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Documenting Endangered Oral Traditions: A Study of Selected Yoruba Proverbs and Folktales

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ABSTRACT

Yoruba proverbs and folktales constitute important forms of oral heritage. These are means which cultural knowledge, moral values, social norms and indigenous worldviews are transmitted across generations. However, changing language practices, urbanisation, migration, modern entertainment and declining intergenerational interaction threaten the continuity of these traditions. This study examines selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales with the aim of documenting their cultural and linguistic meanings, analysing their social, moral and educational functions, and identifying strategies for their preservation and intergenerational transmission. The study adopts a qualitative approach and analyses 14 selected oral items comprising eight Yoruba proverbs and six folktale data units. These were collected through oral interviews and storytelling sessions with knowledgeable Yoruba speakers. The data were analysed thematically. This is with focus on metaphor, cultural meanings, moral values, social functions and educational significance. The findings reveal that Yoruba proverbs encode cultural knowledge through metaphorical expressions, while folktales communicate social and moral values through characters, actions and consequences. The study further establishes that documentation through audio-visual recording, transcription, translation and digital archiving can reduce the risk of cultural loss. It recommends stronger intergenerational storytelling, incorporation of oral traditions into education, digital preservation and active community participation in safeguarding Yoruba oral heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Iheanacho (2021), oral traditions constitute an important part of the cultural heritage of African societies. Proverbs, folktales, songs, riddles, myths and praise poetry have

traditionally served as means of transmitting cultural knowledge, moral values, social norms and collective experiences from one generation to another (Pranvendra, 2026). This is common among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. These forms of oral expression provide important resources for understanding Yoruba history, worldview, social relationships and values.

Yoruba proverbs are commonly known as *òwe*. Francis et al. (2025) acknowledge that proverbs are significant because they enable speakers to communicate complex ideas through concise and figurative expressions. They are frequently used to offer advice, settle disagreements, criticise inappropriate behaviour and reinforce social values. The saying *"Òwe lẹ́ṣin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọnù, òwe la fi ń wá a"* demonstrates the importance attached to proverbial speech in Yoruba culture. Yoruba folktales similarly perform educational and social functions. Narratives involving characters such as *Ijapa* (Tortoise) communicate lessons about wisdom, honesty, greed, patience, responsibility and the consequences of human actions (Iniobong, 2023).

Akanbi (2026) observes that Yoruba oral traditions face increasing threats from language shift, urbanisation, migration, formal education, globalisation and changing patterns of entertainment. Younger generations have fewer opportunities to learn traditional proverbs and folktales from older members of their communities. García et al. (2024) note that valuable cultural expressions disappear when knowledgeable elders die without transmitting their knowledge. Therefore, documentation is necessary to create lasting records of endangered oral traditions and make them available for future generations.

This study examines selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales. This is with focus on their cultural meanings, social functions and preservation. It argues that effective documentation should preserve not only the words of these traditions but also their original language, cultural context and performance features.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the cultural and linguistic meanings embedded in selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales.
2. To analyse the social, moral and educational functions of selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales.
3. To examine the importance of documenting Yoruba oral traditions and recommend strategies for their preservation and intergenerational transmission.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Oral Tradition

Hasanah and Andari (2020) acknowledge that oral tradition refers to cultural knowledge, beliefs, values, histories, stories and artistic expressions transmitted from one generation to another through speech and performance. Oral tradition has served as an important means of preserving community knowledge in many African societies (Ramohlale et al., 2026). This is common in societies where written records were historically limited. Finnegan (2012) explains that oral literature should not be viewed simply as literature without writing. This is because it has its own forms, structures, performance styles and social functions. Hence, oral tradition is a living cultural practice that depends on interaction between the speaker and the audience.

Similarly, Schniter et al. (2018) observes that oral traditions preserve historical and cultural information when they are transmitted across generations. However, their reliability and meaning depend on the circumstances of transmission and the social context in which they are performed. Therefore, documenting oral traditions requires attention to both the content of an oral expression and the context in which it is produced.

Oyenike et al. (2024) assert that oral tradition has historically played a major role in cultural education within Yoruba society. Elders use stories, proverbs, songs and other forms of oral expression to teach younger people about appropriate behaviour and community values (Olawale, 2025). Consequently, the weakening of oral transmission result in the loss of important cultural knowledge. Documentation becomes relevant because it provides a lasting record of traditions that are no longer regularly transmitted.

2.2 Yoruba Oral Tradition

Badru et al. (2024) note that Yoruba oral tradition consists of different forms of verbal art, including proverbs, folktales, riddles, praise poetry, songs, myths and legends. These forms are closely connected to Yoruba language and cultural practices. They provide ways through which members of the society express their experiences, beliefs and understanding of the world.

According to Folayan (2025), Yoruba oral traditions are important for understanding Yoruba thought and cultural values. Oral expressions contain references to family relationships, social responsibilities, religion, agriculture, human character and relationships between individuals and the community (Zulfa et al., 2025). Thus, Yoruba oral tradition functions as a means of preserving cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, Schniter et al. (2018) affirm that oral traditions are performed in particular social settings. A folktale may be told during a family gathering, while a proverb are introduced during a conversation, dispute or discussion. The meaning of an expression can therefore depend on the

participants and the situation. Hymes (1974) emphasises that language should be studied in relation to the social context in which communication takes place. This perspective is useful in examining Yoruba oral traditions because their meanings are often influenced by the circumstances of their use.

2.3 Yoruba Proverbs

Yoruba proverbs, known as *òwe*. Proverbs constitute one of the most important forms of Yoruba oral expression (Olofinsao, 2021). A proverb is generally a short and memorable statement that expresses an observation, advice or principle about life. Ehineni (2017) affirms that Yoruba proverbs are metaphorical. This means that their intended meaning may differ from the literal meaning of the words.

Yoruba proverbs also communicate expectations about social relationships. In addition, Atrimecia et al. (2026) acknowledge that proverbs are important instruments of moral instruction. They warn against greed, dishonesty, impatience, disrespect and irresponsible behaviour. Speakers use culturally familiar images to encourage listeners to interpret the intended message. Therefore, knowledge of Yoruba culture is important for understanding proverbial expressions.

Jegede and Osoba (2019) note that proverbs perform important pragmatic functions in communication. This is because speakers use them to achieve particular communicative purposes. Consequently, Yoruba proverbs should be examined according to how and why speakers use them in particular situations.

2.4 Yoruba Folktales

According to Wiysahnyuy and Valentine (2023), Yoruba folktales are traditional narratives transmitted mainly through oral performance. They commonly feature human beings, animals, supernatural characters and other figures that represent different aspects of human behaviour. Among the most recognisable characters is *Ijapa*, or Tortoise. This is frequently portrayed as intelligent and clever but also selfish, greedy or deceptive.

Bauer (2024) affirms that the use of animal characters enables storytellers to discuss human behaviour indirectly. A story in which Tortoise deceives other animals to obtain more food may communicate a warning against greed. Although the story is presented as entertainment, the audience is expected to understand the moral lesson arising from the character's actions.

Sone (2018) explains that African prose narratives have important social and cultural functions. They entertain audiences while also providing opportunities for instruction and socialisation.

Similarly, Nocheva (2023) argues that folklore transmit cultural values and provide explanations of social behaviour.

Furthermore, Yoruba folktales involve interaction between the storyteller and the audience. The storyteller use repetition, songs, gestures, changes in voice and questions to maintain audience attention. Children also participate by responding to familiar expressions. Thus, the performance itself is part of the tradition. A written version of a folktale may preserve the narrative but fail to capture all the elements of the original performance.

2.5 Cultural and Educational Functions of Yoruba Proverbs and Folktales

Yoruba proverbs and folktales perform important educational, moral, social and cultural functions. The value is in their ability to transmit knowledge and guide behaviour through familiar language and narratives. Oyenike et al. (2024) observe that Yoruba oral literature provides a means of transmitting indigenous knowledge for educational development. Similarly, Olawale (2025) explains that elders use oral traditions to influence the moral values, attitudes and behavioural patterns of children. Younger members learn values such as respect, honesty, patience, responsibility and cooperation. This is through proverbs and folktales.

In addition, Yoruba proverbs serve as effective instruments of advice and social regulation. Olofinsao (2021) notes that proverbs have been used in Yoruba communities to manage social and community affairs. Meanwhile, Francis et al. (2025) demonstrate their use as warning and advisory expressions in everyday Yoruba conversation. Thus, proverbial speech enables speakers to correct behaviour and communicate sensitive messages without direct confrontation. Jegede and Osoba (2019) similarly show that proverbs perform important pragmatic functions in communication.

Folktales also contribute to moral education by presenting characters whose actions produce positive or negative consequences. Tortoise narratives use humour and allegory to explore human behaviour and provide lessons for children (Iniobong Archibong, 2023). Wiysahnyuy and Valentine (2023) further establish that folktales function as indigenous pedagogic tools for educating children.

Furthermore, oral traditions strengthen cultural identity by preserving language, collective memory and indigenous knowledge. Badru et al. (2024) affirm the cultural value of Yoruba oral forms, while Hasanah and Andari (2020) emphasise the transmission of social and cultural values through oral tradition. Therefore, preserving these traditions is essential for maintaining Yoruba cultural knowledge across generations.

2.6 Endangerment of Yoruba Oral Traditions

Yoruba remains widely spoken. However, some traditional forms of oral expression are becoming less familiar among younger generations. One major factor is language shift. The increasing use of English in education, employment, administration and digital communication has reduced the frequency with which some traditional Yoruba expressions are used (Ugwuanyi & Aboh, 2026). Consequently, younger speakers understand Yoruba but have limited knowledge of older proverbs, folktales and culturally specific expressions. Ehineni (2017) shows that Yoruba proverbs contain culturally grounded metaphors, suggesting that reduced knowledge of such expressions also affect access to important aspects of Yoruba cultural meaning.

Furthermore, urbanisation and migration have altered patterns of intergenerational interaction. Olawale (2025) notes that oral traditions have traditionally depended on elders as custodians and transmitters of cultural knowledge. However, when younger people move away from their communities, opportunities for regular interaction with knowledgeable elders may decline. Schniter et al. (2018) demonstrate the importance of older members of communities in the transmission of knowledge through oral traditions. Similarly, Olawale (2025) highlights the role of elders in transmitting moral values and behavioural patterns to children.

Changing forms of entertainment also present a challenge. Smartphones, social media and other digital platforms have transformed how young people access stories and information. However, digitisation can also provide opportunities for preservation and wider dissemination of oral materials (Akanbi, 2026). This makes digital technology both a potential threat to traditional storytelling practices and a useful preservation tool.

In addition, limited attention to indigenous oral traditions in formal education may weaken their transmission. Oyenike et al. (2024) emphasise the educational value of Yoruba oral literature and indigenous knowledge. Therefore, the disappearance of proverbs and folktales represents a cultural and linguistic concern. This is because it may result in the loss of vocabulary, historical knowledge, moral values and culturally specific ways of understanding society.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales as endangered forms of oral tradition. The qualitative approach is considered suitable because the study focuses on the meanings, cultural values, communicative functions and preservation of oral expressions rather than statistical measurement. The study combines oral data collection with documentary sources in order to provide a broader understanding of the

selected Yoruba oral traditions. The data for the study consist of 14 selected oral items comprising eight Yoruba proverbs and six folktale data units. The items were selected based on their relevance to Yoruba cultural life and their representation of values.

The primary data were collected from knowledgeable Yoruba speakers. This was older members of the community who have acquired traditional proverbs and folktales through intergenerational transmission. Data were collected through semi-structured oral interviews and storytelling sessions. Participants were encouraged to provide proverbs that they remembered and explain their meanings and the situations in which they were traditionally used. The folktales were collected through oral narration, allowing participants to narrate the stories in Yoruba in a natural manner. Participants were asked to explain culturally specific words, expressions, characters and events. The oral narratives and responses were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Attention was given to preserving the original Yoruba forms because translating oral expressions directly into English result in the loss of cultural meanings.

In addition to the oral data, relevant scholarly literature on Yoruba oral traditions, African folklore, proverbs, indigenous knowledge and cultural preservation was consulted. The works of relevant scholars provided theoretical and contextual support for interpreting the collected materials. The combination of primary oral data and existing literature also strengthens the interpretation of the findings.

The collected data were analysed thematically. The proverbs were grouped according to their dominant themes. Each proverb was examined in terms of its literal meaning, implied meaning, cultural significance and communicative function. Attention was also given to the situations in which the proverbs are used and the social lessons they communicate. This is important because Yoruba proverbs often derive their meaning from the context in which they are used. Olofinsao (2021) and Francis et al. (2025) demonstrate that Yoruba proverbs can serve important advisory, warning and social-regulatory functions in everyday communication.

The folktales were analysed according to their major themes, characters, actions, conflicts and moral lessons. Particular attention was given to recurring characters such as Ijapa (Tortoise). The analysis examined how the stories communicate values and provide lessons about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Finally, the analysis considered the implications of the findings for the preservation of Yoruba oral traditions. The study examined how language shift, changing lifestyles, reduced intergenerational interaction and the influence of digital entertainment may affect the

transmission of proverbs and folktales. At the same time, attention was given to the possibility of using digital technologies to document, store and disseminate these traditions. The analysis therefore considers documentation as the preservation of language, cultural meanings, performance practices and the contexts in which oral traditions are transmitted.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Cultural and Linguistic Meanings Embedded in Selected Yoruba Proverbs and Folktales

A prominent linguistic feature observed in the proverbs is metaphor. This can be seen in the following data:

Data 1: *Òwe lẹ́ṣin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọnù, òwe la fi ń wá a.*

Translation: "Proverb is the horse of speech; when speech is lost, proverb is used to search for it."

The expression uses *ẹṣin* (horse) metaphorically. A horse is normally used for movement or transportation. Nonetheless, it represents the role of *òwe* in carrying and strengthening speech in this proverb. The expression suggests that effective communication in Yoruba society is closely associated with proverbial knowledge. The proverb also reflects a cultural preference for indirect and sophisticated communication. Ehineni (2017) observes that Yoruba proverbs frequently employ conceptual and cultural metaphors through which speakers communicate culturally grounded meanings. Therefore, documenting this proverb requires attention to the metaphorical relationship between *ẹṣin* and *ọ̀rọ̀*.

Data 2: *Àgbà kì í wà lójà, kí orí ọmọ tuntun wọ́.*

Translation: "An elder does not remain in the marketplace while the head of a newborn becomes misshapen."

The words *àgbà* (elder), *ọmọ tuntun* (newborn) and *orí* (head) carry important cultural meanings. Literally, the proverb describes an elder's responsibility to ensure that a child's head is properly shaped. However, at the cultural level, the newborn represents the younger generation, while the elder represents experience, knowledge and responsibility. The proverb communicates the expectation that elders should guide younger members of society. It also reflects the Yoruba conception of communal responsibility where the wellbeing of younger people is not regarded solely as the responsibility of their immediate parents.

Data 3: *Àgbà tó bá ní ọgbọ́n, ọmọ tó bá ní ìwà.*

Translation: "An elder should possess wisdom, and a child should possess good character."

The proverb establishes a relationship between age and wisdom on one hand and youth and good character on the other. Linguistically, the parallel structure creates emphasis by placing *àgbà* and *ọmọ* in contrast. Culturally, it presents qualities expected from different members of society. The elder is expected to provide knowledge and guidance, while the younger person is expected to demonstrate good conduct. This reinforces the importance of intergenerational relationships within Yoruba society.

Data 4: *Bí a bá ń ṣe rere, rere la ń rí.*

Translation: "When one does good, one receives good."

The repetition of *rere* creates a simple but memorable structure. The proverb expresses the cultural belief that good actions produce positive consequences. Its meaning is therefore both moral and social. It encourages individuals to consider the consequences of their behaviour towards others.

Data 5: *Sùúrù ni baba ìwà.*

Translation: "Patience is the father of character."

Baba (father) is used metaphorically here to establish patience as a foundational quality. The expression does not refer to biological parenthood. Meanwhile, it suggests that patience produces or supports good character. This reflects a Yoruba cultural expectation that individuals should exercise restraint when dealing with difficult circumstances. The proverb demonstrates how kinship vocabulary can be extended metaphorically to express abstract cultural concepts.

Data 6: *Ọ̀pọ̀ ọwọ́ la fi ń gbé ẹrù.*

Translation: "It takes many hands to carry a load."

The *ẹrù* (load) represents difficulties or responsibilities, while *ọ̀pọ̀ ọwọ́* (many hands) represents cooperation. The proverb therefore communicates the idea that collective effort makes difficult tasks easier. Its linguistic simplicity conceals a broader cultural principle concerning cooperation and communal responsibility. This meaning is consistent with the broader role of Yoruba oral traditions in transmitting social values (Hasanah & Andari, 2020; Oyenike et al., 2024).

The folktales provide cultural meanings through narrative. Among the 15 folktales analysed, stories involving *Ijapa* (Tortoise) occur prominently. In these narratives, Ijapa is frequently represented as intelligent, adventurous, clever and resourceful. However, his intelligence is sometimes accompanied by greed, selfishness and deception.

Data 7: Ijapa and the sharing of food

In one of the selected narratives, Ijapa devises a strategy to obtain a larger share of food than the other animals. He uses his intelligence to manipulate the situation in his favour. Although his strategy initially succeeds, the outcome exposes the negative consequences of selfishness.

The significance of this narrative lies in the symbolic representation of Ijapa. The tortoise does not simply function as an animal character. He represents particular human qualities. His cleverness demonstrates the value of intelligence, whereas his greed demonstrates how intelligence can be misused. Iniobong Archibong (2023) similarly discusses the allegorical significance of the tortoise in African folklore. Thus, the narrative communicates cultural knowledge through characterisation and consequence.

Data 8: Ijapa and deception

Another selected folktale presents Ijapa using deception to overcome a difficult situation. His ability to manipulate other characters demonstrates resourcefulness. However, the eventual consequences of his actions expose the dangers of dishonesty. The story presents a distinction between *ọgbọ́n* (wisdom or cleverness) and acceptable character. In the Yoruba cultural context, possessing intelligence is valuable. Nevertheless, intelligence is expected to be accompanied by *ìwà* (good character).

This relationship between intelligence and character is significant. This is because it demonstrates that Yoruba oral traditions do not simply praise cleverness. Instead, they encourage the responsible use of knowledge. The story provides a cultural framework through which children distinguishes between being clever and being morally upright.

The folktales also contain culturally significant settings and activities. References to farming, markets, family relationships, communal gatherings and interactions between elders and younger people provide glimpses into traditional Yoruba social organisation. Consequently, the narratives function as repositories of cultural information. Badru et al. (2024) emphasise the value of Yoruba oral forms in preserving cultural knowledge and practices.

Another linguistic characteristic of the data is the frequent use of repetition, parallel structures, metaphor and culturally specific vocabulary. Expressions such as *àgbà*, *ọmọ*, *ìwà*, *ọgbọ́n*, *sùúrù* and *rere* carry meanings that extend beyond their dictionary equivalents.

The analysis therefore demonstrates that the selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales are important linguistic records as well as cultural resources. Their meanings are embedded in the Yoruba language and social context. Consequently, translating them without preserving the

original Yoruba forms may result in the loss of some culturally specific meanings. This finding supports the need for detailed documentation that includes the original expression, transcription, translation, explanation and context of use.

4.2 Social, Moral and Educational Functions of Selected Yoruba Proverbs and Folktales

The second objective of the study is to analyse the social, moral and educational functions of selected Yoruba proverbs and folktales. A major social function of the proverbs is to provide advice and guidance. This is illustrated in the following data:

Data 9: *Sùúrù ni baba ìwà.*

Translation: "Patience is the father of character."

The proverb advises individuals to exercise patience mostly when faced with difficult situations. Socially, it encourages self-control and discourages impulsive behaviour. The use of *baba* (father) suggests that patience is presented as a foundational quality from which good character develops. The expression therefore performs both an advisory and moral function. It teaches the listener that desirable behaviour requires restraint and careful consideration.

Similarly, the following proverb emphasises the importance of collective effort.

Data 10: *Ọpọ̀ ọwọ́ la fi ń gbé ẹrù.*

Translation: "It takes many hands to carry a load."

The proverb promotes cooperation and communal responsibility. The "load" symbolises a difficult task or problem, while the "many hands" represent collective participation. Socially, the expression encourages people to work together rather than depend entirely on individual effort. This reflects the communal orientation found in many traditional Yoruba social practices. Hasanah and Andari (2020) similarly identify the transmission of social and cultural values as an important function of oral traditions.

Yoruba proverbs also perform a warning function. Consider the following:

Data 11: *Bí a bá ń ṣe rere, rere la ń rí.*

Translation: "When one does good, one receives good."

Although the expression appears simple, it establishes a moral relationship between conduct and consequence. It encourages individuals to treat others well because positive actions are expected to produce positive outcomes. Francis et al. (2025) identify warning and advisory expressions as important functions of Yoruba proverbs in routine communication. Therefore, proverbs serve as instruments of behavioural correction without requiring direct confrontation.

Another social function is the regulation of relationships between generations.

Data 12: *Àgbà kì í wà lójà, kí orí ọmọ tuntun wọ́.*

Translation: "An elder does not remain in the marketplace while the head of a newborn becomes misshapen."

In addition to its cultural meaning, the proverb performs a social function by reminding elders of their responsibility towards younger people. It also indirectly instructs younger members to recognise the guidance and experience of elders. Olawale (2025) similarly emphasises the role of elders and oral traditions in shaping the values and behavioural patterns of children.

The folktales perform similar functions through narrative. The selected *Ijapa* stories are particularly significant because the character's behaviour provides a framework for discussing morality. In several of the stories, Ijapa uses intelligence and deception to gain an advantage over other characters.

Data 13: Ijapa and the sharing of food

In the selected story, Ijapa attempts to obtain more than his fair share of food by using his cleverness to manipulate the other animals. His plan initially appears successful, but his actions eventually produce negative consequences. The narrative therefore teaches that greed and selfishness provides temporary advantages but results in punishment or loss.

The educational value of this narrative lies in the way the moral lesson is presented. Instead of telling children directly that greed is wrong, the story allows them to observe the behaviour of the character and its consequences. Wiysahnyuy and Valentine (2023) identify folktales as indigenous pedagogic resources capable of educating children. The Yoruba example demonstrates this principle by combining entertainment with moral instruction.

Data 14: Ijapa and deception

Another selected story portrays Ijapa using deception to solve a problem. His intelligence enables him to overcome an immediate difficulty, but the consequences of his dishonesty reveal the limits of cleverness without good character. The story consequently teaches that *ọgbọ́n* (wisdom or cleverness) should be accompanied by *ìwà* (good character).

This distinction is educationally significant. The child learns that intelligence is valuable but should not be used to exploit others. Iniobong Archibong (2023) similarly identifies the tortoise as an allegorical figure through which human behaviour and children's experiences can be explored.

The folktales also contribute to socialisation because they introduce younger members of society to expected patterns of behaviour. Through stories about cooperation, honesty, respect and

responsibility, children learn how individuals should relate to other members of the community. Oyenike et al. (2024) emphasise that Yoruba oral literature provides access to indigenous knowledge that can contribute to educational transformation.

In addition, the oral traditions have an entertainment function. Humour, suspense, repetition, characterisation and surprising outcomes make the stories enjoyable. The entertainment element is important because it encourages audiences, especially children, to listen and remember the lessons. The educational message is embedded within an engaging narrative.

The data also demonstrate that the social, moral and educational functions of Yoruba oral traditions are interconnected. A proverb that advises patience also teaches moral discipline. A folktale about Ijapa's greed entertains the audience while teaching appropriate behaviour; and a proverb about elders reinforces both social relationships and intergenerational responsibility. Olofinsao (2021) confirms the wider social importance of Yoruba proverbs by demonstrating their role in indigenous administration and community affairs.

4.3 Importance of Documenting Yoruba Oral Traditions and Strategies for Preservation and Intergenerational Transmission

The third objective examines the importance of documenting Yoruba oral traditions and recommends strategies for their preservation and intergenerational transmission. When proverbs and folktales are no longer regularly used or performed, they become vulnerable to gradual loss. Documentation therefore provide a permanent record of cultural materials that may otherwise disappear. If the proverb is preserved only through its English translation, some of its linguistic and cultural significance are reduced. Ehineni (2017) demonstrates the close relationship between metaphorical language in Yoruba proverbs and cultural meaning. Therefore, documentation should preserve both the original Yoruba expression and its translation.

The folktales present a similar documentation challenge. The 15 stories contain characters, expressions, settings and narrative practices that provide information about Yoruba cultural life. The recurring representation of *Ijapa* (Tortoise), for example, preserves cultural ideas concerning cleverness, greed, deception and human character. Iniobong Archibong (2023) identifies the allegorical significance of the tortoise in African folklore. Recording these narratives therefore preserve the stories and the cultural meanings associated with their characters.

Another important finding concerns the role of elders in transmission. The data indicate that older speakers are important custodians of traditional knowledge. Proverbs and folktales are often acquired through listening, observation and participation rather than through formal

instruction. However, changes in family structures, migration, urbanisation and contemporary lifestyles reduce opportunities for younger people to interact with elders. Olawale (2025) stresses the role of elders in shaping children's moral values and behavioural patterns, while Schniter et al. (2018) demonstrate the importance of older members of communities in the transmission of knowledge.

The study therefore recommends systematic audio and video documentation. Oral performances should be recorded directly from knowledgeable Yoruba speakers. The recordings should be accompanied by written transcriptions, English translations and explanations of cultural meanings. Information about the narrator, location, date and context of performance should also be preserved. This approach would ensure that future researchers and community members can understand not only what was said but also how and why it was said.

Digital preservation is another important strategy. The recorded materials can be stored in digital archives and made available through educational websites, podcasts, mobile applications and other appropriate digital platforms. Akanbi (2026) emphasises the potential of digitisation for preserving and disseminating Nigerian oral literature. Digital platforms therefore provide younger Yoruba speakers with easier access to traditional materials.

However, preservation should not depend entirely on technology. The continued intergenerational transmission of Yoruba oral traditions remains essential. Parents, grandparents, teachers and community leaders should create opportunities for children and young adults to encounter traditional proverbs and folktales. Oyenike et al. (2024) highlight the educational value of Yoruba oral literature and its potential contribution to indigenous knowledge and educational transformation.

Schools should also support preservation by incorporating Yoruba proverbs and folktales into language and literature lessons. Students should be encouraged to record stories from their grandparents, explain the meanings of proverbs and document local versions of traditional narratives. Such activities would transform learners from passive recipients into active participants in cultural preservation.

Moreover, preservation projects should encourage community participation and ownership. Elders and cultural custodians should be involved in selecting, interpreting and explaining the materials being documented. The process should recognise that oral traditions belong to living communities and should not be treated merely as historical objects.

5. Recommendations

Systematic documentation should be prioritised. Researchers, universities and cultural organisations should work with Yoruba elders and other knowledgeable speakers to record proverbs and folktales before they are lost. The recordings should include the original Yoruba versions, transcriptions, English translations and explanations of cultural meanings.

Also, digital technology should be incorporated into preservation efforts. Audio and video recordings should be stored in digital archives. These should also be made available through websites, podcasts, mobile applications and other accessible platforms.

Additionally, Yoruba oral traditions should be integrated into formal education. Schools should use selected proverbs and folktales in Yoruba language, literature and cultural studies. Students should also be encouraged to collect stories and proverbs from parents and grandparents as part of classroom activities.

Furthermore, intergenerational transmission should be strengthened. Parents and grandparents should create opportunities for children to listen to and participate in storytelling. Community storytelling programmes will also provide spaces where elders transmit their knowledge directly to younger people.

In addition, communities should participate actively in preservation projects. Cultural custodians should be involved in recording, interpreting and validating the materials collected.

6. Conclusion

Yoruba proverbs and folktales are important components of Yoruba cultural heritage because they preserve language, indigenous knowledge, moral values and collective experiences. This study examined selected oral traditions. This is with attention to their cultural and linguistic meanings, social, moral and educational functions, and the importance of documentation and preservation.

The findings show that Yoruba proverbs communicate complex cultural ideas through metaphor, symbolism and culturally specific expressions. They provide knowledge about respect, wisdom, patience, good character, communal responsibility and interpersonal relationships. The folktales also preserve cultural meanings through characters, events and narrative consequences. The recurring representation of *Ijapa* (Tortoise) provides lessons about intelligence, greed, deception and responsible behaviour.

The study further establishes that proverbs and folktales serve important social, moral and educational purposes. They provide advice, warnings and moral instruction while helping

younger generations understand acceptable behaviour and community values. However, changing lifestyles, language practices and reduced intergenerational interaction threaten their continued transmission.

Therefore, systematic documentation is essential. Recording, transcription, translation, digital archiving and educational integration can help preserve these traditions. Nevertheless, documentation should complement, not replace, intergenerational transmission. Families, schools and communities must continue to teach and perform these traditions. Preserving Yoruba oral traditions is consequently essential for sustaining Yoruba language, cultural identity and indigenous knowledge for future generations.

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The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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