

An indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi: a potential economic venture for the North-East Region of Ghana

Sherifatu Abas

Department of Textile Technology,
Tamale Technical University (TaTu) Tamale , Ghana.
Email : sherisalma@yahoo.com

Emmanuel Narte Nartey

Department of Textile Technology,
Tamale Technical University (TaTu) Tamale , Ghana.
Email : etarnia27@yahoo.com

Obed Kwesi Ayitey

Department of Industrial Art
Dr Hilla Limann Technical University, Wa, Ghana
Email : aokwesi@dhltnu.edu.gh

Abstract

The Mamprusi of Gambaga and Nalerigu of the North-East region of Ghana has a very rich tradition of indigenous tapestry just like what exist for the Dagomba (bummangli), Gonja (gbayin chibe) and Frafra (motani). However, the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi ethnic group has received less attention as compared to other traditional textiles of Ghana such as kente, kete, bummangli, gbayin chibe and motani. This has resulted in the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi to be less viable economically, also the research knowledge that exist it is scanty to be used for its development and sustainability. This study aimed at profiling the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi and its production system, it also aimed at developing a frame work for development and sustainability. The constructivism research philosophy was adopted because the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi is a social phenomenon and a complex one that requires the understanding and interpretation from the perspective of the participants in their natural setting. Since the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi has limited literature hence the adoption of the case study research design to ensure an in-depth study in the natural environment. Relevant data was collected by employing the semi structured interview, participant observation, focus group discussion, oral history and storytelling. The results of the study indicate the dominance of young females within the age bracket of 15 years to 45 years. The study also

discovered that a good percentage of the artisans had basic education. The study also revealed that the traditional tapestry industry of the Mamprusi in its entirety is a borrowed craft specifically from Bogou in northern Togo. Currently it was inferred that the industry exists as small-scale enterprises employing a smaller number of people who are mostly family members. Production activities are mainly carried out by hand with the help of simple tools, the textile artefacts produced are hand woven fabric traditionally referred to as chinchin mangli or chinchin wugra. They are mostly plain weaves that are warp faced and comes in array of colours. It was indicated in the study that to ensure development and sustainability of the industry the Chen's program theory was adopted to digest the current situation of the industry, propose action that will help avert the situation and prescribe activities that will help measure the rate of development that has occurred and ensure sustainability of the traditional indigenous tapestry industry of the Mamprusi.

Keywords: Indigenous; Tapestry; Mamprusi; Chinchin Wugra; Development and Sustainability

Introduction

Indigenous tapestry is a traditional art that is of enormous cultural value, it is a product of the creative industry that derives inspiration from heritage traditional knowledge combined with artistic elements of creativity. It is also regarded as a material culture which belong to a sector of the economy, UNESCO regard it as cultural Industry which have the potential for wealth creation, income generation from cultural assets and the production of traditional textiles (Rusu, 2011). Indigenous tapestry or cloth weaving has been an aspect of most culture globally that is as vital as agriculture. To Ajila (2006), till date it remains the only accessible techniques for traditional fabric production that cuts across culture and remains an ancient craft that has stood the test of time

despite globalization, and technological advancement, it is evident that the production system of indigenous tapestry cuts across culture which were built on the same theme but different culture.

Various authors' historical perspective on indigenous weaving reveals that there have been desperate efforts of African countries at an early age to derive means to cover their nakedness and to protect themselves from the element of the weather to the discovery of textile technology. Thus, indigenous weaving experimentation was carried out with fibrous materials prior to these experimentation tapestry production (weaving) was carried out with vegetable materials to weave mats and baskets. Other volumes support that the Bamana of Mali place more cultural value on spun yarns and

loomed material, this seeks to buttress the popular saying by the Bamana tribe that seeks to suggest that the cultivation of cotton and the development of weaving predates the sowing of grain. Popular indigenous tapestry in Africa includes Aso Oke, kura, kente, kete and Akwete.

Ghana is a heterogeneous society with diverse cultural heritage one popular cultural is the traditional textiles which are chiefly produced by weaving. Acquaye (2018), postulates that traditional cloth is often woven on a loom, which produces stripes ranging from 2½ to 2 inches wide, which are then sewn together to form textiles pieces. He adds that Ghanaian indigenous woven fabric (tapestry) are without doubt of great importance hence, it highlights the social, culture and religious traditions of the ethnic groups they represent.

Also, Indigenes of northern Ghana specifically are endowed with a heritage of communicating their world view through textiles (Acquah et al., 2017). Indigenous tapestry production of Northern Ghana is prevalent in areas such as Yendi, Daboya, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa, Nalerigu and Gambaga. Asinyo et al. (2021) affirms that it was introduced to these areas through inter-tribal migration from different parts of the world and it is practiced purposefully for the culture and economic welfare of the people.

Preliminary study reveals that the various regions of Northern Ghana are noted for their unique traditional textiles notable among them are

bumangli for the Dagomba, Gbayin Chebi for the Gonja, Montani for the Frafra and the chinchin mangli for the Mamprusi. The above-mentioned traditional textiles are all hand-woven tapestry with similarities but different production methods.

Empirical evidence reveals that traditional textile such as Gbyine Chibe, Bumangli and Motani have received extensive attention, this has led to their suitability in their respective regions and improved economic status of the indigenes. However, the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi (Chinchin Mangli or Chinchin Wugra) have not receive much attention from stakeholders in the industry, even though it comes with unique features as result of the high level of craftsmanship invested into the production methods.

Objectives of the Study

This study's objectives are:

1. To profile the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi and its production system.
2. To develop a frame work for the development and sustainability of the indigenous Mamprusi tapestry.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What is the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi
2. What framework is suitable for the development and sustainability of the indigenous Mamprusi tapestry?

The authors anticipate that the economic prospect of the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi will be brought to the lamplight by profiling it and its production system. It will also inform stakeholders of the potentials of the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi for the economic development of the indigenes and the country as a whole, this is affirmed by Balakrishnan and Arithar (2018) that indigenous textile industry play a vital role in the socio-economic development of countries across the globe; it also provide income opportunities for disadvantaged women living in rural and sub urban areas.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Indigenous textiles are part of the cultural heritage of a community they form part of and could be a mark of identity; they are sources of revenue, they can be a means of communication and instruction in a community, and the preservation of textile designs is in effect the preservation of culture and global diversity Asmah (2008). Akinrujumo (2020) posits that handcrafted textiles are carried out within the cottage setting with labour-intensive methods. Akinrujumo adds that textile production at the cottage level is an activity that has achieved a professional level of craftsmanship and has provided a lot of people with a means of livelihood.

Indigenous textiles are without doubt of great importance to many

societies in Ghana; hence, they highlight the social, cultural, and religious traditions of the ethnic group they represent. Indigenes of the northern part of Ghana are endowed with a heritage of communicating their worldview through textiles (Acquah et al., 2017). The northern part of Ghana has a very rich tradition of indigenous tapestry, just like the popular Ewe kete and Asante kente. indigenous weaving in the northern part of Ghana was introduced to the communities mainly through inter-tribal migrations from different parts of the world, and it is practiced purposefully for the culture and economic welfare of the people (Asinyo et al., 2021).

Acquah et al. (2017) support that the oral tradition of most northern tribes of Ghana indicates that the traditional fabric of the people of northern Ghana originates from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, through trade and migration. Traditional stripe weaving (tapestry) is practiced mainly in Daboya, Bolgatanga, Tamale, Yendi, Gusheigu, Kpatinga, and Navrongo (Amateye, 2009).

Since the study seeks to reveal the economic potential by profiling the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi and its production system, it adopted the theory of empowerment. Also referred to as "empowerment-oriented" intervention, it is always geared towards allowing individuals, communities, and organizations to develop knowledge and skills by involving professionals as partners (Perkins et al., 1995). It is a

developmental process, and it is multi-dimensional; hence, it is used across different disciplines according to its suitability. It has become an alternative approach to community development (Cater, 2006).

Empowering individuals, communities and organizations through interventions that involve professionals, impact skills and knowledge, results in community development. Empowerment is multidimensional, and it aids community growth or development. Education is key in every empowerment process since it helps individuals, groups, and organizations identify their capabilities through knowledge and skill acquisition. Empowerment results in an internal process that has to do with an individual's ability to solve problems on their own and an external process that deals with one's ability to act or implement new practical skills and resources for the benefit of society.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted in Nalerigu and Gambaga of East Mamprusi Municipality of the North-East Region. The study population comprised 10 master craftspersons, 20 craft persons, 5 traders, 2 lecturers, 2 textile tutors, and 2 knowledgeable elders.

This study was supported on the constructivism research philosophy due to its flexibility in explaining the complexities of a social phenomenon

and achieving an emphatic understanding of how the research subject view the world (Bell, 2011).

Constructivism also referred to as anti-positivism assumes that there are no single realities but multiple and subjective realities that depend on the context and the perspective of the participants. Thus, the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi is a social phenomenon and complex one that requires the understanding and interpretation from the perspective of the participants in their natural setting. Learning through social interaction, led to the adoption of qualitative methodology to achieve the objective of the study and to answer the questions posed by the researcher. The process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and the procedures detailed data collection in the natural setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretation to make sense of the data (Cresswell, 2014). Therefore, the qualitative case study strategy was adopted. Case study is used to generate an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life contact. Yin (2003) affirms that a researcher using case study design can apply a variety of methodologies to rely on multiple sources to investigate the researcher's problem. Case study was adopted for the study because indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi has limited literature for stakeholder's use hence an in-depth study in its natural environment. Data

for the study was collected through interview specifically semi-structured interview, participant observation, focus group discussion, oral history and storytelling.

These methods were used to gain insights into the indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi bearing in mind the variables in this study.

Relevant data for the research was collected by employing interview guide, observation check list and focus group checklist. Since most qualitative research involves human participation, it is vital that human research ethics approval is obtained before the

commencement of data collection (Fleming, 2018).

Hence prior to data collection from the research areas, the researcher sought the consent of the participants' involved and had conversations with the key informants (knowledgeable elders and master craft persons) on the aims of the research and its significance. Finally, meanings and answers to the research questions were derived by identifying, examining and interpreting patterns and themes from data collected by adopting context analysis.

Table 1: Study Area Characteristics

Study Area	Age	Sex	Occupation	Educational Background
Nalerigu	15 – 45	Female Dominance	Full-time	Basic Education
Gambaga	13 – 45	Female Dominance	Full-time	Basic Education

Findings and Discussion of the Study

Demographics and Background of Participants

Understanding the background of the participants is relevant to giving a general overview of the nature of the

people involved in the various aspects of the industry. The study revealed that the key actors in the industries fall within the age brackets of 15 years to 45 years. This means relatively young, energetic people are engaged in the industry. On the part of traders dealing in indigenous tapestry, the age range is

between 18 and 45 years. The breakdown of the ages given above is for all the participants in the study areas. The revelation of the ages in the study shows that the industry employs different categories of people. The essence of finding out this information was to determine how mature the workforce of the industry is and how well they are likely to react to changes and reformation in the industry.

Preliminary survey took data from both male and female artisans, lecturers, and people dealing in the indigenous tapestry, chiefs, and knowledgeable elders in the industry. Out of 100% artisans interviewed all of them were females and were solely engaged in the industry from the statistics given above all of the respondents rely on the industry as their only source of livelihood. The statistics given above for the respondents' educational background indicate that a good number of artisans are literate and had basic education hence can contribute when the need arises for reforms in the industry. It also discredits the wrong insight by some people that the northern traditional industry is made up of illiterates.

The overall study of the production systems indicates the dominance of females in active participation at all levels of production. This defeats Acquaye's (2018) assertion that traditional textile production practices and activities in the making of cloth are gender-defined. This means the activities of

the industry can be carried out by both genders, provided one has the technical know-how.

The study reveals that women dominate the weaving sector, which means weaving activity is not bound by any cultural belief system, nor does it require any masculine strength, nor is it reserved for males. The study also reveals that female textile artisans are hardworking and currently produce most of the traditional woven fabrics in the North-East part of the country. This study, therefore, disagrees with Abdulai et al. (2018) confirmation that weaving is male-driven; this is attributed to the physical nature of weaving, which makes it difficult for women, and also to the cultural set-up of northern Ghana, which permits only males to engage in cloth weaving.

From the findings, it was revealed that children are dominant in the industry children between the ages of 7 and 15 years are made to carry out all kinds of activities in the production line. It means the traditional textile industry employs all categories of people, including children, so it keeps them safe and prevents them from engaging in deviant behaviors. Engaging children in the industry is also good for the growth and development of the traditional textile industry; hence, it prepares them for the management of the industry shortly. Furthermore, the act of engaging children in the industry, as revealed in this study, agrees with Asinyo et al.'s (2021) assertion that for the continuation of the textile tradition

in northern Ghana, the young ones in the community are trained to take over from the older generation.

The findings of the study revealed that the indigenous textile industry of the Mamprusi of Gambaga and Nalerigu exists as a cottage industry. It is a small-scale informal manufacturing business that is operated from home, which means it requires a small amount of money as start-up capital and employs a small number of people, mostly ten and below, most of whom are family members. From the findings, it was discovered that the industry is a traditional artisanship of rural folks who produce textiles and textile artifacts from tools and materials that are locally sourced and adopted artistic skills which remain their only means of livelihood. The indigenous textile artefacts of the Mamprusi, as revealed by the study, are unique and distinctive since they are handcrafted and not mass-produced. This means it exists as a brand that is unique and distinguished based on the tribe they represent.

Traditional Textiles of the Mamprusi

It was revealed in the findings of the study that the Mamprusi of Nalerigu and Gambaga have specialised skills in weaving fabrics. This art was revealed in the study as a borrowed craft from neighbouring Togo, specifically Bogou in North Togo. The traditional textiles of the Mamprusi, according to most of the participants in the study, are traditionally called chinchin mangli or

chinchin wugra. They are woven in a narrow or broader strip measuring 14–22 inches with various degrees of thickness, but preferably thicker. Chinchin wugura, as explained by the majority of the participants, is woven in plain weave, mostly warp-faced, with various yarns arranged parallel to each other to create a pattern. It was revealed in the study that traditionally, the colours used were blue, black, white, and red. But participant observation in the research areas discovered various chinchin wugura in an array of colours, such as yellow, pink, wine, violet, and gold. The study unearths some of these weaves (designs) were adopted from Bogou in North Togo. Chinchini mangli, according to a participant;

“...Comes in various patterns and colours notable among the kyinkyin mangli designs are the popular kpankobga (Gunied fowl feather) jabila jakum, sangan and yaa naa. Most indigenes regard the above-mentioned designs as outdated and are only produced by request...” (participant 1, 2024)

Plates 1 represent chinchini mangli traditional design and plates 4.40 to 4.43 indicate the new designs for chinchin mangle.



Plate 1: Kpaan-Kobga
Source: Researcher (2024)



Plate 4: New design
Source: Researcher (2024)



Plate 5: New design
Source: Researcher (2024)



Plate 2: New design
Source: Researcher (2024)



Plate 3: New design
Source: Researcher (2024)

Sub Theme 8: Production System for Traditional Textiles of the Maprusis (Nalerigu/Gambaga).

In the study, it was discovered that textile artisans (weavers) in Nalerigu and Gambaga specialised in stripe weaving. The methodology used (the production system), as revealed by most participants, was adopted from Togo Bogou, to be specific. Tools, materials, looms, and loom accessories used as indicated in the study are unique, and they are as follows:

- Pedestal loom
- Shed sticks
- Cotton yarn
- Polyester yarn
- Metallic yarn

According to a participant in the study,
"...The pedestal loom is mostly bought from

neighbouring Togo; other tools, such as the shed stick, are simple sticks that are cut by the artisans from the trees around the community..." (participant 2, 2024)

The study revealed that the pedestal loom is different from what is used in other communities; unlike the other looms, it is powered by hand and multi-purpose; hence, other production activities such as warping, heddling, reeding, and healds preparation are carried out on it. The participant observation carried out in the research area reveals that the pedestal loom is made from metal; it is vertical in shape, and it can be used by two people at the same time to carry out weaving processes. It has knots that are often loosened to have the woven cloth removed, or it is often loosened to release warp yarns for the weaving process to continue. It was revealed in the study that the pedestal loom can only weave one yard at a time. It was also revealed that it can be used by people who are physically challenged; one participant mentioned that:

"...Attempts to produce the pedestal loom in Ghana proved unsuccessful..." (Participant 3, 2024)

The plates below represent the looms and weaving accessories.



Plate 6: Pedestal loom
Source:
Researcher
(2024)



Plate 7: Display of pedestal loom
Source:
Researcher
(2024)



Plate 8: Polyester yarn
Source:
Researcher
(2024)



Plate 9: Yarns on warping sticks
Source:
Researcher
(2024)

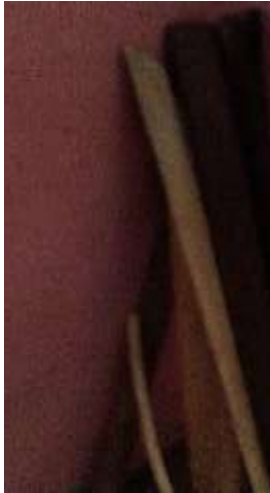


Plate 10: Shed sticks
Source: Researcher (2024)



Plate 11: Warping sticks
Source: Researcher (2024)



Plate 12: Plastic warping stick
Source: Researcher (2024)

... Design is conceptualised to create an image of what the finished fabric will look like; afterward, the weaver calculates the number of colours required and the number of yarns needed. The warping or setting process begins (plate), and while setting (warping), the crosses are secured to facilitate the creation of the shed during the weaving processes. The heddling process is next after setting; it is carried out with a metal rod and a nylon rope. The participants mentioned in the study that individual yarns on the loom are threaded with the nylon cord or yarn during heddling processes, as seen in Plate 4. After the heddling weaving process began, the weaving process involved first brushing the warp yarns with the weaving pin (plate 4), secondly pulling down the heddle (plate), thirdly creating the shed with the shed sticks (plate), then passing the thread (weft), and beating to create the fabric as seen in plate 4... (participants 2, 3, and 4, 2023)

In the study, the production process, as explained by a few participants, includes:



Plate 13: Yarn preparation

**Source:
Researcher
(2024)**



Plate 14: Setting or warping

**Source:
Researcher
(2024)**



Plate 17: Picking process

**Source:
Researcher
(2024)**



Plate 18: Beating process

**Source:
Researcher
(2024)**



Plate 15: Heddlng process

**Source:
Researcher
(2024)**



Plate 16: Shedding process

**Source:
Researcher
(2024)**



Plate 19: Two Artisans carrying out production activities on one loom.

Source: Researcher (2024)

Framework for Development and Sustainability of Mamprusi Indigenous Tapestry

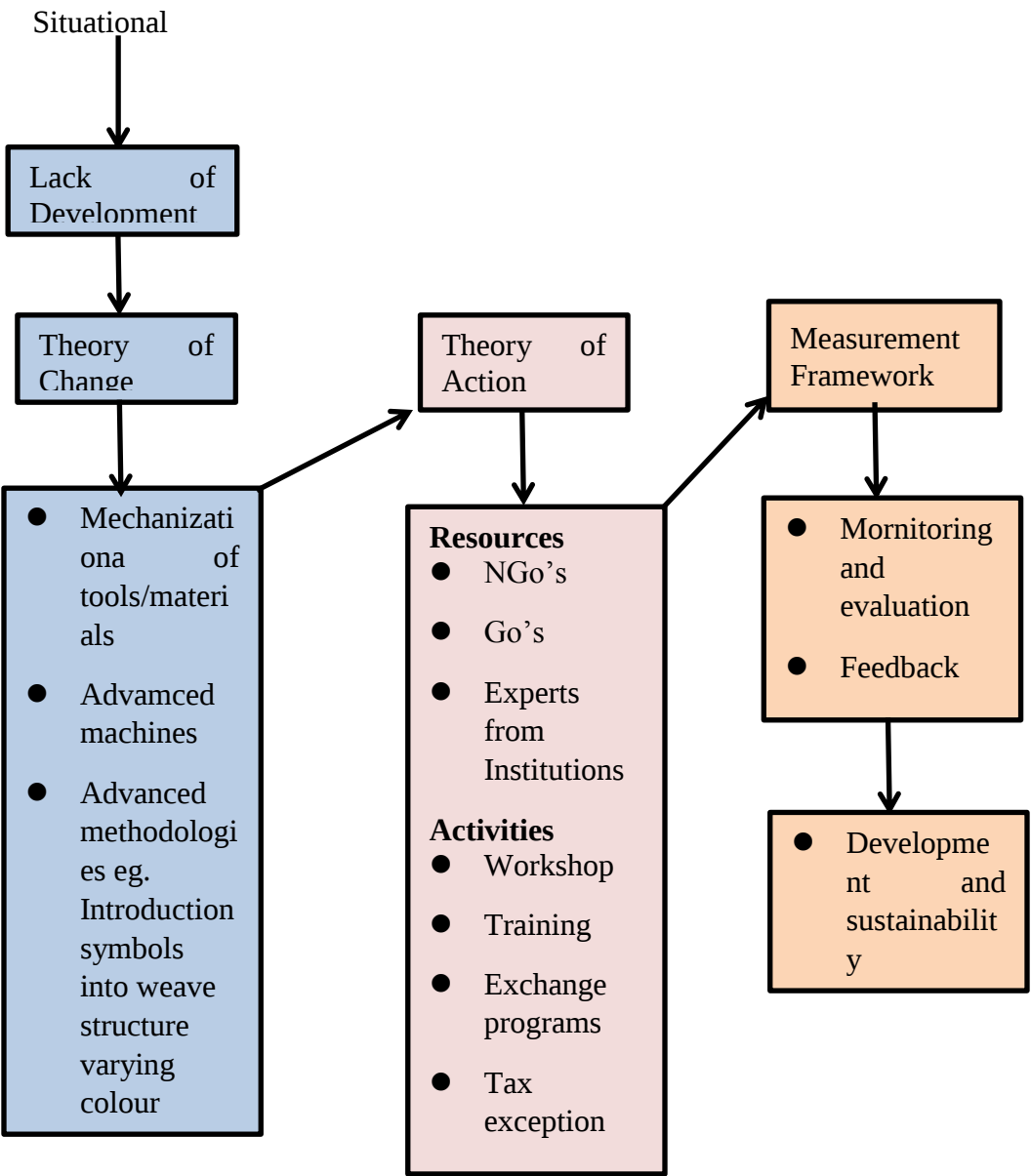


Figure 1: Framework for development and sustainability of Mamprusi Tapestry
Source : Adopted from Chen's Program theory

Figure 1 above shows the framework for the development and sustainability of Mamprusi indigenous tapestry. Assessment of the situational analyses revealed that there is lack of development in the indigenous Mamprusi weaving industry. The theory of change indicates some changes that will ensure the development and sustainability of the industry. Some of the tools and equipment used needs to be mechanized to meet modern standards. This can be achieved by liaising with institutions such as Grattis Foundation and mechanical engineering department of universities. Advanced machines like the warping mill, bobbin winder and broad looms should also be purchased for the indigenous Mamprusi weaving industry to enhance productivity. Advanced methods of designing using software such as weaving point, coral draw, Adobe photoshop should be purchased for the indigenous Mamprusi tapestry industry. Advance weaving methodologies such as the introduction of traditional symbols and varying colour schemes should be introduced into their weave structure. The Indigenous textile artisans in the Mamprusi traditional weaving industry should be given soft skill in computer designing, marketing and management, entrepreneurship etc for the development and sustainability of the indigenous Mamprusi weaving industry. The above changes mentioned can be achieved by organising workshops, training,

exchanges programmes and the government giving tax exemptions and soft loans to weavers and all those dealing in the traditional tapestry at the indigenous Mamprusi weaving industry. Governmental and non - governmental organisations should support financially in ensuring that all the changes needed are implemented. Experts from institutions should ensure that the changes mentioned in the framework are implemented and sustained, experts from institutions should act as facilitators to monitor and evaluate the activities and ensure the continuity of the program.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the indigenous textiles industry in its entirety is an adopted craft for all the ethnic groups that practice it, and it has become an integral part of culture. Finally, it can be inferred from the study that the production activities of indigenous textiles and the industry in its entirety are gender-based highly dominated by females and it is also a business venture for all categories of females including the girl child.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made for consideration or implementation to enhance the artistic skills of traditional textile artisans of Mamprusi ethnic group.

It is essential that there is a collaboration between the Mamprusi

traditional textile artisans and educational institutions so that the experts or technocrats would give support to artisans in the area of designs, materials and technological advancement to meet modern trends. Also, there should be collaborations with other traditional textile artisans from other parts of Ghana so as to learn from each other, especially in the areas of designing and production methods. This would help change the face of traditional textiles in general, thereby improving productivity and rural livelihood.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through the contributions of numerous reviewers.

REFERENCES

- Abdulai, A. R., Mohammed, A. W. A., & Kwadwo, N. I. (2018). The SMOCK: exploring an indigenous industry in Tamale Metropolis of Northern Ghana. *International Journal Advances in Social Science and Humanities*, 4(1), 8-20.
- Acquaah, S., Amissah, E. R., & Yankson, P. G. (2017). Dress Aesthetics of Smock in Northern Ghana: Form, Function and Context. *Journal of Textile Engineering and Fashion Technology*, 1(2), 00013.
- Acquaye, R. (2018). Exploring West Africa fabric design in the context of contemporary global commercial production. PhD thesis, Faculty of Business, Law and Art, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.
- Ajila, K. O. (2016). An appraisal of traditional woven fabric production in South Western Nigeria. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 5, 1, 63- 76.
- Akinrujomu, S. O. (2020). Adaptation of some aspect of Yoruba indigenous hand-crafted textiles for the production of modern interior

- decoration. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*. (Vol. 7, No. 1).
- Amateye, T. L., (2009). *The role of the indigeneous textile in relation to the president's special initiative (PSI) on textiles and garment*. PhD thesis, Department of General Arts Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
- Asinyo, B. K., Howard, E. K., & Seidu, R. K. (2021). Weaving Traditions of Daboya and Yendi communities in Northern Ghana. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 10(04), 39-48.
- Asmah, J. (2008). Historical threads: Intellectual Property Protection of Traditional Textile Designs: The Ghanaian Experience and African Perspectives. *International journal of cultural property*, 15(3), 271-296.
- Bell, S. (2011). Do we really need a new 'constructivist institutionalism to explain institutional change? *British journal of political science*, 41(4), 883-906.
- Cater, E. (2006). Ecotourism as a western construct. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 5, 23-39.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE publications.
- Fleming, J., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2018). Methodologies, methods and ethical considerations for conducting research in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 19(3), 205-213.
- Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American journal of community psychology*, 23, 569-579.
- Rusu, M. (2022). Cultural dimensions of learning-teacher's cultural skills. *Review of Artistic Education*, (24), 237-250.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). Design and methods. *Case study research*, 3(9.2), 84.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Shrestha, A. (2020). "Ecocritical Readings of Nepali Diasporic Literature." *Himalayan Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 15(1), 112-128.

Abas S; Nartey E. N. & Ayitey O. K. (2025). An indigenous tapestry of the Mamprusi: a potential economic venture for the North-East Region of Ghana, *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (ANSUJASS)*, 12 (1): 35-51

Thapa, M. (2010). *Seasons of Flight*.
New Delhi: Penguin Books
India.