



Language, Identity, and Cultural Preservation: The Role of Kiswahili in Shaping African Narratives in a Globalised World

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Article History

Received: 02.05.2025

Revised: 10.10.2025

Accepted: 18.10.2025

Published: 19.10.2025

Keywords

Cultural preservation

Identity formation

Language policy

Kiswahili

How to cite:

Haonga, E. D. (2025). Language, Identity, and Cultural Preservation: The Role of Kiswahili in Shaping African Narratives in a Globalised World. *Journal of Linguistics, Literary and Communication Studies*, 4(2), 147-159.

Abstract

This study investigates the role of Kiswahili in shaping African identity, preserving cultural heritage, and contributing to global narrative formation, with a particular focus on the challenges posed by globalisation. Anchored in postcolonial theory and cultural identity frameworks, the research employs a mixed-methods design to capture both statistical patterns and narrative depth. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 360 participants across East and Central Africa, including cultural practitioners, academics, media professionals, NGO representatives, and community members. Structured questionnaires with closed- and open-ended items enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative insights. Key findings indicate that Kiswahili significantly reinforces African identity (73.6%), safeguards cultural heritage (73.7%), and promotes Pan-African unity (68%), while also serving as a conduit for oral traditions (76.4%) and indigenous knowledge systems through proverbs (76.3%). However, the study identifies critical limitations in Kiswahili's global visibility, with low ratings in international media representation (36.1% poor/very poor) and literary translation (48.6% poor/very poor), alongside intergenerational concerns over declining youth engagement (61.1%). The study argues that despite Kiswahili's regional vitality, structural barriers-linguistic hierarchies, digital exclusion, and weak policy frameworks-continue to constrain its global influence. It calls for strategic interventions, including language policy reform, educational integration, digital resource expansion, and systematic translation efforts to elevate Kiswahili's status as a vehicle for cultural preservation and global epistemic inclusion.

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Introduction

This study investigates the role of Kiswahili in shaping African identity, preserving cultural heritage, and positioning Africa within global narratives. As one of the most widely spoken indigenous languages on the continent, Kiswahili serves more than 200 million speakers across East, Central, and Southern Africa, and has achieved continental recognition as an official language of the African Union (Robinson, 2024). Historically, rooted in the interactions along the East African coast, Kiswahili evolved as both a lingua franca and a vehicle for cultural exchange, oral traditions, and collective memory. Its growth into a regional and continental language has made it not only a medium of communication but also a symbol of unity and resilience against cultural marginalisation (Barasa, 2023; Balogun, Aruoture, & Haruna, 2024; Durodolu & Mojapelo, 2024). Despite these achievements,



globalisation, dominance of Western languages, and generational shifts present challenges to its visibility and sustainability. Against this backdrop, the current study examines how Kiswahili continues to serve as a custodian of African heritage while navigating the pressures of global representation and modern cultural dynamics.

Given this cultural and historical prominence, further inquiry is needed into how Kiswahili negotiates its dual role as a custodian of African heritage and a participant in global linguistic landscapes. As scholars postulate, language is not merely a tool of interaction but also a vessel through which culture, identity, and collective memory are transmitted and sustained (Müsyoki, 2020; Uzoigwe, 2025). Its recognition as an official language of the African Union and several regional bodies elevates it from the status of an everyday lingua franca to a continental emblem of unity, solidarity, and cultural resilience (Williams-Onyeji, 2025; Uzoigwe, 2025). Over time, Kiswahili has functioned as a custodian of African heritage, mediating cohesion among diverse communities through oral traditions, literature, music, film, and formal education (Luvaga, Enaka, & Mwamzandi, 2021; Mohr & Barasa, 2024; Kamuhuro & Makokha, 2025). In this sense, it demonstrates the capacity of an indigenous African language to construct identity, safeguard heritage, and carry African narratives into wider global arenas.

Yet Kiswahili's visibility and sustainability face significant pressures in the contemporary era. The predominance of global languages such as English, French, and Portuguese, combined with the homogenising currents of globalisation, has contributed to the marginalisation of African languages in transnational communication and cultural exchange (Balogun, Aruoture, & Haruna, 2024; Durodolu & Mojapelo, 2024). Intergenerational dynamics further complicate its position: younger generations, heavily immersed in digital cultures shaped by Western media, often display declining interest in traditional linguistic and cultural practices (Saidu, 2025; Vidmar, 2020). Weak policy frameworks, inadequate translation of Kiswahili works, and poor representation in global media further constrain its reach (Nyabola, 2024; Diko, 2024). This paradox highlights an irony in contemporary debates: although Kiswahili is celebrated regionally as a language of unity and heritage, it remains structurally disadvantaged in the international communicative order (Chavinda, 2025).

This tension between Kiswahili's local vitality and its limited international presence underscores a critical research gap. Existing studies have generally emphasised its historical evolution, national roles, or use in specific countries. Still, there remains a shortage of cross-regional, multi-stakeholder analyses that assess its role at the intersection of identity construction, cultural preservation, and global representation (Khohliso, Bwire, Ngugi, Miima, & Babusa, 2024). Moreover, little empirical work has systematically examined how globalisation, digital media, and shifting generational attitudes are redefining the functions of Kiswahili both as a heritage language and as a potential medium of cultural diplomacy (Sumartana, Hudiananingsih, & Rouf, 2025). Addressing this gap is vital for strengthening Kiswahili's role as a unifying African language and enhancing its capacity to contribute to global narratives.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how Kiswahili contributes to African identity, cultural preservation, and narrative construction in a globalised context. It examines the extent to which the language reinforces identity, heritage, and Pan-African unity; identifies significant challenges in translation, global representation, and intergenerational transmission; and explores strategies for positioning Kiswahili as both a cultural resource and a language of global expression. Insights are drawn from cultural practitioners, custodians, academics, media professionals, civil society organisations, and community members across East and Central Africa, providing a



comprehensive perspective on Kiswahili's dual role in sustaining African heritage and amplifying Africa's voice on the global stage.

Previous scholarship has consistently demonstrated Kiswahili's central role in shaping identity and ensuring cultural continuity. Robinson (2024) traces its development from East African coastal societies to its position as a continental lingua franca, while Mūsyoki (2020) describes its enduring significance as a transmitter of Afrocentric consciousness. Williams-Onyeji (2025) situates Kiswahili within broader Pan-Africanist projects, emphasising its role in decolonisation and linguistic sovereignty. Collectively, such studies highlight Kiswahili's potential to reclaim intellectual, artistic, and political spaces long dominated by colonial languages (Kahiraba & Keita, 2024; Siundu, 2020; Uzoigwe, 2025).

Recent scholarship, however, has also emphasised Kiswahili's potential for resistance, innovation, and cultural diplomacy. Abubakar (2025) advocates for developing Swahili creative industries and innovation ecosystems to enhance their socio-economic value. Ondiba (2025) identifies the potential of artificial intelligence to revitalise endangered languages, including Kiswahili. Mhando (2024) illustrates how Tanzanian Swahili DJs indigenise foreign media, such as Chinese martial arts films, producing locally embedded cultural products. These studies resonate with broader arguments that African languages remain central to empowerment, identity reconstruction, and inclusivity. Kiswahili thus emerges as both a linguistic and cultural resource, embodying creativity and resilience (Ojó, 2022; Diyammi, 2025). Recent contributions also highlight strategies for strengthening Kiswahili's global presence. Abubakar (2025) stresses the role of creative industries, while Ondiba (2025) emphasises digital innovation and artificial intelligence. Educational policy reforms are equally prominent, with Khohliso et al. (2024) advocating for the integration of African languages into higher education curricula. In contrast, Sumartana, Hudiananingsih, and Rouf (2025) call for inclusive education that balances globalisation with linguistic heritage. Cultural diplomacy and systematic translation efforts are also viewed as vital to expanding Kiswahili's global recognition (Diko, 2024; Chaligha & Gengshen, 2025).

Taken together, these scholarly perspectives confirm Kiswahili's centrality in identity formation and cultural preservation, while also acknowledging the dilemmas it faces in the global order. At the same time, they suggest potential pathways for fortification, ranging from policy reform and curriculum innovation to digital technologies, translation initiatives, and cultural industries (Uzoigwe, 2025; Abubakar, 2025; Ondiba, 2025). Building on these insights, the present study provides a cross-regional, empirically grounded analysis of Kiswahili's contribution to cultural preservation and its potential to shape global narratives.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This study is anchored in postcolonial theory (Fanon, 2004; Said, 1978; Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Bhabha, 1994) and cultural identity theory (Hall, 1990, 1996; Castells, 1997; Omoniyi, 2010; Fishman, 1999), providing a framework to analyse Kiswahili's role in shaping African identity, preserving cultural heritage, and asserting agency globally. Postcolonial theory examines the enduring legacies of colonialism, including linguistic hierarchies, cultural marginalisation, and epistemic exclusion. Fanon (1961) highlighted the psychological and cultural impact of colonial domination; Said (1978) showed how colonial discourses distorted non-Western cultures; Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasised reclaiming indigenous languages for cultural sovereignty; and Bhabha (1994) explored hybridity between local traditions and global influences. Cultural identity theory complements this by viewing identity as fluid and socially constructed through language and cultural practices. Hall



(1990, 1996) conceptualised identity as historically contingent; Castells (1997) emphasised language in shaping collective identities; Omoniyi (2010) highlighted its role in postcolonial identity formation; and Fishman (1999) noted its role in transmitting cultural memory across generations. By integrating these theories, the study captures both macro-level structural constraints—such as globalisation, linguistic imperialism, and digital exclusion and micro-level lived experiences, showing Kiswahili as a site of resistance, cultural affirmation, and identity construction in the postcolonial world.

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine Kiswahili’s role in cultural preservation, combining quantitative data from closed-ended questions with qualitative insights from open-ended responses. A structured questionnaire covering demographics, identity, heritage, global narratives, and future perceptions was piloted for clarity and cultural sensitivity. Conducted across East and Central Africa, the study targeted 360 respondents – artists, cultural custodians, scholars, media professionals, NGO representatives, and community members – selected through stratified purposive sampling. Digital tools enabled broad outreach, with 65% from East Africa and 35% from Central Africa, recruited via universities, organisations, and online platforms. Initial outreach to 450 individuals ensured representativeness, and digital monitoring improved response rates. Data analysis combined descriptive statistics with thematic review to reveal patterns and depth. Ethical standards were upheld through voluntary participation, anonymity, and cultural respect throughout the process.

Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

To contextualise the study’s findings, it is essential to provide an overview of the participants' socio-demographic profile. Understanding characteristics such as gender, age, occupation, and proficiency in Kiswahili enables nuanced interpretations of perspectives on cultural preservation, identity, and the role of Kiswahili in contemporary African societies. The study involved 360 participants from East and Central Africa, encompassing a broad spectrum of stakeholder groups. The following table summarises the distribution of respondents across these key variables, highlighting the diversity of stakeholders engaged in the study and providing a foundation for subsequent analysis of their responses.



Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants (N = 360)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	190	52.8
	Female	160	44.4
	Other / Prefer not to say	10	2.8
	Total	360	100.0
Age	Below 20	40	11.1
	21-30	110	30.6
	31-40	95	26.4
	41-50	65	18.1
	Above 50	50	13.8
	Total	360	100.0
Occupation	Student	80	22.2
	Lecturer / Researcher	45	12.5
	Policy Maker	30	8.3
	Media / Creative Practitioner	75	20.8
	NGO / Institutional Worker	60	16.7
	Other	70	19.5
	Total	360	100.0
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Kiswahili Proficiency	Native Speaker	145	40.3
	Advanced	110	30.6
	Intermediate	75	20.8
	Beginner	30	8.3
	Total	360	100.0

The demographic composition of the sample reveals a moderately gender-balanced group, with a slight male majority (52.8%) and a significant female representation (44.4%), while a small proportion (2.8%) identified as other or preferred not to disclose. Age distribution skews toward younger adults, with the largest segment aged 21-30 (30.6%), followed by those aged 31-40 (26.4%). This suggests, in line with Creswell (2014), that the study primarily engaged individuals in early to mid-career stages – an age group often at the forefront of cultural production, digital engagement, and linguistic innovation. The presence of respondents below 20 (11.1%) and above 50 (13.8%) adds generational breadth, allowing for comparative insights into how Kiswahili is perceived and practised across age cohorts.

Occupational diversity is another strength of the sample. Students (22.2%) and media/creative practitioners (20.8%) form the largest professional categories, indicating strong representation from both emerging voices and cultural producers. The inclusion of NGO/institutional workers (16.7%), lecturers/researchers (12.5%), policy makers (8.3%), and a varied “other” category (19.5%) ensures that perspectives from academia, governance, civil society, and informal sectors are well captured. This occupational spread enhances the study’s capacity to analyse Kiswahili’s role across institutional, grassroots, and creative domains. Language proficiency levels further reinforce the sample’s analytical value. A substantial majority, 70.9% reported either native (40.3%) or advanced (30.6%) fluency in Kiswahili, while intermediate speakers accounted for 20.8% and beginners 8.3%. This high level of linguistic competence suggests that respondents are well positioned to reflect on Kiswahili’s cultural significance, communicative power, and evolving role in identity formation and global representation. Taken together, the demographic, professional, and linguistic attributes of the sample



provide a rich foundation for exploring Kiswahili’s multifaceted impact, offering insights grounded in lived experience and informed by diverse social positions.

Kiswahili and Identity Development

The study examined respondents’ perceptions of Kiswahili’s role in shaping both individual and collective identity, probing how the language informs personal self-conceptions, communal belonging, and shared cultural memory; it explored whether participants view Kiswahili as a marker of ethnic or national affiliation, a vehicle for Pan-African solidarity, and a medium for transmitting values and historical narratives across generations. Table 2 presents participants’ perceptions of Kiswahili in relation to African identity, cultural preservation, and Pan-African unity. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding the role of Kiswahili in strengthening African identity, fostering connections to Pan-African unity, preserving cultural heritage, maintaining intergenerational links, and representing an authentic African voice globally. The distribution of responses across the five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly, provides insight into both the overall trends and the nuances of how Kiswahili is experienced and valued by diverse stakeholders.

Table 2: Kiswahili's Role in Identity Formation (N = 360)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Kiswahili strengthens my African identity	145 (40.3%)	120 (33.3%)	65 (18.1%)	20 (5.6%)	10 (2.8%)
Speaking Kiswahili connects me to Pan-African unity	130 (36.1%)	115 (31.9%)	75 (20.8%)	25 (6.9%)	15 (4.2%)
Kiswahili helps preserve my cultural heritage	155 (43.1%)	110 (30.6%)	60 (16.7%)	25 (6.9%)	10 (2.8%)
Young people are losing connection to Kiswahili identity	95 (26.4%)	125 (34.7%)	85 (23.6%)	40 (11.1%)	15 (4.2%)
Kiswahili represents authentic African voice globally	140 (38.9%)	105 (29.2%)	70 (19.4%)	30 (8.3%)	15 (4.2%)

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results indicate that a significant majority of participants perceive Kiswahili as central to African identity and cultural preservation. Specifically, 40.3% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that Kiswahili strengthens their African identity, while 43.1% strongly agreed and 30.6% agreed that it helps preserve cultural heritage. Similarly, 36.1% strongly agreed and 31.9% agreed that speaking Kiswahili fosters Pan-African unity, and 38.9% strongly agreed and 29.2% agreed that it represents an authentic African voice globally. However, concerns about generational shifts were evident, with 26.4% strongly agreeing and 34.7% agreeing that young people are losing connection to Kiswahili identity. Overall, these findings highlight both the enduring significance of Kiswahili in promoting cultural pride and identity, as well as challenges in sustaining its influence among younger generations.

The respondents’ perceptions of Kiswahili can be interpreted through both postcolonial and cultural identity lenses. From a postcolonial perspective, their view of Kiswahili as strengthening African identity, preserving cultural heritage, and representing an authentic African voice reflects resistance against the enduring legacies of colonial linguistic and cultural domination (Fanon, 2004; Said, 1978; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986). It demonstrates the reclamation of agency and the decolonisation of language, while concerns about young people losing their connection to Kiswahili highlight ongoing pressures from globalisation and linguistic imperialism. Through the lens of cultural identity theory, the findings underscore language as a medium for constructing and sustaining collective identity



(Hall, 1990, 1996; Castells, 1997; Omoniyi, 2010; Fishman, 1999). High agreement with statements on identity and cultural preservation shows that Kiswahili facilitates belonging, intergenerational memory, and cultural continuity, while perceived generational disconnect emphasises the fluidity of identity and the need for active engagement. Together, these perspectives reveal Kiswahili as both a site of postcolonial resistance and a dynamic instrument for African identity formation and cultural affirmation.

Kiswahili in Cultural Preservation

The results indicate that respondents perceive key cultural elements as highly effective in preserving African heritage. Oral traditions and storytelling were rated very effective by 41.7% of participants and effective by 34.7%. At the same time, traditional proverbs and wisdom received the highest combined effectiveness rating, with 44.4% considering them very effective and 31.9% effective. Cultural ceremonies and rituals, traditional music and poetry, and intergenerational knowledge transfer were also viewed positively, with the majority rating them as very practical or effective. These findings highlight the enduring significance of both oral and performative cultural practices in sustaining identity, transmitting values, and reinforcing Kiswahili as a medium for cultural preservation within African communities. Table 3 presents respondents’ evaluations of the effectiveness of various cultural practices, including oral traditions, proverbs, ceremonies, music, poetry, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Participants rated these elements on a five-point scale from “very effective” to “very ineffective,” highlighting which practices are most influential in preserving cultural values, collective memory, and identity within communities.

Table 3: Kiswahili in Cultural Preservation (N = 360)

Cultural Element	Very Effective	Effective	Moderately Effective	Ineffective	Very Ineffective
Oral traditions and storytelling	150 (41.7%)	125 (34.7%)	60 (16.7%)	20 (5.6%)	5 (1.4%)
Traditional proverbs and wisdom	160 (44.4%)	115 (31.9%)	55 (15.3%)	25 (6.9%)	5 (1.4%)
Cultural ceremonies and rituals	120 (33.3%)	110 (30.6%)	85 (23.6%)	35 (9.7%)	10 (2.8%)
Traditional music and poetry	135 (37.5%)	120 (33.3%)	70 (19.4%)	25 (6.9%)	10 (2.8%)
Intergenerational knowledge transfer	125 (34.7%)	105 (29.2%)	80 (22.2%)	40 (11.1%)	10 (2.8%)

Source: Field Data (2025)

The table above presents participants’ evaluations of the effectiveness of key cultural elements in preserving and transmitting African heritage. Oral traditions and storytelling, traditional proverbs, cultural ceremonies, music, and poetry were perceived mainly as very practical or effective, with combined ratings ranging from 70.8% to 76.3%, highlighting their central role in reinforcing cultural values and collective memory. Intergenerational knowledge transfer, while still rated positively, received a comparatively lower effectiveness score (63.9%), indicating potential challenges in sustaining cultural continuity across generations. From a postcolonial perspective, these findings underscore Kiswahili and associated cultural practices as instruments of resistance against historical and contemporary marginalisation, reaffirming African agency and identity (Luvaga et al., 2021; Kamuhuro & Makokha, 2025). Through the lens of cultural identity theory, the results demonstrate how these elements actively construct and sustain communal identity, transmit values, and foster belonging (Hall, 1990, 1996; Castells, 1997; Omoniyi, 2010; Fishman, 1999). The lower rating for intergenerational transmission reflects the pressures of globalisation and digital media, echoing concerns that without deliberate educational and community interventions, traditional knowledge may erode over time (Saidu, 2025; Vidmar, 2020). Overall, the findings highlight Kiswahili’s dual



function as a site of cultural preservation and a medium for asserting African identity in the contemporary postcolonial context.

Kiswahili in Global Discourse and Narrative

This study suggests that participants generally perceive Kiswahili’s global presence and influence as moderate, with stronger performance in digital platform visibility and academic scholarship. In contrast, international media representation, global cultural diplomacy, and the translation of Kiswahili literature are seen as comparatively weaker. Overall, most ratings fall in the “Good” to “Fair” range, indicating room for growth in enhancing Kiswahili’s international visibility and cultural impact. Table 4 presents a detailed breakdown of participants’ perceptions across these aspects.

Table 4: Kiswahili's Global Presence and Recognition (N = 360)

Aspect	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
International media representation	25 (6.9%)	85 (23.6%)	120 (33.3%)	95 (26.4%)	35 (9.7%)
Academic research and scholarship	40 (11.1%)	95 (26.4%)	110 (30.6%)	85 (23.6%)	30 (8.3%)
Global cultural diplomacy	30 (8.3%)	75 (20.8%)	125 (34.7%)	90 (25.0%)	40 (11.1%)
Digital platform presence	55 (15.3%)	105 (29.2%)	95 (26.4%)	75 (20.8%)	30 (8.3%)
Translation of Kiswahili literature	20 (5.6%)	65 (18.1%)	100 (27.8%)	120 (33.3%)	55 (15.3%)

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings reveal significant challenges in Kiswahili's global visibility and recognition. For instance, only 30.5% of respondents rated its international media representation as good or excellent, while 36.1% rated it as poor or very poor. This aligns with postcolonial theory perspectives (Fanon, 2004; Said, 1978), which highlight the enduring privileging of Eurocentric cultural patterns in global discourse, as noted by Balogun, Aruoture, and Haruna (2024). Academic research and scholarship received slightly higher positive evaluations, with 37.5% rating it good or excellent, yet 31.9% judged it poor or very poor. According to Diko (2024) and Chaligha and Gengshen (2025), this reflects limited translation and international dissemination of Kiswahili scholarly works, reinforcing Bhabha’s (1994) notion of hybridity, in which local knowledge struggles to gain recognition within global epistemic networks. The language’s presence on digital platforms achieved the highest positive scores (44.5% good/excellent), suggesting relative success in online spaces.

However, these results contrast with Nyabola’s (2024) observations about restrictive digital rights and internet language policies that marginalise African languages, highlighting structural constraints emphasised by postcolonial theory. The most critical concern is the translation of Kiswahili literature, with 48.6% of participants rating it poor or very poor and only 23.7% rating it good or excellent. This confirms the persistence of structural barriers that limit Kiswahili’s role in global cultural exchange, as predicted by postcolonial critiques of linguistic imperialism. Cultural identity theory (Hall, 1990, 1996; Omoniyi, 2010) helps explain the local significance of Kiswahili as a marker of identity and cultural continuity despite these global constraints. Integrating these theoretical perspectives, the data indicate that while Kiswahili maintains strong local relevance and digital visibility, its broader international influence remains limited by historical, structural, and systemic factors.

Potential Pathways and Guidance

This study suggests that participants perceive a range of strategies as important for enhancing Kiswahili’s global visibility and cultural impact. Key areas identified include government policy support, integration of Kiswahili into educational curricula, promotion of digital content, international translation initiatives, development of the creative industries, and adoption of



technology and AI applications. Overall, the findings indicate a consensus on the need for coordinated, multifaceted efforts to strengthen Kiswahili’s presence, influence, and role as a vehicle for cultural expression and identity both regionally and globally. Table 5 presents a detailed overview of participants’ perceptions regarding the priority of these strategies.

Table 5: Priority Strategies for Strengthening Kiswahili (N = 360)

Strategy	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not Important
Increased government policy support	185 (51.4%)	120 (33.3%)	45 (12.5%)	10 (2.8%)
Enhanced digital content creation	170 (47.2%)	125 (34.7%)	50 (13.9%)	15 (4.2%)
International translation programs	160 (44.4%)	130 (36.1%)	55 (15.3%)	15 (4.2%)
Educational curriculum integration	190 (52.8%)	115 (31.9%)	40 (11.1%)	15 (4.2%)
Creative industry development	155 (43.1%)	135 (37.5%)	55 (15.3%)	15 (4.2%)
Technology and AI applications	145 (40.3%)	125 (34.7%)	65 (18.1%)	25 (6.9%)

Source: Field Data (2025)

The theoretical interpretation of data in Table 5 highlights the importance of institutional, technological, and cultural strategies in promoting Kiswahili’s global presence, framed through postcolonial and cultural identity theories. The results indicate a strong consensus on key priorities for strengthening the language’s role. Integration into educational curricula received the highest priority (52.8% high priority), closely followed by government policy support (51.4% high priority), reflecting the postcolonial insight that institutional backing is critical for countering historical marginalisation and ensuring language preservation and empowerment (Fanon, 2004; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986). Enhanced digital content creation was prioritised by 47.2% of respondents, supporting Abubakar’s (2025) argument for fostering a Swahili creative economy and innovation ecosystems. This aligns with cultural identity theory (Hall, 1990; Castells, 1997), emphasising the role of language-mediated practices in constructing and sustaining collective identity in modern communicative networks.

Technology and AI applications received moderately high-priority ratings (40.3%), corresponding with Ondiba’s (2025) discussion on leveraging digital and technological interventions for language revitalisation and wider accessibility. International translation programs were rated a high priority by 44.4% of participants, highlighting the need to overcome structural barriers that limit Kiswahili’s international circulation and echoing Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity and negotiation between local and global knowledge systems. Similarly, development of creative industries (43.1% high priority) reflects recognition of the economic potential embedded in Kiswahili-based cultural production. Collectively, these findings indicate that participants view a combination of institutional support, digital innovation, translation initiatives, and creative industry development as essential strategies for reinforcing Kiswahili’s cultural, social, and economic significance, both locally and globally.

Discussion

This study suggests that Kiswahili occupies a complex and multifaceted position as both a heritage language and a transnational medium of communication, offering critical insights into its prospects for globalisation. The demographic diversity of participants highlights Kiswahili’s dual function: youth engagement underscores its integration into digital culture, music, and social media, reflecting Vidmar’s (2020) observations on urban linguistic creativity, while older participants reinforce the continuity of oral traditions, proverbs, and cultural heritage, corroborating Luvaga, Enaka, and



Mwamzandi's (2021) findings on Kiswahili as an anchor of intercultural communication. Broad occupational representation further validates Kiswahili's multidimensional utility across academia, governance, creative industries, and community mobilisation, echoing Robinson's (2024) historical accounts of Kiswahili as both a practical lingua franca and a symbol of African identity.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are strongly illuminated by the dual lens of postcolonial theory and cultural identity theory. Postcolonial theory (Fanon, 2004; Said, 1978; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Bhabha, 1994) frames Kiswahili as a decolonial language that challenges Western linguistic hegemony, confronts Eurocentric epistemic hierarchies, and asserts African presence in global discourses. The study confirms Kiswahili's role in fostering Pan-African cultural development, supporting Williams-Onyeji's (2025) argument for African languages as instruments of artistic liberation. At the same time, tensions emerge where youth engagement occurs through hybridised forms or English-dominated digital spaces, reflecting Saidu's (2025) and Mhando's (2024) concerns regarding linguistic homogenization under globalisation. Cultural identity theory (Hall, 1990, 1996; Omoniyi, 2010; Fishman, 1999) complements this structural critique by emphasising Kiswahili as a repository of collective identity, intergenerational memory, and cultural agency, while highlighting vulnerabilities arising from technological mediation and shifting social practices.

The study further elucidates Kiswahili's critical role in cultural preservation. High ratings for oral traditions and proverbs demonstrate the language's capacity to safeguard memory and aesthetic forms (Kamuhuro & Makokha, 2025; Luvaga et al., 2021), while vibrant poetry and music underscore its dynamic literary and performative traditions (Siundu, 2020). Nevertheless, weaker scores for intergenerational knowledge transfer highlight structural and technological challenges, particularly the influence of digital media and changing youth cultures (Saidu, 2025; Vidmar, 2020). These patterns illustrate how Kiswahili simultaneously functions as a heritage archive and a flexible medium adapted to contemporary modes of communication, consistent with the dual theoretical framing.

Globally, the findings reveal persistent structural inequities constraining Kiswahili's influence. Limited representation in international media and literary translation reflects Eurocentric dominance in global narratives, as noted by Balogun, Aruoture, and Haruna (2024), Diko (2024), and Chaligha and Gengshen (2025). Digital platforms, though promising, are shaped by systemic barriers in internet governance and language rights that marginalise African languages (Nyabola, 2024). Postcolonial theory contextualises these limitations as the enduring legacies of colonial power, linguistic hierarchies, and epistemic exclusion. In contrast, cultural identity theory underscores the capacity of Kiswahili communities to assert agency through localised practices, education, and creative expression. The prioritisation of educational integration and policy support resonates with Khohliso et al.'s (2024) calls for institutional embedding of African languages to secure sustainable vitality.

The study's future-oriented strategies—creative industry development, international translation initiatives, and technology adoption—illustrate pathways to extend Kiswahili's global reach. Creative industries, as emphasised by Abubakar (2025), serve both economic and identity-building purposes, while translation initiatives address gaps in international circulation and visibility (Kahiraba & Keita, 2024). While technology and AI applications are moderately prioritised, they offer potential for language revitalisation and accessibility, consistent with Ondiba's (2025) analysis. The integration of these strategies demonstrates how education, policy, technological innovation, and cultural entrepreneurship can converge to negotiate structural barriers and foster Kiswahili globalisation, aligning with both postcolonial and cultural identity frameworks.



Qualitative insights deepen the understanding of Kiswahili's symbolic and affective dimensions. Participants emphasised the language as a vessel of ancestral memory and collective pride (Rødland, 2021), while concerns over youth detachment and superficial cultural recognition reflect the ongoing effects of linguistic imperialism and cultural commodification (Durodolu & Mojapelo, 2024; Balogun et al., 2024). Aspirations for expanded global teaching and digital sovereignty resonate with Megbowon's (2025) advocacy for active revitalisation of African languages through education, literature, and technology.

Overall, the study advances a theoretically informed argument for Kiswahili globalisation: while the language demonstrates strong regional integration and digital presence, structural, institutional, and technological constraints limit its full international recognition and impact. Postcolonial theory frames these limitations as enduring consequences of historical subordination, whereas cultural identity theory highlights Kiswahili communities' capacity to preserve and project linguistic and cultural identity. The convergence of policy support, educational integration, creative industries, translation programmes, and technological innovation emerges as a holistic strategy to negotiate these constraints, positioning Kiswahili not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbol of African cultural resilience and global aspiration.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Kiswahili occupies a central role in shaping African identity, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting Pan-African unity. It functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a repository of collective memory and a symbol of decolonial resistance against Western linguistic hegemony. Despite its regional and local significance, Kiswahili faces substantial structural barriers to global recognition and intergenerational continuity. Limited international media representation, insufficient translation of literature, and declining youth engagement underscore its marginalisation within global knowledge and digital spaces. These challenges reveal a critical tension between Kiswahili's potent cultural influence and its constrained global presence. Generally, Kiswahili's globalisation demands a theoretically informed, holistic approach: postcolonial theory frames the structural inequities that limit its international reach. In contrast, cultural identity theory underscores the agency of Kiswahili communities in sustaining and projecting their linguistic and cultural heritage. Coordinated interventions across multiple sectors can position Kiswahili not only as a medium of communication but as a globally recognised emblem of African identity, cultural resilience, and intellectual vitality.

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