

Reviving Heritage: The Role of Indigenous Textiles Design in Ghana's Contemporary Fashion Industry

¹Anku Samuel Nutifafa, ²Isaac Kofi Awuyah, ³Christiana Aduko Abane, ⁴Simon Dela Agbeko

1. St. Teresa's College of Education, Department of Vocational Skills, P. O. Box 129 Hohoe, Volta Region, Ghana. Tel: +233 50 136 2305 Email: fafaanku1@gmail.com
2. Corresponding Author, Department of Fashion Design and Textiles, Dr. Hilla Limann Technical University, Wa, P. O. Box 553 Wa, Upper West Region, Ghana. Tel: +233 24 962 9698 Email: aikawuyah@gmail.com
3. Department of Fashion Design and Textiles, Dr. Hilla Limann Technical University, Wa, P. O. Box 553, Upper West Region, Ghana. Tel: +233 24 288 7156 Email: abanechristian23@gmail.com
4. Peki College of Education (Govco), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Department, P. O Box 14, Peki – Ghana. Tel: +233 244453154 Email: simoncdela.cds@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the revival of indigenous textile designs within Ghana's contemporary fashion industry, emphasizing their cultural significance and impact on national identity. A qualitative descriptive research approach was employed. A total of 80 participants were involved, with interviews and observations as tools used to gather data from fashion designers, textiles artists and fashion educators. Additionally, focus groups were conducted to assess consumer preferences. The research investigates how these indigenous designs are being integrated into modern fashion practices. Key findings reveal a growing appreciation among consumers for indigenous textiles, which not only convey cultural heritage but also contribute to a unique fashion narrative. Several contemporary designers successfully incorporate indigenous materials and techniques into their collections, bridging the gap between heritage and modernity. However, challenges remain, including limited resources and the need for greater awareness and education about the value of indigenous textiles. The study argues that reviving indigenous textile designs is crucial for the future of Ghana's fashion industry, fostering community identity and economic sustainability. The implications extend beyond fashion, highlighting the importance of cultural heritage in shaping contemporary societal values. Ultimately, the paper calls for a collaborative effort among designers, consumers, and industry stakeholders to embrace and invest in indigenous textile practices, ensuring the preservation and celebration of Ghana's rich cultural legacy in the global fashion industry.

Keywords: Contemporary, Heritage, Sustainability, Culture

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1. Introduction

Textiles have long been integral to Ghanaian culture, serving as functional materials and symbols of identity, heritage, and creativity (Ayesu et al., 2023). The history of textiles in Ghana dates back centuries, with indigenous fabrics such as 'kente' and 'adinkra' produced by the Asantes, 'kete' by the Ewes, and 'fugu' by the Northerners. Each piece is steeped in rich narratives and cultural significance. The designs and patterns used in these indigenous textiles convey specific meanings often linked to social status, proverbs, or historical events (Saypanova & Gulzada, 2024). The creativity exemplified in indigenous textile production in Ghana, through methods like weaving and dyeing, reflects the ingenuity and craftsmanship of various ethnic groups, contributing to a vibrant Ghanaian cultural identity (Lowe & Monica, 2024). The preservation and promotion of indigenous textiles are vital in maintaining Ghanaian cultural heritage and fostering sustainable development within its fashion industry.

Recent research on indigenous textiles in Ghana has underscored their significance as cultural artifacts and modern design elements. Scholars such as Adeloje et al. (2023) explore how the revival of indigenous textile practices reflects a heightened appreciation for craftsmanship and cultural identity, framing these textiles as

essential components of both personal and collective expression. Their study reveals that Ghanaian designers are increasingly integrating indigenous techniques to create contemporary pieces that resonate with the complexities of today's societal landscape. Moreover, there is a broader discourse around the significance of cultural heritage in global fashion. Scholars like Brown & Vacca (2022) emphasize that integrating cultural narratives in fashion design promotes ethical production methods and sustainable practices. This perspective is reflected in the work of several designers who consciously strive to preserve their cultural heritage while meeting the demands of modern consumers. Majeed & Kosiba (2023) similarly, advocate for the promotion and preservation of indigenous textiles, arguing that their revival contributes to a multifaceted understanding of identity and serves as a catalyst for innovation within the fashion industry. The existing literature illustrates that the revival of indigenous textile designs represents not merely a trend but a crucial component of redefining modern Ghanaian fashion. Despite the rich cultural significance and artistic value of these textiles, their integration within the contemporary fashion industry encounters several challenges, including a growing dependency on imported materials, inadequate public awareness of their cultural importance, and the diminishing skills of artisans due to inadequate training and mentorship opportunities. As modern fashion trends increasingly gravitate toward globalized aesthetics, traditional textile designs risk marginalization, leading to a loss of cultural heritage and identity. Furthermore, the lack of integration of these indigenous textiles within contemporary fashion poses significant barriers to the economic empowerment of local artisans and communities reliant on textile production. With globalization reshaping the fashion industry, there is an urgent need to investigate how traditional textile designs can be effectively revived and incorporated into modern fashion practices. Addressing these issues is critical for revitalizing the indigenous textile industry, fostering cultural pride, promoting sustainability, and ensuring the preservation of Ghana's rich cultural identity in an increasingly homogenized global market.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how indigenous textile designs are being revived and integrated into contemporary fashion in Ghana. By examining the approaches and perspectives of designers championing indigenous fabrics, as well as the responses of consumers to these revived styles, this research aims to uncover the broader implications of this revival for cultural identity and economic sustainability.

This study argues that the integration of indigenous textile designs into the modern fashion industry is not only a means of preserving cultural heritage but also a pathway to rejuvenating the Ghanaian textile industry (Eseagwu, 2024).

Contributions of this study include providing insights into how indigenous textile design can serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity, supporting cultural identity and sustainable fashion practices. Theoretically, the research is grounded in frameworks of cultural preservation and fashion innovation emphasizing the significance of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary design.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Area and Methodology

i. Study Location Description

The study is situated in Ghana, specifically focusing on key regions renowned for their indigenous textile production and cultural significance. The primary locations include:

- **Ashanti Region:** Known as the heartland of Kente weaving, the Ashanti Region plays a vital role in Ghanaian textile heritage. The regional capital, Kumasi, is home to numerous weaving communities and artisans who produce traditional Kente cloths using age-old techniques. This region exemplifies the rich craftsmanship and cultural traditions associated with indigenous textiles.
- **Greater Accra Region:** As the country's capital and economic hub, Accra hosts a vibrant fashion sense that blends traditional textiles with contemporary design. It includes textile markets, fashion showrooms, and design ateliers, making it an ideal location to study the intersection of tradition and modern fashion industries.
- **Volta and Northern Regions:** These regions are known for Kete and fugu weaving and other indigenous textile crafts. The local artisans here contribute significantly to Ghana's textile diversity and offer insights into regional variations and technique

ii. *Study Design and Sampling*

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research approach to explore the role and impact of indigenous textile design in Ghana's contemporary fashion industry. The target population includes fashion designers specializing in indigenous textiles, textile artists, fashion consumers with relevant knowledge of indigenous textiles, fashion educators. This target population encompasses key stakeholders involved in the creation, promotion, and consumption of indigenous textile designs, providing comprehensive insights necessary for analyzing their role in Ghana's contemporary fashion industry.

a) *Sampling Methods:*

- *Stratified Sampling:* The population was first divided into four strata based on the participant groups; fashion designers, textile artists, fashion consumers and fashion educators. To ensure regional diversity, the population within each stratum was further stratified by geographic regions across Ghana (e.g., Greater Accra, Ashanti, Northern and Volta). From each region within a stratum, participants were randomly selected proportionally, which enhances regional representativity and reduces selection bias.

- *Purposive Sampling:* Within each stratum, participants with specific expertise, experience, or insight into indigenous textiles and their application in contemporary fashion were deliberately chosen. This targeted selection prioritizes individuals whose contributions are most relevant for exploring cultural and industry-specific insights, thereby enriching the depth of the data collected.

b) *Sample Size and Justification:*

A total of 80 participants were involved, including 12 fashion designers, 12 textiles artisans, 8 fashion educators, and 4 focus groups, each comprising of 12 participants (totaling 48 fashion consumers). The sample size was selected based on a combination of logistical feasibility and the need for adequate diversity to capture nuanced perspectives across regions. Although the sample size is relatively small, it allows for meaningful qualitative insights. Potential limitations include reduced generalizability due to sample size constraints; however, purposive and stratified sampling helps mitigate this by ensuring relevance and regional spread.

iii. *Methods of Data Collection*

- *Interviews:* Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fashion designers, artisans, and fashion educators to gather in-depth insights into the design processes, challenges, and perceptions regarding indigenous textiles.

- *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):* FGDs were organized with fashion consumers to understand their perceptions, preferences, and awareness of indigenous textiles.

- *Observation:* Field visits to textile markets, ateliers, and fashion shows offered practical insights into the current integration of traditional textiles in fashion production and presentation. These visits also enabled validation of interview findings through direct observation. There was also a review of existing fashion collections, design portfolios, and promotional materials featuring indigenous textiles.

iv. *Data Analysis:*

Qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) was carefully transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, insights, and key themes related to heritage revival and the integration of traditional designs into contemporary fashion. This process involved coding the data to uncover common ideas, perspectives, and attitudes among participants concerning the value and relevance of indigenous textiles and motifs in modern fashion contexts. Additionally, visual data comprising photographs and samples of traditional motifs was analyzed to assess how these motifs are represented and adapted within current fashion trends.

v. *Validity and Reliability:*

Triangulation was employed by comparing data from multiple sources and methods to enhance the credibility of findings. Member checking was carried out by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation.

3. Results and Discussions

The analysis of the data collected from interviews, field visits and review of some existing fashion collections yielded several key themes regarding the role of indigenous textile design in Ghana's contemporary fashion industry. The main insights are summarized as follows:

Cultural Significance: Respondents emphasized the deep cultural heritage associated with indigenous textiles, identifying them as meaningful artifacts that reflect Ghana's history, spirituality, and identity. Interviewees noted that these textiles carry stories and traditions that must be preserved and communicated through modern designs. Interviews with designers indicated a conscious effort to incorporate traditional motifs such as Adinkra symbols, kente patterns, and batik designs into modern garments. Most designers expressed a desire to preserve Ghanaian cultural heritage while making their work appealing to the global market.

Economic Potential: Both designers and artisans highlighted the potential of indigenous textiles as a means of economic empowerment. The revival of these textiles opens avenues for job creation, sustainable livelihoods, and increased local production, balancing the industry's reliance on imported fabrics.

Innovative Integration: Designers revealed that successfully incorporating indigenous textiles into contemporary fashion hinges on innovative design strategies. This includes blending indigenous motifs with modern silhouettes and techniques, which appeal to a broader, younger audience while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Challenges to Sustainability: A recurring theme was the economic and environmental challenges faced by artisans in the textile sector. Issues such as the overdependence on imported materials, the need for skill training, and the impact of globalization on local practices were highlighted as significant barriers to the sustainability of indigenous textile production.

Visual analyses of recent fashion collections revealed an innovative integration of traditional textiles with contemporary silhouettes, which has gained popularity on fashion runways and social media platforms. Fashion shows and exhibitions showcased garments that seamlessly blend heritage motifs with modern aesthetics, indicating an evolving trend that values cultural authenticity.

Several contemporary fashion designers and brands are leading the way in integrating indigenous textiles into their collections, enhancing the visibility and appreciation of Ghanaian heritage in the contemporary fashion industry. Contemporary fashion designers who have incorporated indigenous Ghanaian textile designs into their work include:



Figure 1: Kofi Ansah designs
Photo Source: Annie (2018)

Kennedy Nana Kofi Ansah – Founder and Creative Director for Afri-Ken. Afri-Ken is a Ghanaian based fashion brand that deals in ready to wear, couture, gowns and bespoke pieces for men, as well as statement pieces for women. Often regarded as a pioneer in integrating indigenous Ghanaian textiles like Kente into modern fashion designs, Kofi Ansah created unique pieces that highlighted Ghana's cultural heritage while appealing to a contemporary consumer.



Figure 2: Duaba Serwa designs

Photo Source: Nkansa, S. (2020)



Figure 3: Christina A. Z. K designs

Photo Source: Amu (2020)

Christina A. Z. K.: Known for her vibrant and bold use of kente cloth, marrying indigenous patterns with modern cuts to create ready-to-wear pieces that appeal to both local and international markets.



Figure 4: Kwaku Bediako design
Photo Source: esty (2025)

Kwaku Bediako: As the founder of the brand "Tapas by Kwaku Bediako," he uses indigenous fabrics like adinkra and kente in avant-garde styles, showcasing the versatility of these textiles in high-fashion contexts.



Figure 5: Afua Sam designs
Photo Source: esty (2025)

Afua Sam: Recognized for her luxurious take on indigenous textiles, Afua blends methods of batik and tie-dye with contemporary tailoring, often seen in high-profile fashion exhibitions.



Figure 6: Larry Mohammed design
Photo Source: [Allaire, C. \(2020\)](#)

Larry Jafaru Mohammed began his career designing his accessories line 2012. He pivoted to ready-to-wear around 2016, and launched his label the following year. Mohammed saw an opportunity to use clothing design to support local artists. “When I started my brand, my goal was to collaborate with and empower artisans within my community,” says Mohammed. Mohammed draws inspiration from African culture, textiles, and nature, combining them with modern, streamlined silhouettes.



Figure 7: Atto Tetteh Design
Photo Source: [Allaire, C. \(2020\)](#)

Atto Tetteh offers stylish menswear which can also be unisex with on focusing reinventing traditional African

patterns for the modern man. His brand is a contemporary streetwear brand, line for cosmopolitan men who desire an African aesthetic. He aims to create designs that reflect Africanness, but can also be appreciated by anybody who has never been to Ghana or Africa.

Other fashion designers who also exemplify how indigenous textile designs can be reimagined to fit modern aesthetics while preserving their cultural significance include, *Oheneba Akuffo* who is known for his vibrant and innovative use of 'Kente' and other indigenous textiles, creating sophisticated garments that celebrate Ghanaian culture. *Afrikanske* is a brand that uses indigenous Ghanaian fabrics to create stylish and contemporary pieces that blend indigenous craftsmanship with modern aesthetics. *Christine Agyare* is known as a designer, who combines Ghanaian textiles with modern silhouettes and designs, catering to both local and international markets.

3.1 Consumer Attitudes

The focus group discussion results indicated a generally positive perception among consumers regarding indigenous textiles in contemporary fashion. Key findings include:

1. **Appreciation of Heritage:** A significant 75% of respondents expressed that they value garments made from indigenous textiles due to their cultural heritage and the stories behind them. Consumers indicated that these textiles evoke a sense of pride and connection to their roots.
2. **Desire for Authenticity:** Consumers showed a strong preference for authentic products that originate from artisanal communities. Approximately 68% stated they are willing to pay a premium for clothing made from authentic indigenous fabrics, recognizing the hard work and craftsmanship involved.
3. **Trend Awareness:** Many consumers reported a growing awareness of sustainable fashion and the benefits of choosing indigenous textiles over fast fashion alternatives. They appreciate that supporting these textiles supports local artisans and promotes Ghanaian culture.
4. **Mixed Use in Wardrobe:** While indigenous textiles are appreciated, consumers also noted that modern design elements must be integrated to make these pieces more wearable in everyday settings. This expresses a collective desire for versatility in indigenous textile garments, allowing them to fit seamlessly into contemporary wardrobes.

Overall, the results illustrate a promising outlook for indigenous textile design within Ghana's contemporary fashion industry, characterized by a balance of cultural reverence, innovative design, and consumer engagement that collectively contribute to both the revival and sustainability of this art form and the indigenous textiles industry.

4. Implications for Fashion Industry

The study revealed that reviving indigenous textiles fosters a narrative that highlights quality over quantity, emphasizing artisanal craftsmanship and the stories behind each fabric. These findings align with Ayesu et al. (2023) who reported a similar case. However, unlike their study which focused on the promotion and preservation of indigenous textiles and culture in Ghana, our research extends to documenting the effects of integrating indigenous textiles into contemporary fashion designers' collections. This study reveals that reviving indigenous textiles is not only a means of preserving Ghana's cultural heritage but also has significant implications for the future of the country's fashion industry. Additionally the results suggests that by integrating indigenous textiles into contemporary fashion, designers can cultivate a unique identity for Ghanaian fashion on the global stage, differentiating it from mass-produced, fast-fashion alternatives. Moreover, engaging with indigenous textiles opens up avenues for innovation and sustainability in fashion. The use of locally sourced materials can reduce the carbon footprint associated with textile production, while the promotion of indigenous techniques and designs supports sustainable practices within communities. As the global fashion industry increasingly prioritizes ethical practices, Ghana has the potential to position itself as a leader in sustainable fashion by celebrating and reviving these cultural textiles. Additionally, this revival may lead to increased

tourism and local economic development. Tourists are often drawn to authentic cultural experiences, and fashion that embodies indigenous Ghanaian art could enhance the appeal of local markets and fashion shows, stimulating economic growth through increased sales and visibility. Ultimately Consumer preference for authentic Ghanaian fabrics underscores a shift toward local content, which can bolster the industry economically and culturally. This demonstrates a growing appreciation for indigenous designs as valuable cultural assets that can be leveraged commercially, thus contributing to the industry's sustainability and heritage revival.

5. Challenges Faced

Despite the promising implications, several challenges persist for designers seeking to integrate indigenous designs into their collections. One significant obstacle is the lack of access to high-quality raw materials and tools necessary for indigenous textile production. The overdependence on imported fabrics often undermines local craftsmanship and results in the marginalization of indigenous textile techniques. Furthermore, there is a need for skill development within the artisan community to adapt indigenous methods to contemporary design standards. Many young artisans may lack the opportunity for proper training and mentorship, leading to a generational gap in skills and knowledge necessary to innovate while preserving tradition effectively. Intellectual property rights also pose challenges, as indigenous designs are often communal knowledge. Designers must navigate the complexities of copyright and ownership when using culturally significant patterns and methods. Without proper protection, artisans risk losing the financial benefits of their cultural heritage to external commercial interests. The challenges faced by artisans, such as limited technological access and market exposure, highlight the need for supportive policies and capacity-building initiatives. Encouraging collaborations between traditional textile artisans and contemporary fashion designers can foster innovation and broaden the reach of indigenous textiles.

6. Cultural Significance

The findings suggest that indigenous textiles are central to Ghana's efforts to preserve and promote its cultural heritage within the evolving landscape of global fashion. The integration of traditional motifs into contemporary designs aligns with global trends emphasizing cultural authenticity and sustainable fashion. This points to a symbiotic relationship where heritage textiles are not merely preserved but are also revitalized through innovative design practices for modern markets. Maintaining cultural heritage through textiles is not just about preserving artistic practices; it profoundly contributes to community identity and pride. Indigenous textiles serve as a tangible link to history, embodying the values, stories, and customs that define Ghanaian culture. As Saypanova & Gulzada (2024) found, designs and patterns used in these indigenous textiles convey specific meanings, often linked to social status, proverbs, or historical events. For many communities, textiles are associated with life stages, such as births, marriages, and funerals, playing a crucial role in social cohesion.

The revival of indigenous textiles fosters a sense of pride among local artisans and consumers alike. It reinforces the idea that their heritage and craftsmanship are valuable, instilling a collective pride that resonates through generations. This pride can translate into a stronger commitment to preserving these traditions, encouraging communities to practice and teach these skills to younger generations.

Moreover, when designers highlight indigenous textiles within contemporary fashion, they invite conversation about the cultural significance these fabrics embody, becoming ambassadors for their communities and stories. This discussion enhances awareness of Ghana's rich artistic heritage, contributing to a broader appreciation that resonates beyond local borders.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the revival of indigenous textiles plays a pivotal role in shaping Ghana's contemporary fashion industry, offering a unique opportunity to blend cultural heritage with modern design. This study highlighted the

implications of such revival for creating a distinct identity within the global fashion industry, as well as the potential for economic growth through sustainable practices that leverage local craftsmanship. However, it also illuminated the various challenges that designers face, including access to resources, skill development, and intellectual property concerns, which hinder the seamless integration of indigenous designs into contemporary contexts. Despite these promising results, our study had a relatively small sample size (n=80), which may limit generalizability.

Looking ahead, critical areas for further research and action are necessary to support the revival of indigenous textiles. Future studies could focus on developing frameworks for mentorship programs that connect experienced artisans with younger generations to ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills. Additionally, research into sustainable practices that can be implemented in indigenous textile production could enhance the industry's viability in the current eco-conscious market. Employing a larger sample size for future research could provide deeper insights. Exploring strategic partnerships among designers, artisans, and educational institutions could foster innovation while preserving cultural heritage.

As we move towards a future where tradition and innovation can coexist, there is an urgent call to action for both designers and consumers. Designers are encouraged to actively incorporate indigenous textiles into their collections while promoting collaboration with local artisans to preserve and reinterpret these rich cultural assets. Consumers also play a crucial role; by choosing to support garments made from indigenous textiles, they not only invest in unique fashion pieces but also safeguard the livelihoods of artisans and the values embodied by these textiles.

Together, by embracing and investing in indigenous textile practices, we can ensure that the vibrant legacy of Ghanaian artistry continues to flourish, enriching the contemporary fashion industry and preserving the cultural identity of our communities for generations to come.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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