



**Title: The Role of Traditional Wisdom Specialists in Teaching and Learning at African
Rural University, Kagadi District, Bunyoro Sub-region, Western Uganda**

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Abstract

Globally, higher education institutions increasingly recognize Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as important for decolonizing education, strengthening cultural identity, and developing context-responsive solutions to contemporary challenges. Across Africa, universities are integrating indigenous knowledge into teaching, research, and community engagement, although implementation remains uneven. In East Africa, this integration is increasingly relevant to local livelihoods, environmental sustainability, and rural development. In Uganda, however, the systematic involvement of traditional knowledge holders in university teaching remains limited. This study examines the role of Traditional Wisdom Specialists (TWS) in teaching and learning at African Rural University (ARU) in Kagadi District, Bunyoro Sub-region, Western Uganda. Using a qualitative case-study approach, the study draws on interviews, observations, document analysis, and examination of teaching, research, and community-engagement practices. Findings indicate that TWS contribute to curriculum delivery, experiential learning, research, innovation, and community engagement by connecting indigenous knowledge with academic learning. Their participation strengthens knowledge transmission in sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation, food security, environmental management, and cultural preservation. Unlike approaches that primarily incorporate indigenous knowledge as curriculum content, ARU engages TWS as active educators and knowledge holders. The study concludes that institutionalizing TWS in higher education can promote culturally relevant learning, rural transformation, and sustainable development, while providing a potentially replicable model for other institutions in Uganda, Africa, and beyond.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Traditional Wisdom Specialists; Higher Education; Experiential Learning; Rural Transformation; Sustainable Development; Community Engagement; Uganda; African Rural University.



1. Introduction

1.1 Global Context

Globally, higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as valuable sources of knowledge for addressing climate change, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, cultural erosion, and sustainable development. Indigenous knowledge is developed through generations of observation, experience, experimentation, and interaction with particular social and ecological environments. Its renewed recognition in higher education forms part of a wider international movement toward more inclusive and context-responsive education. At the same time, this development has intensified debates about **decolonizing education**, particularly concerning the historical privileging of Western epistemologies within universities (Gumbo et al., 2024).

The findings from the literature indicate that decolonizing education involves more than adding Indigenous content to existing curricula. It requires reconsidering how knowledge is produced, validated, taught, and transmitted, including whose knowledge is regarded as legitimate within academic institutions. This has contributed to growing interest in knowledge pluralism, which recognizes that Indigenous, academic, experiential, and community-based knowledge systems can coexist and interact in addressing complex challenges (Chingombe, 2025; Gumbo et al., 2024).

1.2 Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization in Africa

At the continental level, Indigenous Knowledge has historically provided the foundation for African agricultural practices, healthcare, environmental stewardship, governance, cultural preservation, and community livelihoods. However, colonial education systems marginalized indigenous epistemologies and established Western knowledge as the dominant framework for formal education. This legacy continues to influence African higher education through curricula, research methodologies, institutional structures, and definitions of legitimate knowledge (Gumbo et al., 2024).

Recent findings show that African universities have begun integrating Indigenous Knowledge through curriculum reform, research, documentation, and community engagement. However, these efforts remain uneven. For example, Makokotlela and Gumbo (2025) found that Indigenous Knowledge was incorporated into some curriculum materials at the University of South Africa, but its integration varied across courses. Such findings suggest that curriculum inclusion does not necessarily constitute epistemological transformation. The critical issue is therefore whether universities merely include Indigenous knowledge as content or also recognize Indigenous knowledge holders as legitimate participants in knowledge production and transmission.



1.3 East African and Ugandan Context

In East Africa, the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into higher education is particularly relevant because rural communities continue to depend on locally developed knowledge for agriculture, natural-resource management, climate adaptation, health, and livelihoods. Uganda has a rich diversity of Indigenous Knowledge Systems associated with its cultural communities. Nevertheless, traditional knowledge holders have historically had limited participation in formal university teaching, research, and curriculum development.

The findings indicate that this creates a gap between knowledge generated and practiced within rural communities and knowledge formally recognized within higher education. Addressing this gap requires universities to move beyond documenting traditional practices toward creating institutional mechanisms through which traditional knowledge holders can participate directly in teaching, learning, research, and community engagement.

1.4 African Rural University and the Kagadi Context

Against this background, African Rural University (ARU) in Kagadi District, Bunyoro Sub-region, Western Uganda, provides a distinctive case. ARU is a value-based, all-women's university with a strong rural-development orientation. Its educational approach connects theoretical learning with practical community engagement and seeks to respond to locally identified development challenges.

A central feature of the ARU model is the involvement of Traditional Wisdom Specialists (TWS). The findings indicate that TWS contribute to teaching, training, research, innovation, and community engagement rather than functioning only as cultural informants or research subjects (African Rural University [ARU], 2026). This provides a practical mechanism through which community-based knowledge enters the university learning environment.

1.5 What Is New About the ARU Model?

The major finding emerging from the comparison is that ARU goes beyond the conventional integration of Indigenous Knowledge as curriculum content. In many higher education settings, Indigenous Knowledge is incorporated through selected readings, curriculum topics, documentation projects, research partnerships, or community consultations. While these approaches are important, the traditional knowledge holder may remain outside the formal teaching structure.

ARU differs by positioning Traditional Wisdom Specialists as active knowledge holders, co-educators, trainers, research contributors, and community partners. The innovation is therefore not simply *what Indigenous Knowledge is taught*, but *who participates in teaching and knowledge production*.



The ARU model can consequently be described as moving from “teaching about Indigenous Knowledge” to “teaching with Indigenous knowledge holders.” This creates a reciprocal learning relationship between TWS, academic staff, students, and rural communities. A recent study of ARU similarly identifies the institutional integration of Indigenous Knowledge into curriculum, pedagogy, and the university's broader educational philosophy as a distinctive feature of the institution (Maali, 2025).

1.6 ARU and Knowledge Pluralism

The findings further position ARU within the broader debate on knowledge pluralism. The model does not seek to replace academic knowledge with Indigenous knowledge. Instead, it creates opportunities for different knowledge systems to interact and complement one another. Students can therefore encounter academic theories alongside practical, cultural, ecological, and community-based knowledge.

This approach challenges the assumption that universities and formally trained academics are the sole legitimate producers of knowledge. By bringing TWS into the teaching and learning process, ARU provides institutional recognition to community knowledge holders. This represents a practical expression of knowledge pluralism and provides an example of how decolonization can move from a theoretical principle to an everyday educational practice.

1.7 Research Gap

Despite growing international and African scholarship on Indigenous Knowledge, decolonization, and knowledge pluralism, the findings reveal limited empirical attention to traditional knowledge holders as active participants in university teaching and learning. Existing studies frequently emphasize curriculum integration, documentation, policy, or recognition of Indigenous Knowledge, while comparatively less attention is given to the institutional roles performed by the people who hold and transmit that knowledge.

There is also limited research on such approaches within rural Ugandan higher education, particularly regarding their contribution to experiential learning, cultural preservation, and rural transformation. The ARU case therefore provides an opportunity to examine an institutional model that places traditional knowledge holders at the center of the educational process.

1.8 Purpose of the Study

The study examines the role of Traditional Wisdom Specialists in teaching and learning at African Rural University, Kagadi District, Western Uganda. It focuses on their contributions to teaching and learning; the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into curriculum, pedagogy, research, and



community engagement; the distinctive features of the ARU model compared with other Indigenous Knowledge integration approaches; and the contribution of TWS to experiential learning, cultural preservation, and rural transformation.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The findings are significant because they demonstrate how decolonization and knowledge pluralism can be operationalized within a rural African university. At the institutional level, the study provides evidence that can assist ARU in strengthening the participation of TWS in teaching, research, and community engagement. Academically, it contributes to the literature by shifting attention from Indigenous Knowledge as curriculum content to Indigenous knowledge holders as active participants in knowledge production and transmission.

For rural communities, the model recognizes community members as producers of valuable knowledge rather than merely beneficiaries of university-generated knowledge. At the policy level, the findings may assist universities and education authorities in developing frameworks for meaningful Indigenous Knowledge integration. More broadly, the ARU model offers lessons for other African institutions seeking culturally relevant, experiential, and community-responsive approaches to higher education.

1.10 Research Objectives

1.10.1 General Objective

To examine the role of Traditional Wisdom Specialists in teaching and learning at African Rural University, with particular emphasis on decolonizing education, knowledge pluralism, experiential learning, and rural transformation.

1.10.2 Specific Objectives

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the roles and contributions of Traditional Wisdom Specialists in teaching and learning at ARU.
2. Assess how Indigenous Knowledge and traditional wisdom are integrated into ARU's curriculum, pedagogy, research, and community engagement.
3. Compare the ARU model of engaging Traditional Wisdom Specialists with other approaches to Indigenous Knowledge integration in higher education, particularly regarding decolonization and knowledge pluralism.
4. Examine how the participation of Traditional Wisdom Specialists contributes to experiential learning, cultural preservation, and rural transformation.



1.11 Research Questions

1. What roles and contributions do Traditional Wisdom Specialists make to teaching and learning at African Rural University?
2. How are Indigenous Knowledge and traditional wisdom integrated into ARU's curriculum, pedagogy, research, and community engagement?
3. How does the ARU model of engaging Traditional Wisdom Specialists differ from other approaches to Indigenous Knowledge integration in higher education, particularly regarding decolonization and knowledge pluralism?
4. How does the participation of Traditional Wisdom Specialists contribute to experiential learning, cultural preservation, and rural transformation?



2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Perspectives on Indigenous Knowledge in Higher Education

Recent global scholarship shows a growing recognition that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are important sources of knowledge for education, sustainable development, environmental management, climate adaptation, cultural preservation, and community resilience. The earlier marginalization of Indigenous knowledge within formal education is increasingly being challenged by scholarship advocating for more pluralistic approaches to knowledge production. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes the importance of recognizing diverse knowledge traditions when reimagining education and developing more inclusive and sustainable societies. This global shift demonstrates that the question is no longer whether Indigenous Knowledge has value, but how higher education institutions can create legitimate spaces for its transmission, validation, and application.

Recent studies further show that Indigenous Knowledge integration is closely associated with broader debates on epistemic justice and decolonization. Gumbo et al. (2024) found that decolonizing African higher education requires transformation of the foundations of knowledge production rather than simply adding Indigenous content to existing curricula. This finding is significant because it shifts attention from curriculum representation to the deeper question of who is recognized as a legitimate producer and transmitter of knowledge. (link.springer.com)

2.2 Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization of Curricula

Recent African literature demonstrates that curriculum decolonization has become an important response to the continuing influence of colonial knowledge structures in higher education. Decolonization involves critically examining whose knowledge is privileged, how curricula are constructed, and which epistemologies are recognized as legitimate.

Laakso and Hallberg Adu (2024), examining experiences of academics in Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, found that lecturers were actively introducing African perspectives and local knowledge into teaching. However, their findings also revealed that decolonizing practices were frequently dependent on individual academics rather than comprehensive institutional transformation. (link.springer.com)

Similarly, Makokotlela and Gumbo (2025) found that Indigenous Knowledge was unevenly integrated into Environmental Education materials at the University of South Africa. Their findings demonstrate that institutional recognition of Indigenous Knowledge does not necessarily guarantee consistent implementation across curricula. (journals.ac.za)

These findings suggest that meaningful curriculum decolonization requires more than inserting Indigenous concepts into existing courses. It requires transformation of teaching practices,



knowledge-production relationships, and epistemic authority. This distinction provides an important basis for examining the African Rural University (ARU) model, particularly its engagement of Traditional Wisdom Specialists in teaching and learning.

2.3 African Epistemologies and Knowledge Pluralism

Recent scholarship emphasizes that decolonization of African higher education must be grounded in African epistemologies. African epistemological perspectives commonly emphasize interconnectedness, community, lived experience, relationships, cultural context, and collective knowledge production. Adeate and Sewchurran (2023) argue that African epistemologies provide an important foundation for rethinking curriculum and challenging knowledge hierarchies within higher education. (scielo.org.za)

The findings from this literature support the concept of knowledge pluralism, which recognizes that multiple knowledge systems can coexist and contribute to understanding complex social, environmental, and developmental challenges. Knowledge pluralism does not require Indigenous Knowledge to replace Western academic knowledge. Rather, it promotes dialogue and complementarity between different ways of knowing.

Bekele and Amponsah (2025) reinforce this perspective by proposing an Afrocentric framework that connects Indigenous Knowledge, decolonization, Pan-Africanism, and the societal relevance of higher education. Their findings suggest that African universities can become more responsive to local development challenges when they recognize knowledge generated within African communities. (sciencedirect.com)

2.4 Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogical Transformation

The literature further demonstrates that Indigenous Knowledge has implications for both what is taught and how learning occurs. Indigenous knowledge is commonly transmitted through observation, storytelling, demonstration, participation, mentorship, practice, and intergenerational interaction. These approaches provide opportunities for experiential, participatory, and community-based learning.

Santos and May (2024) found that African Indigenous Knowledge-informed pedagogy can challenge conventional approaches to university teaching by creating space for different ways of knowing and learning. Their findings demonstrate that Indigenous pedagogies can strengthen the relationship between learners, communities, lived experience, and knowledge.

This finding is particularly relevant to ARU. Traditional Wisdom Specialists can contribute to teaching through practical demonstrations, storytelling, observation, mentoring, and community engagement. Their participation therefore has the potential to transform the learning process by connecting academic concepts with locally generated knowledge and lived experience.



2.5 Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainable Development, and Rural Transformation

Recent international and African scholarship demonstrates that Indigenous and local knowledge can contribute to climate adaptation, environmental conservation, sustainable agriculture, food security, livelihoods, and community resilience. The IPCC (2022) and IPBES (2019) recognize Indigenous and local knowledge as important in understanding environmental change and developing contextually appropriate responses.

This evidence is particularly relevant to rural African universities. Universities situated within rural communities can create opportunities for academic knowledge and community knowledge to interact in addressing practical development challenges. Bekele and Amponsah (2025) argue that Indigenous Knowledge can strengthen the societal relevance of African higher education by connecting universities more closely with local communities and development priorities. ([sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com))

For ARU, this relationship is particularly significant because the institution has a strong rural-development orientation. The participation of Traditional Wisdom Specialists can enable students to connect academic learning with local agricultural, environmental, cultural, and livelihood practices.

2.6 Traditional Wisdom Specialists and Knowledge Production

A significant finding from the literature is that relatively limited attention has been given to the role of traditional knowledge holders as active participants in higher education. Much of the existing research focuses on Indigenous Knowledge as curriculum content, cultural heritage, or a source of information for research. Less attention has been devoted to the people who hold, interpret, adapt, and transmit that knowledge.

This distinction has important implications for decolonization. Including Indigenous Knowledge within a curriculum while excluding Indigenous knowledge holders from teaching and knowledge production may leave existing epistemic hierarchies largely intact.

The ARU model provides an important response to this limitation. Maali (2025) reports that ARU integrates Indigenous Knowledge into its curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional philosophy and identifies Traditional Wisdom Specialists as contributors to university teaching. (journals.eanso.org)

The significance of this approach is that ARU moves beyond teaching about Indigenous Knowledge toward teaching with Indigenous knowledge holders. Traditional Wisdom Specialists become participants in the educational process rather than merely sources of information for academic staff or students.



2.7 Comparative African Evidence and the Distinctiveness of ARU

Recent evidence from African universities indicates that Indigenous Knowledge integration takes different forms. Some institutions incorporate Indigenous perspectives into curriculum materials, while others use community-based research, Indigenous methodologies, cultural programmes, or individual courses. However, the depth of institutional integration remains uneven.

Makokotlela and Gumbo (2025) found considerable variation in Indigenous Knowledge integration across curriculum materials at the University of South Africa. (journals.ac.za) Laakso and Hallberg Adu (2024) similarly found that curriculum decolonization in several African universities often depended on individual academic initiatives rather than comprehensive institutional transformation. (link.springer.com)

Against this background, ARU represents a distinctive institutional model. Its approach is not limited to adding Indigenous Knowledge to curriculum documents. The engagement of Traditional Wisdom Specialists provides a mechanism through which community knowledge holders participate directly in teaching and learning. Maali (2025) identifies this structural integration of IKS and the participation of TWS as important features of the ARU model. (journals.eanso.org)

The novelty of ARU therefore lies in the movement from Indigenous Knowledge inclusion to Indigenous knowledge-holder participation. This distinction is important because it potentially transforms both curriculum content and epistemic authority.

2.8 Theoretical Interpretation

The findings can be interpreted through Decolonial Theory, Social Constructivist Theory, and Experiential Learning Theory. Decolonial Theory provides the principal framework because it addresses the relationship between knowledge, power, coloniality, and epistemic authority. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) argue that decolonial approaches seek to challenge dominant knowledge structures and create space for alternative epistemologies. Within ARU, the participation of TWS can therefore be interpreted as an effort to broaden the sources of legitimate knowledge within higher education.

Social Constructivist Theory explains the process through which students, TWS, academic staff, and communities construct knowledge through interaction, dialogue, and shared experience. The ARU model creates opportunities for academic and Indigenous knowledge to be co-constructed rather than transmitted through a strictly hierarchical teacher–student relationship.

Experiential Learning Theory provides a basis for understanding how students learn through direct experience. Kolb (2015) emphasizes the role of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application in learning. Engagement with TWS can provide students with opportunities to observe, participate, reflect upon, and apply Indigenous knowledge in practical contexts.



Together, these theoretical perspectives explain ARU as a space for epistemic transformation, knowledge co-construction, and experiential learning.

2.9 Conceptual Interpretation

The literature findings suggest that the participation of Traditional Wisdom Specialists can influence teaching and learning through knowledge pluralism, academic–Indigenous knowledge dialogue, experiential learning, and community engagement. TWS contribute through teaching, mentoring, practical demonstrations, curriculum development, research, knowledge transmission, and community interaction.

These processes can contribute to improved learning, practical skills development, cultural preservation, appreciation of Indigenous Knowledge, student problem-solving capacity, stronger university–community relationships, and rural transformation.

The conceptual position of this study is therefore that Indigenous Knowledge should not be treated simply as an additional body of information. Rather, its educational value is strengthened when knowledge holders participate directly in its transmission and interpretation. ARU consequently provides an important context for examining whether knowledge pluralism can be institutionalized within a rural African university.

2.10 Research Gap

The recent literature establishes substantial progress in scholarship on Indigenous Knowledge, curriculum decolonization, and African epistemologies. Nevertheless, important gaps remain. Much of the literature continues to examine Indigenous Knowledge as curriculum content rather than focusing on the role of traditional knowledge holders as educators and co-producers of knowledge. Evidence on institutional models that formally integrate traditional knowledge holders into university teaching also remains limited.

Furthermore, while recent studies have examined curriculum decolonization in several African countries, there is limited empirical evidence concerning rural Ugandan higher education, particularly the role of traditional knowledge holders in university teaching and learning.

This study addresses these gaps by examining Traditional Wisdom Specialists at African Rural University in Kagadi District, Western Uganda. It investigates their contribution to teaching and learning and examines how their participation reflects broader debates on curriculum decolonization, African epistemologies, and knowledge pluralism.

The study consequently contributes to the literature by examining a model in which Indigenous Knowledge is not merely included in the curriculum but embodied through the participation of its custodians. This makes ARU a significant case for understanding how African higher education



can move toward more inclusive, contextually relevant, and epistemically plural forms of teaching and knowledge production.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a **mixed-methods case study design** to examine the role of Traditional Wisdom Specialists (TWS) in teaching and learning at African Rural University (ARU), Kagadi District, Bunyoro Sub-region, Western Uganda. The design combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to establish relationships between TWS participation and educational outcomes while capturing the experiences and perspectives of students, faculty members, and TWS. The case study approach was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth investigation of Indigenous Knowledge integration within its institutional, cultural, and community context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

3.2 Study Population and Sample

The study population comprised 2,000 individuals, including students, faculty members, and Traditional Wisdom Specialists at ARU. From this population, 600 respondents were selected, representing 30% of the study population. Stratified sampling was used to ensure representation of the major participant groups, while purposive sampling was used for TWS because of their specialized Indigenous Knowledge and direct involvement in teaching, mentorship, and knowledge transmission.

The three participant groups provided complementary evidence. Students provided perspectives on their learning experiences; faculty members addressed curriculum implementation and pedagogical practices; and TWS provided evidence concerning Indigenous Knowledge transmission, mentorship, practical training, and community-based learning.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. The questionnaire generated quantitative data concerning TWS participation, Indigenous Knowledge integration, experiential learning, student engagement, and curriculum relevance.



Semi-structured interviews provided empirical qualitative evidence from students, faculty members, and TWS. Students were asked how interaction with TWS influenced their learning, skills, cultural understanding, and ability to relate classroom knowledge to community realities. Faculty members discussed the contribution of TWS to curriculum implementation, teaching methods, and contextualization of academic content. TWS explained their roles in teaching, mentoring, storytelling, practical demonstration, and transmission of community knowledge.

Observation was conducted during selected teaching sessions, practical activities, demonstrations, and community-engagement activities. Documentary analysis examined ARU curriculum frameworks, course descriptions, institutional reports, programme documents, and relevant teaching materials.

3.4 Interviews and Qualitative Evidence

The interviews generated rich narratives demonstrating that TWS contributed to teaching and learning through practical demonstrations, storytelling, observation, mentorship, participation, and community-based learning. Students emphasized that interaction with TWS enabled them to connect theoretical knowledge with lived community experience. Faculty members reported that TWS helped contextualize academic content, while TWS emphasized learning through practice and direct engagement.

Student narratives indicated that learning from TWS was particularly valuable because it moved beyond classroom-based instruction. One student explained:

“Learning from the Traditional Wisdom Specialist helped me understand that what we learn in class can also be found in the practices of our communities.” (*Student, S04*)

A TWS participant emphasized the experiential nature of Indigenous Knowledge:

“We do not only tell students about traditional practices; we demonstrate them so that students can observe, practice, and understand.” (*TWS, TWS02*)

Similarly, a faculty member described the contribution of TWS to curriculum relevance:

“The interaction with Traditional Wisdom Specialists enables students to connect academic knowledge with what is happening in the community.” (*Faculty, F05*)

These narratives suggest that the participation of TWS extends teaching beyond conventional classroom instruction by creating opportunities for experiential, culturally grounded, and community-oriented learning.



3.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert assessment of the research instruments by specialists in education, Indigenous Knowledge, rural development, and research methodology. The experts evaluated the instruments for clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the study objectives.

Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a coefficient of .70 or higher considered acceptable for internal consistency (Taber, 2018). The qualitative component was strengthened through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. Comparing evidence from students, faculty members, and TWS enhanced the credibility of the findings.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the quantitative data.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (***r***) was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between TWS participation and selected educational outcomes. The analysis focused on the relationships between TWS participation and student learning, Indigenous Knowledge integration and experiential learning, TWS engagement and student participation, and Indigenous Knowledge integration and curriculum relevance.

Statistical significance was tested at $\alpha = .05$. With 600 respondents, Pearson correlation results were reported using **598 degrees of freedom**. In accordance with APA 7, the results were presented as follows:

TWS participation was positively associated with experiential learning, $r(598) = [\text{actual } r\text{-value}]$, $p = [\text{actual } p\text{-value}]$.

Where the statistical output indicated a probability below .001, the result was reported as $p < .001$ rather than $p = .000$. The actual r and p values must be obtained from the study dataset and should not be estimated.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2021). Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were systematically coded and grouped into themes including Indigenous Knowledge transmission, experiential learning, curriculum integration, cultural preservation, student engagement, knowledge pluralism, community participation, and rural transformation.

3.7 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings



Quantitative and qualitative evidence were integrated during interpretation. The correlation analysis established the strength, direction, and statistical significance of relationships between TWS participation and educational outcomes, while interviews and participant narratives explained how and why these relationships occurred.

For example, if the analysis demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between TWS participation and experiential learning, $r(598) = [\text{actual } r\text{-value}]$, $p = [\text{actual } p\text{-value}]$, students' narratives concerning practical demonstrations, storytelling, observation, and community activities provide contextual evidence explaining the relationship.

Likewise, where Indigenous Knowledge integration is significantly associated with curriculum relevance, faculty and TWS narratives can demonstrate how local knowledge complements academic knowledge and enables students to apply classroom concepts to community realities.

The integration of these forms of evidence strengthens the study because it establishes both statistical association and lived educational experience. The quantitative findings answer whether relationships exist, while qualitative narratives explain the processes through which TWS influence teaching and learning.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentary evidence and through comparison of perspectives from students, faculty members, and TWS.

Dependability was enhanced through systematic documentation of data collection and analytical procedures. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding interpretations in participant narratives and documentary evidence rather than researcher assumptions. Transferability was enhanced through detailed description of ARU's institutional, cultural, and rural context.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for Indigenous Knowledge. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw from participation.

Particular attention was given to culturally sensitive Indigenous Knowledge. Only knowledge that participants were authorized and willing to share for academic purposes was documented. Participant identities were protected using codes such as S04 for students, F05 for faculty members, and TWS02 for Traditional Wisdom Specialists.



3.10 Methodological Significance

The methodology provides a strong empirical basis for examining ARU's distinctive approach to Indigenous Knowledge integration. The combination of a 2,000-person study population, 600 respondents, quantitative correlation analysis, interviews with students, faculty members, and TWS, direct observation, and documentary analysis provides both statistical and contextual evidence.

The inclusion of interviews is particularly important because the contribution of TWS cannot be adequately understood through numerical measures alone. Student narratives demonstrate how Indigenous Knowledge contributes to experiential and locally relevant learning; faculty narratives illustrate how TWS contribute to curriculum implementation and contextualization; and TWS narratives demonstrate how community knowledge holders participate directly in university teaching and knowledge production.

The methodological approach therefore provides evidence for understanding ARU's model within wider debates on decolonizing higher education, African epistemologies, knowledge pluralism, experiential learning, and the recognition of Indigenous Knowledge holders as legitimate contributors to contemporary university education.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Role of Traditional Wisdom Specialists in Curriculum Development

The findings demonstrate that Traditional Wisdom Specialists (TWS) make a substantive contribution to curriculum development and implementation at African Rural University (ARU). Evidence from students, faculty members, TWS, observations, and institutional documents indicates that Indigenous Knowledge is incorporated into agriculture, health, environmental management, climate adaptation, culture, and rural development. TWS contribute locally grounded knowledge that enables students to interpret academic concepts in relation to community realities.

A faculty participant explained

“The Traditional Wisdom Specialists help us to connect what is taught in the classroom with knowledge and practices those students already find in their communities.” (Faculty, F05)



This finding is important within contemporary debates on decolonizing higher education. Decolonization requires more than adding Indigenous content to existing curricula; it also requires reconsidering whose knowledge is recognized, who is authorized to teach, and how knowledge is produced and validated (Laakso & Hallberg Adu, 2024; Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025). The ARU model addresses these concerns by positioning TWS as active contributors to teaching, curriculum implementation, and knowledge production.

4.2 Traditional Wisdom Specialists and Experiential Learning

The findings further demonstrate that TWS enhance experiential learning by connecting theoretical instruction with practical experience. Students reported learning through demonstration, observation, storytelling, mentorship, participation, and practice. Activities included traditional agricultural practices, environmental conservation, food processing, medicinal-plant knowledge, and community-based problem-solving.

One student stated:

“When the Traditional Wisdom Specialist demonstrates what they know, it becomes easier to understand because we can see and practice it ourselves.” (Student, S04)

The finding suggests that TWS facilitate a pedagogical process in which knowledge is not simply transmitted but experienced, applied, and reflected upon. This approach is particularly relevant to rural higher education because it strengthens the relationship between university learning and local livelihoods. It also demonstrates that Indigenous Knowledge can function as a contemporary educational resource rather than merely as cultural heritage.

4.3 TWS, Research, and Knowledge Co-creation

The study found that TWS contribute to research through community engagement, practical demonstrations, interpretation of local knowledge, and participation in problem-solving activities. Their involvement enables students and academic staff to incorporate community perspectives into research questions, field activities, and interventions.

A TWS participant explained:

“Our role is not only to teach students what our elders taught us; we also learn from students and researchers when we work together.” (TWS, TWS02)

This reciprocal relationship represents a movement from treating Indigenous people primarily as research subjects toward recognizing them as knowledge holders and co-producers of knowledge. It therefore contributes to broader debates on decolonizing research and strengthening epistemic justice.



4.4 Community Engagement and Reciprocal Knowledge Exchange

The findings indicate that TWS act as a bridge between ARU and surrounding communities. Through workshops, storytelling, demonstrations, field activities, and community projects, they facilitate two-way knowledge exchange.

Students reported that community-based activities enabled them to understand development problems within their social, cultural, and environmental contexts. Faculty members similarly reported that TWS strengthened connections between academic knowledge and community practice.

The evidence therefore indicates that community engagement at ARU is not simply a process of transferring university knowledge to communities. Rather, it is a reciprocal process in which communities contribute knowledge to university learning while students and academics contribute contemporary knowledge and skills to community initiatives.

4.5 Challenges in Balancing Traditional and Modern Epistemologies

Despite these positive findings, the study identified challenges associated with integrating Indigenous and modern academic epistemologies. The most prominent challenge concerns the perception that formally documented scientific knowledge is more authoritative than knowledge transmitted orally through elders and community practitioners.

A faculty participant observed:

“The challenge is to ensure that traditional knowledge and academic knowledge are not presented as competing forms of knowledge, but as systems that can complement one another.” (Faculty, F06)

This finding demonstrates that effective knowledge integration requires epistemological dialogue rather than replacement. Indigenous Knowledge should neither be romanticized nor treated as inferior, while scientific knowledge should not automatically be positioned as the only valid source of evidence. Instead, students should be encouraged to critically examine different knowledge systems and determine how they can complement one another in particular contexts.

This approach is consistent with contemporary scholarship on decolonizing African higher education, which emphasizes knowledge pluralism and critical engagement among different epistemological traditions (Laakso & Hallberg Adu, 2024; Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025).

4.6 Institutional Acceptance of Traditional Wisdom Specialists



A further challenge concerns the institutional recognition of TWS. Conventional university systems frequently associate teaching authority with formal academic qualifications. TWS, however, may possess extensive knowledge acquired through intergenerational learning, observation, practice, and community recognition.

This creates questions concerning their appointment, remuneration, participation in curriculum development, teaching responsibilities, assessment, research recognition, and intellectual-property rights. The findings suggest that meaningful institutional acceptance requires universities to broaden their definition of expertise by recognizing community authority, practical competence, lived experience, and demonstrated Indigenous Knowledge alongside formal academic credentials.

This issue is central to decolonization because curriculum transformation cannot be sustained if institutional structures continue to privilege only one form of expertise. Transformation must therefore address both curriculum content and institutional knowledge hierarchies.

4.7 Ethical Protection of Indigenous Knowledge

The study also identified ethical challenges concerning the documentation and dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge. Some knowledge is collectively owned, culturally restricted, sacred, or commercially sensitive. Consequently, universities must establish clear procedures concerning consent, attribution, confidentiality, intellectual property, and benefit sharing.

The findings indicate that TWS should retain agency over what knowledge may be shared, documented, taught, or published. The integration of Indigenous Knowledge must therefore be based on reciprocity rather than extraction. This is particularly important where university research and publication could otherwise separate knowledge from the communities that have developed and maintained it.

4.8 Measurable Impacts on Student Outcomes

The findings demonstrate several student-level outcomes associated with TWS participation, including increased engagement, stronger experiential learning, greater curriculum relevance, improved practical competence, enhanced problem-solving, and a stronger ability to connect theory with practice.

The quantitative analysis provides an opportunity to test these relationships statistically. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine relationships between TWS participation and educational outcomes. The results should be reported in APA 7 format using the actual statistical output. For example:



TWS participation was positively associated with experiential learning, $r(598) = [\text{actual } r\text{-value}]$, $p = [\text{actual } p\text{-value}]$.

Similarly:

Indigenous Knowledge integration was positively associated with curriculum relevance, $r(598) = [\text{actual } r\text{-value}]$, $p = [\text{actual } p\text{-value}]$.

The actual r and p values must be obtained from the study dataset and should not be estimated. A result with $p < .05$ would indicate a statistically significant association at the 5% level.

The qualitative evidence complements the statistical analysis by explaining how TWS participation influences learning. Students attributed their learning experiences to practical demonstrations, storytelling, observation, mentorship, and community activities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence therefore provides both evidence of association and an explanation of the processes underlying that association.

4.9 Measurable Impacts on Community Transformation

The contribution of TWS extends beyond student learning to potential community-level transformation. The study identifies several areas through which this contribution can be assessed, including sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation, environmental conservation, livelihoods, food security, cultural preservation, and university–community partnerships.

Community transformation can be assessed through observable indicators such as adoption of sustainable farming practices, increased use of locally appropriate climate-adaptation strategies, participation in environmental conservation, improvement in food-production practices, development of community-based livelihood initiatives, increased student participation in community problem-solving, and strengthened intergenerational transmission of Indigenous Knowledge.

These indicators provide a stronger basis for evaluating the contribution of Indigenous Knowledge integration than relying solely on general perceptions of cultural relevance. They enable future assessment of whether the ARU model produces sustained educational and developmental outcomes.

4.10 Relationship Between Student Learning and Community Transformation

An important finding is that student and community outcomes are interconnected. When students acquire practical knowledge from TWS, they can apply it through community projects, fieldwork, internships, and rural development activities. Community engagement, in turn, gives students opportunities to test, adapt, and refine their knowledge.



The ARU model consequently creates a relationship between learning and application in which Indigenous Knowledge contributes to student learning, student learning contributes to community engagement, and community engagement generates further opportunities for knowledge creation. This relationship strengthens the potential of rural higher education to contribute directly to local development.

4.11 Knowledge Pluralism and Decolonizing Higher Education

The findings position ARU within broader debates on knowledge pluralism and the decolonization of higher education. The evidence indicates that the strongest contribution of TWS occurs when Indigenous and academic knowledge are brought into dialogue rather than treated as mutually exclusive.

For example, Indigenous observations concerning weather patterns, soil conditions, crop performance, medicinal plants, and ecological change can be considered alongside scientific evidence and contemporary technologies. Such integration enables students to evaluate multiple sources of knowledge and develop contextually appropriate responses to local challenges.

The significance of the ARU approach therefore extends beyond preservation of Indigenous Knowledge. It creates institutional space for different knowledge systems to interact and contribute to knowledge production. This supports the argument that decolonizing higher education involves transforming relationships between knowledge systems and their producers rather than simply replacing one curriculum with another (Laakso & Hallberg Adu, 2024).

4.12 ARU's Distinctive Contribution

The most significant finding is that ARU moves beyond treating Indigenous Knowledge merely as curriculum content. Traditional Wisdom Specialists themselves participate in teaching, experiential learning, community engagement, and knowledge co-creation.

This distinguishes the ARU model from approaches in which Indigenous Knowledge is incorporated only through selected courses, written materials, occasional guest lectures, or cultural activities. At ARU, TWS are positioned as continuing participants in the educational process.



The novelty of the model therefore lies in the institutional recognition of the knowledge holder, rather than merely the institutional inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge as subject matter. This provides a practical pathway for transforming knowledge pluralism from a theoretical principle into an institutional educational practice.

4.13 Overall Results and Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that TWS contribute to ARU across interconnected areas of curriculum development, experiential learning, research, knowledge co-creation, community engagement, sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation, environmental stewardship, and rural transformation.

At the same time, the findings reveal challenges involving epistemological tensions, institutional acceptance, ethical protection of Indigenous Knowledge, assessment, and sustainability of TWS participation. Addressing these challenges requires institutional policies that recognise TWS, protect Indigenous intellectual property, support reciprocal knowledge exchange, and establish clear mechanisms for measuring educational and community outcomes.

The convergence of qualitative and quantitative evidence strengthens the interpretation of the study. Participant narratives explain how TWS influence teaching and learning, while correlation analysis provides an empirical basis for examining whether the observed relationships are statistically significant. Community-level indicators extend the assessment beyond the classroom to determine whether the model contributes to measurable rural transformation.

The central finding is therefore that ARU represents a shift from “Indigenous Knowledge as content” to “Indigenous Knowledge holders as active participants in higher education.” This is a significant contribution to debates on decolonizing African higher education because it challenges conventional boundaries between academic and community knowledge, university and community expertise, and formal and experiential learning.

ARU consequently provides a promising institutional model for rural African higher education in which epistemic diversity, experiential learning, community engagement, and rural transformation are brought together within a coherent educational framework. Its long-term significance will depend on demonstrating measurable improvements in student competencies and community outcomes while ensuring ethical protection, institutional recognition, and sustained participation of Traditional Wisdom Specialists.

5. Conclusion, Recommendations, Advocacy, and Research Gaps

5.1 Conclusion



This study concludes that the integration of Traditional Wisdom Specialists (TWS) into teaching and learning at African Rural University (ARU) represents a distinctive institutional approach to decolonising higher education and advancing knowledge pluralism in rural Africa. The findings demonstrate that TWS contribute not only Indigenous Knowledge as curriculum content but also their expertise, lived experience, pedagogical practices, and community-based perspectives to curriculum implementation, experiential learning, research, and community engagement. This is consistent with recent scholarship arguing that African higher education requires a shift from the dominance of externally validated knowledge toward more pluralistic systems that recognize African epistemologies and knowledge holders (Gumbo et al., 2024; Hoppers, 2021; Laakso & Hallberg Adu, 2024).

Theoretically, the study contributes to debates on decolonization, epistemic justice, African epistemologies, and knowledge pluralism. Its central contribution is the proposition that meaningful decolonization should involve not only changing what is taught but also changing who is recognized as a legitimate producer and transmitter of knowledge. This interpretation is supported by scholarship calling for African universities to recognize Indigenous Knowledge holders as intellectual contributors and to create dialogue between different knowledge systems (Agbaje, 2023; Hungwe & Ndofirepi, 2021).

Practically, the ARU experience demonstrates that TWS can strengthen experiential learning, contextualize academic knowledge, support sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship, and create stronger relationships between the university and surrounding communities. The approach is particularly relevant to rural development because Indigenous and local knowledge can contribute to climate adaptation and resilience when brought into constructive dialogue with scientific knowledge (Filho et al., 2023; Nalau et al., 2022).

The study nevertheless recognizes that institutionalizing Indigenous Knowledge is not without challenges. Balancing Indigenous and scientific epistemologies, establishing institutional legitimacy for TWS, protecting Indigenous intellectual property, ensuring appropriate remuneration, and developing reliable indicators for measuring educational and community outcomes remain important concerns. These challenges reflect wider evidence that decolonization efforts can remain informal or dependent on individual academic commitment when institutional structures and policies are not adequately transformed (Laakso & Hallberg Adu, 2024; Martin et al., 2024).

The study therefore concludes that ARU provides an important practical example of how a rural African university can move from “**Indigenous Knowledge inclusion**” to “**Indigenous Knowledge participation**.” Its significance lies in positioning TWS as active contributors to teaching, learning, research, and community transformation.

5.2 Theoretical Contribution



The principal theoretical contribution of the study is the development of an Indigenous Knowledge–University Knowledge Partnership perspective. The findings suggest that decolonized higher education should not be conceptualized simply as the replacement of Western knowledge with Indigenous Knowledge. Rather, it should create an epistemological space in which Indigenous, scientific, experiential, and community knowledge can interact critically and ethically.

This position is consistent with the argument that dialogue among epistemologies can improve the contextual relevance of education and support sustainability learning in African settings (Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Wals et al., 2021). Recent work similarly emphasizes that African higher education requires pluralistic approaches capable of recognizing knowledge systems historically marginalized by colonial educational structures (Gumbo et al., 2024; Bekele & Amponsah, 2025).

The ARU model extends this theoretical position by emphasizing the **institutional agency of knowledge holders**. The university is not simply integrating Indigenous knowledge into existing academic structures; it is creating a role for TWS within those structures. This distinction provides an important conceptual contribution to discussions of epistemic justice.

5.3 Practical Lessons for African Higher Education

The study offers several practical lessons for universities seeking to integrate Indigenous Knowledge into higher education. First, Indigenous Knowledge should be embedded across relevant curricula rather than confined to isolated courses or cultural activities. Second, knowledge holders should be actively involved in teaching and curriculum development. Third, community-based learning should complement classroom instruction so that students can apply academic concepts to real development challenges.

Fourth, universities should develop institutional frameworks for recognizing TWS as legitimate contributors to teaching and research. Fifth, Indigenous Knowledge should be governed through ethical procedures that protect community ownership, confidentiality, attribution, consent, and benefit sharing. These lessons correspond with recent research showing that successful decolonization requires institutional transformation rather than curriculum modification alone (Laakso & Hallberg Adu, 2024; Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025; Woldegiorgis, 2020).

5.4 Recommendations

ARU should formally institutionalize the participation of TWS in curriculum development, teaching, research, assessment, and community engagement. Their roles should be clearly defined within university policies, including appropriate remuneration, recognition, participation rights, and professional support.

The University should establish an institutional Indigenous Knowledge Integration Framework that specifies how TWS knowledge is incorporated into courses, fieldwork, research, student



assessment, and community projects. The framework should promote dialogue between Indigenous and scientific knowledge rather than presenting them as competing systems.

ARU should expand experiential and community-based learning opportunities. Students should regularly participate in demonstrations, community research, agricultural activities, environmental conservation, storytelling, mentorship, and other forms of practice-based learning facilitated by TWS.

The University should develop an Indigenous Knowledge ethics and intellectual-property policy covering informed consent, confidentiality, ownership, attribution, publication, commercialization, and benefit sharing. This is essential to ensure that decolonization does not reproduce extractive relationships between universities and communities.

ARU should strengthen monitoring and evaluation by establishing measurable student and community indicators. Student indicators should include experiential learning, academic engagement, practical competence, curriculum relevance, problem-solving ability, knowledge application, and graduate employability. Community indicators should include adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, climate-adaptation measures, environmental conservation, livelihood improvement, food security, and intergenerational transmission of Indigenous Knowledge.

Finally, ARU should develop partnerships with other African universities, government agencies, communities, and international organizations to exchange experience and strengthen the evidence base for Indigenous Knowledge integration.

5.5 Advocacy for Indigenous Knowledge in Higher Education

The study advocates for a broader transformation in the way African societies and universities understand knowledge and expertise. Indigenous Knowledge should not be regarded as historical information that belongs exclusively to the past. It remains a living knowledge system that can contribute to contemporary challenges when appropriately documented, critically examined, protected, and applied.

African governments and higher education regulators should therefore create policies that encourage universities to work with Indigenous Knowledge holders. Such policies should recognize that expertise may be acquired through community-based learning, practice, observation, experimentation, oral transmission, and cultural responsibility as well as through formal academic qualifications.

The advocacy position is supported by recent African scholarship showing that Indigenous Knowledge can strengthen the societal relevance of universities and contribute to addressing local development problems (Bekele & Amponsah, 2025; Chingombe, 2025).



The study further advocates for greater recognition of Indigenous Knowledge in climate-change adaptation, sustainable agriculture, environmental management, health, food systems, and rural livelihoods. Evidence from African contexts demonstrates that Indigenous and local knowledge can strengthen adaptation, although institutional and policy barriers continue to limit its mainstreaming (Filho et al., 2023).

5.6 Policy Implications

At policy level, the findings suggest that decolonizing higher education should become an institutional rather than an individual responsibility. Governments and regulatory agencies should encourage universities to establish mechanisms through which community knowledge holders can participate in curriculum development and teaching.

Higher education policies should also broaden conventional understandings of academic expertise. Formal qualifications remain important for academic quality, but they should not automatically invalidate forms of knowledge developed through long-term community practice and cultural transmission.

Furthermore, national research policies should encourage participatory and community-based research in which Indigenous Knowledge holders are recognized as collaborators rather than merely research participants. Such reforms would strengthen epistemic justice and ensure that research agendas respond more directly to African development priorities.

5.7 Research Gaps and Future Research

Despite its contribution, the study identifies several areas requiring further investigation. First, longitudinal studies are needed to establish whether exposure to TWS-supported learning produces sustained changes in graduates' competencies, professional practices, and contributions to rural development.

Second, comparative studies should examine ARU alongside universities in other African countries that have adopted different approaches to Indigenous Knowledge integration. Such comparisons would clarify which institutional conditions enable successful and sustainable integration.

Third, future quantitative research should examine the relationship between TWS participation and measurable student outcomes using larger datasets and more sophisticated statistical techniques. Correlation analysis should be complemented by regression, effect-size estimates, confidence intervals, and, where appropriate, structural-equation modelling.

Fourth, future research should systematically measure community transformation. Indicators should include changes in agricultural practices, household livelihoods, food security,



environmental conservation, climate resilience, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Fifth, further research should examine the experiences of TWS themselves. Important questions concern their institutional status, remuneration, professional recognition, participation in decision-making, intellectual-property rights, and experiences of working within formal university structures. Recent research in Zimbabwe and The Gambia demonstrates that institutional, methodological, political, financial, and attitudinal barriers remain important challenges for Indigenous Knowledge research and integration (Muyambo et al., 2025; Martin et al., 2024).

Finally, future research should investigate whether the ARU model can be adapted to other rural African universities without losing its cultural and contextual integrity.

5.8 Final Conclusion

The integration of Traditional Wisdom Specialists at African Rural University demonstrates that African higher education can become more relevant, inclusive, and transformative when communities are recognized not merely as beneficiaries of knowledge but as partners in teaching, learning, research, and knowledge production.

The study's most important contribution is therefore not simply that Indigenous Knowledge has a place in the university. Rather, it demonstrates that the people who hold and practice Indigenous Knowledge can have a legitimate and active place within the university itself. This distinction represents a significant step toward epistemic justice and the practical decolonization of higher education.

ARU's experience suggests that the future of African higher education should not be framed as a choice between Indigenous and modern knowledge. Instead, universities should create spaces for critical dialogue among Indigenous, scientific, experiential, and community-based knowledge systems. Such an approach can produce graduates who are academically competent, culturally grounded, practically skilled, and capable of responding to local and global challenges.

The long-term value of the ARU model will ultimately depend on its capacity to demonstrate measurable improvements in student learning and community transformation. Nevertheless, the model provides a promising foundation for a form of African higher education in which knowledge pluralism, social responsibility, rural transformation, cultural identity, and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives.

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