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Family-based Knowledge Transmission and Its Influence on Adolescents' Academic Motivation and Identity Formation in African Societies

Tani Emmanuel Lukong
University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon

Family-based knowledge transmission constitutes a foundational yet often under-theorized dimension of adolescent development in African societies. Rooted in African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), family practices such as storytelling, apprenticeship, moral instruction, role modelling, and communal participation serve as primary mechanisms through which values, skills, and identities are cultivated. This article critically examines how these forms of knowledge transmission influence adolescents' academic motivation and identity formation across African contexts. Drawing on sociocultural and ecological theories, the paper argues that family environments do not merely support schooling but actively shape learners' orientations toward education, aspirations, and self-concepts. Empirical evidence from countries such as Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana illustrates that culturally grounded family practices can enhance motivation, resilience, and identity coherence, particularly when aligned with schooling experiences. However, tensions emerge when formal education systems marginalize indigenous knowledge, creating dissonance between home and school environments. The article advances a contextually responsive framework that integrates family-based knowledge into educational practice, emphasizing the need for culturally sustaining pedagogies, parental engagement, and policy reform. It concludes that recognizing family-based knowledge transmission is essential for fostering meaningful academic motivation and identity development among African adolescents.

Keywords: family-based knowledge transmission, adolescents' academic motivation, identity formation in African societies

Introduction

Across African societies, the family has historically functioned as the primary locus of knowledge production, transmission, and identity formation. Long before the expansion of formal schooling systems, African children and adolescents were socialised into systems of meaning through everyday interactions within the family and the wider community. These processes—manifested through storytelling, proverbs, observation, apprenticeship, and participation in communal life—constitute what scholars identify as African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), which are holistic, relational, and contextually embedded (Dei, 2014). Within this epistemological framework, knowledge is not merely cognitive but moral, social, and existential, shaping how individuals

Tani Emmanuel Lukong, Ph.D., Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon.

understand themselves and their roles within society. Consequently, adolescence, as a critical developmental stage, is profoundly influenced by family-based knowledge practices that inform both academic motivation and identity formation.

However, the contemporary educational landscape in Africa reveals a persistent tension between these indigenous systems of knowledge and the formal schooling structures inherited from colonial legacies. Formal education systems across many African countries continue to privilege Eurocentric epistemologies, standardised curricula, and individualised modes of learning that often marginalise or ignore the knowledge transmitted within families. This has resulted in a disjuncture between the cultural realities of learners and the pedagogical practices they encounter in schools (Serpell & Marfo, 2014). For adolescents, who are simultaneously navigating the demands of schooling and the expectations of their families, this disconnection can have significant implications for both motivation and identity. When the knowledge valued at home is not recognised in school, learners may experience alienation, reduced engagement, and fragmented self-concepts.

Adolescence is widely recognised as a period of intensified identity exploration and motivational restructuring. Theoretical perspectives such as Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory highlight the centrality of identity formation during this stage, while Self-Determination Theory emphasises the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in shaping motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In African contexts, these processes are not solely individual but are deeply embedded in familial and communal relationships. For instance, in many Cameroonian and Ghanaian households, adolescents are socialised into values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, and perseverance through family narratives and daily practices. These values often translate into educational aspirations, influencing how young people perceive schooling as a pathway to personal and collective advancement. At the same time, family expectations—such as contributing to household labour or engaging in family enterprises—can both support and constrain academic motivation, particularly in contexts marked by economic precarity.

Empirical evidence from across Africa underscores the significant role of family environments in shaping adolescents' educational trajectories. In Kenya, studies have shown that parental engagement, including guidance, monitoring, and emotional support, is positively associated with students' academic motivation and achievement (Wadende et al., 2016). Similarly, in Nigeria, apprenticeship systems embedded within family structures have been found to cultivate discipline, goal orientation, and resilience among adolescents, qualities that are transferable to academic contexts (Okeke, 2016). In Cameroon, family narratives that emphasise education as a means of social mobility often motivate adolescents to pursue academic success despite structural challenges. These examples illustrate that family-based knowledge transmission is not peripheral to education but constitutes a foundational influence on how adolescents engage with learning.

Yet, the influence of family-based knowledge on adolescents' motivation and identity is neither uniform nor unproblematic. The increasing forces of urbanisation, globalisation, and digitalisation are transforming family structures and modes of knowledge transmission across the continent. In urban centres such as Douala, Lagos, and Nairobi, the shift from extended to nuclear family systems, coupled with increased exposure to global media, has altered the dynamics of intergenerational learning. Traditional practices such as storytelling and apprenticeship are increasingly supplemented—or in some cases replaced—by digital forms of knowledge acquisition. While these changes offer new opportunities for learning, they also raise critical questions about the sustainability of culturally grounded knowledge systems and their role in shaping adolescents' identities.

Adolescents may find themselves negotiating multiple, and sometimes conflicting, sources of influence, leading to hybrid or fragmented identities that reflect both local and global orientations.

Furthermore, the relationship between family-based knowledge and formal education is often mediated by socio-economic inequalities. Families with limited resources may prioritise immediate economic survival over long-term educational investment, thereby affecting adolescents' motivation and engagement with schooling. In rural areas of countries such as Zambia and Tanzania, adolescents may be required to participate in agricultural or household labour, which can limit their time and energy for academic pursuits. At the same time, these responsibilities can foster practical skills, resilience, and a sense of responsibility, highlighting the complex interplay between family roles and educational outcomes. This complexity underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of family-based knowledge transmission that goes beyond simplistic binaries of support or constraint.

In light of these dynamics, there is a pressing need to critically re-examine the role of family-based knowledge in shaping adolescents' academic motivation and identity formation in African societies. Such an examination must move beyond deficit-oriented perspectives that view indigenous practices as barriers to education and instead recognise them as valuable resources that can enhance learning and development. It also requires a decolonial lens that challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies and affirms the legitimacy of African ways of knowing. By situating adolescents' educational experiences within their familial and cultural contexts, this article seeks to contribute to a more holistic and contextually grounded understanding of motivation and identity in African education.

This study argues that family-based knowledge transmission is not merely a background influence but a central determinant of how adolescents perceive, engage with, and derive meaning from education. Recognising and integrating this dimension into educational theory, policy, and practice is essential for developing systems that are both effective and culturally responsive. In doing so, African education can move towards a model that not only promotes academic success but also nurtures coherent, resilient, and culturally grounded identities among young people.

Conceptualizing Family-based Knowledge Transmission in African Contexts

Conceptualising family-based knowledge transmission in African contexts requires moving beyond narrow, formalist definitions of learning towards a broader, culturally embedded understanding of how knowledge is produced, shared, and legitimised within everyday life. In many African societies, the family is not merely a support structure for schooling but a primary epistemic space in which children and adolescents acquire cognitive, moral, and social competencies. Knowledge transmission occurs through lived experience, participation, and relational engagement rather than through abstract instruction alone. This reflects the ontological and epistemological foundations of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), which privilege holism, interdependence, and contextual relevance (Dei, 2014). Within this framework, knowledge is inseparable from identity, responsibility, and belonging, and its transmission is inherently tied to the maintenance of cultural continuity.

Family-based knowledge transmission is therefore best understood as a dynamic, intergenerational process through which values, skills, norms, and worldviews are communicated within kinship networks. Unlike Western models that often isolate the nuclear family as the primary unit of socialisation, African contexts typically involve extended family structures, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings, all of whom contribute to

the educational development of adolescents (Serpell & Marfo, 2014). This distributed model of knowledge transmission reflects a communal orientation in which learning is a shared responsibility and a collective endeavour. For instance, in many Cameroonian communities, grandparents play a central role in storytelling and moral instruction, using folktales and proverbs to cultivate critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and cultural awareness. Such practices illustrate that knowledge is not transmitted as fixed content but as interpretive frameworks that guide adolescents in making sense of their social worlds.

A critical dimension of this conceptualisation lies in recognising the multiplicity of pedagogical modes through which knowledge is transmitted within families. These include oral traditions, observational learning, apprenticeship, participation in economic activities, and ritual practices. In Ghana and Nigeria, for example, apprenticeship systems embedded within family structures provide adolescents with opportunities to acquire vocational skills while simultaneously internalising values such as discipline, perseverance, and accountability (Okeke, 2016). Similarly, in pastoralist communities in Kenya and Tanzania, adolescents learn through participation in herding activities, where they develop spatial awareness, problem-solving skills, and ecological knowledge. These forms of learning challenge conventional distinctions between cognitive and practical knowledge, demonstrating that intellectual development in African contexts is deeply intertwined with action and experience.

From a theoretical perspective, family-based knowledge transmission in African contexts resonates with sociocultural theories of learning, particularly the work of Vygotsky (1978), who emphasised the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development. However, while Vygotskian theory provides a useful analytical lens, it does not fully capture the communal and relational complexities of African learning environments. In African families, learning is not confined to dyadic interactions between a more knowledgeable other and a learner; it is embedded within networks of relationships and mediated by cultural practices that extend beyond the immediate learning context. For example, the use of proverbs in many African societies functions as a cognitive and linguistic tool that encapsulates complex ideas in concise and memorable forms, enabling adolescents to engage in abstract reasoning and moral reflection (Nsamenang, 2002). Such practices highlight the need to expand existing theoretical frameworks to account for the collective and culturally situated nature of knowledge transmission.

Importantly, conceptualising family-based knowledge transmission also requires a critical interrogation of its internal diversities and contradictions. African families are not homogeneous entities, and the processes through which knowledge is transmitted are shaped by factors such as socio-economic status, gender norms, and geographical location. In some contexts, traditional gender roles may influence the type of knowledge transmitted to male and female adolescents, with boys being socialised into leadership and economic roles, while girls are prepared for domestic responsibilities. While these practices can provide adolescents with a sense of identity and purpose, they may also reproduce inequalities and limit access to certain forms of knowledge and opportunities. Similarly, families experiencing economic hardship may prioritise survival-oriented knowledge over formal educational engagement, thereby affecting adolescents' academic trajectories. These complexities underscore the need to avoid romanticising family-based knowledge transmission and instead engage with it as a contested and evolving process.

The impact of urbanisation and globalisation further complicates the conceptual landscape of family-based knowledge transmission. In rapidly urbanising African cities such as Douala, Accra, and Nairobi, traditional modes of intergenerational learning are increasingly being transformed by changing family structures, migration,

and exposure to global media. The shift from extended to nuclear family systems often reduces opportunities for communal learning and intergenerational interaction, while digital technologies introduce new forms of knowledge that may not be rooted in local cultural contexts. Adolescents in these environments are often required to navigate multiple knowledge systems, negotiating between family-based values and the demands of formal education and global cultural influences. This hybridity challenges static conceptions of indigenous knowledge and calls for a more fluid understanding of how knowledge is transmitted and transformed in contemporary African societies (Serpell & Marfo, 2014).

Moreover, the conceptualisation of family-based knowledge transmission must address the persistent marginalisation of indigenous knowledge within formal education systems. Colonial and postcolonial schooling structures have historically devalued knowledge acquired outside institutional settings, framing it as informal or inferior. This has contributed to a disconnect between what adolescents learn at home and what is recognised in school, often leading to a fragmentation of knowledge and identity. For instance, an adolescent in Cameroon may possess extensive knowledge of local history, agricultural practices, or cultural traditions acquired through family interactions, yet this knowledge may have little relevance within the formal curriculum. Such disjunctures not only undermine the value of family-based learning but also limit the potential for meaningful integration between home and school knowledge systems (Dei, 2014).

In light of these considerations, conceptualising family-based knowledge transmission in African contexts requires a decolonial and context-sensitive approach that recognises its epistemic legitimacy and pedagogical significance. It involves rethinking knowledge not as a fixed body of information but as a socially constructed and culturally mediated process that is deeply embedded in family and community life. By foregrounding the role of families as active sites of learning, this conceptualisation challenges dominant educational paradigms and opens up possibilities for more inclusive and contextually relevant approaches to adolescent development. Ultimately, understanding family-based knowledge transmission is essential for appreciating how African adolescents construct meaning, develop motivation, and form identities within complex and evolving sociocultural landscapes.

Theoretical Foundations: Motivation and Identity Formation

The relationship between family-based knowledge transmission, academic motivation, and identity formation among adolescents in African societies is best understood through a synthesis of psychological and sociocultural theories, critically reinterpreted within African epistemological contexts. While dominant theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Eriksonian identity theory provide valuable insights into motivational processes and identity development, their applicability in African settings requires careful contextualisation. African societies are characterised by relational ontologies in which the self is constructed not as an isolated individual but as fundamentally embedded within family and community networks. Consequently, motivation and identity cannot be adequately explained through purely individualistic frameworks; they must be understood as socially negotiated and culturally mediated processes shaped by family-based knowledge systems (Dei, 2014; Serpell & Marfo, 2014).

Self-Determination Theory, as advanced by Deci and Ryan (2000), posits that human motivation is driven by the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In many African family contexts, these needs are cultivated through culturally embedded practices that differ significantly from Western conceptualisations. For instance, relatedness—often considered one of several motivational drivers in

SDT—tends to occupy a central position in African societies, where interdependence and communal responsibility are highly valued. Adolescents derive motivation not solely from personal goals but from their obligations to family and community. In Cameroon, for example, adolescents who are socialised into narratives of collective success and familial responsibility often demonstrate strong academic motivation, not as an expression of individual ambition but as a means of contributing to the well-being of their families. This suggests that SDT, while useful, must be reframed to account for the primacy of relational motivation in African contexts, where autonomy is often exercised within, rather than outside of, communal expectations.

At the same time, the concept of competence within SDT can be enriched by considering the diverse forms of knowledge transmitted within African families. Competence is not limited to academic achievement but encompasses practical, social, and cultural skills acquired through participation in family and community activities. In Nigerian apprenticeship systems, for instance, adolescents develop a sense of competence through mastery of vocational skills, problem-solving in real-life contexts, and engagement in economically productive activities (Okeke, 2016). These experiences can enhance self-efficacy and resilience, which in turn influence academic motivation. However, tensions may arise when the competencies valued within the family are not recognised within formal schooling, leading to a potential misalignment between adolescents' sense of capability and their academic performance.

Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development provides a complementary lens for understanding identity formation during adolescence, particularly through the stage of identity versus role confusion. According to Erikson, adolescents engage in a process of exploring and integrating various roles, beliefs, and values to form a coherent sense of self. In African contexts, this process is deeply influenced by family-based knowledge transmission, which provides adolescents with narratives, symbols, and practices that shape their identities. For example, in many Ghanaian communities, initiation rites and communal ceremonies serve as important sites of identity construction, where adolescents are introduced to their roles within society and internalise cultural values (Nsamenang, 2002). These practices contribute to the development of a stable and culturally grounded identity, which can positively influence academic motivation by providing a sense of purpose and direction.

However, Eriksonian theory, like SDT, has been critiqued for its implicit individualism and limited engagement with non-Western contexts. In African societies, identity is not solely an achievement but a collective process that involves negotiation between personal aspirations and communal expectations. Adolescents are often required to balance multiple identities, including those shaped by family traditions, formal education, and global cultural influences. In urban centres such as Nairobi, Lagos, and Douala, this negotiation becomes particularly complex, as adolescents navigate hybrid identities that reflect both local and global orientations. Family-based knowledge plays a crucial role in anchoring adolescents within their cultural heritage, yet it may also come into tension with the values promoted by formal schooling and global media. This can lead to identity fragmentation or what may be described as "bicultural tension," where adolescents struggle to reconcile competing frameworks of meaning.

Sociocultural theory, particularly the work of Vygotsky (1978), offers a more context-sensitive framework for understanding these dynamics by emphasising the role of social interaction, cultural tools, and mediated learning in cognitive and identity development. Within this perspective, family-based knowledge transmission can be seen as a form of guided participation in culturally meaningful practices. Adolescents learn not only through direct instruction but through observation, imitation, and participation in family activities. In pastoralist communities in Kenya and Tanzania, for example, adolescents acquire knowledge of livestock management,

environmental navigation, and social responsibility through active involvement in herding activities. These experiences shape both their cognitive development and their sense of identity as members of a particular community. Importantly, sociocultural theory highlights that learning and identity formation are inseparable processes, as individuals internalise the values and meanings embedded in their social interactions.

Nevertheless, even sociocultural theory requires critical expansion to fully capture the complexities of African contexts. While it acknowledges the importance of culture and social interaction, it does not sufficiently address the power dynamics and epistemological hierarchies that influence which forms of knowledge are valued. In many African education systems, family-based knowledge is often subordinated to formal, Western-derived curricula, creating a disconnect between adolescents' home and school experiences. This marginalisation can undermine both motivation and identity, as adolescents may feel that their cultural backgrounds are devalued or irrelevant to academic success (Dei, 2014). Consequently, there is a need for a decolonial theoretical approach that not only incorporates sociocultural insights but also challenges the structural inequalities embedded within educational systems.

An emerging perspective that complements these theories is the concept of identity as narrative and relational, which emphasises the role of storytelling and cultural narratives in shaping adolescents' self-concepts. In many African families, storytelling serves as a key mechanism for transmitting values, histories, and identities. Through engagement with these narratives, adolescents construct a sense of self that is both historically grounded and socially situated. For instance, in Cameroonian communities, folktales that highlight themes of resilience, wisdom, and communal responsibility provide adolescents with moral frameworks that influence their behaviour and aspirations. These narrative processes are not merely symbolic; they have concrete implications for motivation, as they shape how adolescents interpret their experiences and envision their futures.

In synthesising these theoretical perspectives, it becomes evident that motivation and identity formation in African contexts are deeply intertwined processes shaped by family-based knowledge transmission. Rather than viewing motivation as an individual psychological state and identity as a personal achievement, a more contextually appropriate framework recognises both as socially embedded and culturally mediated. This integrative approach highlights the need to move beyond the limitations of existing theories and develop models that reflect the realities of African adolescents, whose lives are shaped by complex interactions between family, school, and broader socio-cultural forces. A critical engagement with these theoretical foundations reveals that family-based knowledge transmission is not merely a background influence but a central determinant of how adolescents develop motivation and construct their identities. Grounding theoretical analysis in African contexts, this discussion contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of adolescent development one that recognises the importance of culture, community, and relationality in shaping educational outcomes.

Family-based Knowledge and Academic Motivation: Empirical Insights From Africa

Empirical evidence from across African contexts increasingly affirms that family-based knowledge transmission plays a decisive role in shaping adolescents' academic motivation, albeit in ways that are complex, context-dependent, and often insufficiently recognised within formal education systems. Contrary to deficit-oriented assumptions that portray African families—particularly those in low-income or rural settings—as lacking the resources to support academic achievement, research demonstrates that families actively cultivate motivational dispositions through culturally embedded practices such as storytelling, apprenticeship, moral instruction, and participation in household economies. These practices foster persistence, goal orientation, and a

sense of responsibility, which are critical components of academic motivation. However, the translation of these dispositions into school-based success is mediated by structural inequalities and epistemological misalignments between home and school (Serpell & Marfo, 2014).

In East Africa, studies conducted in Kenya provide compelling evidence of the positive relationship between family engagement and adolescents' motivation to learn. Research by Wadende et al. (2016) shows that indigenous caregiving practices—including guidance, encouragement, and the use of culturally grounded narratives—significantly enhance children's readiness for schooling and their sustained interest in academic tasks. Adolescents raised in such environments tend to develop what may be described as relational motivation, where their commitment to education is tied not only to personal aspirations but also to familial expectations and communal well-being. This form of motivation contrasts with the individualistic orientation often assumed in Western motivational theories and highlights the importance of understanding academic engagement within a broader socio-cultural framework.

Similarly, in West African contexts such as Nigeria and Ghana, apprenticeship systems embedded within family structures have been shown to cultivate motivational attributes that are transferable to academic settings. Okeke (2016) observes that adolescents involved in family-based vocational training develop high levels of discipline, perseverance, and task commitment. These qualities, often reinforced through daily practice and mentorship, contribute to a strong work ethic that can enhance academic engagement when appropriately channelled. In Ghana, studies on family influence further indicate that parental expectations and the modelling of industrious behaviour play a significant role in shaping adolescents' attitudes towards education. However, these findings also reveal a critical tension: while apprenticeship fosters competence and motivation, it may sometimes compete with formal schooling, particularly when economic pressures necessitate adolescents' active participation in family enterprises.

Evidence from Central Africa, particularly Cameroon, underscores the nuanced interplay between family-based knowledge and academic motivation. In many Cameroonian households, education is framed as a pathway to social mobility and collective advancement, and this narrative is often reinforced through family discourse and expectations. Adolescents are encouraged to view academic success not merely as a personal achievement but as a contribution to the family's socio-economic upliftment. This collective orientation can generate strong motivational drives, particularly in contexts where educational attainment is associated with improved life chances. However, socio-economic constraints frequently complicate this dynamic. In rural and peri-urban areas, adolescents may be required to balance schooling with household responsibilities such as farming, trading, or caregiving. While these responsibilities can instil resilience and time-management skills, they may also limit the time and energy available for academic pursuits, thereby creating ambivalent motivational outcomes.

In Southern Africa, research in South Africa highlights the role of family support in sustaining academic motivation, particularly among adolescents facing socio-economic adversity. Studies indicate that emotional support, parental involvement in school activities, and the reinforcement of educational aspirations contribute positively to learners' motivation and achievement (Hadebe-Ndlovu & Khalane, 2022). Importantly, these forms of support are often mediated through culturally specific practices, such as communal encouragement and the use of proverbs or narratives that emphasise perseverance and responsibility. Yet, the South African context also reveals significant disparities, as families in marginalised communities may struggle to provide consistent support due to economic hardship, limited educational background, or systemic inequalities. This suggests that while

family-based knowledge can enhance motivation, its impact is contingent upon broader socio-economic and institutional conditions.

A critical insight emerging from the empirical literature is that family-based knowledge transmission often fosters forms of motivation that are not fully captured by conventional academic metrics. For example, adolescents who demonstrate strong commitment, resilience, and responsibility in family contexts may not necessarily exhibit equivalent performance in formal schooling environments. This discrepancy can be attributed to the misalignment between the competencies valued within families and those assessed in schools. In many African education systems, academic success is measured primarily through standardised testing and individual performance, which may overlook the collaborative, practical, and context-specific skills developed through family-based learning. Consequently, adolescents may experience a form of motivational dissonance, where their sense of competence in family contexts does not translate into recognition within the school system (Dei, 2014).

Moreover, the influence of family-based knowledge on academic motivation is increasingly shaped by the forces of urbanisation and globalisation. In urban centres such as Nairobi, Lagos, and Douala, changing family structures and increased exposure to digital media have transformed traditional modes of knowledge transmission. While some families continue to emphasise educational achievement, others may adopt more individualised or market-oriented approaches to motivation, reflecting broader socio-economic shifts. At the same time, the erosion of extended family networks can reduce opportunities for intergenerational learning and support, potentially weakening the motivational frameworks that have historically sustained academic engagement. These transformations highlight the need for a dynamic understanding of family-based knowledge that accounts for both continuity and change in African societies.

Importantly, the empirical evidence also points to the need for a more integrative approach to understanding academic motivation in African contexts. Rather than viewing family-based knowledge and formal education as separate or competing domains, there is a need to conceptualise them as complementary systems that can mutually reinforce each other. In Kenya, for instance, educational initiatives that incorporate community storytelling and parental involvement into classroom practice have shown promising results in enhancing students' motivation and engagement (Wadende et al., 2016). Such approaches demonstrate that when schools recognise and build upon the motivational resources embedded within families, they can create more meaningful and effective learning experiences.

Nevertheless, the existing body of research remains limited in several respects. Much of the empirical evidence is context-specific and based on small-scale studies, making it difficult to generalise findings across diverse African settings. There is also a need for more longitudinal research that examines how family-based knowledge influences motivation over time and across different stages of adolescence. Furthermore, the literature often focuses on positive outcomes, with less attention given to the potential constraints and contradictions inherent in family-based knowledge systems. A more critical and nuanced research agenda is therefore required to fully understand the complexities of this relationship.

Empirical insights from Africa reveal that family-based knowledge transmission is a powerful yet underutilised determinant of adolescents' academic motivation. It fosters relational forms of motivation grounded in cultural values, communal responsibility, and lived experience. However, its impact is mediated by structural inequalities, epistemological misalignments, and socio-cultural transformations. Recognising and integrating

these insights into educational policy and practice is essential for developing more contextually relevant and motivationally effective education systems across the continent.

Family-based Knowledge and Identity Formation

Family-based knowledge transmission occupies a central position in the formation of adolescent identity across African societies, where the self is not conceived as an isolated, autonomous entity but as fundamentally relational and socially embedded. Within African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), identity is constructed through continuous participation in family and community life, mediated by cultural practices, moral instruction, and intergenerational dialogue (Dei, 2014). Adolescents come to understand who they are through what they are taught, what they observe, and how they are positioned within familial structures. In this sense, family-based knowledge does not merely inform identity; it constitutes the very framework through which identity is imagined, negotiated, and enacted.

One of the most significant mechanisms through which families shape identity is storytelling. Across many African contexts, storytelling functions as a pedagogical and epistemic practice that encodes cultural values, social expectations, and historical consciousness. In Cameroon, for instance, folktales narrated by elders often convey lessons about resilience, communal responsibility, and moral integrity. Through repeated engagement with such narratives, adolescents internalise not only ethical principles but also culturally specific models of personhood. These narratives provide what may be described as "identity scripts", guiding adolescents in interpreting their experiences and situating themselves within a broader cultural continuum. Similarly, in Ghana and Nigeria, proverbs serve as condensed forms of wisdom that stimulate critical reflection and moral reasoning, enabling adolescents to engage in abstract thinking while grounding their identities in shared cultural meanings (Nsamenang, 2002).

Family-based knowledge also shapes identity through participation in culturally significant practices and roles. In many African societies, adolescents are gradually introduced to responsibilities that reflect their emerging status within the community. These may include involvement in family enterprises, participation in communal labour, or engagement in initiation rites. In pastoralist communities in Kenya and Tanzania, for example, adolescents develop a sense of identity through their roles in herding and environmental stewardship, acquiring not only practical skills but also a deep sense of belonging and purpose. Such experiences reinforce what may be termed relational identity, where the self is defined in relation to others and to the community as a whole. This contrasts with Western models of identity formation that emphasise individual autonomy and self-expression, highlighting the need for culturally situated theoretical frameworks.

Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation, particularly the stage of identity versus role confusion, provides a useful starting point for understanding these processes. However, its emphasis on individual exploration and personal choice requires critical adaptation in African contexts. In many African families, identity formation is less about individual experimentation and more about guided participation within established cultural frameworks. Adolescents are not left to construct their identities in isolation; rather, they are supported—and sometimes constrained—by familial expectations and communal norms. This guided process can foster a strong sense of identity coherence, as adolescents are provided with clear reference points for understanding their roles and responsibilities. At the same time, it may limit opportunities for alternative identity exploration, particularly in contexts where conformity to traditional roles is strongly enforced.

A critical dimension of identity formation in African contexts is the role of language as a carrier of cultural meaning. Family-based knowledge is often transmitted in indigenous languages, which encapsulate the conceptual categories, metaphors, and values of a given culture. Through language, adolescents acquire not only communication skills but also culturally specific ways of thinking and interpreting the world. For example, in many Cameroonian communities, the use of proverbs and idiomatic expressions in local languages enables adolescents to engage in nuanced reasoning and moral deliberation. However, the dominance of colonial languages such as English and French in formal education systems can disrupt this process, creating a linguistic and cultural disjuncture that affects identity formation. Adolescents may find themselves navigating multiple linguistic worlds, each associated with different values and expectations, leading to hybrid or fragmented identities (Brock-Utne, 2017).

The influence of family-based knowledge on identity formation is further complicated by the forces of globalisation and urbanisation. In rapidly urbanising African cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, and Douala, traditional modes of knowledge transmission are increasingly intersecting with global cultural influences mediated through digital technologies and mass media. Adolescents in these contexts are exposed to diverse and sometimes conflicting identity models, ranging from local cultural norms to globalised ideals of modernity and success. Family-based knowledge can serve as an anchor in this fluid environment, providing adolescents with a sense of continuity and cultural grounding. However, it can also become a site of tension when traditional values conflict with contemporary aspirations. For instance, expectations related to gender roles or career paths may clash with adolescents' exposure to alternative possibilities, leading to processes of negotiation, resistance, or reconfiguration of identity.

Empirical evidence from across Africa underscores the importance of family influence in shaping adolescent identity. In Ghana, initiation rites and communal ceremonies have been shown to play a significant role in reinforcing cultural identity and social belonging (Nsamenang, 2002). In South Africa, studies indicate that family narratives and cultural practices contribute to the development of resilience and self-esteem among adolescents, particularly in contexts of socio-economic adversity (Serpell & Marfo, 2014). In Nigeria, apprenticeship systems not only transmit vocational skills but also instil a sense of identity linked to work, responsibility, and community contribution (Okeke, 2016). These examples highlight the multifaceted nature of identity formation, where cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions are deeply intertwined.

Nevertheless, it is important to critically interrogate the limitations and contradictions inherent in family-based knowledge systems. While they can provide stability and coherence, they may also reproduce social inequalities and restrict individual agency. Gendered forms of knowledge transmission, for example, may reinforce traditional roles that limit opportunities for girls in education and professional life. Similarly, rigid adherence to cultural norms may inhibit adolescents' ability to explore alternative identities or adapt to changing social conditions. These tensions underscore the need for a balanced approach that recognises the value of family-based knowledge while also promoting critical reflection and inclusivity.

Moreover, the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge within formal education systems continues to undermine the potential of family-based knowledge to support identity formation. When schools fail to recognise or integrate the cultural knowledge that adolescents bring from their families, they risk creating a sense of dislocation and alienation. Adolescents may perceive a disconnect between their home identities and their school identities, leading to what can be described as identity fragmentation. Addressing this challenge requires educational approaches that validate and incorporate family-based knowledge, thereby fostering a more coherent and integrated sense of self.

In conclusion, family-based knowledge transmission is a powerful and complex determinant of adolescent identity formation in African societies. It provides the cultural scripts, social frameworks, and experiential contexts through which adolescents come to understand themselves and their place in the world. However, its influence is mediated by broader socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural dynamics that both enable and constrain identity development. A critical engagement with these processes is essential for developing educational systems that support not only academic achievement but also the formation of coherent, resilient, and culturally grounded identities.

Critical Issues and Tensions

The relationship between family-based knowledge transmission, adolescents' academic motivation, and identity formation in African societies is characterised by profound tensions that are epistemological, socio-economic, cultural, and institutional in nature. While family systems remain powerful sites of learning and identity construction, their interaction with formal education is often fraught with contradictions rooted in colonial legacies and contemporary transformations. At the heart of these tensions lies a persistent hierarchy of knowledge in which indigenous, family-based ways of knowing are subordinated to Western-derived curricula and assessment regimes. This epistemic imbalance not only marginalises the knowledge adolescents acquire within their families but also creates a disjuncture between their lived experiences and the expectations of formal schooling (Dei, 2014; Serpell & Marfo, 2014). Consequently, adolescents may experience diminished academic motivation when the knowledge that shapes their identities is rendered invisible or irrelevant in educational spaces.

One of the most significant tensions arises from the misalignment between the values and competencies cultivated within families and those rewarded within formal education systems. Family-based knowledge transmission often emphasises communal responsibility, practical skills, moral discipline, and relational identity, whereas schooling tends to prioritise individual achievement, abstract reasoning, and standardised performance. In many Cameroonian and Nigerian contexts, for instance, adolescents are socialised into roles that require active participation in household economies—such as farming, trading, or caregiving—which foster resilience, problem-solving, and a strong work ethic. However, these competencies are rarely recognised within formal schooling, where success is measured primarily through examinations. This misalignment can lead to what may be described as motivational dissonance, where adolescents who demonstrate competence and responsibility in family contexts may feel disengaged or undervalued in academic settings.

Socio-economic inequalities further complicate the relationship between family-based knowledge and educational outcomes. In many African societies, families operate within conditions of economic precarity that shape the priorities and possibilities of knowledge transmission. While families may value education as a pathway to social mobility, immediate survival needs often necessitate adolescents' involvement in income-generating activities. In rural areas of countries such as Ghana, Tanzania, and Cameroon, adolescents may be required to balance schooling with agricultural labour or family businesses, which can limit their time and energy for academic engagement. At the same time, these responsibilities can enhance practical intelligence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. This duality highlights a critical tension: family-based knowledge can both support and constrain academic motivation, depending on the socio-economic context in which it is embedded.

Gender dynamics constitute another important site of tension within family-based knowledge systems. In many African contexts, knowledge transmission is shaped by culturally defined gender roles, which influence

the types of skills, responsibilities, and expectations assigned to boys and girls. For example, girls may be socialised into domestic roles that prioritise caregiving and household management, while boys may be encouraged to pursue economic or leadership roles. While these practices can provide adolescents with a clear sense of identity and social function, they may also reproduce inequalities and limit access to educational opportunities, particularly for girls. Empirical studies from Nigeria and Ethiopia indicate that gendered expectations within families can negatively affect girls' academic motivation and persistence, especially when educational aspirations conflict with cultural norms (Okeke, 2016). Addressing this tension requires a critical engagement with cultural practices that balances respect for tradition with a commitment to equity and inclusion.

Urbanisation and globalisation introduce additional layers of complexity by transforming family structures and modes of knowledge transmission. In rapidly urbanising cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, and Douala, the shift from extended to nuclear family systems has reduced opportunities for intergenerational learning and communal socialisation. At the same time, adolescents are increasingly exposed to global cultural influences through digital media, which often promote individualistic values and alternative identity models. This exposure can create tension between the values transmitted within families and those encountered in broader societal contexts. Adolescents may find themselves negotiating multiple and sometimes conflicting identities, leading to hybrid or fragmented self-concepts. While such hybridity can be a source of creativity and adaptability, it may also generate uncertainty and weaken the coherence of identity formation (Serpell & Marfo, 2014).

Language represents another critical dimension of tension, particularly in relation to the transmission of knowledge and the construction of identity. Family-based knowledge is typically conveyed in indigenous languages, which carry cultural meanings, metaphors, and cognitive frameworks that are integral to identity formation. However, formal education systems in many African countries prioritise colonial languages such as English and French as the primary mediums of instruction. This linguistic divide can create barriers to learning and diminish the value of family-based knowledge, as adolescents may struggle to reconcile the linguistic and cultural codes of home and school. Research has shown that learning in a familiar language enhances comprehension, participation, and cognitive development, suggesting that the marginalisation of indigenous languages may have adverse effects on both motivation and identity (Brock-Utne, 2017). The tension between linguistic accessibility and educational policy thus remains a critical challenge.

Another significant issue is the risk of romanticising family-based knowledge transmission without adequately addressing its internal contradictions. While such knowledge systems are often celebrated for their cultural richness and relevance, they are not inherently egalitarian or progressive. Certain practices may reinforce hierarchical power relations, limit individual agency, or resist necessary social change. For instance, rigid adherence to traditional authority structures may discourage critical thinking or constrain adolescents' ability to question established norms. Similarly, the emphasis on communal conformity may conflict with the need for individual self-expression and innovation in contemporary societies. A critical approach to family-based knowledge must therefore recognise both its strengths and its limitations, avoiding uncritical idealisation while engaging constructively with its transformative potential.

Institutional barriers within education systems further exacerbate these tensions. Teachers are often trained within pedagogical frameworks that do not adequately prepare them to recognise or integrate family-based knowledge into classroom practice. As a result, they may inadvertently reproduce the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, reinforcing the divide between home and school. In South Africa, for example, studies have shown that teachers acknowledge the value of indigenous knowledge but lack the pedagogical tools and

institutional support to incorporate it effectively into teaching (Hadebe-Ndlovu & Khalane, 2022). This highlights the need for systemic reform in teacher education and curriculum design to bridge the gap between family-based and formal knowledge systems.

These tensions are embedded within broader processes of decolonisation and knowledge transformation in African education. The marginalisation of family-based knowledge is not merely a pedagogical issue but a reflection of historical power dynamics that continue to shape educational systems. Reclaiming the value of indigenous knowledge requires a deliberate effort to challenge these hierarchies and to create educational frameworks that are inclusive, contextually relevant, and socially just. This involves not only integrating family-based knowledge into curricula but also rethinking the fundamental purposes and structures of education. The critical issues and tensions surrounding family-based knowledge transmission in African societies are multifaceted and deeply rooted in historical, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics. While family systems offer rich resources for fostering academic motivation and identity formation, their potential is often constrained by structural inequalities, epistemological hierarchies, and societal transformations. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced and context-sensitive approach that recognises the complexity of African realities while striving for educational practices that are both culturally grounded and forward-looking.

Toward a Contextually Responsive Framework

Moving towards a contextually responsive framework for understanding and leveraging family-based knowledge transmission in African societies requires a fundamental reorientation of educational thought and practice. Such a framework must depart from assimilationist models that position schooling as the primary and superior site of knowledge, and instead recognise families as legitimate, dynamic, and epistemically rich spaces of learning. At its core, this approach calls for a decolonial reconstruction of education in which African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) are not merely appended to existing curricula but are treated as foundational to how adolescents develop motivation and identity (Dei, 2014). This implies a shift from viewing family-based knowledge as informal or supplementary to recognising it as central to the cognitive, moral, and socio-cultural development of learners.

A contextually responsive framework must first be grounded in the principle of epistemic integration. This involves creating meaningful connections between the knowledge adolescents acquire within their families and the content and practices of formal education. Rather than maintaining a rigid separation between home and school, educators should seek to build pedagogical bridges that allow these knowledge systems to interact productively. For example, in Cameroon, storytelling traditions that convey historical memory, ethical reasoning, and communal values can be integrated into language and social studies curricula, thereby enhancing both cognitive engagement and cultural relevance. Similarly, in Ghana and Nigeria, apprenticeship-based knowledge related to trade, craftsmanship, and entrepreneurship can be incorporated into vocational and life-skills education, enabling adolescents to see continuity between their lived experiences and academic learning. Such integration not only strengthens motivation but also affirms the legitimacy of learners' cultural identities.

Central to this framework is the reconceptualisation of the role of teachers. Teachers must move beyond their traditional role as transmitters of prescribed knowledge and become cultural mediators who can recognise, validate, and incorporate family-based knowledge into their pedagogical practices. This requires a transformation in teacher education, where training programmes emphasise cultural competence, reflexivity, and the ability to design context-sensitive learning experiences. In South Africa, studies have shown that while teachers often

acknowledge the value of indigenous knowledge, they lack the pedagogical tools to integrate it effectively into classroom practice (Hadebe-Ndlovu & Khalane, 2022). A contextually responsive framework addresses this gap by equipping teachers with strategies for engaging families, incorporating local knowledge into lesson planning, and facilitating dialogic learning environments where multiple forms of knowledge are valued.

Another critical dimension of this framework is the active involvement of families and communities in the educational process. Given that knowledge transmission in African contexts is inherently communal, schools must create institutional spaces for collaboration with parents, elders, and other community members. This could take the form of community-based learning projects, intergenerational storytelling sessions, or the inclusion of local experts in classroom activities. In Kenya, for instance, initiatives that integrate community storytelling and parental engagement into early education have demonstrated positive outcomes in both academic motivation and identity development (Wadende et al., 2016). Such practices not only enrich the learning experience but also strengthen the relationship between schools and communities, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for adolescent development.

Language policy is another crucial element of a contextually responsive framework. Family-based knowledge is typically transmitted in indigenous languages, which carry the cultural meanings and cognitive structures that shape adolescents' understanding of the world. However, the dominance of colonial languages in African education systems often creates a disconnect between the language of instruction and the language of lived experience. A responsive framework must therefore prioritise multilingual education, particularly in the early and middle stages of schooling, to ensure that learners can engage meaningfully with both family-based and formal knowledge. Research indicates that learning in one's mother tongue enhances comprehension, participation, and cognitive development, thereby supporting both motivation and identity formation (Brock-Utne, 2017). In practice, this would involve incorporating indigenous languages into classroom instruction, learning materials, and assessment practices.

Importantly, this framework must also embrace pedagogical innovation by adapting family-based knowledge to contemporary educational contexts. While it is essential to preserve the cultural integrity of indigenous practices, it is equally important to recognise that these practices are dynamic and can be reinterpreted in response to changing social conditions. In urban African settings, where traditional forms of knowledge transmission are increasingly intersecting with digital technologies, there is an opportunity to create hybrid learning environments that combine the strengths of both. For example, digital storytelling platforms can be used to document and share oral traditions, while online collaborative tools can facilitate intergenerational learning across geographical boundaries. Such innovations must, however, be guided by a critical awareness of the risks of cultural commodification and the need to maintain the authenticity of indigenous knowledge.

Assessment practices also require significant transformation within this framework. Conventional assessment systems, which prioritise standardised testing and individual performance, are often inadequate for capturing the multidimensional nature of learning that occurs through family-based knowledge transmission. A contextually responsive approach calls for alternative forms of assessment that recognise diverse expressions of competence, including practical skills, collaborative abilities, and cultural knowledge. For instance, adolescents' participation in family enterprises, their ability to apply moral reasoning in real-life situations, or their engagement in community activities could be considered valid indicators of learning. Such an approach aligns with broader efforts to redefine educational success in ways that are more inclusive and contextually relevant.

Furthermore, the framework must address issues of equity and inclusion by critically engaging with the internal dynamics of family-based knowledge systems. While these systems offer valuable resources for learning, they may also reproduce social inequalities, particularly along lines of gender, class, and geography. A contextually responsive approach must therefore seek to harness the strengths of family-based knowledge while challenging practices that limit opportunities or reinforce exclusion. For example, educational interventions in Ethiopia and Nigeria have shown that engaging families in discussions about gender roles and educational aspirations can lead to more equitable outcomes for girls. This highlights the importance of integrating critical reflection into the framework, ensuring that it is not only culturally responsive but also socially transformative.

The development of a contextually responsive framework must be supported by coherent policy and sustained research. Policymakers need to create enabling environments that support the integration of family-based knowledge into education through curriculum reform, teacher training, and resource allocation. At the same time, there is a need for rigorous, context-sensitive research that documents diverse practices of knowledge transmission across African societies and evaluates their impact on adolescents' motivation and identity. Such research should be participatory and collaborative, involving families and communities as active contributors to knowledge production. A contextually responsive framework for family-based knowledge transmission represents a critical step towards reimagining education in African societies. By integrating indigenous knowledge systems into formal education, reconfiguring the roles of teachers and communities, and embracing linguistic and pedagogical diversity, such a framework can enhance both academic motivation and identity formation among adolescents. More fundamentally, it offers a pathway towards decolonising education and creating learning environments that are not only effective but also meaningful, inclusive, and rooted in the lived realities of African learners.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The recognition of family-based knowledge transmission as a central determinant of adolescents' academic motivation and identity formation in African societies carries profound implications for both educational policy and pedagogical practice. At the policy level, there is an urgent need to move beyond assimilationist educational models that continue to privilege Eurocentric epistemologies and instead embrace frameworks that legitimise African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) as foundational to learning. Current curricula across many African countries remain largely disconnected from the socio-cultural realities of learners, thereby limiting their relevance and effectiveness (Dei, 2014; Serpell & Marfo, 2014). A critical policy response must therefore entail a deliberate restructuring of national education frameworks to incorporate family-based knowledge as an integral component of curriculum design, rather than treating it as peripheral or symbolic.

Such curricular reform requires a reconceptualisation of what constitutes valid knowledge within formal education systems. Policymakers must expand the epistemic boundaries of schooling to include the forms of knowledge transmitted within families, such as oral traditions, practical skills, moral reasoning, and communal values. In Cameroon, for instance, integrating storytelling, proverbs, and culturally grounded narratives into language and social studies curricula can enhance both cognitive engagement and identity formation. Similarly, in Ghana and Nigeria, apprenticeship-based learning can inform the development of vocational education programmes that align more closely with local economic realities and cultural practices. This approach not only strengthens academic motivation by making learning more relevant but also affirms the cultural identities of adolescents, thereby fostering a more inclusive and meaningful educational experience.

Teacher education and professional development represent another critical area for policy intervention. Teachers are key agents in mediating the relationship between family-based knowledge and formal schooling, yet many are inadequately prepared to recognise or integrate indigenous knowledge into their teaching. Training programmes must therefore be reoriented to include culturally responsive pedagogy, enabling teachers to draw on learners' familial and cultural backgrounds as resources for learning. In South Africa, research indicates that while teachers often acknowledge the value of indigenous knowledge, they lack the pedagogical strategies to incorporate it effectively into classroom practice (Hadebe-Ndlovu & Khalane, 2022). Addressing this gap requires not only technical training but also a transformation of teacher identity, where educators see themselves as cultural mediators capable of bridging the divide between home and school knowledge systems.

Language policy is equally central to the integration of family-based knowledge into education. The use of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction, particularly in the early stages of schooling, is essential for ensuring that learners can engage meaningfully with both family-based and formal knowledge. Research has consistently shown that mother-tongue education enhances comprehension, participation, and cognitive development, thereby supporting academic motivation (Brock-Utne, 2017). In multilingual contexts such as Cameroon, adopting flexible language policies that incorporate local languages alongside official languages can help to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between home and school. This not only facilitates learning but also reinforces adolescents' sense of identity and belonging.

Beyond formal schooling, there is a need for policies that actively promote family and community engagement in education. Given that knowledge transmission in African contexts is inherently communal, educational systems must create institutional mechanisms for collaboration between schools and families. This could include structured parental involvement programmes, community-based learning initiatives, and the inclusion of elders and local knowledge holders in educational activities. In Kenya, for example, initiatives that integrate community storytelling and parental participation into classroom practices have demonstrated positive outcomes in both academic motivation and identity development (Wadende et al., 2016). Such approaches highlight the importance of viewing education as a shared social enterprise rather than a solely institutional process.

From a practical perspective, educators must adopt pedagogical approaches that are flexible, inclusive, and contextually grounded. This involves designing learning environments that reflect the cultural and social realities of learners, as well as incorporating teaching strategies that build on family-based knowledge. For instance, classroom activities can be structured around real-life scenarios drawn from learners' home environments, such as market transactions, agricultural practices, or family narratives. These approaches not only make learning more engaging but also enable adolescents to see the relevance of their education to their everyday lives. In rural areas of Tanzania and Zambia, for example, integrating agricultural knowledge into science and mathematics instruction has been shown to enhance both understanding and motivation.

Assessment practices must also be re-evaluated to align with the principles of a contextually responsive education. Traditional assessment methods, which focus primarily on standardised testing and individual performance, often fail to capture the diverse forms of competence developed through family-based knowledge transmission. A more holistic approach to assessment is required, one that recognises practical skills, collaborative abilities, and cultural knowledge as valid indicators of learning. This could involve the use of portfolio assessments, project-based evaluations, and community-based performance tasks that reflect real-world applications of knowledge. Such approaches not only provide a more accurate measure of learning but also validate the competencies that adolescents develop within their families.

Importantly, policy and practice must also address issues of equity and inclusion. While family-based knowledge systems offer valuable resources for learning, they may also reproduce social inequalities, particularly along gender and socio-economic lines. For example, in some contexts, girls may be socialised into roles that limit their educational opportunities, while boys may be encouraged to prioritise economic activities over schooling. Educational policies must therefore incorporate strategies that promote gender equity and support marginalised groups, ensuring that all adolescents can benefit from both family-based and formal learning opportunities. This requires a critical engagement with cultural practices, recognising their value while also challenging aspects that may hinder educational access and achievement.

Furthermore, the integration of family-based knowledge into education must be supported by sustained research and documentation. There is a need for comprehensive studies that explore the diverse forms of knowledge transmission across African societies and their impact on adolescents' motivation and identity. Such research should be participatory, involving families and communities as active contributors to knowledge production. In Cameroon, for instance, documenting local storytelling traditions, apprenticeship practices, and family-based learning strategies can provide valuable insights for curriculum development and policy formulation. This knowledge base is essential for informing evidence-based interventions that are both culturally relevant and pedagogically effective.

The broader implication of integrating family-based knowledge into education lies in its potential to contribute to the decolonisation of African education systems. By recognising and valuing indigenous knowledge, policymakers and practitioners can challenge the historical marginalisation of African epistemologies and create more inclusive and contextually grounded educational frameworks. This is not merely a pedagogical adjustment but a transformative process that redefines the purpose and nature of education in African societies. The implications for policy and practice are far-reaching and demand a comprehensive and coordinated response. Integrating family-based knowledge into education requires curricular reform, teacher training, language policy adjustments, community engagement, and innovative assessment practices. It also necessitates a critical and reflective approach that balances respect for cultural traditions with a commitment to equity and inclusion. By embracing these changes, African education systems can better support adolescents' academic motivation and identity formation, ultimately fostering learners who are both intellectually and culturally grounded.

Conclusion

This article has argued that family-based knowledge transmission remains a foundational yet systematically under-recognised determinant of adolescents' academic motivation and identity formation in African societies. Across diverse contexts—from storytelling traditions in Cameroon to apprenticeship systems in Nigeria and community-based learning practices in Kenya—families continue to function as primary epistemic spaces where values, competencies, and identities are cultivated. These processes are not incidental to education; they constitute the very conditions under which adolescents develop dispositions towards learning, aspirations for the future, and a sense of who they are. However, the persistent marginalisation of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) within formal schooling has created a disjuncture between home-based and school-based knowledge, thereby weakening the potential of education to be both meaningful and transformative (Dei, 2014; Serpell & Marfo, 2014).

Critically, the analysis reveals that academic motivation in African contexts cannot be adequately understood through individualistic frameworks alone. Rather, it is deeply relational, shaped by family

expectations, communal responsibilities, and culturally embedded notions of success. In many African households, adolescents are motivated not merely by personal achievement but by the desire to contribute to family welfare and social advancement. This relational orientation offers a powerful motivational resource, yet it is often overlooked in educational theories and practices that prioritise individual competition and standardised performance. Similarly, identity formation among African adolescents is not a solitary process of self-discovery but a socially negotiated experience mediated by family narratives, cultural practices, and intergenerational relationships. These findings challenge dominant theoretical assumptions and call for more context-sensitive models that reflect the realities of African societies.

At the same time, the article has highlighted the complex tensions that shape the interaction between family-based knowledge and formal education. Socio-economic inequalities, gender dynamics, linguistic divides, and the forces of urbanisation and globalisation all influence how knowledge is transmitted and how adolescents engage with schooling. In cities such as Douala, Lagos, and Nairobi, adolescents increasingly navigate hybrid identities shaped by both local traditions and global influences, often resulting in fragmented or contested self-concepts. While family-based knowledge can provide a sense of continuity and grounding, it may also come into tension with the demands and values of formal education. These contradictions underscore the need for a nuanced and critical approach that recognises both the strengths and limitations of family-based knowledge systems.

Importantly, the article has argued that addressing these tensions requires a transformative rethinking of education in African contexts. Integrating family-based knowledge into formal schooling is not simply a matter of inclusion but a process of epistemic reconfiguration that challenges the hierarchical privileging of Western knowledge systems. This involves recognising indigenous knowledge as intellectually valid, reconfiguring teacher roles as cultural mediators, promoting the use of local languages in instruction, and developing assessment frameworks that capture diverse forms of learning. Such changes are essential for creating educational environments that are responsive to the lived experiences of adolescents and capable of fostering both academic motivation and coherent identity formation.

Furthermore, the future of education in Africa depends on the ability to harmonise continuity and change. While it is crucial to preserve the cultural integrity of family-based knowledge, it is equally important to adapt these practices to contemporary realities shaped by technological advancement and socio-economic transformation. Innovative approaches that combine traditional knowledge with modern pedagogical tools—such as digital storytelling or community-based learning platforms—offer promising pathways for bridging the gap between past and present. However, such innovations must be guided by a critical awareness of the risks of cultural erosion and commodification, ensuring that indigenous knowledge remains a living and evolving resource rather than a static relic.

This article contends that family-based knowledge transmission is not a peripheral influence but a central pillar in shaping how African adolescents learn, aspire, and become. Its integration into educational policy and practice is therefore both a pedagogical necessity and a decolonial imperative. By re-centering the family as a site of knowledge and identity formation, African education systems can move towards more inclusive, contextually relevant, and intellectually empowering models of learning. In doing so, they will not only enhance academic outcomes but also nurture adolescents who are culturally grounded, socially responsible, and capable of navigating the complexities of contemporary African life.

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