



## DOCUMENTATION OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURAL VOCABULARIES FOR RESIDENTIAL BUILDING COMPONENTS IN YORUBA CULTURES

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### ABSTRACT

Cultural architectural vocabularies are not only rich but diverse and they usually reflect their unique cultural expressions. These vocabularies cut across all building components, such as; roof structures, walling and flooring systems, finishes, materials, and a host of others. This study documents local architectural vocabularies for residential building components in Nigeria cultures with focus on Yoruba residential buildings in Oyo State. Using qualitative research approach, traditional building components of Yoruba residential buildings were identified, and their features documented. The cultural and historical significance were analysed. The building layout, room divisions, structural systems, roof forms, wall treatments, and decorative motifs were identified as the key Yoruba architectural elements. Thirty-five (35) building components were identified and the pictorial and Yoruba language interpretations were documented in a tabular form "See table 3.1". The alignment of buildings with the cardinal points reflects the spiritual significance and connection with the natural world. The decorative motifs used in Oyo architecture hold symbolic meanings. The "adinkra" motif represents the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. Modernization, urbanization, and socio-economic changes pose threats to the continuity of traditional building practices. The increasing use of modern building materials and standardized construction methods diminishes the authenticity and uniqueness of Oyo architecture. The documentation of these vocabularies is essential for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, as well as for the development of sustainable building practices that are rooted in local traditions. The findings of the research highlight the cultural significance and symbolism embedded within the architectural vocabularies of the Oyo tribe.

**Keywords:** architectural documentation, building components, culture, Yoruba culture

### INTRODUCTION

Architecture reflects a society's cultural identity, values, beliefs, and practices Wiley (2013). In Nigeria, the built environment is characterized by a rich variety of architectural styles that reflect the diverse cultural heritage of its people Adesoji & Oluwadare, (2019). This is an indication that the Yoruba culture which make up the majority of the Nigerian population, have distinct architectural vocabularies and styles that are expressed in their residential buildings. Research positions by Larsen, (2008) posited that these vocabularies cut across the use of local materials, the incorporation of symbolic motifs, and the utilization of indigenous building techniques, the methods of practice in building construction, incorporation of materials and components and a host of others. Despite the importance of these architectural vocabularies to the understanding of the Yoruba culture, there is no doubt that there is need to systematically document these components for use by architects in Nigeria. The gap in knowledge of the native languages used in describing architectural components has led to the neglect of these cultural resources and thus makes many traditional buildings and techniques disappear over time. It is indispensable to document these architectural vocabularies to preserve this important aspect of Nigerian culture for future generations and for built environment professionals in Nigeria. It is imperative to differentiate the way of practice of the construction based on their culture.

The Yoruba culture in Nigeria has a deep-rooted history in architecture, particularly in residential buildings. Unfortunately, the rapid urbanization and the influence of Western architecture have led to the loss of some of these traditional building components. Therefore, documenting the

local architectural vocabularies for residential building components in Yoruba culture, with a case study of Oyo State, is crucial to understand and appreciate the significance of Yoruba cultural heritage and promote sustainable development through indigenous architecture. According to tradition, the Oyo tribe is descended from Oduduwa, a great Yoruba ancestor and hero who likely migrated to Ile-Ife, where his son became the first Alaafin of Oyo. The Oyo Empire began in the 1300s in the West African savannah north of the tropical forest, using armored cavalry on horseback to extend its reach across parts of northern and western Nigeria. In 1835, the empire fell to the superior forces of the Fulani Empire.


The pre-colonial kingdom of Oyo, founded in the 1300s in present-day Nigeria, quickly became one of the most powerful states in the Yoruba-speaking region. Ruled by an alafin and aristocratic leaders, Oyo expanded southwestward to the Atlantic coast, becoming part of the Atlantic Ocean trade system and trading mainly in slaves Lawuyi, (2002). The downfall of the kingdom was swift, with weak peripheral states breaking free and becoming political and military rivals. By 1837, the kingdom of Oyo had collapsed. However, the rapid urbanization and the influence of Western architecture have led to the loss of some of these traditional building components. Therefore, documenting the local architectural vocabularies for residential building components in Yoruba culture, with a case study of Oyo State, is crucial to understand and appreciate the significance of Yoruba cultural heritage and promote sustainable development through indigenous architecture.

Oyelola et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of walls, roofs and floors as major building components whose architectural vocabularies preserves Yoruba culture and identity. (Olajide and Fakere 2014) identified various building components, including walls, roofs, windows, and doors, and documented the local names and materials used for each component. The study also highlighted the importance of these architectural elements in preserving Yoruba culture and identity. One of the significant challenges facing the documentation of local architectural vocabularies in Nigerian cultures is the lack of comprehensive documentation. There is a dearth of reliable and comprehensive documentation on the indigenous architectural vocabularies and techniques used in residential buildings across different Nigerian cultures. As a result, there is a need for research to document and preserve these local architectural vocabularies before they become lost or altered due to modernization. As noted by Okechukwu et al. (2021), there is a significant gap in the documentation of indigenous architectural vocabularies in Nigeria. Most of the available literature on Nigerian architecture focuses on the colonial and post-colonial periods, neglecting the pre-colonial era. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive documentation of indigenous architectural vocabularies across different Yoruba cultures.

The lack of comprehensive documentation also poses a challenge to the preservation of indigenous architectural vocabularies. According to Omotoso and Okoye (2017), the failure to document indigenous architectural vocabularies has resulted in the loss of cultural heritage and knowledge. Therefore, there is a need for research to document and preserve these architectural vocabularies for future generations. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive documentation also affects the research and development of innovative building techniques and materials. As noted by Lawal et al. (2019), the documentation of indigenous architectural vocabularies is crucial for the research and development of innovative building techniques and materials that are culturally responsive and sustainable. In conclusion, the lack of comprehensive documentation is a significant research gap that requires attention in the documentation of local architectural vocabularies for residential building components in Nigerian cultures. Future research can focus on documenting and preserving indigenous architectural vocabularies, especially those that are at risk of being lost or altered due to modernization.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a rich array of architectural elements and design features within the residential buildings of the Oyo tribe. The architecture of the Oyo tribe is characterized by its distinctiveness, reflecting the cultural identity and historical influences of the community. Key architectural elements identified in the research include the building layout, room divisions, structural systems, roof forms, wall treatments, and decorative motifs. The building components realized and documented from the qualitative research carried out are as follows with their local translations:

Sn	Building Component	Sample Pictorial representation /form	Yoruba interpretation
a)	Foundation		<u>Ipile</u>

This study thus focuses on establishing a collective effort that would better intensify the use of local languages. At the end of the research, architects and other stakeholders in built environments would have a template that will guide towards understanding local terminologies relating to building components in Yoruba culture. The research will improve and allow patronage of the Yoruba traditional language for use and to enhance proper understanding to solve challenges in the built environment and measures or solutions to those identified challenges.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD


This study was conducted using a qualitative research technique which includes the case study approach, interviews and fieldworks and site visits.

### Case Study Approach

The research for this study adopts a case study approach to examine the local architectural vocabularies of residential building components within Yoruba culture, with a specific emphasis on the Oyo tribe. The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific group or community, providing detailed insights into their architectural practices, design elements, and cultural significance.



Interviews with local residents, such as homeowners, artisans, elders, and community members, possess first-hand information about the design elements, construction techniques, and cultural symbolism embedded in the residential building components. Experts, such as traditional builders, architects, and scholars, provide specialized knowledge and expertise on Yoruba architecture and the specific architectural vocabularies within the Oyo tribe. These interviews were structured or semi-structured, allowing for open-ended discussions and the exploration of diverse perspectives. Photographs were taken to document the physical structures, decorative elements, and spatial arrangements within the Oyo communities. Throughout the fieldwork and site visits, we actively engaged with the Oyo community, establishing relationships, fostering trust, and respecting local customs and protocols. Ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent, protecting privacy, and ensuring cultural sensitivity, are prioritized throughout the fieldwork activities.

b)	Wall		Ògiri.
c)	Roof		Orule
d)	Floor		Ile-ile or paka.
e)	Door		Iakua.
f)	Entrance door		Iakua, emu ona
g)	Window		Eeresè.
h)	Ceiling		Aia
i)	Stairs		Eeteesi

j)	Column		Ila ooto
k)	Floor Slab		Pakà pelèhè.
l)	Bricks		Biriki/ Okuta.
m)	Chimney		Iho efin.
n)	Fireplace		Ibi ina.
o)	Balcony		Corridor - Odeje.
p)	Roof Gutter		Gòta.
q)	Drainage		Idominuzere.

F)	Fence		Odi.
s)	Gate		Ibode... ilekun nla
r)	Lintel		Iscigba
u)	Burglary/guard		asorandi
v)	finishes		vari
w)	step		igbese
x)	glass		Ogiri onigilasi
y)	house		ile.

o)	duplex		Ile aloke maai
aa)	room		vava
ab)	courtyard		asobala
ac)	terrace		filati
ad)	frame		ifecau.
ae)	furniture		aga
af)	bed		ibachun
ag)	kitchen		idana

2h)	Path		Onipona
2i)	Swimming pool		Odo iwe

## CONCLUSION

This research explored the documentation of local architectural vocabularies for residential building components in Yoruba culture, with a specific focus on the Oyo tribe. Through an in-depth study of the architectural elements, construction techniques, materials, and cultural significance, valuable insights have been gained into the unique architectural heritage of the Oyo tribe. The findings of this research demonstrate the richness and complexity of the architectural vocabularies within the Oyo tribe. The residential buildings reflect the cultural values, traditions, and beliefs of the community. The careful spatial organization, use of traditional construction techniques, and incorporation of symbolic motifs and decorative elements highlight the deep-rooted cultural significance of Oyo architecture. Furthermore, the research identified the challenges faced in preserving and promoting the local architectural vocabularies. Modernization, urbanization, and a lack of awareness among younger generations pose threats to the continuity of traditional building practices. However, the research also highlights the importance of raising awareness, involving the community, and integrating traditional architectural vocabularies into contemporary design practices to ensure their preservation and continued relevance. Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made to promote the documentation, preservation, and promotion of local architectural vocabularies for residential building components in Yoruba culture, specifically within the Oyo tribe: active involvement of the Oyo community, including homeowners, artisans, elders, and community leaders, is essential for effectively documenting and preserving the local architectural vocabularies within their community. Community engagement is a key factor in capturing the wealth of architectural heritage. Also, education and awareness initiatives are crucial for preserving the cultural significance of Oyo architecture and ensuring its continuity in contemporary contexts.

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