

NOVEL TRADITIONS IN CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN NIGERIA: A GENERIC PERSPECTIVES OF THE THREE NOVELISTS FROM THE REGION

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the current trends of literature in English from northern Nigeria, focusing on three acclaimed novelists, namely Abubakar Gimba, Zaynab Alkali and Aliyu Kamal. The aim of this research was to scrutinize the stylistic idiosyncrasies of three writers mainly in the way they converge and diverge in their thematic focus in exploring contemporary realities of northern Nigeria. The three writers are from three major states from northern Nigeria. Aliyu Kamal is from Kano state, Zaynab Alkali from Borno state while Abubakar Gimba from Nassarawa State. Questionnaires were administered to critics, literary scholars and literature students in various secondary schools and tertiary institutions from the three states where the novelists live with a view to seeking the critical perspectives of the three writers in the area they converge and diverge in their portrayal of contemporary issues in northern Nigeria. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, after formal introductions. The researcher collected the questionnaires at fixed time agreed by the respondents and their representatives in various schools of three states. Appendices of the questionnaires are attached at the last page of the paper the findings of the study revealed the three writers are deeply obsessed with depiction of theme marriage and education. The paper recommends among others, that the writers from northern Nigeria should be fully supported with enough funds to publish their novels in reputable publishing company for wider circulation.

Keywords: Novel Traditions, Contemporary, Northern Nigeria and Novelists

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study explores novel traditions in contemporary northern Nigeria, focusing on the literary perspectives of three major novelists from the region, namely Aliyu Kamal, zaynab Alkali and Abubakar Gimba. Given its narrative ethos, the three novelists prefer to use the genre of novel to depict their themes about their region. This amplifies the fact that the novel is a narration that tells rather than enacts and this distinguishes it, on grand scale, from drama and poetry (Agbo, 2015). What distinguishes novel apart from other genre is hinged on its ability to incorporate a lot from human life and experiences through its narrative power (Jeremy, 1985).

According to Jaji (2015), there is a plethora of themes depicted by many northern Nigerian literary writers in novelistic form and they attract universal recognition. Corroborating this,

Killam (1969) expatiates that “the nove¹ brings news of a strange part of the world and values and attitude of a group of people” (p.2). Many critics in the immediate pasts and Jibril included criticize the literary writers from the region for their inability to produce sustainable work of art in English. This Jibril (1990) writes: “there has been no creative writing in English of appreciative quantity and quality from Northern Nigeria: (p.19).

At best, the situation has taken a paradigm with emergence of a crop of writers from the region , such as Abubakar Gimba, Zaynab Alkai, Aliyu Kamal whose novels are heavily imbued with contemporaneous realities about northern Nigeria (Saje, 2011).. Supporting this, Shabba (2005) adds the emergence Kamal Aliyu, Abubakar Gimba, Labo Yari and Helo Habila is a great manifestation of literary achievement for northern Nigeria on the basis that the novelists are well-versed in English. Above all, they are more concerned in exploring post-independence problems in particular Nigeria, and Africa at large. Engra (1985) is right in his submission that “committed African writers are extremely sensitive to the social problems of their day and coming to grip with them, hoping to play their parts”. (p.12). There are many writers in northern Nigeria now compared to the immediate past but are not fully recognized in African as well as world literary scenes partly, because their works are published locally. Self-publication becomes the focal concern for many potential writers in Nigeria because of its cheapness and relative complexity in terms of editorial assessment (Abba, 1997).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Reading novel written in English among students in Northern Nigeria has deterred critical reception of novels produced by the emerging writers from the region who use the cultural experiences typical to their environment (northern Nigeria). The main concern of the youth in the region is to read novels written in Hausa. Only a small portion in the immediate pasts would be able to pass critical discourse orally about the novels written by acclaimed writers in the region. Kano is the spring board for the sales of the Hausa novels (Shabba 2005, Malumfashi, 2006 and Malumfashi, 2007). This informs the conduct of this study with a view to witness a paradigm shift in the critical perception of three acclaimed writers from northern Nigeria.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Umar (2012) contends that literature in English from Northern Nigeria is a nascent one, because many potential writers in the region are not committed to write in English. Linked to this, Kassam (1997) submits that “not much has been known about writing in English in Northern Nigeria until recently” (p.18). Abba (1997) corroborates that northern Nigeria already had embraced Islam in that all its literary productions were in ajami-Arabic. That is why western education was received with skepticism in the region, seeing it as a potential factor that could dismantle their cultural and religious practices (Jibril 1990:3). Aligned to this, Abodurin (1990) adds that in the past, only a few writers from northern Nigeria were able to write novel in English, because western education was not recognized owing to western overtures associated with it by northerners

¹ My appreciation to TETFUND for sponsoring my Institution Based-Research on which the findings of the research is the outcome of this article

Northern Nigeria, as echoed by Jibril, (1990) needs to be projected to the world so that it would be fully recognized like other parts of the country in terms of literary productions in English. The area where northern Nigeria was not receiving much critical attention was in prose fiction (in English) but with emergence of a crop of literary writers in the recent pasts that are good in English and artistically capable of handling contemporaneous themes in the prose fiction, it becomes a history now. Abubakar Gimba, Heron Habila, Zaynab Alkali, LaboYari Aliyu Kamal to mention but few, are examples of literary writes from northern Nigeria that have trailed very fast in the treatment of contemporary themes in their novels. Fajenyo (2008) expatiates that Northern Nigerian novels are always about societal problems in Africa.

There is a corpus of literary writings in English written by the emerging writers from Northern Nigeria but are not yet critiqued because of poor reading culture among teeming students in the region (Abdu, 2013). As such, the literary texts are covered in dust and become restricted to limited readers.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is primarily guided by phenomenological ontology using in-depth questionnaires techniques to get perceived critical responses on the literary perspectives of three novelists from northern Nigeria. The quantity or number of questionnaires generated as the data of the study were analysed and interpreted from quantitative and qualitative angles.

3.1 Research Design

This study is descriptive in nature in that it deploys the interpretive phenomenology as its design formation to uncover the responses of academic scholars , literary critics and students from secondary schools and tertiary institutions of the three states of northern Nigeria , namely Kano State , Borno and Nassarawa. Creswell (2009) defined phenomenological research design as a “research plan which describes the meaning of the lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon for several individuals” (p. 13).

3.2 Population of the Study

The participants of this study include critics, literary scholars and literature students from the three states where the novelists who are expected to offer convincing explanation regarding the literary perspectives of the three novelists.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study will comprise a total of 1500 hundred people. 500 respondents were given questionnaires to fill based on their perceptions on the three novelists about novel tradition in contemporary northern Nigeria. .

3.4 Method of Data Collection

As far as data collection is concerned, questionnaires were given to the participants of the study whom are from the area of the study. The researcher had formally introduced himself to the heads of the institutions, critics, literary scholars on his research. The researcher distributed the

questionnaires the copies of the questionnaires to the selected participants. As for the tertiary institutions and schools, the research requested the management to allow him brief the literature students on his mission and the reasons for data collection.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process used by researchers to reduce data to a story and interpret it to derive insightful information about the research. This is because raw data could not offer comprehensive and convincing information until they are analysed into manageable form. This relates to Miller & Salkinds` (2003) view that data analysis often “helps a researcher reduces a large chunk of data into smaller fragments to make it comprehensible” (p.34). This reveals the fact that the process of the application of deductive and inductive form to the research and data analysis (Malim & Birch 1992). The questionnaires were thoroughly sorted out analyzed and interpreted, using alphabetical labels: “A” for Kamal, “B” for Zaynab Alkali and “C” for Abubakar Gimba. Tables and charts were also used for clarity of the interpretation of data. The data were scrutinized and validated by experts to ensure that all the research instruments are effectively used.

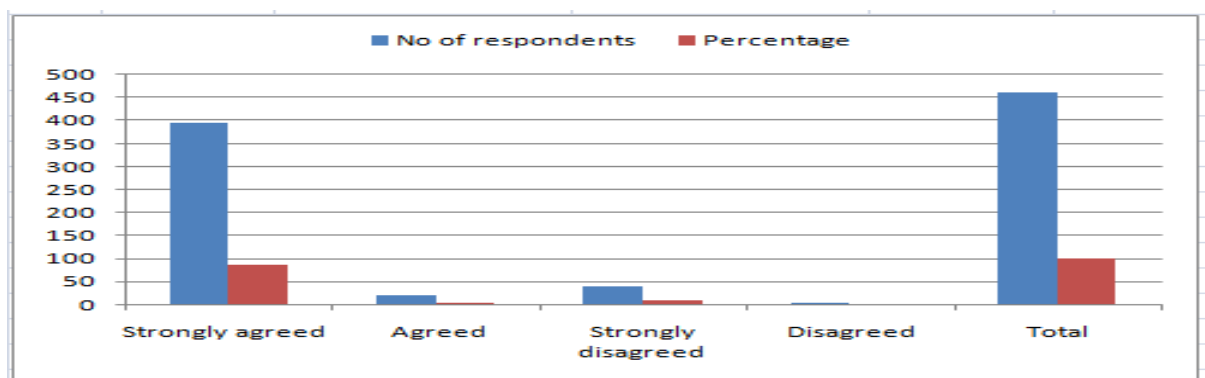
4.0 RESULT OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Questionnaire Responses on Aliyu Kamal`s Literary Perspectives on Novel Tradition in Northern Nigeria

Table 1 “A”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 396 | 86.1 |
| 2 | Agreed | 20 | 4.3 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 40 | 8.7 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 4 | 0.9 |
| 5 | Total | 460 | 100.0 |

The table 1 “A” above reveals that Aliyu Kamal is stylistically attuned to the portrayal of theme of marriage as a major center stage of his thematic thrust in contemporary northern Nigeria. This is evidenced in the way 396 of out of 500 respondents representing 86.1 percentages strongly agreed as well as 20 respondents 4.3 percentage representing 4.3 who agreed respectively. 4 respondents representing 0.9 disagreed with peculiar stylistic thumbprint of Kamal in treating the theme of marriage in his novels.

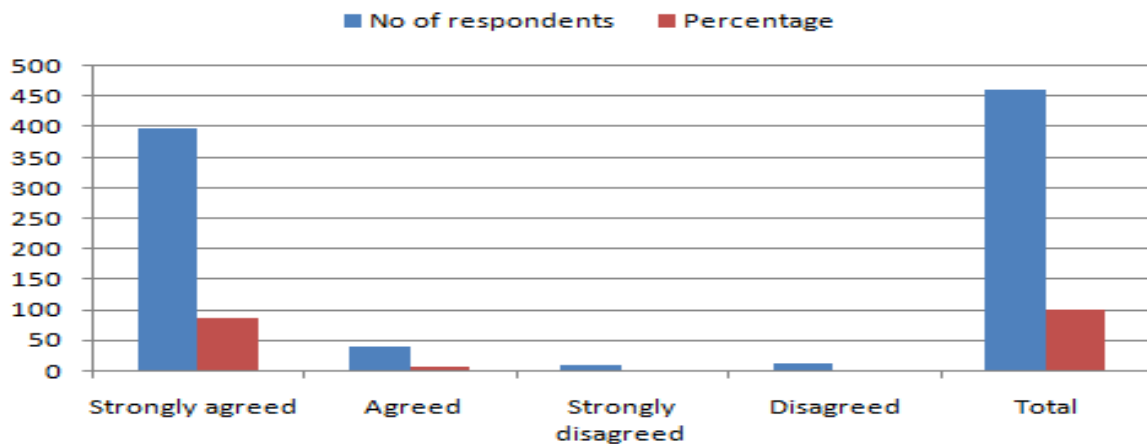


Field work: 2024

Table 2 “A”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 399 | 86.7 |
| 2 | Agreed | 39 | 8.5 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 9 | 2.0 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 11 | 2.4 |
| 5 | Total | 460 | 100.0 |

In the table 2 “A” above, it reveals that 399 respondents representing 86.7 percentage have strongly agreed that Aliyu Kamal depicts the theme of socio-economic activities of northern Nigeria within the context of contemporary realities of northern Nigeria in his novels. Similarly, 39 respondents representing 8.5 percentages are aligned their same response with agreement (agreed). The number of response who strongly disagreed is 9 while those that disagreed is 11. From this context, one can say that Kamal is stylistically inclined in the depiction of contemporary economic activities of northern Nigeria in his novels.



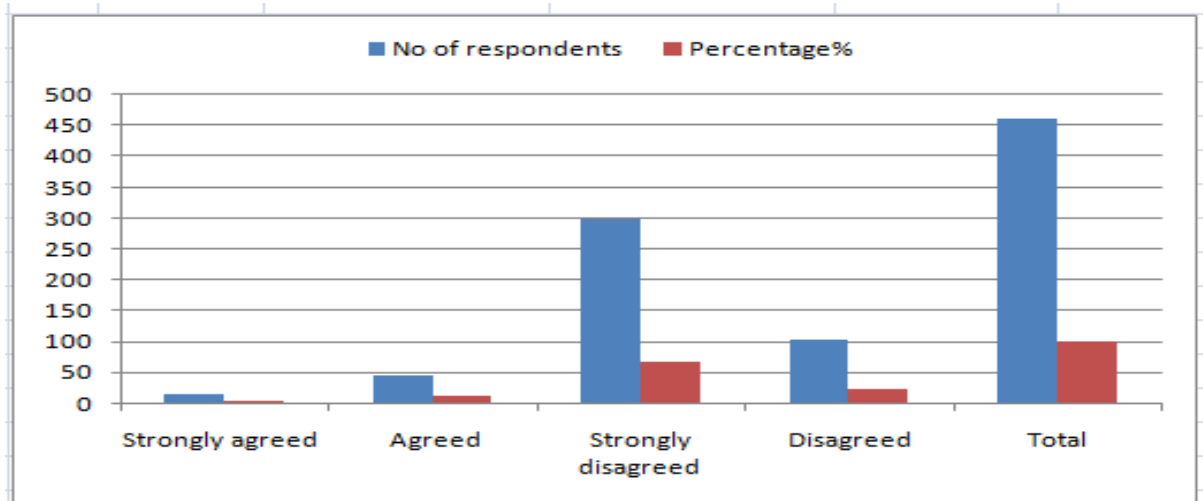
Field Work: 2024

Table 3 “A”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 14 | 3.0 |
| 2 | Agreed | 45 | 9.8 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 299 | 65.0 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 102 | 22.2 |
| 5 | Total | 460 | 100.0 |

The table 3 “A” above reveals that 299 respondents representing 65.0 have strongly disagreed that Kamal does not in the least diverge from Gimba and Alkali as far as his thematic exploration of northern Nigerian experiences are concerned. This is corroborated by 102 respondents representing 22.2 who disagreed. This shows that the three novels are converged

on the same stylistic angle as far as their depiction of novel tradition in northern Nigeria is concerned.

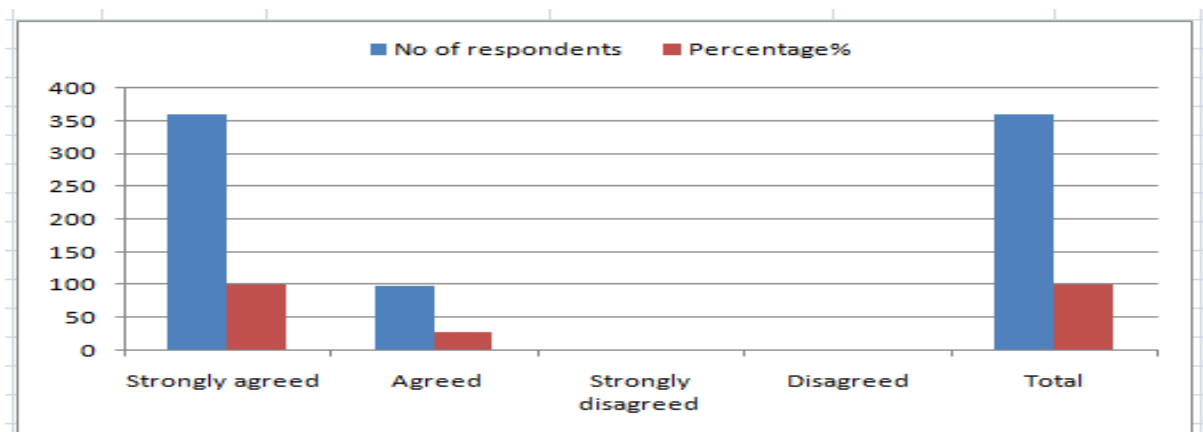


Field work 2024

Table 4 “A”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 360 | 100.0 |
| 2 | Agreed | 97 | 26.9 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 1 | 0.3 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 2 | 0.6 |
| 5 | Total | 360 | 100.0 |

The Table 4 “A” above elucidates the fact that Aliyu Kamal is a writer fully preoccupied with depiction of theme of education as one of the emancipatory tool for socio-economic and political liberation in contemporary northern Nigeria. This is supported by the response given by 360 respondents representing 360.6 percentage who strongly agreed with Kamal’s artistic style in the depiction of education. Equally 97 respondents representing 26.9 responded with agreement. However, only 2 respondents strongly disagreed and 1 disagreed.



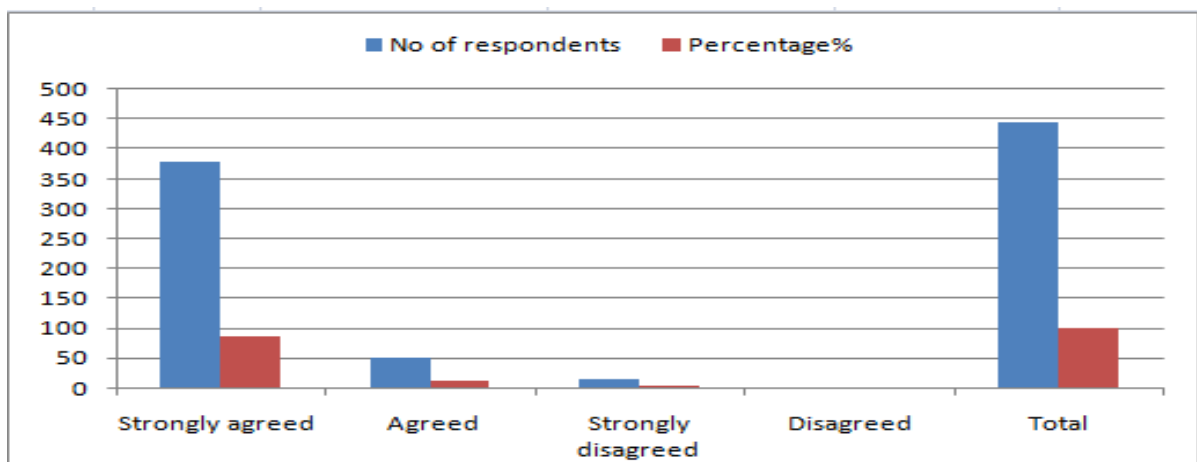
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4.2 Questionnaire Responses on Zaynab Alkali`s Literary Perspectives on Novel Tradition in Northern Nigeria

Table 1 ‘B’:

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 378 | 84.9 |
| 2 | Agreed | 52 | 11.7 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 15 | 3.4 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 1 | 0.2 |
| 5 | Total | 445 | 100.0 |

The table 1“ B” above shows that 378 respondents out of 500 representing 84.9 percentage have strongly agreed with fact that Zaynab Alkali has been deeply obsessed with depicting of theme of marriage in her novels. In addition, 52 respondents representing 11.7 have agreed on that while 15 respondents representing 3.4 have strongly disagreed. Lastly a single respondent disagreed. This amplifies the fact that Zainab Alkali has marriage as the major center stage of her thematic treatment in her novels.



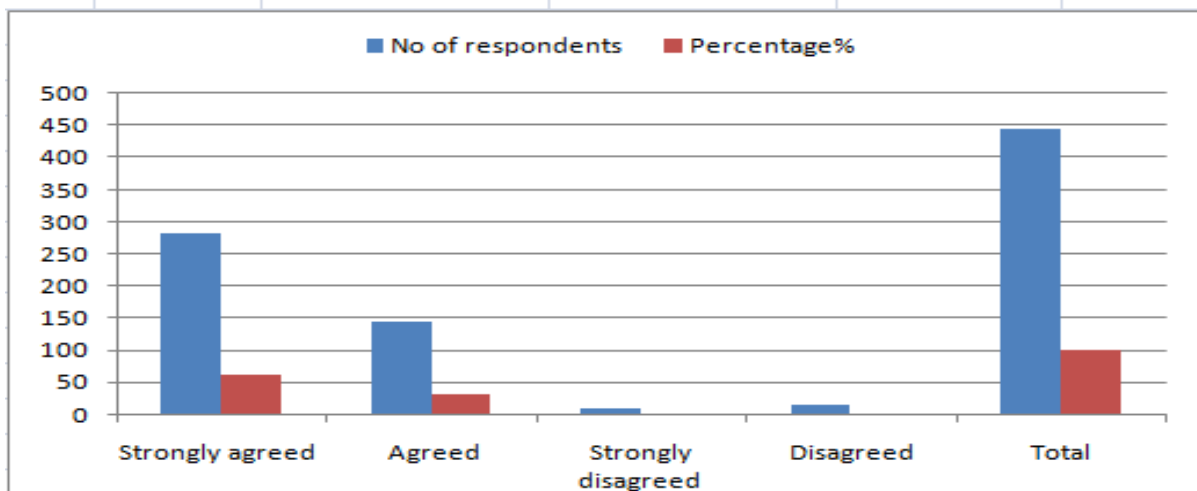
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Table 2“B”:

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 281 | 63.1 |
| 2 | Agreed | 144 | 32.4 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 9 | 2.0 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 14 | 3.1 |
| 5 | Total | 445 | 100.0 |

In the table 3 “B” above, the 281 respondents representing 63.1 strongly agreed that Zaynab Alkali is writer creatively obsessed with portrayal contemporary socio-economic activities of

northern Nigeria. Added to the validity of the above, 144 respondents agreed while 14 percentage disagreed. From this backdrop, one can say Zaynab Alkali is a writer with socio-cultural visions.

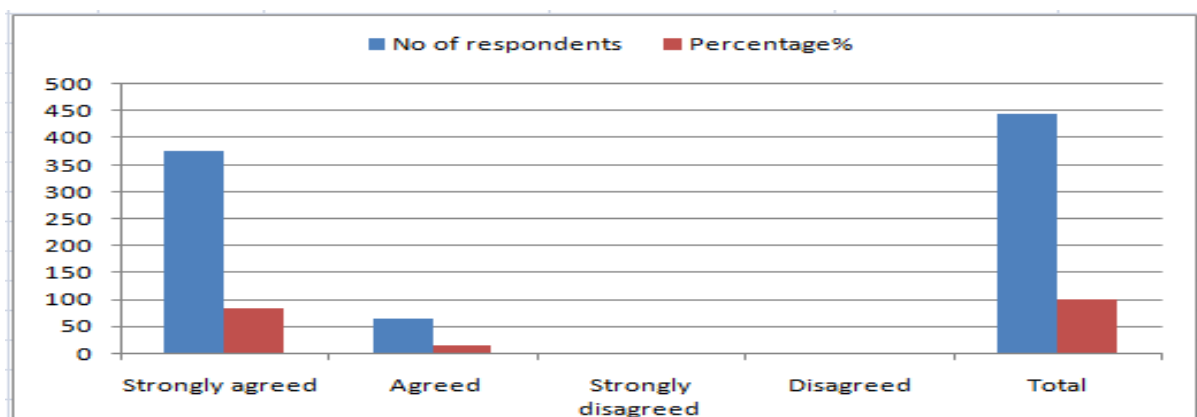


Field work 2024

Table 3“B”:

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 376 | 84.5 |
| 2 | Agreed | 64 | 14.4 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 2 | 0.4 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 3 | 0.7 |
| 5 | Total | 445 | 100.0 |

The table 3 “B” shows 376 respondents representing 84.5 percentage strongly agreed with statement that Zaynab Alkali does not diverge in her thematic treatment with Gimba and Kamal. This is further concurred by 64 respondents representing 14.4 percentage who also agreed. However, 2 respondents representing 0.4 percentages strongly disagreed and 3 representing 0.3 percentage disagreed. By this, it shows that Zaynab Alkali shares the same stylistic thumbprint with two Kamal and Gimba as far as her literary perspective is concerned..

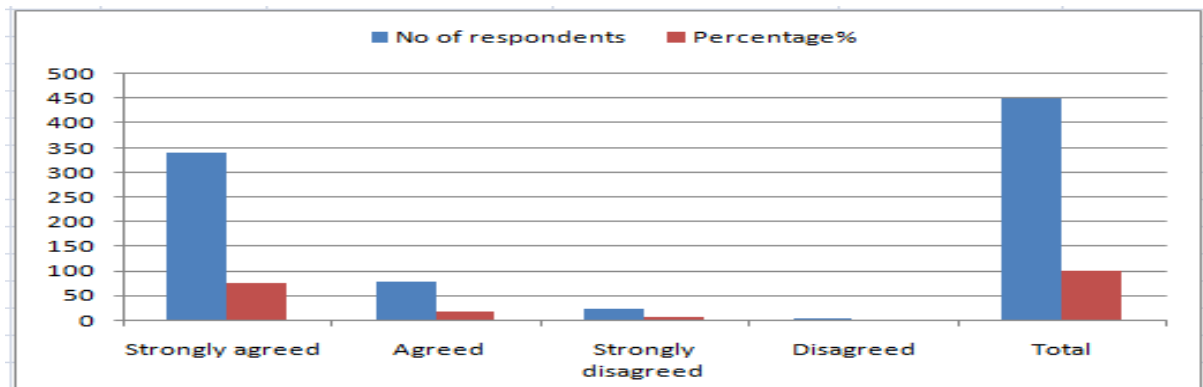


Field work 2024

Table 4 “B”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 340 | 75.6 |
| 2 | Agreed | 78 | 17.3 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 23 | 5.1 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 4 | 0.9 |
| 5 | Total | 450 | 100.0 |

As far as the depicting of education as a major theme is concerned, the respondents from the table four "B" above, shows that 340 respondents representing 75.6 percentages have strongly agreed with fact that Zaynab Alkali gives the theme of education a great priority in her novels. 78 respondents representing 17.3 percentages also concurred with this by ticking "agreed". In contrast, 23 respondents strongly disagreed while 04 disagreed respectively



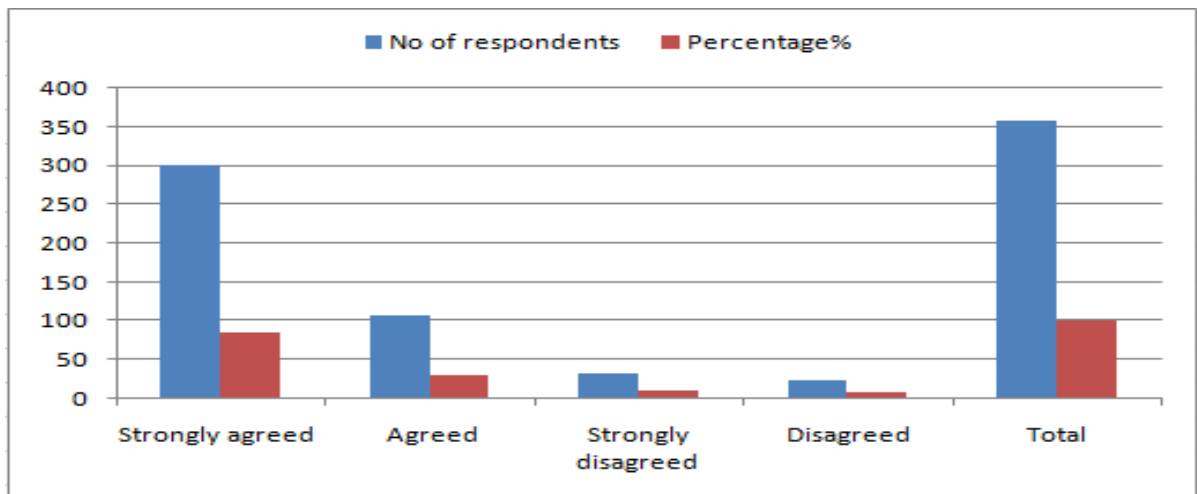
Field Work 2024

4.3 Questionnaire Responses on Abubakar Gimba’s Literary Perspectives on Novel Tradition in Northern Nigeria

Table 1 “C”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 301 | 83.8 |
| 2 | Agreed | 105 | 29.2 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 30 | 8.4 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 23 | 6.4 |
| 5 | Total | 359 | 100.0 |

The Table 1 “C” above shows that 301 respondents representing 83.8 percentages have strongly agreed that Abubakar Gimba is stylistically preoccupied with exploring of the theme of marriage in his novels. Equally, 105 respondents representing 29.2 percentages agreed on that while 30 representing 8.4 percentages strongly disagreed and two 23 representing 6.4 disagreed respectively.

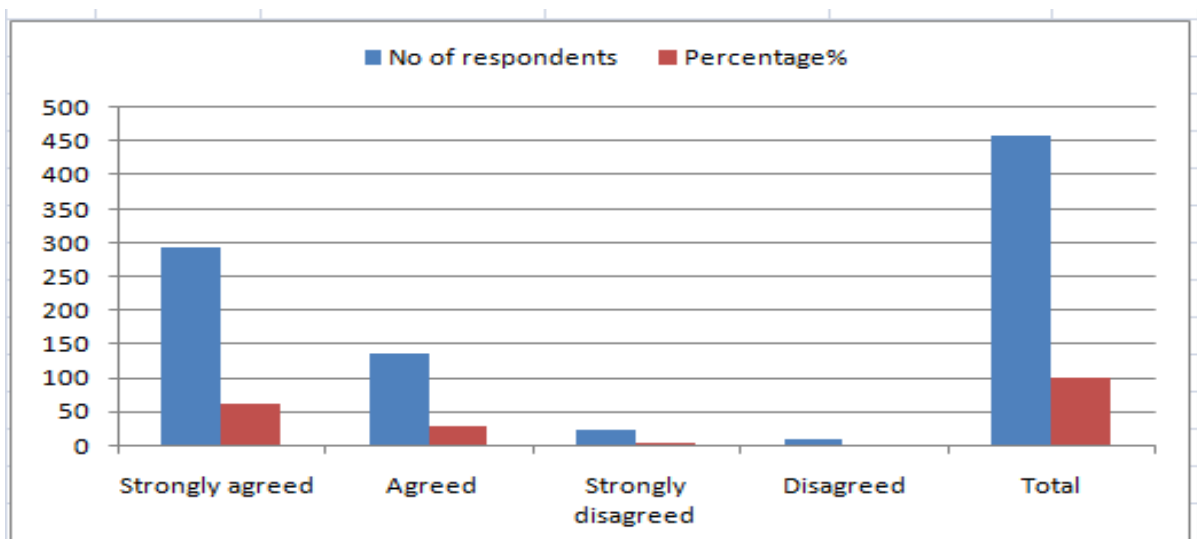


Field work 2024

Table 2 “C”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 293 | 63.8 |
| 2 | Agreed | 136 | 29.6 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 21 | 4.6 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 9 | 2.0 |
| 5 | Total | 459 | 100.0 |

The Table 2 “B” above shows that Gimba has effectively treated the theme of socio-economic activities of northern Nigeria. This is corroborated by the response of 293 respondents representing 63.8 who strongly agreed and 136 respondents representing 29.6 who agreed. In the same vein, 21 respondents representing 4.6 percentages strongly disagreed while 09 respondents representing 2.0 disagreed respectively.

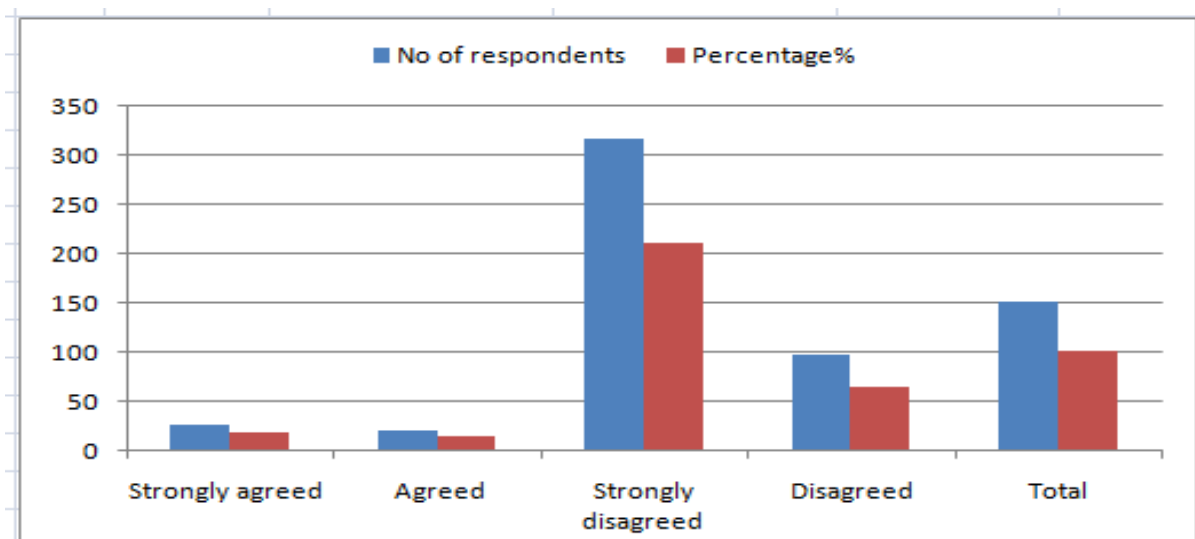


Field Work 2024

Table 3 “C”:

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 26 | 17.3 |
| 2 | Agreed | 19 | 12.7 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 317 | 211.3 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 97 | 64.7 |
| 5 | Total | 150 | 100.0 |

The table 3 “C” above shows 317 respondents that strongly disagreed and 97 disagreed with statement that Abubakar Gimba stylistically diverges in his thematic treatment with Zaynab Alkali and Aliyu Kamal as far as novel tradition in contemporary northern Nigeria is concerned. 26 respondents strongly agreed while 19 disagreed. From the context of percentages of the respondents, it is overtly pertinent to note that Abubakar converge with Kamal and Zaynab Alkali as far as novel tradition in contemporary northern Nigeria is concerned.

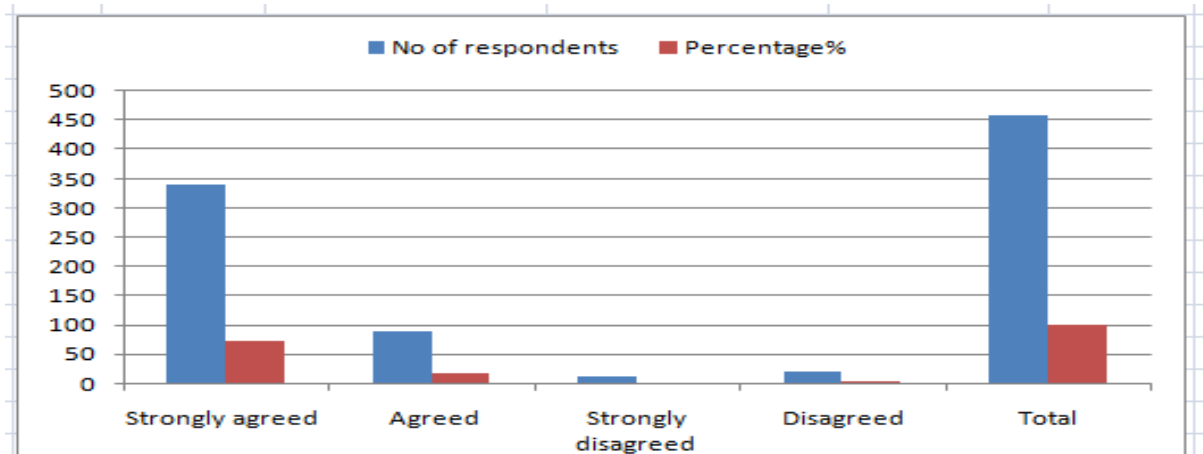


Field work 2024

Table 4 “C”

| S/N | Response | No of respondents | Percentage% |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Strongly agreed | 340 | 74.1 |
| 2 | Agreed | 88 | 19.2 |
| 3 | Strongly disagreed | 11 | 2.4 |
| 4 | Disagreed | 20 | 4.4 |
| 5 | Total | 459 | 100.0 |

The table 4 “C” above shows 340 respondents strongly agreed and 88 agreed that Abubakar Gimba depicts the theme of education as the vital instrument for emancipation and liberation in his contemporary novels. At best, 11 respondents e strongly disagreed while 20 disagreed



Field work 2024

5.0 DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

As far as the generic model of novel tradition in contemporary northern Nigeria is concerned, the responses from questionnaires generated on the three prominent writers across the Northern Nigeria region shows that they converged on the the following thematic preoccupation

(1) Theme of Marriage: The three writers stylistically converge in the treatment of the theme of marriage as far as the burgeoning responses from questionnaires are concerned. Many respondents strongly agreed on this with highest figures. From example in table 1 “1” 366 respondents responded strongly that Kamal concerns in the treatment of theme of marriage in his novels while 20 agreed. Asfor table 1 “B” for Zaynab Alkali, 378 (who strongly agreed) and 52 respondents (who agreed) confirmed that Alkali is obsessed with exploring theme of marriage in all her novels. Lastly, the table 1 “c” on Abubakar Gimba reveals that 301 respondents strongly agreed while 106 agreed concurrently that he is preoccupied with exploring the theme of marriage. Oversell, this shows that the institution of marriage is one of concerns or focuses of the three writers simply because it occupies a center stage in contemporary northern Nigeria novel tradition. Therefore, marriage is one of the contemporary generic models as it featured in all novels produced by Gimba, Alkali and Kamal. This corroborates Shabba (2015) that marriage institution in northern Nigeria has suffered a great setbacks, as divorce is too rampant. Kelani (2004) elaborates that writers are social reformers: they cannot be detached from their cultural conviction

(2) The Theme of Education

As far as questionnaire responses of the three writers are concerned, education features as one of the generic concern of the three novelists. It is profusely explored in all novels of Kamal, Gimba and Alkali as garnered by the perceived responses from the three states of northern Nigeria.. It is a contemporary northern Nigerian phenomenon. This is connected to the fact that western education received skeptic reactions in the past (Jibril, 1990, Abba, 1997 and Kassam 1997). For example in table 1 “A” on Kamal, 360 strongly agreed while 97 agreed that Kamal

treats the themes of education in his novels. As for Alkali, the table 1'B' shows that 340 respondents agreed while 78 respondents agreed that Alkali is deeply obsessed with depiction of theme of education in her novels. And this is the same as Gimba in which 340 respondents strongly agreed while 88 agreed. This corroborates Zango's (2010) submission that marriage and education forms the basic concerns of northern Nigerian writers.

(c) The theme Contemporary Realities: The three writers stylistically converge in the treatment of contemporary realities about northern Nigeria in their novels. Many respondents strongly agreed on this with highest confidence. This shows that the three writers are obsessed with depiction of contemporary socio-economic and cultural problems of northern Nigeria. Therefore, contemporary realities are one of the generic models as it featured in all novels produced by Gimba, Alkali and Kamal

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper offers the following recommendations:

- a) The government should prioritize literature teaching in Nigerian primary and secondary schools.
- b) The writers from northern Nigeria should be fully supported with enough funds to publish their novels in reputable publishing company.
- c) The parents and teachers should cultivate reading culture among their children
- d) The literary novels produced in northern Nigeria circulated globally by the government

7.0 CONCLUSION

Northern Nigerian writers have contributed, in contrast with past, to the growth and sustenance of African literature in the 21st century. This is not only ascertained by the number and variety of their creative outputs, but in the magnificent way in which contemporary issues, such as problems of education and marriage are constantly treated by them in their novelistic engagement. The three writers are from different states in northern part of Nigeria but have the same thematic focus. This reveals the true identity of literature in northern Nigeria, a distant form of regionalized literature.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of English, Federal College of Education, Kano

Academic Research Questionnaire

You are kindly invited to participate in a research, Development and Testing of Contemporary Generic Models for Analyzing Novel Traditions in Contemporary Northern Nigeria

DEAR SIR/MADAM,

I am a researcher from the Department of English, Federal University of Education, Kano. . I am currently conducting a study on Novel Traditions in Contemporary Northern Nigeria: An Investigation into the Thematic Preoccupation of the Three Novelists from the Region. This questionnaire is solely for the academic purpose. All information provided shall be treated with utmost confidentiality with the researcher. I undertake to report the result in such a way that anonymity of the respondents is reserved.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Danladi Abdu

Tel: +2348025545359

GUIDELINE: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements as all questions have the same options (1= Strongly Disagreed (SD), 2 =Disagreed (D), 3, 4=Agreed (A), 5 Strongly Agreed (SA))

| Questions | SD | D | A | SA |
|--|----|---|---|----|
| Do Aliyu Kamal, Abubakar Gimba and Zaynab Alkali explore the theme of marital in their novels from the context of northern Nigerian cultural milieu? | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Do the three writers diverge in their thematic treatment as far as novel tradition in contemporary northern Nigeria is concerned? | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Do the three writers depict the education as the vital instrument for emancipation and liberation in their contemporary novels? | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Do the three writers use simple language in their novels to depict contemporary realities of northern Nigeria ?. | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 |