



Exposing Uganda's Cultural Mosaic: An examination of the *Endingidi's* origins, educational and aesthetic dimensions

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Abstract

The field of music analysis has experienced significant growth, encompassing diverse aspects such as corporal movements in instrumental performance, dance studies, and cognition-centric methodologies. This paper provides a historical overview of the *endingidi*, a traditional tube-fiddle, within a broader context. It examines the materials used in constructing the *endingidi* as well as the challenges encountered in this process. Additionally, the paper explores the performative expressive elements of the *endingidi*, including accompanying gestures. Despite the enduring presence of the *endingidi* as a timeless traditional instrument, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive studies that unravel its intricate cultural significance, an oversight this investigation conscientiously seeks to address. The study identifies challenges in material sourcing for the *endingidi* due to scarcity and environmental degradation. Proposed interventions include afforestation, alternative materials, government support, and community engagement. Emphasizing sustainable practices and responsible harvesting, it urges government leadership, documentation of techniques, and community support for artisans. Linking to broader music education challenges, it advocates for government resource allocation. Providing a nuanced understanding of the *endingidi*, it underscores multidimensional approaches to safeguarding it as part of Ugandan cultural heritage, highlighting the importance of sustainability, research, government, and community involvement in preservation efforts.

Introduction

Traditional indigenous music possesses potential beyond merely enhancing the overall quality of life, yet it falls short of fulfilling this role due to prevalent challenges (Kigozi, 2018). In Uganda, the vibrant cultural performances of traditional music were historically centred around kings' palaces and chiefs' homesteads, featuring a variety of instruments, including the *endingidi*, a traditional tube-fiddle (Kagoloby, 2007; Kaahwa, 2004).

During the colonial era, traditional music and instruments were marginalised in formal administrative and educational settings (Kagoloby, 2007). However, following Uganda's independence in 1962, their use in formal public contexts increased, with the *endingidi* symbolising cultural resilience in the face of colonial suppression.



Despite traditional musical instruments' enduring presence, academic inquiry into their cultural significance, production processes, and artistic nuances remains limited. Traditional instrument crafting relies on rudimentary tools and techniques, unlike contemporary production methods. Yet, these instruments exhibit remarkable continuity in their forms and dimensions, suggesting a shared conceptual framework in their creation (Brandt, Gebrian, & Slevc, 2012).

In Uganda, the Baganda and Basoga communities possess distinct musical traditions centred around the *endingidi* and *ndingindi*, respectively. While the *endingidi* is prominent among the Buganda and Busoga, its influence extends to areas of Bunyoro, enriching traditional community events and school festivals. Scholars like Wachsmann (1971) suggest that the instrument may have originated with the Luo migrations from Sudan in the 15th and early 16th centuries, later adopted by the Basoga and introduced to the court of the Baganda King, Mutessa I, during his reign in 1852.

With the arrival of missionaries in Buganda in the 19th Century, a convergence occurred between religious practices and traditional musical instruments like the *endingidi*, associated with African worship. The missionary presence introduced the concept of civilisation as a measure of African communities, often labelling indigenous cultures as "barbarian" or "uncivilised." In the missionary-founded schools in Uganda, missionaries held significant influence integral to the colonial process, condemning traditional musical instruments and aiming to eradicate them from African culture. Ssekamwa (2000, p.126) emphasises this dynamic, stating:

... missionaries filled the boards with themselves and with people who supported the missionary point of view ... boards of governors of such very prominent schools as King's College Buddo, Saint Mary's College Kisubi, Namilyango College, Busoga College Mwiri, Saint Peter's College Tororo, Gayaza High School and all training colleges and technical schools, were chaired by the bishop of the foundation body. The missionary strength in overshadowing government influence in education was further demonstrated through the de Bunsen Education Committee of 1952.

Margaret Macpherson, a Briton, who was actively involved in educational circles in colonial Uganda, notes the impact of the missionary colonial education system on indigenous theatre practices in Uganda as per her experiences at Makerere University in the 1940s. Macpherson says:

...this was a time when young educated men and women ... tended to despise their own languages and culture. In their mission school days, they had sometimes been discouraged from dancing traditional dances as primitive...and although interested expatriates examined traditional music and songs, and recorded myths and legends, there was a subconscious feeling that such an interest among educated East Africans was beneath their dignity (2000, p.24).

The colonisation of Africa completed the Western process of civilisation, distancing Africans from their music, instruments, and cultural identity (Agawu, 2003). The *endingidi* faced near extinction during the colonial era due to perceived threats to the "civilisation" process. However, the quest for independence reignited connections to cultural values, nationhood, and music, serving as a catalyst against colonialism. Ethnomusicologists have played a crucial role in reintroducing the *endingidi* to schools, indirectly shaping learners' musical development. Kubik (1982), Trowell and Wachsmann (1953), and Kebede (1982) have studied the innovations on the *endingidi*, influencing its shape, structure, and tuning.



Since the early 20th century, scholars such as Rycroft (1975) and Kirby (1934) have drawn attention to *endingidi* playing cultures, advocating for comprehensive interdisciplinary approaches in studying traditional musical performance. As showcased in the 'Music of Africa' series, Hugh Tracey's field recording techniques exemplify exceptional sound quality in documenting African musical performances across diverse conditions and contexts. Kubik's research addressed sound-producing techniques, melodic properties, and tuning, while Kirby focused on documenting, describing, and classifying various African indigenous musical instruments. However, these scholars mainly addressed typological and technical aspects of the *endingidi*, leaving a void regarding its cultural and social significance among the Bantu, which this paper aims to address.

Focus

This paper probes the origins of the *endingidi* and its craftsmanship to shed light on its historical roots and evolution, tracing its geographical distribution across diverse regions in Uganda. The investigation explores *endingidi* development among distinct ethnic groups, aspiring to provide a thorough understanding of the instrument's historical import and cultural diversity. The paper evaluates the significance of materials used in crafting the *endingidi*, specifically wood, animal skin, cultural resonance, and visual aesthetics, elucidating the pivotal roles these play in shaping the unique qualities and cultural significance of *endingidi*. A focal point unveils the historical and cultural relevance of these materials. In addressing multifaceted challenges arising from the scarcity of construction materials for the *endingidi*, the paper addresses environmental, cultural, economic, and technological dimensions. This approach aims to provide valuable insights and potential solutions for the preservation and sustainable development of traditional musical instruments. This objective underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the research, seeking to comprehensively address challenges and mitigate the impact of material scarcity on the preservation and sustainability of *endingidi*, and similar traditional instruments. Finally, this paper advocates for the formal integration of synchronised instrumental music education of traditional musical instruments in Uganda's school curricula, aiming to propose pedagogical approaches, assess benefits, and explore societal impacts, focusing on enhancing graduates' employability and contributing to comprehensive strategies for addressing youth unemployment and its associated challenges.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study adopts diverse theoretical approaches to analyse data, focusing on the revival of indigenous performances and instruments post-colonization. This resurgence signifies the agency of formerly colonised peoples in the postcolonial era. Postcolonial theory, a compound theory encompassing various perspectives, serves as the theoretical framework for this analysis.

Carter (2004) asserts that postcolonial theory can be applied to understand processes such as modernity, identity, representation, and resistance in cultural contexts. The researchers argue that employing postcolonial theory sheds light on underlying cultural dynamics and prompts critical examination of the conditions shaping the production and enactment of indigenous performances. Additionally, Carter (2004) and Morton (2007) suggest that contemporary cultural studies inevitably engage with postcolonial themes.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995) emphasise the ongoing relevance of postcolonial theory, noting that postcolonial societies still experience forms of neo-colonial domination despite achieving independence. McLeod (2000) similarly argues that the legacies of colonialism and decolonisation persist across various contemporary domains, including anthropology, economics, art, global politics,



media, and literature. This underscores the enduring significance of postcolonialism as a framework for understanding resistance and reconstruction in postcolonial societies.

Given the perspectives on postcolonial theory discussed, the researchers contend that resistance to colonialism persists as an ongoing endeavour. They suggest that one peaceful means of resisting cultural imperialism is by reaffirming one's distinct cultural identity. This can be achieved through the performance of indigenous music using traditional instruments like the *endingidi*, which colonial mechanisms attempted to marginalise culturally. Lalu (2000) highlights the role of norms, practices, institutions, and discourses in shaping agency, emphasising the importance of reclaiming cultural agency in postcolonial contexts.

Regarding the cultural continuities of indigenous populations post-colonialism, postcolonial theory may not comprehensively explain their persistence in modern independent states. Alternative perspectives from socio-anthropological and cultural theories, exemplified by Barth (1969), offer insight into ethnic boundary maintenance, which is briefly discussed here:

...it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. ... categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (1969, p. 9 -10)

Barth's anthropological insights offer valuable explanations for the persistence of indigenous theatre arts in Uganda despite colonial disruption. Despite the colonial era's challenges, Uganda retained revitalised cultural practices after gaining independence, such as using the *endingidi* instrument.

Methodology

Data collection was conducted through structured interviews to obtain firsthand information from participants. This method was chosen based on its effectiveness in gathering valuable insights, as Yin (2009) and Woodside and Wilson (2003) emphasised. The study involved 50 selected participants with knowledge of the *endingidi*. Participants included students, faculty from teachers' colleges and universities, educators from secondary schools, recording engineers, producers, renowned musicians, proficient *endingidi* players, and skilled instrument makers. Through interviews, the researchers gathered opinions on the usage, challenges, construction materials, aesthetics, and preservation of the *endingidi* within educational settings. Woodside and Wilson (2003) suggest that gaining a deep understanding of research involves grasping participants' mental models, which represent their perception of reality. Interviews facilitated this understanding, allowing the authors to capture participants' diverse perspectives verbally, which observation alone could not achieve.

The study also employed document analysis, which involves systematically reviewing and evaluating printed and electronic materials, as defined by Bowen (2009, p.27). This method, like others in qualitative research, aids in understanding and building empirical knowledge. Bowen (2009, pp.29-30) notes that documents serve as witnesses to past events, facilitating insight into historical contexts and perspectives.

Data from various sources, including books, journal articles, and online materials, complemented the interview findings. Through rigorous scrutiny, interrogation, and analysis, data from these sources



were validated to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This comprehensive validation process strengthens the credibility and robustness of the research outcomes.

Historical origins of the *endingidi*

The *endingidi*, a prevalent pan-ethnic indigenous musical instrument, reflects ancient cultural intersections among diverse early settlers in Uganda. Ethnographic literature, including works by Rycroft (1975, 1976), Kirby (1934), and Tracey and Dargie (1988), underscores its crucial role in activities such as farming, hunting, and territorial defence. Scholars suggest a connection between the *endingidi* and Nilotic-speaking migrants, particularly among Bantu communities in East Africa.

Buganda, a region of historical significance, has played a central role in adopting and evolving the *endingidi*. Functioning as a symbol of cultural identity and royalty, the instrument holds a paramount traditional presence within Buganda, permeating ceremonies and rituals. Its name, derived from Luganda, underscores its association with natural materials, particularly the banana plant's sound box (Makubuya, 1999).

Beyond Buganda, neighbouring regions like Busoga and Teso contribute to the instrument's cultural significance, adapting it to their unique traditions. The *endingidi's* prevalence across regions serves as a unifying force, transcending boundaries and reflecting Uganda's shared musical history and cultural heritage.

The *endingidi* in education

Music occupies a unique role in formal education, from early childhood to university levels, though historically lacking mandatory status as a subject. The new Lower Secondary Curriculum with the Performing Arts Syllabus introduced by the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports in 2020 marks a departure from colonial legacies, aiming to integrate indigenous performative forms into formal education. The syllabus emphasises competence and skill-based learning, aiming to equip students with tangible skills while preserving Uganda's rich cultural heritage (Uganda, 2020).

Despite these advancements, challenges persist in integrating music into school curricula. Music education receives low priority, with some schools citing financial constraints as a barrier to implementation (Kigozi, 2014). Additionally, traditional pedagogical approaches, such as rote learning, hinder effective teaching and assessment, particularly regarding instruments like the *endingidi* (Nzewi, 1999). While Makerere University and Kyambogo University offer music education at the undergraduate level, traditional instruments are often taught by rote, posing challenges for learners (Herbst et al., 2003).

A synchronised incorporation of traditional instruments into formal music curricula would enhance music education, fostering conservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Addressing youth unemployment, a pressing issue in Uganda, requires comprehensive strategies. By institutionalising instrumental music education across all educational levels, from primary to tertiary, opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship could be expanded, offering sustainable solutions for the future workforce (Awiti, 2016).

A synchronised instrumental music education program within school curricula has the potential to revolutionise livelihoods, empower individuals, and address the multifaceted challenges of youth unemployment in Uganda.

Aesthetic dimensions, durability and preservation



The selection of construction materials for the *endingidi* is crucial, impacting its structural integrity, acoustic properties, and cultural significance. According to Robert Kijogwa, an *endingidi* player and maker, historically, only a few specialised individuals were responsible for crafting the instrument. However, increased demand has led to a proliferation of makers, often driven by commercial motives. Material choices go beyond functionality, reflecting cultural and regional importance and affecting the instrument's aesthetics, playability, and authenticity. Kijogwa notes that:

In ancient times, *endingidi* construction relied on softwood due to limited access to advanced cutting tools. Hunters often utilised various animal skins, including monitor lizards' skin, obtained from their hunts. However, contemporary advancements in wood-cutting tools enable the use of hardwood like *musambya* (*Markhamia lutea*). Cowhide and goat skin are now the predominant choices for instrument covering, as regulations protecting wildlife make the use of game skin rare.

Wood is central in crafting the *endingidi*, influencing its resonating component and overall structure. Whether using '*musambya*' or '*Mutuba*', the chosen wood determines the instrument's acoustic properties and tonal richness. Kijogwa highlights the crucial role of wood selection in achieving desired musical qualities.

Historically, '*nswaaswa*' lizard skin encased the instrument's upper resonator, contributing to its sound box formation and unique tonal attributes. The use of animal skin adds complexity to the *endingidi*'s sonic profile. Traditionally, the *endingidi* features a single string made from plant fibres or synthetic materials, with plant materials used for securing the string and crafting the bow. These choices hold both musical and cultural significance.

Technological advancements have influenced the *endingidi*'s appearance and texture, with modern makers using plastic strings and sometimes goat hair for decoration. While electronic amplification alters the sound, traditional characteristics persist. Similarly, Ahabwe (2023) discusses changes in the *enanga* due to evolving music technology.

Due to conservation laws, the use of monitor lizard skin is now prohibited, leading makers to use goat and cow hides instead. Beyond its acoustic properties, the selection of materials for the *endingidi* holds significant cultural and regional importance. These materials, including specific woods, resonate with deep-rooted cultural traditions, imbuing the *endingidi* with symbolic and historical significance. This tangible link between materials and cultural heritage reinforces the instrument's identity as a cultural artefact.

The materials used in crafting the *endingidi* extend beyond mere functionality to influence its aesthetic dimension within its cultural context. Wood choices, for instance, prioritise natural beauty, incorporating grain patterns and embellishments to enhance visual appeal. This enhances the instrument's ceremonial and symbolic roles within cultural and commercial spheres. Additionally, material choices impact the instrument's ergonomics and playability, affecting the tactile experience for the player. The durability of the *endingidi* is contingent upon the type of wood and string used. Both goat skin and cowhide are preferred for their sound qualities, with slight tone, resonance, and texture variations. Skin thickness, preparation methods, and instrument construction further influence sound production. Prospective buyers often sample the *endingidi* to determine their preferred sound texture before purchase.



Research suggests that *endingidi* made from *Markhamia lutea* is more durable than other wood types, while plastic strings offer greater longevity than plant or animal-based materials (Kijogwa & Mukungu).

Challenges and interventions

Laws prohibiting the cutting of trees and killing of animals for crafting the *endingidi* can significantly impact both its sound production and cultural identity. Traditional materials like specific woods and animal skins are crucial to the instrument's unique sound and cultural heritage. When artisans must use alternative materials due to legal constraints, it can lead to changes in the *endingidi's* sound quality and characteristics, potentially diminishing its authenticity within Ugandan musical traditions. Moreover, alterations in materials can affect the instrument's cultural symbolism and significance. Deforestation and depletion of specific plant and animal species have further threatened the authenticity and cultural significance of the *endingidi* in recent years.

Using alternative materials and increasing costs pose barriers for artisans and musicians, limiting accessibility and affordability and losing traditional craftsmanship and skills. The declining presence of the *endingidi* in cultural activities jeopardises the preservation of cultural practices and traditions, potentially leading to the loss of significant aspects of cultural heritage.

Therefore, individuals or the government must invest in afforestation initiatives for trees like *Markhamia lutea* and *Ficus natalensis* to sustain the supply of wood used in making the *endingidi* and other instruments.

Conclusion

To address these challenges, the researchers advocate for strategic interventions to ensure sustainable material sourcing for the construction of the *endingidi*. Proposed measures include intentional afforestation or reforestation initiatives by the government, individuals, or non-governmental organisations of tree species like *Markhamia lutea* and *Ficus natalensis*.

Additionally, alternative materials should be explored through dedicated research, with advocacy for government support in cultural preservation initiatives. The active involvement of local communities is essential in promoting awareness and the preservation of materials useful in manufacturing musical instruments. Adoption of sustainable material sourcing practices, including responsible harvesting techniques and innovative material utilisation, is urgently needed.

These proposed interventions underscore the significance of sustainable material acquisition, research, and innovation, as well as government support for cultural preservation and environmental consciousness. Government leadership in cultural preservation initiatives, comprehensive documentation of construction techniques, and intensifying awareness about environmental impacts are crucial. Community engagement, supported by tailored programs to assist artisans and musicians, is essential for ensuring the continued creation and utilisation of the *endingidi*.

Given the prevalent lack of music education in educational institutions due to essential equipment and facilities deficiencies, the government must increase resource allocation to address these shortcomings.

This paper provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges affecting the perpetuation of the *endingidi*, exploring its historical, cultural, and material dimensions and its educational significance. Emphasising the hurdles posed by material scarcity, the article advocates for sustainable practices,



research initiatives, government support, and community engagement to safeguard the *endingidi* as an integral facet of Ugandan cultural heritage.

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