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ORAL SOURCE AS A VITAL PEDAGOGICAL TOOL AMONGST YORUBA HISTORIANS

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ABSTRACT

Among Yoruba historians, oral sources are powerful and dynamic pedagogical tools, in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, history, and values through storytelling, oral traditions, eye witness account, poetry, and performances. Techniques such as *itan*(historical narratives), *owe* (proverbs), *orin* (songs), and *oriki* (praise songs). These sources serve not only as repositories of historical information but also as effective methods of teaching and learning. The study adopted historical methodology, relying on oral interviews, existing literatures, and comparative analysis to explore how oral traditions facilitate knowledge transmission, enhance cultural identity, and promote historical consciousness. It further evaluates the strengths and limitations of oral sources, including issues of subjectivity, memory distortion, and lack of precise chronology. The study argued that despite these challenges, oral tradition remains indispensable in Yoruba historiography and should be integrated into modern historical pedagogy. The paper find out that oral sources remain a vital pedagogical tool among Yoruba historians because they preserve indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and historical traditions that are often absent in written records through folks, praise poetry, myths, proverbs, and eyewitness accounts, It concludes that the preservation and documentation of oral sources are essential for sustaining indigenous knowledge system and enriching contemporary historical scholarship.

Keywords: Oral source, pedagogical tool, yoruba historiography, *Oriki,*talking drum

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Introduction

Oral source is the most important source of reconstructing the past, apart from the study of materials, remains left by man which is the focus of archaeology. The Nigeria societies, particularly the Yoruba's still had clear concepts of history as the past already lived and as the study of the past, their idea of the past is influenced greatly by their world view of philosophy of life (Abdullahi, 2020).

Oral source has been used by both amateur and professional historians in Nigeria particular amongst the Yoruba's as a pedagogy tool in reconstructing African history. For example, in Nigeria, we have the likes of Reverend Samuel Johnson, J.F Ade Ajayi, Saburi Biobaku, Toyin Falola, Jacob Olupona and more recently, Biodun Adediran, and many others Historians whoused oral source for the reconstruction of Africa history. These historians have played a significant role in shaping Nigeria's historical narrative and promoting the use of oral sources in historical research. (Olubomehin, 2021).

There are several ways of preserving the knowledge of the past, through historical songs and poems that relate to event such as deeds of rulers and wars that depict society and social value, genealogies and list of place names that facilitate the study of migrations, demography and political developments of the past societies. (Olubomehin, 2021).

Conceptual Clarification

Oral Source: Webster`s dictionary defines "Oral" as "spoken rather than written", and it defines the word "tradition" as, transmittal of elements of a culture from one generation to another, especially by oral communication (Merriam-Webster, 2026).

The phrase "Oral source" refers to folklore, legends, tales, taboos and stories through which knowledge of the past is preserved and transmitted from one generation to another (Olaogu, 2020). Vansina (1965), Oral source is a verbal message which is reported statements from present generation which specifies that the messages must be oral statement spoken, sung or

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called out on musical instruments only. There must be transmission by word of mouth over at least a generation. Ki-Zerbo (1969), defined Oral source as being a testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another. Its special characteristics are that it is verbal and the manner in which it is transmitted.

For the Nigerian historians, oral source is linked to their ways of life. Most Nigeria societies place great worth in oral source because it is a primary means of conveying culture and mode of transmitting feelings and attitude. For centuries, Nigeria people depended upon oral source to teach the listeners important traditional values and morals pertaining to how to live. Oral source delivers explanations to the mysteries of the universe and the meaning of life on earth. Oral source is non-written history, it is spoken word only (Osiyale, 2023).

Pedagogy: Pedagogy is the art, science, and method and techniques and approach use to facilitate knowledge. It refers to the principles strategies, and practices that teachers use to help students learn effectively (Olupona, 2008).

Pedagogy tool is any method, techniques, strategy, or resource used to facilitate teaching and learning, which help teachers to teach effectively and help leaners to understand better e.g oral source, text book, maps, field trip, group discussion etc.(Olupona, 2008). African scholars and writer, John Mbiti (1969) asserts:

> Most African people did not invent an alphabet for the art of reading and writing. Therefore, they could not keep written records of their history. Instead, they passed on information from one generation to another by words of "**mouth**" The human voice is the key element in oral source. Oral source relies on human voice to communicate varied messages.

Vincent Muli Wakitutu (1994) explains:

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> Voice was the vehicle in which knowledge was passed on from one generation to another. Voice unified a family, clan, or community, enforcement of customs depended on voice. When a person died, his or her voice was no longer to be heard, it was as if a whole library had been destroy (Wakitutu1997).

Another integral part of oral source is the integrating of **music**. Music plays an important role in African societies. According to Mbiti, "Africans are very fond of music. Therefore, music, dance and singing are found in every community in Africa". The most important musical instrument of Africa is **drum**. Drums accompany different forms of communication, including storytelling, singing and dancing. Drums are made in different sizes and shapes for different purposes. Mbiti explains:

> There are many types and shapes of musical instruments, the commonest being the drum. There are drums of many shapes, sizes, and purposes. Some drums are used only in connection with kings and chiefs, the royal drums are often considered sacred and may not be played commonly or by anybody. There are war drums, talking drums, ceremonial drums, and so on (Wakitutu,1997).

Although the drum is the primary musical instrument and it is used to send and receive messages. The drum is considered sacred. It is used to send and receive spiritual messages;the drummer must be skilled as an oral communicator, and skilled at the art of drumming. Jacob Olupona declares:

> Forthe African, the drum is sacred, created by god like humans, and the drummer is a speaker and communicator of the sacred , the drummer can be compared to a poet, just as the poet uses his voice to entertain people, so the drummer uses the drum to entertain. The drummer therefore must not be regarded as a technician alone; he is an artist in his own right. Even if the texts

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> are fixed and unchanging, he still has to learn the words and acquire the special art of drumming, if he is not a good artist, the message cannot be reproduced fully (Olupon, 2008).

Forms of Oral Source

Oral Source can be classified into myths, folktales, Legends, the literature of the cult of divination, praise name, proverbs, and songs etc. In an interview with Seyi *(Ayo nleifa)*, a traditional practitioner, **Myth** is one of the most reliable form of oral source, myths is time history. It deals with fundamental realities. It explain the origin of things, why things happen the way they do, and its sets down rule for human behavior. It is often regarded as having been bequeathed by the gods themselves, most whom lived earthly lives as culture founders and heroes during the times of the beginnings. Hence, myth is sacred truth and is ledged about with taboos against its improper use.

However, the form and content of myth are carefully preserved and the recitation of the sacred is carefully controlled in most instances the one who recites the myths is a priest or other privileged functionary to whom the sacred history has been entrusted (Seyi, 2025). In a separate interview with Ogunrinade (*BabaAgba*);

> **Folktale** is another form of oral source, often confused with myth. It contains many of the elements as doe's myth: it may be set in the same times of the beginning, the same gods and heroes may appear, folktales often offers explanation of peculiarities in animal and human behavior and experience. Its recitation may also appear to be controlled. The principal purpose is for entertainment. Myth is privileged information, folktales are public properties. It is the moral lesson that folktale teach that are important and not the historical veracity of the details (Ogunrinade, 2025).

In an interview with Ifadare an Ifa Priest;

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> Oral literatures that contain material of historical values are the literature of the cult, for example *ifa***cult,** Yoruba god of divination, praise name, poems, proverbs, and songs. Some of these forms of oral literature are "sources to narrative histories", they are probably transmitted with less alteration from generation to generation and with the utmost care of oral literature concerning their utilization for historical purposes. *Ifa* poems are handed down from one generation to another generation with utmost care. The rigorous training of **ifa** priest makes the transmission of *Ese Ifa* almost completely free from the type of adulteration that will disrupt the system and make the whole corpus unreliable (Ifadare, 2023).**Songs,** this category includes: poetry, epic, chants and other verse forms. Songs are record of the times.
>
> Songs provide historian with the opportunity to bring to historical writing a vitality, an aliveness that is often used as vehicle for recording certain special events, such as memorable battles, successfully hunts and the accomplishment of important individuals; some song are old especially those of warrior-heroes, royal personages. But more often they are useful as records of relatively recent events. Whether old or recent, songs can be reliable sources of data. Because of their wide exposure and also because of the strictures, impose by their rhythm; song are not generally amendable to alteration. Song could be embellished in fresh details from time to time as it is transmitted from one generation to another. One must watch for exaggerations, distortions and shameless untruths (Ifadare, 2023).

In an interview with Ayandele, a professional drummer;

> Oriki, praise name, cognomen or nickname could be in honor of individual's families and communities. It describes the child's character, circumstances of its birth or what he or she is hoped to become. Oriki describe the character and achievement of personalities, records the exploits of prominent individuals that are of most value to historical towns. Oriki must be used with caution since they tend to present their personalities in most favourable and glorious light (Ayandele, 2024).

In a separate interview with Olowokere, a palace guard;

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Proverbs are self-evident truth, which give the gist of what one wants to say in a brief and unmistakable form. They present ideas or describe situations and recall particular events in the life of the community which created them and in which they are used, such events are war, battle, farming and particular social experiences. Since proverbs are handed from one generation to generation as truthful sayings, tested by usage, information obtained from them are reliable than that which may be gathered from songs and poems. One weakness of proverbs as a source of history is that occasionally they may be overtaken by events (Olowokere, 2025).

MERITS OF ORAL SOURCE

Oral source is a source material for the reconstruction and transmission of Africa history has helped immensely to correct the prejudiced ideas and the wrong impressions created by the distorted images of Africa, especially Negro Africa and her peoples, by the Arab and European writers (Olupona, 2008).

Oral source may be used to correct or supplement written records. For example, it is noteworthy to draw attention to the fact that Arab Muslim writers accredited most of the achievements of Mali Empire to Mansa Musa, the ostentations Muslim ruler of that empire and neglected the achievements of Sundiata, the pagan founder of the empire. Through oral source, the exploits of Sundiata were highlighted (Ogundipe, 2023).

It also enabled the African to puncture and refute the falsehood inherent in the Hamitic hypothesis which presents the Negro African as having no culture or tradition of his own and credited all noble achievements in Negro Africa to sources outside Africa.

Finally, oral source assists other disciplines in their reconstruction and presentation of African history (Ogundipe, 2023).

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Method of Preserving Oral Source

1. **Direct Narration from Elders to the Younger Ones:** the family tree, foundation, ancestors, and important information from the first generation, which is done mostly by the most senior member of the family.
2. **Professional Historians and Ballard Singers** e.g. Ihogbe of Benin, AlaroArokin of old Oyo, Sene Gambia, Moaridi of Congo, through commenting into memories, various events that took place in the past, compile genealogies of rulers and their notable achievements were recited on special occasions such as death of a ruler or enthronement of his successors, on most cases new rulers were tutored by the professional historians on the past history activities of his people.
3. **Religion:** Yoruba through Ifa cult ,the OduIfa was made of sixteen corpuses each out of additional sixteen can be derived to make total of 256 believed to contain things, report of past event and idea such as names of towns, settlement, people and object which exist in the past, which help to show the origin of town, lineage, intergroup relationship among the people and various dimension of achievements such as the use of Oriki, bibliography of an individual or praise names which show how powerful and dynamic ancestors are in the olden days. Africans believe in Supreme Being, to say African has no believe in God does not speak well. The Yoruba`s believed in Olorun through their various Orisa, they were able to communicate with the Supreme being, for you to go to war successfully, you must go through Ogun, the god of iron..
4. **Traditional Festival** : it contains history, drama, secular drama e.g. Edi festival in Ile Ife, the war between Egba and Ife (Moremi), Olojo festival in Ile Ife, Osun Oshogbo festival, Agemo festival in Ijebu, Eyo festival in Lagos, New Yam festival among the

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Igbo's in the Eastern part of Nigeria, Argungun fishing festival in Kebbi among others.

5. **Religion Rites**: Installation ceremony of an Oba shows cultural reflection of history of the Oba e.g. in Ijebu ode Awujale the king passes through the villages and hamlets for rituals or rites to show the battle between chief Apebi and new elected Oba , showing in Obanta (Awujale) defeating Apebi.(Ogundipe, 2023).

LIMITATIONS AND PROBLEMS OF ORAL SOURCE

Oral source, like all other sources materials for the writing of African history, has its limitations.

Firstly, is the problem of chronology which is said to be back bone of history, chronology is the science of time measurement, which furnishes the principles by which it becomes possible to assign events a definite position in the stream of time" time and space flee the historian who losses his way in a universe of clouds, chronology can be arrived at by the use of list of rulers or king list and the genealogy of groups of kin.

Secondly, one should also not lose sight of the fact that most oral source cannot go far into the past. In fact only a few of them can account for the events of the past beyond 12-1500AD.

Thirdly, more so, there is an African proverb which sum up the faults of the oral method: "No one likes to point to the direction of his father's village with the left hand" thus, people often, in oral source, leave out things which are thought to spoil the good name and greatness of their ancestors and tend to champion the things that will promote their name and greatness.

Fourthly, oral source can be readily and drastically altered to conform to written history. In fact, it is the opinion of some scholars that the idea of Egyptian origin of the Yoruba,

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projected by Lucas and others like Johnson, was merely intended to give the Yoruba a noble ancestry. Also, fabrication and distortion is another limitation of oral source.

Finally, the adoption of Islam added to the problem of using oral source in the

Reconstruction and writing of African history, Islamic influences tend to dilute and often wipe out the memory of pre-Islamic traditions. (Solebo, 2022).

Conclusion

Oral source remainsindispensable to teaching, learning and presentation of Yoruba history through true oral traditions, praise, poetry, folktales, myths, proverbs, songs, genealogies, and eyewitness accounts, Yoruba historians have successfully transmitted historically knowledge and cultural values across generations. Despite challenges, oral sources continue to complement written records by providing indigenous perspectives that are often absent from documentary evidence.

Recommendations

Government agencies, universities, should document and digitally preserve oral testimonies and other forms of Yoruba oral tradition before they are lost

Students of history should be trained in oral history research techniques, including interviewing, recording, transcription, and source criticism.

History educators should integrate oral history methods into the teaching of ypruba history at all level of education.

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