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Interdisciplinary Language and Culture Studies

Attitudes Towards Traditional Personal Names Among the Bamanan Community in Buguni

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ABSTRACT

This work investigates attitudes towards traditional personal names within the Bamanan community. It specifically focuses on perceptions, preferences, and the cultural significance related to those traditional names. Naming practices among Bamanan people are carried out on the basis of ritual procedures that can determine the genealogical, social, and ethnic belonging, as well as the gender of the name bearer. In this context, naming is not merely the selection of a word but serves as a symbolic transmission of cultural identity. Traditional names are often embedded with meanings linked to the collective memory of the community and are closely tied to values passed down through generations. The type of research employed in this present study is a mixed method, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected using structured interviews and focus group discussions among Bamanan people living in Buguni. The sample was chosen using purposive sampling technique, and the participants were divided into three categories: name bearers, non-name bearers, and name givers. The findings show that personal names in the Bamanan community are not given to newborns randomly. Instead, different social, religious, and cultural trends are considered. Furthermore, the findings highlight a predominantly positive attitude toward traditional names and the interplay between tradition and modernity in name selection. Naming is revealed as a socially meaningful practice.

Keywords: *Attitude, Bamanan, Buguni, Name, Personal names*

Buguni'deki Bamanan Topluluğunda Geleneksel Kişisel İsimlere Yönelik Tutumlar

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Bamanan topluluğundaki geleneksel kişi adlarına yönelik tutumları incelemektedir. Araştırmada, kişi adlarına ilişkin bireylerin nasıl düşündüğü, hangi adları tercih ettikleri ve bu adların kültürel anlamları ele alınmaktadır. Bamanan halkı arasında çocuklara ad verme süreci, yalnızca bir isim seçimi değil; kişinin soyunu, toplumsal ve etnik kimliğini, hatta cinsiyetini belirleyen bazı geleneksel ritüellere dayanmaktadır. Bu nedenle ad verme, kültürel kimliğin bir parçası olarak görülmektedir. Geleneksel adlar, toplumun hafızasında yer etmiş anlamlar taşır ve kuşaktan kuşağa aktarılan değerlerle güçlü bir bağ içindedir. Araştırmada hem nicel hem de nitel yöntemlerin bir arada kullanıldığı karma bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Veriler, Buguni'de yaşayan Bamanan halkıyla yapılan yapılandırılmış bireysel görüşmeler ve odak grup tartışmaları yoluyla toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilmiş ve üç gruba ayrılmıştır: ad taşıyanlar, ad taşımayanlar ve ad verenler. Elde edilen bulgular, Bamanan toplumunda çocuklara ad verilirken bu tercihin rastgele yapılmadığını; aksine sosyal, dini ve kültürel faktörlerin etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu, geleneksel adlara olumlu yaklaştıklarını belirtmiştir. Ayrıca, ad seçiminde gelenekle modernlik arasındaki dengenin önemli bir rol oynadığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, ad vermenin yalnızca

bireysel bir tercih değil, aynı zamanda toplumun değerlerini yansıtan anlamlı bir uygulama olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Tutum, Bamanan, Buguni, Ad, Kişi adları*

INTRODUCTION

The expression "personal name" is embodied in anthroponomy which is linked to sociology, genealogy and anthropology. Anthroponomy is one of the subfields of onomastics that has a great deal of the study of proper nouns without neglecting their use and forms (Algeo,1992). Onomastics can be seen as the study of the history, etymology and use of proper names (Crystal, 1999). Pfukwa (2013, p.57) states that "a personal name is a social statement reflecting the bearer, the namer and the social environment in which the name is found." This view enhances the existence of the well-organized societies that Africa in general and Bamanan traditional community in particular were before in terms of naming practices. Children are conferred names in order to differentiate, to know, and to recognize their cultural belongings, for naming practices are compulsory for newborn babies. Naming occurs when people confer an identity to a newborn baby. Naming reveals information about named people: gender, birthplace, religion, ethnicity, nationality and their rank of arrival to their family. This happens through language depending on the ethnic group the person belongs to (Minkailou, 2017). Like other societies in Africa, Bamanan people understand the significance of names and naming practices. Their traditional names give insight into how their people are ordered and organized in society in terms of language, culture, religion, culture, and thought. The nature of Bamanan traditional personal names lies in Bamanan religious beliefs and their embracement with other foreign cultures. Many researchers like Monteil (1924) and Dieterlen (1951) use the word "Bamanan" as the Mande speaking community living in the west Africa such as Mali, Guinea, Senegal, just to name few. The term Bamanan also refers to one given ethnic group which does not believe in God. For many communities, including the Bamanan, studies highlight that names can reflect historical events, familial ties, and cultural heritage (Nash, 1994; Smith, 2000). The perception of traditional names can vary widely depending on social and cultural contexts. The way of naming traditionally among Bamanan seems to be neglected by the modern generation. This gap is likely due to the lack of knowledge related to the great value of these Bamanan traditional personal names. Research by Lippmann (1997) shows that individuals with traditional or minority names may face discrimination or prejudice, influencing their social integration and acceptance. For that reason, the study specifically aims to find out the attitudes of name bearers, non-name bearers and name- givers towards Bamanan traditional personal names.

METHOD

This work makes use of a mixed method, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate attitudes to Bamanan traditional personal names among different groups within the Bamanan community. It aims at checking the attitudes of three categories of participant, namely name bearers, non- name bearers and name- givers, towards Bamanan traditional personal names. The first category denotes individuals who currently bear Bamanan traditional personal names. The second one covers individuals who do not have Bamanan traditional names, but they are familiar with them. This group was included to gauge external perceptions of these names. The last group concerns individuals responsible for naming newborns in the Bamanan community. This group was studied to understand the ongoing practice and attitudes related to the traditional naming process. Those three groups of participants involve a population of Bamanan native speakers in Bamanan stronghold: Buguni. Priority was given to Bamanan native participants of 30 years old or above because they seemed mature enough in such a way, they could provide the researcher with appropriate data related to traditional personal naming practices among Bamanan people. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to

ensure that each group (name bearers, non-bearers, name givers) was represented. Data are collected on the basis of the consent agreement from the three categories of participants. Structured interview and focus group discussion were used to collect data related to Bamanan people s' attitude towards their traditional personal names. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with selected participants to gather detailed personal narratives and experiences related to bamanan traditional personal names. This method provided qualitative data to complement the quantitative findings from the surveys. To gain deeper insights into participants' attitudes and the reasons behind their opinions, focus group discussions were also conducted. The analysis was started by transcribing structured interview and focus group discussion data. Data obtained from participants were then analyzed using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was used to examine data from focus group discussions and interviews. Responses were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to perceptions of traditional names, reasons for preferences, and the impact of cultural and religious factors (Nowell et al., 2017).

FINDINGS

This study explores the attitudes of Bamanan traditional name bearers, non-bearers, and name givers towards Bamanan personal names. It reveals a complex interplay of cultural pride and social pressures, highlighting both positive and negative perceptions of these traditional names within the Bamanan community.

Attitudes of name bearers towards Bamanan Traditional Personal Names

The participants were asked questions in order to grasp their attitudes of the name bearers towards Bamanan traditional personal names. The questions are represented and their answers are in different charts to highlight the participants' viewpoints upon their traditional names.

Figure 1:

Attitudes of name bearers towards Bamanan traditional personal names
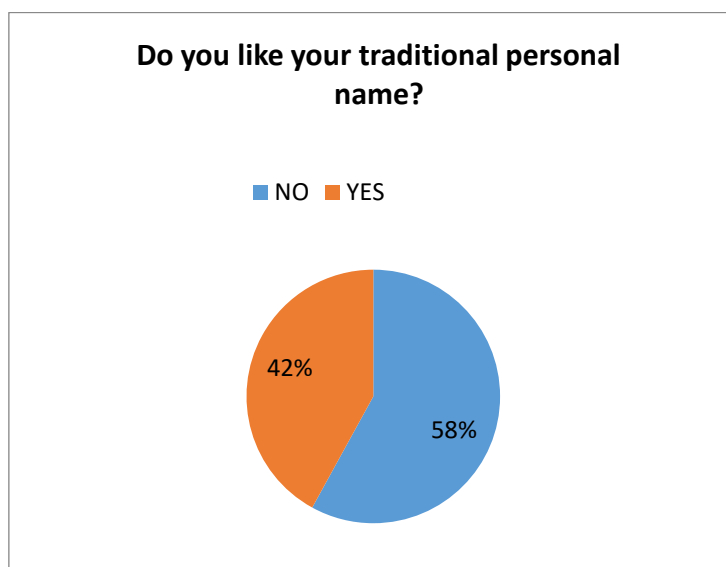
The rationale behind this question is that the researcher wants to determine whether the participants (name bearers) like or dislike their personal names. Figure N° 1 above reveals that 58% of the respondents really like their name. On the other hand, 42% of the participants are not comfortable with their traditional names.

The focus group discussion was used in order to be familiar with the reasons behind those two opposing attitudes. Although the majority of old people have positive attitudes towards the use of Bamanan

traditional names, many participants who bear such names do not feel happy. They focus on diverse reasons for getting such negative feelings about the use of Bamanan traditional personal names.

According to some participants, Bamanan traditional personal names easily reveal their identity which should be kept as a secret. Other ethnic groups are afraid when they learn that the name bearer is Bamanan because they believe that Bamanan people are bad and are evil with black magic powers. Therefore, when a bad thing happens in society, Bamanan people are always indicated. Furthermore, some respondents who bear Bamanan traditional personal names according to their birth claim that they do not feel well. For example, the name 'alamusa' (Thursday) can be conferred to Bamanan people. This process of naming testifies that the bearer of alamusa was born on Thursday. They believed that the day on which they were born should not be revealed to people. This is due to the fact that it is commonly believed that people might use the birthday name of somebody to cast a spell on him or her. In short, birthday names seem to be the soul of the bearer, and it is easy to have spiritual authority over him or her. Moreover, mockery is another reason for having negative attitudes towards the use of the Bamanan names. According to participants, people laugh at the bearers of those traditional names because they find them archaic.

The prominent use of Islamic and Christian names over Bamanan traditional personal names is one of the reasons of negative attitudes towards Bamanan names. People prefer those two monotheist names because they believe that they are not Bamanan (unbeliever). They also believe that those traditional names are too local and not presentable in all places. In other words, those participants consider that Bamanan personal name bearers are not so much religious because religious faith resides in the name of a person. They also believe that if they continue using those traditional personal names, they will promote the Bamanan traditional value. However, it is commonly believed that it is not religiously forbidden to use Bamanan traditional personal names.

Figure 1:

Attitudes of traditional Bamanan name bearers towards their personal names
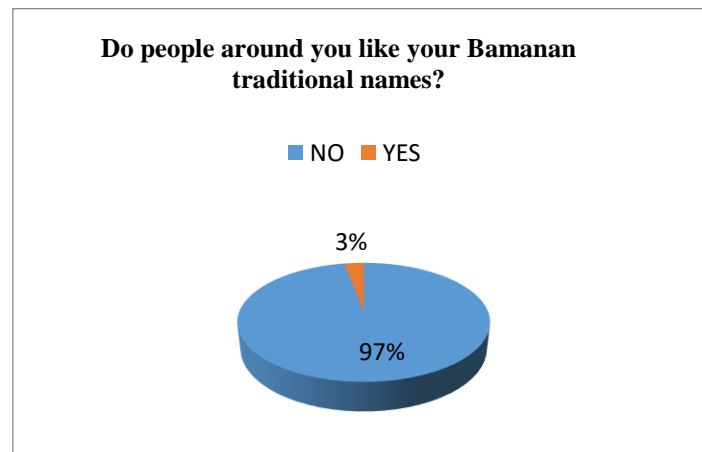
The findings displayed in figure number two show that 97% of the participants consider that people around them never like their Bamanan traditional personal names. They also indicate that such negative attitudes are due to their ignorance of the meaning and the circumstances behind those traditional names. They even laugh at traditional personal name bearers. Yet, only 3% of the informants do appreciate the traditional names bearers. This minority of respondents are aware of African values including names and naming practices.

Figure 2:

The extent of change of traditional personal names for other type of names

Name change for christian and islamic names or other names?

YES 9%

NO 91%
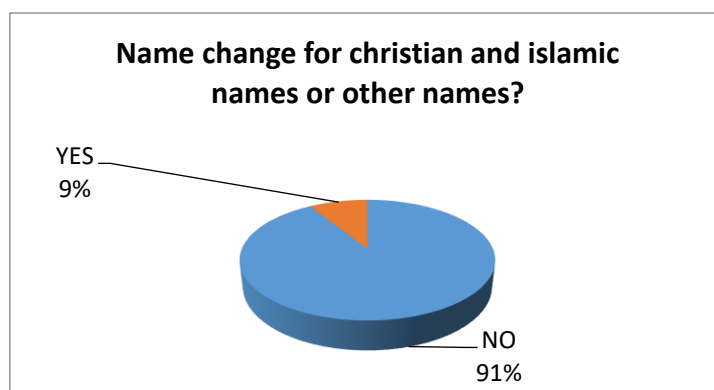
A significant majority (67%) of the informants in this context indicate that they prefer to bear Christian, Islamic or other names at the expense of their Bamanan traditional personal names. On the other hand, 33% of the participants do not want to change their traditional names in favor of the Christian, Islamic and other names.

The reasons behind this high percentage in favor name change testify the fact that the traditional name bearers do not really know what their names really mean and ignore the circumstances in which their name was used. Furthermore, they also believe that a good religious person must be conferred a religious name such as Islamic or Christian one. Yet, what those people do not know is that some religious names have little to do with religion. The case of "Ibrahim", an Islamic name, meaning in English: the father of people is one of the names those 67% participants prefer without being aware of its real meaning. The 33% of participants advocate that their names are not conferred at random, and they are bestowed following certain circumstances. They definitely like their names because they know their meaning. they also argue that the naming practice has been seen as the symbol of identity in the Bamanan community. The naming practice details the Bamanan cultural pride because it uncovers cultural and historical significance. In other words, conferring people a name within a Bamanan context helps to underline elements of culture history behind name bearers.

Figure 3:

The extent of the attribution of traditional personal names to children

Attribution of traditional names to children?

Yes NO

16%

84%
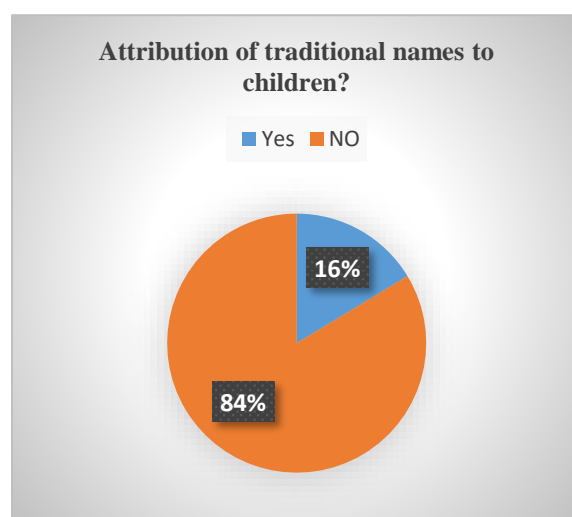
Only 16% of the respondents are in favor of giving Bamanan traditional personal names to their children; 84% do not want their children to be traditional name bearers. The few informants in favor of traditional

personal names defend the significance of traditional names which can help to identify people and reveal the social and the cultural belonging of the bearers. On the other hand, the majority never want to use those names. They underline that they do not like to impose traditional names on their children because of social pressure. They do not want their children to be laughed at by their classmates at school because of the use of the Bamanan traditional names. They believe that bearing such names is uncivilized in the eyes of the name bearers' friends. Such perceptions show the damage caused by colonialism on the minds of Africans in general and some Bamanan people in particular by colonialism. The respondents do not see any worth in their own cultural value system including the traditional personal names. One participant argues as follows:

"Due to social pressure, Bamanan traditional personal names are not widely used since they are seen as the name of backward people. No one wants to be associated with personal names which denote a lower status in the community" (respondant)

Attitudes of non-bearers of traditional names towards Bamanan traditional personal names

This section deals with the attitudes of the non- traditional name bearers towards Bamanan names. It mainly focuses on the data which have been collected on the basis of certain questions.

Figure 4:

The familiarity about Bamanan traditional personal names
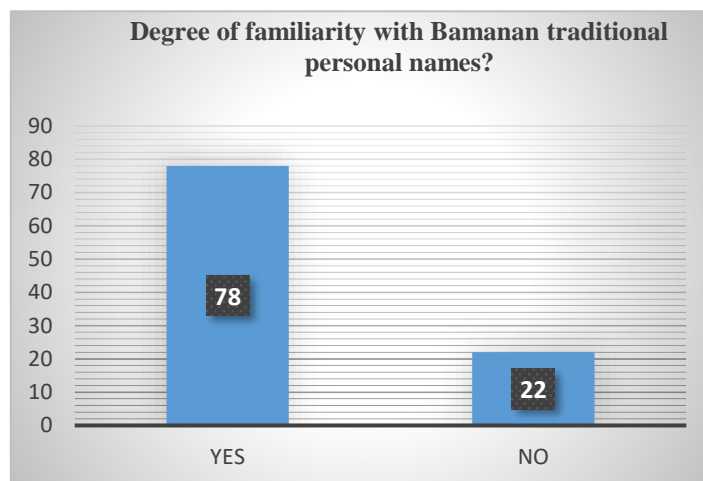
The question was asked to 60 participants, the result shows that most of the respondents (78%) have heard about Bamanan traditional personal names. The participants also provided the researcher with names falling in this category. They also make use of these names when they are asked to give their viewpoints upon naming practices within their community. Surprisingly, all of them bore a Christian or an Arab name although some were not aware of it. They do believe that through these traditional personal names, people may identify the origin of name bearers. Unfortunately, it is not the case for them since they are Arab and Christian name holders. One participant goes further when he says the following: "If I could give a name to myself, I would always choose a traditional one". He believes that the traditional names are important and meaningful, and there is always a reason behind such a naming practice. Instead of being called *'yaya'* he prefers the name *'sibiri'* since he was born on Saturday. Thus, Bamanan traditional personal names are given on the basis of their meaning and circumstances (see the part of name typologies). Yet, the other 22% participants are not aware of the existence of Bamanan traditional personal names. This minority knows some Bamanan traditional personal names, but they do believe that those names are Arab and Christian. In addition to the interviews, the focus group discussion

was used to underline the attitudes of non- bearers of traditional names towards the bearer of Bamanan traditional personal names. Two attitudes emerge mainly positive and negative. The following graph shows those attitudes.

Figure 5:

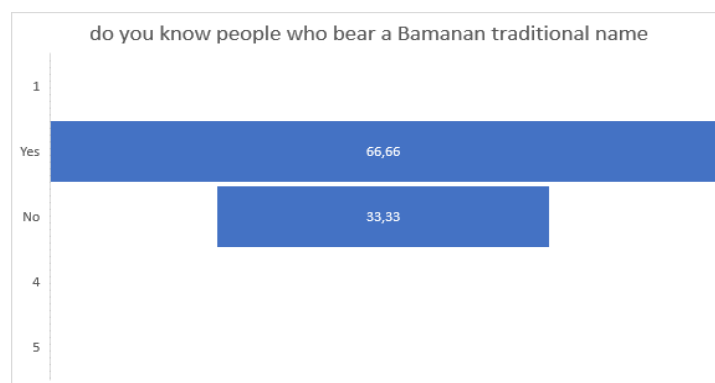*Attitudes of non-bearer of traditional names towards traditional names*
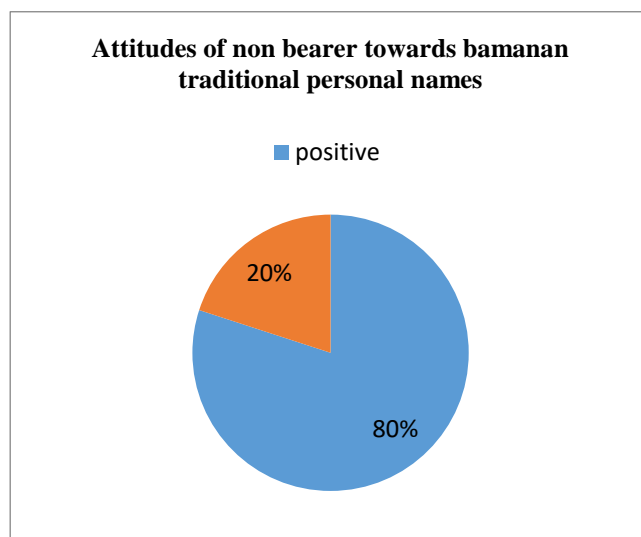
The findings show that 80% of the respondents have positive attitudes towards traditional personal names while 20 percent of the participants do not. In other words, the figure six mostly demonstrates the positive attitudes of the non-bearers of traditional names towards Bamanan traditional personal names. Some participants encourage the name-givers to keep their original names when naming children. Others believe that some bearers of such traditional names may feel uncomfortable because they do not know the meaning of the name they bear. They add that the name-givers have to sensitize those traditional name bearers about the circumstances and meaning surrounding their names. Moreover, they argue the fact that other communities can uncover the identity of a person through the name he or she bears. One respondent points out that he is not happy with his name because he bears an Arab name. He argues that he prefers Bamanan traditional names to others (Arab or Christian names). He is also astonished to see the negative attitudes of the name bearers towards their traditional names. He believes that they are not aware of the advantage they have from such names.

Although most of the time positive attitudes emerge, a group of participants finds out some Bamanan traditional names look funny. They observe that those funny names must be eradicated although they are not able to provide an example of such names. According to them, a good religious man has to avoid those traditional names especially the ones related to fetish or idols.

Figure 6:

The preference of particular types of names
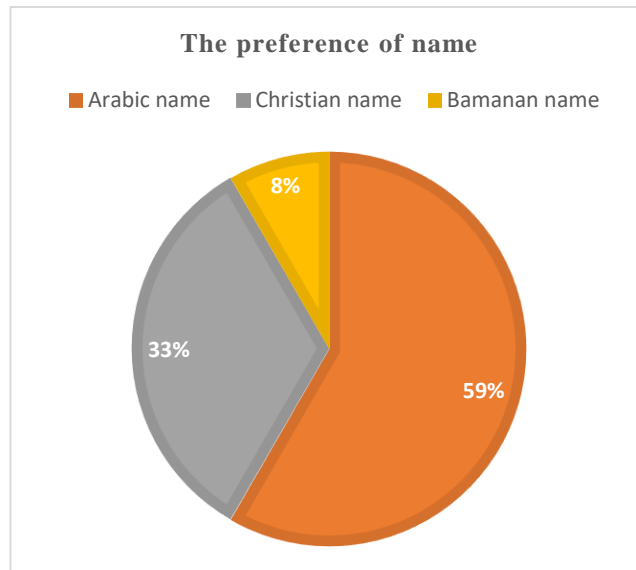
Regarding the given answers, 59% of the participants prefer to have Islamic-oriented Arab names. The reason behind such an attitude is that all of them are Islamic believers, so they ensure they must be named accordingly. 33% of participants claim Christian names as their personal names. The participants who are for religious name always believe that names go with religion. Unfortunately, religion has a great impact on naming practices although the practice of religion has nothing to do with personal names. Surprisingly, the minority of the participants especially 8% like Bamanan name as personal names. They argue that people must dissociate naming practices from religion. A Bamanan traditional name bearer may be a good religious person while he/she does not bear an Arab or Christian name.

Figure 7:

Knowledge of people who bear Bamanan traditional personal name

The results show that 66,66% know people who bear Bamanan name as personal names. Only 33.33% percent do not know the bearer of Bamanan personal names.

Attitudes of name givers towards Bamanan traditional personal names

Not all Bamanan people are assigned the role of naming a newborn baby. The task is ascribed to a minority of people living in the community. This part of the research examines the attitudes of name

givers towards Bamanan traditional personal names. Those attitudes of name givers are represented in the following graphs.

Figure 8:

Persistence of attribution of traditional personal names to children

It is noticeable from figure N° 9 that the highest percentage of name-givers (80%) would prefer Bamanan traditional personal names to other types of names when they are asked to confer a baby a name. This attitude shows the huge interest the name-givers have towards their traditional names. It is culturally believed that after the birth of a new baby, it is conferred a Bamanan name. According to the participants, naming practices help to differentiate people from each other. Moreover, they do believe that conferring a name to a baby differs from one culture to another. A person without a name means that the person doesn't live or exist in the eyes of respondents. Names are both significant and meaningful. As a result, Bamanan people are bestowed names which carry meanings. Names like juma, sunugu, jiri, jala, sungalo are not just meaningful, but also circumstantial. According to them, no name is given at random. Some Bamanan people attribute the name of a dead person to their children. The bearer of such a name reminds the name-givers (including the family) the dead person. Bamanan people also think that giving a child his ancestral name is important because ancestors are strong enough to protect the child.

The rest of the informants (20%) do not continue to give Bamanan traditional names to the new born baby. Respondents falling in this category do not value Bamanan traditional names because they believe that they are old-fashioned and useless in the modern world. With the spread of religion, Islam and Christianity have a huge impact on the Bamanan society including their naming practices.

Figure 9:

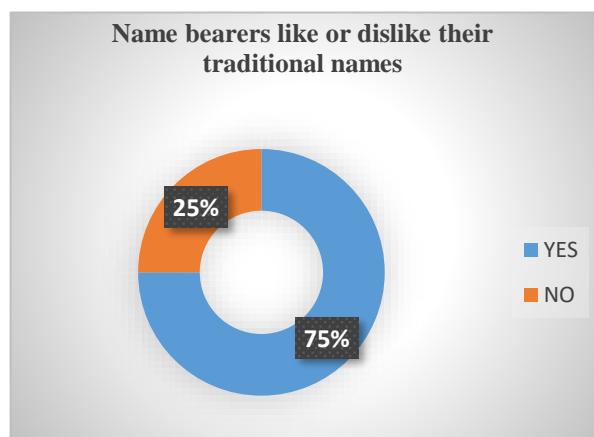*Attitudes of name bearers to their own traditional names*

Figure N° 10 shows that 75% of respondents do believe that traditional name bearers like their names. They underline the fact that most of the bearers know the birth circumstances behind their names. The bearers of Bamanan traditional names are also happy about their names because they are identified through those names.   However, 25% of participants point out that the Bamanan traditional name bearers do not like their name. This attitude is due to the significant impact of the two existing religions on Bamanan society. Thus, Arab and Christian names are adopted when naming Bamanan newborn babies.

Attitudes towards Bamanan traditional personal names were under investigation during interviews and focus group discussions. Attitudes were categorized so that the researcher could tackle with different viewpoints. There were attitudes of bearers and non-bearers of names and name-givers. The findings showed both negative and positive attitudes towards the Bamanan traditional personal names. These two opposing viewpoints have been discussed with participants in order to highlight the reasons behind them.

There have been three views of groups related to positive and negative attitudes of the Bamanan traditional personal names. The first group, the name bearers, has a positive attitude with the average of 58%. The second group concerns the non-bearers of the Bamanan traditional personal names. This group has showed 80% of positive attitude towards the Bamanan traditional personal names. The last group is related to the views of the name givers. This group has underlined a positive attitude towards the Bamanan traditional personal names

DISCUSSION

Different attitudes have emerged towards the use of Bamanan traditional personal names. Several participants didn't agree on the massive use of Arabic and Christian names among Bamanan people. Although Bamanan people liked those religious names, they didn't want their ethnic identity (traditional personal names) to be disappeared at the expense of those foreign cultures. Question was raised through interviews in order to find out the feeling of participants about the naming practices among Bamanan people. The finding showed that the majority of participants shared positive attitudes towards the use of Bamanan traditional names in the setting place. There have been three views of groups related to positive and negative attitudes of the Bamanan traditional personal names. The first group, the name bearers, has a positive attitude with the average of 58%. the second group concerns the non-bearers of the Bamanan traditional personal names. This group has showed 80% of positive attitude towards the Bamanan traditional personal names. The last group is related to the views of the name givers. This group has underlined a positive attitude towards the Bamanan traditional personal names.

CONCLUSION

This study looks at how people in the Bamanan community in Buguni feel about their traditional personal names. Many name bearers like their traditional names, but there is tension due to modern religious and social influences. Some feel their names are old-fashioned or might lead to prejudice. On the other hand, those who don't bear the names like name givers generally appreciate the cultural and historical value of Bamanan names and want to keep them alive. Even though more people are choosing Christian and Islamic names, many in the community are still committed to their traditional naming practices. The study highlights the importance of understanding and valuing the cultural heritage of Bamanan names and shows how tradition and modern life interact in naming customs.

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