



Oral Literature and the Spiritual Formation of Believers: An Assessment of Contemporary Worship in Tanzanian Pentecostal Churches

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Abstract : This article examines how oral-literary forms contribute to spiritual formation in contemporary Pentecostal churches in Tanzania. Adopting a qualitative and interpretive orientation, it brings scholarship on African oral literature into dialogue with participant accounts reported in the study. The analysis considers narratives, proverbs, spiritual songs, sermons, dramatic performances, riddles, and folktales as culturally situated modes of religious communication. The findings indicate that these forms can render theological instruction more intelligible and memorable, encourage affective and congregational participation, transmit moral values, reinforce communal identity, and connect Christian teaching with local languages and cultural memory. Their effectiveness, however, depends on critical and context-sensitive use: oral forms should illuminate rather than displace Scripture, and cultural continuity should be pursued without romanticizing every inherited practice. The article argues that oral literature remains relevant in technologically mediated worship because its dialogic, performative, and mnemonic qualities support both individual devotion and corporate belonging.

Keyword : oral literature; Pentecostal worship; spiritual formation; Tanzania; religious communication; cultural identity

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INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is a major repository of cultural memory, ethical reflection, and communal knowledge. It includes narratives, proverbs, songs, riddles, testimonies, and other verbal arts transmitted through speech and performance. In Pentecostal worship, these forms do more than embellish liturgy: they shape how religious claims are interpreted, remembered, and enacted. This article therefore examines the relationship between oral-literary practice and believers' spiritual formation in Tanzanian Pentecostal churches.

Within African societies, oral traditions have historically transmitted social norms, historical consciousness, and communal philosophies through spoken language, music, folktales, proverbs, riddles, and performance. Modernization, globalization, and digital media have altered the settings in which these forms circulate, but they have not eliminated their communicative force. Contemporary Christian communities continue to draw on indigenous songs, proverbial speech, testimony, and narrative illustration to interpret spiritual and moral teaching within locally intelligible frames.

The religious significance of oral literature may be considered along three related dimensions. Pedagogically, stories and proverbs translate abstract doctrines into concrete moral situations. Communally, shared singing,

testimony, and responsive speech cultivate participation and solidarity. Culturally, the use of indigenous languages and expressive forms sustains collective memory and can deepen the local intelligibility of worship (Mulokozi, 1996).

Oral literature also mediates relationships between generations. Where younger people encounter strong globalizing influences and diminished access to inherited cultural knowledge, worship can become a site in which language, history, and ethical memory are critically renewed. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) associates the use of indigenous languages and expressive traditions with cultural agency and intellectual independence; this insight is pertinent to religious institutions that seek to communicate Christianity without severing it from local experience.

Accordingly, the article asks how oral-literary forms function within contemporary Pentecostal worship and how they contribute to spiritual instruction, moral formation, communal cohesion, and cultural continuity. Its central claim is that oral literature remains formative not simply because it preserves the past, but because performance enables religious communities to reinterpret inherited resources in response to present spiritual and social concerns.

1.1 Scope and Methodological Orientation

The analysis is qualitative and interpretive. It synthesizes scholarship on African oral literature and Pentecostal worship with participant accounts reported in the study, organizing the material thematically by genre and formative function. Its purpose is analytical rather than statistical: the discussion identifies recurring ways in which oral forms mediate teaching, participation, memory, moral reflection, and cultural identity.

2.0 Conceptualizing Oral Literature

Kirumbi (1975) defines oral literature as narratives and artistic expressions communicated from one person to another through speech and performance, while Matteru (1983) emphasizes its distinction from literature transmitted primarily through writing. Although scholars have debated the conceptual boundaries of the term, oral literature is usefully understood here as aesthetically organized, socially situated expression whose meaning emerges through the interaction of words, performers, audiences, and occasions.

This definition resists reducing oral literature either to entertainment or to a static archive of custom. As Okpewho (1992) argues, oral forms participate in education, moral instruction, and social cohesion. Their incorporation into worship can

therefore mediate theological ideas through culturally recognizable language and experience; it can also invite critical reflection on which inherited values are consonant with Christian teaching.

2.1 Oral Literature as Religious Communication

Wambui's (2020) study of a Kiswahili-speaking church community in Kenya illustrates how inherited narratives may be recontextualized in worship. Such narratives can locate faith within communal history, strengthen collective identity, and provide interpretive resources during hardship. Stories of persons who endure adversity, for example, can function as moral exempla when preachers relate them carefully to Scripture and to the lived conditions of congregants.

The following illustrative narrative demonstrates how an oral story may be interpreted within preaching and Christian formation.

Courage in Times of Adversity

Long ago, in a certain village, there lived a woman named Mama Neema. She was a widow who remained with her three children after the death of her husband. Following his death, the relatives of her late husband seized a substantial portion of the family property, believing that a woman was incapable of

managing a household independently.

As a result, Mama Neema encountered numerous hardships. She struggled to provide adequate food for her children, received little support from relatives, and was frequently ridiculed by villagers who assumed that poverty would ultimately destroy her future. Nevertheless, she refused to surrender to despair. Every morning, she woke up early to cultivate the small piece of land that had been left in her possession.

One year, a severe drought devastated the region, causing crops throughout the village to wither. Many farmers lost hope and abandoned their farms. Mama Neema, however, remained steadfast. Guided by perseverance and faith, she continued caring for her crops and sought alternative methods of irrigation. She worked harder than ever before.

At the end of the season, her farm produced a harvest that surpassed those of many other farmers in the village. She sold part of the produce, paid her children's school fees, and established a small grain business. A few years later, her children excelled academically and became valuable contributors to their community.

The villagers who had once mocked her came to admire and

respect her as a symbol of courage, perseverance, and faith. Through her example, Mama Neema taught them that challenges are not the end of life but rather stepping stones toward success for those who remain hopeful and committed to hard work.

Interpretive and Theological Significance

Read within a Christian framework, the narrative foregrounds perseverance, hope, responsible action, and women's agency in the face of dispossession. Its value in preaching lies not in offering a formula for material success, but in opening reflection on faithful endurance, communal responsibility, and resilience. Four interpretive themes are especially evident:

1. Perseverance can sustain purposeful action amid prolonged adversity.
2. Faith is represented as active trust expressed through disciplined and responsible labour.
3. The narrative affirms women's leadership and their capacity to sustain families and communities under difficult conditions.
4. Hope enlarges the possibility of constructive response, whereas despair constricts moral and practical agency.

Proverbs perform a related interpretive function. The saying 'One tree does not make a forest,' for example, condenses an ethic of cooperation, unity, and collective responsibility. Mbugua (2021) similarly argues that proverbial discourse in religious gatherings can reinforce moral values, mutual respect, and social harmony.

3.0 Effects of Oral Literature in Worship

Oral literature can deepen worship by joining cognition, emotion, memory, and participation. Mwangi (2023) reports that worshippers experienced oral-literary forms, particularly songs grounded in oral tradition, as sources of encouragement and increased religious engagement. Such evidence suggests that spiritual formation is not communicated through propositions alone, but also through embodied and shared practices.

Fasipe (2023) further observes that oral narratives can help religious communities address social concerns, including dishonesty, moral fragmentation, and weakened communal responsibility. Because many traditional narratives dramatize truthfulness, love, integrity, and commitment, they can provide a culturally resonant vocabulary for Christian ethical reflection.

Finnegan's (2012) account of songs, folktales, proverbs, and related genres underscores the social work

performed by oral forms. In worship, their principal contributions may be organized as follows:

a. Strengthening Social Unity

Oral literature creates opportunities for collective participation in worship activities. Through communal singing, storytelling, and shared cultural expressions, believers develop a stronger sense of belonging, solidarity, and communal identity.

b. Transmitting Values and Beliefs

Stories, songs, and proverbs provide effective mechanisms for transmitting religious beliefs and moral principles from one generation to another. Through these forms, communities preserve and communicate their spiritual heritage.

c. Providing Moral and Spiritual Guidance

Oral literature often challenges existing social problems and offers guidance on ethical conduct. Through narratives and symbolic expressions, believers receive spiritual direction and encouragement in addressing personal and societal challenges.

d. Promoting Cultural Identity

The use of indigenous languages and traditional artistic expressions within worship contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural identity. This process strengthens the connection between faith and culture while ensuring the continuity of local traditions.

Source: Adapted from Finnegan (2012).

Effects of Oral Literature in Contemporary Worship: Mulokozi's Perspective

Mulokozi's (1996) framework highlights five closely related contributions of oral literature to contemporary worship:

a. Enhancing Spiritual Communication

Oral literature facilitates the communication of religious messages through emotionally engaging and culturally familiar forms such as songs, proverbs, and instructive narratives. These forms enable believers to understand and internalize spiritual teachings more effectively.

b. Encouraging Emotional and Intellectual Participation

The incorporation of oral literary elements increases attentiveness, interaction, and participation among worshippers. Since these forms often employ familiar language and expressive styles, they foster both emotional engagement and intellectual reflection.

c. Preserving and Promoting Cultural Heritage

Oral literature contributes significantly to the preservation of indigenous languages, traditional songs, and cultural expressions. By incorporating these elements into worship, religious institutions help sustain cultural heritage and collective memory.

d. Building a Bridge Between Religion and Traditional Culture

Oral literature serves as a meeting point between religious beliefs

and traditional cultural practices. Through culturally recognizable narratives, symbols, and expressions, it becomes easier for believers to relate religious teachings to their everyday experiences and cultural backgrounds.

e. Strengthening Social Cohesion

Worship services that integrate oral literary forms foster a shared spiritual and cultural experience among participants. This collective engagement promotes unity, mutual understanding, and stronger interpersonal relationships within religious communities.

Taken together, these functions show that oral literature is not merely ornamental. It is an educational, spiritual, and cultural resource through which religious communities communicate faith, negotiate identity, transmit moral commitments, and organize collective participation.

4.0 Pentecostal Worship in Tanzania

Pentecostalism is a major stream of Christianity distinguished by its emphasis on the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit, experiential faith, and the continuing activity of divine power. Its name recalls the Pentecost event narrated in Acts 2, in which the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples for witness and ministry.

Pentecostal spirituality commonly emphasizes prayer, divine healing, prophecy, glossolalia, testimony, and participatory worship. These emphases vary across denominations and congregations, but

they typically assign considerable importance to spoken performance, affective expression, and congregational response.

In Tanzania, churches commonly associated with Pentecostalism include:

- a. Tanzania Assemblies of God (TAG)
- b. Free Pentecostal Church of Tanzania
- c. Kanisa la Ufufuo na Uzima
- d. Full Gospel Bible Fellowship
- e. Assemblies of God

For the purposes of this article, Pentecostal churches are understood broadly as Christian communities whose teaching and practice emphasize the experience of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts. Their services often combine fervent prayer, congregational music, preaching, testimony, and collective response.

This participatory ecology is especially receptive to oral-literary forms. Singing, testimony, proverbial speech, narrative illustration, and dramatic performance invite worshippers to engage bodily, emotionally, and intellectually rather than remain passive recipients of religious discourse.

Tanzanian Pentecostal churches therefore provide a productive context for examining how oral traditions mediate spiritual formation, moral instruction, communal belonging, and cultural expression within modern African Christianity.

5.0 Oral-Literary Forms in Pentecostal Worship

Within worship, oral literature is best approached as a repertoire of communicative practices rather than as a single genre. Narratives, proverbs, songs, riddles, folktales, sermons, testimonies, and dramatic performances each organize meaning differently, yet all depend on performance, audience recognition, and situational interpretation.

These forms make religious teaching audible, memorable, and culturally situated. Their contribution to spiritual formation becomes clearer when the principal genres are examined separately.

5.1 Spiritual Songs

Spiritual songs are among the most visible oral-literary forms in Pentecostal worship. Often performed with local rhythmic and musical idioms, they enable doctrinal language, biblical imagery, proverbial wisdom, and communal memory to circulate through repeated and embodied participation.

The formative capacity of music extends beyond aesthetic enjoyment. By shaping attention, emotion, memory, and participation, music can influence moral imagination and religious commitment (Lewis, 2021).

Praise and worship songs occupy a central position in many Pentecostal services. Repetition and memorable melodic structures facilitate congregational learning and

participation, while biblically derived lyrics provide material for meditation and communal confession (Lewis, 2021).

Song also creates a shared affective environment in which worshippers express devotion corporately. Rhythm, musical accompaniment, and bodily movement can intensify participation, linking personal response to public religious identity and communal belonging.

Hymns, gospel songs, and contemporary worship music thus perform overlapping theological, emotional, and social functions: they articulate praise, console worshippers, reinforce memory, and coordinate communal response.

5.1.1 Significance of Spiritual Songs in Pentecostal Worship

Participant accounts reported in the study point to four principal functions of spiritual songs in Pentecostal worship:

a. Worship and Praise of God

Songs provide one of the primary means through which believers worship, glorify, and express gratitude to God. Gospel music, choir performances, and contemporary worship songs evoke feelings of joy, reverence, thanksgiving, and devotion.

ii. Teaching Religious Doctrine

Many worship songs contain lyrics that communicate biblical teachings, historical accounts of faith, and Christian values. Singing these songs enables worshippers to

learn, remember, and internalize important religious doctrines.

b. Fostering Unity Among Believers

Congregational singing promotes a sense of fellowship and collective identity among worshippers. Through shared participation in musical worship, believers strengthen their spiritual connections with one another and develop a deeper sense of belonging within the faith community.

c. Stimulating Spiritual and Emotional Engagement

Music possesses a unique capacity to evoke diverse emotional responses, including peace, joy, repentance, hope, and consolation. Consequently, songs help create an atmosphere conducive to worship, meditation, and spiritual reflection.

Spiritual songs therefore operate as both devotional practices and vehicles of oral transmission. Their continued prominence reflects their capacity to connect doctrine, affect, memory, and collective participation.

5.2 Narratives and Stories

Narratives have long shaped religious instruction and communal identity. Scholarship on African oral literature emphasizes that stories do not simply preserve information; through performance, they invite audiences to interpret values, motives, consequences, and possible courses of

action (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1992).

Within Christian worship, narrative gives concrete form to theological claims. By locating themes such as grace, repentance, obedience, and perseverance within recognizable human situations, stories can make religious teaching more intelligible and memorable.

Biblical and contemporary narratives are consequently used across Christian traditions to interpret repentance, faithfulness, obedience, perseverance, and spiritual maturity. Their pedagogical value lies in showing how religious convictions are embodied within particular decisions and relationships.

Biblical narratives are especially prominent in preaching. The account of David and Goliath, for instance, is often invoked to frame courage and trust in God amid apparently overwhelming opposition (Johnson, 2021). Responsible interpretation should nevertheless attend to the narrative's theological context rather than reduce it to a generic message of individual self-confidence.

The account of the woman accused of adultery (John 8:1-11) likewise opens reflection on judgment, mercy, repentance, and restoration. Its use in worship can deepen Christian ethical reflection when compassion is held together with the call to transformed life.

Contemporary testimonies of transformation, healing, deliverance,

and perseverance also function as oral narratives in Pentecostal settings. They connect faith claims to lived experience and can strengthen hope, although their interpretation requires pastoral care so that individual experiences are not treated as universally normative.

Through biblical stories and contemporary testimonies, congregants encounter models of faith, struggle, failure, and renewal. Narratives contribute most constructively to spiritual growth when they prompt discernment and faithful practice rather than uncritical imitation.

5.2.1 Significance of Narratives in Pentecostal Worship

The analysis identifies four principal functions of narrative in Pentecostal worship:

a. Teaching Through Illustration

Biblical narratives, stories of saints, and contemporary life experiences provide effective illustrations for communicating spiritual teachings. Stories make religious messages easier to understand, remember, and apply in everyday life.

b. Inspiring Emotional Engagement and Transformation

Well-told narratives possess the ability to touch listeners emotionally and motivate them to make meaningful changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and spiritual commitments.

c. Demonstrating God's Power in Human Life

Personal testimonies and faith-based narratives reveal how God works

in the lives of individuals and communities. Such accounts strengthen faith by providing concrete examples of divine guidance, protection, healing, and provision.

d. Building Relationships Within the Faith Community

The sharing of personal and communal stories creates opportunities for deeper interpersonal connections among believers. Narratives foster empathy, mutual understanding, and a sense of shared spiritual identity.

Narrative is therefore a central mode of spiritual and moral formation. It links theological truth to lived experience, supports memory, and creates interpretive connections among members of the worshipping community.

5.3 Sermons

Sermons are a central form of oral discourse in Christian worship. Preaching combines exposition, narration, persuasion, and performance, and its meaning is shaped by the interaction between preacher, congregation, language, and context. Okpewho's (1992) account of oral communication helps explain why familiar experience, verbal artistry, and performative competence influence how a message is received.

Pentecostal preachers frequently integrate narratives, proverbs, testimonies, symbolic language, and illustration into biblical exposition. These devices can mediate abstract theological ideas through culturally

recognizable forms and connect scriptural interpretation with everyday concerns.

Concrete illustration can improve comprehension, recall, and application when it serves rather than obscures the scriptural argument (Anderson, 2022). The effectiveness of preaching therefore depends on both the substance of interpretation and the communicative practices through which it is delivered.

Pentecostal sermons are also characteristically interactive. Rhetorical questions, congregational responses, testimonies, stories, and affective speech turn preaching into a participatory event and encourage listeners to interpret the message in relation to their own lives.

Through such oral-literary resources, preachers address family relations, moral conduct, economic hardship, leadership, personal responsibility, and spiritual growth. Contextualization strengthens relevance, but it also requires theological discernment so that cultural familiarity does not substitute for careful biblical interpretation.

Participant accounts in the study indicate that sermons incorporating stories, proverbs, testimonies, and familiar cultural references were perceived as more comprehensible and spiritually compelling than discourse relying exclusively on abstract doctrinal explanation.

5.3.1 Significance of Sermons in Pentecostal Worship

The analysis identifies six functions of sermons in Pentecostal worship:

a. Teaching the Word of God

Sermons serve as the principal medium for interpreting and communicating biblical teachings. Through preaching, scriptural passages are explained and related to contemporary life situations, enabling believers to understand the practical implications of God's Word.

b. Inspiring and Strengthening Faith

Effective sermons encourage believers to cultivate deeper spiritual commitment and stronger faith in God. Through exhortation, encouragement, and biblical instruction, preaching motivates individuals to persevere in their spiritual journeys.

c. Providing Moral and Ethical Guidance

Sermons offer practical guidance on how believers should conduct their lives according to Christian principles. They address moral issues, interpersonal relationships, and social responsibilities from a faith-based perspective.

d. Correcting and Transforming Behaviour

Preaching also serves a corrective function by confronting harmful attitudes, sinful practices, and inappropriate behaviours. Through biblical instruction and spiritual exhortation, sermons encourage

repentance, personal transformation, and moral renewal.

e. Promoting Spiritual Growth

By continually exposing believers to scriptural teachings and spiritual insights, sermons contribute to the development of spiritual maturity. They help worshippers deepen their understanding of God, strengthen their relationship with Him, and grow in Christian discipleship.

f. Strengthening Community Cohesion

Sermons frequently address issues affecting the wider faith community and society at large. As a result, they contribute to the cultivation of shared values, mutual responsibility, and collective identity among believers.

Sermons thus constitute a major site at which oral artistry, biblical interpretation, and communal formation converge. Narratives, proverbs, testimony, and persuasive speech can strengthen religious education and moral reflection when they remain accountable to sound theological interpretation.

5.4 Proverbs and Sayings

Proverbs and sayings condense communal experience into brief, figurative, and memorable formulations. Their semantic density makes them effective for moral reasoning: a proverb can name a problem, invite comparison, and guide judgment without lengthy exposition.

In many African societies, proverbs serve as repositories of indigenous knowledge. When incorporated into worship, they can connect Christian instruction with familiar cultural reasoning and create dialogue between local wisdom and theological claims.

The saying 'Unity is strength,' for example, emphasizes fellowship and collective responsibility. The Kiswahili proverb 'Usipoziba ufa utajenga ukuta' ('If you do not mend a crack, you will build a wall') illustrates the prudence of addressing spiritual, moral, or social problems before they intensify. Such compression supports both comprehension and recall (Mulokozi, 1996).

Biblical wisdom literature performs a comparable, though theologically distinct, function. The Book of Proverbs offers instruction on diligence, integrity, justice, speech, relationships, and righteous living and is consequently prominent in Christian education and pastoral formation.

Proverbs 10:1, for example, contrasts the moral consequences associated with wisdom and folly:

"A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother."

The surrounding sayings similarly address diligence, righteousness, integrity, and knowledge, providing a textual basis for moral and spiritual reflection.

In Pentecostal preaching, culturally familiar proverbs can clarify complex ideas and relate Christian values to ordinary experience. Sayings concerning love, forgiveness, patience, humility, faithfulness, and perseverance are especially suited to ethical exhortation.

Participant accounts reported in the study describe proverbs as useful instruments of wisdom and moral instruction because they connect spiritual principles with recognizable social situations.

5.4.1 Significance of Proverbs and Sayings in Pentecostal Worship

The analysis identifies six principal functions of proverbs and sayings:

a. Teaching Moral Values and Wisdom

Many African and indigenous proverbs embody traditional wisdom and ethical principles that can be used to explain spiritual teachings. Through proverbs, preachers communicate lessons concerning integrity, responsibility, compassion, humility, and righteous living.

b. Enhancing Memory and Retention

Because proverbs are concise and meaningful, they are easy to remember. Their memorable nature enables worshippers to retain and apply the lessons communicated during sermons and religious instruction.

c. Connecting Faith with Culture

The use of proverbs links religious teachings to the cultural

experiences of believers. This connection enables worshippers to perceive Christianity as relevant to their daily lives and cultural environments rather than as a detached or foreign system of belief.

d. Simplifying Complex Spiritual Concepts

Proverbs condense broad and sometimes abstract ideas into simple expressions that are readily understandable. Consequently, they help believers grasp difficult theological concepts more effectively.

e. Encouraging Reflection and Critical Thinking

The figurative and symbolic nature of proverbs invites listeners to reflect deeply on their meaning and relevance. This reflective process promotes intellectual engagement and personal application of religious teachings.

f. Preserving Indigenous Knowledge Systems

By incorporating proverbs into worship, churches contribute to the preservation and transmission of indigenous wisdom, language, and cultural heritage. In this way, religious institutions become important custodians of cultural memory and identity.

Proverbs and sayings therefore enrich religious communication by condensing moral insight, supporting memory, and placing Christian teaching in conversation with indigenous knowledge. Their value depends on critical interpretation rather than the assumption that every

inherited saying is equally authoritative.

5.5 Performances and Dramatic Presentations

Dramatic presentation is a performative mode of oral literature used especially during celebrations, conferences, commemorations, and Christian education. By combining speech, gesture, movement, music, and visual representation, drama allows congregants to encounter religious narratives through multiple senses.

Campbell (1949) emphasizes the capacity of narrative performance to embody stories that shape collective belief and value. In Christian contexts, dramatized biblical events can translate abstract theological themes into concrete scenes that invite both interpretation and affective response.

Pentecostal churches may use dramatization to bring scriptural narratives into closer relation with congregational experience. Portrayals of the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, for example, can focus reflection on redemption, sacrifice, forgiveness, and salvation.

Smith (2020) argues that dramatization can deepen emotional engagement and improve comprehension and recall. Its pedagogical force arises from the coordinated appeal to sight, hearing, emotion, imagination, and bodily participation.

Participant accounts in the study characterize drama as an effective

means of visualizing biblical teaching and relating moral or spiritual principles to contemporary situations.

5.5.1 Significance of Performances and Dramatic Presentations in Pentecostal Worship

The analysis identifies seven functions of dramatic presentation in Pentecostal worship:

a. Bringing Religious Messages to Life

Dramatic presentations transform biblical stories and spiritual teachings into living experiences. By visually representing scriptural events and moral lessons, performances make religious messages more engaging and easier to understand for worshippers of all ages.

b. Enhancing Emotional Engagement

Drama possesses a unique capacity to evoke emotional responses such as empathy, compassion, joy, repentance, and hope. These emotional experiences deepen worshippers' connection to the spiritual messages being communicated.

c. Facilitating Experiential Learning

Certain religious teachings are more effectively understood when demonstrated through action rather than explained solely through words. Dramatic presentations provide experiential learning opportunities that enable believers to internalize spiritual lessons more deeply.

d. Strengthening Memory and Understanding

Visual and performative communication enhances the retention

of information. Worshippers are more likely to remember spiritual lessons when they are presented through memorable scenes, characters, and dramatic actions.

e. Encouraging Active Participation

Performances often involve members of the congregation as actors, narrators, singers, or organizers. This participatory element fosters a stronger sense of ownership, commitment, and engagement within the worship community.

f. Promoting Moral and Spiritual Reflection

Many dramatic presentations address themes such as repentance, forgiveness, faith, obedience, integrity, and social responsibility. Through these portrayals, believers are encouraged to evaluate their own lives and make positive spiritual and moral changes.

g. Increasing Interest and Attention in Worship

Drama adds variety and creativity to worship services, helping maintain the attention and interest of participants. As a result, religious gatherings become more dynamic, interactive, and meaningful.

Dramatic presentation can therefore enhance comprehension, affective engagement, participation, and moral reflection. As with other oral forms, its spiritual value depends on the quality of interpretation and on the relationship between artistic expression and theological purpose.

5.6 Riddles and Folktales

Riddles and folktales appear less frequently in formal worship than songs, sermons, or testimonies, but they can be valuable in ministry to children and young people. Their combination of play, suspense, analogy, and creative reasoning supports memorable moral instruction (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). In Pentecostal Christian education, these forms may nurture faith when they are interpreted explicitly rather than left as culturally familiar entertainment.

The study's field evidence suggests three principal contributions of riddles and folktales to Christian formation:

- a. Cognitive engagement: Riddles stimulate interpretive reasoning, curiosity, and creativity, particularly in small-group or children's settings.
- b. Learning through play: Interactive verbal forms can introduce basic Christian teaching in ways that sustain attention and support recall.
- c. Cultural integration: Riddles and folktales connect Christian education with local language, imagination, and cultural memory.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that oral literature remains a consequential medium of spiritual formation in Tanzanian Pentecostal worship. Songs, narratives, sermons, proverbs, dramatic presentations, riddles, and folktales contribute differently to theological understanding, moral

reflection, memory, affective engagement, and communal identity. Their significance lies not only in preserving cultural heritage but also in enabling congregations to interpret Christian teaching through participatory forms grounded in lived experience.

The analysis should nevertheless be interpreted within the limits of the evidence presented. The source study does not provide sufficient detail about sampling, field sites, or analytical procedures to support broad generalization across Tanzania's diverse Pentecostal landscape. Future research should compare denominations, linguistic communities, rural and urban congregations, and digitally mediated worship settings while documenting how congregants themselves understand and evaluate spiritual growth.

Within these limits, the study supports a deliberate rather than merely nostalgic recovery of oral traditions. Church leaders can integrate culturally resonant forms into preaching, music, testimony, Christian education, and ministry to children while testing their content through Scripture, theological reflection, and pastoral discernment. Such critical integration can strengthen worship, sustain cultural memory, and support spiritual maturity without treating either culture or performance as an end in itself.

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