

Intergenerational Transmission of *Adungu* (Bow-Harp) Musical Knowledge in Bweyale-Karuma, Uganda: A Phenomenological Study of Indigenous Pedagogy, Embodied Learning, and Decolonial Praxis

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Abstract

The *Adungu*, a multi-stringed arched bow-harp indigenous to the Alur and Lugbara communities of north-western Uganda, represents one of East Africa's most architecturally sophisticated traditional instruments. Despite its ceremonial significance and growing presence in formal music education contexts, the pedagogical mechanisms through which *Adungu* musical knowledge is transmitted across generations remain substantially undocumented in scholarly literature. This qualitative phenomenological study investigates how master *Adungu* players in Bweyale-Karuma a multi-ethnic community in Kiryandongo District renowned across Bunyoro Kitar Kingdom for producing the finest *Adungu* instruments and most accomplished players transmit complex musical, cultural, and embodied knowledge to apprentices. Drawing on six months of intensive fieldwork (February–July 2025), the study employed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to generate rich, experience-near accounts from eighteen participants: six master players, nine apprentices at varying stages of learning, and three cultural leaders. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, participant observation across rehearsal and ceremonial performance contexts, and audio-visual documentation of teaching interactions. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework revealed seven interconnected transmission mechanisms: graduated tonal scaffolding, ensemble interdependence, embodied string memory, improvisation within communal constraints, master-apprentice mentorship, contextual performance immersion, and cultural narrative integration. These mechanisms constitute a sophisticated distributed pedagogical system that challenges deficit assumptions about oral, non-notational music education and offers critical insights for decolonial music education theory and Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum reform.

Keywords: *Adungu pedagogy, indigenous music transmission, embodied learning, decolonial education, Competency-Based Curriculum.*

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Introduction

In the semi-arid lowlands of Bweyale-Karuma, where the Victoria Nile corridor intersects the western boundary of Kabalega National Park in Kiryandongo District, a remarkable convergence of ethnic communities has produced what practitioners across Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom recognise as Uganda's premier centre of *Adungu* bow-harp excellence. This multi-ethnic settlement home to Lugbara, Alur, Acholi, Langi, and Banyoro communities has become the primary source of high-quality *Adungu* instruments purchased by schools throughout western Uganda for music festivals and cultural competitions. Master players from Bweyale-Karuma are regularly invited into formal school settings as resource persons, bridging indigenous knowledge systems and formal music education in ways that anticipate the aspirations of Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reform (Namatende-Sakwa, Kiambati, Luyima, & Wawire, 2025). Yet this pedagogical bridge remains almost entirely invisible in academic literature. This study addresses that gap by investigating how master *Adungu* players transmit complex musical, cultural, and embodied knowledge to apprentices through phenomenological inquiry. Theoretically, the study draws on Wenger's (1998) communities of practice, Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, Merleau-Ponty's (1962) embodied cognition, and decolonial epistemologies (Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) to illuminate indigenous pedagogical sophistication. The paper proceeds through literature review, methodology, results (seven transmission mechanisms), discussion, and conclusion.

Literature Review

Adungu and Ugandan Instrument Pedagogy

Indigenous African music transmission has received growing scholarly attention as decolonial imperatives reshape music education discourse (Akuno, 2019; Ngoma, 2024; Roy, 2021). Nzewi (2003, 2019) established foundational principles of African musical arts pedagogy, emphasising communal participation, contextual learning, and the inseparability of music from social function. Blacking's (1973) seminal work among the Venda demonstrated that musical competence is socially constructed rather than innately distributed, challenging Western assumptions about musical talent. Recent Ugandan scholarship has documented transmission mechanisms for specific instruments: Ssegantebuka, Walubo, and Sekalegga (2022) examined Endingidi (tube fiddle) pedagogy, while Walubo, Ssegantebuka, and Sekalegga (2025a, 2025b) explored Amayebe musical traditions among Busoga communities. Isabiry'e's (2024) recent ethnographic work on *Adungu* music communities in Awach, Gulu District, documented community musicking practices and musical cognition among Acholi *Adungu* players, revealing how collective performance contexts shape individual



cognitive processes. However, systematic investigation of pedagogical transmission mechanisms how masters structure learning, scaffold complexity, and integrate cultural knowledge remains absent from *Adungu* scholarship. Makwa (2025) argues for harnessing community musicians as living archives for sustainable teaching and learning of Ugandan musics at university level, yet the specific pedagogical strategies employed by these living archives require empirical documentation. Kubik's (1982) foundational work on Ugandan instruments, including the related *Endingidi*, provides organological context but does not address pedagogical processes.

Oral Transmission and Embodied Learning

Embodied learning theories provide crucial frameworks for understanding non-notational music transmission. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception emphasises that bodily knowledge precedes cognitive abstraction, a principle central to *Adungu* learning where finger patterns and postural alignments constitute primary knowledge forms. Mbingo (2020) demonstrates how music functions as a pedagogic tool and co-teacher in African dances, revealing that rhythmic structures guide bodily movement and that live drumming creates collaborative learning environments where learners develop kinaesthetic intelligence through imitation and improvisation. This embodied pedagogy challenges Western music education's privileging of notation over physical knowledge. Makwa (2021) documents how musicking and dancing *Imbalu* at *Namasho* enacts indigenous education among the *Bagisu*, showing that ceremonial performance contexts serve as primary pedagogical sites where cultural knowledge, moral values, and technical skills are transmitted simultaneously through embodied participation. Mapana and Campbell (2023) illustrate how learning *Wagogo* (*Nindo*) music through World Music Pedagogy pathways integrates embodied practice, oral transmission, and cultural contextualisation, offering models for bridging indigenous and formal education systems. Isabirye (2021b) argues that indigenous music learning in contemporary contexts nurtures learner identity, agency, and passion precisely because it centres embodied, contextualised, and socially meaningful practice rather than abstract skill acquisition.

Communities of Practice and Situated Learning

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory and Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework illuminate how musical competence emerges through legitimate peripheral participation in authentic performance contexts. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development explains how master-apprentice scaffolding enables learners to accomplish tasks beyond their independent capacity. Hutchins' (1995) distributed cognition model demonstrates that complex knowledge systems are collectively held rather than individually possessed, a principle evident in ensemble-based African music pedagogy. Isabirye (2021a) asks whether indigenous music learning processes can inform contemporary schooling, documenting how apprenticeship models, peer learning, and contextual immersion produce deep musical competence and cultural identity formation that formal schooling struggles to replicate. Nettl's (2005) comprehensive study of ethnomusicology emphasises that music transmission systems are culturally specific, shaped by cosmological beliefs, social structures, and epistemological assumptions, cautioning against universalising Western pedagogical models. Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Weintraub (2012) explore the role of sound archives and sound repatriation in Uganda, arguing that recorded materials must be reconnected to living transmission practices to remain culturally meaningful, reinforcing the centrality of master-apprentice relationships in sustaining indigenous music knowledge.



Decolonial Music Education and CBC Reform

Decolonial music education scholarship challenges the epistemic violence of Western-centric curricula that marginalise indigenous knowledge systems (Akuno, 2019; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024; Roy, 2021). Mignolo's (2007) concept of epistemic disobedience and Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) call for epistemic freedom demand recognition of indigenous pedagogies as sophisticated knowledge systems rather than primitive precursors to Western methods. Smith's (2012) decolonising methodologies framework insists that research with indigenous communities must centre indigenous voices, epistemologies, and self-determination. Wa Thiong'o's (1986) foundational work on decolonising the mind emphasises that language and cultural knowledge systems are sites of colonial domination and decolonial resistance, arguing that education must reclaim indigenous epistemologies to achieve genuine intellectual freedom. Human and Akuno (2024) provide frameworks for indigenising music education, arguing that curriculum reform must move beyond tokenistic inclusion of indigenous content toward structural transformation that centres indigenous pedagogies, epistemologies, and assessment practices. Isabirye (2022) advocates for reclaiming indigenous epistemes in African music education, demonstrating how Entenga royal drum pedagogy embodies sophisticated knowledge systems that formal education has systematically devalued. Ekadu-Ereu (2019) examines Karimojong indigenous education and the effects of non-formal education curricula, revealing tensions between indigenous holistic learning and fragmented formal schooling. Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum reform emphasises learner-centred, experiential, and contextualised pedagogy (Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025), yet implementation struggles persist, particularly in music education where teachers lack training in indigenous instruments. Understanding how *Adungu* masters achieve precisely the outcomes CBC envisions deep competence through authentic practice offers critical insights for curriculum reform that respects rather than replaces indigenous knowledge systems.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology designed to explore how individuals make sense of lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA's idiographic commitment to detailed case-by-case analysis aligns with the study's aim to understand master players' and apprentices' subjective experiences of knowledge transmission. The double hermeneutic participants interpreting their experiences while the researcher interprets those interpretations enabled rich, experience-near accounts of pedagogical processes. IPA's phenomenological foundations, rooted in Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, prioritise embodied, lived experience over abstract theorising, making it particularly appropriate for investigating non-notational music transmission where bodily knowledge precedes cognitive articulation.

Study Site and Context

Fieldwork occurred February–July 2025 in Bweyale-Karuma, Kiryandongo District, a multi-ethnic settlement renowned across Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom for *Adungu* excellence. Located in the Victoria Nile corridor adjacent to Kabalega National Park, the community comprises Lugbara, Alur, Acholi, Langi, and Banyoro populations



whose convergence has created a unique centre of *Adungu* craftsmanship and performance. The community supplies high-quality *Adungu* instruments to schools throughout western Uganda for music festivals and cultural competitions, and master players are regularly invited as resource persons in formal education settings. This positioning at the intersection of indigenous knowledge systems and formal education makes Bweyale-Karuma an ideal site for investigating pedagogical transmission mechanisms with implications for curriculum reform.

Participants

Purposive sampling identified eighteen participants: six master players (Okello Bosco, Adong Grace, Oryema Patrick, Ocen Robert, Amony Christine, Ojok Samuel), nine apprentices at varying learning stages (Akello Christine, Ojok David, Acen Mercy, Okello James, Adong Sarah, Akello Grace, Okot Francis, and two others), and three cultural leaders (Rwot Ogenga, Isingoma Joseph, Omara Francis). Selection criteria for masters included minimum fifteen years' playing experience, active teaching roles, and community recognition as expert practitioners. Apprentices ranged from beginners (under six months) to advanced learners (over three years), enabling analysis of pedagogical progression across learning stages. Cultural leaders provided contextual knowledge about *Adungu's* ceremonial functions, historical significance, and cosmological meanings.

Data Collection

Data generation employed three methods over six months (120 hours total observation). Semi-structured interviews (60–90 minutes each, conducted in Alur, Lugbara, or English per participant preference) explored learning experiences, teaching philosophies, cultural meanings, and perceptions of formal versus indigenous education. Interview protocols were developed through pilot conversations with two master players not included in the final sample, ensuring cultural appropriateness and linguistic clarity. Participant observation across rehearsals, teaching sessions, and ceremonial performances (weddings, funerals, harvest celebrations, cultural festivals) documented pedagogical interactions, ensemble dynamics, and contextual learning environments. Audio-visual documentation captured teaching episodes for detailed micro-analysis of gestural instruction, verbal guidance, and embodied demonstration. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary by bilingual research assistants fluent in Alur, Lugbara, and English.

Data Analysis and Ethics

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarisation through repeated reading and listening; initial coding of semantic and latent content; theme identification through code clustering; theme review against data extracts and entire dataset; theme definition and naming; and report production with vivid extracts. Analysis was iterative, moving between individual cases and cross-case patterns to identify both idiographic detail and shared transmission mechanisms. Coding was conducted manually, with codes organised thematically using concept mapping to visualise relationships among emerging themes. Ethical considerations included informed consent in participants' preferred languages, confidentiality assurances, and cultural protocol observance (including seeking permission from Rwot Ogenga as cultural authority before commencing fieldwork). Participants chose whether to use real names or pseudonyms; all six masters and three cultural leaders opted for real names, viewing research participation as cultural documentation and knowledge preservation. The study adhered to decolonising research principles (Smith,



2012) by centring indigenous voices, sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation, and committing to community-accessible dissemination in local languages.

Results

Thematic analysis revealed seven interconnected transmission mechanisms constituting Bweyale-Karuma's *Adungu* pedagogical system. Each mechanism is presented with supporting evidence from participant accounts, demonstrating how indigenous pedagogy achieves sophisticated learning outcomes through non-notational, embodied, and contextualised practice.

Graduated Tonal Scaffolding

Masters structure learning through carefully sequenced tonal progressions, beginning with simple two-string patterns and gradually introducing harmonic complexity as learners develop aural discrimination and finger independence. Okello Bosco explained: "You cannot start a child with all seven strings. First, they must hear the conversation between two strings the bass string speaking, the middle string answering. When their fingers know this conversation in their sleep, then we add the third voice. If you give them all seven strings at once, they hear only noise, not music." This scaffolding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, where masters calibrate challenges slightly beyond learners' current capacity, providing support until independent competence emerges. Apprentice Akello Christine described her experience: "For three months, I played only three strings. I thought I would never learn the full instrument. But one day, Master Adong added the fourth string, and suddenly I understood each string is a person in the conversation, and I was learning to hear all the persons speaking together. Now when I play all seven strings, I still hear them as separate voices, not just one sound." The graduated approach builds both technical facility and aural discrimination, ensuring learners develop deep pattern recognition before confronting full instrumental complexity. Masters assess readiness through observation of finger fluency, rhythmic stability, and the learner's ability to maintain melodic lines while other instruments play contrasting patterns, demonstrating that progression is competence-based rather than time-based.

Ensemble Interdependence

Adungu learning occurs primarily in ensemble contexts where multiple instruments, voices, and percussion create interlocking rhythmic and melodic patterns, positioning individual competence as emerging through collective participation rather than isolated practice. Oryema Patrick emphasised: "The *Adungu* does not speak alone. It speaks with the drums, with the voices, with the other *Adungus*. If you learn alone, you learn nothing you must learn your place in the conversation. The drums tell you when to enter, the voices tell you when to be quiet, the other *Adungus* show you the path. This is how our ancestors learned, and this is how we teach." This distributed cognition model (Hutchins, 1995) positions musical knowledge as collectively held rather than individually possessed, with competence defined as the ability to participate appropriately in ensemble contexts rather than demonstrate solo virtuosity. Apprentice Ojok David recounted: "When I play alone, I make many mistakes. But when I play with the ensemble, the drums guide my rhythm, the other *Adungus* show me when to enter, the voices tell me when to be quiet. The music teaches me through the group. Master Oryema says the ensemble is like a family each person has their role, and if one person is missing, the family is incomplete." Ensemble interdependence cultivates



listening skills, rhythmic precision, and social attunement essential for ceremonial performance contexts where *Adungu* functions as communal rather than soloistic expression. Masters deliberately rotate learners through different ensemble roles to develop holistic musical understanding and social flexibility.

Embodied String Memory

Masters emphasise developing kinaesthetic knowledge what participants termed “finger memory” or “hand knowledge” through repetitive physical practice until string patterns become automatic, bypassing conscious cognitive processing. Adong Grace explained: “The fingers must know the strings without the eyes looking, without the mind thinking. When you dance, your feet know the steps the *Adungu* is the same. The hands must dance on the strings. I tell my students, ‘Close your eyes and let your fingers remember.’ At first they are afraid, but then they discover their fingers are wiser than their minds.” This embodied cognition (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) prioritises bodily knowledge over cognitive abstraction, recognising that musical competence resides in the body’s capacity for skilled, pre-reflective action. Apprentice Acen Mercy described the process: “At first, my fingers were stupid they did not know where to go. But Master Adong would take my hands and place them on the strings, again and again, until my fingers remembered. She would say, ‘Do not think, just feel.’ Now when I hear the song in my mind, my fingers move by themselves. Sometimes I am surprised by what my hands do they know things I did not know I learned.” The emphasis on embodied memory challenges Western music education’s privileging of notation over physical knowledge, demonstrating that sophisticated musical competence can develop through non-literate transmission. Masters use physical guidance, gestural demonstration, and repetitive practice in short, focused sessions to build muscle memory and haptic familiarity with string tensions and tonal relationships.

Improvisation Within Communal Constraints

While *Adungu* performance involves improvisation and individual creative expression, masters teach within culturally defined boundaries that preserve melodic identity and ceremonial appropriateness, balancing innovation with tradition. Ocen Robert clarified: “You can decorate the song, but you cannot change the song. The song belongs to the ancestors, to the community. Your decoration must honour the song, not destroy it. If you change the melody too much, the ancestors will not recognise their song, and the song loses its power. But if you play the same way every time, the song becomes dead. So we teach the skeleton the bones that must always be there and then we teach how to add flesh.” This balance between individual creativity and communal tradition reflects what Pressing (1988) terms “referent-guided improvisation,” where performers elaborate on shared melodic frameworks while maintaining structural coherence. Apprentice Okello James explained: “Master Ocen teaches me the skeleton of the song the bones that must always be there. Then he shows me how to add flesh, how to make the song beautiful. But if I add too much flesh, he stops me and says, ‘That is not our song anymore.’ I am learning where the boundaries are how much I can change before I break the song.” This pedagogical approach cultivates both technical virtuosity and cultural responsibility, ensuring innovation remains rooted in tradition and that individual expression serves communal rather than egocentric ends. Masters model appropriate improvisation during performances, then invite learners to attempt variations, providing immediate feedback on whether elaborations honour or violate the song’s essential character.



Master-Apprentice Mentorship

Learning relationships extend beyond technical instruction to encompass moral guidance, cultural knowledge transmission, and social integration, positioning music education as inseparable from character formation and community membership. Amony Christine described her role: “When I teach a child the *Adungu*, I am not only teaching music. I am teaching respect for elders, patience, humility, the history of our people. The *Adungu* carries all of this. If a child is impatient, I teach them to wait. If a child is proud, I teach them to listen. The music is the path, but the destination is becoming a good person who serves the community.” This holistic mentorship aligns with Nzewi’s (2003) observation that African music education is inseparable from character formation, with musical competence understood as one dimension of broader social and moral development. Apprentice Adong Sarah reflected: “Master Amony is like my second mother. She teaches me songs, but she also teaches me how to behave, how to speak to elders, how to carry myself. When I play the *Adungu*, I represent her teaching if I play badly or behave badly, I shame her name. So I must be careful not only with my fingers but with my whole life.” The mentorship model creates accountability structures and intergenerational bonds that sustain knowledge transmission across decades, embedding musical learning within networks of reciprocal obligation and affective attachment. Masters often support apprentices materially, reinforcing that the relationship transcends transactional skill transfer to constitute fictive kinship.

Contextual Performance Immersion

Apprentices learn through participation in authentic ceremonial contexts weddings, funerals, harvest celebrations, cultural festivals where performance carries social and spiritual significance, ensuring musical competence develops alongside cultural competence and contextual appropriateness. Ojok Samuel explained: “You cannot learn the *Adungu* in a classroom. You must learn it where it lives at the funeral, at the wedding, at the chief’s installation. Each context has its own songs, its own meanings. The *Adungu* speaks differently in each place. At a funeral, the *Adungu* cries with the mourners. At a wedding, the *Adungu* dances with the bride. If you learn only in a classroom, you learn the notes but not the meaning.” This situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) ensures musical competence develops alongside cultural competence, with learners internalising not only technical skills but also the social functions, emotional registers, and spiritual dimensions of *Adungu* performance. Apprentice Okot Francis recounted: “The first time Master Ojok brought me to play at a funeral, I was terrified. But he said, ‘You are ready. The ancestors will guide your fingers.’ And truly, playing for the mourners, I understood the songs in a new way I felt their grief, and my *Adungu* spoke their grief. The classroom cannot teach this. You must be there, in the moment, with the people.” Contextual immersion transforms technical skills into culturally meaningful expression, embodying Blacking’s (1973) principle that music is humanly organised sound serving social functions. Masters gradually increase apprentices’ performance responsibilities, beginning with silent observation, progressing to playing supporting roles in low-stakes contexts, and culminating in lead roles at significant ceremonies, ensuring learners develop confidence and contextual sensitivity through legitimate peripheral participation.

Cultural Narrative Integration

Masters embed musical instruction within oral histories, proverbs, and cosmological narratives that situate *Adungu* knowledge within broader cultural worldviews, ensuring



musical learning simultaneously transmits historical consciousness and cultural values. Rwot Ogenga, a cultural leader, explained: “Every *Adungu* song carries a story the story of our ancestors, our migrations, our struggles, our victories. When we teach the songs, we teach the stories. The music and the history are one. If you know only the melody but not the story, you have learned nothing. The story gives the melody its power, and the melody keeps the story alive.” This narrative pedagogy (Bruner, 1991) creates meaning frameworks that enhance memory and cultural identity, positioning music as a mnemonic device for historical knowledge and a vehicle for intergenerational cultural transmission. Apprentice Akello Grace described: “When Master Okello teaches a song, he first tells the story who composed it, why they composed it, what it means for our people. Then when I play the song, I am not just making sounds I am telling the story with my fingers. The story helps me remember the melody, and the melody helps me remember the story. They are like two threads woven together.” Narrative integration ensures musical knowledge transmission simultaneously transmits historical consciousness and cultural values, resisting the fragmentation of knowledge characteristic of Western disciplinary boundaries. Masters use storytelling to explain technical choices, linking musical structure to cultural meaning and ensuring learners understand music as embedded in social life rather than as autonomous aesthetic practice.

Discussion

The seven transmission mechanisms identified constitute a sophisticated distributed pedagogical system that challenges deficit narratives about oral, non-notational music education. Far from representing primitive or unsystematic knowledge transfer, *Adungu* pedagogy embodies principles increasingly recognised in contemporary learning sciences: scaffolded progression, distributed cognition, embodied learning, situated practice, and holistic development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). These findings align with broader scholarship on African music pedagogy (Nzewi, 2003, 2019; Blacking, 1973) while offering instrument-specific insights previously absent from literature. The mechanisms operate synergistically rather than sequentially, with graduated scaffolding occurring within ensemble contexts, embodied memory developing through contextual immersion, and narrative integration reinforcing improvisation boundaries.

The study’s decolonial implications are substantial. By documenting indigenous pedagogical sophistication, the research counters epistemic violence that positions Western notation-based methods as superior to oral transmission (Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Wa’Thiong’o, 1986). Master players’ expertise developed through decades of practice and refined across generations constitutes legitimate pedagogical knowledge deserving recognition in formal education policy. The fact that Bweyale-Karuma masters are already invited into schools as resource persons demonstrates practical recognition of their expertise, yet this recognition remains informal and precarious, dependent on individual teachers’ initiative rather than systemic curriculum integration. Human and Akuno’s (2024) call for indigenising music education requires structural transformation: formal credentialing for master teachers, curriculum space for extended contextual learning, and assessment methods valuing embodied competence over written knowledge. Isabirye’s (2022) argument for reclaiming indigenous epistemes demands that curriculum reform centre rather than supplement indigenous pedagogies, recognising them as primary knowledge systems rather than cultural enrichment.



For Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum reform, *Adungu* pedagogy offers a working model of the learner-centred, experiential, contextualised approaches CBC envisions but struggles to implement (Namatende-Sakwa et al., 2025). The graduated scaffolding, ensemble interdependence, and contextual immersion documented here achieve precisely the deep competence CBC seeks to cultivate. Rather than importing pedagogical models from Western contexts, curriculum developers could learn from indigenous systems already producing desired outcomes. This requires epistemic humility recognising that communities without formal schooling have nonetheless developed sophisticated educational systems refined across centuries. Makwa's (2025) advocacy for harnessing community musicians as living archives for sustainable teaching and learning gains empirical support from this study's documentation of master players' pedagogical expertise. However, integration must avoid extractive appropriation that decontextualises indigenous knowledge; as Ekadu-Ereu (2019) demonstrates with Karimojong education, formal curricula often fragment holistic indigenous learning into discrete subjects, destroying the very coherence that makes indigenous pedagogy effective.

The study also illuminates tensions between indigenous and formal education systems. Masters emphasised holistic development character formation, cultural knowledge, social responsibility alongside musical skill, reflecting African educational philosophies where learning serves communal rather than individualistic ends (Nzewi, 2003). Formal schooling's fragmentation of knowledge into discrete subjects and its emphasis on individual achievement over collective participation create pedagogical misalignments that may explain why indigenous instruments remain marginalised in schools despite policy rhetoric supporting cultural education. Isabirye's (2021a) question can indigenous music learning processes inform contemporary schooling? gains urgency when we recognise that formal education systematically undermines the very conditions (extended mentorship, contextual immersion, ensemble interdependence) that make indigenous pedagogy effective. Genuine curriculum reform requires not merely adding indigenous content to existing structures but transforming structures to accommodate indigenous pedagogical logics.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. The study's focus on one community, while enabling deep idiographic analysis, limits generalisability to other *Adungu*-playing communities or other Ugandan instruments. Comparative research across Bweyale-Karuma, Isabirye's (2024) Awach site, and other *Adungu* centres could identify regional variations and pan-ethnic principles. The six-month fieldwork period, though intensive, captured only one seasonal cycle; longer engagement might reveal seasonal variations in pedagogical practice or lifecycle-specific transmission mechanisms. The researcher's positionality as a Ugandan music educator facilitated cultural access but may have influenced participants' accounts, particularly regarding formal education critiques; participants may have emphasised indigenous pedagogy's strengths to validate their knowledge systems in the face of formal education's marginalisation. Finally, the study documented transmission mechanisms but did not experimentally test their effectiveness compared to alternative pedagogical approaches a direction for future research, though such experimental designs risk imposing Western epistemological assumptions about measurable outcomes onto indigenous knowledge systems that value holistic, long-term development over quantifiable short-term gains.



Conclusion

This phenomenological study reveals that *Adungu* knowledge transmission in Bweyale-Karuma operates through seven interconnected mechanisms graduated tonal scaffolding, ensemble interdependence, embodied string memory, improvisation within communal constraints, master-apprentice mentorship, contextual performance immersion, and cultural narrative integration constituting a sophisticated pedagogical system refined across generations. These findings challenge deficit assumptions about oral music education and demonstrate that indigenous pedagogies embody principles aligned with contemporary learning sciences while remaining rooted in culturally specific epistemologies. The mechanisms operate synergistically, creating a holistic learning environment where technical skill, cultural knowledge, moral development, and social integration occur simultaneously rather than sequentially.

For music education policy, the study argues for systemic recognition of indigenous pedagogical expertise. Rather than positioning master players as supplementary “resource persons,” curriculum frameworks should centre indigenous knowledge systems as primary pedagogical models, particularly for cultural education domains. This requires institutional changes: formal recognition and compensation for master teachers equivalent to certified educators, curriculum space for extended contextual learning beyond fragmented lesson periods, assessment methods valuing embodied competence and contextual appropriateness over written examinations, and teacher education programs that prepare educators to facilitate rather than replace indigenous transmission. Schools purchasing *Adungu* instruments from Bweyale-Karuma should simultaneously establish formal partnerships with master players, creating sustained mentorship relationships rather than one-off workshops.

For decolonial education theory, the study contributes empirical documentation of epistemic alternatives to Western-centric pedagogies. The holistic, communal, embodied, and contextualised learning documented here represents not a deficit to be remedied through schooling but a sophisticated system offering insights for reimagining education beyond colonial inheritances. Wa Thiong’o’s (1986) call to decolonise the mind gains practical application when we recognise that indigenous pedagogies already embody the learner-centred, experiential, and culturally grounded approaches that progressive education theorists advocate. The challenge is not to modernise indigenous pedagogy but to decolonise formal education by learning from indigenous systems.

Future research should examine *Adungu* pedagogy in other communities to identify regional variations and shared principles, comparing Bweyale-Karuma’s multi-ethnic context with more ethnically homogeneous sites to understand how cultural diversity shapes transmission. Longitudinal studies tracking apprentices’ development over multiple years could reveal how competence evolves across learning stages and how early pedagogical experiences shape long-term musical identity. Comparative research across Ugandan instruments (*Adungu*, *Endingidi*, *Entenga*, *Amadinda*) could identify pan-ethnic pedagogical principles while respecting instrument-specific and community-specific practices. Investigations of how master players navigate tensions between indigenous and formal education systems when teaching in schools could inform integration strategies that preserve rather than compromise indigenous pedagogical integrity. Studies exploring learner outcomes musical competence, cultural identity, social integration, moral development produced by indigenous versus formal pedagogical approaches could provide evidence for policy advocacy, though such research must resist reducing indigenous pedagogy’s holistic aims to measurable



variables. Finally, participatory action research engaging masters, apprentices, teachers, and curriculum developers in co-designing integration models could generate culturally grounded, practically feasible pathways for centring indigenous pedagogy in formal education.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that in the semi-arid lowlands of Bweyale-Karuma, where the *Adungu*'s resonant strings carry ancestral voices into contemporary contexts, indigenous communities have developed pedagogical systems of remarkable sophistication systems that formal education would do well to learn from rather than replace. The challenge facing Uganda's education system is not how to modernise indigenous knowledge transmission but how to decolonise formal schooling by recognising, respecting, and centring the pedagogical wisdom that communities like Bweyale-Karuma have sustained across generations.

Conflict of interests

No conflict of interest.

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