

PERCEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY ADIRE PRODUCERS ON THE USE OF PRESTIGE FABRICS FOR PRODUCTION IN ITOKU, ABEOKUTA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The use of prestige fabrics in Adire (tie-dye) production represents a significant shift in a traditionally cotton-based craft. Yet, the perception and adoption of this trend among producers remain underexplored. This study investigates the perception of contemporary Adire producers regarding the use of prestige fabrics in Itoku, Abeokuta, Nigeria, a key center for Adire production. The objectives were to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of producers, assess their knowledge of prestige fabrics, and identify the challenges they face in using these materials. A survey was conducted with 100 Adire producers in Itoku market using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used for data analysis. Results showed that the majority of respondents were married females aged 41–50 years, with 89% having formal education. While 92% agreed that prestige fabrics could be used for Adire, and 81% had used them, only 64% reported that these fabrics were commonly used. Key challenges identified included high cost (62% agreed), limited availability (only 26% agreed fabrics were easily accessible), and small-scale production quantities. The study concludes that although producers are aware of prestige fabrics, their adoption is constrained by economic factors, material availability, and a lack of specialized technical knowledge regarding dye-fabric compatibility. It is recommended that governmental and non-governmental organizations provide targeted training programs to enhance producers' skills in working with diverse fabric types and to improve access to these materials, thereby supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of handmade Adire.

Keywords: *Adire* production, perception, prestige fabric, specialized dye, *Adire* producers.

Introduction

Abeokuta is reputed to be the capital of the *Adire* industry in Nigeria (Saheed, 2013). *Adire* are indigo-resist-dyed cotton cloths traditionally made by women across Yoruba land in South-Western Nigeria. The resist-dyeing technique involves creating patterns by using materials such as rope for tying, candle wax or cassava paste for marking, or stitching to prevent areas from

absorbing dye. *Adire*, both in its production and as a product, falls within the purview of traditional or indigenous knowledge and is deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of the Yoruba people (Areo&Areo, 2014).

With the growing availability of chemical dyes from Europe, a revolution in color and technique occurred. *Adire* patterns caught the attention of Nigerian fashion designers, who adapted them to create high-quality cloth using

imported colorfast dyes, moving beyond traditional indigo. This gave birth to contemporary *Adire*. Contemporary *Adire* can be defined as a simplified version of the more meticulous indigenous designs, characterized by the use of multiple colors. Its application expanded beyond clothing to items such as tablecloths, bedspreads, and draperies (Anidugbe, 2003).

In its indigenous form, *Adire* production began with handwoven fabric (Kijipa) made on vertical looms, with all materials sourced locally. In contemporary practice, the most commonly used fabrics are brocade, imported white shirting (100% cotton), industrial misprints, and *Ankara* (machine-printed fabric). More recently, *Adire* has entered an "exotic" phase, where it is produced using prestige fabrics (Braide&Agboola, 2014). Prestige fabrics are high-quality, trendy materials such as chiffon, georgette, satin, lace, linen, silk, and organza. However, these fabrics are often not cheap and can be difficult to source, with many available in the Nigerian market as factory seconds or samples. This scarcity may contribute to their limited use in contemporary *Adire* production.

A significant challenge facing the industry is the influx of imported, machine-printed *Adire* fabrics, which threatens the sustainability of the indigenous handmade craft (Areo&Areo, 2014). This competition, coupled with a decline in patronage due to foreign cultural influences (Adiji&Oladimeji, 2015) and a reduction in skill transfer (Ogunduyile, 2001), jeopardizes the

livelihoods of traditional producers. Furthermore, the use of synthetic dyes has led to a proliferation of colorful, mass-produced items, sometimes diluting the unique aesthetic and intricate designs that define high-quality handcrafted *Adire* (Gbadebo, 2008, personal interview). The distinction between handmade and machine-printed *Adire* is becoming increasingly difficult for consumers to discern, further impacting the market for authentic craft.

Despite these challenges, innovation persists. The entry of producers with tertiary education—which increased from 7.4% in 2012 (Braide, 2012) to 17% in 2019 (Kerewi, 2019)—has introduced new ideas and techniques. However, a significant portion (63%) of producers still rely on indigenous technology (Braide, 2012). This study recognizes the need to investigate the producers' awareness and perception of using prestige fabrics, as this represents a potential avenue for product differentiation and market repositioning. Understanding their knowledge, challenges, and acceptance of this new trend is critical for developing interventions that can support the craft's evolution and sustainability. Therefore, this study investigates the perceptions of contemporary *Adire* producers regarding the use of prestige fabrics in production in Itoku, Abeokuta. The specific objectives are to: (1) determine the socio-demographic characteristics of *Adire* producers in Itoku market; (2) investigate the producers' knowledge and perception of prestige fabrics; and (3) examine

the challenges faced by producers when using prestige fabrics for *Adire* production.

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Itoku market area of Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. Abeokuta, the state capital, was founded in 1830 and is known as a center for *Adire* production (Biobaku, 1991). Itoku market, in particular, is widely recognized as a hub for *Adire* producers and sellers.

Research Design

An investigative survey research design was employed for this study.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of registered *Adire* producers in Itoku market, estimated at 200 individuals. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 respondents for the study, targeting those actively involved in production.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered by trained

research assistants. For respondents with no formal education, an interview guide was used to elicit responses. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize the data.

Results and Discussion Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the *Adire* producers. The largest age group was 41–50 years (40%), indicating a mature workforce. The majority were married (66%). The gender distribution was nearly equal, with females comprising 51% and males 49%. This finding contradicts the historical perception of *Adire* production as a female-dominated occupation, suggesting a significant shift in gender participation, possibly driven by economic opportunities. Regarding education, 89% had some formal education, with the largest proportion having secondary education (57%). This relatively high level of literacy is a positive indicator for the potential adoption of new techniques and business practices.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (n=100)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	30 years and below	13	13
	31-40 years	26	26
	41-50 years	40	40
	51-60 years	15	15
	Above 60 years	6	6
Marital Status	Single	15	15
	Married	66	66
	Others	19	19
Sex	Male	49	49
	Female	51	51
Education	No Formal Education	11	11
	Primary	15	15
	Secondary	57	57
	Tertiary	17	17

Knowledge and Perception of Prestige Fabrics

The findings in Table 2 reveal a high level of awareness among producers. Most respondents (91%) were aware of prestige fabrics and knew they could be used for *Adire* (92%). Lace was universally recognized (100%) as the most common prestige fabric in the market, followed by linen (91%), satin (90%), and organza (89%). Furthermore, 81% of

respondents had used prestige fabrics in their production at some point. Despite this familiarity, only 64% agreed that prestige fabrics are *commonly* used in *Adire* production, and only 46% reported using them "sometimes."



Plate 1: These are samples of Adire made from prestige fabrics. The appearance in colour and limitations

Surface decoration and availability are two constraints identified by the local producers.



Plate2: These are second-generation shirting cotton imported from Manchester that were used to destroy local weaving industries

This indicates a gap between awareness and consistent practice. The most commonly used prestige fabric in production was lace (100%), while others, such as silk (10%) and organza (25%), were far less frequently used. This discrepancy may be due to factors such as cost, ease of handling, or customer demand.

Table 2. Perception of Prestige Fabrics by *Adire* Producers (n=100)

Variable	Response	Frequency (%)
Do you know prestige fabrics?	Yes	91
	No	9
What type of prestige fabrics are commonly available in the market?	Chiffon	60
	Linen	91
	Organza	89
	Lace	100
	Satin	90
	Silk	80
Can prestige fabric be used in <i>Adire</i> production?	Yes	92
	No	8
Have you used prestige fabric in <i>Adire</i> production?	Yes	81
	No	19
What types of prestige fabrics have you used in <i>Adire</i> production?	Chiffon	50
	Linen	60
	Organza	25
	Lace	100
	Satin	30
	Silk	10
Are prestige fabrics commonly used in <i>Adire</i> production?	Yes	64
	No	36
How often do you use prestige fabric for <i>Adire</i> production?	Always	23
	Sometimes	46
	Rarely	11
	Never	20

Challenges in Using Prestige Fabrics for *Adire* Production

Table 3 presents producers' perceptions of the challenges associated with using prestige fabrics. A significant majority (62%) agreed that making *Adire* with prestige fabrics is expensive. This aligns with the nature of prestige fabrics as high-quality, costly materials. Regarding availability, only 26% agreed that these fabrics are easily accessible, while 43% disagreed. This perception of limited availability and high cost likely contributes to their infrequent use.



Plate3: The contemporary adire made with cotton blend, a commonly used fabric in the marketplace

Interestingly, a majority (56%) disagreed that using prestige fabrics makes production easier. This suggests a potential technical barrier, as working with delicate fabrics like chiffon or silk requires different skills and dyes than traditional cotton. The lack of specialized knowledge about dye-fabric compatibility (e.g., using acid dyes on silk vs. reactive dyes on cotton) could be a significant obstacle. Producers also disagreed that *Adire* made from prestige fabrics does not last long (37% disagreed), indicating a belief in the quality of the final product. Overwhelmingly, 95% agreed that *Adire* made from prestige fabrics is more beautiful, highlighting the aesthetic potential and market appeal of this innovation.

Table 3. Perception of Challenges in the Use of Prestige Fabrics for *Adire* Production (n=100)

S/N	Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1	Prestige fabrics make <i>Adire</i> production easier.	17	4	79
2	The cost of making <i>Adire</i> with prestige fabric is high.	77	14	9
3	Prestige fabrics in <i>Adire</i> production are limited in colour.	23	11	66
4	<i>Adire</i> made with prestige fabric is not made in large quantities.	61	8	31
5	<i>Adire</i> made with prestige fabric does not last long.	22	12	66
6	<i>Adire</i> made with a prestigious fabric is more beautiful.	95	4	1
7	Dyes used for prestige fabric in <i>Adire</i> are common.	66	9	25
8	Prestige fabric <i>Adire</i> is suitable only for tie-and-dye.	37	14	49
9	Prestige fabrics are easily available.	44	19	37

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the perception of contemporary *Adire* producers in Itoku, Abeokuta, on the use of prestige fabrics. The findings reveal that while producers are aware of prestige fabrics and recognize their

aesthetic potential, their adoption is limited by significant challenges. Key barriers include the high cost of materials, perceived difficulty in handling, limited availability, and a likely lack of technical knowledge regarding appropriate dyes and techniques for different fabric types.

The producers are predominantly middle-aged and literate, with a nearly equal gender distribution, suggesting a capable workforce that could adapt to new methods with appropriate support.

The current infiltration of machine-printed *Adire* poses a serious threat to the handmade craft industry. Adopting prestige fabrics offers a strategic pathway for differentiation, allowing producers to target elite markets and justify higher prices. However, this transition requires more than just material availability; it demands targeted education and skill development.

Recommendations:

1. Technical Training: Industry stakeholders, including the National Institute for Cultural Orientation and textile NGOs, should organize workshops for *Adire* producers on dye selection and application techniques

for diverse prestige fabrics (e.g., acid dyes for silk, reactive dyes for cotton blends). This would address the knowledge gap revealed by producers' difficulty in handling these materials.

2. Resource

Access: The *Adire* producers' association in Itoku should explore cooperative purchasing arrangements to acquire prestige fabrics in bulk, reducing individual costs and improving consistent availability.

3. Market Development: Government agencies such as the National Council for Arts and Culture should support branding initiatives that distinguish handmade *Adire* on prestige fabrics from machine-printed alternatives, enabling producers to command premium prices that offset higher material costs.

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