International Journal of Studies in Education – Vol. 21, Issue 1, 2025, 455-463
ISSN: 2636-6320 (ONLINE) - 2636-6339 (PRINT) - https://ijose.unn.edu.ng/

INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN TEACHING SOCIAL ISSUES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into formal education has gained increasing recognition as a pathway to contextualized, culturally responsive, and socially transformative learning. This study investigates the role and impact of integrating indigenous knowledge in teaching social issues within the secondary school social science curriculum in Nigeria, driven by the need to address the disconnect between Western epistemologies and local socio-cultural realities. Drawing on principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and indigenous epistemology, the research explores how local knowledge rooted in traditions, community values, oral histories, and customary practices can enrich students' understanding of contemporary social issues such as conflict, governance, environmental degradation, and communal living. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, curriculum content analysis, and semi-structured interviews with 120 social science teachers, 12 curriculum developers, and 12 community elders across three geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative insights and descriptive statistics with regression analysis for quantitative trends. The findings reveal that when effectively integrated, indigenous knowledge enhances students' critical thinking, cultural identity, and social responsibility. However, challenges such as curriculum rigidity, teacher preparedness, and policy misalignment were identified. The study concludes that meaningful integration requires curriculum reform, teacher training, and collaborative partnerships with local communities, with policy implications including the need for a decolonized curriculum model and institutional support to foster relevance, inclusivity, and deeper student engagement in addressing social challenges.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge systems; social issues; social science education; curriculum integration; cultural relevance

Introduction
Education plays a pivotal role in shaping how individuals understand and respond to social issues, especially within diverse and complex societies such as Nigeria. Social science education at the secondary school level is designed not only to transmit knowledge about societal structures and historical developments but also to foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and cultural awareness among learners. However, the current curriculum is often criticized for its over-reliance on Western epistemologies, which may not fully reflect the socio-cultural realities or indigenous worldviews of Nigerian communities (Odora Hoppers, 2002; Dei, 2014). Despite the 2013 National Policy on Education's emphasis on reflecting national values and heritage, there remains a significant research gap in Nigeria regarding the systematic integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into social science instruction. This gap is particularly evident given the limited empirical studies

exploring how local knowledge can address contemporary social issues in a Nigerian context, where diverse cultural traditions offer untapped potential for educational relevance.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems, defined as the cumulative and evolving bodies of knowledge, practices, and beliefs developed by local communities through generations of interaction with their environment, offer a rich, underutilized resource for contextualizing social science education (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). These systems encapsulate traditional governance structures, conflict resolution methods, environmental stewardship, oral traditions, and communal ethics, which are deeply embedded in the lived experiences of Nigerian societies. The theoretical underpinning of this study draws on the Ecological Epistemic Justice Framework (Adebayo, 2023), a recent advancement that integrates indigenous epistemology with environmental sustainability and equitable education. This framework emphasizes the need to recognize indigenous knowledge as a vital component of learning systems, promoting both cultural preservation and adaptive problem-solving in response to modern challenges.

The integration of indigenous knowledge into formal education has gained global momentum, with scholars advocating for a decolonized curriculum that promotes epistemic justice and cultural relevance. In Nigeria, however, implementation remains limited due to rigid curricula, lack of teacher training, and exam-oriented frameworks. Research suggests that when students see their identities, languages, and community practices reflected in the classroom, their engagement and academic performance improve significantly (Gay, 2010; Owuor, 2007). Integrating IKS into the teaching of social issues thus holds potential not only for enhancing curriculum relevance but also for fostering critical consciousness, cultural pride, and locally grounded solutions to contemporary problems. This study therefore seeks to explore how indigenous knowledge systems can be effectively integrated into the teaching of social issues in Nigerian secondary schools. It also examines the implications of such integration for curriculum design, teacher pedagogy, and educational equity. The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between formal education and indigenous worldviews, offering a pathway to more inclusive, context-specific education that empowers students to address Nigeria's pressing social challenges effectively. This study is significant both practically and theoretically. It addresses a research gap by enhancing curriculum relevance through local knowledge, fostering student engagement, cultural pride, and solutions to social issues like conflict and governance. Practically, it offers actionable insights for curriculum reform, teacher training, and community partnerships, promoting educational equity and context-specific learning. Theoretically, it advances culturally relevant pedagogy and indigenous epistemology by providing empirical evidence for decolonizing education, contributing to a transformative framework for global and local citizenship.

Statement of the Problem

Despite ongoing curriculum reforms and increased discourse on culturally responsive education, the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the teaching of social issues within Nigeria's secondary school social science curriculum remains marginal. The prevailing curriculum largely reflects Eurocentric paradigms and formal academic knowledge, often detached from the lived realities, historical experiences, and communal values of indigenous Nigerian societies. This disconnection not only limits students' ability

to critically engage with social issues such as inequality, governance, and communal conflict but also undermines their cultural identity and sense of belonging in the learning process. While national policies such as the National Policy on Education (2013) emphasize the need for education to be relevant, culturally rooted, and socially transformative, there is limited empirical evidence of structured efforts to embed indigenous epistemologies into social science instruction. Many teachers rely on outdated textbooks and are ill-equipped both in training and in pedagogical approach to incorporate indigenous worldviews, practices, and historical narratives into classroom discourse (Nnama-Okechukwu, 2023). As a result, students are often presented with abstract or foreign frameworks for understanding social problems, rather than being encouraged to critically analyze these issues through the lens of their own communities' knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, the exclusion of IKS from formal education contributes to the erosion of valuable indigenous heritage and limits opportunities for developing locally relevant and sustainable solutions to Nigeria's pressing social challenges. This oversight is particularly troubling in a diverse country like Nigeria, where cultural and communal traditions offer rich insights into conflict resolution, environmental management, and civic responsibility all central to the social sciences. Given these gaps, there is an urgent need to investigate how indigenous knowledge can be effectively integrated into the teaching of social issues and what implications such integration holds for pedagogy, curriculum development, and students' social awareness. Addressing this problem is critical for fostering inclusive education, enhancing the relevance of social science instruction, and empowering learners to engage critically with both local and global social realities.

Purpose of the Study

The following research objectives guided the study.

1. To examine the extent of integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the teaching of social issues within the secondary school social science curriculum.
2. To explore teachers' perceptions regarding the relevance of IKS in social science education.
3. To identify key challenges affecting the integration of IKS in secondary social science instruction.
4. To assess the effect of IKS integration on students' engagement and contextual understanding of social issues.

Hypotheses

H_1: There is a significant relationship between the level of IKS integration and the effectiveness of teaching social issues in secondary schools.

H_2: Teachers with more favorable perceptions of IKS are more likely to integrate indigenous content into their social science lessons.

H_3: Lack of curriculum flexibility and teacher training significantly hinders the integration of IKS in social science instruction.

H3: The integration of IKS significantly enhances students' engagement and their contextual understanding of social issues.

Methods

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the teaching of social issues within the secondary school social science curriculum in Nigeria. The convergent design was chosen to enable triangulation of data, providing both measurable insights into trends and a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions and contextual dynamics (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The population for the study comprised all social science teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators across public secondary schools in selected states in Nigeria's North Central, which includes Nasarawa, Benue, Kwara, and Plateau states, while in the South East zones, Enugu, Anambra, and Abia states were considered, with Benue (North Central) and Anambra (South East) purposively selected because of their rich indigenous traditions and educational diversity. A multistage sampling technique was employed. First, two states Benue and Anambra were purposively selected based on cultural representation and diversity of indigenous practices. Second, five secondary schools were randomly selected from each state. From these, a total of 120 teachers were selected for the quantitative survey, determined using a proportionate stratified sampling formula based on an estimated teacher population of 300 across the 10 schools, aiming for a 40% representation to ensure statistical reliability. Additionally, 12 participants (including 4 teachers, 4 principals, and 4 community elders) were purposively selected for qualitative interviews, justified by the need for in-depth insights from a manageable, representative sample aligned with qualitative research norms for thematic saturation (Patton, 2015). Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, containing four sections aligned with the research objectives: current use of IKS in teaching, teacher perceptions, perceived challenges, and impact on students. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview guides were used to probe participants' experiences, beliefs, and insights regarding the use and integration of indigenous knowledge in social science instruction. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review by two university lecturers in curriculum studies and indigenous education. A pilot test involving 15 teachers outside the study area yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, indicating high internal consistency of the instrument. Permission was obtained from relevant educational authorities, including the State Ministries of Education in Benue and Anambra, and school principals, ensuring ethical compliance and voluntary participation through formal letters and consent forms. Data collection occurred over a six-week period. The researcher administered questionnaires during teachers' free periods and conducted face-to-face interviews with selected participants in schools and community centers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis to test the research hypotheses. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS v25. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Codes were generated from interview transcripts and grouped into themes representing

participants' views on relevance, challenges, and strategies for integrating IKS into social science education.

Results

Table 1: Regression Analysis for H_1: IKS Integration → Student Engagement (n=120)

Predictor	**B**	**SE B**	**t**	**p**
Constant	0.522	0.291	1.79	.075
IKS Integration	0.410	0.091	4.52	< .001

The result shows that IKS integration significantly predicts student engagement (B = 0.410, p < .001). The positive coefficient indicates that greater use of Indigenous Knowledge in teaching social issues leads to higher student engagement. This supports H_1.

Table 2: Regression Analysis for H_2: Perception of IKS → IKS Integration (n=120)

Predictor	**B**	**SE B**	**t**	**p**
Constant	2.884	0.274	10.51	< .001
Perception of IKS	0.076	0.076	1.00	.322

Teachers' perception of IKS does not significantly predict the level of its integration into classroom practice (p = .322). This suggests that even when teachers appreciate IKS conceptually, it does not automatically translate to practical use in the curriculum. Thus, H_2 is rejected.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for H_3: Institutional Challenges → IKS Integration (n=120)

Predictor	**B**	**SE B**	**t**	**p**
Constant	3.398	0.208	16.33	< .001
Institutional Challenges	-0.087	0.072	-1.22	.226

Institutional challenges (e.g., lack of training, rigid curriculum) do not significantly predict IKS integration in this model (p = .226). While challenges are reported, their standalone effect may be indirect or context-dependent. H_3 is also not supported.

Table 4: Multiple Regression for H4: IKS Integration + Perception + Challenges → Student Engagement (n = 120)

Predictor	**B**	**SE B**	**t**	**p**
Constant	0.535	0.396	1.35	.180
IKS Integration	0.348	0.085	4.12`	<.001
Perception of IKS	0.249	0.070	3.53	<.001
Institutional Challenges	-0.247	0.066	-3.72	<.001

Model Fit: $R = .65$, $R^2 = .42$, Adjusted $R^2 = .40$, $F(3,116) = 28.3$, $p < .001$
As shown in Table 4, IKS integration significantly predicted student engagement, $B = 0.35$, $t(116) = 4.12$, $p < .001$, such that higher levels of integration were associated with higher engagement. Similarly, perception of IKS was a positive and significant predictor, $B = 0.25$, $t(116) = 3.53$, $p < .001$, indicating that more favorable perceptions of IKS corresponded to greater engagement. In contrast, institutional challenges negatively predicted student engagement, $B = –0.25$, $t(116) = –3.72$, $p < .001$, suggesting that increases in institutional barriers were linked with reduced engagement. The constant was not statistically significant, $B = 0.54$, $t(116) = 1.35$, $p = .180$.

Discussion
This study explored the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the teaching of social issues in the secondary school social science curriculum, focusing on its impact on student engagement and the influence of teacher perceptions and institutional challenges. The results offer a multidimensional view of the factors that either facilitate or hinder the use of IKS in classrooms.

The analysis in Table 1 confirmed a statistically significant positive relationship between IKS integration and student engagement ($B = 0.410$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that greater incorporation of indigenous knowledge enhances student motivation and participation, likely because it makes abstract social concepts more relatable and culturally resonant, fostering a sense of ownership in learning. This aligns with foundational research by Gay (2010), who emphasized that culturally responsive pedagogy boosts learners' identity and critical understanding. More recent studies reinforce this, such as Mncube and Ngwenya (2024), who found that integrating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKSs) into STEM education in South Africa improved student engagement through contextual relevance, and Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2023), who reported similar outcomes in Nigerian secondary education, where IKS helped students connect traditional practices to modern social issues like conflict resolution. However, contradicting evidence exists; for instance, Mthembu and Ndlovu (2025) highlighted in a South African life sciences context that IKS integration sometimes led to lower engagement due to students perceiving indigenous content as outdated or irrelevant in exam-oriented curricula, potentially creating confusion rather than motivation.

Contrary to expectations, Table 2 showed no significant relationship between teachers' positive perceptions of IKS and its actual integration into classroom practice ($p = .322$). This indicates a theory-practice gap, where teachers' conceptual appreciation does not translate to implementation, possibly due to external constraints like time limitations or lack of resources overriding their attitudes. This is consistent with Owuor (2007), who noted that teacher valuation of indigenous knowledge requires supportive structures to materialize. Recent literature aligns with this, including Maphosa and Maphosa (2024), who in a Zimbabwean study found that despite favorable perceptions, teachers faced barriers in integrating IKS into general education, leading to minimal adoption. Similarly, Khupe (2023) in a South African review identified systemic disconnects preventing perception from driving practice. On the contrary, some studies contradict this by showing strong links; for example, Okeke and Okeke (2025) in Nigerian higher education reported that positive

teacher perceptions directly correlated with higher IKS integration when institutional support was present, suggesting the gap may be context-dependent rather than universal.

Table 3 indicated that institutional challenges do not significantly predict IKS integration in isolation ($p = .226$). This could be attributed to the indirect or interactive nature of these challenges, where factors like curriculum rigidity or lack of training do not independently block integration but amplify other barriers. This supports Sarfo et al. (2023), who argued that institutional constraints operate through complex interactions in African educational settings. Aligning recent work includes Ndlovu and Sibanda (2025), who in a systematic review of South African technology education found that isolated institutional issues had limited predictive power for IKS adoption, emphasizing multifaceted influences. However, contradicting findings are evident in studies like Mthethwa and Gumede (2024), where institutional challenges in KwaZulu-Natal schools were shown to directly and significantly hinder IKS integration, with rigid policies alone accounting for over 50% of variance in non-adoption, highlighting potential regional variations.

As shown in Table 4, when IKS integration, perception of IKS, and institutional challenges were considered together in a multiple regression model, all three emerged as significant predictors of student engagement ($p < .001$ for all), with IKS integration and teacher perception exerting positive effects and institutional challenges a negative one. This holistic result underscores the interdependent nature of these factors, where combined reforms are necessary for optimal outcomes, as isolated efforts may fall short. This echoes Battiste's (2005) call for systemic reform in indigenous education. Recent aligning literature includes Ngcobo (2025), who in a decolonization study of African environmental education demonstrated that multifaceted integration of IKS, perceptions, and addressing challenges collectively enhanced learner outcomes. In contrast, some research contradicts this synergy; for instance, Sithole and Dlamini (2023) in Eswatini found that even when combined, these predictors did not significantly improve engagement due to overarching colonial legacies in curricula, suggesting deeper structural issues may override interactive effects in certain African contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined the role and impact of integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the teaching of social issues within the secondary school social science curriculum in Nigeria. The findings affirm that IKS integration significantly enhances student engagement by making learning more culturally relevant, participatory, and context-specific. However, despite positive teacher perceptions toward IKS, the study reveals a disconnect between awareness and classroom application largely due to structural barriers such as rigid curricula, inadequate teacher training, and lack of institutional support. Regression analyses showed that while teacher perception alone may not predict IKS use, the combined influence of perceptions, institutional challenges, and IKS integration significantly predicts student engagement. These insights underscore the need for a multi-level reform approach that addresses both the philosophical and operational aspects of curriculum delivery. Ultimately, this study reinforces the imperative to decolonize the social science curriculum in Nigeria by recognizing the legitimacy and utility of indigenous worldviews, histories, and problem-solving strategies. Doing so not only strengthens learning outcomes but also preserves cultural identity and builds locally grounded civic competencies among learners

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Federal Ministry of Education and relevant curriculum bodies (e.g., NERDC) should revise the secondary school social science curriculum to include structured spaces for the integration of Indigenous Knowledge.
2. Professional development programs should be organized to train social science teachers on culturally responsive pedagogy and the pedagogical use of IKS.
3. Schools should collaborate with community elders, traditional leaders, and local knowledge holders to co-develop teaching materials and organize experiential learning sessions that reflect indigenous perspectives on social issues.
4. Education policymakers should institutionalize incentives for schools that innovate with indigenous approaches.
5. Advocacy campaigns should be launched to educate stakeholders, parents, policymakers, and education officers on the value of indigenous knowledge in modern education.

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