

## Exploring the diverse age groups of folk literature practitioners among the Temne people of Sierra Leone

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the practitioners of the Temne folk literature, focusing on age group variations. Even though there has been an increasing global interest in African cultural practices and their practitioners, not much research categorizes them by age. The study adopted a mixed methods design used in Thulla's study to identify categories of Temne folk literature practitioners and their forms across different ages. The study also explored the link between participants' ages and their engagement with Temne literature, hypothesizing no significant relationship. The study concludes that elderly people use stories, proverbs, and riddles more frequently in daily communication. Also, practices like proverbs, songs, dances, and riddles vary slightly across age groups. These findings are crucial for understanding the transmission and conservation of Temne culture and suggest that scholars should investigate the reasons behind differences in storytelling to reflect the culture's flexibility.

**Keywords:** African cosmology, Cultural preservation, Indigenous traditions, Folk literature, Temne culture

**Résumé :** Cette étude examine les praticiens de la littérature populaire temne, en s'intéressant aux variations selon les groupes d'âge. Malgré un intérêt mondial croissant pour les pratiques culturelles africaines et leurs interprètes, peu de recherches les catégorisent par âge. L'étude a adopté une méthodologie mixte, similaire à celle de l'étude de Thulla, afin d'identifier les catégories de praticiens de la littérature populaire temne et leurs formes selon les âges. Elle a également exploré le lien entre l'âge des participants et leur rapport à la littérature temne, sans toutefois formuler l'hypothèse d'une relation significative. L'étude conclut que les personnes âgées utilisent plus fréquemment les contes, les proverbes et les devinettes dans leur communication quotidienne. De plus, des pratiques telles que les proverbes, les chants, les danses et les devinettes varient légèrement selon les groupes d'âge. Ces résultats sont essentiels à la compréhension de la transmission et de la conservation de la culture temne et suggèrent que les chercheurs devraient étudier les raisons des différences dans la narration afin de refléter la flexibilité de cette culture.

**Mots-clés :** Cosmologie africaine, Préservation culturelle, Traditions autochtones, Littérature populaire, Culture temne

### Introduction

Due to the increasing interest in African cultural practices and knowledge systems among academics worldwide, scholars such as Turner (2020), Thulla (2019), Hall and Tandon (2017), Heleta (2016), Idang (2015), and Tengö et al. (2014) have significantly contributed

to discussions about decolonizing African culture and its values. However, while these studies have focused on the importance of African folk literature practitioners, also known as griots or griottes (female griots), in preserving African belief systems and epistemology in the study of African literature in general, and African folk literature in particular, little has been done to categorize these practitioners based on age.

A deeper understanding of African customs and belief systems can help contextualize this seemingly simple but significant aspect of African folk literature. For example, Wane's (2005) research emphasizes the holistic and linked nature of African cultural rites and beliefs, which are critical to comprehending global developments. African culture, according to Idang (2015), is the entirety of the African way of life, and what it means is essential to understanding the culture (Awoniyi, 2015). Maylam (2017) and Clark and Worger (2016) argued that the apartheid system in 1994 erased the historical, intellectual, and cultural contributions of Africa and other parts of the 'non-African' world. However, Africans still cling to conventional knowledge systems for traditional practices (Meijer et al., 2015; Brown et al. 2009). Ani (2013) mentioned that the development of an Africa-based modern knowledge system is influenced by the cultural and traditional aspects of African cultures.

Rex (2020) and Smedley (2018) question the distinction between world views, knowledge systems, nations, races, and conventional research methods as they explore the implications of indigenous knowledge systems, such as healing practices and technology, for COVID-19 treatment (Attah et al., 2021). Such information is often locked up in indigenous knowledge systems and other grey literature, which are not compatible with the concept of sustainability. Ntloedibe (2025) claimed that university knowledge systems in Africa are derivations of the Western canon. Conversely, Africa, with its tremendous health and medical knowledge, has learned through traditional practices. To guarantee the preservation and advancement of African culture and values, however, the intricate issues of gender dialectics and indigenous Africa-centered knowledge systems must be addressed (Adom et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Sone, 2018; Amadiume, 2015; Kreps, 2013; Bacchilega, 2012).

During the colonial period, wrong characterizations were made about Africans as lacking civilization. Stories such as the Central African Empire serving as home to skilled artisans, according to Hoogstraten and Giles-Vernick (as cited in Aviam, 2017) prove that such characterizations were wrong. There has also been evidence that Africans had rich arts and oral traditions such as the Temne traditions of northern Sierra Leone and the music and dance of the Congolese Aka people (Thulla, 2019). In the context of African folk literature, the exploration of traditional oral narratives within African communities sheds light on the values and social behaviours embedded in these narratives, revealing a rich heritage that is deeply intertwined with their cultural traditions (Anasiudu, 2024). Akinyemi and Falola (2021) revealed that the belief in ancestral origins from the northeast region of Sierra Leone, known as *Rothoron*, reflects the region's connection to its historical roots and the significance placed on geographical symbolism. Bangura (2022) revealed that the creation myths and beliefs of the Temne people highlight their understanding of the world's origins and the characteristics of the first inhabitants.

Gelfand's (2019) study touches upon social norms and practices, such as attitudes towards adultery and the treatment of deformed children, providing insights into the ethical and moral values upheld by African Indigenous communities. Ongodia (2014) noted that the exploration of oral narratives among the Iteso people in Uganda and Kenya offers a comparative perspective on the role of storytelling in African communities. In a way, oral narratives are an underappreciated tool for change in Africa, particularly in the Temne folktales of the northern communities of Sierra Leone (Thulla, 2019). This makes the narratives a crucial part of the generational interaction and makes it possible to identify the practitioners of these literary elements.

African traditional values and institutions are represented through stories, proverbs, riddles, and songs that fall under the genre of African folk literature. However, Asante (2003) highlights the close relationship between African indigenous knowledge and environmental beliefs, which is crucial for folk literature, while Wane (2005) highlights the loss of indigenous knowledge due to a cultural shift toward nuclear families, the demise of traditional wisdom, and the transition from oral to written traditions, all of which have threatened the field of folk literature.

Furthermore, the analysis of folk literature by scholars like Finnegan challenges misconceptions about African literary traditions and underscores the sophistication and creativity inherent in oral storytelling practices (Sone, 2018). Finnegan's critique of Eurocentric perspectives on African folk literature illuminates the complexity and depth of oral narratives, countering stereotypes of primitivism and lack of originality (Anasiudu, 2024). By showcasing the intricate storytelling techniques and thematic richness found in African oral poetry and epics, scholars like Finnegan and Ngugi contribute to a broader understanding of the literary and cultural significance of oral traditions in Africa (Otiono, 2021). Scholars such as wa Thiong'o (2023), Finnegan (2018), Finnegan (2012), and Fashina (2011) have emphasized the continued importance of folk literature in African civilizations, stressing its role in preserving cultural legacy, passing down knowledge to future generations, and promoting communal cohesiveness.

The transmission of the values of the African peoples by word of mouth is an essential element of their civilizations, which can be traced back to their communal lives in the past (Ajibade, 2016; Hanson, 2008; Jackson, (in Wafula, 2003). This approach, according to M'bayo (2011), is essential to uphold societal standards and tell stories that support traditional values over capitalist ones.

Finnegan (2012) stated that African literature was primarily based on oral expressions, such as proverbs and folktales. According to Igboin (2011), colonialism and African cultural values are closely linked, with communal values being essential for a return to the past. These values are prominent in family and communal rituals, as well as in art and buildings. Maffly-Kipp (2010) highlighted that African-American race histories also highlight the intellectual lineage of communal life, asserting the significance of early African civilizations and the intellectual lineage of African-American communal life.

Unfortunately, discussions about culture in Sierra Leone have frequently been biased against oral literary components, which used to be a key component of the way of life of the Temne people, one that used to serve as a means of education and enjoyment. To revitalize Sierra Leonean traditions, Olioso (2013) noted that reintroducing the Mende, Temne, and other indigenous cultures into school and children's books is a step. For this reason, scholars have spent their entire lives studying folk literature to better understand the oral narratives of the Temne people in northern Sierra Leone. In the digital era, it is essential to preserve all oral culture (Thulla, 2019) so as to prevent data bias and maintain Sierra Leone's distinctive cultural legacy.

Returning to the topic of practitioners of folk literature, Ebine (2019) recommended a look at this phenomenon called griot, as it concerns traditional dynamics in the African traditional society of West Africa, and it allows scholars to bring to the fore the activities of the griots. But earlier, before Ebine's proposal, White (2010) stated that from the outset, the performance perspective of folklore is transmitted from generation to generation, on into the 1960s when attention was turned to the griot to preserve the age-old traditions of Africa or even before. Like the Madingos, among the Temne people, practitioners of folk literature are typically referred to as griots or jalis (Stasik, 2010). These individuals play crucial roles in preserving and transmitting the oral traditions, history, and cultural values of the Temne community through storytelling, music, dance, and other artistic forms. Griots are often regarded with great respect and hold significant influence within the society (Thulla et al., 2022; Fofanah et al., 2021; Falade, 2013; Giovannoni et al., 2011).

The study, therefore, examined the category of people who practised folk literature among the Temne people. It also looked into the relationship between participants' ages and their involvement with Temne literature, testing the following hypothesis: H<sub>01</sub>: The medians of Temne storytelling are the same across age groups. H<sub>02</sub>: The medians of Temne proverbs are the same across age groups. H<sub>03</sub>: The medians of Temne traditional songs and dances are the same across age groups. H<sub>04</sub>: The medians of Temne riddles are the same across age groups.

## 1. Literature Review

### *Interpretations of African folk literature*

Folk literature has traditionally been defined as literature recognised by the general public or community (Thulla, 2019; Finnegan, 2012). To a large extent, the meanings have reverted to refer to literature transmitted orally. Nonetheless, several academics have offered somewhat diverse but intriguing interpretations of this term. Folk literature, according to Sone (2018), is a way for Indigenous nations' values to be embodied in and transmitted to their youth through a system of education and entertainment that represents all that these civilizations hold dear. This encompasses societal standards, values, ideas, concepts, and beliefs that are intended to bring about constructive change.

Onebunne and Obasi (2019) defines orature as African literature that originates from Africa, addressing African issues, conveyed by knowledgeable Africans about their

cultures, traditions, and literary styles. It emphasizes a type of literature characterized by an African narrative mode, typically orally performed in front of an audience, particularly during the pre-colonial era. This contrasts African (oral) literature with Western (written) literature, contributing to the ongoing debate over whether folk literature serves as a breeding ground for advanced literacy (Green and McLachlan, 2024; Weissenrieder and Coote, 2015 and Effendy, 2020) rather than as a fully formed and comprehensive intellectual system in and of itself Thulla et al., 2022; Finnegan, 2012).

This is a completely distinct problem that needs thorough investigation since modernization and the advent of cutting-edge technologies have made it more difficult to describe and comprehend African traditional literature. This study, however, is restricted to the age range of Sierra Leonean users of Temne traditional literature.

#### *Practitioners of African folk literature*

African folklore practitioners have always been designated individuals (Fofanah, et al., 2021; Akinyemi and Falola, 2021). In African societies and their social and ceremonial frameworks, these individuals hold certain places. Because of this, practitioners of African folk literature can only be individuals with unique abilities—mostly spiritual—who are revered as griots, griottes, or storytellers. According to Thulla et al. (2022), the primary Mende folk media performers are still town criers and storytellers. This suggests that while contemporary entertainers are still at the forefront of entertainment in Sierra Leone today, some Mende traditional performers seem to naturally stick to this role. According to Fofanah et al. (2021), Mende folk literature is typically practised by elderly people and their talented performers, such as Falui. The jelis/griots, especially those from Mauritania, Mali, and Nigeria in West Africa, were identified by Al-Muid and Elementary (2021) as practitioners, which uphold previous perceptions of popular consumers of African folk literature.

Adefarasin (2023) revealed that griots performed within the confines of Limba society and attested that literature is ancient and has always been transmitted from a generational perspective, which is why the griot is the custodian of history. Sherman (2015) stated that storytelling is an ancient practice known in all civilizations throughout history, and characters, tales, techniques, oral traditions, motifs, and tale types transcend individual cultures. However, Gentile (2011) highlighted the specific role of the griot in West African society, (the griot of Mali who may have recognized specialities) is grossly oversimplified if we consider them only as solo storytellers because they transcend the confines of mere storytelling but are sometimes the living repositories of history and the oral tradition of the people. Smith et al. (op. cit.) as cited in Thulla (2019) also attested that the West African griots are specifically the living repositories of oral traditions.

This is why Telling (2012) pointed out that the ancient West African bardic tradition of Jaliyaa is the specific oral tradition where the role of the griot is a particularly traditional oral historian. For him, it is through the path of the griot, or storyteller, that human history is enshrined. Jansen (2018) emphasized the importance of young griots in Mali in the 1980s, particularly the Kela griots, who were often consulted by researchers. In his 'Young Griots' Quest for Authority', he recounted encounters with six Jilli keas (singing men) who

began a loud song to flatter the inhabitants' vanity and their friendship for the Mandingoes and further played music to distract them and gain welcomes from strangers at Kinytakooro. The singing men then proceeded to the Bentang, where they heard their dentegi (history).

Though these narratives and communal endeavours have been highly recognized by scholars such as McIntyre (2011), they have been seriously threatened by modernism, resulting in the younger generation seeking foreign means of education and entertainment, leaving the folklore of the Temne people to die (Hughes and Krochler, 2005). But over time, these practitioners have grown less noticeable, confined to family homes, and muted since their name, "jeli-bobo" suggests quiet griots (Frank, 2022), a problem this research aims to explore.

#### *Age variation in the use of African folk literature*

According to scholars like Thulla (2019), practitioners of African folk literature, particularly Sierra Leonean literature, have been exploited based on age. Finnegan (2012) has highlighted certain age groups that have primarily served as audiences and performers for particular folk narratives. In particular, she said that children, young people, and adults have used the many kinds of African folk literature in diverse ways, and that elders are its custodians. In particular, Finnegan emphasized that children primarily employ forms like riddles for pleasure and to develop their intellect. Mwenzwa (cited in Enna et al., 2024) asserts that children in Akamba traditional homes are supposed to pay attention to their elders and heed their advice. According to Okpewho (1992), skilled performers frequently use hilarious stories and epic narratives for adult audiences in order to reaffirm shared identity and historical accounts. In a similar vein, she observes that older people use folk literature to assist younger people in making moral choices and acting appropriately in social situations. According to Gill (2017) and Nehusi (2010), oral art sessions serve as a way to foster language and knowledge development through nursery rhymes and play songs, in addition to being communal entertainment venues that pass down traditions and values to the young.

The variation of practitioners of folk literature across age groups within the African community of folkloric tradition can be observed in their roles, skills, and the depth of their knowledge; some of whom, the griots and griottes, according to Mougoué (2019), tremendously performed the role of upholding the oral tradition of the people. The griots or griottes told stories and sang songs that were accompanied by a traditional African dance form that upholds tradition and fosters a sense of community (Marcoux, 2012). Dorsch (2017) stated that in pre-colonial times, griots and griottes used the stage to perform relations with patrons. In Senegalese Wolof wrestling, griots and griottes not only praised wrestlers but were often revered for their wisdom, experience, and mastery of traditional stories, songs, and rituals. Riley (2021) also mentioned griots who praise attending guests for money in the context of family ceremonies. Also, elders are highly respected as custodians of tradition and may serve as advisors to chiefs and community leaders, and they practise other forms like stories, jokes, and proverbs, which require justifying (Fofanah et al., 2021; Nyaduwi, 2003 and Kamara, 2002 ). This study examined the age variation identified in the folk literature of the Temne people.

### *Nature and significance of African folk literature*

Most findings of studies on the importance and dynamics of African folk literature have been varied. Finnegan (2017) states that the perspectives on Africans regarding their folk literature are full of contradictory assumptions that have resulted in African traditions being undervalued. This, according to her, is because of the dominance of colonial anthropologists in the discipline. Indeed, African folk literature has declined as a result of its prior contradicting presumptions, such as the inferiority of African oral traditions. Harvey (2003) attributes this decline in indigenous culture to globalization, which has led to a predilection for foreign lifestyles, especially among youth. In Southeast Asia, young people have been seen to choose their improvement over community or state improvement. Similarly, in Africa, according to Cunningham and Reich (2016), there is a shift in the arts and cultural expressions, which has resulted in the decline in traditional practices among practitioners and custodians of the culture of the African peoples. Contrary to the common belief that globalization has eaten up African cultural practices, Lambert and Frisch (2013) believes that these practices can endure and adapt in the digital age. Similarly, Devatine (2009) sees folk practices as a dynamic thing capable of adapting as society combines old and modern practices.

Fofanah et al. (2021) cited that in Sierra Leone, like all other African countries, the folklore of the people remains a powerful source of identity, recognition, education, solace, and entertainment but unfortunately, the clash between Indigenous cultures with Western ones has affected the performance, enjoyment, and preservation of folk literature among the ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. This claim is supported by Abdullahi (2011) who stated that Western culture has had a tremendous negative impact on the role of traditional culture especially in rural parts of Africa as Western education, Christianity and increased contact with Modern technology have resulted in rapid erosion of cultural values in a traditional African society (Kebaya, 2013; Wahab et al., 2012). Sibani (2018) commented that Africans have imbibed Western culture so much that African native culture tends to give way to European culture.

Furthermore, Whyte (2017) pointed out that colonialism caused changes at such a rapid pace that many problems related to new diets, to erosion of their cultures; Indigenous peoples live in worlds so changed by colonialism. In this vein, Fofanah et al. (2021) related that, it is colonialism which has resulted in the assimilation and adulteration of the values and cultural identity of the Mende folk arts. This sad reality triggered Coté (2016) to connote that colonialism is the catalyst for historical trauma on Indigenous peoples, which is why Indigenous peoples have recognized the dangers of colonial infiltration in Africa. Coté (2016) also stated that Indigenous peoples the world over are actively shaping, nurturing and fostering healthy and sustainable communities through their self-determination efforts and decolonization strategies.

There is a need to preserve endangered dialects, according to Takubo (2017), such as the Sherbro language in Sierra Leone, in the midst of growing linguistic disengagement among the younger generation. In addition to this, there is the common view that Africans

lacked epic and because of that, there might exist no literature for them, which reflects an elitist view of Africa and its peoples (Finnegan, 2017; Mulokozi, 2002). Erroneous views such as the above are reasons why it has been claimed that the younger generations in Sierra Leone have neglected their traditions for foreign ones, even when it becomes clear that their culture, identity, and history can better be expressed in the culture they are neglecting. If this is so, the need to find effective means to bridge the gap between the young people and the elders who are custodians of these traditions is imperative. This will enable folk practices such as storytelling to be revived once again in local communities in Sierra Leone.

#### *Evolution and preservation of African performance traditions*

Although the Anansesem storytelling tradition is an ancient practice in many African cultures, Abankwah & Abankwah (2017) have long acknowledged the necessity to address the preservation of African tales in the modern era. Maples (2018) noted that the history of African art has been characterized by tensions surrounding European and American scholars and players, which have omitted arts like Ordehlay masquerade from its canon. However, the Ordehlay masquerade, a form of African mask performance, has been and is still being invented in Africa's cities, particularly in Freetown, Sierra Leone. They were successful due to their open membership, organizational structure, willingness to adapt, and ability to entertain. They were also adopted by rural towns in Sierra Leone as part of population growth and urbanization strategies. Similar masquerade societies are now emerging in the diaspora as migrant communities seek to create a local yet shifting sense of identity as cosmopolitan/urban or rural.

Similar to Ordehlay, Minestrelli et al. (2024) explored the use of Virtual Reality (VR) to engage with Indigenous artefacts and cultural knowledge, which enables reconfiguring storytelling from Indigenous, Tribal, and Southern European perspectives. Minestrelli et al. (2024) further mentioned that the Bondo Mask in Sierra Leone and the Turtle Shell mask in the Torres Strait Islands carry deep transcultural and cross-cultural meanings, practices, and traditions that VR technologies and environments can enhance.

Thulla et. al. (2022) also commented on the necessity to utilize traditional and electronic media in Indigenous communities in Southern Sierra Leone. This is because they found out that Mende folk media play an important role in disseminating social, religious, and cultural information, including being used in ceremonies such as singing and storytelling sessions, litigation, court hearings, naming, weddings and political campaigns, and funerals, and that traditional Mende media are mainly used by the nominees of Paramount Chiefs, the community griots, the heads of the tribal and secret societies and volunteers. This aligns with Edet, Akpan and Isaac (2015), who highlighted puppet shows, folk drama, storytelling, proverbs, visual arts, concerts, gong beating, dirges, songs, drumming and others as part of indigenous communication media for the development of information in rural communities of South-South Nigeria. Amongst the forms of Mende folk media Thulla et al. (2022) revealed that fire, smoke, flames, ashes, town criers, storytelling, traditional music dance, and tying and knotting of ropes, grass, leaves, palm fronds and threads remain the main forms of Mende folk media in Southern Sierra Leone. Zeng, Peng and

Wu (2021) also see traditional media usage as an important part of social culture and a channel for the government to disseminate information.

Even though globalization has been acknowledged, there is a need to determine how it can be used for the good of folk traditions without destroying indigenous cultures. Many grey areas for investigation exist. For instance, investigating how to use social media to preserve and transform oral practices can be an effective way of ensuring the continuity of folk literature, investigating the endangered languages in Sierra Leone, such as Mani (Bullom So), Kim (Krim) and Bom (Bum) (Childs, 2015) and highlighting more reasons for the language loss, may be investigated further.

This study may help in the resuscitation, dissemination, and ongoing significance of the Temne people’s traditional literature in modern culture. While this study did not cover every aspect of Temne culture, it did provide sufficient information on their folklore, particularly on the use of Temne riddles, proverbs, and stories by both young and old.

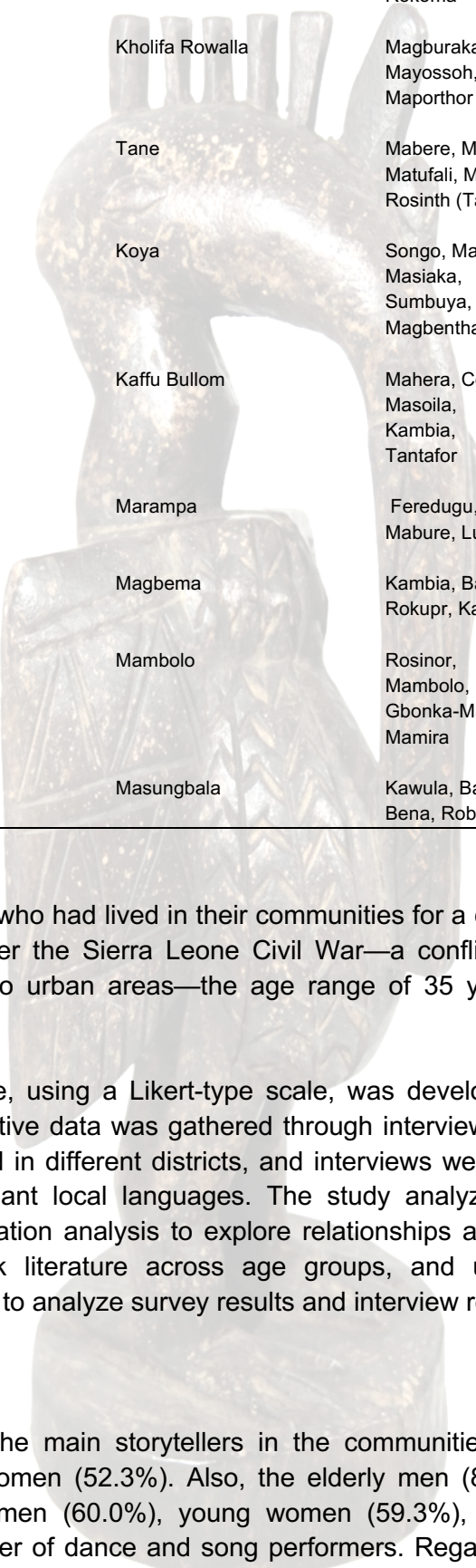
## 2. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods research design used in Thulla’s (2019) study, which included triangulation, to determine the category of practitioners of Temne folk literature and the forms used across age groups. It also used a description survey design for quantitative analysis and an ethnographic design for qualitative analysis (Lambert and Lambert, 2012). The mixed methods research design consisted of four categories: triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory. The study primarily used the embedded mixed methods design.

The population of the study was 349,618 as determined by Thulla (2019), comprising predominantly the Temne people of northern Sierra Leone. A sample of 645 respondents was selected for the study using probability and non-probability sampling techniques. For the research, 60 communities from 12 chiefdoms were selected (see Table 1). These communities were selected because the pilot survey’s findings showed that they were the center of Temne cultural institutions, including chieftaincy ceremonies, secret societies like *Bondo* and *Poro*, and other events that once served as venues for the use of Temne folklore.

**Table 1: Selected Districts, Chiefdoms and Communities**

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, Rochain, Mayoppoh,



		Rokoma
	Kholifa Rowalla	Magburaka, Rowalla, Mayossoh, Mamuntha, Maporthor
	Tane	Mabere, Matotoka, Matufali, Masamp, Rosinth (Tane)
Port Loko	Koya	Songo, Mamamah, Masiaka, Sumbuya, Magbentha
	Kaffu Bullom	Mahera, Conakridee, Masoila, Kambia, Tantafor
	Marampa	Feredugu, Makomp, Petifu, Mabure, Lunsar
Kambia	Magbema	Kambia, Bamoi-Luma, Rokupr, Kapairo, Rogbara
	Mambolo	Rosinor, Mambolo, Gbonka-Maria, Katema, Mamira
	Masungbala	Kawula, Bamoi, Rokirma, Bena, Robanka

Source: Thulla, 2019

To target respondents who had lived in their communities for a considerable amount of time both before and after the Sierra Leone Civil War—a conflict that forced many Temne people to relocate to urban areas—the age range of 35 years and older was selected.

A survey questionnaire, using a Likert-type scale, was developed for quantitative data collection, while qualitative data was gathered through interview guides. Four focus group discussions were held in different districts, and interviews were conducted in Krio and Themne, the predominant local languages. The study analyzed quantitative and qualitative data using correlation analysis to explore relationships and compare groups, such as the usage of folk literature across age groups, and using a “concurrent triangulation method design” to analyze survey results and interview responses.

### 3. Results

Table 2 shows that the main storytellers in the communities investigated were elderly men (63.2%) and women (52.3%). Also, the elderly men (81%) were the main users of proverbs. Young men (60.0%), young women (59.3%), and elderly women (53.5%) had the most number of dance and song performers. Regarding riddles, elderly

men were the majority of performers. Children were the least performers in proverbs and riddles (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Categories of People who Practised (Performer) Temne Folk Literature (n = 645)**

Category	Stories (P%)	Proverbs (P%)	Songs & Dances (P%)	Riddles (P%)
Elderly men	63.2	81.0	36.7	57.7
Elderly women	52.3	55.3	53.5	40.3
Traditional leaders	34.2	52.0	45.0	41.0
Young men	42.7	22.5	60.0	31.5
Young women	41.2	19.7	59.3	29.3
Children	52.2	8.7	42.8	22.3

Source: Thulla, 2019

. Table 3 shows that children were the largest audience (62.3%) for storytelling in the communities investigated. For riddles, elderly men were the primary audience (58.5%). Children were the small category among the audiences for the proverb and riddle sessions (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Categories of People who were Fond of (Audience) Temne Folk Literature (n = 645)**

Category	Stories (A%)	Proverbs (A%)	Songs & Dances (A%)	Riddles (A%)
Elderly men	44.3	69.3	38.8	58.5
Elderly women	40.2	47.8	54.8	39.7
Traditional leaders	27.2	52.3	47.8	39.3
Young men	45.5	33.3	61.7	32.5
Young women	44.8	29.8	60.8	29.7
Children	62.3	14.3	43.7	23.0

Source: Thulla, 2019

The Kruskal-Wallis Test showed a significant difference in the median scores of Temne storytelling among age groups, having a p-value of 0.009 (see Table 4). Because of this, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The same test, with a p-value of 0.056, did not show a significant difference in the median scores of Temne proverbs by age

group. This made the researcher maintain the null hypothesis. The test also found no significant variation in median scores for Temne traditional songs and dances among chiefdoms, having a p-value of 0.287. This supported the null hypothesis. The Temne riddles across districts, as with storytelling, proverbs, and traditional songs and dances, the Kruskal-Wallis Test showed no significant difference, with a p-value of 0.190 (shown in Table 4). This supported the null hypothesis.

**Table 4: Differences in Forms of Temne Folk literature across Age Groups**

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
Th The medians of Temne storytelling are the same across age groups.	Independent-Samples Median Test	.009	Reject the null hypothesis.
T The medians of Temne proverbs are the same across age groups	Independent-Samples Median Test	.056	F Fail to reject the null hypothesis.
T The medians of Temne traditional songs and dances are the same across age groups	Independent-Samples Median Test	.287	Fail to reject the null hypothesis.
T The medians of Temne riddles are the same across age groups.	Independent-Samples Median Test	.190	F Fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Source: Thulla, 2019

The Temne storytelling medians appear to be the only form to differ considerably among age groups. However, there is insufficient evidence to imply variations in proverb, traditional song and dance, and riddle medians across age groups.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of the study show that elderly people like telling stories and use proverbs and riddles in their daily interactions. The deliberations during the focus group mentioned that people are still practising these folk traditions. Some of the participants in the groups were even identified as frequent users of certain types. For example, a female participant aged 49 stated:

*Yes, we have, but there are not many; you can count them in the country. We have one called Fatu Koroma, a good singer, and Pa Brima Conteh, among others. These are renowned practitioners... even Pa Turay is a good storyteller... and Ya Yebu is a singer...*

The findings of the study show no significant differences between young and elderly audiences for the four folk forms. This is consistent with Thulla (2019) and many other folk literature scholars who have revealed that indigenous folk practices are primarily performed by the elderly (see Tables 2 and 3). According to Onebunne and Obasi (2019), not all indigenous folk practices are performed by elders. Nyaduwi (2003) and Kamara (2002) state that the most important parts of African folklore are passed down from generation to generation. Thulla (2019) and Kamara (2002) have revealed that the folk

performances of the Temne are partly age-related, as their findings show that the participant ratio of young people to adults in non-spirit performances is significantly higher than in spirit performances. The findings of the study also show that various folk performances of the Temne are reserved for “designated” practitioners. Practices such as songs and dances, even though elders can participate in them, are usually performed by young people full of energy. The focus group discussions revealed that dances for men are typically forceful and warlike. A rural griot or woman typically performs romantic, emotional songs and dances. According to Finnegan (2012), African cultures were not at all similar in terms of culture and social customs. This contrasts with Nyaduwi’s (2003) finding that only the elderly and revered tell proverbs in Kirundi. In his analysis of Achebe’s work, Eustace Palmer shares that the most essential components of African folklore are conveyed through the mouths of the elderly and prominent (Kamara, 2002). This finding challenges the traditional view of the “transmission gap” in indigenous folk practices, which have been seen as predominantly elder-performed and thus “dying”. It suggests that youth are equally receptive to these traditions, prompting a call for cultural education revitalization. Policies should shift from documentation to active integration of folk forms into modern society.

The study’s findings, which demonstrate that Temne practices like proverbs, songs, dances, and riddles did not differ statistically significantly between age groups, suggest that the Temne community of all ages shared and preserved cultural traits (Falade, 2013; Giovannoni et al., 2011). Also, the variation in storytelling across age groups could indicate that older or younger populations like different stories. This could be a result of generational shifts or the consequences of modernization and education. Because one cultural element (storytelling) changes with age while the others do not may indicate that some form of Temne folk practices are more susceptible to change than others. In this sense, it appears that storytelling may be easier to be influenced by external forces than proverbs, songs, and dances. (Kebaya, 2013; Brown et al., 2009). This finding contests the “generational erosion” thesis in post-colonial folk literature analysis. It highlights that, contrary to the belief that indigenous knowledge is declining among the youth due to globalization and Western education, the engagement with Temne folk forms is unaffected by age. The findings urge policymakers and cultural institutions to incorporate indigenous knowledge into education and cultural agendas, advocating for cultural revitalization rather than merely documenting it.

The study reveals that 63.2% of elderly men and 52.3% of elderly women are the main storytellers in Temne folk literature, highlighting their role as custodians and transmitters of oral traditions. The data also highlights the need for deliberate preservation efforts to protect these oral traditions, especially as the primary bearers age. Dance and song participation is more diverse across age and gender, with 60.0% of young men, 59.3% of young women, and 53.5% of elderly women participating in these cultural forms. Children are the largest audience for storytelling, with 62.3% attendance, but their active contribution is limited, possibly reflecting a developmental stage in cultural education where observation precedes active participation. Elderly men constitute 58.5% of the audience for riddles, suggesting these sessions are significant for social and intellectual

engagement among older community members (Gill, 2017; Finnegan, 2012; and Nehusi, 2010).

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test reveal significant age-related differences in storytelling; the null hypothesis that age has effect on storytelling practices is rejected with a p-value of 0.009, indicating that storytelling varies significantly across age groups, possibly reflecting shifting values or different social roles. However, no significant differences were found in the median scores of proverbs, traditional songs and dances, and riddles among different age groups, indicating a more uniform engagement across these cultural expressions. The study's findings serve as a foundation for future policy-making, educational programming, and community-based initiatives aimed at sustaining the rich cultural heritage of Temne communities.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **i. Conclusion**

i. While the elderly among the Temne are more inclined to tell stories and say proverbs in their daily communication, the appreciation of these forms spans across generations. This suggests that the decrease in folk traditions is not due to a generational divide in taste, but rather a failure in the mechanisms that facilitate cultural inheritance.

ii. Despite significant differences in Temne storytelling across age groups, there is a notable cultural continuity in related forms such as proverbs, songs, dances, and riddles. These folk forms are essential to the everyday lives of both young people and the elderly in the Temne community, acting as a living social and linguistic exchange rather than artefacts of the past. However, this modest variance within age groups raises issues about underlying reasons.

### **ii. Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

- a) To ensure the continuity of Temne folk literature, parents should recall and tell their preschool children the folk literature of their ethnic group.
- b) Policymakers and cultural institutions should incorporate indigenous knowledge into education and cultural agendas.
- c) Future studies should examine the reasons behind younger generations' reduced participation in certain traditional practices to understand how contemporary influences affect traditions.

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