

REIMAGINING EKITI INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN THE 21ST CENTURY THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This study demonstrates that the indigenous knowledge systems of pre-colonial Ekiti were complex, adaptive, and deeply embedded in social, political, and ecological contexts. Far from being primitive or obsolete, these systems provided effective frameworks for governance, agriculture, healthcare, education, and conflict resolution. Colonialism and Westernisation marginalised Ekiti indigenous knowledge, weakening its transmission and institutional legitimacy. Nevertheless, the study finds that indigenous knowledge remains highly relevant to contemporary development challenges. Reimagining Ekiti indigenous knowledge through digital media offers a viable pathway for preservation, revitalisation, and integration into modern society. Digital documentation can safeguard endangered knowledge, enhance cultural continuity, and promote intergenerational transmission. Incorporating indigenous knowledge into education, policy, and development planning can contribute to sustainable development and epistemic justice. Ultimately, recognising and revitalising Ekiti indigenous knowledge affirms cultural identity and enriches global knowledge systems in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Decolonisation of knowledge, Digital heritage, Ekiti division, Indigenous knowledge systems, Yoruba history

1. Introduction

Knowledge remains one of the most critical resources for societal survival, continuity, and transformation. Beyond physical and economic resources, the capacity of a society to generate, preserve, and transmit knowledge determines its ability to respond to environmental, political, and cultural change. Indigenous knowledge represents a cumulative body of skills, practices, values, and worldviews developed by communities through prolonged interaction with their natural and social environments. Unlike formal scientific knowledge, indigenous knowledge is often transmitted orally and embedded in cultural practices, rituals, language, and

social institutions. In Africa, such knowledge systems historically underpinned governance, agriculture, medicine, education, environmental management, and conflict resolution (Akinloye 2024a; 2024b).

Ekiti indigenous knowledge systems informed virtually every aspect of pre-colonial life. Agricultural practices were grounded in detailed observation of rainfall patterns, soil conditions, vegetation cycles, and crop compatibility. Indigenous medicine combined extensive herbal knowledge with spiritual diagnosis to provide holistic healthcare. Education occurred through apprenticeship, storytelling, observation, and moral instruction, ensuring the transmission of skills and values across generations. Conflict resolution relied on mediation, consensus-building, and restorative justice rather than coercive punishment, thereby promoting social cohesion and stability.

This study seeks to reimagine Ekiti indigenous knowledge systems within the context of the digital age. Digital media offers unprecedented opportunities for recording oral traditions, archiving cultural practices, and disseminating indigenous knowledge beyond local boundaries. By examining the structure, functions, and contemporary relevance of Ekiti indigenous knowledge, this study contributes to broader debates on decolonising knowledge, promoting epistemic justice, and integrating indigenous epistemologies into modern development frameworks.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with indigenous knowledge has expanded significantly over the past few decades, driven by concerns about cultural identity, sustainability, and postcolonial development. Indigenous knowledge is generally understood as knowledge generated within specific cultural contexts and transmitted across generations through oral traditions and social practices. Purcell (1998) conceptualises indigenous knowledge as historically produced understanding that enables communities to adapt to their biophysical environments over time. This perspective highlights the functional and adaptive nature of indigenous epistemologies.

Materer et al. (2002) emphasise the context-specific character of indigenous knowledge, arguing that it is deeply embedded in local languages, belief systems, and ecological conditions. Because of this embeddedness, indigenous knowledge cannot be easily transferred between societies without losing its meaning and effectiveness. This view challenges universalist assumptions often associated with Western scientific knowledge and underscores the need to value local epistemologies on their own terms (Akinloye, 2025).

UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage represents a major policy intervention aimed at protecting indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. The convention emphasises documentation, transmission, and community participation as key strategies for safeguarding

intangible heritage. Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven, particularly in African contexts where institutional capacity and funding are limited.

Despite the growing body of literature on indigenous knowledge, focused studies on Ekiti indigenous knowledge systems remain scarce. Existing research rarely explores the internal organisation, adaptive capacity, and digital revitalisation of Ekiti IKS. This study addresses this gap by combining historical analysis with contemporary perspectives on digital media and knowledge preservation.

3. Methodology / Materials and Methods

Qualitative research is used to explore a study like this (Olaniyi & Obembe, 2020; Olaniyi et al., 2020). A qualitative historical research methodology is used in the study. Both primary and secondary sources of information were gathered (Adeniran & Tayo-Ladega, 2024; Adeniran et al., 2024; Adeniran & Fakunle, 2025; Adeniran et al., 2020). Oral interviews with traditional leaders, elders, herbalists, and community members were used as primary data, along with field observations of cultural institutions and behaviours. Textbooks, journal articles, archival documents, and electronic publications were examples of secondary sources.

The Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) theoretical framework, which looks at how indigenous knowledge is created, passed down, marginalised, and reinvigorated within shifting sociopolitical contexts, served as a guide for data analysis. This approach is useful for comprehending how indigenous worldviews and colonial epistemologies interact.

4. Discussion

Structure of the Indigenous Knowledge System in Pre-Colonial Ekiti:

The indigenous knowledge system (IKS) of the pre-colonial Ekiti Division was decentralized yet well organized, serving the primary purpose of adaptation, survival, and community stability. Although indigenous knowledge systems differ across societies, they commonly link people closely to their local environment. As noted by Materer et al. (2002), IKS is culture-specific and cannot be transferred to other societies because it is embedded in local language, beliefs, sayings, and worldviews. In Ekiti, indigenous knowledge evolved from scientific observation of nature, oral traditions, and social structures, making it unique to the people and their ancestral land.

Ekiti indigenous knowledge was organized and transmitted through sociocultural activities, rituals, ceremonies, and daily practices. It guided local decision-making, agriculture, food processing, natural resource classification, ethnobotanical knowledge, environmental conservation, and risk management. Governance structures also played a central role in preserving and applying this knowledge. Ekiti towns were administered by the Oba (king), councils of chiefs, and the youth group

known as Oodo ilu. The Oba, regarded as semi-divine, upheld ancestral laws (Ofin ilu) and ensured social order. Knowledge of diplomacy, customary law, and conflict resolution was passed down orally within palace systems through apprenticeship.

Administration followed a hierarchical but inclusive structure beginning with family heads, progressing to chiefs, and culminating in the monarch. Chiefs had clearly defined roles determined by custom and royal authority. Palaces were central institutions in every town, often built on strategic elevated locations that unified different quarters, as seen in Ado-Ekiti and Efon. Kingship was hereditary within ruling houses and could not be purchased; wealth was not a requirement. Cultural festivals further supported governance by promoting unity, fertility, protection, and communal well-being. Overall, Ekiti's indigenous knowledge system integrated governance, culture, environment, and spirituality into a coherent framework sustaining society.

Agricultural Practices

The pre-colonial Ekiti people were predominantly agrarian, with farming forming the backbone of their economy and daily life. Using simple tools such as cutlasses, hoes, and axes, Ekiti farmers produced sufficient food for their families and communities. According to Captain Anderson in 1899, despite the absence of modern technology, Ekiti agriculture was highly productive, with food crops neatly arranged in market displays resembling Egyptian pyramids near royal palaces. Farming activities began early in the morning, around 6 a.m., with men and boys heading to farms, sometimes using *kananko*) a cultural concept of shortening distance to save time. By about 4 p.m., farmers returned home in groups, men carrying firewood and women bearing heavy loads.

Agriculture was essential to Ekiti existence, as vast forest lands were cleared and cultivated with basic implements. Major crops included kolanut, maize, yam, cocoyam, beans, rice, gourds, melon, okro, and various vegetables such as *tete*, *ewe dudu*, and *water leaf*. Mushroom soup (*Oosun*) was particularly common. Other crops included cassava, plantain, cotton, pawpaw, and pepper, while palm oil, palm kernels, and palm wine were also produced. Men handled land preparation and planting, women managed harvesting and marketing, and livestock such as pigs, goats, and dogs were reared. Ekiti agriculture relied on indigenous ecological knowledge, including mixed cropping, shifting cultivation, organic fertilisers, and environmental observation preserved through proverbs and folklore.

Systems of Conventional Medical Practices and Healing:

Babalawo and Onisegun, or healers (Herbalists)specialists in the use of roots, leaves, and barks (*Agbo*)for preparing medicine. They diagnosed through observation, divination, consulting the oracles and patient narration. Babalawo/Ifa priest played a dual role in spiritual causes of sickness and prescribing sacrifices or medicine. Based on their knowledge of spiritual healing, medicinal herbs, and diagnostic methods (such as Ifa divination), they created a scientific and spiritual

framework for preventing and treating illness, they consult oracles for divine protection.

Social Order and Conflict Resolution:

Every town in Ekiti had the same kingship-based form of government both before and after colonisation. The monarchs had all governmental, judicial, military, and cultural authority. They also had a large number of slaves, messengers, and court servants, all of whom contributed to their reputation as being above all others. The Kings controlled every aspect of their subjects' social, political, religious, and cultural lives. They were also ranked or categorised based on population, military, medical, and cultural standards. They even have the ability to kill their subjects. The community's overall health depended on Babalawo and Onisegun, or healers. They developed a scientific and spiritual framework for illness prevention and treatment based on their understanding of medicinal herbs, spiritual healing, and diagnostic techniques (such as Ifa divination). If they have any challenges on weather or any ailment that attacks the community, they believe that is the gods that needs to consult.

Education and Knowledge Transmission:

Indigenous education is rooted in oral tradition, observation, imitation, group activities, apprenticeship, and strong cultural contexts. Knowledge is regarded as sacred and is believed to be constructed by learners themselves through personal experience and cultural engagement (Cameroon & Dodd, 1970). Learning is viewed as a lifelong process that shapes identity, purpose, and commitment to community survival and sustainability. Indigenous education emphasizes holistic, experiential, transformative, and spiritual learning, integrating multiple perspectives. An ideal learning environment includes indigenous language, customs, spirituality, elders, family, community, land, and traditional skills.

Among the pre-colonial Ekiti, education was informal yet systematic, with apprenticeship serving as the primary method of learning. Young boys and girls trained for fixed periods under skilled professionals in various fields such as medicine, music, blacksmithing, weaving, dyeing, carving, beading, trade, hunting, and body adornment or scarification. Some skills were inherited through family traditions, while others were learned through close social interaction and participation in community activities. Parents bore primary responsibility for moral education, particularly the training of girls to prepare them for marriage and productive roles in society.

Learning also occurred through association in social, artistic, and cultural events, including marriage traditions. The Ekiti believed every child was capable of learning. When a child struggled to understand or retain knowledge, a traditional memory-enhancing charm known as Ogun Isoye was used to aid comprehension and recall. Overall, Ekiti indigenous education fostered practical skills, moral values, cultural continuity, and communal responsibility.

Relevance to the 21st Century

By combining with contemporary technologies and influencing policy in sectors like governance and tourism, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) continue to be extremely relevant in Ekiti State, Nigeria, offering sustainable solutions for natural resource management, agriculture, and medicine. While IKS in medicine provides alternative treatments, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) helps conserve plants, and its cultural components can be used to promote sustainable tourism and economic development. However, thorough documentation, community involvement, and policies that acknowledge IKS's importance in accomplishing developmental objectives are necessary for its effective usage.

Environmental Management and Climate Resilience

Indigenous knowledge provides the basis for problem-solving and represents vital component of global knowledge for developmental issues (Adebayo & Adeyemo, 2018). Indigenous knowledge encompasses all areas of human activity, including but not limited to trade and economics, agriculture, the environment, pharmacology, health, and political systems, claims Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019). In African nations, the majority of local populations rely on indigenous farming methods, where traditional farming produces the majority of the food produced (Aboyade & Adeyemo, 2019). Indigenous people use their expertise to predict when it will rain, which helps them decide when to plant and which farming techniques to use to improve soil fertility, yield, harvest, weed control, plant propagation, pest management, and methods for protecting plants, as well as strategies for processing, marketing, preservation, and storage (Adigun, 2014).

Hunting played a significant role in the pre-colonial Ekiti's agrarian way of life. Almost all farmers were also hunters during this time, and the situation is exactly the same now. They used locally manufactured firearms, various kinds of traps, wires, and catapults. In addition to solitary hunting, there were also recurring hunting expeditions consisting of 20 to 30 hunters or more hunting a variety of animals and birds. These hunting-related games were typically divided into age-based groups and exchanged for food or goods.

Traditional agricultural and ecological practices offer insights on sustainable resource management. Taboos against overharvesting, rotational farming, and sacred woods are examples of indigenous conservation practices.

Wellbeing and Health

According to studies on traditional medicine, indigenous people in different communities across Ekiti employ plant extracts to treat and cure a range of illnesses. For instance, according to Adigun (2014), locals can use traditional knowledge to participate in conventional medical procedures such surgery, bone setting, heat therapy, quarantine, incisions, and the use of different herbs to treat various illnesses.

Eighty-five percent (85%) of Nigerians are thought to use traditional medicine for its therapeutic, social, and psychological advantages. It has been shown that plant and animal extracts from various regions of Nigeria can help heal illnesses such as inflammation, sickle cell disease, diabetes, epilepsy, dementia, and malaria (Adeleja, 2006). Indigenous knowledge has become recognized as a key resource in the advancement of global health, as 40% of contemporary medication was developed from plants that were initially utilised locally, according to WHO (2019). Spiritual healing and herbal medicine are still popular around the world. Although they are still poorly studied, several Ekiti medicinal plants have potential pharmaceutical uses. Health outcomes can be enhanced by combining traditional and contemporary therapy, particularly in rural areas.

Education and Indigenous Pedagogy

Teaching indigenous knowledge, practices, and content in official or informal educational systems is the special focus of indigenous education. In response to the loss and degradation of indigenous knowledge brought about by colonialism, globalisation, and modernity, indigenous education methods may be recognised and used (May & Aikman, 2003). In order to ensure their cultural survival, indigenous people should be able to recover and revalue their languages and customs. This will enhance the educational achievement of indigenous students (May & Aikman, 2003).

Alternatives to rote learning are provided by indigenous teaching strategies that involve storytelling, apprenticeship, and community involvement. Cultural literacy and critical thinking can be promoted by reviving these methods.

Governance and Conflict Resolution

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), which are based on community elders and traditional institutions, serve as the foundation for traditional governance and conflict resolution in Ekiti Division. These IKS use techniques like consensus-building and mediation to promote peace and harmony. Its ability to offer long-lasting, culturally relevant frameworks for dispute resolution and governance, tackling societal issues and fostering holistic development through knowledge passed down through the generations, makes it relevant to the twenty-first century.

Traditional African communities have strong linkages to deeply ingrained cultural realities, and elders are crucial in problem-solving, strategy development, and the development of local visions based on knowledge and expertise. They accomplish this by drawing on their prior experiences and knowledge, which are passed down from one generation to the next. Elders' collected knowledge is indigenous wisdom that has been developed within the local community. As a result, elders use their indigenous wisdom to plan for development and address societal issues.

The author chose the Anyuaa people from East Africa, who reside near the border between Ethiopia and South Sudan, via Gambella for the purposes of this paper.

Nyieye and Kwaaro are traditional institutions that apply indigenous wisdom to address social issues, such as conflicts.

In Ekiti Division, traditional administration and conflict resolution are centred on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), which are derived from traditional institutions and community elders. To foster harmony and peace, these IKS employ strategies like mediation and consensus-building. Its relevance to the twenty-first century stems from its capacity to provide durable, culturally appropriate frameworks for governance and dispute resolution, addressing social concerns and promoting holistic development through knowledge passed down through the generations.

The concepts of indigenous knowledge, conflict resolution, the roles of indigenous knowledge in conflict resolution, and Anyuaa's traditional institutions, like the headman (Kwaaro) and the Nobleship (Nyieya), along with their dispute resolution procedures, compensation, and purification, are thus briefly covered in the paper's body. The conversation is backed up by images that make it simple for us to comprehend the pertinent connection between indigenous knowledge and conflict resolution. In order to highlight how African traditional institutions, use their indigenous knowledge to manage disputes, the conclusion is finally advanced. Particularly in rural development approaches, the focus on restorative justice and community consensus may influence alternative dispute resolution procedures and local governance frameworks.

Identity and Cultural Renewal:

In an era of globalisation, preserving and utilizing indigenous knowledge helps to assert identity and dignity. Additionally, it is an essential instrument for decolonizing education and creating African-focused curricula. Because it forms the basis for distinctive customs, practices, and values - such as Ipesi festivals, indigenous governance, traditional medicine, and environmental management - indigenous knowledge is extremely important for 21st-century identity and cultural revitalisation in Ekiti Division. Despite the dangers posed by modernity, this information aids in re-establishing historical consciousness in a globalised society, strengthening communal resilience, and anchoring cultural authenticity.

The survival and revitalisation of Ekiti's identity depend on actively maintaining and advancing these cultural heritage practices through programs like recording, archiving, and intergenerational transmission. The Ipesi festival is still very important for maintaining and advancing Ekiti cultural legacy in the present era. Additionally, it draws tourists and visitors who want to get a firsthand look at traditional Nigerian culture. All things considered, Ekiti State's Ipesi festival is a colourful representation of the diverse cultural fabric of Nigeria, honouring spirituality, community, and the generational continuation of customs.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the indigenous knowledge systems of pre-colonial Ekiti were complex, adaptive, and deeply embedded in social, political, and ecological contexts. Far from being primitive or obsolete, these systems provided effective frameworks for governance, agriculture, healthcare, education, and conflict resolution. Colonialism and Westernisation marginalised Ekiti indigenous knowledge, weakening its transmission and institutional legitimacy. Nevertheless, the study finds that indigenous knowledge remains highly relevant to contemporary development challenges.

Reimagining Ekiti indigenous knowledge through digital media offers a viable pathway for preservation, revitalisation, and integration into modern society. Digital documentation can safeguard endangered knowledge, enhance cultural continuity, and promote intergenerational transmission. Incorporating indigenous knowledge into education, policy, and development planning can contribute to sustainable development and epistemic justice. Ultimately, recognising and revitalising Ekiti indigenous knowledge affirms cultural identity and enriches global knowledge systems in the twenty-first century.

Recommendations

Indigenous knowledge has to be digitally maintained and methodically recorded. Indigenous knowledge and pedagogical approaches should be incorporated into educational curricula. There should be more cooperation between academics and traditional knowledge holders. Indigenous intellectual property rights should be acknowledged and safeguarded by government policies. In order to incorporate and conserve Ekiti indigenous knowledge, academic institutions and traditional knowledge bearers must work together on research projects. Priority should be given to the documentation and digitisation of oral histories and practices.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author Responsibility Statement

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