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Audiovisual Documentation of Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Sustainable Preservation and Economic Development

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Abstract

African indigenous knowledge systems are suffering from the threats of extinction due to poor preservation and documentation initiatives. Worse still, inadequate awareness to the available documented resources has not helped the situation. Thus, the need for proper documentation and archiving of indigenous knowledge in audio-visual formats for teaching, research, innovation and sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. This paper, therefore, assessed audiovisual documentation of Yoruba indigenous knowledge in South-West Nigeria. Case study method and purposive sampling technique were used to gather information from the respondents on the documentation of Yoruba indigenous knowledge systems of economic importance. Data was also sourced from audio-visual recordings and published resources in the Kenneth Dike Library, Institute of African Studies Library, and the University Media Resource Centre, all in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Findings revealed that elements of Yoruba indigenous knowledge system that relate to economic/income generating activities include skills such as blacksmithing, carving, crafting, molding, construction, building, medicine, cooking, pottery, tie and dye, fishing, palm processing, calabash designing, music, iron pot making, drum making, and others were documented and preserved in the library and information centres of the University of Ibadan. Challenges such as cultural barriers, funding, inadequate documentation centres hinder the documentation of Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Formulation of policies which will help in documenting and preserving indigenous knowledge for sustainable economic development was recommended.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Preservation, Economic Development, Audiovisual, Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

1.0 Introduction

The value of knowledge to the sustenance and advancement of human societies cannot be overemphasized. Knowledge refers to ideas, information and understanding which have been internalized by people and use on several occasions and in different sociocultural settings. Indigenous knowledge is peculiar to specific communities and is often used to sustain the livelihood of the people. It is their main asset to invest in the struggle for survival, to produce food, to provide for



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shelter and to achieve control of their own lives (Senanayake, 2006). Due to its importance, indigenous knowledge serves as the basis for agriculture, food preparation, healthcare, education and training, environmental conservation, and a host of other activities (Noyoo, 2007). Interestingly, most of African indigenous knowledge is domiciled in the minds of the people and are usually transferred to different generations orally. The ongoing practice of using such knowledge for beneficial purpose necessitates the development of an indigenous knowledge system for the effective management of local knowledge in communities.

1.1 The Concept of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The increasing attention which indigenous knowledge is receiving by the academia and developmental institutions has not yet led to a unanimous perception of the concept of indigenous knowledge. None of the definitions of indigenous knowledge are essentially contradictory; they overlap in many aspects. Indigenous knowledge is an area of study that focuses on the ways of knowing, seeing, and thinking that are passed down orally from one generation to another. These ways of understanding reflect thousands of years of experimentation and innovation in areas like agriculture, animal husbandry, child-rearing practices, education systems, medicine, and natural resource management—among many others.

Rajasekaran (1992) defined indigenous knowledge as a systematic body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments, and intimate understanding of the environment in each culture. To Nakata and Langton (2005), indigenous knowledge is collectively owned and exists as agricultural and medicinal practices, stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, taboos, norms, languages, and rituals. Indigenous knowledge contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. Melchias (2001) cited in Eyong (2007) viewed, indigenous knowledge as what indigenous people know and do, and what they have known and done for generations – practices that evolved through trial and error and proved flexible enough to cope with change. Indigenous knowledge represents the information base of a society, which facilitates effective decision-making and developmental activities.



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Unlike other forms of knowledge, indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture or society as it serves as the basis for local level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities. Sithole (2007) expressed that indigenous knowledge is predominantly tacit, embedded in the practices and experiences of its holders commonly exchanged through personal communication and demonstrations from the teacher to the apprentice, from parents to children, from neighbour to neighbour. Indigenous knowledge remains as knowledge held by local people, outside the formal scientific domain and therefore, deserves to be preserved (Mhache, 2017). Since the basic component of any country's knowledge system is its indigenous knowledge, the knowledge system which encompasses the skills, experiences, ideas and insights of the people needs to be preserved from going to extinction. Thus, the quest for proper documentation and archiving of indigenous knowledge in electronic formats for continuous improvement of people's livelihood becomes expedient.

1.2 The Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge System

The Yoruba is an ethnic group that inhabits Western Africa region, majorly in Nigeria, Benin, Togo and part of Ghana in West Africa, as well as in Cuba and some Caribbean countries. Oral history of the Yoruba recounts Odùduwà to be the Progenitor of the Yoruba and the reigning ancestor of their crowned kings (Oti and Ayeni, 2013). Ile-Ife was regarded as the (*Orisun - source*) and the Cradle of Civilization of the Yoruba people, followed by the Oyo and Benin Kingdoms. The Yoruba people constitute a major part of Nigeria population with significant contributions in the political, economic, educational and social spheres of the country, and beyond. Like other African ethnic groups, the Yorubas are rich in terms of culture and tradition (Akintoye 2010). The rich culture of the Yoruba people is evident in their religion, arts, crafts, food, attire, clothing and others.

Due to the nature of the indigenous Yoruba society which depends largely on oral history and tradition, the bulk of knowledge about the Yoruba cultural systems are domiciled in the minds of the people and transferred verbally across generations. Yoruba Indigenous knowledge system of economic importance such as local blacksmithing, carving, crafting, molding, construction, building, medicine, cooking, pottery, tie and dye, fishing, palm processing, calabash designing, music, iron pot



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making, drum making, and others are domiciled in individuals who transfer the knowledge to other people. The Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge system which encompasses their cultural practices, experiences, rituals and others encourage people to be diligent and to participate in economic activities. The Yoruba adage “*Ise Logun Ise*” which could be translated as “*diligence is the antidote to poverty*” is one of the several proverbs which emphasize the active participation of Yoruba people in different economic activities. Some economic activities which are unique to the indigenous Yoruba community engage include the following:

Ose Dudu - Yoruba indigenous black soap is produced locally with ingredients such as palm oil, coconut oil, palm kernel oil, ash from various plants (including shea tree bark, cocoa pods, banana husk, and plantain leaves), and water. This indigenous soap is used to prevent and/or treat skin diseases and health-related issues (Ahmed et al., 2005) (Ajaiyeoba et al. (2003). Due its medicinal use and other purposes, it generates employment opportunities for people in the local communities (Adewusi and Akanle 2020) thus enhancing their means of livelihood.

Adire – (Tie and Dye) is a product of Yoruba indigenous craft which is inextricably connected to the economic and social fabrics of the Yoruba people (Solomon and Ezra, 2015). *Adire* is a local cloth made by dyeing clothes in indigo plants with the addition of other ingredients. This cloth is produced majorly in Abeokuta, Ibadan and Osogbo areas of South-Western Nigeria. *Adire* serves as an important clothing material for the Yoruba people on different occasions and it also generates income for the farmers who cultivate the cotton and the indigo plants used as raw materials as well as the producers of the cloth.

Aso ofi or ***Aso oke hunhun*** - (Cloth Weaving) is another element of the Yoruba indigenous knowledge, which is largely domiciled in Iseyin, approximately, 100 kilometres north of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Aso Ofi or Aso Oke, is a popular traditional fabric worn on special occasions by the Yoruba usually for coronation, chieftaincy, wedding engagement, festivals, naming ceremony and other important events. The cloth serves as a major source of income for the local communities.



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Local blacksmithing, carving, building, medicine, pottery, palm processing, calabash designing, iron pot making, drum-making and others are products of Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge System which contribute to the economic activities of the people. These activities serve as sources of income for people and could also help achieve sustainable development in Yoruba communities. However, the long-standing traditions of the Yoruba people in spreading indigenous knowledge from their ancestral generations verbally, faces a major threat as valuable cultural knowledge could be lost due to death of some people who are regarded as the custodians of these knowledge. Based on this, we ask the following questions: what are the local initiatives in documenting and preserving the Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge Systems? What are the challenges facing the preservation of this knowledge?

1.3 Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge

Despite the tacit nature of indigenous knowledge, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play major roles in improving the accessibility to indigenous knowledge and enhancing their blending with the modern scientific and technical knowledge. Thus, the digital preservation of indigenous knowledge of the Yoruba people in Southwest Nigeria is the thrust of this paper while emphasis will be placed on initiatives aimed at ensuring the documentation of this knowledge by libraries and information Centres in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Preservation entails all activities that are geared towards maintaining valuable knowledge, information or object in a format that ensures the continued use and accessibility of the information provided. According to the Online Encyclopedia (2019),

“Preservation involves criteria for selecting materials that have cultural or historical importance and assessing their preservation needs; halting the deterioration of materials by providing a stable environment and proper supplies and equipment for storage; developing and implementing policies for the safe use of materials; and providing the resources necessary to engage in an ongoing preservation program committed to the continued existence of valued materials”.

Nowadays, preservation of indigenous knowledge is implemented by leveraging the benefits of ICT in form of digital preservation. Russel (1999) cited in Sawant (2014) viewed digital preservation as the process by which digital data is preserved in digital form in order to ensure the usability, durability and intellectual integrity of the information contained in them. Through digital preservation, the



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information contained in a digital medium is protected from agents of deterioration and the longevity of such materials are ensured.

2.0 Methodology

The study adopted a case study method while purposive sampling technique was used to select the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan; Institute of African Studies Library, University of Ibadan; and the University Media Resource Centre, Ibadan. Semi-structured interview and participant observation method were employed in gathering data for the study. The staff handling the digital preservation project were interviewed and their responses were documented. One of the researchers was permitted to assist in some of the digital processing of indigenous knowledge for a short while (one day in each case). Thereafter, recordings were done using video, of some indigenous activities of the Yoruba people, to fill some gaps in audiovisual documentation of indigenous knowledge. The collection of data for this study took place between June and August 2015.

3.0 Findings and discussion

This section presents the responses from the interview sessions held with key staff of the selected libraries and information Centres. The different initiatives aimed at documenting and preserving the indigenous knowledge of the Yoruba people in the Centres were also discussed.

3.1 Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge: Premier efforts of the University of Ibadan

A summary of the discussions with the respondents on digital preservation activities of the libraries and information centres at the University of Ibadan are as follows:

- Dialectology and ethnolinguistics (Cultural linguistics), ethnomusicology, and greater parts of anthropology, notably rituals and dance, but also the documentation of traditional technologies and working skills are of utmost importance. Consequently, it was the Nigerian Premier University, University of Ibadan (UI) that started audiovisual archiving by systematically establishing sound archives. The foundation of the phonogram archives in the University of Ibadan started in 1947 till early 1990 and this was accompanied by many other sound collections set up as part of the research institutions. They all dealt systematically with the rich various traditional African knowledge.



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- Sound recording and archiving were demanding and expensive. In those early days, there was a natural tendency to accumulate recordings in dedicated collections, some of which also supported the production of audio recordings, mainly in the field. Presently, documentation of traditional handicrafts and pre-industrial technology greatly profited from professional video recordings by the University Media Centre (UMC), Ibadan. It should be emphasized that present day knowledge of the linguistic and cultural diversity is mainly based on audiovisual documents, in their greatest part accumulated over past years. In a world of accelerated globalization, the significance of these documents reaches far beyond the mere academic world (Schuller 2008).
- However, over the past ten years, the situation has changed dramatically. Digital technology has conquered audiovisual production, post-processing, and archiving of Yoruba indigenous knowledge. Audio has totally become part of the IT world, and video has followed the same way. All dedicated audio formats acquired are not dead, as serious conversion and cloud storage of the media are in progress.
- Over the past years, the number of over fifty thousand hours audio and one hundred thousand hours of video were frequently quoted from various sides by scholars. This is a rough and unofficial estimate based on a first calculation when assessing the Sound Room of the Institute of African Studies and the University Media Resource Centre, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. These numbers were often estimated to keep growing over the years as relentless efforts are being made to process these resources by the professional, coordinated and dedicated staff of the Centres. Processed materials are classified and put on closed shelves. Access to the resources are restricted and can only be used for research consultation on site.



Figure 1: A Library Shelf at the Institute of African Studies Library, University of Ibadan displaying processed Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge in Reel-to-Reel format. (Photo credit: Mustapha Adebayo)

- In the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, conservation of Yoruba indigenous knowledge entails the careful movement, proper handling of materials, dusting of shelves and other preservation and conservation measures. Audio Visual resources were moved to the Institute of African Studies Library (which is a Departmental library under the Kenneth Dike Library) in 2006. There was an orderly movement with all volumes of a given title held together in batches.
- In all, over two thousand various indigenous knowledge resources documented by the University with audio technology from 1947 till 1990 are presently undergoing conversion process into digital mp3 format while the University Media Resource Centre engages in the acquisition, processing and cloud storage of Yoruba indigenous knowledge and other university activities. Prominent among the indigenous knowledge in the databases are *Aso ofi hunhun (Cloth Weaving)*, *music*, *Odu Ifa (Indigenous Counseling system)* and *Traditional Hairdressing* amongst several databases of documented knowledge.

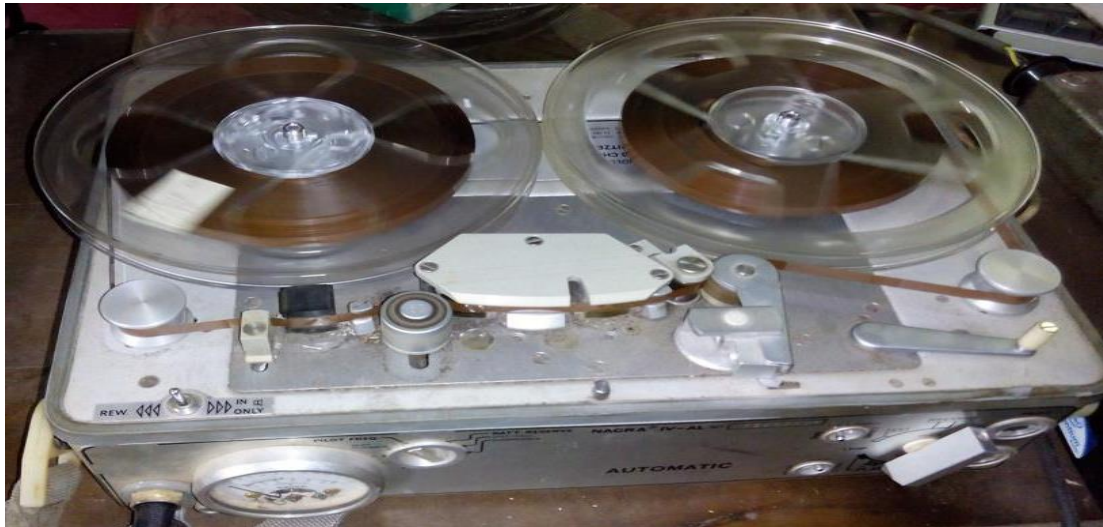


Figure 2: An Automatic Reel-to-Reel player



Figure 3: Reel-to-Reel



3.2 Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge: Institute of African Studies Library

From the interview sessions conducted with the respondents, it was gathered that the preservation procedures for audiovisual documents in the Institute of African Studies Library are as follows:

1. The volumes of documents are placed flat or spine down to provide support. Documents are transported by trolley with great care to ensure that they do not catch on the sides of the trolley or on the sides of the doors, walls or storage racks. Before information resources are moved, either manually or by trolley, adequate planning is made – clearing of the route, doors are opened while other obstructions are usually removed.
2. Records are stored in such a way that they are accessible and safeguarded against environmental damage. Vital information resources are stored in a disaster safe or vault to protect against fire, flood, earthquakes, and other conflict situations.
3. Great care is exercised when retrieving and or handling the document. For instance, a Reel-to-Reel object must be handled with an utmost care because of its fragility. They are placed in acid-free cases as this will reduce the likelihood of it getting damaged or deteriorated.
4. The computer used in the conversion is protected with up-to-date antivirus while limited access is allowed into the sound room, to control sound mutilation and other factors that can lead to the loss of the resources.
5. Adobe movie maker software is used for the conversion process. This helps provide quality and perfect sound conversion.
6. Finally, records at the Institute of African Studies' library are being stored in such a way that they are accessible and safeguard against environmental damage. Typical documents are stored in a file cabinet in the library. Vital documents are stored in a disaster-resistant safe or vault to protect against fire, flood, earthquakes and conflict situations.



Figure 4. Mixed tape materials of different sizes on the shelves, Institute of African Studies Library (Photo credit: Adebayo Mustapha).

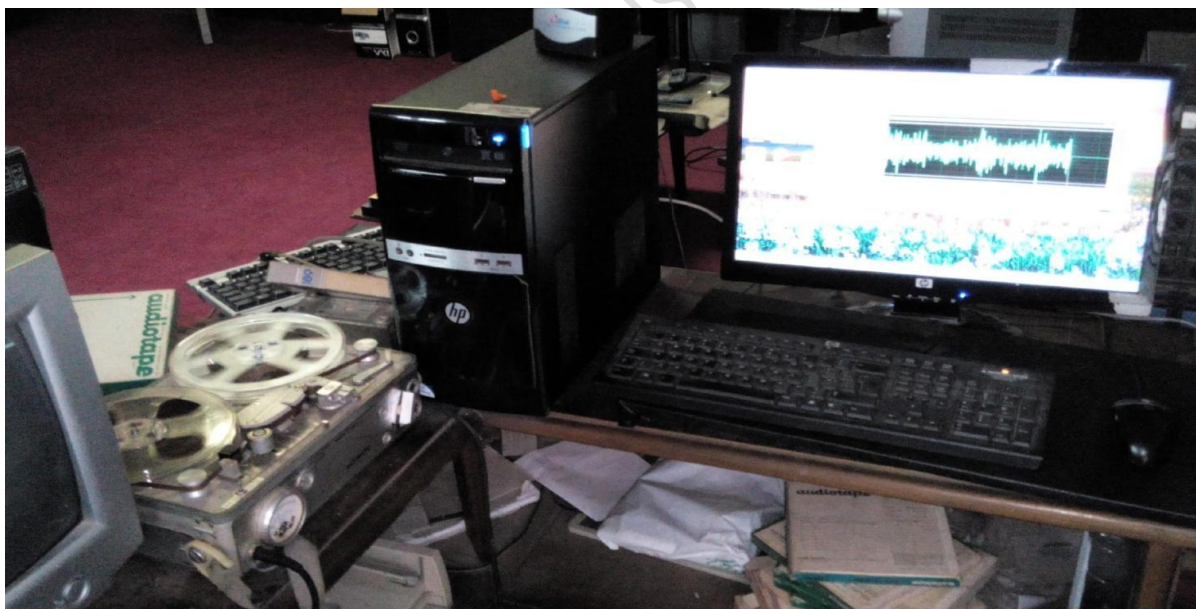


Figure 5: Conversion of Reel-to-Reel material into a digital format.

NB: *The Reel-to-Reel automatic player is connected to the Central Processing Unit, while Adobe media software is used to run the conversion.*



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3.3 Information Communication Technology: Sustainable tools of University Media Resource Centre, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The University Media Centre (UMC) Ibadan, is responsible for professional digital acquisition and documentation of all the University of Ibadan activities, including inaugural lectures, lecture series, memorial activities, and other university activities. Also, the Centre engages in systematic recordings of Indigenous knowledge in Ibadan and the environs. It is the citadel of documentation, saving the Yoruba culture and African races digitally.

The media Centre over the years has documented over three thousand various indigenous knowledge on economic skills, using latest digital technologies. The media Centre uses ICTs to:

1. Capture, store and disseminate indigenous knowledge so that traditional knowledge is preserved for the future generation.
2. Promote cost-effective dissemination of indigenous knowledge.
3. Create easily accessible indigenous knowledge information systems.
4. Promote integration of indigenous knowledge into formal and non-formal training and education, and;
5. Provide a platform for advocating for improved benefits from Indigenous Knowledge systems of the poor.



Figure 6: An ios Apple computer used in processing of indigenous knowledge records. Attached are external storage devices for adequate backup.



Figure 7: Recording of a live event at the Media Resource Centre, ICT equipment used includes; (i) Digital Camcorder, (ii) DVD Player and (iii) Television. Mobile phones are used to communicate with the recording staff at the event location.



4.0 Conclusion

While some people remain skeptical about the direct contributions of ICTs to indigenous knowledge transfer and preservation, the libraries and information centres show to the global communities that ICTs can contribute to sustenance of indigenous knowledge and attainment of sustainable development goals. Proper application of ICTs is essential to stimulate the flow of indigenous knowledge and incorporation of modern scientific and technological understandings to traditional knowledge. This requires adequate understanding of the ICT devices, their capacities and different contexts which they can be put to effective use. Proper application of ICTs also requires an understanding of the main characteristics of indigenous knowledge and defining tools, applications and services that meet those characteristics. However, there are challenges which will need to be overcome to ensure that the utilisation of ICT for indigenous knowledge documentation deliver maximum benefits to both the indigenous communities who own the knowledge and the wider community at large.

Challenges such as cultural practices hinder the effective communication of indigenous knowledge in Yoruba communities. Some people who are regarded as custodians of valuable indigenous knowledge are often reluctant to share the knowledge to outsiders. This lack of cooperation from local communities in sharing their indigenous knowledge limits the capturing and documentation of some indigenous knowledge in Yoruba community. Similarly, the existence of some copyright laws prevents researchers and knowledge professionals from accessing Yoruba indigenous knowledge. Finally, the conversion, documentation and preservation of Yoruba indigenous knowledge requires adequate funding which most libraries and information centres in this community do not have. This challenge is worsened by the lukewarm attitude of government agencies in supporting the documentation and preservation of the Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

5.0 Recommendations

To ensure effective acquisition, documentation and preservation of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development in South-West Nigeria and Africa in general, the following recommendations were made:



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Policy and strategies: appropriate policies should be formulated by concerned authorities on the best way which researchers, staff of cultural institutions and academic communities can collaborate with indigenous people to record their knowledge. This will help these professionals to support the communities in documenting and preserving their indigenous knowledge and subsequently, promoting sustainable development. This will stimulate the flow of indigenous knowledge and increase awareness on Yoruba indigenous knowledge.

Staff Development: Staff of libraries and information centres should be properly trained in the aspect of professional documentary filming and cinematography. Workshops and seminars should be organized for this staff on audiovisual documentation, digitization and digital archiving practices of indigenous knowledge.

Equipment Upgrade: There is a need for an upgrade of the equipment used in the documentation and conversion activities of the centres. State-of-the-art gadgets such as digital cameras, ios Apple computers, updated antivirus, and others should be put in place to enhance the activities of these libraries and information centres.

Research: Further research is required to identify and resolve social and cultural barriers to the free flow of indigenous knowledge. The Yoruba and indeed all indigenous communities need to collaborate to put develop mechanisms for identifying, collecting, documenting, characterizing, recognizing and sharing of indigenous knowledge at national levels. The need to establish the necessary organizational incentives and support systems to enhance these activities is also important.



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