are particularly suitable for this study because they will elicit perceptions of the locals on preserving IK in the Northern part of Ghana and recommend ways in which preserving such knowledge systems can be done in culturally grounded and sustainable means.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is now widely valued for promoting sustainable development. It is kept alive through ongoing interactions between indigenous communities and their natural environment (Magni, 2017). It is usually passed down by word of mouth and is deeply steeped in local traditions, values, and practices (Magni, 2017; Sultana et al., 2018). In recent years, IK has become an important part of development strategies based on local cultures globally and within Ghana. (Boadu, 2022; Dei, 2024)

Globally, IK has assisted local economies by supporting sustainable agriculture, herbal medicine, eco-tourism, and handcrafted artisanal products. It also emphasizes local independence, sustainable environmental management, community members' participation in decision-making, and provides diverse adaptive strategies to climate change (El Yazidi & Rijal, 2024; Ghimire & Dhakal, 2021). Though IK plays a crucial role in rural socio-economic transformation and development, it should not be regarded as totally beneficial because of the risks of commodification through its exploitation (Boadu, 2022; Dei, 2024; Derbile et al., 2022; Magni, 2017). Some scholars also lament the over-commercialization of indigenous symbols, arguing that it leads to the stripping of these products of their cultural contexts, leading to cultural appropriation and loss of authenticity (Polymenopoulou, 2017; Prazmowska-Marcinowska, 2020).

There are several approaches for preserving IK and traditional arts and crafts, namely documentation, museumification, and multisensory methods, among others. Recording indigenous knowledge using global languages and Western methodologies can sometimes alter or misinterpret the original meanings tied to marginalized communities. (Ajani et al., 2024; Dash, 2024; Shizha, 2017). However, documentation must adopt approaches that are culturally sensitive and inclusive. "Museumification" is a preservation strategy where cultural items are preserved in forms of static relics, without compromising their lived significance (Boüan & Khine, 2018), while multisensory methods including oral storytelling and audiovisual media are the audio and visual representations of IK surrounding cultural items (Alexander, 2017; Choo et al., 2020; Welch, 2019).

Digital platforms also offer both benefits and drawbacks for IK preservation. The digital divide remains a critical issue, especially in the Global South, where access to digital tools is limited (dos Santos et al., 2022; Ragnedda & Gladkova, 2020). While Tulloch (2023) supports digital storytelling as a decolonial approach to preserving IK, Christen (2018) expresses concerns regarding indigenous communities' control over digital content. Couldry and Mejias (2019) also argue that the digital economy can commodify IK, often without the consent of its custodians.

Generational changes and urban growth also pose a threat to the transmission of IK, as the youth see traditional practices as outdated and prefer complex Western lifestyles. This situation may arise as a result of the neglect of traditional teaching and learning pedagogies, such as oral tradition, in our modern or formal educational system. (Battiste, 2018; Das, 2015; Ghose & Ali, 2023). Govender and Mutendera (2020) stress that without being integrated into the formal curriculum, IK could become irrelevant to the next generation.

In Ghana, preservation of IK may be hindered by the absence of consistent government support. Though some initiatives incorporate IK into national development policies (Afful-Arthur et al., 2022; Asamoah & Ngulube, 2023), they are usually top-down and thus do not mirror local realities. According to Afful-Arthur et al. (2022), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are rather more proactive in supporting indigenous artisans, though such efforts are insufficient and lack long-term sustainability. The absence of these participatory institutional frameworks undermines the sustainability of IK (Das, 2015; Ghose & Ali, 2023). Notwithstanding these setbacks, IK, as a key developmental resource, contributes to environmental conservation, local economic development, and social inclusion (El Yazidi & Rijal, 2024; Ghimire & Dhakal, 2021; Magni, 2017). Its preservation requires context-sensitive approaches that integrate oral and digital methods while addressing systemic challenges such as generational disinterest, digital exclusion, and weak institutional support.

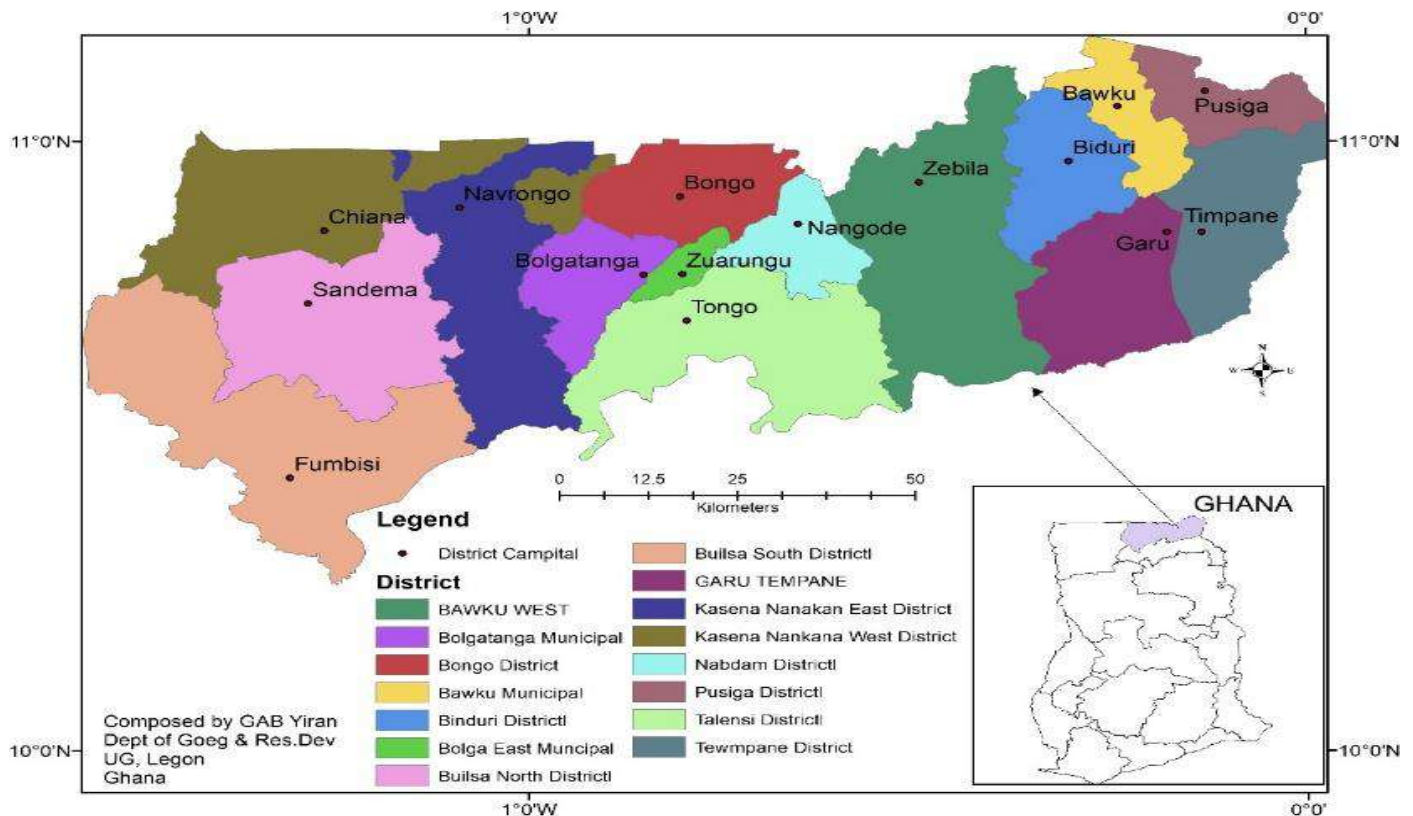
The abundant arts and crafts heritage of Ghana is vulnerable to the erosion of IK. However, protecting IK associated with these products is challenging because many youth are no longer connected to traditional practices due to the influence of modern education and a shift in lifestyle and cultural values. Efforts to incorporate IK into development planning are hampered by the fact that they are state-driven and tend to leave out the authentic experiences of indigenous groups. The voices of these knowledge custodians are frequently absent from policy discourse and

academic literature. In light of this marginalization, this study aims to bridge the gap between policy intentions and lived realities. By exploring the perspectives of local communities, the study seeks to promote a more participatory approach to cultural preservation and sustainable development in Ghana.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Context and Description

The total area of Upper East Region (UER) is 8,842 sq. constituting 4% of Ghana’s landmass (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021). Nearly 80% of the working population depends on rain-fed agriculture (GSS, 2021). However, due to climate variability and change, agricultural activities are dwindling (Yiran & Stringer, 2016). Thus, alternative traditional livelihood sources have become imperative. The arts and crafts sector is gaining widespread interest due to its economic importance and can help the youth address the unemployment situation and ameliorate the incidence of poverty.



**Figure 1**  
*Map of the Upper East Region*

#### 3.2 Research Design and Sampling Techniques

The study adopted a constructionist research design with a multistage sampling procedure. First, the Upper East region was divided into three cultural hearths/zones, namely the Eastern (Bawku West, Bawku, Binduri, Tempane and Pusiga Districts), Central (i.e. Talensi, Bolgatanga East, Bolgatanga, Bongo and Nabdam Districts), and Western (i.e. Kassena Nankana East, Kassena Nankana West, Builsa North and Builsa South). Secondly, two districts were selected based on a simple random sampling. In each of the selected districts, two active arts and crafts production sites were identified with the aid of community leaders.

Using schedules, focused group discussions (FGDs), and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted to gather data on the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge of the arts and crafts production. Artisans who participated in the FGDs were those who had worked in the industry for more than five years. This was to ensure that rich perspectives on the preservation of IK in the art and craft industry were captured. In places where artisans did not work in groups, ten artisans were gathered to participate in the FGDs. With in-depth interview schedules, the study gathered information from persons who had retired from the arts and crafts industry through a snowballing method.

Local dialects were used to conduct all the FGDs and IDIs. The discussions were audio taped with permission from participants. The data instruments were pretested while making sure that wording and formatting were aligned

with study objectives (Boatbil et al., 2024). According to Teye (2008), FGDs have the propensity to ensure in-depth probing about phenomena or variables.

### 3.3 Sample Size

The sample size for the study was 69 participants. Focus group discussions (FGDs) took place in six production centres involving 10 participants each (FGDs,  $n = 6 \times 10$ ). In addition, nine (9) key informants participated in in-depth interviews (IDIs), with each zone having three knowledgeable persons (IDIs,  $n = 3 \times 3 = 9$ ). According to Yiran and Stringer (2016), a participant number of between 8 and 10 for FGD is conducive to providing a congenial environment for fruitful discussions. Krueger and Casey (2014) also assert that such numbers for FGDs are large enough to get varied opinions, and yet small enough to facilitate.

### 3.4 Data Analysis





Data from discussions, interviews and observations were recorded, transcribed, and analysed with the help of the QSR software for qualitative analysis like NVivo, which assists in managing large amounts of data, improving rigor and validity, assisting in identifying themes as well as efficiently managing and creating relationships generated (Dollah et al., 2017). Thus, transcripts were fed into the NVivo software, version 11, and coded to extract emerging themes for analysis based on the research objectives. To ensure rigor, the transcripts were reread while listening to the audio recordings, in order not to distort meaning. The study complemented the results with notes from field observations. The study evaluated the narratives and organised them around emergent themes.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Descriptions of Arts and Crafts Products

Traditional art and craft industries whose members engaged in the study were those in basket, smock, drum, and quiver making, which served as significant sources of livelihood for these local artisans. However, the study revealed that the producers are geographically dispersed, lacking a centralised location or organised tourist-oriented market for collective display and sale.

According to participants, this lack of organisation hinders effective marketing, limits exposure to tourists, and ultimately undermines the sustainability of both production and the tourism sector. The absence of unified marketplaces is addressed by intermediaries who buy and sell locally or for export. This not only limits their capacity to generate substantial income and perpetuates poverty and economic insecurity, but also threatens the continuity of Indigenous Knowledge systems, as younger generations may perceive little value in learning and sustaining the arts and crafts industry. Plate 1 displays some products of the arts and crafts activities in the Upper East Region.

Zones	Arts and Crafts products	
Eastern	 <p>Smock at Zebilla</p>	 <p>Weaving smock material at Garu</p>
Central	 <p>Baskets at Bolgatanga</p>	 <p>Drum making at Zuarungu</p>

**Plate 1**

*Tourism Products Produced by Tourism Stakeholders*

#### 4.2 Perceived Importance of Indigenous Knowledge

The study strongly highlighted the need to preserve indigenous knowledge in arts and crafts, which emerged strongly throughout the study. For example, a participant stated that:

*"If we do not preserve our indigenous knowledge, we will lose our identity. Our arts and crafts tell our stories and hold deep cultural meanings. For instance, traditional crafts, such as weaving and carving, often require years of dedication to master, yet may not offer substantial financial reward or social recognition in contemporary society. As a result, fewer young people are willing to invest the time needed to learn and preserve these skills". Indigenous knowledge shapes everything we do. The techniques, patterns, and materials we use have been refined over generations. For example, the dyes we use are made from local plants, and the weaving techniques ensure durability. This knowledge connects us to our ancestors and keeps our identity alive."*

While these perspectives place emphasis on traditional crafts as both vessels of history and symbols of cultural continuity, the disinterest of younger generations in learning Indigenous crafts and preferring modern careers instead has serious implications for the survival of Indigenous knowledge.

Participants also emphasised the socio-economic value of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) for both local communities and the broader society. As cultural expressions, preservation of IK contributes to livelihoods, community development, and sustainable economies through tourism development, as well as archaeological and sociological studies. One participant succinctly stated that:

*"The art and crafts industry employs many people... Especially during the dry season when farming is not possible, most of us tend to engage in either basket weaving or leather works as an alternative source of income until another farming season begins."* Another said that: *"It strengthens our community ties because knowledge is passed from elders to the youth. It therefore serves as a cultural bridge, preserving ancestral wisdom while equipping the youth to navigate both traditional and contemporary worlds."* A third contributor noted: *"These crafts go beyond aesthetics. They embody the identity, resilience, and knowledge systems of our people"*.

#### 4.3 Ways of Preserving Indigenous Knowledge

This section discusses issues such as methods of preservation of indigenous knowledge (i.e, accessibility and language, contextual information for interpretation, and value of multisensory and experiential learning), the role of technology and limitations and challenges to preserving IK.

##### 4.3.1 Accessibility and Language

The study revealed that documentation was widely recognised among residents as a vital means of preserving indigenous knowledge. Its high preservation value and utility are often undermined due to community members' inability to read and relate to the content. Participants emphasized that preservation efforts must address linguistic equity to ensure community ownership and usability. It also fosters genuine community ownership, enabling local people to lead and benefit from the preservation of their heritage. According to a basket weaver,

*"Documentation is a crucial method for preserving indigenous knowledge, but its effectiveness depends on accessibility and language. In many cases, written records are in English or other official languages, which may limit their reach among indigenous communities."* Another participant also noted, *"The Upper East Region has the second-lowest literacy rate among the 16 regions in Ghana. So, there is a need to translate these records into major local languages, if not all of them."* Another participant commented, *"If properly*



*archived and translated into local languages, such documentation will ensure long-term preservation for future generations.”*

#### 4.3.2 Contextual Information for Interpretation (CII)

Participants in the study acknowledged CII's effectiveness in documenting intricate designs, materials, and creative processes of local craft and IK. However, contextual narratives or explanations were absent, thus diminishing the value of CII, as images alone may not fully convey the depth of knowledge associated with a craft. One participant said:

*“Without proper contextual information, images alone may not fully convey the depth of knowledge associated with a craft. For example, our pottery designs have intricate meanings that, if you are not told, you will not know. Another said: “Their effectiveness depends on proper interpretation, as meaning can sometimes be lost over time. If you critically observe, most of our crafts are losing their original meanings”.*

#### 4.3.3 Value of Multisensory and Experiential Learning

Participants regarded this approach as one of the most effective means to conserve and transmit indigenous knowledge. For example, videos provide both visual and auditory learning, enabling the documentation of crafting processes and the stories that accompany artistic traditions. A participant noted:

*“Videos provide both visual and auditory learning... capturing step-by-step crafting processes, as well as the stories and meanings behind various artistic traditions.”*

Another intimated that:

*“Through storytelling, mentorship, and apprenticeship, elders pass down skills and cultural significance.”*

However, the study also revealed a major challenge as a participant said:

*“Limited access to technology and digital storage in some communities potentially restricts the use and dissemination of this medium”.*

#### 4.3.4 Role of Technology in Preservation

Participants generally acknowledged that digital technology creates new possibilities and promotes indigenous art and craft, but they also highlighted ongoing concerns about unequal access. A participant indicated that:

*“Social media has become an emerging tool for promoting our indigenous art and craft. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube allow us as artisans to showcase our work, share tutorials, and reach wider audiences.”* Another said that: *“technology risks cultural appropriation and authenticity due to the dual nature of digital exposure”.*

#### 4.4. Challenges of Preserving Indigenous Knowledge

Discussions highlighted some key challenges to preserving IK, including risks posed by modernization and cultural appropriation, declining interests and modern influences among younger generations, competition from modern products, inadequate government support, and broader societal shifts. Other participants also identified challenges such as limited access to technology and digital storage facilities, infrastructure gaps and low digital literacy, especially in rural or marginalized communities.

Modernization and cultural appropriation emerged as major contributing factors to the decline of oral traditions and the misuse of indigenous knowledge. Outsiders often adopt, commercialise and distort traditional symbols, stories, or practices for profit or aesthetic value, frequently stripping them of their original cultural significance. On oral traditions, a participant cautioned that:

*“With modernization and changing lifestyles, reliance on oral traditions alone poses a risk, as knowledge may be lost if not documented.”*

The situation is even more precarious with the advent of social media, as another participant laments that:

*“I have concerns about authenticity and the risk of cultural appropriation of our products in the advent of social media. You know, as IK gains wider recognition and commercial interest from tourism to art and fashion, there is an increasing risk that elements of our Indigenous culture may be taken out of context, misrepresented, or commodified without consent”.*

On the issue of lost youth interest, a participant indicates:

*“One big challenge in preserving IK is that our younger generation is not interested in learning the crafts. They prefer modern jobs. Moreover, modern job markets frequently devalue or ignore Indigenous knowledge, reinforcing the perception that such knowledge is outdated or irrelevant.”* Another said, *“Young people want fast money and do not have the patience to learn traditional crafts.”*

Another challenge was with regard to competition from modern products. IK, which relies on experience, environmental awareness, and cultural traditions, is increasingly facing stiff competition, thereby endangering it. Participants argued that the forces of competition undermine the relevance of IK and devalue it in the eyes of younger generations and broader society. Thus, a participant explained:

*“Cheap factory-made products are replacing our handmade crafts, making it hard to compete. These mass-produced alternatives, often manufactured with cost-efficiency rather than quality or cultural significance in mind, saturate our markets and undermine the value of artisanal work. As a result, we as craftspeople face mounting challenges in maintaining both economic viability and the integrity of our craft.”*

These challenges, in their view, were worsened by what appeared to be institutional neglect, stemming from the government’s apparent inability to recognise the importance of indigenous knowledge. Hence, a participant lamented that:

*“Government support is lacking. If there were more programs to promote indigenous crafts, things might be different. For instance, the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFAC), which used to be a biannual celebration in Ghana to showcase a wide range of artistic and cultural expressions, has not seen much activity over the last few years. Another said, “NGOs do more than the government in supporting us. Some organizations help us find markets for our crafts...”*

The findings of the study also revealed that societal shift in values and aspirations presents a major challenge to the preservation of IK systems. A participant explained that:

*“Many parents today encourage their children to pursue formal education and white-collar jobs instead of learning traditional crafts and artisanal skills that have shaped generations. In doing so, however, they often inadvertently contribute to the decline of traditional crafts, which are rich sources of cultural heritage and practical knowledge that have sustained our communities for centuries.”*

#### 4.5 Discussion

The findings of our current study reaffirm the vital role that language and accessibility play in conserving IK, especially through documentation. Ajani et al. (2024) and Dash (2024) propose that although documentation is a dependable method of preservation, it can be exclusionary and marginalise minority tribes when implemented in dominant languages. According to Shizha (2017), when IK is described using Western perspectives, it loses its original context and importance.

Furthermore, visual media (e.g., photography and drawing), while effective at capturing material detail, are considered insufficient without contextual interpretation. This finding aligns with Bouan and Khine (2018), who warn against the museumification of IK without explaining their deeper meaning, cultural background, or how they were originally used or understood. Visual media should be supplemented with oral histories, storytelling, or textual interpretation.

In supporting this perspective, some researchers have contended that meanings associated with IK are relational, evolving, and shaped by context (Alexander, 2017; Choo et al., 2020). Videos and storytelling should, therefore, be considered as avenues in preserving IK within its significant context. The focus on multisensory and embodied learning, particularly through oral traditions and videos, aligns with the view of Welch (2019) that IK is fundamentally based on lived experiences and performances.

However, the finding that technology offers both opportunities and obstacles in preserving IK mirrors the contrasting views in existing literature. While scholars like Tulloch (2023) laud digital storytelling for its ability to undo the effects of colonialism, others like Christen (2018) raise concerns about their inability to manage digital resources independently and free from outside influence or interference.

More to the point, existing literature widely documents the dual characteristics of digital platforms, characterising them as both empowering and potentially exploitative. For example, Couldry and Mejias (2019) discuss how the digital economy frequently commodifies cultural expressions without the consent of the Indigenous community for whose benefit this knowledge is often documented. This reiterates the major concerns expressed by several participants in the study about authenticity and cultural appropriation.

The digital divide, as repeatedly emphasised in our study, is a recurring theme in Global South scholarship (dos Santos Tavares et al., 2022; Ragnedda & Gladkova, 2020), highlighting the fact that access to digital tools is uneven and often reinforces existing structural inequalities. Hence, while social media can increase access, it can also reinforce neo-colonial dynamics if not managed properly.

Closely connected to the above is the dual challenge of modernization and commercialization, which emerged as barriers to the preservation of IK. This perspective is supported by Prazmowska-Marcinowska (2020) and Polymenopoulou (2017), who posit that increasing the commodification of indigenous symbols in the artisanal sector separates these products from their cultural context and, in extreme cases, infringes on intellectual property.



Our findings that modernization leads to loss of authenticity, erosion of oral traditions, and increased vulnerability to cultural exploitation echo growing calls for the development of cultural protocol frameworks aimed at protecting Indigenous communities from exploitative knowledge-sharing practices. Our current study reinforces the widely held view emphasized in extant literature that IK is not only a repository of cultural identity but also a crucial resource for sustainable development (Magni, 2017; Sultana et al., 2018).

Thomas et al. (2016) illustrate the role of IK in contributing to cultural resilience. However, our present findings challenge this view by exposing the apparent lack of interest among the youth, who tend to opt for modern career paths. This suggests that identifying the value of IK, especially within Ghana's artisanal art and craft industry, is inadequate unless tangible economic and social incentives align with its efforts at preservation.

A key finding of this study is that preserving IK is challenged by the generational gap and urban migration. Scholars like Battiste (2018) argue that Western education systems fail to integrate indigenous knowledge, while Das (2015) points to the absence of institutional support for Indigenous artisans. Participants also observed that the NGOs are more active than governments in this regard, highlighting a shift towards privatization of indigenous work, which has both benefits and drawbacks.

Though there are some initiatives to protect indigenous craftsmanship, our findings indicate that these efforts are fragmented and largely inadequate. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have made a notable contribution, largely through the provision of intermittent material support and skills training. However, without comprehensive, long-term strategies, the sustainability and impact of such programs remain limited. This, therefore, underscores sustained and coordinated efforts, particularly at the governmental level, to support the continuity and vitality of IK systems.

The limited involvement by governmental institutions, particularly in developing and enforcing policies, worsens the situation as weak regulatory mechanisms fail to protect local artisans from the negative effects of imports, particularly inexpensive mass-produced goods that undercut the market for genuine local crafts. The findings on shifting values and parental preferences demonstrate how internalized modernity can lead to the marginalization of IK from within. Govender and Mutendera (2020) argue that IK stands to be regarded as outmoded if it is not integrated into formal education. This presents a paradox—despite widespread recognition of the importance of IK, prevailing systemic influences often steer young people toward modern aspirations, thereby compromising the continuity of their cultural traditions.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

Overall, this study's findings strongly align with and add depth to the existing body of literature on Indigenous Knowledge preservation. They emphasise the tension between cultural continuity and modernity, the dual potential of digital media as both a tool and a barrier, and the important role of community-led, context-specific approaches. Also, the study revealed a palpable lack of interest among the youth regarding indigenous trades and IK.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The findings highlight several major recommendations for safeguarding IK. Government policies should go beyond merely protecting to actively promoting indigenous arts and crafts by investing in infrastructure, providing tax incentives, and facilitating trade. Moreover, NGOs are acknowledged as more dynamic actors in enhancing market reach and providing skills development. However, to reinforce these initiatives, we recommend deeper partnerships with higher institutions of learning. Universities and research bodies must engage actively in recording, researching, and disseminating indigenous artistic knowledge, thus ensuring its intergenerational transfer and validation in scholarly discourse.

We also suggest a multifaceted approach to effectively safeguard IK systems: (1) the implementation of youth-centred training initiatives that foster intergenerational knowledge transmission; (2) financial assistance mechanisms like seed capital or subsidies to artisans; and (3) enhanced promotional campaigns at both local and international levels to increase the recognition and value of indigenous crafts. We also advocate for the incorporation of indigenous arts and crafts into formal educational curricula. Embedding IK in the teaching curriculum would instill cultural pride among young people and present artisanal skills as credible and sustainable sources of livelihood.

Considering the apparent disinterest among younger generations in Indigenous Knowledge (IK), driven by modernisation and a preference for white-collar jobs, it is recommended that authorities develop youth-oriented digital solutions, entrepreneurial frameworks, and education reforms. These initiatives should strive to make IK more appealing, relevant, and economically rewarding for the youth.



Furthermore, Indigenous Knowledge systems ought to be incorporated into national youth employment and entrepreneurship programmes, particularly within the creative arts and digital sectors. This integration would support both the preservation of cultural heritage and the socio-economic empowerment of young people. Moreover, it is recommended that the Ghana Tourism Authority, along with municipal and district assemblies and the central government, work together to establish centralised markets. These hubs would boost the visibility and accessibility of local tourism products, thereby improving their marketability and the sustainability of tourism businesses.

Also, future research should conduct a comparative analysis between the experiences of older artisans and the attitudes of the younger generations. This would help uncover practical strategies for bridging the generational gaps and designing initiatives that make IK-related industries more appealing to the youth.

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