

Structural and Textual Dimensions of *Bolojo* Performance in Ogun West Secondary Schools, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines how Bolojo, an indigenous Yewa musical genre, functions as a vehicle for cultural identity, social meaning, and musical creativity within secondary schools in Ogun West, Nigeria. Although Bolojo is historically rooted in Gelede performance traditions, its contemporary school-based practice remains under-documented. Using observation schedules, structured interviews, and archival sources, the study analyses how students engage Bolojo during key social events, highlighting performance organisation, instrumental practice, dance vocabulary, and dialectal expression. Merriam's ethnomusicology theory guides the structural and textual analysis of selected songs, revealing the genre's pentatonic and mixolydian scalar tendencies, call-and-response forms, and culturally coded themes of thanksgiving, communal ethics, and identity affirmation. Findings show that school performances sustain indigenous knowledge, reinforce dialect competence, and cultivate social cohesion, while enabling students to embody cultural values through music. The study contributes empirical insight into how traditional genres can be meaningfully integrated into music education and cultural transmission in contemporary Nigerian schools.

Keywords: Bolojo Songs, Performance, Social Events, Textual Analysis, Yewa Secondary Schools



Introduction

Music occupies a central position in Yoruba cultural life, functioning not merely as an artistic expression but as a repository of communal memory, social philosophy, and identity. Among the Yewa people of Ogun State, musical traditions are deeply woven into everyday life, shaping social interactions and reinforcing cultural values. Scholars such as Agawu (2016) emphasise that African musical cultures are inseparable from the social worlds that produce them, and this observation is particularly evident in the Yewa region where music, dance, and ritual form an integrated cultural system.

Ogun State itself is a culturally diverse region with a long history of migration, settlement, and interethnic interaction. The Yewa people, formerly known as Egbado, possess a distinctive cultural identity shaped by historical movements from Ile Ife, Oyo, Ketu, and Dahomey. Their musical heritage reflects this complexity, combining Yoruba musical principles with stylistic elements influenced by neighbouring communities. Bolojo, one of the most vibrant genres in Yewa culture, exemplifies this synthesis. Originating from Gelede ritual aesthetics, Bolojo has evolved into a secular entertainment form characterised by energetic drumming, acrobatic dance, and dialect-rich singing.

Despite its cultural prominence, Bolojo's contemporary adaptation within formal school environments has received little scholarly attention. Secondary schools in Ogun West serve as important sites of cultural transmission where students participate in traditional performances during events such as Cultural Day, Founders' Day, Valedictory ceremonies, and End-of-Year celebrations. These performances provide opportunities for young people to engage with indigenous music, develop artistic skills, and strengthen communal identity. Yet, the structural and textual features of the songs performed in these contexts remain under-analysed.

This study addresses this gap by examining how Bolojo is performed and adapted within secondary school social events in Ogun West. It analyses the musical structure and textual content of selected songs and explores how performance practice, instrumentation, and dialectal expression contribute to cultural continuity within educational settings. In doing so, the study contributes to broader

conversations about the role of indigenous music in contemporary Nigerian education and cultural preservation.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in Allan P. Merriam's ethnomusicology theory, which conceptualises music as a cultural system comprising sound, behaviour, and conceptualisation (Merriam, 1964). This tripartite model provides a holistic lens through which Bolojo can be understood, allowing the analysis to move beyond musical notation to consider the social and cultural meanings embedded in performance.

Merriam's first domain, sound, encompasses the structural elements of music such as melody, rhythm, scale, texture, and instrumentation. In the context of Bolojo, this includes the pentatonic and mixolydian scales, the predominance of call-and-response forms, and the characteristic rhythmic patterns produced by the Akuba drum ensemble. The second domain, behaviour, focuses on the actions and interactions of performers and audiences. Bolojo performance is inherently communal, involving coordinated drumming, improvisatory dance, and dialectal singing that reflect the social organisation and cultural values of the Yewa people. The third domain, conceptualisation, addresses the ideas, beliefs, and meanings associated with music. Bolojo songs often articulate themes of thanksgiving, communal ethics, identity affirmation, and social commentary, revealing the philosophical underpinnings of Yewa culture.

Cultural semiotics further enriches this analysis by illuminating how Yoruba musical genres encode social philosophy and communal ethics through text, gesture, and sound. Bolojo's dialectal expressiveness, acrobatic dance style, and ensemble coordination reflect broader Yoruba semiotic traditions, making it an important site for cultural pedagogy within schools.

Literature Review

The relationship between music and cultural identity has been widely explored in African music scholarship. Ajewole and Adebisi (2004) argue that music functions as a cultural archive, preserving communal values and historical memory.



In Nigeria, traditional music continues to play a vital role in social education, serving as a medium through which communities articulate identity and transmit cultural knowledge. Olusoji (2013) highlights the importance of integrating indigenous music into school curricula to promote cultural literacy and identity formation, noting that traditional genres provide rich pedagogical value.

The Yewa people possess a complex migration history involving movements from Ile Ife, Oyo, Ketu, and Dahomey, resulting in diverse dialects and cultural practices (Johnson et al., 2021). Their musical traditions, including Bolojo, remain central to communal identity and social cohesion. Bolojo developed from Gelede ritual aesthetics but evolved into a secular entertainment genre characterised by energetic drumming, improvisatory dance, and dialectal singing (Olorunsogo, 2005, 2018). Its performance practice emphasises teamwork, virtuosity, and cultural symbolism, making it a compelling subject for ethnomusicological analysis.

Despite the rich scholarship on Yoruba music, studies focusing specifically on Bolojo within contemporary educational contexts remain scarce. This gap underscores the need for research that examines how traditional genres are adapted and sustained within formal school environments, particularly in regions where cultural identity is closely tied to musical practice.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative ethnomusicological design, combining field observation, interviews, and musical analysis to capture the multifaceted nature of Bolojo performance in secondary schools. Six schools were selected using stratified and purposive sampling to ensure representation across urban and rural areas in Ogun West Senatorial District. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how Bolojo is performed in different socio-cultural settings.

Table 1. *Selected Secondary Schools in Ogun West Senatorial District*

S/N	Key	Name of School	Type	Local Government Area	Public/Private School
1.	School A	Itolu Comprehensive High School, Ilaro	Urban	Yewa South Local Government	Public

2.	School B	Uptimum Success international College, Ilaro	Urban	Yewa South Local Government	Private
3.	School C	Ajoda High school, Ayetoro	Rural	Yewa North Local Government	Public
4.	School D	.Alapoti Community High School, Alapoti	Rural	Ado-odo ota Local Government	Public
5.	School E	Yewa (Egbádo) College, Ilaro.	Urban	Yewa South Local Government	Public
6.	School F	Adie-owe Community High School, Ketu	Rural	Ado-odo ota Local Government	Public

Data collection involved detailed observation schedules documenting performance events, ensemble organisation, dance movements, and audience interaction. Structured interviews were conducted with teachers, student performers, and cultural instructors to gain insight into the pedagogical and cultural significance of Bolojo within school environments. Secondary sources, including archival materials, library resources, and internet-based documents, provided additional contextual information.

The analytical procedure was guided by Merriam’s framework, which informed the structural and textual analysis of six Bolojo songs performed during school events. Each song was examined for its form, scale, texture, rhythm, range, thematic content, and performance context. This comprehensive approach ensured that both musical and cultural dimensions were captured in the analysis.

Contextual Background: Yewa People and Bolojo Tradition

The Yewa people, formerly known as Egbado, inhabit the western region of Ogun State. Their cultural identity is shaped by migration histories, dialectal diversity, and proximity to the Benin Republic. They maintain strong traditions in agriculture, hunting, textile production, and music, all of which contribute to a vibrant cultural landscape. Music plays a central role in social life, serving as a medium for communal expression, ritual performance, and cultural preservation.

Bolojo emerged in the 1970s as a popular entertainment genre derived from Gelede ritual performance. While Gelede is associated with masked rituals and

ancestral veneration, Bolojo developed as a secular form of entertainment characterised by lively drumming, improvisatory dance, and dialect-rich singing. The Akuba drum ensemble forms the backbone of Bolojo performance, supported by instruments such as Sekere, Agogo, Agidigbo, and Gangan. The genre's energetic dance style and expressive singing reflect the dynamism of Yewa culture.

In contemporary school environments, Bolojo is performed during major social events such as Cultural Day, Send-off and Valedictory ceremonies, Founders' Day, and End-of-Year celebrations. These performances provide platforms for cultural expression and identity reinforcement, allowing students to engage with their heritage in meaningful ways. The integration of Bolojo into school events demonstrates the genre's adaptability and its continued relevance in modern educational contexts.



Figure 1: *Cultural Day: Itolu Comprehensive High School, Ilaro (2021)*



Figure 2: *Cultural Day: Alapoti Community High School, Alapoti (2020)*



Figure 3: *Valedictory Service: Adie-owe Community High School, Ketu (2018)*

These figures illustrate the vibrancy of Bolojo performance in school settings, highlighting the costumes, ensemble arrangements, and communal participation that characterise the genre.

Structural and Textual Analysis of Selected Bolojo Songs



6/8 (Compound duple)

Agogo (timeline)

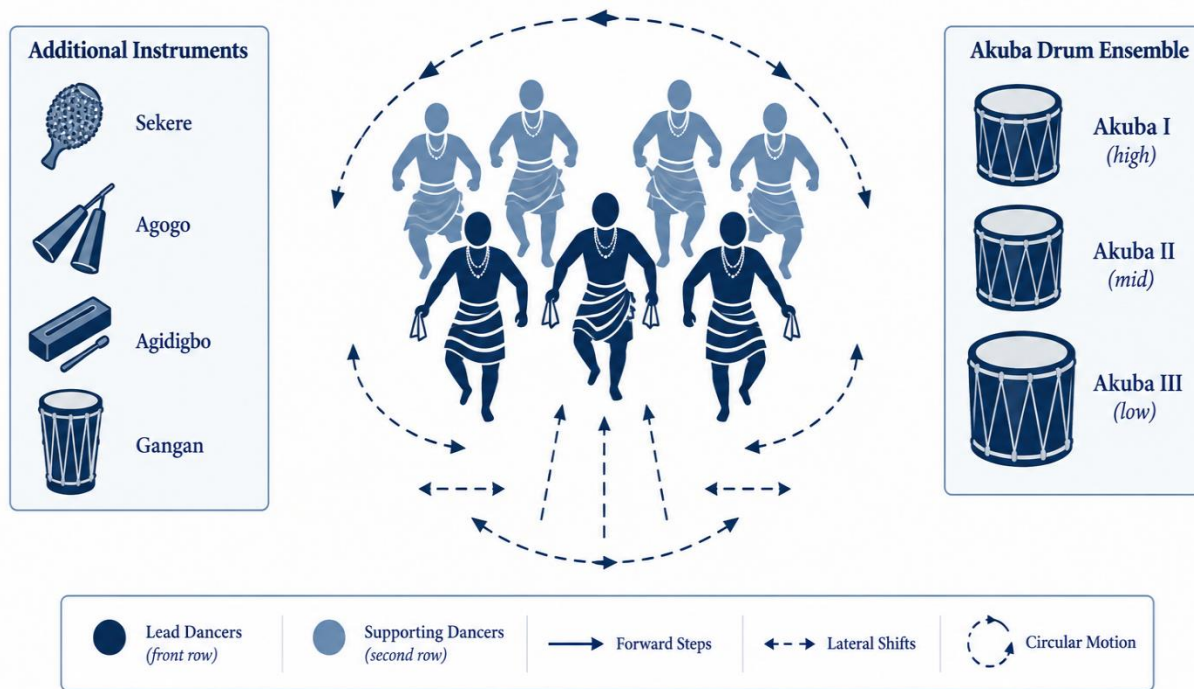
Akuba I (high drum)

Akuba II (mid drum)

Akuba III (low drum)

Figure 4. *Excerpt of Bolojo Drum Pattern showing interlocking Akuba rhythm and Agogo timeline.*

Figure 4 presents a two-bar excerpt of a Bolojo-style drum pattern associated with the Yewa cultural context of Ogun State, Nigeria, illustrating the characteristic rhythmic interplay between the three Akuba drums and the Agogo timeline. The high-, mid-, and low-pitched Akuba voices establish complementary rhythmic layers through interlocking patterns, syncopated accents, and strategically placed rests, while the Agogo maintains a consistent temporal reference in compound duple metre (6/8). The excerpt demonstrates how rhythmic coordination and contrasting instrumental roles contribute to the forward-driving momentum of Bolojo performance. It is presented as an illustrative reconstruction of the rhythmic texture rather than a verified transcription of a specific performance.



Schematic representation of spatial organisation and movement pathways in Bolojo dance performance.

Figure 5. *Bolojo Dance Formation Diagram*

The structural and textual analysis of the selected Bolojo songs reveals the musical coherence and cultural richness of the genre. Each song exhibits distinctive musical features and thematic content that reflect the values and identity of the Yewa people.

Song 1: *Eni Oluwa Se Loore*

The song *Eni Oluwa Se Loore* is structured around a call-and-response form, a hallmark of Yoruba musical practice. Its pentatonic scale and monophonic texture create a melodic simplicity that enhances its thematic focus on thanksgiving. The compound time rhythm supports a steady, flowing movement that complements the song's reflective tone. With a vocal range extending from B3 to D5, the song is accessible to student performers and encourages communal participation. The performance forces, comprising voice and local instruments, reinforce the cultural authenticity of the piece. The textual content expresses gratitude and communal affirmation, reinforcing moral values and social cohesion during school ceremonies.

ENI OLUWA SE LOORE

CALL

RESPONSE

E - ni O-lu-wa se___ loo - re ko-na-wo so-ke

o - se mi oo___ o se mi o,___ mo

du-pe lo - wo___ Je - su o - lu - gba - la___ hal - le-lu - yah mo wa du-pe e - ni-yan lo___ ko -

le a - la - ja me - fa to-ja - de l'a - ye___ mo du-pe lo - wo___ Je - su o - lu - gba - la___

Figure 6. Excerpt of *Eni Oluwa Se Loore*

Text of “*Eni Oluwa Şe Loore*” (Yoruba and English Translation)

Yoruba Text

Eni Oluwa şe lóore, ko n’awọ s’oke
O şe mi o o, O şe mi o
Mo dupe lówọ ọ Jesu Olugbala
Halleluyah mo wa dupe
Eniyan lo kọle alaja mefa to jade laye
Mo dupe lówọ ọ Jesu Olugbala

English Translation

The blessed of the Lord should signify.
 He has blessed me (2×).
 I give thanks to Jesus the Saviour.
 Hallelujah, I have come to give thanks.
 Many who owned mansions have died.
 I give thanks to Jesus the Saviour.

Song 2: *E Mi A Yago O*

E Mi A Yago O employs a call-and-response structure and a pentatonic scale, producing a melodic pattern that is both engaging and culturally resonant. Its



monophonic texture and compound time rhythm create a rhythmic vitality that reflects the celebratory nature of Bolojo. The song's range, from G3 to C5, accommodates a wide spectrum of student voices. The textual theme emphasises cultural pride and asserts the value of Bolojo within both traditional and educational contexts. By declaring that Bolojo does not hinder academic pursuits, the song promotes a harmonious relationship between cultural heritage and formal education.

E MI A YAGO O (BOLOJO)

Traditional Doh is E



E mi a ya-go o, Bo-lo - jo n-bo lo - na, e mi a ya-go o, Bo-lo - jo n-bo lo - na a - ye o - ni - ye e - mi a ya-go o bo - lo-jo o ma ni ka - wa ma ka we o, bo - lo-jo o ma ni ka - wa ma ka we o, a - ye o - ni ye e - mi a ya-go o

Figure 7. Excerpt from *E Mi A Yago O (Bolojo)*

Text of “*E Mi A Yago O (Bolojo)*” (Yoruba and English Translation)

Yoruba Text

E mi a yago o, Bolojo m bo lona
E mi a yago o, Bolojo m bo lona
Aye o, O ni ye ee, E mi a yago o
Bolojo o ma pe e kawa ma kawo o
Bolojo o ma pe kawa ma kawo o
Aye o, O ni ye ee, E mi a yago o

Song 3: *Orile Agege*

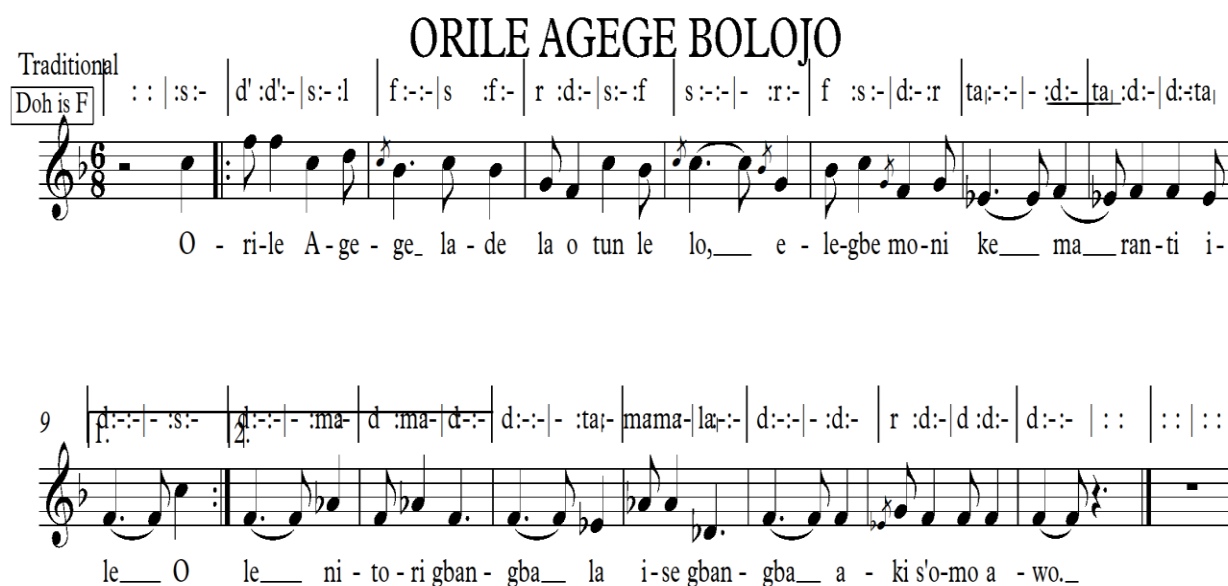
English Translation

Give way, Bolojo is coming.
Give way, Bolojo is coming.
Bolojo is worthwhile, so give way.
Bolojo does not prevent us from studying.
Bolojo does not prevent us from studying.
Bolojo is worthwhile, so give way.

Orile Agege is structured around a call-and-refrain form and employs a mixolydian scale, giving it a distinctive tonal character. Its monophonic texture and compound duple rhythm create a steady, grounded musical flow. The vocal range, extending from E3 to B5, allows for expressive variation. The song's textual content encourages remembrance of one's cultural roots, reinforcing identity among students and reminding them of the importance of maintaining ties to their heritage even when navigating new environments.

ORILE AGEGE BOLOJO

Traditional
Doh is F



O - ri-le A - ge - ge_ la - de la o tun le lo, e - le-gbe mo-ni ke ma ran-ti i-

le O le ni - to - ri gban - gba la i-se gban - gba a - ki s'o-mo a - wo.

Figure 8. Excerpt from *Orile Agege*

Text of “*Orile Agege*” (Yoruba and English Translation)

Yoruba Text

Orile Agege la de la o ni la o ni le lo

Elegbe mo ni ke ma a rantti ile

Nitori gbangba la n se gbangba

A ki so mu awo

English Translation

We are now at Orile Agege.

But I want to advise my colleagues not to forget our native home.

Not to forget our native home.

Not to hide in the strange land.

Song 4: *Ire Loju Owo N Ri*

Ire Loju Owo N Ri is built on a chorus form and a pentatonic scale, producing a cohesive and accessible musical structure. Its monophonic texture and compound duple rhythm support a rhythmic clarity that enhances the song's thematic focus on blessing and goodwill. The range from F4 to F5 allows for a bright, uplifting vocal quality. The textual content conveys communal goodwill and moral assurance, strengthening social bonds and fostering a sense of collective optimism.

IRE LOJU OWO NRI

Traditional Doh is F



O-du wa-ye e ka ni me ti ju i - re lo - ju o - wo nri, a - mi

8 ko se be ni a - fe, fe, o - mo to sa - de -

13 un ko - ni gba - to - ro - je. o - je.

Figure 9. Excerpt from *Ire Loju Owo N Ri*

Text of “*Ire Loju Owo N Ri*” (Yoruba and English Translation)

Yoruba Text

Oduwaye ka ni me ti ju

Ire loju owo nri o

Amin ko şe be ni a fe o ri (2×)

Ọba t’o ş’adeun ko gba tọrọ je

English Translation

Oduwaye, you will not be put to shame.

It is going to be well with you.

So shall it be.

He that promised will fulfil his promises.

Song 5: *A N Gbadura F’awon Senior Awa*



This medley employs a pentatonic scale and monophonic texture, creating a musical continuity that supports its thematic focus on communal prayer. The compound duple rhythm provides a steady foundation for the song’s reflective tone. With a range from E4 to F5, the song is well suited to student performers. The textual content expresses collective aspirations and intergenerational solidarity, making it particularly appropriate for valedictory events where students honour their seniors and articulate hopes for future success.

A N GBADURA F'AWON SENIOR

Traditional : : s :- d' | s :- :l | - :f :- | f :- s :- | r :- :d | f :- m :- :f :- | :d :- | s :- :f | s :- :s | - :s :- | :f :- | s :- :s

Doh is F

1. A n - gba - du - ra ____ fa - won se - nior a - wa, e - ya ____ te - wo kan fo - wo bo

8 | s :- : - | - : - : - | : : | r :- :r | f :- :s | - :r :- | :d :- | d :- :ta | d :- : - | - :d :-

ju ____ O - sa le mi lo e - ko re wa ____ le

13 | s :- d' :- | r :- :s | f :- :s | - :r :- | :d :- | d :- :ta | d :- : - | - :d :-

I - l'o - yin - bo le mi lo e - ko re wa ____ le

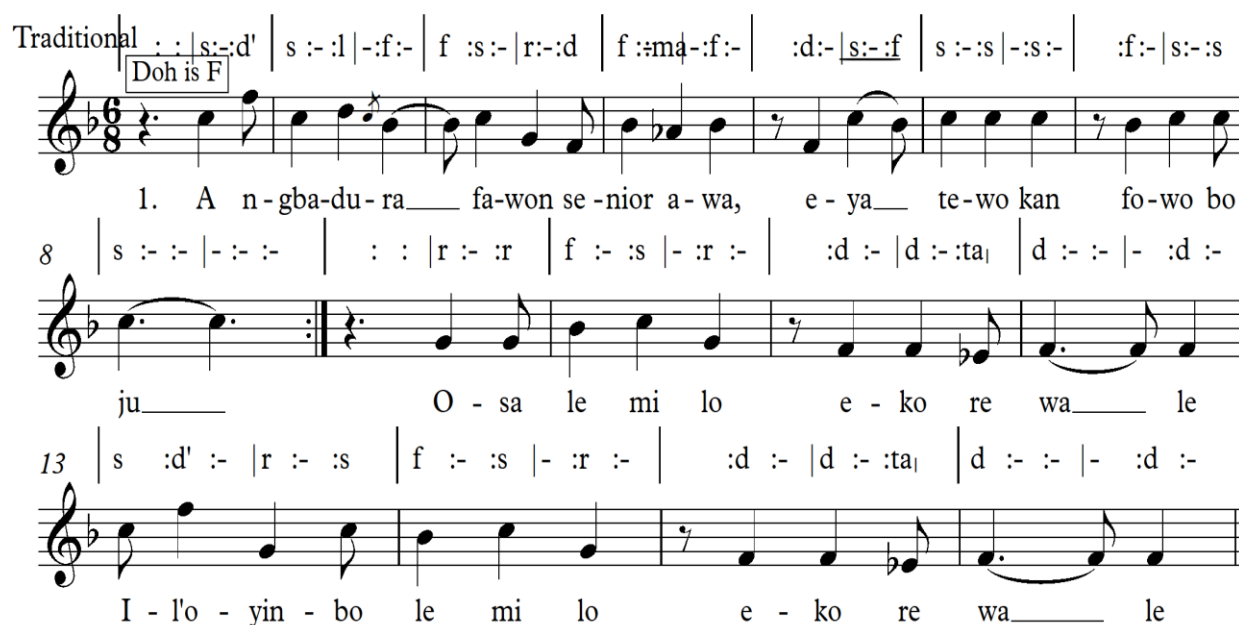


Figure 10. *Excerpt from A N Gbadura F'awon Senior Awa*

Text of “A N Gbadura F'awon Senior Awa” (Yoruba and English Translation)

Yoruba Text

A ngbadura f'awon senior awa

E ya t'ewo, kan ya f'owo boju

O sa l'awa a a kore wa si'le

Ilu Oyinbo l'e e lo k'ore wa s'ile

English Translation

We are praying for our seniors.

Let us wish them well.

We shall all be fruitful in our endeavours.

You are attaining greater heights.

Song 6: *Mo Pe Yin*

Mo Pe Yin stands out for its polyphonic texture and Mixolydian scale, which create a richer and more layered musical experience. The compound duple rhythm supports the song's dynamic movement, while the range from A3 to B4 allows for expressive vocal interplay. The textual content honours individuals and families, reinforcing social hierarchy and communal respect. The song's structure and performance practice highlight the importance of recognition and honour within Yewa culture.

Traditional $\text{♩} = 70$
Doh is E

Call

Response

7

mo - pe yin e-mi ma pe yin mo-fo - ri ba - le e-ko wa r'o-de're

mo-pe Pro-fe so

e-mi ma pe yin mo fo - ri ba - le e-ko wa r'o-de're

ko-wa ko-wa ja

Figure 11. *Excerpt from Mo Pe Yin*

Text of “*Mo Pe Yin*” (Yoruba and English Translation)

Yoruba Text

Mo pe yin, emi ma pe yin mo foribalẹ

Ẹ ko wa r'ode ire

Mo pe Şiyanbọla

Nitor'omọ rẹ ni n ba n jo

Mo pe Professor

Nitor'omọ rẹ ni n ba n jo

Mo pe yin, emi ma pe yin mo foribalẹ

English Translation

I call you and I bow.

Take us out for goodies.

I call Şiyanbọla.

His child has the floor.

I call Professor.

His child is dancing.

I call you and I bow.

Yoruba Text*E ko wa r'ode ire***English Translation**

Take us out for goodies.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Bolojo performance in secondary schools functions as a dynamic site of cultural transmission, identity formation, and social cohesion. This aligns with broader ethnomusicological scholarship which argues that traditional music in African societies is not merely an artistic practice but a medium through which cultural knowledge, social values, and communal identities are reproduced (Agawu, 2016; Nketia, 1974). The school environment, as observed in Figures 1, 2, and 3, provides a structured yet socially vibrant space where students engage with Bolojo as both a musical and cultural practice.

The prominence of call and response forms across the analysed songs reflects a core feature of Yoruba musical aesthetics, which emphasise dialogue, communal participation, and collective identity (Vidal, 2012). In school performances, this dialogic structure fosters a sense of belonging among students, enabling them to participate actively in the musical process. The rhythmic vitality and dance movements associated with Bolojo further reinforce this communal ethos. As Arom (1991) notes, African rhythmic systems often serve as frameworks for social coordination, and this is evident in the synchronised drumming and dance formations observed during Cultural Day events.

The textual themes of the songs reveal the moral and philosophical dimensions of Bolojo. Songs such as *Eni Oluwa Se Loore* and *Ire Loju Owo N Ri* articulate values of gratitude, goodwill, and moral assurance, reflecting the ethical foundations of Yewa culture. This aligns with Omojola's (2012) argument that Yoruba musical texts often serve as vehicles for moral instruction and social commentary. In the school context, these themes contribute to character formation, reinforcing values that are central to communal life.

The dialectal expressiveness of Bolojo is particularly significant in the school environment. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, students perform in full dialect, demonstrating linguistic competence and cultural pride. This supports Adegbite's



(1994) assertion that indigenous music plays a crucial role in sustaining linguistic heritage. In a multilingual nation such as Nigeria, where dominant languages often overshadow minority dialects, the performance of Bolojo in schools helps preserve the Yewa dialect and reinforces students' sense of identity.

The integration of Bolojo into school events also reflects broader trends in music education. Scholars such as Campbell (2004) and Schippers (2010) argue that culturally responsive music education enhances students' engagement and fosters deeper connections to their heritage. The performances observed in this study exemplify this principle, as students demonstrate enthusiasm, creativity, and cultural pride during Bolojo performances. The presence of traditional instruments, costumes, and dance formations, as illustrated in Figures 1 to 3, further enriches the educational experience by providing students with opportunities to engage with indigenous artistic practices.

Moreover, the structural features of the songs reveal the musical coherence and pedagogical value of Bolojo. The predominance of pentatonic and mixolydian scales, the accessibility of vocal ranges, and the clarity of rhythmic patterns make Bolojo suitable for school performance. This supports Nzewi's (1997) argument that African musical systems possess inherent pedagogical qualities that facilitate learning and participation.

In sum, the discussion highlights that Bolojo performance in secondary schools is not merely an artistic activity but a culturally embedded practice that contributes to identity formation, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. The integration of Bolojo into school events demonstrates the genre's adaptability and its continued relevance in contemporary educational contexts. The findings underscore the importance of sustaining indigenous musical traditions within formal education, as they provide rich opportunities for cultural learning, artistic development, and communal engagement.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Bolojo performance in secondary schools is far more than an extracurricular activity; it is a vital cultural institution through which Yewa communities sustain identity, transmit indigenous knowledge,



and cultivate social cohesion among young people. Within the school environment, Bolojo becomes a pedagogical space where musical structure, dialectal expressiveness, and embodied performance practice converge to reinforce cultural memory and communal belonging. The genre's characteristic rhythmic organisation, scalar patterns, and textual themes provide students with a framework for understanding their heritage not only as an artistic tradition but as a lived social philosophy.

By analysing the structural and textual features of selected Bolojo songs, this study offers a foundational resource for scholars and educators seeking to understand how indigenous musical forms adapt within contemporary educational settings. The evidence suggests that Bolojo's integration into school ceremonies strengthens cultural continuity, enhances students' linguistic competence in the Yewa dialect, and fosters a sense of collective identity that extends beyond the performance space. In this way, Bolojo contributes meaningfully to the formation of culturally grounded young citizens who can navigate modernity without losing connection to their roots.

The implications of this research extend to broader conversations about music education, cultural sustainability, and the role of indigenous arts in shaping social values. Future studies may pursue comparative analyses across Yoruba sub-groups to illuminate regional variations in musical pedagogy, or examine how Bolojo and related genres might be formally embedded within Nigerian music curricula. Such work would deepen understanding of how traditional performance practices can enrich contemporary education and ensure that indigenous musical knowledge continues to flourish across generations.

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