

Exploring Artistic Practices of Hides and Skins in Preserving Bakiga Cultural Heritage in Kabale District: A Case of Selected Communities in Kabale Municipality

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Abstract: The research is a community-based, cultural-heritages oriented, qualitative dominant mixed-methods case study examining the contemporary existence of hides and skins artistry among the Bakiga of Kabale District, southwestern Uganda. The research participants (artisans, cultural elders, and institutional stakeholders) numbered thirty and data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, artifact documentation, and life-history interviews during a fourteen-week fieldwork period. The research was informed by, Material Culture Theory, UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Framework, Cultural Memory Theory, and Social Identity Theory. Findings support the existence of Bakiga hide and skin artistry through five tanning techniques (bark tanning, fat curing, smoke curing, etc.), four artifact forms (clothing, household implements, ceremonial objects, musical instruments), and gendered division of labour. Findings also reveal issues threatening hides and skins artistry in the community, including aging practitioner populations, lack of or absent successors, and modernization, the latter of which is identified by 91.7% of participants as a prime threat. The research demonstrates that overall, Bakiga hide and skin artistry is a valuable cultural-heritage tradition that requires urgent community-led documentation, transmission, and institutional support.

Keywords: Bakiga Cultural Heritage, Hide and Skin Artistry, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Material Culture, Traditional Craftsmanship, Uganda.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is the totality of the legacy of human species, transmitted from one generation to the next through artifacts, practices, values, and knowledge, which define them as a community, and make up their collective identity (Bendix, 1992). Over centuries, cultural remnants of Africa's sophisticated natural products art practices in general and that of hides and skins in particular have been used as threads connecting communities with their histories, identity constructs, and traditional knowledge of their ancestors (Whittington-Jones et al., 2025). Insubstantial though these cultures are, their practices are under-documented and on the brink of extinction due to ongoing colonial conditions, modernization, urbanization, and globalization.

The Bakiga, a Bantu speaking ethnic group living in the highlands in the southwestern Uganda (Kabale, Rukiga, Kisoro, Kanungu and Rukungiri districts), are known for their hard work, terraced cultivation, and intricate cultural practices (Kitara Foundation, 2020). Although the Bakiga community has gained both national and international recognition, their crafts and traditional utensils made from hides and skins remains undocumented. This study seeks to fill this lacuna.

➤ Problem Identification

Hide and skin arts and crafts traditions among the Bakiga are still not much documented and elaborated upon. Cultural heritage policies and institutional forms have not sufficiently considered these elements of Bakiga material culture heritage, resulting in only fragmented form of documentation. The scope, character, organization, and the

general state of these traditions are not known at present. This factual and policy gap directly has impact on the tourism and cultural heritage preservation, as well as the practices of traditional arts and crafts.

➤ *Purpose and Objectives*

This study intended to examine the indigenous arts and crafts of hides and skins and how they help to sustain the Bakiga cultural heritage through those arts and crafts in Kabale Municipality with a view to;

- To characterize and describe the current artistic usage of hides and skins by the Bakiga at the Kabale Municipality, among other techniques, substances used, kinds of artifacts, and socio- cultural aspects.
- How do these artistic practices help to sustain the cultural heritage of the Bakiga people?
- Investigate art processes that may be utilized to sustain, and support Hide and Skin use among Bakiga.

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

This study employed four complementary theoretical frameworks:

Material Culture Theory (Tilley et al., 2006; Miller, 2010) offered analytical frames for thinking about how objects carry social values, cosmologies, and power relations. As Miller (2010:3) suggests, “things make people,” referring to the dialectics of persons and material objects. In Bakiga society hides and skins are not just mechanisms and raw material but repositories of social relations.

Subtitled ‘Guidance for Heritage Conceptualization and Action,’ UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Framework (2003) provided normative and analytical insights into implementation of heritage preservation as a vibrant community-based process. The Convention characterizes intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups or individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. The framework’s focus on traditional craftsmanship as a heritage domain was especially relevant to this study.

Since Assmann (1995) and Assmann and Assmann (1995), Theory of Cultural Memory (2011) demonstrated how collective memory is constructed, which ensures communities’ sense of identity and historical continuity by selectively remembering and forgetting, ‘communicative memory’ (personal, material, linguistic communication over no more than three generations, is distinguished from ‘cultural memory’ (institutionalized, objectified communication which is institutionalised and transmitted via media of symbols). Hide and skin object encountered in this paper serve as media of symbols that encode technical, aesthetical, social, and symbolic knowledge.

Tajfel & Turner (1979) borrowed a group in-group/out-group category theory approach from government policy analysis, to describe how engaging with traditional art forms satisfies the need of defining oneself as a group, distinguishes the group from other others, and helps to build cohesion. For

the Bakiga, hide and skin practices seem to serve as mechanisms for these processes of construction and reinforcement of their cultural identity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Literature Review and Research Gap*

This study builds upon and extends existing scholarship across several domains:

• *Hides and Skins:*

Whittington-Jones et al. (2025) completed the first pan-African systematic review of carnivore skin usages in cultural contexts, discovering 18 African countries practicing skins as regalia, dance dress, political symbols and tokens, and religious icons. Kuma and Assefa (2017) studied the use of hides and skins within Ethiopian agro-pastoral groups, discovering 48% of informants using skins for bedding, seats, and tack. Both authors show the pan-African importance of hide and skin traditions, yet suggest future work to focus on ethnographically-specific documentation.

• *Art and Cultural Heritage:*

Olalekan et al. (2025) illustrated how African textiles encode “identity scripts” of status, ethnicity, ritual function, and historical belonging. Matiore (2023) recorded seventy traditional cultural objects of Shona peoples of Zimbabwe, concluding that paradigm shifts in religion, urbanisation and technological transition jeopardise tangible material heritage. Asubonteng et al. (2023) studied traditional Ghanaian vegetable tanned leather manipulation, exemplifying its technical possibilities for its application in contemporary craft.

• *Readings of Indigenous Skin Craft Practices:*

Palomino and Boon (2020) traced the Hezhen fish-leather craft revival in North-Eastern China via the Fish Skin Lab participatory workshop model, illustrating the transfer of indigenous skin craft skills to new producers concurrent with the production of new aesthetic forms. Lee and Song (2025) studied indigenous Siberian footwear-making traditions for their encoding of culturally specific ideas of bodily shape and cultural ideals.

• *Cultural Heritage Preservation in Uganda:*

Kentaro (2024) discussed the indigenous religious practices and colonization in Kigezi and hence the repulsion of CBOs from ‘manyitse’ traditional cultural values. The ‘Nyabingi’ Movement was a colonial project in Kigezi that sought to depopulate the ‘manyitse’ cultural heritage. Nsibambi (2018)provided a study towards institutional dissonance at Ugandan museums and artifacts collections, indicating the under-investment of the institutional structures, with the conspicuous marginalization of ethnically-situated material culture components. Harding (2023) looked at the living heritage and the creative survival of local communities in the face of institutional neglect.

• *The Dearth of Research:*

Although there is much literature on the various types of artists and contemporary practices, there has been no

empirical research on the phenomena of Bakiga identity and hide and skin artistry as a heritage conservation method. Out of the twelve sources examined, only three (Kentaro, 2024; Zavaleta-Cortijo et al., 2021; Mulemi et al., 2015) speak about Bakiga or Kigezi, and none speaks of any artistic practices or hide and skin material culture. This research is the pioneer systematic research to document Bakiga hide and skin material culture.

➤ *Study's Importance*

This research makes a valuable contribution to existing academic knowledge by addressing the acknowledged lack of literature on the Bakiga material culture and African art history; and in terms of methodology, by showing how ethnographic, participatory research designs are useful for documenting traditionally under-documented craft practices. In practice, the research provides substantiating evidence for Uganda's cultural heritage policy in support of the Kabale Regional Museum, Uganda Museum and in terms of designing culturally-specific preservation programmes for the government. It also offers information to Uganda in her obligations to UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). For the Bakiga community, it offers practical documentation of their heritage to inform education, indigenous knowledge revitalisation, and intergenerational transmission.

III. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design and Paradigm*

This study employed a qualitative dominant convergent mixed methods case study approach with an ethnographic focus (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The case was geographically and culturally bounded by the specifically chosen communities within Kabale Municipality as well as their linkages to the larger heritage network across Kabale District southwestern Uganda. The ethnographic approach permitted capture of the specific hide and skin practices within their natural circumstances, though the case study format drew on defined geographical bounds.

➤ *Study Setting*

District of Kabale, south-west of Uganda, borders Rwanda to the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. With an average altitude of 2000mt, the district's population is primarily predominately Bakiga who practice subsistence and small-scale commercial farming. Kabale district is situated in the Kigezi sub-region and is home to the Kabale Regional Museum and Cultural Centre the District's institutional stakeholder in cultural heritage preservation.

➤ *Study Population and Sampling*

The sampled population consisted of three groups of individuals who have direct experience with hide and skin crafts or with safeguarding the cultural values of the Bakiga in Uganda: (a) active or retired artists involved in the craftsmanship of the hide (roughly 30-50); (b) elders and cultural custodians from within the Bakiga community (roughly 20-30); (c) institutional representatives involved in cultural preservation efforts (district cultural officers, museum staff, cultural organizations, etc.), (roughly 5-10).

A sample of 30 participants was recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques:

- CATEGORY A: 14 craftspeople (8 males, 6 females) aged 35-78 years with 22 years of experience on average.
- CATEGORY B: 10 cultural elders and custodians (7 males and 3 females aged 60-92 years)
- CATEGORY C: 6 institutional stakeholders including cultural officers, curators, and heritage operators

Purposive sampling was used to select practitioners with relevant expertise, or who held specific institutional duties, and snowball sampling was used to trace practitioners who do not appear in official records.

➤ *Theoretical Framing in Data Collection*

Data collection was guided by the four theoretical frameworks:

- Material Culture Theory was embedded in the artifact inventory documentation form within each section of the form: artifact type, materials used, techniques applied, and cultural meaning.
- UNESCO ICH Framework, focussed on transmission pathways, community custodianship, and living heritage dimensions.
- Cultural Memory Theory influenced the design of life-history interview methods according to the procedures of storing, transmission, and remembrance of information.
- Identity Theory questioned the use of hide and skin in creating common identity.

➤ *Data Collection Methods and Instruments*

Collected through several complementary methods during a 14-week fieldwork (Phase 1: Entry and recruitment; Phase 2: Interviews; Phase 3: Observation and documentation; Phase 4: Analysis and validation):

- *In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews:*

With artisans, elders, and institutionally located clients and traders. Topics explored included sourcing, processing of raw materials, leather treatment, cutting/stitching, ornamentation, type of artifacts, used for, symbolic parameters, apprenticing, historical development, modern day trends and preservation requirements. Interviews were conducted through Rukiga and English and assisted from the Karamojong translations and readers when required.

- *Participant Observation with Researcher Field Journal:*

In workshops, homesteads, and communities practicing hide and skin, researcher took notes on workflow, tools, materials, processes, social interactions, learning processes, and explicit symbolic characteristics.

- *Artifact Inventory and Documentation Sheet:*

To record the identified hides and skins objects in community and institutional collections, including information on the object type, origin, date estimated, measurements, state, material, tanning/processing technique,

ornamentation, purpose, cultural relationship, and societal/ceremonial association.

- *Photographic and Video Documentation:*

This was employed to record artefacts, tools, working conditions, production processes, and other visual information.

- *Life-History Interviews:*

Obtained from senior practitioners and caretakers of long-standing to trace and document entry into craftwork, apprenticeship experiences, fluctuations in market demands and raw materials, decline or resurgence of activity, and future outlooks.

- *Structured Questionnaire:*

Given to the community participants whom we could reach to collect descriptive scores of knowledges, participation, perceived heritage value, history of exposure to apprenticeship, willingness to learn, support for preservation projects.

- *Data Quality Control*

Trustworthiness was ensured through:

- *Credibility:*

Triangulation of methods and sources, member checking, and extended involvement.

- *Transferability:*

Detailed description of setting, participants, practices, contexts.

- *Dependability:*

Audit trail of decisions about method, decisions about how fieldwork was conducted, decisions about coding, and research process changes.

- *Confirmability:*

Reflexive field notes with researcher positionality considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- *Data Analysis*

Qualitative data were subject to thematic analysis in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarization with data, initial coding, development of themes, review of themes, definition of themes, and production of written report. Coding was carried out using an inductive approach, focusing upon participants' accounts and comments in addition to a deductive approach, appraising the theoretical framework. Artefacts were examined via a descriptive and typological approach taking material, form, function, technique, decoration, and cultural context into account. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed through the usage of descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages, and testing for associations where sample and measurement quality allowed. Integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings was achieved during interpretation, examining the qualitative themes in

relation to the quantitative data to determine areas of convergence, divergence, or complementarity.

- *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval was received from Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee (BSU-REC-2026-2134). Informed written consent was obtained from all respondents for interview, visual observation, photography, and video recording. Respondents were made aware of their right to refrain and withdraw without penalty. The highest confidentiality standards were ensured by assigning each respondent a code and storing personal identifiers separately from data. Sacred/ritually secret information was neither recorded nor photographically/audio visually reproduced unless this had been agreed with the custodians of that knowledge. The usage of community validation afforded respondents the opportunity to challenge or contextualize previously what was made public.

IV. RESULTS

- *Technical Practices and Artifact Diversity*

This study identified several hide and skin artistic practices among Bakiga artisans, including three main tanning methods:

- *Bark Tanning:*

Barks from certain types of trees like 'omukamba' (African Babul)(an upper parchet of the Falcata family) were pounded, boiled in water, and thereafter was used as a tanning substance. Hides were steeped for days and weeks until they became soft to the required level and colour. One of the artisans from Kamwezi sub-county elaborates:

We take the bark of an 'omukamba' (tree from around here). We pound it and boils in water. Then we put it in water for some days. The skin softens us and turns brown. Our fathers and grandfathers did it too. (Male Artisan interview, 58 years).

- *Fat Curing:*

This was achieved by rubbing in animal fats that were often blended with plant extract into the cured hide. A kneading process produced a soft pliable leather that was used for clothing and as part of ritual acts. Another respondent noted how the technique was gendered:

Curing is a task done by the women. After it becomes soft like cloth, then the fat rubs it in well with the skin. Cow's and goat's fats are the most suitable for curing work. We added some leaf juice as a perfume to it. (female artisan, 62 years)

- *Smoke Curing:*

Tanned hides were hung above smouldering fires and allowed to be smoked through the skin. Craftsmen noted this to serve two functions; preserve the hide from insects, but also to impart a smell to the skin which was highly related in ritual. The woods of 'omutoma' and 'omukarungu' were especially popular.

Table 1 Distribution of Participants by Category and Gender (N=30).

Participant Category	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Category A: Practising Artisans	8	6	14	46.7%
Category B: Cultural Elders/Custodians	7	3	10	33.3%
Category C: Institutional Stakeholders	4	2	6	20.0%
Total	19	11	30	100%

Source: Field Data, 2025-2026

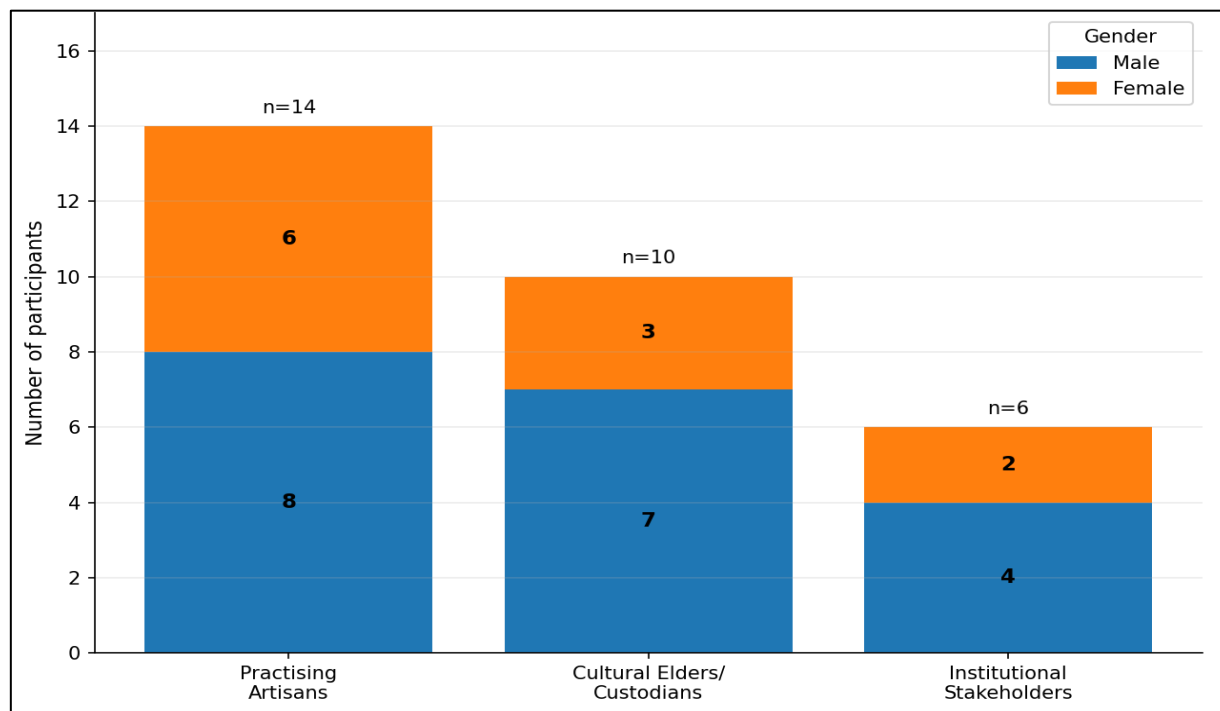


Fig 1 Distribution of Participants by Category and Gender (N=30).

Source: Field Data, 2025-2026.

➤ *Artefact Types and Cultural Significance*

The study documented four major categories of artefacts:

- *Clothing and Adornment(36%):*

‘*Enkanda*’ (women’s leather skirt) indicated whether a person was married, their rank, and clan. Differences in these were interpretive of information about the wearer and their position in society. ‘*Ebishaato*’ (traditional robes of dressed sheep and goat skin) were donned for the following life cycle ceremonies: initiation, marriage, burials. Smock-like ‘*Egoye*’ (traditional women’s clothing) were made for certain life-cycle traditions: for marriage and after birthing.

- *Household Implements (28%):*

The tanned cowhide sleeping mats, the carrier straps and cords, and seat covers/cushions that marked the owner’s status. An institutional stakeholder explained this use and its holds cultural importance as follows:

“The stool was once covered with a skin, and had a design painted on it, this was only allowed by the chief, others sitting on it would have been insulting. The design was meant to symbolize the powers of the chief, to be able to make decisions.” (Interview, institutional stakeholder, 45 years)

- *Ceremonial Objects (24%):*

Shields (brought for warfare and later used as dance props) of thick ox-hide bearing symbols of warrior rank; and ‘*engoma*’ (symbolic drums) with drumskin-padded, hollow frames, played as part of ceremony hide was prepared and attached to drum in dwellings prior to use as per ritual. Essential clothing consisted of robes worn by medicine men and clansmen during the ceremony and were regarded as restricted higher body secret was reflected in extremely secret, high degree of craftsmanship.

- *Musical Instruments (12%):*

Skins processed to make drum membranes and shakers. One elder emphasized:

The drum is our language. The sound of the drum; the people hear that sound. The skin that is put on the drum, you need to be that good choice animal, with prayer, respect for the ancestors. (Life history interview, Elder, 85 years)

➤ *Gendered Division of Labour and Knowledge Transmission*

The research demonstrated a definite gendered separation of responsibilities in Bakiga hide and skin work. Men handled the most physically demanding tasks associated with processing the hides: slaughtering of animals, hide

removing, scraping, sun-drying, bark tanning, and smoking. Women performed the de-hairing and fat-curing and were responsible for stitch work, decorating, bead work and production of piggery. A female artisan commented that:

We women are not supposed to peel the cow skin that is still on its body.... Yet we do come to peel the goat/sheep skin without a hitch. Why this is a sheep/cow skin, it's for us women; if it is a cow skin, it's for men. That is the way it is meant to be." (Female Artisan, 56 years)

Knowledge was received via family apprenticeship, with boys apprenticed to male kin and girls apprenticed to female kin. An artisan described her training as:

I began to learn when I was 10 years old. My father would bring me along when he was working with the skins. I watched him while he was working. I did de-hairing of the small skins for the first time. He would correct me. Then I did the whole process like his father did. (Life history interview, Male Artisan, 68 years)

Yet participants felt that this system was becoming significantly weakened through formal education, urban employment and shifting economic circumstances.

➤ Statistical Findings

Table 1 Heritage Preservation Status Indicators

Indicator	Measurement	Status
Artisan Age Profile	64.3% aged 50+	Critical
Apprentice Recruitment	21.4% currently teaching	Critical
Knowledge Succession	42.9% no successors	Critical

Source: Field Data, 2025-2026

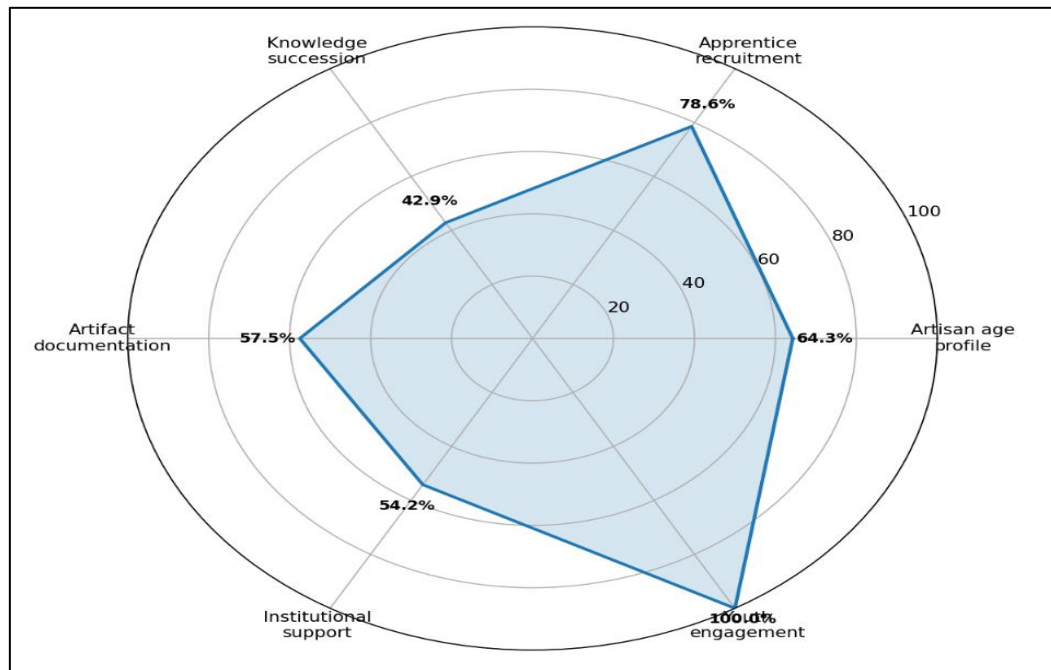


Fig 2 Heritage Preservation Status Indicators.

Source: Compiled from Field Data, 2025-2026.

The age profile was particularly telling: 45.8% of artisans and elders were over 65 years compared to only 20.8% under 50 years. This suggests a narrowing of intergenerational succession with few younger artisans within the study areas.

Table 2 Perceived Threats to Hide and Skin Practices

Threat Factor	Percentage Reporting
Modernisation/Urbanisation	91.7%
Loss of Apprenticeship Systems	83.3%
Stigmatisation of Traditional Practices	75.0%
Economic Marginalisation	70.8%
Colonial Legacy	62.5%
Institutional Neglect	54.2%
Environmental Pressures	33.3%

Source: Field Data, 2025-2026

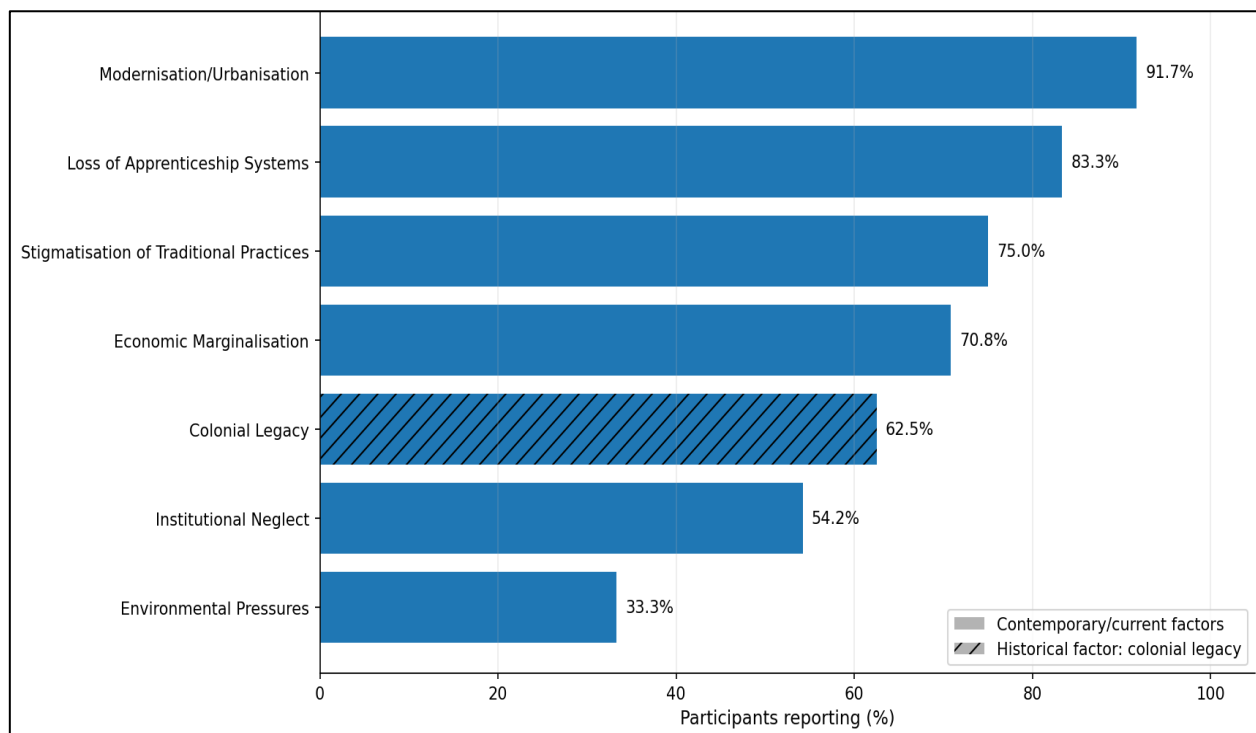


Fig 3 Perceived Threats to Hide and Skin Practices.

Source: Compiled from Field Data, 2025-2026.

Modernization and urbanization were highlighted by almost 92% of respondents as the most significant threat, followed by the disappearance of apprenticeship systems (83.3%) and stigmatization of traditional practices (75%). The fact that colonial legacy factors were highlighted by 62.5% reaffirms the historical basis of the decline.

➤ Mechanisms of Heritage Preservation

Six pathways were identified in which the artistic application of hide and skin supports intangible cultural heritage in addition to:

- **Material Culture as Cultural Memory:**

An object is a material repository of cultural memory by embodying technical, aesthetic, social and symbolic forms of knowledge. Material aspects in themselves may be expressive smell, feel, ways in which the material is light or weighty may contain symbolic content, and the capacity of these meanings themselves. As one old woman commented: *'When I touch the skin I touch the hands of my grandmother.'*

- **Social Identity and Community Bonding:**

Practising hide & skin strengthens Bakiga identification and cements identification, as members of group by enhancing social bonding. Artefacts serve as evident indicators of identity, and can be seen during ceremonial occasions and ritual ceremonies.

- **Intergenerational Transmission:**

Skills, knowledge and values are transmitted across generations through family-based apprenticeship and observational learning, such as preparation of tradition ceremonies. This process is approaching extinction as 42.9% of artisans have no noted successors.

- **Living Heritage:**

The knowledge and practice continue to be relevant to and adapt to new circumstances, while still upholding the fundamental community values that make it economically viable and culturally appropriate.

- **Creative Innovation:**

The indigenous craft worker modifies a customary skill to include new techniques, resources, and appearance. They keep the craft economically feasible but keep the wisdom. E.g., the craftsman once articulated:

"I have just started designing for the young generation (young people). I make Oxfam bags, wallets, and household items. The old stuff like the 'enkanda,' the traditional cloth is still selling, but I must also produce goods for the modern generation to enter the modern market. By doing so I will get chance to learn something and teach others." (Interview, Male Artisan, 53 years)

- **Institutional Documentation:**

a. Though institutions may offer documentation, it is lacking and underfunded. Most hide and skin objects belonging to the Bakiga are housed in private or community collections.

➤ Practical Findings

The following plates are but modern practical representations which were aimed at producing creative utility items, from skins and hides, as a way of archiving the art practices of the Bakiga cultural heritage of Kabale Municipality.



Fig 4 Some of the Tools Used in the Production of Items Produced from Hides and Skins
Source: Compiled from Studio Data, 2025-2026.



Fig 5 Shoe Items Produced from Hides and Skins
Source: Compiled from Studio Data, 2025-2026.



Fig 6 The Researcher Involved in Shoe Production Process at his Studio
Source: Compiled from Studio Data, 2025-2026.

V. DISCUSSION

➤ Interpretation of Findings

This research report demonstrates that Bakiga hide and skin artistry is a complex, culturally imbued yet critically endangered heritage art tradition. The elicited tanning techniques (bark, fat, smoke curing), decorating techniques and artefacts variety reveals adopted levels of sophisticated technical knowledge over generations. Such technical complexity substantiates Material Culture Theory concept of the co-constitution between persons and things (Tilley et al., 2006), in which material production is both technical and social endeavour.

The gendered division of labour men drawing the work that involves heavy processing, and women on the more decorative and stitch work are organised along gender identities, which stabilise this gender division. This has implications for heritages preservation; the loss of knowledge transference does not necessarily translate equally for women and men. Matiore (2023) noted similar trends in Shona material culture; the waning adherence to traditional religion and migration to urban areas and the influence of contemporary technology erode the traditional transmission of material culture.

Considering the above, this data is especially troubling. Seventy-five percent of the 50+ practitioners had no successor and 9.5% had unsure successor resulting in a

significant intergenerational crisis. This matches other research on indigenous craft practices across Africa. Asubonteng and co-authors (2023) found widespread concern about disappearance of craft occupations in West African artwork traditions, found in the reduction ethnic distinctiveness following the disappearance of craft occupations. Mulemi et al. (2015) found modernization and cultural change as reasons for the disappearance of traditional ethnic material culture in southwestern Uganda.

The threat perceptions modernization (91.7), apprentice lost (83.3%) and stigmatization (75%) are in line with Souissi and Njoya (2025) who contend that Africa has always neglected intangible cultural heritage in the development process. There were no institutional infrastructure, archives, training programmes, markets, and regulatory bodies to promote its value.

This conclusion validates the Cultural Memory Theory's focus on externalization into symbolic media as the material form of memory (Assmann, 2011) because artefacts also carry meaning via their sensory attributes: by touch, smell, appearance. Material culture thus conveys memory through means inaccessible to written abstractions, illustrating Millar's (2010) "humility of things": the normal objects that "determine our experience of the world [and] provide the ground for the social" but can be overlooked in heritage discussions.

This shows that hide and skin practices have contributed to sustaining social identity underpinning the core hypothesis of Social Identity Theory that sharing practices contributes to collective identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Nonetheless, the findings indicate tensions between traditional identity and the affective forms of aspirations among the youth. In this case, hide wearing was denounced by the youth as backward or primitive. Mulemi et al. (2015) found a similar case in Kiruhura District where communities presented traditional material culture as a comparative indicator of the identity of the cultures represented by the community vis-a-vis that of the "more modernized" regions.

The documented shortfall of material documented most items not in a formal collection of big, national, or academic institutions, but preserved and stored by a patrilineal private or community collection reaffirms Nsibambi's (2018) research into Ugandan under-documentation within museums, and the geospatial (and ethnic) systematic neglect of ethnicity-specific material culture. The Uganda Museum functions on these tight financial resources (roughly 80,000 American dollars a year, during Harding's 2023 research.)

➤ *Theoretical Contributions*

This piece exemplifies how to use a mixture of theories that researchers use to analyse the connection between arts practice and heritage preservation:

- Material Culture Theory gave the analytical vocabulary to explicate the social biographies, production techniques, and value coded in hide and skin objects.

- UNESCO ICH Framework provided the normative basis and means for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.
- Cultural Memory Theory described this attempt to the survival of the shared identity of communities by means of the material culture.
- Social Identity Theory explained the process of how partaking in traditional customs maintained the cohesion of social groupings.

➤ *Implications for Heritage Practice*

The study has significant implications for heritage practice and policy:

• *For Policy:*

Uganda needs a national policy to preserve the traditional crafts that directs resources for the documentation, transmission, and revival of crafts, and empowers local administrators and cultural institutions to resource initiatives for recording, and the transmission of craft knowledge and skills. Special attention should be given to providing adequate funding and capacity-building support to cultural institutions involved in documenting crafts of various ethnic groups, other than western-trained institutional crafts (basketry, weaving, brick/lime production). Traditional craftspeople should be legally and formally recognized as custodians of intangible cultural heritage and provided with the significant support they need to maintain their craft practices.

• *During Practice:*

Critical efforts to document and archive audio-visual record, artifact inventory, oral history interview, urgently required. Community workshops need to be held to enable interchange of and transmission of artisan's skills between generations. Market development interventions should encourage artisans to use their skills in developing new, trendy and commercially viable products.

• *For Community:*

Cultural festivals and events should Celebrate Bakiga folk culture and Defend hide and skin arts. Cultural education should Increase awareness of Bakiga history, culture, and arts. Pride in cultural customs should be Bolstered to direct off negative stereotypes.

➤ *Limitations*

Several limitations should be acknowledged:

- Time Constraints: The fourteen-week field work period restricted the observation of all seasonal/ceremonial activities.
- Institutional Collections: few institutional artifact collections existed at this time in Kabale, while community collection provided my primary sources.
- Sacred Knowledge: Obscuration of sacred, restricted, or taboo knowledge could have constrained application of the techniques.
- Language Barriers: Due to differences in the Rukiga language, some interviews were affected, especially among older interviewees.

- Recall Bias Life-history reports concerning memory of practices from past years may be subject to a bias toward memory loss.

Future studies can improve on these limitations by conducting longer-term fieldwork, establishing more institutional partnerships and forums, participating in more community projects, and enhancing Rukiga language capacity.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Conclusion

The present research has concluded that Bakiga hide, and skin artistic activities are an integral but also critically endanger aspect of overall Bakiga culture. These activities have obvious built-in qualities of technical knowledge, aesthetics and social significance that have accumulated over generations, and benefit together for utilitarian, economic, social, and symbolic human purposes in traditional Bakiga society. However, these crafts are under great threat of diminution from the impact of colonial disruption, missionization, modernization and urbanization, and marginalization and stigmatization of local built-in value systems. Most of its practitioners are over 50 years, with no identified successor, and therefore much of the technical knowledge and all the local built-in value systems as well as world-views shall be wiped out under the prevailing generation.

For the Bakiga skin and hide artwork such as 'Bataala' to survive, many public and community-based action strategies are needed, including: (a) documentation and archiving, (b) creativity and flexibility and (c) innovation in the practice of genuine form of visual arts, (d) education, training and skill transmission, (e) institutional and policy support, and (f) cultural revitalization. All these strategies should be community driven, participatory, and intergenerational, connecting elders, artisans, young generation, and cultural institutions.

➤ Recommendations

• Policy Recommendations

- ✓ Establish National Policy for Traditional Crafts Conservation: The Government of Uganda (through the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities) should form a national policy that aims to conserve and promote traditional crafts, setting aside financial allowances to facilitate documentation, transfer of skills, and revitalization.
- ✓ Develop Institutional Capacity : Provide resources to the Uganda Museum, the Kabale Regional Museum, and other cultural institutions for documentation of traditional craft skills through ethnographic research, conservation and promotion activities and community participation.
- ✓ Support to traditional artisans: State may officially recognize traditional artisans as bearers of intangible cultural heritage and could facilitate to them in form of tax

exemptions, credit facility, marketing, financial incentives. 4. Encouragement to Traditional Artists: State Governments shall encourage traditional living artists through marketing support, financial incentives, credit facilities, and tax exemptions.

- ✓ Promote traditional handicrafts by making it a part of the classroom/ vocational trainings: The Ministry of Education and Sports should incorporate traditional crafts into school syllabi and vocational training courses, so that the youth are able to learn traditional crafts even as they make a livelihood of them.
- ✓ Fulfil UNESCO commitments: The state should reinforce Ugandan implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) by means of national safeguarding programs and report.

• Practice Recommendations

- ✓ Storage and documentation. Researchers, cultural institutions, and community organization need to document systematically all the practices, processes, techniques, objects, their cultural context, provide audio visual documentation, inventory of collected objects, conduct oral history interviews to establish digital archives accessible to everyone, everywhere.
- ✓ Community Workshops: Community workshops should consist of the elders teach the kids tanning, joining, decoration, and products making skills as well as the expressing of culture significance.
- ✓ Market Development: Artisans need support for the development of contemporary products that will appeal to today's markets as well as provide images of the Bakiga culture. Support should provide enterprise training and product design, market linkages, and product branding.
- ✓ Cultural Festivals and Events: To promote Bakiga traditional cultural pride of hide and skin art, make the people aware of and interested in it, the festivals and events should be organized.
- ✓ Museum-Community Alliances: Museums must build alliances with practitioners of the community for documentation and preservation of hide and skin practices through community-led documentation, co-curated exhibitions, and repatriation of artifacts of cultural significance.

• Future Research Recommendations

- ✓ Comparative Studies: Comparative studies of hide and skin practices across Ugandan and other East African communities would help identify the similarities, regional differentials, and means of preservation.
- ✓ Longitudinal Research: Document how practices change with time as conducted by the Bakiga, the effectiveness of preservation techniques, and any arising challenges and opportunities.
- ✓ Economic analysis: Economic analysis should refer to the feasibility and profitability of hide and skin arts and crafts production with regards to knowledge, income, markets, and livelihood implications.

- ✓ Psychological and Social Effects Studies: Studies should analyse psychological and social effects on performer practice on performers including identity, self-esteem, well-being, and social implications.
- ✓ Applied Research : Developed and evaluated practical strategies for conserving and marketing hide and skin practices, such as the product development, marketing, training, and institutional support, should be.

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➤ Conflict Of Interest

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