

Indigenous Knowledge Acquisition and Transfer among Members of the Nupe Royal Music Band in Nigeria

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Abstract

The traditional Nupe royal music has survived till the present day in spite of the splitting of the Kingdom into seven emirates. This royal music has passed through generations through a knowledge transfer and acquisition aspects of which are shrouded in mystery. This study investigated this traditional knowledge transfer system. The case study approach was used, with all 50 members of the traditional royal band of Bida emirate forming the population and sample of the study. Data was collected by structured and translated questionnaire. Findings show that the acquisition of knowledge is largely through traditional instruction methods, learning through observation and imitation of older relatives, while apprenticeship is not popular. The challenges faced by this traditional system of knowledge acquisition and transfer include myths associated with the knowledge, lack of interest and rural to urban drift by the youth, poor remuneration of members and the negative influences of modernisation on indigenous cultures. The use of ICT in repackaging the knowledge is recommended as strategy to preserve the knowledge as well as promote its acquisition among the youth.

Keywords

Indigenous knowledge, Nupe, Royal music band, Knowledge acquisition, Knowledge transfer.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with diverse indigenous cultures, including more than 250 languages and dialects. The country is politically divided into thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Nineteen of the states are located in the northern part of the country, and peopled by several major ethnic groups such as Hausa, Kanuri, Tiv, Igala, and Nupe. The Nupe ethnic group is one of the largest in central (also known as middle-belt) Nigeria, and inhabit the basins of the Niger and Kaduna rivers. The area extends from Leaba, eastward of the Niger to Kataregi to form the northern boundary of Nupe land; and from Tsaragi in Kwara State through Patigi to Lokoja in Kogi State to form the southern boundary. The main occupations of the Nupes are farming and fishing.

According to Ismaila (2002), it is generally accepted that the ancestor of the Nupe was Uban bn Nafi who was said to have migrated from across North-East Africa to Nubia, and then to the present Nupe land in Nigeria. The earliest history of Nupe centres on the figure of Tsoede or Edegi, the cultural hero and mythical founder of the Nupe kingdom. Tsoede or Edegi was the son of the *Attah* (King) of Igala, born of a Nupe woman. According to Ibrahim (1992), Tsoede (a shortened form of "Etsu ye-de") brought various royal insignia such as bronze, canoe, a long trumpet called kakati, drums and special chains for binding prisoners (known today as "dzari Tsoede") to Nupe country. Apart from the royal insignia and some emblems of magic, Tsoede brought certain crafts such as silver smiting, glass making, and canoe building, and these crafts have survived in different wards of Bida till this day. Tsoede died in 1591 at the reputed age of 128 years as recorded in some oral narratives after many years of successful wars against many tribes and kingdoms. He built a capital at Gbara on the river Kaduna to replace Nupeko.

Presently, there are seven emirates of Nupe in Kwara, and Niger states of Nigeria: Agaie, Bida, Lafiagi, Lapai, Patigi, Tsaragi and Tsonga.

As stated by Idrees (1998), the Nupe tradition and custom lay much emphasis on the paraphernalia of the institution of the *Etsu* (King of) Nupe. The richness of this regalia often had some positive or negative impact on the people in the acceptability of an individual as the *Etsu*. These included famous royal drums used known as “kpadondo”. These were exclusively used during special ceremonies and in war fronts in the pre-Fulani era of Nupe kingdom and they are still used today during ceremonies. Other components of the royal Nupe music include trumpet (kakati), talking drums, praise singing and other drums.

Knowledge is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as: (i) expertise, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject; (ii) what is known in a particular field or in total; facts and information; or (iii) awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation. Indigenous knowledge has been variously referred to as cultural knowledge, local knowledge, traditional knowledge, farmer’s or pastoralist’s knowledge, folk knowledge, traditional wisdom, traditional science, people’s knowledge and also a sub-set of traditional knowledge. According to UNESCO, MOST Phase I website and Nuffic-Ciran (2001-2002), Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is “the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It is the basis for local-level decision-making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities.”

Statement of the Problem

Indigenous knowledge and skills abound among the Nupe land, alongside preference and quest by the Nupe youth for both western and Islamic education. As stated by Fafunwa (1995), education, whether ancient or modern, aims at perpetuating the culture of the society. Traditional education attaches considerable importance to this aspect of training (that is, promotion of cultural heritage) but, this is done without elaborate equipment or complicated teaching methods. The child just grows into and

within the cultural heritage of his people and imbibes it. Culture in traditional society is not taught, it is caught. The child observes, imitates and mimics the actions of his elders and siblings. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environment. Unfortunately however, modernisation of societies often witnesses the older people preferring and clinging to the traditional cultural values and practices while the young are more predisposed to accept modern and foreign cultures. The result is that as the older generations die off, the survival of traditional cultural practices and values are threatened by extinction.

The traditional Nupe royal music, as introduced by Tsoede in the 15th century, has survived till the present day, in spite of the splitting of the kingdom into seven emirates and the influences of modernisation. The old royal musical insignia survives, especially in Bida and Patigi emirates. This royal music has passed through generations through a knowledge transfer system that appears now threatened to extinction by the influences of Western education and music and urban drift of the rural youth who would be expected to acquire the knowledge and skill in the traditional music. In order to provide an insight into the opportunities and threats that the music faces in contemporary Nupe society and the digital age, this study investigated the traditional system of acquisition and transfer of this knowledge.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- (i) identify the types of people who are involved in the traditional Nupe royal band.
- (ii) find out the method of knowledge acquisition and transfer members of traditional Nupe royal band.
- (iii) find out the challenges faced by the knowledge transfer and acquisition systems.

Methodology

This was a case study. The population of the study is made up of the members of *Etsu*-Nupe Royal band,

all of whom were involved in the study. In all, 50 members comprising drummers, praise singers, trumpeters, and talking drummers were used. A structured questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument, and the collected data were analysed using frequency count and simple percentages.

Data Analysis

The sample of 50 members of the Bida royal band was dominated by persons who were older than 40 years. In addition, six (12%) respondents were between 31 – 40 years; 10 (20%) were between 21 – 30 years of age; and seven (14%) respondents were between the age 10 – 20 years. Thirty-six (72%) of them were married. In terms of education, 30 (60%) of the respondents had had Quranic education, four (8%) had had primary education, nine (18%) had had secondary education, while seven (14%) had had post secondary education. Quranic education is clearly the predominant type of education acquired by the respondents, although some of them combined this form of education with Western education at the primary, secondary and lower post-secondary levels. In terms of the other occupations that the respondents combined with their practice of royal band music, 20 (40%) of them were farmers, while between 10 and 14 % of the others engaged in local crafts were herbalists or healers, or public servants. Thirteen of them (26%) were into other types of occupations.

Types of Royal Music Instruments Played

Table 1 shows the types of main types of traditional royal instrument that each of the 50 respondents played. The table shows that only three main types of instruments are used in addition to praise singing, and that a clear majority of the band members were drummers.

Table 1: Kinds of Traditional Music Instrument mainly played by Respondents

Instrument	Frequency	%
Talking drum	8	16.0
Other drums	21	42.0
Trumpet	10	20.0
Voice (Praise singling)	11	22.0
Total	50	100.0

Experience in Traditional Royal Music Practice

Table 2, which provides information on the extent of experience of the respondents, shows that nearly two-thirds of them (64%) had had more than 20 years of experience in the practice, most of whom are also likely to be the older people. Also, the higher proportion of those who had had less than eleven years experience (12%) compared to those who had had 11-20 years experience suggests that there had been some additions to the membership of the royal band population during the previous decade. These are likely to be younger persons, as indicated by the data in table 3. The data shows that more than three-quarters of the current population of the royal band members joined the practice at the tender age of between 5 and 10 years, mostly likely as assistants to their older relations in the band.

Table 2: Experience in Traditional Royal Music Practice

Experience	Frequency	%
Up to 10 years	12	24.0
11 – 20 years	6	12.0
More than 20 years	32	64.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 3: Age at which Members joined the Practice

Instrument	Frequency	%
5 – 10 years	38	76.0
11 – 15 years	8	16.0
16 – 20 years	3	6.0
Above 20 years	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Knowledge Transfer and Acquisition Practices

Analysis of the data showed that almost all (96%) of the respondents played mainly the type of instrument that they inherited from their families, suggesting that inheritance of skills is a major mode of skills transfer between related older and younger members of the band. However, the findings also show that as many as 84% of the members could also play other types of instruments, suggesting that there is some knowledge and skills acquisition and transfer across family and inheritance ties within the band.

These conclusions and inferences appear corroborated by the data in table 4, which shows the different methods of knowledge transfer that the members of the band reported to be using. Although the members (all of them except one) claimed that band membership was not restricted by background, it is clear that membership is influenced almost exclusively by hereditary and inheritance factors, sustained by such behaviours as observation and imitation of elders by their younger relatives. Apprenticeship with persons who are not related to existing band members was virtually absent, and was considered to be an ineffective mode of knowledge transfer of band music knowledge.

Table 4: Methods of Knowledge Transfer used among the Band Members (N=50)

Method	Frequency	%
Allowing people from any background to join the band	49	98
Long history of family performance	49	98
Heredity/Inheritance	49	98
Imitation of elders	49	98
Observation	50	100
Apprenticeship	1	2
Documentation by audio/visual	49	98

Knowledge Transfer Challenges

From table 5, 50(100%) all the respondents encountered problems as: lack of interest by youths, rural-urban drift, and poor remuneration of members. They were also of the opinion that the tradition might die down if the youths refused to join the band. Most of the respondents also expressed that modernisation is a major problem behind the acquisition of this knowledge, 49 or (98%). The same proportion of the respondents also agreed that there was mystery behind the acquisition of the knowledge.

Table 5: Problems encountered in acquiring and transferring knowledge (N=50)

Problem	Frequency	%
Tradition might die down if the youth refuse to join the band	50	100
Lack of interest by youths	50	100
Rural-urban drift of the youth	50	100
Poor remuneration of members	50	100
Mystery behind acquisition of the knowledge	49	98
Modernization affect the band negatively	49	98

Discussion

Findings revealed that instruments played by members of the royal dictated by family background, and that the practice is sustained within families by knowledge transfer from older to younger family members, who usually begin to learn the craft at very early (3-10 years) by observing and imitating elders within the family. These findings, along with the finding that apprenticeship of persons from non-royal band families is not common, suggest that knowledge transfer and acquisition is restricted to within the existing royal band families. Moreover, although royal band members usually learn to play other instruments than those inherited from their families, they do so not as traditionally recognised and respected experts in the playing of these other instruments and are most likely to be subordinated to the royal band members who originate from families recognised as experts in the instruments. Accordingly, not only does the totality of royal band playing skills held within the circle of royal band families, the individual skills are further held within specific families. It also follows that the survival of the royal band skills depends on the abilities of the royal band families to sustain their inherited skills through knowledge transfer from older to available and willing-to-learn younger members of the families.

The study also found out that among the other major challenges that threaten the sustainability of the royal band skills are the myths usually associated with the skills by both practitioners (often as barriers-to-entry strategy) and non-practitioners of the skills, the growing lack of interest in such traditional music by the Western-educated youths who are more likely to migrate to the urban areas in search of further education and white or blue collar jobs, and the poor remuneration of bands members which contributes further to the lack of interest among the youth. All the respondents agreed that the tradition might die off if the youth (in their families) refused to join the royal band practice.

Conclusion

This study provides some valuable insight into the knowledge transfer and acquisition practices and challenges among those who practise the indigenous

knowledge that provides the Nupe royal band music. This indigenous knowledge is clearly acquired and transferred mostly within families who are likely to protect their skills and knowledge as inherited sources of income, even if minimal. There is also some assurance that the practice of the Nupe royal band music would survive as long as the Nupe royalty patronises and promotes it. Nevertheless, the knowledge system still faces some challenges that are related to inter-generational dynamics within the families of royal band members, as well as the larger social dynamics of societal modernisation through Western education that often devalues traditional cultures and values. Nevertheless, because the youth are often in love with information and communication technologies (ICTs), it may be possible to use ICTs to repackage the knowledge and music to promote and sustain the interest of the youth in the music and indigenous knowledge.

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