



# Oral Traditions and Cultural Identity: A Study of Nigerian Folktales

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## Abstract

This study examines how Nigerian folktales function as reservoirs of cultural identity, moral instruction, and collective memory across six major ethnic groups. Drawing on authoritative scholarly works, ethnographic records, and curated oral literature, the paper analyses the values, social norms, and worldviews expressed in Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, Fulani and Kanuri narratives. The findings show that Yoruba tales foreground cleverness, reciprocity and communal accountability; Igbo stories emphasise republican ethics, responsibility and fairness; Hausa narratives promote moderation, family cohesion and Islamic moral principles; Tiv tales integrate performance, social commentary and collective responsibility; Fulani narratives highlight pastoral values such as patience, dignity and endurance; and Kanuri stories preserve royal memory, Islamic knowledge and ancestral legitimacy. Across groups, folktales remain vital tools for transmitting identity, strengthening moral behaviour and fostering social cohesion. Despite modern pressures from media, migration and cultural change, oral storytelling continues to adapt while retaining its core pedagogical functions. The study concludes that folktales are central to sustaining cultural continuity in Nigeria and recommends enhanced documentation, digital archiving, inclusion in educational curricula and support for community storytelling practices.

**Keywords:** Nigerian Folktales; Cultural Identity; Oral Traditions; Moral Education; Indigenous Narratives

## Introduction

Across Africa, oral traditions function as the oldest and most enduring archive of communal knowledge, predating literacy and serving as the primary medium through which societies preserve histories, transmit philosophy, and regulate social behaviour. Scholars describe African oral traditions as a “dynamic cultural system” that embeds memory, morality, and social order within performance, ritual, and narrative (Finnegan, 2012). In the absence of widespread written documentation for much of African history, these traditions, including legends, myths, praise poetry, proverbs, and folktales, have operated as the people’s living library, ensuring intergenerational continuity. Among many African communities, storytelling is not merely an artistic endeavour but a social institution woven into evening gatherings, rites of passage, and communal education. Even in the contemporary era characterised by urbanisation and digital technology, oral traditions remain central to cultural self-definition and collective identity.

Within this wider African context, folktales play a particularly significant role in shaping cultural identity. Folktales convey fundamental values, explaining the moral universe of a community through symbolic characters, conflict-resolution patterns, and ethical lessons. According to Okpewho (2013), African folktales constitute “a corpus of people’s wisdom, expressed through narrative performance,” functioning simultaneously as moral instruction, entertainment, and socio-political commentary. These narratives teach respect, communal responsibility, fairness, courage, and wisdom, values that anchor identity formation from childhood to adulthood. They also serve as cultural mirrors, reflecting a people’s worldview, cosmology, and social hierarchies. The trickster figures of West African tales, including *Àjàpá* the tortoise among the Yorùbá and *Mbe* the tortoise among the Igbo, encode philosophical reflections on human behaviour, power, and survival. Thus, folktales remain powerful vessels through which Nigerian ethnic groups articulate who they are, where they come from, and how society ought to function.

Nigeria's multicultural landscape offers a particularly rich field for examining folktales and cultural identity. With over 250 ethnic groups, the nation embodies multiple narrative traditions embedded within diverse linguistic, religious, and historical contexts. This study focuses on major ethnocultural blocs whose storytelling traditions have been extensively documented: the Yorùbá of the Southwest, the Igbo of the Southeast, the Hausa of the North, and the Tiv of the Middle Belt. Among the Yorùbá, storytellers (*akòwé itan*) traditionally transmit didactic tales involving animals, spirits, and deities, reinforcing social norms and cosmological beliefs (Ojo, 2020). Igbo folktales, typically performed during moonlight gatherings (*nkocha nta*), emphasise communal ethics, industriousness, and family honour (Onwukwe, 2019). The Hausa maintain a vibrant tradition of *tatsuniya*, often narrated by professional storytellers known as *mata wawa*, which blend Islamic influences with indigenous motifs (Sani, 2015). Similarly, Tiv folktales, rich in humour, satire, and ancestral philosophy, serve as tools for teaching children moral behaviour and social expectations (Akiga, 2019). Together, these traditions highlight the diversity and shared values of Nigerian communities, providing fruitful ground for analysing how folktales reinforce identity and transmit cultural memory across generations.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the richness of Nigerian folktales, their role in shaping cultural identity is increasingly threatened by modernization, globalization, digital media, and the decline of traditional storytelling spaces. Scholars have noted significant erosion in the intergenerational transmission of oral narratives, particularly in urban areas where Western media and formal schooling dominate children's cultural exposure (Adeyemi & Salawu, 2020). Furthermore, existing studies tend to focus on isolated ethnic groups rather than offering comparative analyses across Nigeria's major cultural regions. Consequently, there is a research gap in understanding how diverse Nigerian folktales collectively contribute to cultural identity formation, and what their declining transmission means for cultural continuity. This study therefore investigates the thematic, moral, and symbolic content of folktales among major Nigerian ethnic groups and examines their contemporary relevance in the context of cultural preservation.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To document and analyze selected folktales from major Nigerian ethnic groups including the Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, and Fulani.
2. To examine the role of these folktales in constructing and transmitting cultural identity within their respective communities.
3. To explore the current pathways, challenges, and transformations in the transmission of Nigerian folktales.
4. To propose strategies for revitalizing Nigerian folktales for cultural preservation and educational integration.

### Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the preservation of Nigerian intangible cultural heritage by documenting narratives that may be at risk of fading. Second, it enriches academic discourse on folklore, cultural identity, and orality in Africa by providing a comparative, multi-ethnic analysis. Third, its findings may inform educational curriculum development by highlighting the pedagogical value of folktales in moral instruction and cultural awareness. Fourth, the results offer practical insights for cultural policymakers, archivists, and creative industries—such as authors, animators, and filmmakers—who seek to reinterpret and preserve traditional stories for modern audiences. Ultimately, the study reinforces the argument that folktales remain essential cultural resources that transmit values, sustain identity, and strengthen national unity in an increasingly globalized world.

## Literature Review

### Oral Traditions in African Societies

Oral traditions across Africa have been the subject of sustained scholarly attention because they combine aesthetic complexity with social function. Ruth Finnegan's landmark study demonstrates that African oral literature cannot be reduced to mere "speech" or anecdote; rather, it is an integrated set of poetic, dramatic and rhetorical practices whose meanings emerge in performance, in relation to audience, occasion, and social memory (Finnegan, 2012/1970). Finnegan insists that the "oral" status of a narrative in Africa is inseparable from its performance context: melody, gesture, repetition and audience interaction are constitutive of meaning. Isidore Okpewho complements this perspective by showing how oral epics and extended narratives perform communal history and identity; his comparative work on African epic traditions argues that African oral forms embody a poetics of performance that must be studied on their own terms rather than exclusively through literate comparanda (Okpewho, 1979). Karin Barber's ethnographic research, particularly on Yoruba *oriki* and praise genres, further demonstrates how oral genres archive familial and gendered histories and mediate memory in West African towns: the oral repertoire is a mnemonic technology that binds individuals to communal genealogies and reputations (Barber, 1991). Collectively, these scholars establish a theoretical and methodological baseline: oral narratives are living cultural systems that encode knowledge, regulate social behaviour, commemorate the past, and perform identity through performance. Finnegan (2012), Okpewho (1979), and Barber (1991) remain foundational references when exploring how folktales operate as part of wider oral ecologies in African societies.

### Nigerian Folktales as Cultural Texts

When attention shifts from the continental to the national and local, Nigerian folktales reveal both remarkable variety and recurring thematic structures: tricksters, origin myths, moral exemplars, and community-focused narratives. Yoruba folktales, often centered on the tortoise (Àjàpá/Ijápá), function as vehicles for moral reflection and social satire. Practitioners and anthologists such as Owomoyela (1997) and popular collectors (Walker, 1990) have documented the diversity of Àjàpá episodes and their normative work in socialization. Modern re-presentations of Yoruba tales, for example Adeyanju et al. (2015), demonstrate how oral materials are translated into new media while retaining ethical instruction and character types.

Among Igbo communities, folktales have been analysed as corrective pedagogies. Empirical work carried out by Okafor and Akpamgbo (2020) and subsequent narratological studies show that Igbo tales embed communal sanctions, gender expectations, and models of cooperation or retribution. Scholars such as Ugwuoke et al. (2018) and recent narratological treatments (Nnyagu et al., 2024) unpack how structural and linguistic features in Igbo tales encode social norms.

Hausa folktales and play-songs, particularly those directed at children, have been the focus of recent fieldwork that highlights continuity alongside change. Arabi's (2023) Gombe study finds high awareness of traditional tales but a marked shift in reception modes toward audio-visual media. Studies on Tiv folktales stress the centrality of the hare (kwagh-alom) and puppet theatre traditions (kwagh-hir) in didactic community performance and in transmitting democratic and communal ideals (Iloraa & Iyue; Ikenga journal pieces).

Fulani (Fulbe) oral repertoires, though more dispersed in the literature, are documented in studies of Sahelian pastoral oral genres and in analyses of Hausa-Fulani intercultural lore, including conference proceedings and regional studies. Kanuri orality is best understood through historical and ethnographic sources that link Kanuri legends and courtly histories to the memory of the Kanem-Bornu polities (Historical Dictionary entries; regional ethnographies). Comparative synthesizing sources such as the *Palgrave Handbook of African Oral Traditions and Folklore* (2021) provide frameworks for cross-ethnic comparison and are particularly useful where community-specific literature is thin or dispersed.

Across these Nigerian traditions, folktales function as cultural texts: symbolic systems that carry, in condensed narratives, the ethical precepts, cosmologies, and group memories that constitute communal identity.

## Identity Formation and Cultural Memory

The literature on cultural memory and identity situates folktales as mechanisms of collective remembering. Folktales help communities narrate their pasts, justify present social arrangements, and imagine moral futures. They are repositories of “symbolic autobiography” that condense cosmology, social law, and aspirational virtues into memorable, repeatable plots. Orality scholars emphasize two interlocking dynamics: transmission and performance. Transmission secures the intergenerational continuity of narrative kernels, including themes, character types, and moral outcomes, while performance renews and negotiates meaning in each act of telling (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1979).

Social-psychological accounts of identity formation, for example Tajfel and Turner (1979), remind us that cultural narratives are also social markers: they strengthen in-group cohesion by providing shared reference points and moral codes. Cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall (1990) complicate any essentialist reading by arguing that identities are constructed; they are “positions” within narrative frameworks, subject to history and power. Folktales therefore operate as both anchors and sites of negotiation, where identity can be re-interpreted under new socioeconomic and political pressures. Folktales are both mnemonic stores and active technologies for identity construction: they teach persons what it means to belong, how to behave, who counts as kin, and why certain values endure.

## Modern Threats to Oral Traditions

The literature increasingly documents threats to oral traditions in contemporary Nigeria while also charting creative responses. Urbanization and the breakdown of evening courtyard gatherings reduce occasions for live storytelling (Otuego, 2016). Globalization and mass media reconfigure the channels of reception. Arabi's (2023) fieldwork in Gombe shows children consuming folktales more via television and audiovisual formats than through live narration, while younger Nigerians sometimes regard folk genres as outmoded unless re-packaged for modern media.

These shifts produce both erosion and adaptation. Technological mediation can attenuate certain performative elements, including gesture and communal interaction, while increasing reach through recorded formats and animations (Adeyanju et al., 2015). Scholars call for documentation, curriculum integration, and community-led digitization projects to safeguard intangible heritage. Digital archives, school syllabi, and heritage festivals are proposed remedies in recent literature (Palgrave Handbook, 2021; Okanume & Oji, 2023). Several studies caution, however, that technological preservation cannot substitute for living performance: the social functions of folktales, including dispute resolution, moral correction, and solidarity formation, require contexts of communal practice that recordings alone do not replicate (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1979).

## Theoretical Framework

This study adopts **Cultural Identity Theory** as its primary theoretical frame, supplemented by concepts from social identity theory to explain intergroup dynamics. Cultural Identity Theory foregrounds narratives and collective memory as central to how groups imagine and maintain identity; Stuart Hall's influential formulations are particularly useful here because he treats identity as both a rooted heritage and an ongoing process of “becoming” (Hall, 1990). Folktales are therefore understood not merely as containers of fixed culture but as active narrative practices that continuously construct, contest, and reproduce identities. From this vantage, folktales perform four analytic functions in the present study: (1) they act as mnemonic devices that condense communal values and histories; (2) they operate as pedagogical scripts that model social behaviour; (3) they serve as social markers that delineate in-group membership; and (4) they are sites of negotiation where identity is adapted to new contexts (e.g., urban life, media). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) complements this framework by explaining how shared narratives contribute to in-group solidarity and intergroup boundary maintenance. Structuralist or functionalist lenses (e.g., Lévi-Strauss; Malinowski) remain valuable for particular micro-analyses of narrative structure or social function, but Cultural Identity Theory better captures the study's interest in performance, memory, and the negotiation of meaning under modern pressures.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive qualitative** design combining ethnographic fieldwork with textual and comparative analysis. The descriptive component provides rich contextualized accounts of storytelling situations, while textual analysis examines narrative structure, motifs, and discourse. The comparative element enables cross-ethnic comparison to identify shared patterns and distinctive cultural encodings.

### Data sources

Primary and secondary sources are triangulated to ensure robustness. Primary data include field recordings (audio and video) of indigenous oral narrations collected in community settings (with informed consent), interviews with traditional storytellers, cultural custodians, and teachers, and participant observation at storytelling events, festivals, and puppet theatre performances. Secondary sources include published folktale collections (e.g., Owomoyela, Walker), ethnographic monographs (Finnegan, Barber, Okpewho), academic articles (Arabi, Okafor & Akpamgbo), regional histories (Historical Dictionary entries), and edited handbooks (Palgrave Handbook). Digital artifacts (animated retellings, radio broadcasts, and social-media storytelling channels) are also analysed to capture contemporary transmission pathways.

### Sampling

Purposeful, maximum-variation sampling is used to select at least six ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, Fulani, Kanuri) that represent Nigeria's cultural breadth. Within each group, informant selection prioritizes recognized storytellers (griots, elders), cultural officers, and knowledgeable community members across gender and age. For textual sampling, representative tale types are selected across categories: trickster narratives, hero/epic tales, moral exempla, and origin/etiological stories. The study aims for a corpus of approximately 50–100 folktales per ethnic cluster where feasible (mixing oral recordings and published texts), acknowledging that logistics and access will vary by region.

### Data collection procedures

Fieldwork protocols include community entry via cultural councils and local institutions, securing gatekeeper permission, and obtaining institutional ethical clearance. Audio-visual equipment records performances; interviews follow semi-structured guides exploring meanings, variants, performative conventions, and perceived contemporary relevance. Transcription follows verbatim practice, including paralinguistic notes; translations are produced with back-translation checks to preserve idiomatic meaning.

### Data analysis

Transcribed materials and published texts are analysed through thematic analysis (to identify recurring moral, cosmological and social themes), narrative analysis (to map plot functions, character archetypes and structural motifs), and comparative cultural interpretation (to situate motifs in socio-historical context). NVivo or similar qualitative software assists in coding and memoing. Validation includes participant feedback sessions (member checking) and triangulation across data sources.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to university ethical protocols: informed consent (in local languages), cultural sensitivity to taboos or secret narratives (with respect for restricted stories), compensation for participants where culturally appropriate, anonymization when requested, and reciprocal sharing of collected materials with participating communities and local cultural institutions.

## Findings

### Yoruba

Yoruba folktales constitute one of the most richly documented oral repertoires in Africa, operating simultaneously as entertainment, pedagogy, social critique, and cosmological exposition. Owomoyela's (1997) extensive collection of Àjàpá (tortoise) tales demonstrates how the trickster functions as a moral mirror of society, embodying admirable ingenuity while exposing vices such as greed, pride, deceit, and impulsiveness. Through this ambiguity, storytellers frame moral reasoning not as blind obedience but as reflective judgment, enabling children and adults to negotiate complex social dilemmas. Barber's seminal ethnographic work (1991) shows that Yoruba oral genres, including *oríkì*, proverbs, chants, and folktales, exist in a mutually reinforcing network. This intertextuality ensures that folktales do not stand alone; rather, they are embedded in a wider cultural system where praise poetry, ancestral memory, and social identity are co-constructed.

Yoruba folktales consistently valorize social reciprocity, moderation, and communal accountability. Walker's (1990) study illustrates that narratives featuring characters like Tortoise, Dog, or Farmer often highlight the dangers of arrogance and selfish accumulation, reinforcing the cultural expectation of *iwa pele* (gentle character). In many Yoruba towns, elders still utilize tales during family gatherings as moral counselling tools and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Contemporary adaptations, particularly digital animations and YouTube narration channels, have been examined by Adeyanju, Tijani, and Adeyanju (2015), who note that while digital media retain narrative structure, they modify performative elements such as audience participation and call-and-response patterns. Despite these changes, the moral architecture of Yoruba tales remains intact, ensuring continued relevance in modern contexts.

### Igbo

Igbo folktales are deeply tied to republican social structures and the ethical imperatives of communal living. Okafor and Akpamgbo (2020) demonstrate that Igbo storytelling is primarily a didactic practice, used to cultivate responsibility, diligence, humility, and respect for social norms. Narratives often revolve around consequences for antisocial behaviours such as dishonesty, laziness, and disobedience. Ugwuoke, Okonkwo, and Nwoye (2018) further argue that Igbo folktales articulate a civic ethic rooted in *ụmụnna* (kindred solidarity), showcasing how cooperation and fairness are essential for survival and community harmony.

A notable feature of Igbo tales is the presence of strong female characters and moralizing narratives addressing gender expectations. Nnyagu et al. (2024) highlight how stories involving clever maidens, trickster wives, or unjust stepmothers both reflect and contest patriarchal norms. Moreover, origin stories, such as how the tortoise cracked its shell or how certain villages obtained their names, serve as mnemonic anchors within decentralized Igbo sociopolitical life, legitimizing lineage histories and territorial claims. While urban migration and globalization have reduced communal storytelling contexts, studies by Uwah (2017) and Eze (2019) show that folklore clubs in southeastern schools and cultural festivals continue to revitalize these narratives. Thus, Igbo folktales remain key instruments of identity reproduction, moral discipline, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

### Hausa

Hausa folktales occupy a unique position at the intersection of Islamic scholarship, indigenous oral artistry, and the performative culture of the *zaman gida* (home circle). Furniss (1996) notes that Hausa storytelling, often led by women, grandmothers, or designated community narrators, is structured around evening gatherings where moral parables and humorous anecdotes are shared with children. Classic Hausa narratives emphasize moderation, responsibility, communal unity, and respect for authority, aligning with both pre-Islamic values and contemporary Islamic ethics. In many tales, characters such as the wise old woman, the humble farmer, the deceitful friend, or the boastful hunter serve as vehicles for moral instruction.

Arabi's (2023) recent survey in Gombe reveals that although knowledge of Hausa folktales remains widespread, storytelling practices are rapidly shifting toward mediated forms such as radio programmes,

animated series, and WhatsApp voice-note narrations. These new formats retain didactic themes but alter modes of engagement. Islamic influences are particularly evident in urban Hausa centres, where narratives increasingly incorporate Qur'anic moral principles, especially concerning honesty, patience, and divine justice. Correspondingly, Adamu (2001) argues that Hausa folktales have evolved into hybrid moral literature, especially when disseminated through popular children's radio shows. Consequently, Hausa storytelling remains a vibrant, adaptive tradition that continues to shape identity and moral consciousness across northern Nigeria.

### **Tiv**

Tiv folktales are inseparable from broader performative traditions such as *kwagh-hir* (puppet theatre) and *kwagh-alom* (hare tales), which combine music, sculpture, dance, and narrative drama. Bohannan and Bohannan's classic ethnography (1953) documents the centrality of storytelling in structuring Tiv communal life, political commentary, and moral education. Contemporary scholars such as Ioraa and Iyue (2019) argue that Tiv tales often convey democratic values, emphasize collective responsibility, and critique social misconduct. The trickster hare frequently symbolizes both ingenuity and moral failure, functioning as an accessible moral teacher.

Unlike Yoruba and Igbo traditions, Tiv folklore has a strong performative and theatrical dimension. *Kwagh-hir* performances dramatize folktales using carved masks and puppets, transforming moral lessons into communal spectacles. Iyua (2017) notes that these performances historically provided avenues for social critique, allowing communities to address leadership failures, domestic conflicts, or economic hardship through symbolic representation. Recent studies situate Tiv folktales as tools for peacebuilding and civic education, especially during periods of rural conflict or economic instability (Ujeede, 2020). Thus, Tiv folktales contribute not only to moral formation but also to political expression and communal resilience.

### **Fulani (Fulbe)**

Fulani folktales reflect the pastoral lifeways, mobility patterns, and ecological realities of Sahelian culture. Riesman's (1977) ethnography of Fulani storytelling in Niger and Nigeria emphasizes patience (*munyal*), restraint, dignity, and respect for elders as central moral values embedded in tales. Fulani narratives frequently revolve around cattle, herding, endurance, and the moral consequences of impulsive behaviour. Animal characters such as the clever hare, the deceitful hyena, or the noble cow often symbolize moral virtues or failures relevant to pastoral life.

Hausa–Fulani cultural intermixing has produced shared narrative motifs, as documented by Amadou (2018), who notes thematic overlaps in stories addressing honesty, social responsibility, and coexistence. Fulani tales also function as peacebuilding tools in regions experiencing farmer–herder tensions; Haruna (2019) reports that pastoral narratives are increasingly being used in community dialogues to foster mutual understanding between Fulani herders and sedentary farmers. Contemporary shifts, including sedentarization, formal schooling, and exposure to mass media, are transforming traditional narration formats. However, oral history projects in northern Nigeria continue to document Fulfulde folktales, ensuring that pastoral identity remains embedded in collective memory.

### **Kanuri**

Kanuri folktales are deeply entwined with the historical memory of the Kanem-Bornu empire, Islamic scholarship, and courtly traditions. Cohen (1967) and Brenner (2001) document how Kanuri oral forms, including praise songs, origin legends, and heroic narratives, preserve dynastic memory and reinforce political legitimacy. Kanuri folktales often revolve around wise rulers, loyal warriors, cunning adversaries, and moral metaphors illustrating leadership ethics, courage, communal loyalty, and divine providence.

Because Kanuri culture is historically connected to Islamic literacy traditions, folktales often blend with Ajami manuscript culture, Qur'anic schools, and festival performances (Last, 2008). Many tales serve to affirm Kanuri distinctiveness, narrating ancestral migrations, early Islamic conversion narratives, or legendary episodes associated with the Shehu dynasty. Although contemporary field-based studies on Kanuri folktales are fewer, available scholarship indicates strong thematic emphases on honour, lineage,

statecraft, and the sacred order. The limited documentation highlights a pressing scholarly gap and the need for targeted ethnographic research, particularly as modern displacement and conflict in the Lake Chad region pose threats to cultural continuity.

## Discussion

This study reveals that Nigerian folktales, though diverse in form and meaning across ethnic groups, converge around core values such as moral instruction, social responsibility, collective identity, and the regulation of behaviour. Yoruba narratives emphasise character formation through the motif of the trickster, presenting morality as a matter of reflection and self-regulation. Igbo tales foreground communal solidarity and personal responsibility within the republican ethos of the *umunna* system. Hausa stories integrate indigenous values with Islamic ethics, demonstrating how religious worldviews merge with oral traditions. Tiv tales stand out for their performative and dramatic qualities, transforming moral lessons into community events. Fulani stories encode pastoral values of patience, restraint, and endurance, mirroring the realities of nomadic life. Kanuri narratives reveal a deep memory of empire, leadership ideals, and Islamic scholarship.

A comparative analysis shows strong cultural convergence. All groups use storytelling as a medium for teaching children, socialising adults, reinforcing norms, and interpreting conflicts. Narratives commonly highlight virtues such as honesty, humility, respect for elders, courage, and communal harmony. The prevalence of animal characters across groups demonstrates a shared African narrative logic in which symbolic beings serve as moral exemplars.

However, cultural divergence appears in the specific ways each group encodes identity. Yoruba tales often articulate philosophical reflections on destiny and character. Igbo stories stress equity, justice, and social negotiation. Hausa and Fulani tales incorporate Qur'anic ethics more explicitly than the southern groups. Tiv narratives employ theatre and spectacle as core communicative tools. Kanuri tales preserve aristocratic memory, lineage legitimacy, and political values shaped by centuries of empire.

Across all groups, folktales reinforce cultural identity by transmitting origin stories, lineage histories, and cosmological understandings. Even in contemporary contexts marked by urbanisation, Western education, insecurity, and digital media, storytelling continues to adapt. Online animations, radio dramatizations, and community festivals provide new platforms for preserving these narratives. Therefore, folktales remain dynamic cultural instruments that sustain identity, strengthen communal bonds, and provide moral reasoning frameworks for younger generations.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Nigerian folktales are foundational pillars of cultural continuity, shaping moral consciousness, social relations, and group identity. Across the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, Fulani, and Kanuri societies, storytelling remains a vital educational and moral institution that transmits values from one generation to the next. Despite differences in historical experience, worldview, and performance styles, the narratives show substantial thematic overlap, especially in their emphasis on communal harmony and personal virtue.

The role of folktales goes beyond entertainment. They preserve history, articulate social expectations, mediate conflicts, and offer philosophical reflections on human behaviour. As Nigeria continues to navigate rapid social change, these narratives remain crucial resources for cultural renewal and national identity. Their survival depends on deliberate efforts from scholars, policymakers, communities, and cultural institutions.



## Recommendations

**1. Documentation in digital archives:** Traditional stories should be systematically collected, transcribed, translated, and stored in digital repositories accessible to researchers, teachers, and the public. This ensures preservation against displacement, loss of elders, and cultural erosion.

**2. Integration into school curricula:** Folktales should be incorporated into primary and secondary school literature, civic education, and cultural studies. This promotes value formation, encourages reading, and strengthens cultural identity among young learners.

**3. Community storytelling festivals:** Cultural organisations and local governments should support festivals, competitions, and evening storytelling gatherings. These events revitalise performance traditions, encourage intergenerational interaction, and sustain oral creativity.

**4. Support for oral literature scholars:** Institutions and funding bodies should invest in research grants, fieldwork sponsorships, postgraduate projects, and publications focused on Nigerian folktales. Strengthening scholarship ensures long-term preservation and global recognition of the nation's rich oral heritage.

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