

Ensera in Cultural Transmission and Iban Sociocultural Identity Formation

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Abstract

This article examines how selected Iban cultural knowledge holders perceive the role of ensera in cultural transmission and sociocultural identity formation. Situated in the Sarawak Iban cultural context, the study considers how ensera is understood to preserve knowledge, communicate communal values and support identity amid social change. A qualitative interview study was conducted with six participants selected through criterion-based purposive sampling for their direct academic, research, cultural-practice or community-based engagement with Iban oral traditions. Data from semi-structured online interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis was predominantly inductive and semantic while remaining attentive to the sociocultural meanings articulated by participants. The informants described ensera as an oral repository of collective memory, language, custom, ritual knowledge, longhouse life and moral principles. They also perceived its narration, intergenerational listening and emerging digital circulation as potential routes through which cultural knowledge and shared meanings may be maintained. These accounts suggest that ensera can support belonging, pride, ethical orientation and sociocultural resilience. However, the findings represent the interpretations of six adult knowledge holders and do not directly establish transmission outcomes or identity change among younger people. The study therefore contributes an informant-centred account of ensera while identifying the need for future textual, performance-based and youth-focused research.

Keywords: *Cultural transmission, ensera, Iban sociocultural identity, Indigenous knowledge, intangible cultural heritage.*

Submitted: 12 July 2026

Revised: 31 August 2026

Published: 30 September 2026

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Ensera dalam Pewarisan Budaya dan Pembentukan Identiti Sosiobudaya Masyarakat Iban

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Abstrak

Artikel ini meneliti persepsi pemegang pengetahuan budaya Iban terpilih terhadap peranan *ensera* dalam pewarisan budaya dan pembentukan identiti sosiobudaya. Berlatarkan konteks budaya Iban di Sarawak, kajian ini meneliti cara *ensera* difahami sebagai wahana yang memelihara pengetahuan, menyampaikan nilai komuniti dan menyokong identiti dalam menghadapi perubahan sosial. Kajian temu bual kualitatif ini melibatkan enam orang peserta yang dipilih melalui persampelan bertujuan berasaskan kriteria berdasarkan penglibatan langsung mereka dalam bidang akademik, penyelidikan, amalan budaya atau pemegangan pengetahuan komuniti berkaitan tradisi lisan Iban. Data temu bual separa berstruktur secara dalam talian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik reflektif Braun dan Clarke (2021). Analisis dilaksanakan secara dominan induktif dan semantik dengan memberikan perhatian kepada makna sosiobudaya yang diungkapkan oleh peserta. Para informan menyifatkan *ensera* sebagai khazanah lisan yang menyimpan ingatan kolektif, bahasa, adat, pengetahuan ritual, kehidupan rumah panjang dan prinsip moral. Mereka juga melihat penceritaan, pendengaran antara generasi dan penyebaran digital yang sedang berkembang sebagai saluran berpotensi untuk mengekalkan pengetahuan budaya dan makna bersama. Pandangan tersebut mencadangkan bahawa *ensera* berpotensi menyokong rasa kebersamaan, kebanggaan, orientasi etika dan ketahanan sosiobudaya. Walau bagaimanapun, dapatan ini mewakili tafsiran enam orang pemegang pengetahuan dewasa dan tidak membuktikan secara langsung hasil pewarisan atau perubahan identiti dalam kalangan generasi muda. Oleh itu, kajian ini menyumbangkan penelitian berpusatkan informan tentang *ensera* serta mengenal pasti keperluan penyelidikan teks, persembahan dan perspektif belia pada masa hadapan.

Kata Kunci: *ensera*, identiti sosiobudaya Iban, pengetahuan peribumi, pewarisan budaya, warisan budaya tidak ketara.

Dihantar: 12 Julai 2026

Disemak: 31 Ogos 2026

Diterbit: 30 September 2026

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1.0 Introduction

Oral tradition occupies a central position in the social sciences and humanities because it not only preserves inherited narratives, but also sustains cultural knowledge, collective memory, moral values, social norms and communal identity across generations. In many Indigenous and local communities, oral literature functions as a living cultural system through which people interpret their history, negotiate social change and reaffirm their sense of belonging. Recent scholarship on intangible cultural heritage emphasises that living heritage contributes to cultural continuity, social cohesion, community resilience and sustainable development when it is actively transmitted, interpreted and practised by community bearers (Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024; Zabulis et al., 2025). Within the wider Bornean context, oral literature is also closely associated with the survival of ethnic identity, particularly when minority and Indigenous communities experience the pressures of modernisation, technological change, language shift and changing cultural preferences among younger generations (Syam et al., 2024). This issue is highly relevant to the Iban community in Sarawak, whose sociocultural life is deeply rooted in oral expression, ritual language, customary knowledge, longhouse values, ecological awareness, heroic ideals and communal memory. Studies of Iban language and literature indicate that research on the Iban language has expanded across literature, culture, education and linguistics. Nevertheless, further systematic inquiry is needed to strengthen the documentation, interpretation and application of Iban cultural knowledge in contemporary scholarship (Gerry et al., 2024).

Within Iban oral literature, *ensera* refers to an epic saga or extended traditional narrative that is partly delivered in poetic language and partly narrated through prose, explanation and dialogue. These narratives commonly centre on the mythical heroes and heroines of Panggau Libau and Gelong, including Keling, Kumang and Laja, while conveying cultural memory, customary knowledge, moral values and the Iban worldview (Osup, 2019). Research on Iban education indicates that cultural inheritance is embedded in learning orientation, community values and social development rather than being separate from intellectual formation (Ahoi & Mohamad Nasri, 2021). Studies of *Ieka main* likewise identify complex cognitive, lexical and cultural structures in Iban oral poetry (Peter Langan & Sarudin, 2023). Thomas et al. (2026) analysed representations of Iban cultural integrity in *Ensera Kumang* through Braginsky's Sfera Faedah, showing how one selected text encodes cultural values and transgenerational meanings. That text-centred and theory-led study is closely related but empirically and methodologically distinct from the present article. It did not examine how differently positioned cultural knowledge holders describe the conditions, limitations and contemporary possibilities of transmission across family, community and digital settings. The present study therefore shifts the evidential focus from what a selected *ensera* text represents to how six knowledge holders interpret the role of *ensera* in cultural transmission and sociocultural identity formation.

The relevance of *ensera* must also be examined against the realities of cultural change. In Sarawak, the decline and transformation of Iban cultural artefacts have been linked to globalisation, religious change, shifting social needs and the adoption of contemporary cultural practices, all of which affect how traditional culture is valued and transmitted by the present generation (Kiyai @ Keai, 2023). At the same time, the growth of digital media has reshaped communication, social interaction and information-sharing in Malaysian society. Digital platforms



may widen access to heritage materials, but they may also encourage fragmented, superficial or decontextualised engagement with tradition (Mohd Hamizi & Hamzah, 2023). Historical studies of Iban education further show that formal education has long influenced the social positioning, cultural awareness and adaptive responses of the Iban community, making education an important site for understanding how identity is preserved, negotiated and transformed over time (Junaidi & Wan Mat Ali, 2024).

Taken together, previous scholarship establishes that Iban language, oral literature, education and selected *ensera* texts carry cultural meanings and identity resources. Three gaps nevertheless remain. Empirically, limited attention has been given to how cultural knowledge holders occupying different academic, research, practitioner and community roles interpret the contemporary transmission of *ensera*. Conceptually, preservation, transmission and identity formation are often presented as established functions without separating perceived roles from directly observed outcomes. Methodologically, few studies have used an explicitly reflexive thematic analysis of interview accounts while acknowledging the limits of perception-based evidence. To address these gaps, this article examines how six selected Iban cultural knowledge holders interpret the roles, conditions and limitations of *ensera* in cultural transmission and sociocultural identity formation. It asks, how do these knowledge holders perceive *ensera* as contributing to cultural memory, intergenerational learning, identity, moral orientation, social cohesion and adaptation to social change?

2.0 Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine *ensera* in cultural transmission and Iban sociocultural identity formation. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on meanings, cultural values, social functions, communal memory and identity-related experiences associated with Iban oral tradition. Rather than measuring cultural phenomena statistically, the study sought to understand how *ensera* is perceived by knowledgeable informants as a living cultural medium that preserves collective memory, transmits moral and social values and reinforces the sociocultural identity of the Iban community.

The empirical material consisted of semi-structured interview data obtained from six knowledgeable informants who were familiar with Iban oral tradition, cultural practices, customary values and the social functions of *ensera*. The informants were recruited through purposive criterion sampling based on their knowledge, experience and ability to provide meaningful insights into the role of *ensera* in Iban cultural life. Their views were used to examine how *ensera* functions as a cultural archive, a medium of intergenerational transmission, a source of sociocultural identity formation, a vehicle for moral values and social cohesion, and a mechanism of sociocultural resilience in the context of social change.

In accordance with the study's confidentiality protocol, the six informants are identified only by the codes INF01-INF06. They ranged in age from their thirties to their sixties and were drawn from several divisions across Sarawak. The informants comprised academics specialising in Iban language and literature, researchers of Iban customary practices and oral traditions, cultural practitioners and activists, and community knowledge bearers. Reporting these characteristics in



broad categories safeguards the informants' identities while demonstrating the diversity of expertise and cultural experience represented in the dataset.

Six informants were recruited through criterion-based purposive sampling. Eligibility required direct and demonstrable engagement with Iban oral tradition through academic research, cultural practice, community knowledge or sustained experience with *ensera*, willingness to discuss the topic in depth, and informed consent. Individuals without relevant engagement or who did not consent were excluded. Potential informants were initially identified and contacted directly by the researcher based on their recognised academic, professional or community involvement in Iban oral traditions. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed by asking the initial informants to recommend other individuals with relevant knowledge and experience. All recommended individuals were screened against the predetermined inclusion criteria before being invited to participate and providing informed consent. The sample was considered adequate for the focused interpretive aim because it brought together complementary knowledge positions and the later interviews predominantly elaborated existing codes rather than generating substantively new thematic domains. This rationale concerns depth and information relevance, not statistical representativeness.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth explanations while maintaining a clear focus on the research objectives. The interview questions explored the informants' understanding of *ensera*, including its role in preserving Iban customs, language, ritual knowledge, communal values, longhouse life, heroic figures, identity consciousness, moral education and adaptation to modern social realities. The semi-structured format also allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions when informants provided cultural details that required further clarification.

The interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2021). The analytical process involved six interconnected phases, familiarisation with the interview transcripts, generation of initial codes, construction of preliminary themes, review of the themes against the coded data and the complete dataset, definition and naming of the final themes, and production of the analytical account. Coding was primarily inductive, although it remained guided by the study's objective of examining *ensera* as a mechanism of cultural transmission and Iban sociocultural identity formation. The final themes were developed through repeated comparison across the six informants' accounts while retaining attention to culturally specific terms, meanings and narrative contexts.

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify meaningful statements related to the sociocultural functions of *ensera*. These statements were coded systematically and grouped into broader themes. The main themes that emerged were *ensera* as a cultural archive of the Iban community, cultural transmission through *ensera*, *ensera* and Iban sociocultural identity formation, moral values and social cohesion in *ensera*, and *ensera* and sociocultural resilience in the context of social change. These themes were developed by comparing patterns across the six informants' responses and interpreting them in relation to the research objective.



The overall flow of the research methods and materials is illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows the relationship between the qualitative case study design, semi-structured interviews, interview transcription, thematic coding, theme development and the final interpretation of *ensera* as a mechanism of cultural transmission and Iban sociocultural identity formation.

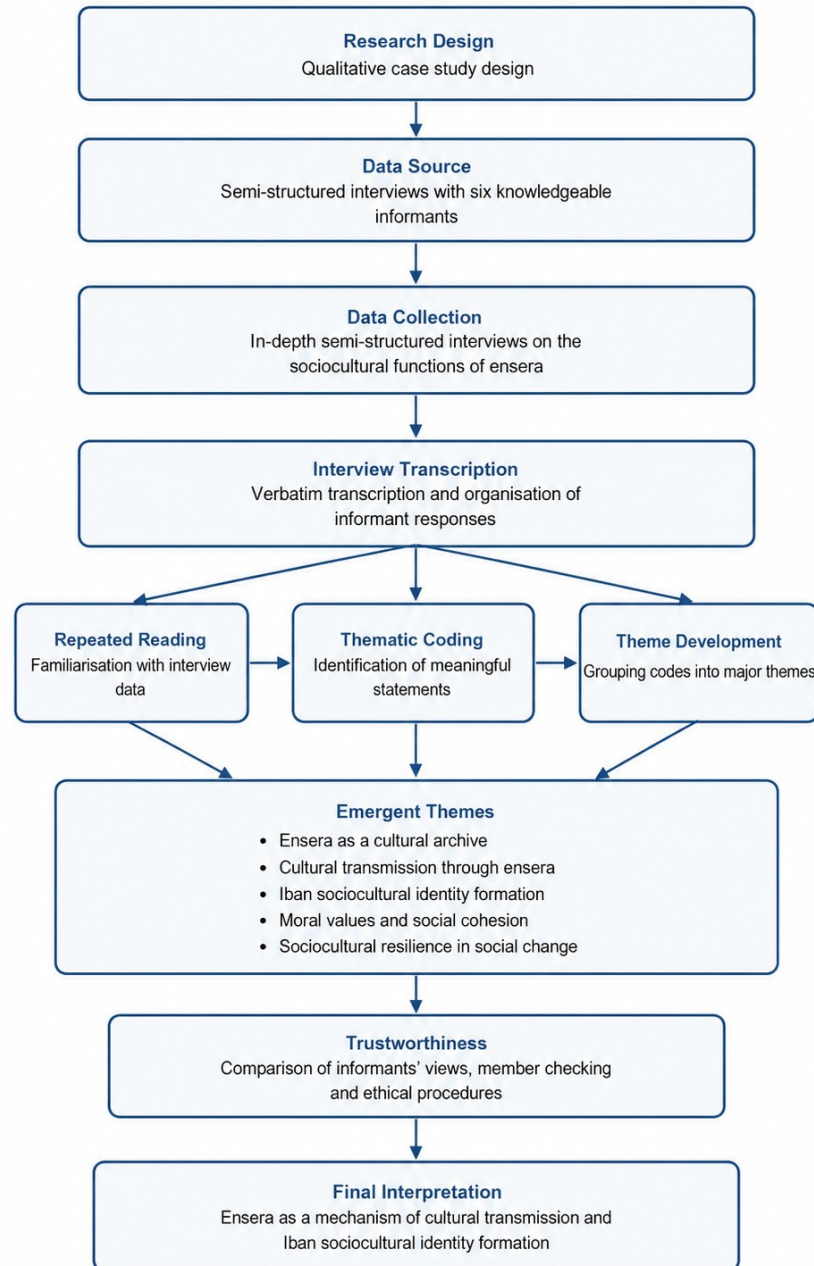


Figure 1: Flow of Methods and Materials

(Source: Adapted and modified by the researcher based on Braun and Clarke, 2021)

Trustworthiness was strengthened through careful coding, comparison of informants' views, member checking and ethical research procedures. Comparing responses across the six



informants helped strengthen credibility by identifying recurring patterns and shared interpretations. Member checking was used to ensure that the informants' views were represented accurately. Ethical considerations were observed through informed consent, confidentiality and the use of informant codes. These procedures helped ensure that the findings were credible, transparent and respectful of the cultural knowledge shared by the Iban community.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are organised according to the main objective of examining *ensera* as a mechanism of cultural transmission and Iban sociocultural identity formation. The findings are discussed through thematic insights obtained from semi-structured interviews with six knowledgeable informants. This section demonstrates that *ensera* functions not only as a form of traditional oral narrative, but also as a cultural archive that preserves collective memory, customary knowledge, moral values, social relationships and the worldview of the Iban community. The discussion focuses on how cultural elements such as language, customs, beliefs, ritual practices, heroic values and longhouse-based communal life are understood through *ensera*, and how these elements contribute to the transmission of Iban cultural identity across generations. The informants' views show that *ensera* continues to play an important role in educating the community, shaping ethical behaviour, reinforcing social cohesion and sustaining cultural continuity amid the challenges of modernisation.

3.1 *Ensera* as a Cultural Archive of the Iban Community

Ensera may be understood as a cultural archive of the Iban community because it preserves and transmits collective memory, ancestral knowledge, worldview, values and lived experiences through oral narrative. As a traditional form of Iban oral literature, *ensera* does not merely function as entertainment; it also operates as a repository of sociocultural knowledge that records language, customs, beliefs, ritual practices, social relationships, gender roles, heroic ideals and communal ethics. Recent studies on intangible cultural heritage emphasise that oral and performative traditions are crucial in sustaining Indigenous languages, cultural practices and intergenerational knowledge transmission, particularly when communities face the pressures of modernisation, cultural homogenisation and changing social values (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023; Poplawska, 2025).

In this regard, *ensera* can be viewed as a living archive because it stores cultural meaning not only through written documentation, but also through memory, performance, narration and repeated communal engagement. Its symbolic language, poetic expression, recurring motifs and culturally significant characters reveal how the Iban community understands its relationship with ancestors, nature, spirituality and the longhouse as a central social institution. This is consistent with the idea that cultural knowledge is often transmitted tacitly through practice, participation and guided interpretation rather than through explicit instruction alone (Miton & DeDeo, 2022). Therefore, this subtopic discusses how *ensera* stores, represents and communicates



Iban cultural knowledge while demonstrating its role in sustaining cultural continuity and strengthening Iban sociocultural identity.

Table 1: Informants' Support for *Informants' Support for Ensera as a Cultural Archive of the Iban Community*

(Source: Fieldwork data from semi-structured interviews with INF01-INF06, transcribed, translated and thematically analysed by the researcher, 2026)

Informant	Line No.	Selected Verbatim Evidence	Cultural Archive Dimension	Interpretation
INF01	B38	<i>"If we look at this ensera (oral narrative) as an archive of oral culture, it is because it records birth rituals, how the Iban people celebrate a birth."</i>	Life-cycle customs and oral cultural memory	INF01 directly describes <i>ensera</i> as an oral cultural archive that records Iban customary practices, especially birth ceremonies and related traditions.
INF02	B29	<i>"Thus, this ensera does not only preserve stories, but it also preserves the language, customs, way of thinking, and how people speak."</i>	Language, customs and traditional communication	INF02 describes how <i>ensera</i> stores not only stories, but also language, customs and traditional forms of communication.
INF03	B13	<i>"This ensera is indeed the deepest repository (or wellspring) of the Iban language."</i>	Iban language and linguistic heritage	INF03 positions <i>ensera</i> as a deep repository of Iban language, particularly classical and culturally rich expressions.
INF04	B36	<i>"This ensera is a keeper of the community's history."</i>	Oral history and communal memory	INF04 describes how <i>ensera</i> preserves community history, including genealogy, migration, past conflicts and collective experiences.
INF05	B25	<i>"The ensera serves as the foundation (literally 'mountain of origin') of our way of life. It breathes life into our customs through the proper order..."</i>	Cultural continuity and customs	INF05 presents <i>ensera</i> as a foundation of Iban cultural continuity because it keeps customs alive through proper traditional narratives.



INF06	B27	<i>“Its role is immense... it serves as a reminder of the Gawai rituals, marriage customs... and how to resolve disputes using our customary laws.”</i>	Ritual, marriage customs and customary conflict resolution	INF06 highlights <i>ensera</i> as a reminder of customs, including Gawai, marriage practices and conflict resolution according to Iban customary rules.
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The views of the six informants collectively suggest that *ensera* functions as a cultural archive of the Iban community because it preserves multiple layers of sociocultural knowledge that define Iban life, memory and identity. INF01 (B38) provides the most direct affirmation by describing *ensera* as an archive of oral culture that records life-cycle customs, particularly birth rituals and the way the Iban community celebrates the arrival of a child. This view is strengthened by INF02 (B29), who expands the archival function of *ensera* beyond narrative content by emphasising that it preserves stories, language, customs, ways of thinking and modes of speech. INF03 (B13) further reinforces the linguistic dimension of this archive by identifying *ensera* as the deepest repository of the Iban language, suggesting that the narrative form safeguards classical vocabulary, symbolic expressions and culturally refined forms of speech that may no longer be widely used in everyday communication.

The remaining informants extend this interpretation. INF04 (B36) describes *ensera* as a keeper of community history and therefore positions it as an oral record of genealogy, migration, conflict, peacemaking and collective experience. INF05 (B25) interprets *ensera* as the foundation of the Iban way of life because it keeps adat alive through proper narrative order, while INF06 (B27) stresses its role as a reminder of Gawai rituals, marriage customs and customary conflict resolution. Taken together, these views show that *ensera* is not a passive storehouse of old stories, but a dynamic cultural archive that records, organises and transmits Iban knowledge through language, memory, ritual, customs, social practice and moral instruction. This finding is consistent with recent studies on oral tradition and intangible cultural heritage, which argue that oral narratives function as repositories of cultural values, identity markers, intergenerational knowledge and community-based education (Abdul Aziz et al., 2023; Nursalam et al., 2024; Rustina et al., 2026).

The synthesis of the six informants also reveals that the archival role of *ensera* operates through three interconnected dimensions: preservation, transmission and identity formation. First, *ensera* preserves cultural memory by retaining knowledge of customs, rituals, old language, social organisation and historical experience that may otherwise weaken under the influence of modernisation, migration and changing patterns of cultural participation. Second, *ensera* transmits this knowledge through oral performance, storytelling, repetition, symbolic language and communal listening, allowing cultural values to be absorbed naturally rather than through formal instruction alone. Third, *ensera* contributes to identity formation by reminding the Iban community of its shared origins, moral order, adat, communal ethics and worldview. In this sense, *ensera*



functions as a living archive because it is continually activated whenever it is narrated, interpreted, remembered and connected to contemporary Iban experience.

3.2 Cultural Transmission through *Ensera*

Cultural transmission through *ensera* refers to the process by which Iban knowledge, values, language, customs and social meanings are passed from one generation to another through oral narrative, performance and communal listening. In the Iban community, *ensera* does not transmit culture through formal instruction alone. Instead, it embeds moral lessons, customary practices, symbolic language, heroic models, ritual knowledge and collective memories within an engaging narrative structure. This makes *ensera* an important medium of informal cultural education because listeners are not merely exposed to stories; they are invited to interpret, remember and internalise the values represented by characters, events and cultural symbols.

Recent studies on folklore education and oral tradition show that traditional narratives can support cultural learning by giving communities a meaningful space to understand inherited values, strengthen identity and connect younger generations with local knowledge systems (Agung et al., 2024; Baderan, 2025). Research on Indigenous knowledge preservation also highlights that oral forms such as folklore, poetry, storytelling and performance remain central to the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of community knowledge, particularly when transmitted through elders, cultural practitioners and community-based learning spaces (Chigwada & Ngulube, 2024). Therefore, *ensera* may be understood as a living mechanism of cultural transmission because it carries Iban cultural knowledge across time through language, memory, performance and social participation.

Table 2: Cultural Transmission through *Ensera* Based on Informants' Views
(Source: Fieldwork data from semi-structured interviews with INF01-INF06, transcribed, translated and thematically analysed by the researcher, 2026)

Informant	Line No.	Selected Verbatim Evidence	Cultural Transmission Dimension	Interpretation
INF01	B36	<i>“When we were little, we would always sit with these aunts to listen to their ensera (oral narratives).”</i>	Intergenerational oral transmission	INF01's account suggests that <i>ensera</i> is transmitted through informal listening practices between older and younger generations, especially within family and community settings.
INF02	B41	<i>“All of that was taught through informal methods, simply by listening to the stories.”</i>	Informal cultural education	INF02 explains that cultural values are transmitted indirectly through storytelling rather than formal instruction, making <i>ensera</i> a medium of natural cultural



			learning.
INF03	B29	<i>“Knowledge [is acquired] through the method of storytelling and listening.”</i>	Knowledge transmission through narration and listening INF03 describes how knowledge is passed through the act of narrating and listening, and portrays <i>ensera</i> as a traditional system of cultural learning.
INF04	B38	<i>“The children could ask questions directly, and their grandmothers would explain it to them.”</i>	Interactive intergenerational learning INF04 recalls that <i>ensera</i> creates an interactive learning space where younger listeners can ask questions and receive cultural explanations from elders.
INF05	B31	<i>“The younger generation can use modern technology such as TikTok, YouTube, or Podcasts to retell these ensera in a digital format.”</i>	Digital cultural transmission INF05 indicates that <i>ensera</i> can be transmitted through modern platforms, allowing younger generations to reinterpret oral tradition through digital media.
INF06	B49	<i>“Through this cyber platform (literally ‘cyber ruai/verandah’), our ensera will remain strong and resilient even as the world changes rapidly.”</i>	Cyber community and heritage continuity INF06 suggests that digital spaces can function as a new ruai for cultural transmission, which the informant believed could help <i>ensera</i> remain active despite rapid social change.

The views of the six informants collectively show that cultural transmission through *ensera* occurs through a layered process of listening, narration, interaction, interpretation and adaptation. INF01 (B36) recalls how children sat with older women to listen to *ensera*, indicating that the transfer of Iban cultural knowledge begins within intimate family and community spaces. This form of learning is informal, affective and relational because cultural values are not delivered as abstract lessons, but absorbed through repeated exposure to stories, voices, gestures, memories and explanations from elders. INF02 (B41) strengthens this point by explaining that the values embedded in *ensera* are taught through informal methods simply by listening to stories. INF03 (B29) further clarifies the mechanism of transmission by stating that knowledge is acquired through storytelling and listening, thereby positioning *ensera* as a traditional system of knowledge transfer in which both narrator and listener are important.

The synthesis of INF04 (B38), INF05 (B31) and INF06 (B49) extends the discussion by showing that cultural transmission through *ensera* is not limited to traditional face-to-face storytelling, but may also evolve through interactive and digital forms of cultural continuity. INF04 (B38) highlights the interactive nature of *ensera* transmission by explaining that children could ask questions directly and receive explanations from their grandmothers. INF05 (B31) and INF06 (B49) shift the focus towards contemporary transmission by suggesting that younger generations can use digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and podcasts to retell *ensera*, while the idea of a cyber ruai indicates



that digital space can function as a new communal platform for sustaining oral heritage. This confirms that *ensera* is a living mechanism of cultural transmission because it carries ancestral knowledge into the present while allowing the Iban community to adapt its oral tradition to changing social and technological realities.

3.3 *Ensera* and Iban Sociocultural Identity Formation

Ensera and Iban sociocultural identity formation are closely connected because oral narratives do not merely represent culture; they also shape how a community understands its origins, values, social roles and collective belonging. In the Iban context, *ensera* becomes a narrative space where identity is formed through representations of heroic figures, longhouse life, customary practices, gender ideals, ritual knowledge, ecological relationships and moral expectations. Characters such as Keling and Kumang are not only narrative figures, but also cultural models through which courage, wisdom, responsibility, beauty, dignity, leadership and social ethics are imagined and internalised by the community.

In the Iban mythological universe, Panggau Libau and Gelong are elevated realms associated with mythical heroes and heroines who embody culturally valued qualities. Keling is commonly represented as an archetype of courage, leadership and wisdom, while Kumang embodies beauty, virtue, wisdom and exceptional weaving skill. Laja is represented as Keling’s heroic companion and deputy. Their significance therefore extends beyond their roles as narrative characters. They function as culturally recognised models through which listeners interpret courage, social responsibility, gender ideals, leadership and communal belonging (Osup, 2019; Majlis Adat Istiadat Sarawak, 2024).

This shows that Iban sociocultural identity is not formed through biological belonging alone, but through continuous engagement with inherited stories, symbolic language, shared memory and communal values. Recent studies on intangible cultural heritage emphasise that heritage practices, minority languages and cultural expressions play an important role in sustaining group identity, strengthening cultural belonging and ensuring that community knowledge remains meaningful across generations (Robinson-Jones, 2024; Jin et al., 2025). Therefore, *ensera* may be understood as a formative medium of Iban sociocultural identity because it enables the Iban community to recognise who they are, where they come from, what values they inherit and how these values continue to guide their social life.

Table 3: Informants’ Views on *Ensera* and Iban Sociocultural Identity Formation
(Source: Fieldwork data from semi-structured interviews with INF01-INF06, transcribed, translated and thematically analysed by the researcher, 2026)

Informant	Line No.	Selected Verbatim Evidence	Identity Formation Dimension	Interpretation
INF01	B42	<i>“Keling and Kumang serve</i>	Heroic	INF01’s account suggests that Keling



		<i>as symbols of heroism and our community's identity."</i>	symbolism and ethnic identity	and Kumang function as symbolic figures of Iban heroism and cultural identity. Through these figures, <i>ensera</i> presents ideal models of courage, dignity and cultural pride.
INF02	B31	<i>"The ensera (oral narratives) helps us always feel a sense of belonging to the same race and shared culture."</i>	Shared ethnicity and collective belonging	INF02 highlights that <i>ensera</i> strengthens the feeling of being one people with a shared culture, thereby reinforcing collective Iban identity.
INF03	B35	<i>"This ensera is indeed the spiritual strength (or inner fortitude) for our youth to protect and maintain their identity."</i>	Cultural spirit and identity resilience	INF03 presents <i>ensera</i> as a source of cultural strength that helps younger generations maintain their Iban identity.
INF04	B48	<i>"The ensera is actually a form of character building that instills a sense of pride in one's origins."</i>	Character formation and pride in origin	INF04 explains that <i>ensera</i> builds character by cultivating pride in ancestral origin and ethnic belonging.
INF05	B29	<i>"This identity also grows from a deep love for the richness of our native language, ensuring that the youth do not feel ashamed of being Iban."</i>	Linguistic pride and ethnic confidence	INF05 describes how Iban identity grows through love for the richness of the original language, helping young people feel proud rather than ashamed of being Iban.
INF06	B31	<i>"When the youth know Keling, Laja, and Kumang, they look up to examples of good conduct, bravery, wisdom, and respect."</i>	Ideal characters and cultural values	INF06 indicates that knowledge of characters such as Keling, Laja and Kumang helps young people recognise ideal Iban values such as good conduct, courage, wisdom and respect.

The views of the six informants collectively demonstrate that *ensera* contributes significantly to Iban sociocultural identity formation by providing symbolic models, shared cultural meanings and emotional attachment to Iban heritage. INF01 (B42) highlights the symbolic importance of Keling and Kumang as figures of heroism and communal identity, suggesting that these characters function as cultural ideals through which the Iban community recognises courage, dignity, beauty, wisdom and pride. INF02 (B31) extends this interpretation by emphasising that *ensera* helps the Iban people feel that they belong to the same race and shared culture. INF03 (B35) further strengthens this idea by describing *ensera* as a source of spiritual strength for the younger generation to maintain their identity. These views show that *ensera* forms Iban sociocultural identity by transforming narrative figures into cultural symbols, communal stories into shared belonging and inherited values into a source of identity resilience.



The views of INF04, INF05 and INF06 further reveal that Iban sociocultural identity formation through *ensera* is closely linked to character building, pride in ancestry, linguistic consciousness and the internalisation of cultural values. INF04 (B48) describes *ensera* as a form of character building that instils pride in one’s origins, indicating that identity is shaped through moral orientation and awareness of ancestral roots. INF05 (B29) adds that identity grows through love for the richness of the native Iban language, ensuring that young people do not feel ashamed of being Iban. INF06 (B31) completes this synthesis by showing that young people who know Keling, Laja and Kumang are exposed to models of good conduct, bravery, wisdom and respect. Thus, *ensera* reinforces the Iban sense of self by enabling the community to recognise its origins, value its language, admire its cultural heroes and sustain pride in being Iban amid changing social realities.

3.4 Moral Values and Social Cohesion in *Ensera*

Moral values and social cohesion in *ensera* are closely related because Iban oral narratives function not only as cultural memory, but also as a moral framework that guides individual conduct and strengthens communal relationships. Within *ensera*, values such as courage, honesty, responsibility, respect for elders, cooperation, humility, loyalty to the community and obedience to customs are communicated through characters, conflicts, consequences and symbolic events. These values are not presented as abstract moral principles, but embodied through narrative actions that allow listeners to recognise desirable and undesirable behaviour within a culturally familiar setting.

In this sense, *ensera* becomes an informal moral education system through which the Iban community teaches ethical conduct, regulates social behaviour and reinforces shared expectations of communal life. Recent studies on folklore and oral traditions show that traditional narratives contribute to moral development by shaping behaviour, preserving local wisdom and transmitting values such as respect, responsibility, generosity and communal living (Yaacob et al., 2024; Olawale, 2025). Through storytelling sessions, shared listening and communal interpretation, *ensera* creates a moral space where the community learns to value harmony over selfishness, responsibility over individual pride and consensus over conflict.

Table 4: Moral Values and Social Cohesion in *Ensera* Based on Informants’ Views
(Source: Fieldwork data from semi-structured interviews with INF01-INF06, transcribed, translated and thematically analysed by the researcher, 2026)

Informant	Line No.	Selected Verbatim Evidence	Moral and Social Cohesion Dimension	Interpretation
INF01	B24	<i>“In this ensera (oral narrative), it emphasizes the spirit of mutual cooperation (gotong-royong) as one aspect, and secondly, the</i>	Cooperation, mutual assistance and communal	INF01’s account suggests that <i>ensera</i> emphasises cooperation and reciprocal assistance as core moral



		<i>spirit of beduruk (reciprocal work sharing/mutual assistance in farming)."</i>	responsibility	values that sustain Iban communal life.
INF02	B47	<i>"We couldn't survive back in the old days without cooperating, without helping one another, without unity."</i>	Cooperation, mutual dependence and unity	INF02 highlights that survival in traditional Iban society depends on cooperation, mutual support and unity, which are repeatedly represented in <i>ensera</i> .
INF03	B39	<i>"This ensera serves as a foundation for harmony. It safeguards peace and unity."</i>	Peace, harmony and social unity	INF03 positions <i>ensera</i> as a foundation of peace because it promotes harmony and strengthens unity within the community.
INF04	B52	<i>"The ensera acts as a social glue that unites the community."</i>	Social bonding and community cohesion	INF04 describes <i>ensera</i> as a social glue that binds members of the Iban community through shared values, stories and collective memory.
INF05	B33	<i>"The ensera binds unity through kind and gentle language."</i>	Unity through refined speech and oral expression	INF05 describes how <i>ensera</i> fosters unity through refined language, poetic expression and meaningful storytelling that can soften conflict and strengthen relationships.
INF06	B15	<i>"The value of unity... respect for the elders. Matters like these are among the core elements within the ensera."</i>	Unity, respect for elders and social manners	INF06 identifies <i>ensera</i> contains key moral values such as unity, respect for elders and proper conduct, which are central to Iban social cohesion.

There was broad convergence around relational obligations, but the emphases differed. INF01 and INF02 connected morality to cooperation and mutual dependence, INF03 and INF04 used the language of peace, unity and social bonding, INF05 located cohesion partly in gentle and refined speech, and INF06 joined unity with respect for elders. This pattern suggests that participants did not separate moral content from communicative practice both what is narrated and how people speak and listen were treated as socially significant.

The accounts also contain a tension between ideal and practice. Participants described values that *ensera* ought to sustain, but the study did not examine conflict episodes, behavioural change or communities with limited exposure to the tradition. Accordingly, the theme is best interpreted as a perceived moral framework whose social influence



depends on performance, discussion, credibility of narrators and opportunities to apply the values in communal life.

3.5 Ensera and Sociocultural Resilience in the Context of Social Change

Ensera and sociocultural resilience in the context of social change are closely related because oral tradition enables the Iban community to preserve continuity while responding to new social, cultural and technological realities. In this study, sociocultural resilience refers to the ability of a community to sustain its cultural identity, values, memory and social organisation despite pressures such as modernisation, migration, declining mastery of traditional language, reduced numbers of skilled storytellers and the growing influence of digital entertainment. Within this context, *ensera* functions as a resilient cultural mechanism because it not only preserves ancestral knowledge, but also allows that knowledge to be reinterpreted and transmitted in ways that remain meaningful to contemporary Iban society.

Through narratives of heroic conduct, longhouse solidarity, respect for customs, ecological awareness, communal responsibility and adaptation to changing circumstances, *ensera* strengthens the community’s capacity to remember its past, negotiate present challenges and imagine cultural continuity for future generations. Recent scholarship on cultural heritage and resilience emphasises that tangible and intangible heritage can strengthen community resilience by reinforcing shared identity, social cohesion and local knowledge (Seduikyte et al., 2025). Heritage research also highlights that intangible cultural practices are not static remnants of the past, but living cultural resources that can support adaptation, continuity and community participation when actively practised, safeguarded and connected to present social needs (Fiorentino et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Table 5. Informants’ Views on *Ensera* and Sociocultural Resilience in the Context of Social Change

(Source: Fieldwork data from semi-structured interviews with INF01-INF06, transcribed, translated and thematically analysed by the researcher, 2026)

Informant	Line No.	Selected Verbatim Evidence	Sociocultural Resilience Dimension	Interpretation
INF01	B65	<i>“In the past, ensera (oral narratives) were strictly verbal. But nowadays, they can be presented through recordings, audio recordings, radio, television, and even YouTube is available now.”</i>	Transformation of transmission medium	INF01’s recollection contrasts earlier verbal narration with recorded, broadcast and digital forms. It is treated as a personal historical account rather than a comprehensive history of <i>ensera</i> performance.
INF02	B43	<i>“This thing allows us to preserve our customs and</i>	Preservation of customs and	INF02 highlights that <i>ensera</i> helps preserve Iban customs and traditions, especially when



		<i>traditions."</i>	tradition	certain traditional practices are no longer commonly seen in everyday life.
INF03	B43	<i>"This ensera is a reflection of the times (or a mirror of the era)."</i>	Reflection of social change	INF03 positions <i>ensera</i> as a mirror of time, suggesting that it can reflect changing social realities while still retaining Iban cultural meanings.
INF04	B56	<i>"The ensera functions like a giant mirror that records every phase of social change within the Iban community."</i>	Documentation of social transformation	INF04 explains that <i>ensera</i> records the phases of Iban social change, making it a cultural medium that documents transformation while preserving continuity.
INF05	B37	<i>"This ensera is indeed a reflection of the times that depicts the transition in our way of life."</i>	Adaptation to changing ways of life	INF05 describes how <i>ensera</i> reflects changes in Iban life and adapts meanings such as bravery, struggle and success to contemporary social realities.
INF06	B49	<i>"Through this cyber platform (literally 'cyber ruai/verandah'), our ensera will remain strong and resilient even as the world changes rapidly."</i>	Digital resilience and cultural continuity	INF06 suggests that a cyber ruai can become a new communal space for sustaining <i>ensera</i> , which the informant believed could support Iban oral heritage despite rapid social and technological change.

The accounts cluster around two ideas, continuity of cultural content and adaptation of transmission media. INF01 recalled that *ensera* had previously been conveyed verbally and contrasted this remembered practice with recordings, radio, television and YouTube. This statement is presented as one informant's recollection rather than an absolute historical claim about all *ensera* performances. INF02 focused on the preservation of customs, whereas INF03, INF04 and INF05 described *ensera* as reflecting changing times and ways of life.

INF06's cyber *ruai* offers the clearest image of adaptation, but it remains a proposal rather than evidence of successful digital transmission. Together, the accounts suggest that resilience may require both continuity and innovation, while also raising questions about language competence, cultural context, narrator-listener interaction and platform fragmentation. Kiyai @ Keai (2023) documents pressures on Iban cultural artefacts, and Mohd Hamizi and Hamzah (2023) identify broader social-media impacts, the present data add knowledge holders' views of adaptation but cannot establish whether digital audiences learn, retain or identify with *ensera*.



Nevertheless, the movement of *ensera* into digital media should not automatically be equated with successful cultural transmission. The informants' suggestions demonstrate the potential of TikTok, YouTube, podcasts and the cyber *ruai*, but the present study does not establish whether younger audiences engage with complete *ensera* recitations or primarily encounter shortened and decontextualised fragments. Declining competence in classical Iban expressions may also limit comprehension even when recordings are readily accessible. Digital safeguarding should therefore combine full-length recordings with contextual information, Iban-language transcripts, translations and explanations provided by recognised cultural knowledge holders. Community consent and control over attribution, interpretation and access are equally important so that increased digital visibility does not reduce *ensera* to detached entertainment.

4.0 Conclusion

This study concludes that *ensera* plays a significant role as a mechanism of cultural transmission and Iban sociocultural identity formation. The findings show that *ensera* is not merely a form of traditional oral narrative or entertainment, but a living cultural archive that preserves collective memory, ancestral knowledge, language, customs, rituals, moral values and the worldview of the Iban community. Through its narratives, symbolic characters, poetic language and representations of longhouse life, *ensera* transmits cultural knowledge from one generation to another while strengthening the community's awareness of its shared origins, values and identity.

The study also demonstrates that *ensera* contributes to moral development, social cohesion and sociocultural resilience in the context of social change. The informants' views reveal that *ensera* promotes cooperation, respect for elders, unity, communal responsibility and adherence to customary values. At the same time, *ensera* remains relevant by adapting to new platforms such as recordings, radio, television, YouTube, podcasts and cyber community spaces. Therefore, the preservation of *ensera* should not be understood only as an effort to safeguard oral tradition, but also as a strategy for sustaining Iban cultural identity, strengthening intergenerational learning and ensuring the continuity of Iban sociocultural heritage in contemporary society.

The findings have practical implications for cultural institutions, educational authorities and Iban communities. The safeguarding of *ensera* should prioritise community-led audiovisual documentation, bilingual digital archiving and the recording of contextual information concerning performers, narrative settings and culturally specific terminology. Selected *ensera* materials may also be incorporated into Iban language, heritage and character education, provided that their meanings are explained by knowledgeable cultural bearers and presented with appropriate community consent.

As this study is based on the interpretations of six knowledgeable informants, future research should examine the reception of *ensera* among younger listeners and compare transmission practices across different Iban regions. Further studies may also evaluate whether digital adaptations preserve the narrative structure, performance context, linguistic nuances and cultural authority of the original oral tradition. Participatory research involving storytellers, educators, young people and cultural organisations would be particularly valuable for developing culturally responsible models of *ensera* documentation and revitalisation.



5.0 Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) for the institutional support and facilities provided throughout the study. Special thanks are also extended to all participants/informants who generously contributed their time and insights during the data collection phase.

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