

Folk literature and social values of the Temne in northern Sierra Leone

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the art and wisdom of the Temne traditional oral narratives. A primary opinion held generally by scholars the world over and by scholars and people in Sierra Leone prompted this research. That folk literature has always served as potent instrument in directing the social, political, economic and cultural life of the African peoples. This seems to be the central argument. This study is concerned with investigating the efficacies of that claim: investigating whether the Temne folk literature still serves as a credible means to comment on and direct social behaviors. The findings include but not limited to 'Folk literature among the Temne is still used to achieve values such as discipline, kindness, respect for people, hard work, skills, the culture of their societies, moral lessons etc. but these values were shown to be not much accepted by the young because of modernization, western education and religion'.

Keywords: Folk literature, Social Behaviour, Temne, Oral Narrative, Values

1. Introduction

The Temne consider kindness, truth, and generosity as values worthy of pursuit and are expressed in many proverbial sayings (ɛlomə) and stories (ɛmump). All tribal societies in Sierra Leone reiterate daily that the kind will get their reward and will receive the commendation of both God and men. They also believe in the "end justifying the means" as in the Temne saying, "Kən kən ɔlɪpsə ɔthesə". Not only do proverbs and everyday sayings reflect the close relationship of morality and religion, but there are also numerous religious prohibitions or taboos held by West Africans which refer to rules of conduct as well as to material things. Also, these stories or proverbs or riddles or sayings normally feature human beings and animals, either separately or together.

They explore themes that hinge on moral values and religious beliefs of the Temne people. These range from the "done things" in that society to "moral or religious Prohibitions or taboos." They include, but not limited to, "Kətut ki yo mu I ti-e fu" (jealousy can make someone lose everything); "Də dir di kərə mu mi ləp" (greed can result in disgrace); "Mə pensə kə til-e imbəye kipensə kə nink" (we may encounter difficulties if we refuse to heed our parents' advice); "Kə bənkəne kən fimki lis" (it can be dangerous to assert one's self on people); "Məthemne mi karamuokororo" (laziness can make someone unprogressive); etc. Because they believe in the extended family system (ənbonso), polygamy, etc they often tell stories that warn against people that are not united. They abhor jealousy and backbiting, and as a result, they tell stories and proverbs that warn of the dangers of jealousy and backbiting. In the story of "ənram na ka tut" (The Price of Jealousy) recorded by Abdul Turay (1989), the co-wife loses everything – husband and co-wife because of her jealousy. In "Pə Nənsən yi oninkərəkon" (Mister Spider and his Mother-in-law), the spider experiences shame and disgrace because of greed and selfishness. Disobedience, especially from children is not encouraged by the Temne people. That is why most of

their stories about children revolve around their obstinacy. In 'The Girl who decides to find a Husband on her own', the girl suffers the brunt of being swallowed by the boa. In addition, the Temne want everybody in their community to be friendly with one another. They believe that no matter your strength, you ought to respect the weaker ones. This ideal is reflected in most of their stories and sayings. In "Təbəri yi Ankrifi" (The Twins and the Devils) because these devils force themselves on the people of that town with their 'teleng', they were vanquished by a more powerful spirit—the twins. In the story of "owən urusmə yi owən uyəy" (The Industrious Child and the Lazy child), "oləngbə kədirə kibənə-e" (The Great Sleeper), the lazy characters suffer greatly as a result of that flaw. Other themes explored in the stories of the Temne people are: the mistreatment of disadvantaged people is not good and may result to curse to the perpetrator; obsessive love can be disastrous; an unfaithful woman can bring many men into trouble; and several others that make the Temne values and beliefs.

One does not need to look too deeply to see that these comments have been neglected; with the advent of industrialization and the creeping in of technological implements to our villages, youth, it seems, prefer to draw more on these for their social behavioral repertoire than from folk comments. They prefer to dance to Pop Music to the 'Bubu' Music; they prefer to talk, to walk and act like the hero of some violent fantasy movie, and be attracted to a host of other borrowed behaviours. It is clearly evident; therefore, that deviance and misbehavior have invariably become unbridled. These values can only be projected and deviant attitudes curbed if we go back to the roots – combining traditional approaches to social attitudes and behaviours. When we do that, we come in touch with our original awareness of evenings, localities, and people. Perhaps with that, the Temne people will become conscious of their past and remember their roots. The study's main thrust therefore, is to investigate the art and

wisdom of the Temne traditional oral narratives in so far as their preservation and revitalization can act toward positive social change in the North. The specific objective determines the values of folk literature among the Temne.

2. Methodology

A. General Data Collection Method

Traditional anthropological technique of participant observation (Ijaiya, 1999) [9]. In which the researcher is an active participant in the performance of the folklore was adopted in all communities visited. Data collection was conducted with the use of a structured questionnaire designed to survey a sample of 60 communities (10 in each community) selected at random within the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. Four focus group discussions (1 from each district) were conducted in selected communities to provide complementary data at the district level.

Field work for the study was carried out from August 2013 to January 2014 following the pilot study involving 5 typical communities in the previous year. All interviews were conducted in Krio and Themne (the most common local languages).

B. Research Population and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used due to the very large size of the sampling space (i.e., the entire Northern Province having an estimated population of 1,745,553 People). This method was extremely helpful in identifying first target respondents who invariably identified other respondents relevant to the research. In the four districts (Bombali, Tonkolili, Port Loko, and Kambia) sixty communities were selected from twelve chiefdoms (See Table 1).

Table 1: Districts, Chiefdoms and Communities Selected

District	Chiefdom	Community
Bombali	Makarie Gbanti	Makarie, Masongbo, Roketeh, Mayobo, Masaprie
	Bombali Shebora	Makeni, Rosinth, Robat, Buya Bombe
	Sanda Tendaren	Mataboi, Rogboreh, Rokulan, Madina, Rogbin
Tonkolili	Gbonkolenken	Petifu- Mayoppoh, Yele, Rochian, Mayoppoh, Rokoma
	Kholifa Rowalla	Magburaka, Rowalla, Mayossoh, Mamuntha, Maporthor
	Tane	Mabere, Matotoka, Matufali, Masamp, Rosinth (Tane),
Port Loko	Koya	Songo, Mamamah, Sumbuy, a Masiaka, Magbentha
	Kaffu Bullom	Mahera, Conakridee, Kambi, a Masoila, Tantafor
	Marampa	Feredugu, Lunsar, Makomp Petifu, Mabure
Kambia	Magbama	Kambia, Bamoi-Luma, Rokupr, Kapairo, Rogbara
	Mambolo	Rosinor, Mambolo, Gboka-Maria, Katema, Mamiri
	Masumgbala	Kawula, Bamoi Rokirma, Bena, Robanka

In each section of the community, three categories of respondents were considered; namely (1) Key respondents like the village leaders and other stakeholders; (2) household griot or village griot; and (3) respondents of age 35 and above. These

were selected because they are known for using and benefiting most from folk literature.

C. Research Instruments and Techniques

The field research approaches used were questionnaires; focus group discussion and participant observations.

D. Construction of Questionnaire and Data Collection Plan

The questionnaire asked respondents about the existence of folk literature in their communities, their levels of operation and values, and respondents' general perceptions about them. A perception survey model was used to structure the latter part of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was structured to justify the truthfulness of the major hypothesis which states that 'the more attention given to folk literature of the Temne and its practice presented to the grass roots (and the cognoscenti), the more there will be chance for social behavioral changes; the greater it will help in guiding social interaction, and the faster the community will develop'. Therefore, in order for a logical conclusion to this hypothesis to be reached, the researcher included questions in the questionnaire that tested its validity in the field. Later the questionnaire was pretested and a reliability analysis done using the Cronbach' Alpha Statistics. Questions whose measure is relatively stable over-time were also selected. Not only that, Questions were carefully devised so as to ensure that respondents' scores on any of the indicators be related to their scores on other indicators. In questions requiring a great deal of subjective judgments as in the recording of observations or the triangulation of data into categories or where observers had to decide on how to classify the subjects' behavior, inter-observer consistency was ensured. In the criterion of social behavioral changes, the questionnaire was able to test the likelihood to which respondents differed.

E. Selection of Question Items

Items included in the main study questionnaire were selected from three sources

1. The Pilot Questionnaire Survey

The responses to items on the pilot questionnaires given in appendix 2 were used in selecting the items to be used in the main study questionnaires. Items with which most respondents agreed, disagreed or were uncertain of were excluded.

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3. Focus group Discussion

A list of questions given in appendix 2 on the general concept of the Temne folk literature to which respondent were asked to respond to was constructed from references made in the pilot interviews. In particular, the sources of information on general perception about the concept included on the questionnaire were derived from the pilot interview.

F. Data Collection Plan

The table below displays the data collection plan adopted by the researcher.

No.	Activity	Start time	End time	Result
1.	Familiarization tour and distribution of notice letters.	August 1, 2013.	September 1, 2013.	Notice letters distributed and preliminary discussions held with stakeholders.
2.	Distribution of Questionnaires, group discussions and recordings.	October 1, 2013	January 1, 2014.	Questionnaires distributed and collected; group discussions held and recordings of discussions and folk performances done.

G. Data Analysis

Data gathered from questionnaires were analyzed using the General Social Survey (GSS) method to help determine how the Temne people “think and behave at given time and track their personal opinions” (Agresti and Franklin 2013: 349) [13]. On folk literature that enabled for a possible, reliable predictions given the small number of people targeted. Qualitative analysis was conducted with the use of SPSS 16.0 to generate cross tabulations and charts.

3. Summary of Research findings

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate the art and wisdom of the Temne traditional oral narratives. Two suppositions seemed to be the main thrust for undertaking this study: 1) According to Young (2004) [2]. Alembi (2002) [12]. etc. oral forms of literature have manifested themselves in many unique ways that expressed the concerns, understandings, insights and protests of the African peoples, especially during the heady imperialistic periods (i). 2) Mafala (2007) [11]. Says that oral literature in Africa used to be the means by which the young are taught to be responsible adults, but “the dramatization of oral narratives is diminishing among the Africans”. These seem to be their central arguments. This study is concerned with determining the values of folk literature among the Temne.

The results showed that an overwhelming percentage of respondents indicated that Folk literature among the Temne is still used to achieve values such as discipline, kindness, respect for people, hard work, skills, the culture of their societies, moral lessons etc. but these values were shown to be not much accepted by the young because of modernization, western education and religion.

The research was a triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative design. However, 90% was put on the quantitative design and only 10 % on the qualitative.

4. Results

The study’s main thrust therefore, is to investigate through a careful comparative study the art and wisdom of the Temne traditional oral narratives in so far as their preservation and revitalization can act toward positive social change in the North. The specific objective determines the values of folk literature among the Temne. To do this, 600 respondents were required to record answers to the various aspects of the structured questionnaire. Their judgments were then compared and presented in graphs and tables. The discussions of these results are presented below.

A. Values of Temne Folk literature

The study assessed the values of the Temne folk literature. To be able to arrive at a reasonably comprehensive conclusion about the values of the Temne folk literature, the variable was divided into three, viz:

- i) Statements of evidence about the values of Temne folk literature;

- ii) Possible values the young can acquire from folk literature; and
- iii) Possible Action.

Figure 1 through figure 4 presents the study’s findings below.

i. Statements of evidence about the values of Temne folk literature

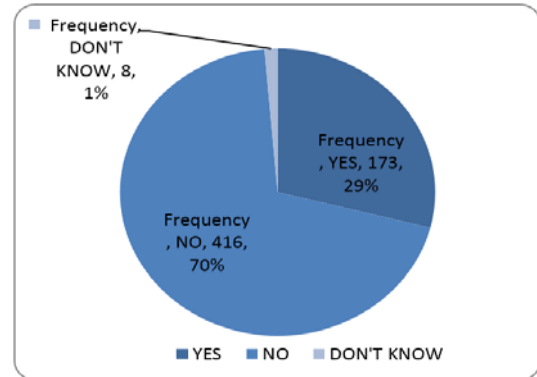


Fig.1: When I was young I was told many stories but I learned nothing from them

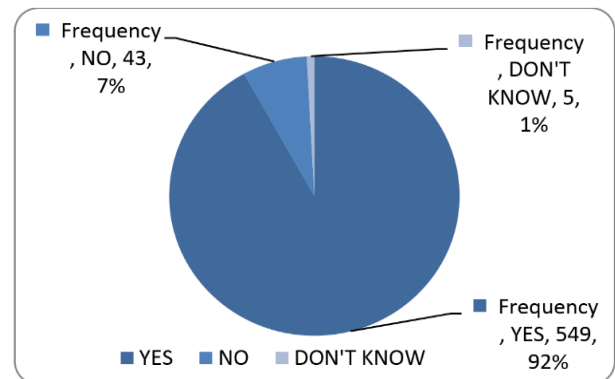


Fig 2: When I was young I learned good things from the proverbs I was told

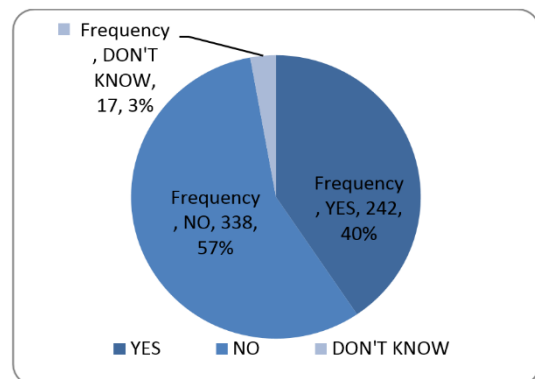


Fig 3: When I was young, I learned good things from the riddles I was told

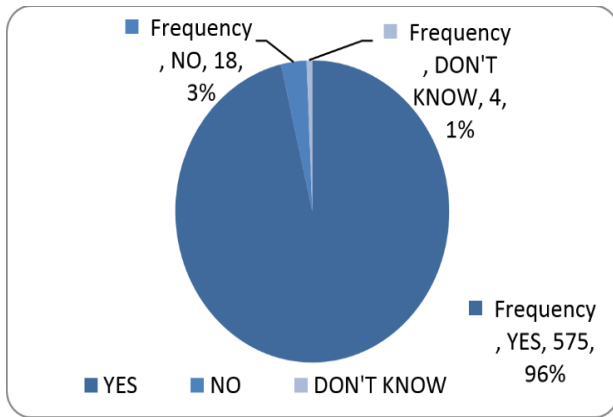


Fig.4: When I was young, I learned nothing from the songs and dances I heard

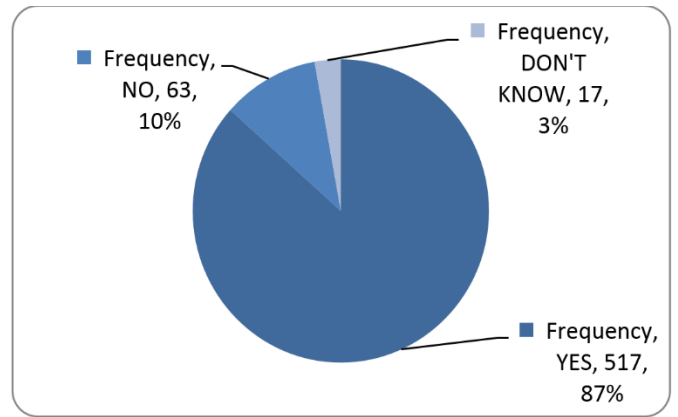


Fig.6: Can young people learn because we tell them stories?

Seventy percent of respondents surveyed stated they learnt something from the stories they were told when they were young. Only 29% indicated they learnt nothing from those stories. Similarly, 92% stated they learnt good things from the proverbs they were told. Only 7% stated they learnt no good things from those proverbs. The percentage of respondents who said they learnt good things from riddles when they were young was relatively as high (57%) as those who indicated they learnt no good things from it (40%). Because the 'No' response is close to being significant, further investigation is required in this area. Traditional songs received the highest response of respondents who indicated they learnt good things from the traditional songs and dances they engaged in when they were young (96%). Only 3% said they learnt nothing.

This variable tested the opinion that folk literature has always provided the necessary guide line for social behaviour among the Temne. This, unfortunately, seems not be the case for the Temne of present day Sierra Leone as the subsequent data will reveal (See Fig. 1-4).

Values the Young could acquire from Folk literature

The following were deemed by respondents to be very possible and effective virtues the young could acquire from the folk literature of the Temne people:

Learning: proverbs, 86% with only 12% disagreeing; stories, 87% with 10% disagreeing; riddles, 72% with 20% disagreeing; and traditional songs, 86%, 12% disagree.

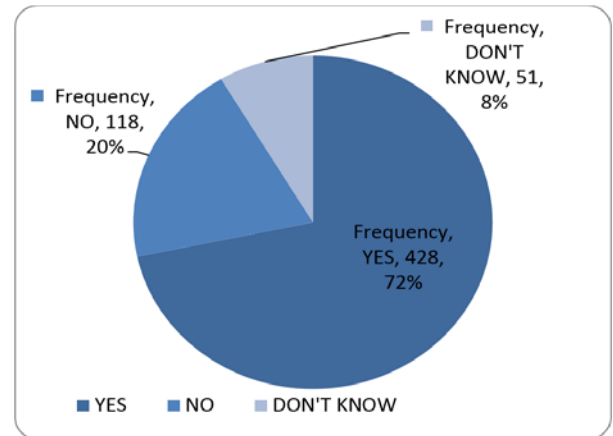


Fig. 7: Can young people learn because we tell them riddles?

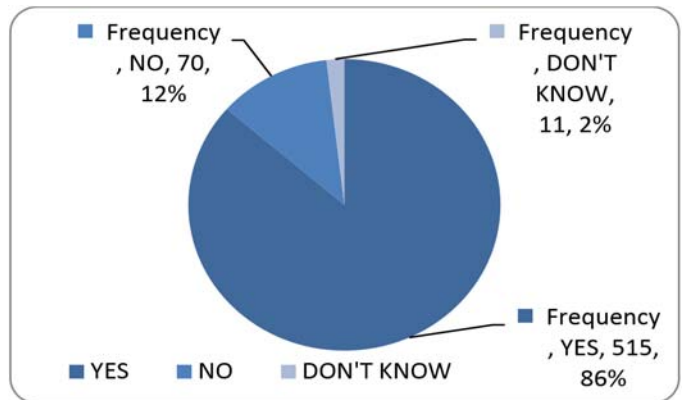


Fig. 8: Can young people learn because we sing our songs to them?

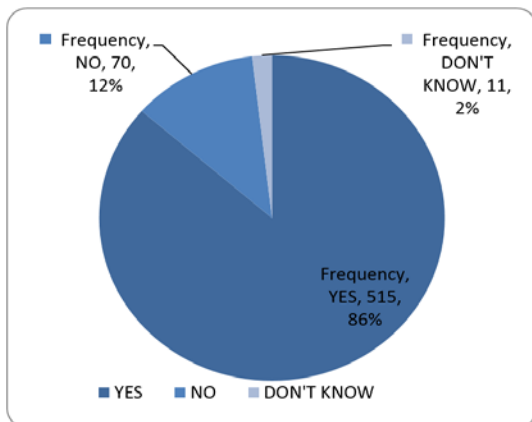


Fig. 5: Can young people learn because we tell them proverbs?

ii. Possible virtues they could learn: Seventy two percent said the young could learn to be disciplined through folk literature. Twenty percent disagreed. Ninety three percent noted they could learn to be kind and 6% said no to this. Ninety four percent said it could be possible to learn respect for people through folk literature; 85% indicated it could be possible to learn hard work through it. Eighty eight percent noted the young could learn not to be proud while 78% indicated they could learn a skill of some sort. Twenty percent said somehow the young could not learn skills from folk literature. Both 'not to be promiscuous' and 'not to trust everybody' received moderate positive responses of 75% and 80% respectively and relatively high percentages of no for the variables. 'Could educate them'; 'the culture of our people' and 'moral lessons'; all received high percentages of response (87%, 92%, 94%

correspondingly). Learning to use folk literature as defense against rivals received a comparatively low percent (68%). Twenty eight percent stated they could not learn that virtue.

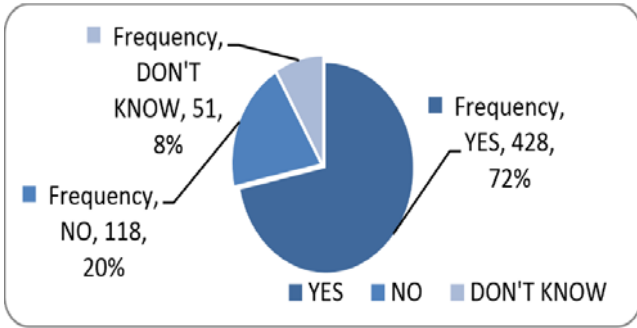


Fig.9: Discipline

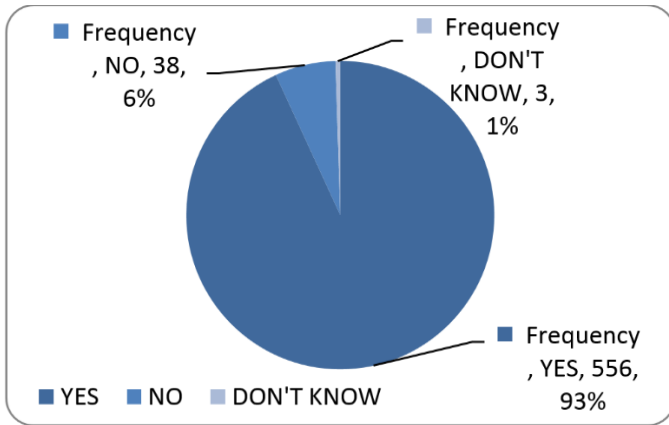


Fig.10: Kindness

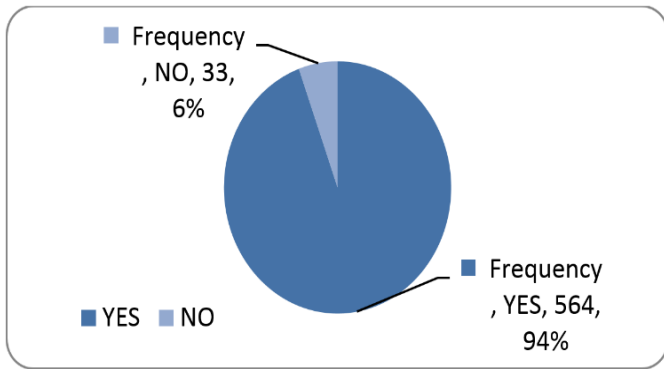


Fig.11: Respect for people

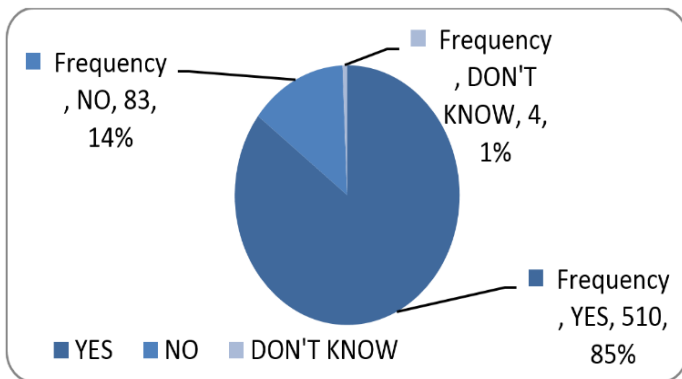


Fig.12: Hard work



Fig.13: Not to be proud

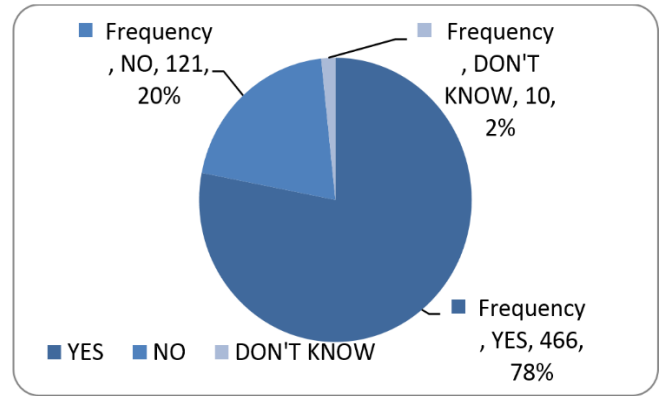


Fig.14: Skill

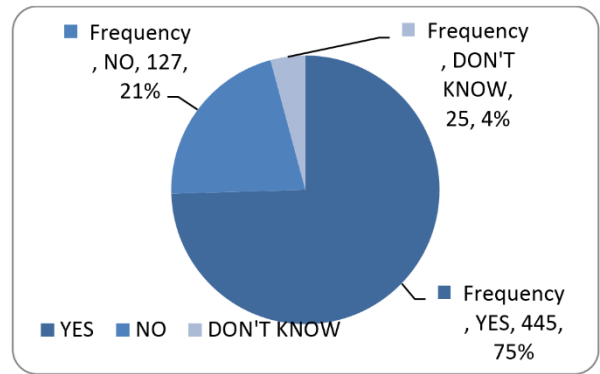


Fig.15: Not to be promiscuous

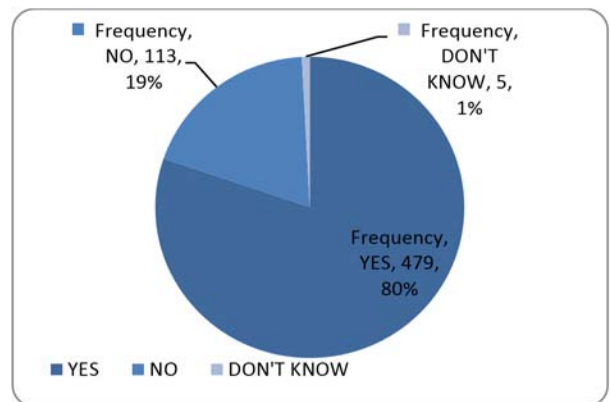


Fig.16: Not to trust everybody

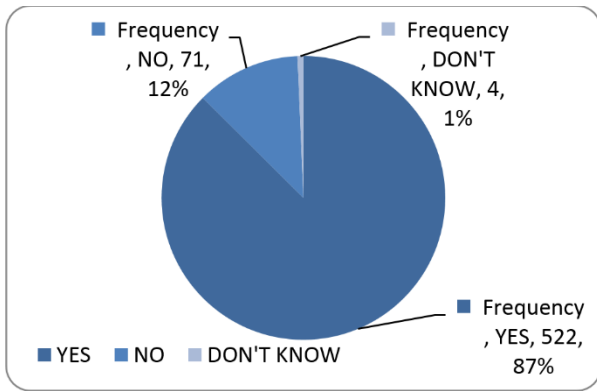


Fig.17: Could educate them

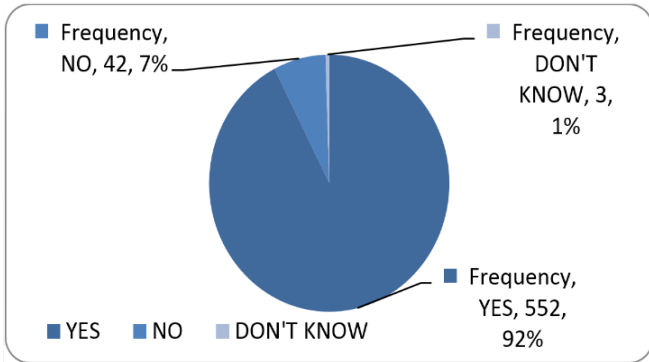


Fig.18: The culture of our people

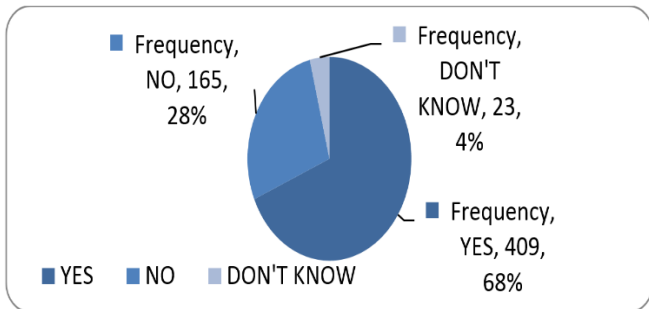


Fig.19: Used as defense against rivals

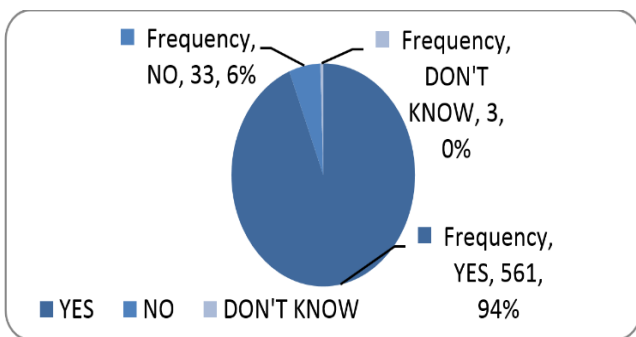


Fig.20: Moral lessons

Guiding behaviour: The results in respect of the above behaviour are presented in the descriptive statistic of Figure 4.1.6.5b.1 through Figure 4.1.6.5b.4 below. According to the figures, the responses for possibility for folk literature to guide the behaviour of young people were overwhelmingly higher than the responses of those who questioned its possibility. However, the negative intensity shown for riddles was equally

high (19%) with 12% uncertain of this possibility. Similarly, the negative level for the possibility of song is reasonably high. Nonetheless, these figures could not be used to determine that riddles and songs can guide the social behaviour of the young in Temne land, as they are proportionately much lower than the responses for 'yes' for both genres. But, inasmuch as the percentages show insignificant levels, they could be marked as forewarning signs (as most people claimed in the open-ended question) of the declining intensity of such practices to direct behaviour. Using figures 4.1.6.5b.1 and 4.1.6.5b.2, therefore, is not enough to make reasonable conclusion for objective F above.

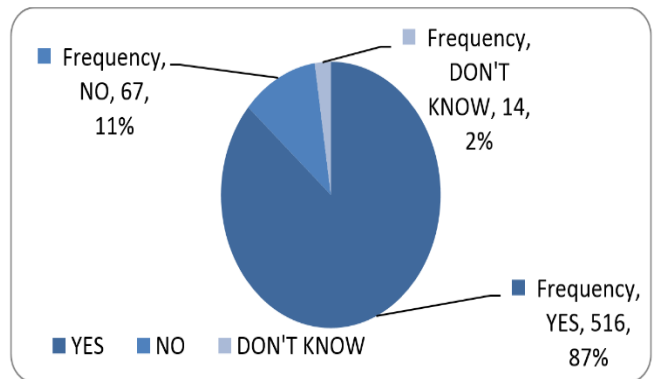


Fig 21: Could young people's behaviour be properly guided because we tell them stories?

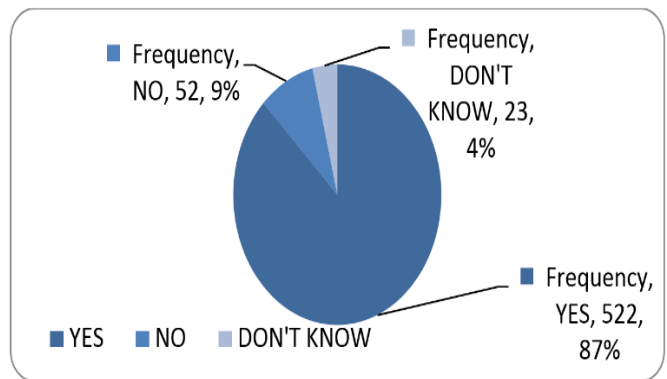


Fig 22: Could young people's behaviour be properly guided because we tell them proverbs?

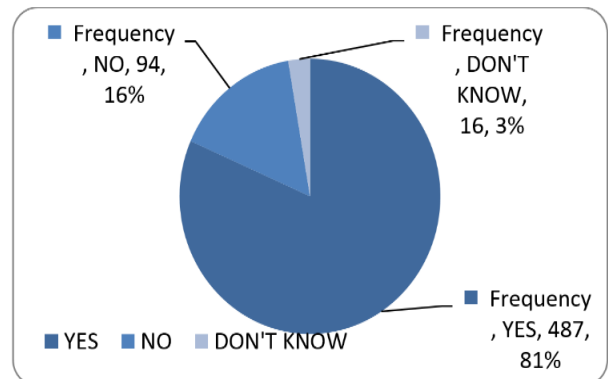


Fig 23: Can young people's behaviour be properly guided because we sing our songs to them?

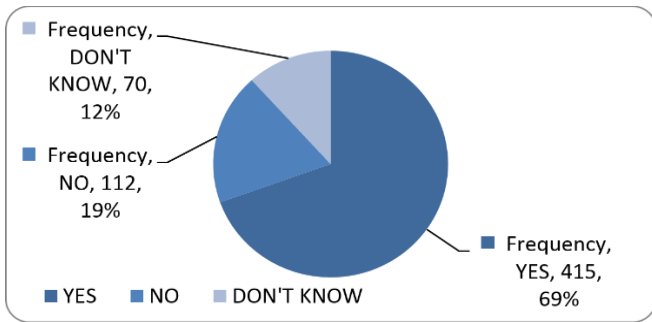


Fig 24: Can young people's behaviour be properly guided because we tell them riddles?

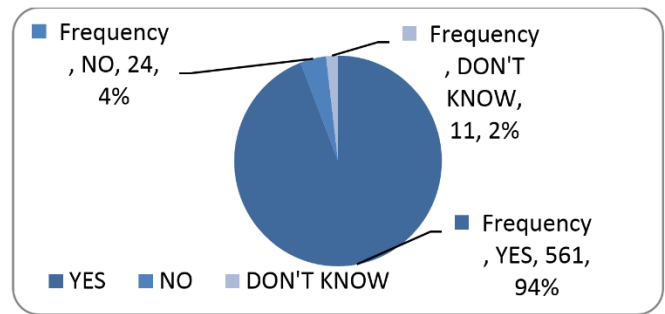


Fig 27: Can young people's behaviour be properly guided because we tell them riddles?

ii. Possible Actions: Figure 4.1.6.5b.1.1 through 4.1.6.5b.3 below presents the possible actions suggested by respondents for the possible acquisition of the values discussed in figure 4.1.6.5b.1 through 4.1.6.5b.4 above. The results show that there is every possibility for folk literature of the Temne to guide the behaviour of the young if we tell them stories with (positive) moral lessons (97%); folk literature that talk about their society (94%) and when you instruct them to follow the good examples depicted in the folk literature (94%).

B. Translation and Descriptive Summary of Focus Group Discussions

Values of Temne folk literature

These forms are normally practised to direct the behaviours of people. We listened to these forms and the followed the values in them. However, children nowadays don't sit to listen to them. Before this time, even a simple keen look from your parents or an elder meant something to the young. Now if you continue to look at young person for long time you may attract a blaring question 'why are you looking at me like that, old man?' Sometimes, they just told proverbs or cited a story to warn people. Sincerely, these forms are still practised to warn the young. They are still done to entertain; just for the same purposes they were used for.

The discussions revealed that the same purposes for which traditional folk practices were told in the past still remained to be the purposes for which they are told these days.

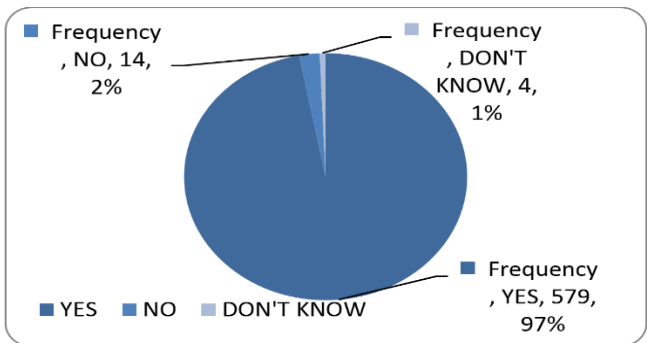


Fig.25: When you tell them folk with moral lessons

Present means of Transmitting Temne Values to the Young

"Now most of what they learn is taught to them in schools."

Factors preventing the practice of Temne folk literature

The foremost thing is education. Another is technology—films, football, discotheques, etc. Government is also another inhibiting factor. So also the human rights laws, radio, religion, etc. these things have made the young not to come close to us, the elderly. The discussions, to a great extent, speculated modernity, religion and human rights laws as the major reasons for the neglect of folk literature among the Temne of Northern Sierra Leone. These discussions were most times biting.

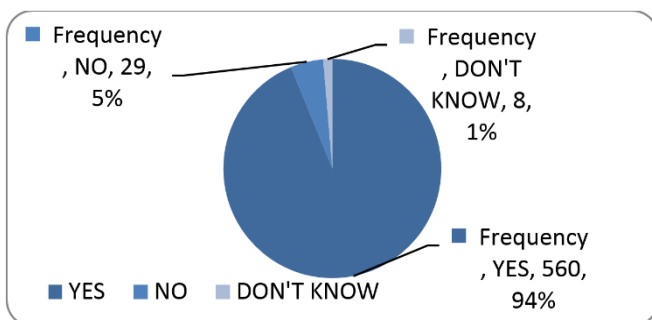


Fig 26: When you tell folk literature literatures that talk about their society

Present Benefits of Temne folk practices

'One is they make us to know how to do things; how to go about our business with hurting people. They also make people to be wise and reasonable.' The group discussion unveiled rather the same result as of objective F and seemed to support it. The answer encompassed all the five major values of folk literature outlines in 4.1.6- to educate; to entertain; to warn; to castigate; to ridicule.

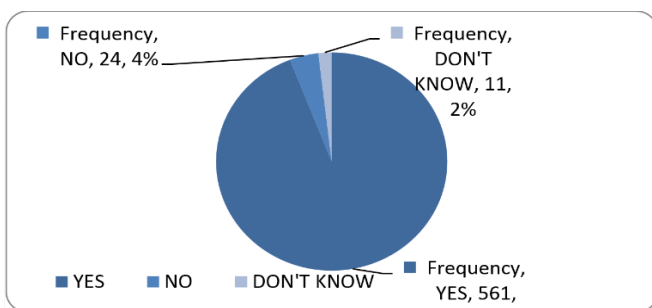


Fig 14: When you instruct them to follow the good examples in the folk form

5. Discussions

The discussions in relation to the results and the review of literature are presented in this section.

Values of Temne Folk Literature

The study endeavored to determine the values of folk literature among the Temne and found out that the folk literature of the Temne still teaches many values that range from encouraging discipline to showing kindness, having respect for others, valuing hard work, knowing it is pleasant not to be proud, wise to acquire skills, patriotic to cherish the culture of a society, wise to go after knowledge, preparedness to counter rivalry and general desire to inculcate moral lesson. Guang-Lea (2011)^[15]. Findings supported the finding when he pointed out that many of the values Koreans instill in their children, have foundation in Confucianism. These values are taught in large extent through folk literature. Through such practices, children learn that recognition and a man's worth are determined by a person's actions and his ability to display these actions.

Song (2005) in Billingsley (2014)^[17]. Elaborated further in his finding that one popular folktale revolving around good deeds is *'The Sun and the Moon' (1988)* where a little boy and a girl stay home and while their mother goes out to sell rice cake, a tiger eats the cake and gabbles the mother up. This tiger then puts on the mother's clothes and pretends to be the mother so as to attack the children. These children wish for a miracle to escape from the tiger. When this happens, a rope comes from the sky and lifts the children to the sky. They become the moon and the sun. The tiger attempts to chase the children but dies when the rope breaks. When children read this story they distinguish between being good and being bad.

Young (2004)^[2]. had a similar finding. He found out that folk literature "introduces students to many cultures", and that they can easily establish values such as "honesty, hard work, mercy and forgiveness, gratitude, kindness and learning that are honored across cultures (782). Vander Grift (2014)^[16]. Discovered that children could learn about life's experiences through folk literature and, as a result, could overcome those life's experiences through folk literature. Similarly so, Sutherland pointed out that in order for children to function well in their society they must go by the values of that society depicted mostly in their folk literature. Perhaps, through this, those children can know who they are and what are expected of them. That is why Solokov (2014) found out that characters in Russian folk literature often found themselves struggling to discover themselves. *'The Golden Ax and the Silver Ax' (2009)*, according to Gang-Lea contains clear lesson about honesty; presenting honest and dishonest behaviour. But observation showed that the Temne children sometimes indulged in negative practices like trickery not tolerated by the society. Whether they copied this value from their folk literature is a matter that requires further research. Indeed, the structure of the Temne story has a section for the antagonist; where the undone things of the society are emphasized. Sometimes fraudulent behaviours are presented in such a way that they seem attractive to listeners, or violent acts illuminated though negatively. Whether these have endeared some young people in Temne land to love violence and admire trickery requires further study. Billingsley (2014)^[17]. Supported this belief that sometimes negative folktale content may instill negative values in our children. Darigan felt this is not true.

Folk literature has been shown to possess many values. It transmits to the young or to people at large. The Korean folk literature for example is shown to be grounded in traditional

values. Many of the values they instill in their children. Guang-Lea (2011)^[15]. points out have foundation in Confucianism. These values are taught in large extent through folk literature. Through such practices, children learn that recognition and a man's worth is determined by a person's actions and his ability to display these actions. Song (2005) says, one popular folktale revolving around good deeds is *'The Sun and the Moon'* where a little boy and a girl escape from, the deceit of the tiger.

Young (2004)^[2]. affirms that folk literature "introduces students to many cultures", and that they can easily establish values such as "honesty, hard work, mercy and forgiveness, gratitude, kindness and learning that are honored across cultures (782). Vander Grift (2014)^[16]. puts it generally that children's stories are meant to explore the world and enable children "to confirm, to illuminate, and to extend her own life experience, in ways that give her power over them.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analyses on the Temne folk literature and social behaviour and inline with the discussions of the findings and the major considerations of the literature review, the following conclusions are drawn.

Folk literature among the Temne is still assumed to be used for the purposes of education, entertainment, puzzling, drawing ethical instances and guiding behaviour.

Folk literature among the Temne is still used to achieve values such as discipline, kindness, respect for people, hard work, skills, the culture of their societies, moral lessons etc. but these values were shown to be not much accepted by the young because of modernization, western education and religion.

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