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Oral Tradition and Intergenerational Transmission of Musical Knowledge in Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom: The *Ensegu* (flute) Tradition – An Empirical Study in Hoima City

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Abstract
The *Ensegu* (flute) ensemble occupies a central yet undocumented place in the ceremonial life of Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, western Uganda. Despite its indispensable role at the annual Empango royal coronation ceremony, its intergenerational transmission mechanisms have received no empirical investigation. This phenomenological qualitative study examined how musical knowledge is transmitted within the *Ensegu* tradition among master musicians, craftsmen, and apprentices in Hoima City, Uganda. Data were collected between February and July 2024 through in-depth interviews, field observations at rehearsals and the June 2024 Empango ceremony, and audio recordings. Sixteen participants were recruited through purposive sampling from a community of over forty learners, comprising two master players and instrument makers, four experienced ensemble musicians, three cultural leaders, and seven apprentices. Thematic analysis revealed six interconnected transmission mechanisms: sonic role differentiation, ceremonial apprenticeship immersion, melodic interlocking pedagogy, master-to-apprentice oral coaching, cultural memory activation through Runyoro song texts, and instrument craft transmission. The *Ensegu* tradition constitutes a distributed pedagogical system in which musical technique, ensemble intelligence, cultural identity, and craft knowledge are transmitted as an integrated whole. Findings carry implications for decolonial music education policy and integration of indigenous pedagogical models into Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum.

Introduction

The *Ensegu* (flute) ensemble occupies an indispensable yet undocumented ceremonial role in the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, western Uganda. Six end-blown flutes each producing a single pitch, each held by a different performer create interlocking melodic lines that accompany the annual Empango royal coronation ceremony. Crafted from the straight-grained omujwa-mata tree, shaped with metallic tools, and sealed at the lower end with monitor lizard skin for resonance, each flute is itself an object of cultural knowledge (Netshivhambe, 2024). Together with the *Entimbo*, four small long-drums of different sizes and pitches the *Ensegu* announces the imminent arrival of the Omukama (king). When the king appears, nine *Amakondere* royal trumpeters and nine *Entajemerwa* drums join

the soundscape; the *Ensegu* and *Entimbo* withdraw, returning only when the king retires to the *Omunsiika (*the royal chamber).

Despite this ceremonial centrality, the *Ensegu* tradition has received no scholarly attention. Ugandan music education scholarship has documented the Entenga xylophone revival at Kyambogo University (Isabirye, 2022), Amayebe traditions among the Basoga (Walubo et al., 2025a, 2025b), and Adungu harp communities in northern Uganda (Isabirye, 2024), yet the *Ensegu* remains entirely absent from the literature. This absence reflects a broader pattern in which indigenous oral transmission systems are marginalised in formal education policy, treated as "tradition" rather than as sophisticated pedagogical systems (Ngoma, 2024; Human & Akuno, 2024).

This study asks: How is musical knowledge transmitted within the *Ensegu* (flute) ensemble tradition in Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom? Drawing on six months of primary fieldwork in Hoima City (February–July 2024), the study documents six interconnected transmission mechanisms and argues that the *Ensegu* constitutes a distributed pedagogical system in which knowledge is not held by individuals but emerges through participation in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Linson & Clarke, 2021). The findings contribute to ethnomusicological transmission theory, decolonial music education scholarship, and the integration of indigenous pedagogies into Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum (Busobozi & Isabirye, 2026).

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates four complementary frameworks. Community of Practice theory (Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991) conceptualises learning as increasing participation in a shared domain: apprentices begin as peripheral observers, gradually assuming central performance roles as they master individual flute parts and internalise ensemble protocols. Distributed Cognition (Hutchins, 1995; Linson & Clarke, 2021) theorises the six-voice hocketing system as a cognitive unit distributed across performers, instruments, and the ceremonial environment. No single player holds the complete melody, and musical meaning emerges only through precise ensemble coordination (Jocuns, 2009). Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) provides a developmental lens: masters scaffold apprentice learning through embodied demonstration, singing, and physical guidance within the Zone of Proximal Development, enabling the gradual internalisation of musical tools. Decolonial Pedagogy (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Mignolo, 2007) frames the study's ethical commitments, centring *Ensegu* practitioners as knowledge producers and arguing for the curricular integration of indigenous transmission systems as foundational, not supplementary, models of musical learning (Isabirye, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024).

The four frameworks are not applied in isolation but as a mutually reinforcing analytical architecture. Community of Practice theory illuminates the social structure of *Ensegu* learning: who participates, on what terms, and through what stages of inclusion (Wenger, 1998). Distributed Cognition accounts for the acoustic and cognitive architecture of the ensemble itself, the hocketing system as a distributed mind in which no single performer holds the complete melody (Hutchins, 1995; Linson & Clarke, 2021). Vygotskian theory explains the dyadic master-apprentice relationship and the mechanisms of scaffolded skill transfer, embodied demonstration, corrective feedback, and the gradual withdrawal of support as competence develops (Vygotsky, 1978; Smith et al., 2009). Decolonial Pedagogy provides the critical-political lens, insisting that indigenous transmission systems be studied on their own epistemic terms rather than measured against Western Conservatory standards (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Mignolo, 2007; Ngoma, 2024).

Literature Review

Indigenous Music Transmission in Uganda

Isabirye (2021a, 2021b) identified scaffolded oral pedagogies, learner identity formation, and community mentorship as core mechanisms in Basoga music revival. His Entenga drum revival study (2022) documented apprenticeship methods, storytelling, embodied demonstration, and graduated release of autonomy that resonate with the *Ensegu* tradition. Walubo et al. (2025a, 2025b) examined the Amayebe tradition among Busoga communities, revealing intergenerational transmission of musical, choreographic, and instrument-making skills through elder-led apprenticeship, with craft knowledge and performance pedagogy integrated as interconnected identities. Makwa (2025) argued for harnessing community musicians as knowledge custodians for sustainable teaching at Makerere University a framework that informed the present study's collaborative design. No study has examined the *Ensegu* or any hocketing-based flute ensemble in the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom.

Collectively, this body of scholarship establishes three foundational insights for the present study. First, Ugandan indigenous music traditions share a common pedagogical grammar: elder-led apprenticeship, embodied demonstration, and the integration of performance with cultural meaning-making (Isabirye, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Walubo et al., 2025a). Second, instrument-making and performance are consistently treated as inseparable domains of knowledge, a principle the *Ensegu* tradition exemplifies (Makwa, 2025; Netshivhambe, 2024). Third, these traditions are under-documented and at risk: urbanisation and curriculum neglect have accelerated the erosion of transmission chains (Walubo et al., 2025b; Busobozi & Isabirye, 2026). The *Ensegu* tradition is particularly vulnerable confined to a small community of practitioners in Hoima City and entirely absent from Uganda's formal music education curriculum. This study responds directly to that gap.

Ensemble Pedagogies and Hocketing

Oludare (2021) documented Yoruba instrumental ensemble pedagogy in Nigeria, describing apprenticeship-based role learning structurally comparable to the *Ensegu*. Jocuns (2009) identified intent participation, mediated discourse, and distributed cognition as key mechanisms in Balinese Gamelan learning, a comparative framework applicable to hocketing pedagogy. Netshivhambe (2024) argued that instrument preservation requires revitalising maker-player pedagogies, informing this study's attention to craft transmission as an integral pedagogical domain.

Karkina et al. (2022) extended this analysis to digital ensemble contexts, demonstrating that the cognitive demands of ensemble coordination, listening, timing, role-awareness, and adaptive response are consistent across acoustic and virtual performance environments. Ruron and Astari (2025) documented hocketing pedagogy in Tabu Gong Rede Geda performances in Indonesia, identifying whole-to-part-to-whole instruction and role-based learning as cross-cultural constants. Dzakey et al. (2023) emphasised that community-based learning produces deeper cultural and musical competence than formal instruction alone. These comparative studies contextualise the *Ensegu* tradition within a global literature on ensemble pedagogy while highlighting its distinctive integration of hocketing, ceremony, craft, and cultural memory as a unified pedagogical system.

Decolonial Music Education

Ngoma (2024) and Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024) demonstrated that decolonising pedagogy requires shifts in method from teacher-centred transmission to community-centred, participatory learning. Human and Akuno (2024) proposed principles of recontextualised authenticity for

indigenising formal music education, emphasising community negotiation and cultural protocol. Dordzro (2025) and Agbenyo et al. (2025) underscored the importance of studying indigenous transmission systems on their own terms. In Uganda, the CBC (2020) created opportunities for the integration of indigenous pedagogy, yet implementation remains uneven due to insufficient teacher training and limited curriculum guidance (Busobozi & Isabirye, 2026).

Granville (2025) extended this argument to indigenous classical musicians, documenting how practitioners reclaim oral knowledge through deliberate decolonial practice, refusing notation-based validation and asserting oral transmission as epistemically sufficient. Ahmed (2025) provided a comparative lens from Islamic educational contexts, demonstrating that oral, community-based transmission systems can achieve high levels of precision and cultural fidelity without written codification. Odeke and Kirui (2025) raised urgent questions about data sovereignty and the ethics of documenting indigenous sonic archives, questions that informed the present study's ethical design. These contributions collectively argue that decolonial music education is a pedagogical programme with concrete methodological implications for how researchers enter, document, and represent indigenous musical traditions.

Distributed Cognition and Participatory Aesthetics

Linson and Clarke (2021) demonstrated that ensemble musical intelligence is distributed across performers, instruments, and the environment, and is irreducible to individual cognition. Day (2024) linked this to African participatory aesthetics and the Ubuntu principle of relational music-making. Isabirye's (2024) ethnography of Adungu communities extended distributed cognition to community musicking, arguing that participatory learning cultivates social intelligence and cultural identity alongside technical skill.

Kigozi (2024) argued that music composition in African educational contexts is itself a distributed cognitive act, a collective negotiation of musical ideas rather than an individual creative act. This framing extends to the *Ensegu*: the three named melodic patterns (Tumulinde, Hangiriza and the coronation withdrawal pattern) are not composed by individuals but held collectively as community property, maintained through oral transmission and renewed at each Empango ceremony. Small's (1998) concept of 'musicking' music as a social relationship rather than a product resonates strongly with this analysis: in the *Ensegu* tradition, playing together is simultaneously musical, pedagogical, and political affirming the identity and continuity of the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative design grounded in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009), seeking to understand how master musicians, apprentices, and cultural leaders experience and enact the transmission of *Ensegu* knowledge. IPA was chosen for its emphasis on participants' own meanings and interpretations, treating practitioners as experts in their pedagogical practices (Isabirye, 2021b; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative design was appropriate for three reasons. First, the research question 'how is musical knowledge transmitted?' is inherently processual and experiential, requiring methods that capture practice as it unfolds rather than measure outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, the *Ensegu* tradition is oral and embodied: its pedagogical logic is enacted through demonstration, imitation, and ceremonial participation, not through artefacts amenable to content analysis. Third, as an insider researcher with prior fieldwork experience in Ugandan music communities (Busobozi & Ekadu, 2026a, 2026b), the author was positioned to build trust relationships necessary for candid interview

responses. Reflexivity was maintained through a field journal documenting the researcher's positionality and interpretive choices throughout the study.

Study Site

Fieldwork was conducted in Hoima City, the administrative and cultural capital of the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, in western Uganda. Hoima hosts the Karuzika royal palace the site of the annual Empango ceremony and the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom Cultural Centre, which provides access to master musicians, rehearsal spaces, and archival materials. The fieldwork period, February–July 2024, encompassed pre-Empango rehearsals (February–May), the June 2024 Empango ceremony itself, and post-ceremony reflection interviews (July 2024).

The choice of Hoima City as the sole fieldwork site was theoretically grounded. As the seat of the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, Hoima concentrates the highest density of active *Ensegu* practitioners and the most experienced master musicians. The Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom Cultural Centre, adjacent to the Karuzika palace, provided a dedicated rehearsal space and facilitated introductions of participants through the Kingdom's cultural affairs office. Access to the June 2024 Empango ceremony was negotiated with the Kingdom's protocol office, granting the researcher observer status. This enabled close-range documentation of the full ceremonial sequence: *Ensegu* and *Entimbo* opening, *Amakondere* and *Entajemerwa* joining at the Omukama's arrival, *Ensegu* withdrawal, and return at the Omukama's retirement to the *Omunsiika*.

Participants

Sixteen participants were recruited through purposive sampling from a training community of over forty learners, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with deep knowledge of *Ensegu* performance, instrument-making, and cultural leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample comprised: two master players and instrument makers—Magezi (age 68) and Kisembo (age 62), primary custodians of *Ensegu* knowledge with over four decades of Empango performance; four experienced ensemble musicians—Baguma (45), Alituha (38), Tumwesige (41), and Kugonza (36); three cultural leaders—Kusiima (55), Kalyegira (50), and Tumusiime (48); and seven young apprentices—Businge (19), Njabu (21), Balyesiima (18), Mugisa (20), and three others who requested anonymity. Master musicians and cultural leaders consented to the use of their first names, consistent with Bunyoro cultural protocols for recognising knowledge holders.

Data Collection

Three complementary methods were employed. In-depth semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2019) were conducted with all sixteen participants: 60–90 minutes for masters and cultural leaders, 30–45 minutes for apprentices. Topics included *Ensegu* history, learning individual flute part, *Entimbo* coordination, instrument construction, and Runyoro song text meanings. All interviews were conducted in Runyoro with a cultural interpreter, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Field observations were conducted at ten rehearsal sessions (2–3 hours each) and at the June 2024 Empango ceremony, documenting ensemble arrangement, teaching sequences, verbal and non-verbal communication, and instrument use. Audio recordings of ensemble practice and performance were made using a Zoom H5 portable recorder, capturing interlocking melodic lines and timbral qualities of the *Ensegu* and *Entimbo*.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis followed the six-phase process of Braun and Clarke (2006): data familiarisation, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings were coded. Initial coding was inductive; codes such as

"listening for the *Entimbo* cue," "watching the master's breath," and "learning the story behind the song" were grouped into broader categories, from which six overarching themes emerged. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking (sharing findings with master musicians for feedback), triangulation (comparing interview, observational, and audio data), and reflexivity (a research journal documenting positionality and evolving interpretations) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Issues

Informed consent was obtained through a two-stage process: written consent forms in English and Runyoro for adult participants, and parental or guardian consent plus apprentice assent for participants under 21. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality was negotiated individually: master musicians and cultural leaders preferred to be named (consistent with Bunyoro protocols for recognising knowledge holders), while three apprentices requested anonymity. Cultural protocols were observed throughout: the researcher sought permission from the Omukama and the Empango Organising Committee, conducted a formal introduction ceremony at Karuzika palace, and consulted master musicians at every stage from question design to findings interpretation. Reciprocity commitments included providing participants with copies of audio recordings, producing a Runyoro-language summary of findings, and collaborating with the Cultural Centre on educational materials (Granville, 2025; Odeke & Kirui, 2025).

Findings

Thematic analysis revealed six interconnected transmission mechanisms constituting a distributed pedagogical system. The mechanisms are not sequential stages but simultaneous and mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single integrated practice: an apprentice learning to play the *Ensegu* is simultaneously learning their sonic role, their ceremonial identity, their cultural history, and the craft of instrument-making. Each mechanism is presented below with verbatim participant evidence, followed by theoretical analysis. Named participants are identified by first name in accordance with cultural protocol and informed consent agreements.

Sonic Role Differentiation: Learning One's Voice in the Ensemble

The six *Ensegu* (flute)s correspond to a pentatonic scale: l d r m s l (la, do, re, mi, sol, la—spanning approximately an octave). Each flute carries a named role: *Ensegu* y'*Okutandika* (starting flute, lowest pitch), *Ensegu y'Okukurikira* (following flute), *Ensegu y'Okwesimba* (anchoring flute), *Ensegu y'Okweyongera* (adding flute), *Ensegu y'Okusemberera* (approaching flute), and *Ensegu y'Okumaliriza* (completing flute, highest pitch).

Figure 1. Two Ensegu end-blown flutes from the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, Hoima City, Uganda. Photo: Nicholas Busobozi (2024)

Apprentices are assigned a single flute and spend weeks mastering its pitch, timing, and ensemble role before attempting to hear the whole. Magezi explained:

> "*You cannot learn the Ensegu by trying to play all the* flutes. *Each flute has its own voice, its own time to speak. A young person must first learn to listen to hear when their flute should enter, when it should be silent, when it should sing loudly or softly. Only after they know their own voice can they begin to hear the whole ensemble.*" *(Magezi, personal communication, March 2024)*

This principle learning one's voice before learning the whole reflects distributed cognition: musical competence is relational rather than individual (Linson & Clarke, 2021). Apprentice Businge described the process:

> "*At first, I could not hear when to play. The master would sing the pattern – la, do, la, do – and I would try to follow, but I was always too early or too late. Then he told me, 'Listen to the Entimbo. When you hear the small drum, that is your time.' After many days of listening, I began to feel the rhythm in my body, and then I knew when to play without thinking.*" *(Businge, personal communication, April 2024)*

Ceremonial Apprenticeship Immersion: Learning Through Participation

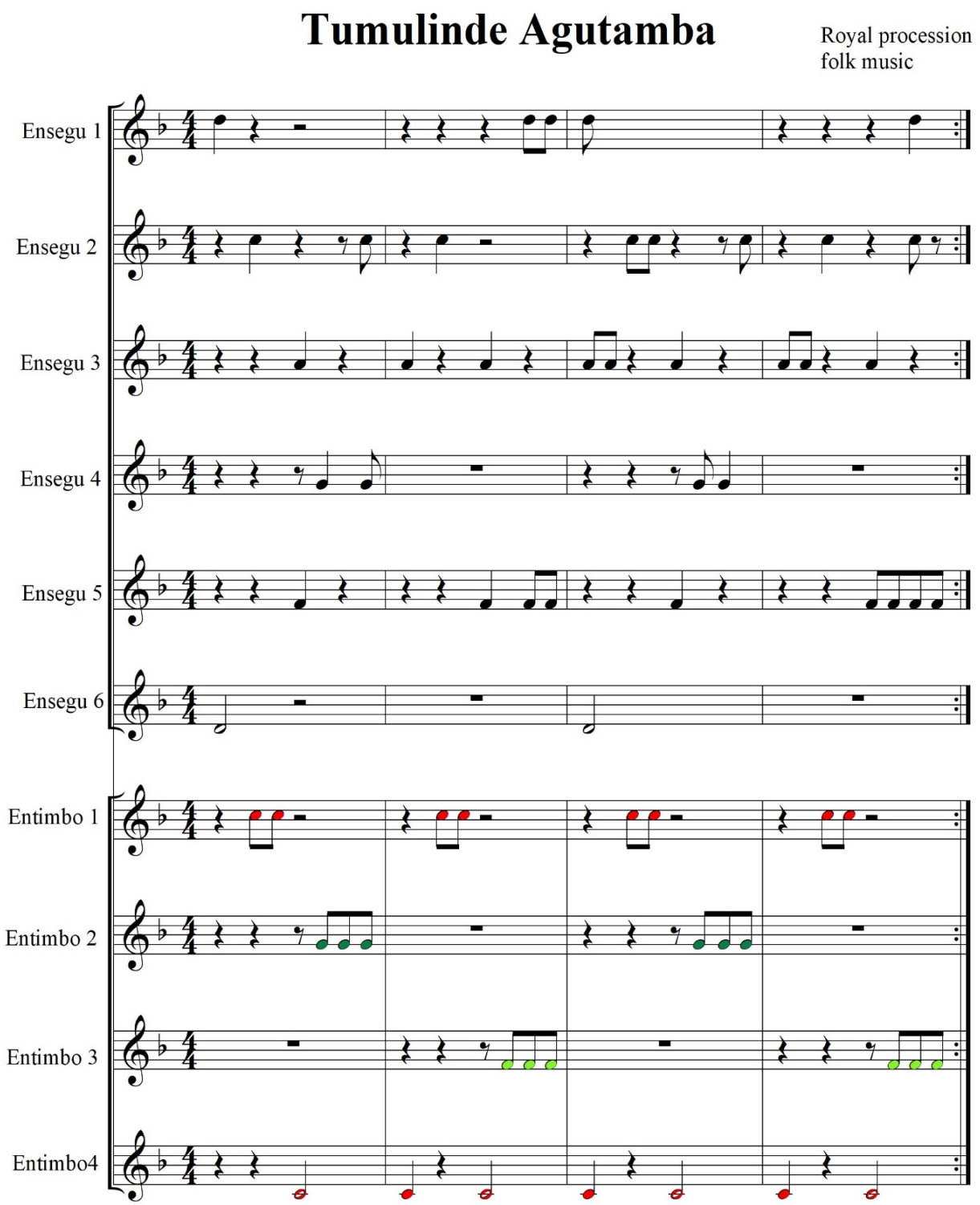
Ensegu transmission is embedded in ceremonial life. Apprentices begin as observers at rehearsals and ceremonies which Wenger (1998) calls legitimate peripheral participation absorbing cultural meanings and social protocols before assuming active roles. Kalyegira, a cultural officer, observed:

> "*We do not have a classroom for Ensegu. The rehearsal is the classroom. The ceremony is the classroom. A young person learns by being there, by watching, by carrying instruments, by sitting close to the masters and listening. Over time, they are given a flute to hold. Later, they are allowed to play at a small ceremony. Then, when they are ready, they play at the Empango.*" *(Kalyegira, personal communication, May 2024)*

The June 2024 Empango ceremony was the most significant data collection event of the study. Field observations documented apprentices performing alongside masters for the first time, with Magezi positioned centrally to provide real-time cues through subtle hand gestures and eye contact. Post-ceremony interviews revealed that apprentices experienced the Empango performance as a transformative rite of passage, a moment of identity formation within the *Ensegu* community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Isabirye, 2021b).

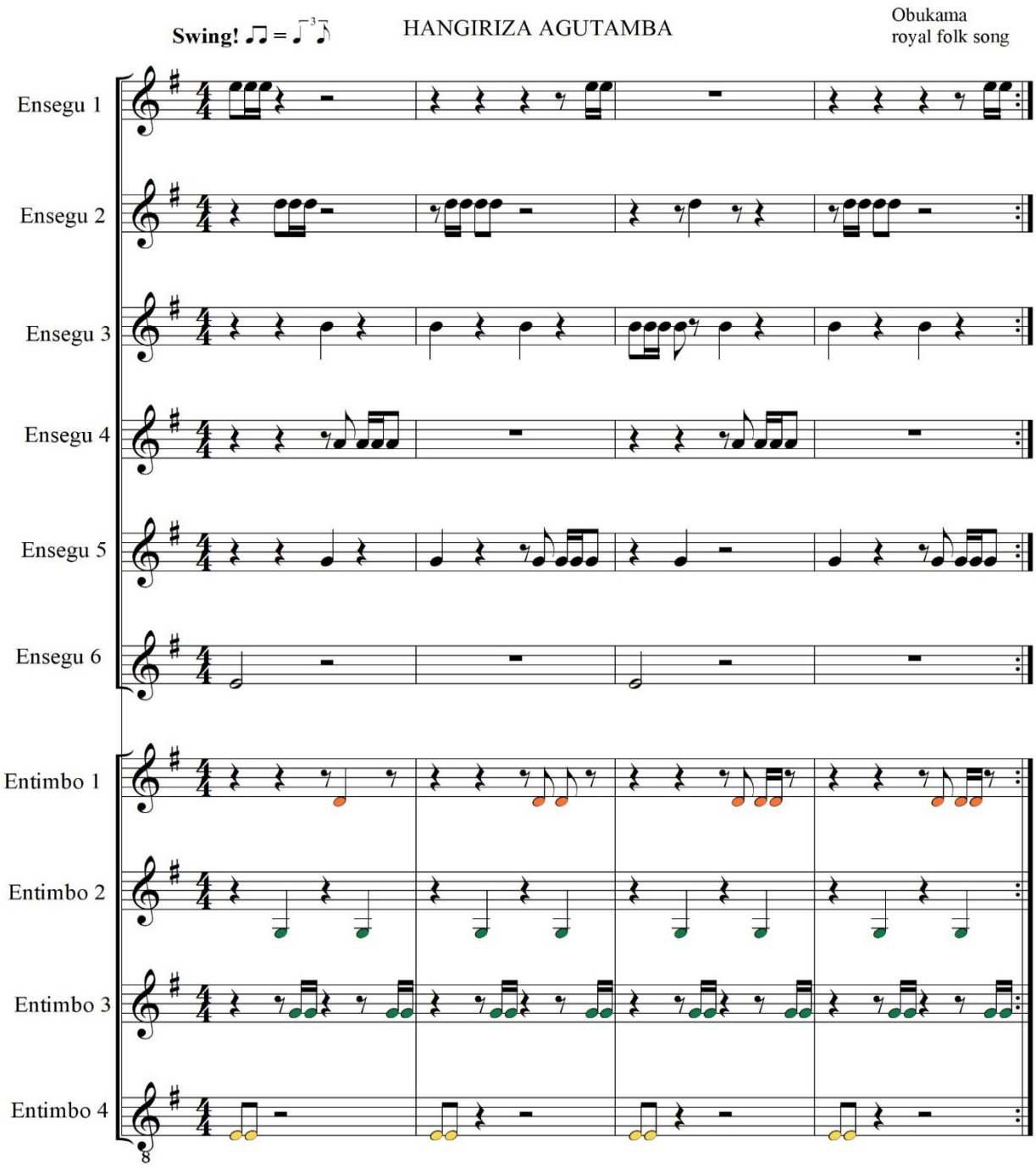
Melodic Interlocking Pedagogy: Teaching the Hocket

Three named melodic patterns structure *Ensegu* pedagogy. Tumulinde ("We wait for the Almighty, we wait, He is seen") is the primary pattern, notated in Runyoro staff as follows:



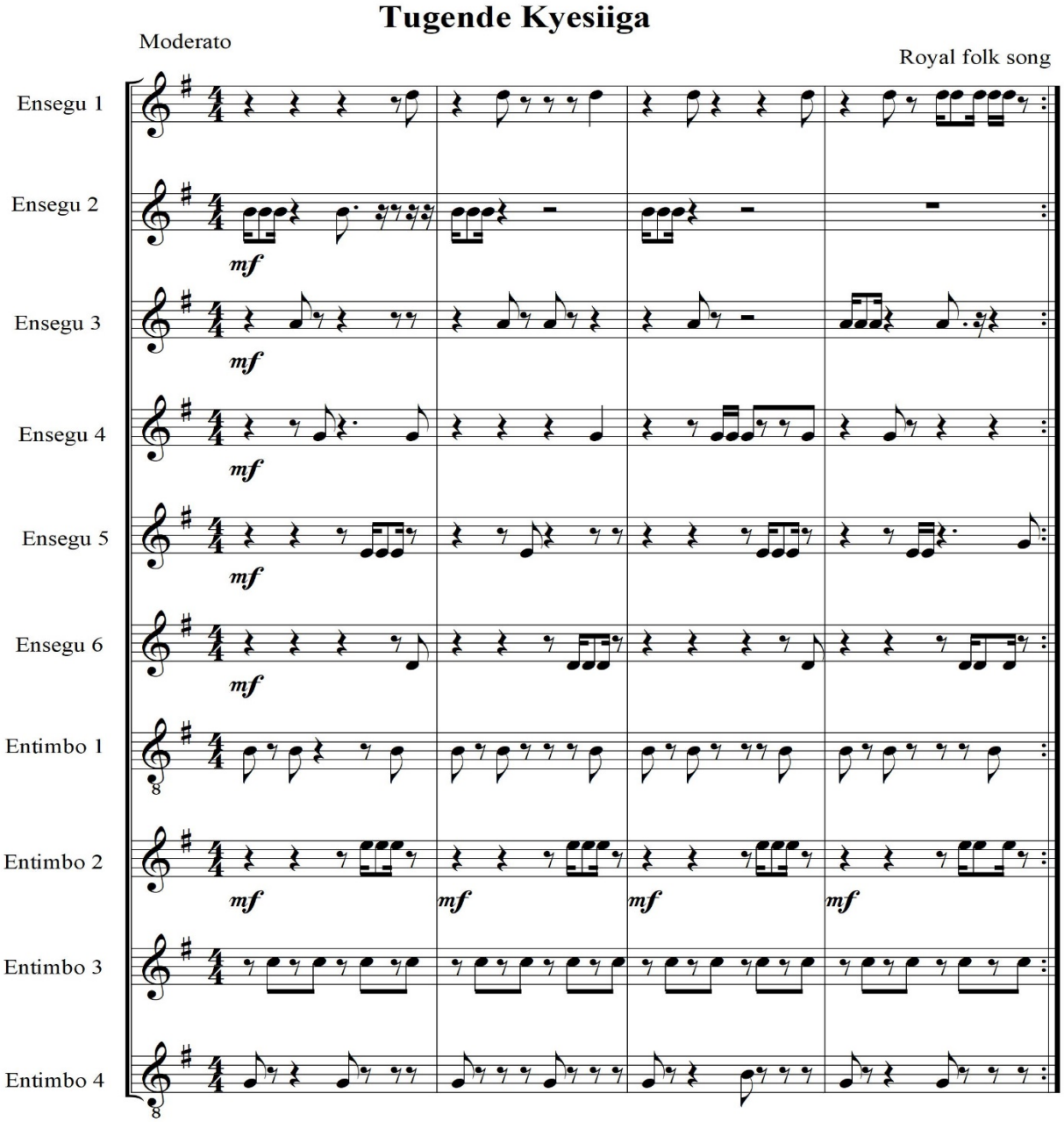
Melodic Pattern 1. The primary pattern, performed as the crowd waits for the Omukama (King) at Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom coronation (empango)

The second music performed to entertain the King's presence is called 'Hangiriza Agutamba" ("We adore you the bright new morning; we adore you the mighty Lion of Bunyoro") is the second melodic pattern as notated in staff below:



Melodic Pattern 2. The second ceremonial pattern performed to entertain the Omukama (king).

The third ceremonial music 'Tugende Kyesiiga" performed after which the coronation withdrawal procession that accompanies the King's return to the *Omunsiika* (private royal chamber) as notated below:



Melodic Pattern 3. The third ceremonial pattern performed during procession that accompanies the King's return to the Omunsiika (private royal chamber)

Several ceremonial performances are presented to entertain the crowd as the King returns to the royal chamber. Masters teach each pattern by singing the complete melody first, then isolating individual flute lines, then reassembling the hocket through repetition and correction. Kisembo described the method:

> *"I sing the whole song first, all six voices together in my head, I sing them as one. Then I sing only the first flute's part – la, la, la, do. Then the second – do, do, re, do. I make them listen until they can hear their own part inside the whole song. That is when they are ready to play." (Kisembo, personal communication, March 2024)*

This pedagogical sequence whole, to part to whole aligns with Communities of Practice theory: apprentices first encounter the complete cultural artefact (the melody), then learn their individual contribution, then reintegrate into the ensemble (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Dordzro, 2025).

Master-to-Apprentice Oral Coaching: Embodied Demonstration and Correction

Ensegu pedagogy is non-notational and primarily non-verbal. Masters uses singing, physical demonstration, breath guidance, and tactile correction to transmit technique. Alituha, an experienced ensemble member, described his own apprenticeship:

> *"Magezi never told me how to hold the flute. He stood behind me and put his hands over mine and showed me the angle how to hold it to the lips, how to breathe. He did not say anything. He just showed me, again and again, until my body remembered." (Alituha, personal communication, February 2024)*

This embodied, demonstrative pedagogy exemplifies Vygotskian mediated learning: the master's body becomes a pedagogical instrument, and the apprentice internalises technique through repeated, scaffolded practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Busobozi & Ekadu, 2026a). Field observations confirmed that verbal instruction was rare; the primary pedagogical medium was demonstration followed by apprentice imitation and master correction through gesture.

Cultural Memory Activation Through Runyoro Song Texts

The Runyoro texts of *Ensegu* melodies encode theological, historical, and royal-political knowledge. Tumulinde's text "Tumulinde hangiriza Agutamba, Tumulinde kayaboneka" ("We wait for the Almighty, we wait, He is seen") positions the Omukama's arrival as a theologically charged event. Hangiriza's text "Hangiriza enkya nungi, Hangiriza entale ya Bunyoro" ("We adore you the bright new morning; we adore you the mighty Lion of Bunyoro") encodes royal praise and historical identity. Tumusiime, an elder and oral historian, explained:

> *"The songs are not just music. They are history. When a young person learns to sing Tumulinde, they are learning who we are as Banyoro our relationship with God, our relationship with the Omukama, and our place in the Kingdom. The melody carries the words, and the words carry the history." (Tumusiime, personal communication, June 2024)*

This mechanism—cultural memory activation through song text aligns with Okpewho's (1992) analysis of oral literature as a vehicle for intergenerational cultural transmission, and with Isabirye's (2025) documentation of okulamusa practice among the Basoga as a site of cultural meaning-making.

Beyond theological and historical encoding, the Runyoro song texts also function as mnemonic devices for ensemble protocol. Each melodic pattern is associated with a specific phase of the Empango ceremony: Tumulinde is performed as the Omukama processes to the throne; Hangiriza

accompanies the coronation rites; the third pattern signals the Omukama's withdrawal. "If you know the song, you know where you are in the ceremony. The music is the programme," observed Kusiima, a cultural custodian (personal communication, June 2024). Learning the *Ensegu* repertoire is therefore inseparable from learning the political and spiritual grammar of Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom. Yembuu's (2021) comparative study of intergenerational knowledge transmission similarly found that oral texts function simultaneously as mnemonic, pedagogical, and identity-forming instruments a convergence suggesting cultural memory activation may be a cross-cultural feature of oral transmission in ceremonial contexts.

Instrument Craft Transmission: Making as Pedagogy

Instrument construction is integral to *Ensegu* pedagogy, not a separate domain. Magezi teaches flute making alongside playing, beginning with *omujwa-mata* tree selection, choosing straight-grained wood of the correct diameter progressing to shaping with metallic sharp-pointed devices, boring the air column, and finally fitting the monitor lizard skin resonator at the lower end. Kugonza, an experienced ensemble member, reflected:

> "*When you make the* flute *yourself, you understand it differently. You know why it sounds the way it does. You know what makes it speak well and what makes it speak badly. Making the* (flute) *is part of learning to play it.*" *(Kugonza, personal communication, April 2024)*

Baguma added that the transmission of craft knowledge also includes maintenance repairing cracks, replacing the lizard-skin resonator, and tuning the air column length skills that are passed through demonstration and supervised practice. This mechanism theorises as embodied distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995): the (flute) is not merely a tool but a cognitive artefact that encodes and transmits cultural and acoustic knowledge (Netshivhambe, 2024; Oludare, 2021).

Discussion

The Ensegu as a Distributed Pedagogical System

The six transmission mechanisms documented in this study constitute an integrated distributed pedagogical system in which no single mechanism is sufficient on its own. Sonic role differentiation establishes the cognitive architecture of individual-within-ensemble learning. Ceremonial immersion provides the social and cultural context in which learning is meaningful. Melodic interlocking pedagogy transmits the technical repertoire. Oral coaching scaffolds individual technique. Cultural memory activation embeds musical learning within historical and theological identity. Craft transmission integrates making and playing as unified knowledge. Together, these mechanisms demonstrate that *Ensegu* pedagogy is oral but not informal, communal but not unstructured, and culturally specific but theoretically generalisable (Hutchins, 1995; Wenger, 1998; Linson & Clarke, 2021).

Crucially, the distributed character of the *Ensegu* pedagogical system is not a limitation but a design feature. The fact that no single master holds all pedagogical knowledge, that craft transmission, melodic coaching, cultural history, and ceremonial protocol are distributed across multiple masters, elders, and cultural leaders ensures the system's resilience. The loss of single master does not collapse the transmission chain; knowledge is held collectively and redundantly across the community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Hutchins, 1995). This has direct implications for documentation and preservation: interventions that focus on individual master musicians as sole repositories of knowledge and misunderstand the systems' distributed architecture. Effective preservation requires documenting and supporting the entire community of practice, not only its most visible members (Makwa, 2025; Dzakey et al., 2023).

Oral Pedagogy as Sophisticated, Not Informal

A central finding of this study is that the *Ensegu* transmission system is highly structured in some respects, more structured than Western Conservatory models. The assignment of individual flute roles, the sequential whole-part-whole teaching method, the integration of craft and performance pedagogy, and the ceremonial performance assessment system all reflect deliberate pedagogical design. This challenges the colonial assumption that oral, non-notational pedagogies are "informal" or "pre-modern" (Ngoma, 2024; Human & Akuno, 2024). The *Ensegu* tradition embodies what Day (2024) calls participatory aesthetics, a relational, communal model of musical learning that foregrounds ensemble intelligence, cultural identity, and embodied knowledge over individual technical mastery.

The sophistication of the *Ensegu* pedagogical system is most clearly visible in its assessment architecture. Western conservatory models typically assess competence through formal examinations scales, sight-reading, repertoire performance before a panel. The *Ensegu* system employs a more contextually authentic form: public ceremonial performance before the Omukama and the assembled Kingdom. There is no rehearsal for the Empango performance itself; the ceremony is the assessment. Apprentices who are not ready are not invited to perform a collective judgement made by masters and cultural leaders through sustained observation over months of rehearsal. This model is consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation: competence is demonstrated through increasing participation in the community's core activities, not through decontextualised technical tests. It also resonates with Green's (2008) argument that informal music learning produces musical understanding that formal instruction frequently fails to achieve.

Decolonial and Curricular Implications

The findings carry direct implications for decolonial music education policy in Uganda and across sub-Saharan Africa. The CBC's emphasis on experiential learning, cultural relevance, and community engagement provides a policy framework within which *Ensegu* pedagogical principles such as role-based learning, ceremonial immersion, oral coaching, and craft integration could be operationalised in formal music education (Busobozi & Isabirye, 2026). Practically, this might involve: inviting master musicians as co-teachers in schools; designing role-based ensemble activities modelled on hocketing pedagogy; integrating instrument construction into music curriculum units; and using indigenous song texts as vehicles for cultural and historical learning (Isabirye, 2022; Makwa, 2025; Dordzro, 2025). The study also contributes to comparative ethnomusicology: the six mechanisms documented here share structural features with Amayebe transmission among the Basoga (Walubo et al., 2025a, 2025b), Adungu pedagogy among the Acholi (Isabirye, 2024; Busobozi & Ekadu, 2026b), and Gamelan learning in Bali (Jocuns, 2009), suggesting that distributed, community-based transmission systems may constitute a generalisable model of indigenous music pedagogy across diverse cultural contexts.

At the level of teacher education, the findings argue for the inclusion of indigenous music transmission pedagogies in pre-service and in-service music teacher training programmes at Ugandan universities. Current training programmes at Kyambogo University and Makerere University include ethnomusicology content, but rarely engage with indigenous pedagogical methods as models for classroom practice (Busobozi & Isabirye, 2026; Makwa, 2025). Training teachers to understand and apply distributed, role-based, oral pedagogical methods would enable them to facilitate indigenous ensemble learning in schools without requiring the presence of community masters, though community-school partnerships remain the most culturally authentic model. At the policy level, the findings support the argument made by Walubo et al. (2025a) and Isabirye (2022) that Uganda's music education policy must move beyond tokenistic inclusion of indigenous content to genuine epistemic reorientation: treating indigenous transmission systems as the primary pedagogical reference point,

with Western Conservatory methods as supplementary. This is not a call for cultural isolationism but for epistemic justice, the recognition that Ugandan children have the right to be educated in and through their own musical heritage (Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024).

Limitations

This study has five principal limitations. First, fieldwork was conducted at a single site (Hoima City), limiting transferability to other *Ensegu* communities or to the tradition as practised in rural Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom. Multi-site comparative research is needed to assess the consistency and variation of transmission mechanisms across contexts. Second, purposive sampling prioritised depth over breadth: the 16-participant sample provides rich qualitative data but cannot support claims about the representativeness of the documented mechanisms across all *Ensegu* practitioners. Third, the study does not include acoustic transcription with cent measurements or spectrographic analysis of the hocketing microtonality a significant gap given the centrality of pitch precision to *Ensegu* performance. Future research should integrate acoustic analysis to document the ensembles's tuning system and intonation practices. Fourth, female representation in the participant group was limited, reflecting the male-dominated composition of the current *Ensegu* training community. Research into gender dynamics and the historical participation of women in Bunyoro royal music traditions is warranted. Fifth, the study captures a synchronic snapshot of transmission practices at a single point in time. Longitudinal research tracking apprentices from initial learning through to independent performance and eventual master status would provide a more complete account of the transmission lifecycle.

Conclusion

This study provides the first detailed empirical account of intergenerational transmission mechanisms in the *Ensegu* (flute) ensemble tradition of Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, Uganda. Through in-depth interviews, field observations, and audio recordings conducted between February and July 2024—including the June 2024 Empango ceremony the study documented six interconnected mechanisms: sonic role differentiation, ceremonial apprenticeship immersion, melodic interlocking pedagogy, master-to-apprentice oral coaching, cultural memory activation through Runyoro song texts, and instrument craft transmission. These mechanisms constitute a distributed pedagogical system in which musical technique, ensemble intelligence, cultural identity, and craft knowledge are transmitted as an integrated whole.

The findings demonstrate that the *Ensegu* tradition embodies a sophisticated, highly structured pedagogical model that challenges colonial assumptions about the informality of oral transmission systems. The study contributes empirical evidence to growing scholarship on indigenous African music pedagogies and offers replicable analytical frameworks for documenting oral transmission systems across sub-Saharan Africa. For music education policy, the findings provide concrete models for integrating indigenous transmission principles into Uganda's Competency-Based Curriculum, not as cultural enrichment but as foundational pedagogical approaches grounded in community knowledge, relational learning, and embodied practice.

Three directions for future research emerge from this study. First, multi-site comparative research is needed to assess whether the six transmission mechanisms documented here are consistent across *Ensegu* communities in rural Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, or whether Hoima City's urban context has shaped the tradition in distinctive ways. Second, longitudinal research tracking apprentices through the complete transmission lifecycle would provide a richer account of developmental trajectories and the Empango's role as a transformative learning event. Third, acoustic and organological research that combines cent measurements with spectrographic analysis of the *omujwa-mata* flutes would complement the pedagogical analysis presented here. The present study establishes the empirical and

theoretical foundation for all three directions, serving as both a scholarly contribution and a resource for the *Ensegu* community.

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