

Intergenerational Transmission of Feminist Indigenous Knowledge in Nigeria: A Study of Cultural Continuity and Change

Titilope Rachael Opesemowo

Centre for Education Rights and Transformation, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

*Corresponding Author

Email: topesemowo@uj.ac.za

Abstract

The intergenerational transmission of Feminist Indigenous Knowledge in Nigeria represents a critical area of study that explores the mechanisms through which traditional feminist values, practices, and wisdom are passed down through generations, ensuring continuity while adapting to societal changes. The study provides insight into feminist indigenous knowledge, explores the historical continuity of feminist indigenous knowledge, the role of women as custodians and transmitters of feminist indigenous knowledge in Nigeria, and critical historical events among feminists in Nigeria that have influenced cultural change and continuity. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Five Nigerian Indigenous women from Osun State purposively participated in this study. Osun State is rich in Yoruba cultural traditions, especially about feminist indigenous knowledge. The semi-structured interview guide was used to generate the data, which was analyzed thematically. The study concluded that feminist indigenous knowledge remains vital in Nigeria's cultural and social fabric. Still, its future transmission faces significant challenges, requiring deliberate efforts to sustain its relevance

Keywords: *Feminist Indigenous knowledge, Transmission, Cultural Continuity, Community Resilience, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's various ethnic groups have historically operated within patriarchal structures, yet women have played significant roles as nurturers, instructors, and transmitters of essential knowledge. The contributions of women to the sustenance of the cultural values of the historically patriarchal societies is the main focus of Feminist Indigenous Knowledge (FIK). FIK in Nigeria, according to Aluede and Okakah (2022), embodies the traditional wisdom, practices, and worldviews of Indigenous Nigerian women, reflecting a profound connection to the environment, community, and cultural heritage. This knowledge offers unique insights into gender roles, social justice, and empowerment, challenging colonial logic and settler colonialist ideals (Huuki & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2023). The intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge is necessary for maintaining cultural legacy and building community resilience. Indigenous knowledge models in Nigeria emphasize the importance of understanding multiple variables in illness causation, including spiritual connections in physical illness, while highlighting the significance of good health habits in preventing specific physical ailments (Aluede & Okakah, 2022). Women often play fundamental roles in local economies through farming, trading, and artisanal crafts. They know extensively about local agriculture, medicinal plants, and sustainable environmental practices. Indigenous African women are often the custodians of traditional medicine, using their knowledge of herbs and healing practices to treat illness and maintain health. In African societies, women play crucial roles in rituals and ceremonies such as childbirth, marriage, and funeral rites, and they are pivotal in maintaining cultural links and social unity. At the same time, female elders are often the storytellers, preserving and transmitting history, values, and moral lessons through oral narratives, songs, and dances. Colonial influences and modernization disrupted the traditional systems and the roles of women in the cultural affairs of Nigerian society, with colonial policies undermining women's roles and Western education marginalizing Indigenous knowledge (Abimbola et al., 2023). Western interpretations of African societies erased or misrepresented women's roles in

Indigenous practices, particularly in leadership, spirituality, and labor. Based on the research of Bakare-Yusuf (2003), the introduction of European economic systems prioritized male labor, relegating women to informal or undervalued roles despite their central role in pre-colonial economies. The imposition of Western ideologies devalued indigenous practices, including non-gendered systems of social organization, reducing African women's autonomy and agency. Despite these challenges, Nigerian women have continued to preserve and transmit their cultural heritage, showcasing resilience in the face of external pressures and societal changes. FIK is indispensable in Nigerian culture, influencing various aspects of life from agriculture and healthcare to environmental conservation and social organization. Preserving these traditions through the study of knowledge transmission is vital to prevent their loss to globalization (Hangshing, 2019). FIK in Nigeria encompasses various beliefs and cultural norms maintained and transmitted by women in multiple regions. Examples of FIK in Nigeria include:

Farming Methods: Women in Southern Nigeria, especially in the Yoruba and Igbo communities, use crop rotation intercropping, and these strategies produce organic fertilizing among other traditional farming methods and sustainable agricultural outputs (Olumba & Olumba, 2024; Onoh et al., 2023). The cultivation and processing of cassava are well versed in by women in this area; they make a variety of products out of cassava, including tapioca, fufu, and garri, which are significant meals in the area. Their knowledge includes using traditional methods for peeling, fermenting, and drying cassava to ensure its edibility. Igbo women have specialized knowledge in planting, harvesting, and storing yams and processing them into food products like yam flour and pottage. According to (Aderinoye-Abdulwahab et al., (2024), women in Northern Nigeria invented and preserved traditional dry land farming methods tailored to the region's arid climate. Drought-resistant crops and soil-saving techniques like zai pits (small planting pits that conserve water) are some of them. Women are essential in selecting and preserving seeds to maintain the genetic diversity and resilience of crops like millet, sorghum, and groundnuts.

Medical Care and Herbal Remedies: Women have much experience with labour and aftercare, especially older women in Hausa culture, referred to as 'Ungozoma'. They use herbal remedies and traditional methods to ensure safe deliveries and the well-being of mothers and infants. This includes utilizing herbs like neem (*Azadirachta indica*), moringa (*Moringa oleifera*), and baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) to cure common ailments like malaria, gastrointestinal problems, and skin problems (Sumankuuro et al., 2022). According to Chijindu et al. (2020), women from Southern Nigeria treat a variety of illnesses, including respiratory disorders, digestive issues, and malaria, using scent leaf (*Ocimum gratissimum*) and bitter leaf (*Vernonia amygdalina*), Uziza (*Piper guineense*), and ogbono (*Iryngia gabonensis*). Traditional birth attendants in these areas help in childbirth and offer postpartum care using their indigenous expertise using herbal baths and massages (Aworinde et al., 2020).

Arts and Crafts: As indicated by Benjamin, (2024), Northern Nigerian women are renowned for their prowess in weaving and dyeing, particularly in the Kano and Katsina regions. Generation after generation produces the well-known "adire" or indigo-dyed fabrics and elaborate embroidery. Women engage in pottery-making using methods that have been conserved for centuries. These crafts have valuable functions in daily life and are beautiful creations. Yoruba women are well known for their prowess in creating "adire", a customary resist-dyed fabric (Igbekere & Aihie, 2023). The Akwete cloth, a traditional hand-woven textile known for its intricate designs and used in garments and ceremonial attire, is produced by women in Akwete, Abia State, and handcrafted with natural dyes and elaborate patterns (Onwuakpa & Ononeme, 2016). Igbo women are also talented in jewelry making and beadwork. Not only are these crafts cultural icons, but they are also significant sources of revenue and indicators of social status.

Social and Community Leadership: In many Igbo communities, women hold significant leadership roles in market organization and trade. The “Omu”, or market queen, is a position of authority overseeing market activities, they oversee market operations and represent women’s interests (Osunyikanmi, 2017). Organizations like the Umuada (Daughters of the Land) influence community decision-making, they engage in conflict resolution and community development, emphasizing women’s empowerment (Obasi & Nnamani, 2015). According to Osunyikanmi, (2017), women’s associations like the Yoruba “Iyaloja” are essential to organizing markets and facilitate decision-making processes for community welfare. These organizations provide women a forum to engage in leadership and impact socio-economic policy.

Learning and Skill Development: Women pass down moral lessons, cultural values, and histories through storytelling, and they also ensure that subsequent generations continue to learn traditional skills like cooking, weaving, and basketry (Chuku, 1999).

Studying the transmission of FIK confirms women’s contributions, strengthens intergenerational bonds, and fosters a sense of identity and belonging within communities, which is crucial for maintaining cultural practices and addressing contemporary environmental challenges. Most studies on Indigenous knowledge in Nigeria concentrate broadly on ethnic or regional groups. There has been little research specifically focusing on women’s knowledge systems or feminist approaches within distinct indigenous communities such as Osun State, where this knowledge is actively preserved or evolving, hence the study. This study investigated the mechanisms through which feminist Indigenous knowledge is transmitted across generations in Nigeria, explored the impact of socio-cultural changes on the continuity and transmission of feminist indigenous knowledge, and assessed the implications of these changes for cultural identity and community resilience.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design, rooted in feminist epistemology and decolonial inquiry, to examine the dynamics of intergenerational transmission of feminist indigenous knowledge among women in Osun State, Nigeria. The use of focus group discussions (FGDs) enabled a participatory and dialogic process through women’s voices, experiences, and cultural practices could be meaningfully engaged and interpreted. The research focused on indigenous women embedded within communities renowned for preserving traditional knowledge systems through rituals, festivals, healing practices and matriarchal leadership. These settings provided a culturally rich environment to explore how knowledge is transferred across generations. The population consisted of women across Osun State, with purposive sampling targeting those involved in indigenous knowledge practices. A stratified purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure generational diversity. The final sample included five participants: three elders aged 50 and above, identifies as custodians of traditional feminist knowledge, and two younger women aged 20-49, recognized as active learners within the knowledge transmission process. To acquire information on the intergenerational transmission of FIK, cultural continuity, and change in their community, the women carefully explored the three study themes through their discussions. The questions in the guide focused on the mechanisms by which feminist indigenous knowledge is passed down through generations within their society, the impacts of socio-cultural shifts on its evolution and survival, and the implications of their socio-cultural shifts on cultural identity and community resilience. An in-depth interview and focus group discussions were used to gather data. The participants were consulted to schedule sessions at a convenient time. The participants gathered for an open discussion in a conducive, private atmosphere. The focus group discussions with guided questions lasted for ninety minutes with 5-minute breaks every 25 minutes, after a fifteen-minute

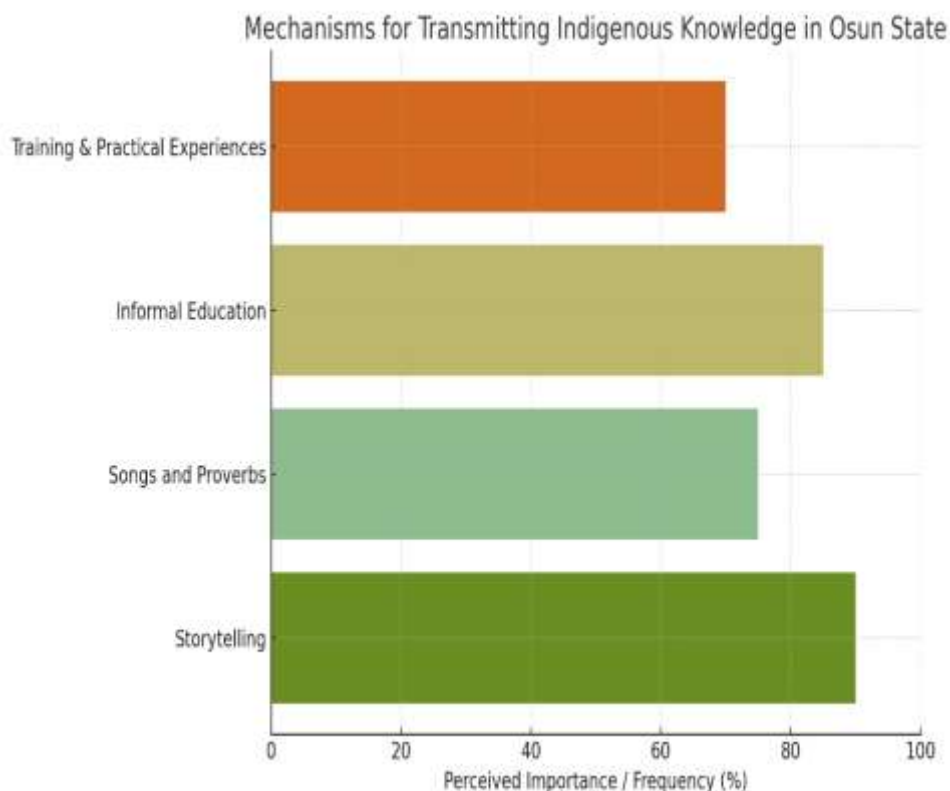
introduction that included a welcome, an explanation of the study's goal, and ground rules. The debate concluded with a fifteen-minute summary of the main ideas raised during the discussion, an inquiry about any more ideas, and an expression of gratitude for everyone's time and participation. Interviews and discussions were captured using audio recorders, and field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and spontaneous insights. The study involves working with indigenous communities, understanding cultural practices, and handling the knowledge that has deep significance to these communities, which is essential; hence, the researcher sought permission and obtained approval from the community authorities, before data was collected. The full knowledge and consent of the participants were also obtained. Culturally appropriate language and formats were used to explain the study's purpose, procedures, and potential outcomes to the participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were not coerced into contributing due to power dynamics or expectations from community leaders. A guarantee of participant anonymity was given top priority.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of the results followed the order in which the research questions posed in the study were developed. Furthermore, themes were employed in the findings to reveal the participants' perspectives, experiences, and ideas regarding the intergenerational transmission of FIK and its cultural continuity and change.

Mechanisms through which feminist indigenous knowledge is transmitted across generations in Osun State.

The mechanisms through which feminist indigenous knowledge is transmitted in Osun state based on the findings from the participants include storytelling, songs and proverbs, training and practical experiences, and informal education.



Participant Five said, *“Ooh, you just reminded me of my late mother. May the Lord rest her soul. She was a custodian of cultural knowledge learned from her mother. She gathers us in her local*

kitchen to share stories. These story-selling sessions often happen in the evening when she returns from the market. The interactive nature of her oral storytelling allows us to engage with narratives by asking questions or providing reflections, reinforcing the lessons being shared..... ” Oral storytelling preserves cultural identity by maintaining the stories of powerful women, goddesses, and historical figures, keeping the heritage of female leadership. Stories of Osun, Oya, and Moremi's oral storytelling reinforce women's roles as leaders, protectors, and decision-makers within the community. One of the participants noted that most of the stories of feminist deities and historical figures she knew were encapsulated in songs and proverbs. These short, memorable sayings and chants carry moral lessons and celebrate the virtues of women like Yemoja, Oya, and Osun. Proverbs allow these stories to be easily remembered and passed down in everyday conversations. A traditional healer specialized in herbal medicine, midwifery, and other forms of indigenous healthcare stated that her knowledge of medicinal plants and healing practices was passed down through her mother through observation and practical experiences. Also, skills like beading, weaving, and ceramics are taught through training. Participant Four testified that FIK can be transmitted through training and practical experiences. *FIK is also transmitted through informal education, especially from mothers to daughters. Participant Two said that I learned cooking and home management through familiarity and by observing my mother while doing it.* Through shared experience and observation, young women know, and this informal education aids in preserving traditional customs and modifying them for modern environments. Feminist Indigenous knowledge in Osun State, Nigeria, is passed down through various cultural and social mechanisms that ensure the continuity of wisdom and practices embedded in the community's traditions.

Impact of socio-cultural changes on the continuity of transmission of FIK

Based on the findings, Westernization, Urbanization, Formal education, and technological advancement impacted the continuity of transmission of feminist indigenous knowledge positively and negatively.

Participant Four: *“Olaju ti ba gbogbo e je meaning Westernization has spoiled everything. New cultural norms, beliefs, and practices brought forth by globalization and Westernization frequently clash with traditional indigenous knowledge.....”*. Some feminist indigenous knowledge has been gradually losing ground, especially those that are perceived as “backward” or “unscientific” by Western standards. Indigenous knowledge may become less relevant and less likely to be transmitted if industrial farming or modern medicine replaces indigenous agricultural methods or healing practices. In Addition to what she said, Western values frequently advance gender equality in ways that either strengthen or weaken feminist indigenous knowledge. Although more women have access to economic and educational possibilities, this can also have the unintended consequence of diminishing the value of activities that women have historically performed, such as herbalism or midwifery, which are vital parts of feminist indigenous knowledge systems. Participant Five: *“I have three children who are not currently with me, even though they are not married. Younger generations are moving from rural to urban regions for more excellent economic prospects.....”* The traditional pathways through which female indigenous knowledge is transmitted, such as daily interactions with elders, engagement in communal activities, and involvement in rites and ceremonies, are disrupted by their physical separation from their communities. However, they are exposed to a wide range of cultural influences in urban environments, which can create hybrid knowledge systems that combine native customs with contemporary ones. Feminist Indigenous knowledge may change and adapt due to this, but it may also lose some of its unique qualities and continuity. Participant Two: *It is good to learn, but Nigeria's formal education system, which is mainly based on Western curricula, sometimes disregards or minimizes indigenous knowledge, including feminist viewpoints.* The customary wisdom passed down by our ancestors may be lost on younger generations when they pursue formal education. Secularism and the focus on scientific rationality

have the potential to marginalize further the holistic and spiritual components of feminist indigenous knowledge. On the positive side, new technologies have made it possible to record and preserve feminist indigenous knowledge with greater ease. Participant Three added that to ensure that ancient practices, traditions, and rituals continue even in the face of socio-cultural shifts, digital archives, social media platforms, and online communities are used to document them.

Implication of socio-cultural changes in continuity and transmission of FIK on cultural identity and community resilience.

From the findings, the socio-cultural changes impacting feminist indigenous knowledge have profound implications for cultural identity and community resilience. Although these changes bring difficulties, they offer chances for cultural practices to be preserved, modified, and revitalized.

Participant One: *Communities may see a deterioration of their cultural identity as feminist indigenous knowledge systems are eroded by Urbanization, globalization, and Western influences.* A group may feel less connected to its ancestral roots and less like it belongs if its traditional customs, rituals, and knowledge are lost. These elements determine the community's distinctiveness. *Participant Two: Younger generations may experience identity crises, especially if they have moved to cities or attended schools that follow Western norms.* They could become perplexed about their cultural identity and place in their community due to being torn between conventional ideals and contemporary influences. Integrating modern influences with traditional practices leads to hybrid cultural identities. While it can be seen as a positive adaptation to changing circumstances, it has also diluted distinct cultural elements, making it harder for empowerment and unity within the community. *Participant Four added that by integrating new technology and ideas with traditional practices, communities successfully adapt feminist indigenous knowledge to modern circumstances and exhibit resilience by offering fresh approaches to communities to maintain a clear and cohesive cultural identity.* On the other hand, the transmission of FIK has led to a stronger and more inclusive cultural identity. Communities now promote a more gender-equitable view of their past and challenge patriarchal interpretations of their culture by reviving and recreating feminist narratives with indigenous knowledge systems.

Resilience

Participant Five: *Social structures essential for a community's resilience have been upset by socio-cultural changes like migration and Urbanization. It has led to the deterioration of shared knowledge and communal links, leading to social fragmentation, which makes it more difficult for communities to respond to problems as a group.* The continued transmission of FIK has strengthened community resilience by empowering women as custodians of cultural practices and social values. Through sharing ancestral knowledge and wisdom, women can guide future generations in preserving their heritage and identity. Intergenerational transmission of FIK ensures that traditional practices and values are upheld and passed down, further enhancing the community's resilience in facing challenges and hardships. In this way, women play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity and fostering a sense of current problems while preserving a link to cultural origins. For example, the Osun-Osogbo sacred grove, a critical cultural religious site, was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. The recognition has helped protect and promote the grove as a Yoruba spirituality and culture centre. The annual festival celebrates the Osun goddess and attracts visitors worldwide, reinforcing the significance of Yoruba religious traditions and women's roles as priestesses and spiritual leaders. The festival is being watched worldwide through social media, which was not so in the past. Indigenous Feminist knowledge's future will hinge on communities' capacity to manage these adjustments, preserve their cultural identities, and resilience in constant change. Communities may ensure that

their cultural heritage remains a vital and dynamic force for future generations by embracing continuity and innovation.

This study explored the intergenerational transmission of feminist indigenous knowledge and its continuity and change. Three themes were generated for the study. The first theme was titled ‘mechanisms’. It was discovered that a significant portion of the participants disclosed that storytelling is one of the ways to transmit feminist indigenous knowledge across generations. This corroborates Hausknecht et al. (2021) findings that storytelling is a foundational practice in indigenous cultures, where elders share knowledge through narratives encapsulating history, values, and teachings. Indigenous feminisms emphasize the importance of intergenerational dialogue, where stories reflect the unique experiences of indigenous women, addressing issues of sexism and cultural resilience (Anderson, 2020). Digital storytelling initiatives have emerged, allowing Aboriginal youth to create and share their stories, thus reinforcing their cultural identity and connection to traditional knowledge (Edmonds et al., 2022). Storytelling is a common way for women to transmit knowledge. Through storytelling, women in various communities gather to recount tales of their ancestor’s bravery and emphasize the significance of respecting their environment, fostering a deep connection to nature and heritage. Storytelling is vital for transmitting feminist indigenous knowledge across generations, fostering cultural continuity and identity. Storytelling is essential for transmitting feminist indigenous knowledge across generations, fostering cultural continuity and identity. This method preserves traditional narratives and empowers younger generations to engage in heritage actively.

Participants reported that feminist indigenous knowledge in Nigeria, particularly in herbal medicine and midwifery, is effectively transmitted through training and practical experiences, as evidenced by the roles of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) and female producers. TBAs are pivotal in managing pregnancy complications among indigenous women and offer to employ both physical and metaphysical strategies based on their training and experiences (Arukwe et al., 2024). Also, Traditional skills like beading, weaving, and ceramics are taught through training. Younger women gain knowledge by assisting more seasoned craft people and practicing and observing as they go. Through practical experience, arming techniques and information regarding sustainable practices, soil conservation, and crop management are passed along. Additionally, feminist indigenous knowledge is transmitted through familial networks, particularly from mothers to daughters. This transmission encompasses essential skills such as cooking, childcare, and home management, and this corroborated the findings of Gareau (2023) that mothers play a crucial role in teaching daughters about practices, ensuring that cultural values are maintained across generations.

A significant concern of the participants was forces such as globalization, Urbanization, education, and technology, which affected how feminist indigenous knowledge was preserved, adapted, and transmitted across generations. These changes have led to both the erosion and revitalization of feminist indigenous knowledge, depending on the context and the community's responses. The shift to urban settings often results in a disconnection from traditional practices, diminishing the transmission of indigenous knowledge (Gareau, 2023). Educational reforms incorporating Indigenous epistemologies have legitimized previously marginalized knowledge, fostering a resurgence of feminist indigenous practices (Park, 2022). Programs that integrate indigenous perspectives into nursing and other fields exemplify how education can revitalize and adapt indigenous knowledge for contemporary contexts (Moore, 2023). While these forces can threaten indigenous knowledge, they also present opportunities for revitalization through community resilience and adaptive practices. The challenge lies in balancing modern influences with the preservation of traditional wisdom.

Participants reported that the erosion of feminist indigenous knowledge systems due to Urbanization, globalization, and Western influences significantly impacts community cultural identity. This confirms the findings of Suzack et al. (2011), who unveiled that urbanization often

leads to the dilution of traditional practices as individuals migrate to cities, resulting in a fragmented cultural identity. The conventional knowledge marginalization systems threaten the sustainability of cultural practices that have historically defined communities (Nijar, 2013). Conversely, some argue that integrating diverse influences can lead to a dynamic cultural evolution, allowing communities to adapt and thrive in a changing world. However, this perspective often overlooks the profound loss of unique cultural identities accompanying such changes.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the enduring importance of feminist indigenous knowledge systems in Nigeria, particularly in regions like Osun State. These systems, embedded in ceremonies, oral traditions, and community practices have long been preserved by women across generations. However, factors such as urbanization, globalization, and Western influence are disrupting the traditional transmission processes, leading to the dilution of these cultural assets. Despite these challenges, many communities continue to adapt and uphold their practices, with younger generations beginning to interpret feminist indigenous values in response to modern social realities. The role of women remains pivotal in ensuring cultural continuity and resilience. The study concludes that while feminist indigenous knowledge remains a vital part of Nigeria's cultural identity, its continued relevance and survival depend on intentional efforts to bridge generational divides, promote intergenerational dialogue, and support locally driven strategies that sustain and revitalize these traditions in evolving contexts.

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