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PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF MOTHER TONGUE TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS IN SCAFFOLDING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF KIKAMBA IN LOWER PRIMARY EDUCATION IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of teachers regarding the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in scaffolding competency development in lower primary education in Kenya. Although Kenya's language-in-education policy advocates the use of indigenous languages in early-grade learning, concerns persist regarding the pedagogical relevance of available instructional materials. Guided by Mwaniki's (2004) Language Management Approach (LMA), the study adopted an evaluative case study design. Data were collected from teachers and headteachers using structured questionnaires and interviews.

Findings revealed that teachers perceived Kikamba teaching and learning materials as effective in enhancing learners' comprehension, classroom participation, literacy acquisition, communication skills, and cultural identity. The materials enabled learners to interact more meaningfully with classroom content by using a familiar language and, culturally relevant learning experiences. Teachers further indicated that the use of Kikamba instructional materials promoted learner confidence, active classroom engagement, and improved understanding of concepts in lower primary education.

The study concludes that Kikamba language teaching and learning materials play a significant facilitative role in scaffolding competency development in lower primary education. The study recommends strengthened policy support for indigenous language instruction and increased investment in the development of culturally relevant and curriculum-aligned Kikamba teaching and learning materials.

KEYWORDS: *scaffolding, Kikamba language teaching and learning materials, lower primary education, competency development, indigenous language, Kikamba.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous language instruction has received increasing global recognition as a foundational approach for fostering early literacy, cognitive development, and equitable education access. Evidence from multilingual education research consistently demonstrates that when initial instruction is delivered in a familiar language supported by appropriate teaching and learning materials, learners acquire literacy skills, classroom competencies, and conceptual understanding more effectively (Naddumba and Athiemoolam, 2022; Muchemi, 2024; Semilla, Parmisana, Fajardo, and Abucayon, 2023). Such materials enhance comprehension, learner participation, and active engagement by linking classroom content to linguistic and cultural experiences.

In Kenya, this perspective is institutionalised within the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which emphasises the use of learners' home languages in lower primary education to enhance comprehension, participation, progressive competency acquisition, and communication (BECF, 2017; 2019). Kikamba serves as an important medium of instruction for learners in Kamba-speaking regions, where it is expected to support the development of foundational literacy and other learner competencies in lower primary education.

However, despite this policy commitment, questions persist regarding the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in supporting classroom practice competency development. Existing studies indicate that the availability and pedagogical use of indigenous language teaching and learning materials influence the quality of learner engagement and educational outcomes (Magaju, Kubai, and Kanyi, 2024; Mose and Kaschula, 2019; Muchemi, 2024). Consequently, evaluating how teachers perceive these materials' effectiveness is important in understanding their contribution to competency development within the CBC framework.

Teachers' perceptions are particularly significant because they reflect direct classroom experiences and provide practical insight into how instructional materials facilitate learner comprehension, participation, literacy acquisition, communication skills, and cultural identity formation (Mose and Kaschula, 2019; Naddumba and Athiemoolam, 2022). Studies on mother tongue instruction further demonstrate that teachers' classroom experiences provide an important basis for

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evaluating instructional resources' pedagogical effectiveness in supporting learner engagement and foundational competency development (Cekiso, Meyiwa, and Mashige, 2019). Therefore, perceived effectiveness offers an important analytical lens for assessing the instructional value of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in lower primary education.

Therefore, this study examines teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in scaffolding competency development in lower primary education in Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on mother tongue instruction consistently demonstrate that learners achieve stronger cognitive, linguistic, and literacy outcomes when learning occurs in familiar languages. Indigenous language instruction enhances comprehension, participation, and early literacy acquisition by enabling learners to connect new knowledge with prior linguistic and cultural experiences (Cummins, 2000; UNESCO, 2016).

Despite these documented benefits, research in African contexts highlights persistent concerns regarding the effectiveness of indigenous language education, particularly in relation to the availability, quality, and standardisation of teaching and learning materials. Weak production systems, limited publishing capacity, and inconsistent material development continue to constrain the usefulness of such resources in classroom practice (Benson, 2014). This implies that the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction is closely linked to pedagogical practice and the quality and suitability of instructional materials.

In Kenya, the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) has intensified the demand for effective indigenous language instructional materials to support competency development in lower primary education. However, gaps remain between curriculum expectations and materials available for classroom use. Within this context, teachers' perceptions are central to understanding instructional effectiveness, as they reflect classroom realities and determine how teaching and learning materials are interpreted, adapted, and utilised. Empirical evidence shows that evaluative judgments of teachers significantly influence instructional choices and directly shape learning outcomes in classroom settings (Bordoh, 2025; Tonkolu and Seyoum, 2024). This positions perceived effectiveness as a critical lens for assessing instructional materials.

Beyond availability, research indicates that mother tongue teaching and learning materials play a central role in supporting competency development among early grade learners. When appropriately designed and utilised, such materials enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills by improving comprehension, vocabulary development, fluency, participation, and learner confidence. They also support sustained literacy development and meaningful engagement in multilingual learning environments (UNESCO, 2016). In addition, specialised indigenous language resources, such as dictionaries and phrasebooks, strengthen communication competence and promote active language use in early education contexts (Dugushina, 2024).

International evidence further reinforces the relationship between instructional materials and competency development. In Europe, structured instructional resources in minority languages such as Welsh, Irish, Galician, and Sorbian, including textbooks, teacher guides, audio materials, and digital platforms, have been shown to enhance language competence and support curriculum attainment (Hoyte-West, 2025). Similarly, in Australia, studies on Yolŋu Matha demonstrate that exposure to well-developed mother tongue resources supports cognitive development, language retention, and intergenerational transmission of linguistic competence (Li, Brar, and Roihan, 2021). Collectively, these studies indicate that both the availability and quality of instructional materials are key determinants of competency development in early education.

Growing recognition of indigenous languages has contributed to increased production and use of instructional resources for mother tongues across Africa. UNESCO (2017) reports the expanding availability of textbooks, storybooks, and supplementary readers in African languages for early grade learning.

These materials have been associated with improved literacy development, learner participation, and acquisition of foundational skills (UNESCO, 2019). In Kenya, access to indigenous language materials enhances reading culture, learner engagement, and literacy achievement in early-grade classrooms (Magaju, 2024; Mandillah, 2019; Mose, 2015). Collectively, these findings point to the instructional value of indigenous language materials in supporting early learning outcomes.

Recent studies confirm the role of mother tongue teaching and learning materials in scaffolding competency development. In Timor-Leste, UNESCO and UNICEF (2025) report that mother tongue instructional resources improve literacy outcomes and learner retention. Similarly, Semilla, Parmisana, Fajardo, and Abucayon (2023) found that contextualised mother tongue e-learning materials enhance learners' engagement and reading performance among early-grade learners. Ximenes (2025) further notes that mother tongue instruction strengthens early literacy development, cognitive growth, and learner motivation. Additionally, digital and print indigenous-language resources, such as dictionaries, storybooks, and e-learning platforms, have been shown to promote language retention, communication competence, and cognitive development (Li, Brar, and Roihan, 2021).

Overall, the literature converges on the view that mother tongue teaching and learning materials are important enablers of competency development in early-grade education. However, despite this growing global and regional evidence, limited research has focused specifically on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in supporting competency development within Kenya's lower primary classrooms. This gap is significant within the CBC context, which emphasises competency acquisition and learner-

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centred instruction. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in scaffolding competency development in lower primary education.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT APPROACH (LMA)

This study is anchored on the Language Management Approach (LMA) developed by Mwaniki (2004). The LMA conceptualises language use in educational settings as a structured and dynamic process involving planning, implementation, and evaluation of language practices. It further emphasises the role of key stakeholders, including teachers, learners, and policymakers, in managing linguistic resources to achieve effective teaching and learning outcomes.

Within this framework, language is viewed not merely as a medium of instruction but as a managed educational resource whose effectiveness depends on deliberate policy decisions, classroom implementation practices, and continuous evaluation of outcomes. Instructional materials are therefore central to language management, as they operationalise language-in-education policies into practical classroom resources that support teaching and learning.

In this study, the LMA is used to examine the role of Kikamba teaching and learning materials as managed instructional resources within lower primary classrooms. The framework provides an analytical lens for understanding how these materials are planned, implemented, and evaluated in relation to competency development under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). It also foregrounds teachers as key agents in the language management process, particularly in how they interpret, adapt, and utilise instructional materials to support learning.

Overall, the LMA guides the study in assessing the extent to which Kikamba teaching and learning materials function effectively within classroom language management processes to enhance learner comprehension, participation, and competency acquisition in lower primary education.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an evaluative case study research design to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in supporting competency development in lower primary schools. The design was appropriate, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of real classroom experiences and contextual understanding of instructional practices.

The study was informed by the development-oriented strategies of the Language Management Approach, which operate within a complementary matrix of language management practices. The most relevant strategies for this study were indigenisation, participatory action research, and dialogical intervention strategies. Indigenisation underscores the importance of using culturally relevant and locally grounded language resources within educational settings. Participatory action research emphasises the incorporation of teachers' and school administrators' experiences and local knowledge in understanding and improving classroom practices. Dialogical intervention strategies further guided the study by highlighting the importance of interaction, participation, and the inclusion of diverse stakeholder perspectives in assessing the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in lower primary education.

The target population comprised lower primary school teachers teaching Kikamba and headteachers from selected primary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience in the use of Kikamba teaching and learning materials, ensuring that data were drawn from informed and relevant respondents.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were administered to lower primary school teachers to obtain data on the use and perceived effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in supporting learner comprehension, participation, and competency development. Semi-structured interviews with headteachers provided qualitative insights into instructional practices, material utilisation, and the perceived contribution of Kikamba teaching and learning materials to learner engagement and classroom interaction.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, and presented in tables and narrative summaries. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, with responses organised into emerging themes related to teachers' perceptions of effectiveness, classroom use of Kikamba teaching and learning materials, and their contribution to competency development in lower primary education.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Perceived effectiveness of the Kikamba teaching and learning materials

The study examined teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of Kikamba teaching and learning materials in enhancing learner participation, comprehension, cultural identity, and overall academic performance in lower primary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from teachers and headteachers. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews indicated that a majority of respondents viewed Kikamba TLMs positively. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

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Table 1: Questionnaire results

Key**: SD- Strongly disagree, D-Disagree, N- Neutral, A- Agree, SA- strongly agree.**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
The Kikamba teaching materials actively involve and motivate students to engage with the learning process.	7 8%	2 2%	3 3%	56 63%	21 24%
The Kikamba materials help reinforce students' cultural identity and promote cultural understanding.	3 3%	3 3%	0 0%	64 72%	19 21%
The content of Kikamba teaching materials is thorough and easily understandable by students.	6 7%	4 5%	2 2%	69 78%	8 9%
The Kikamba materials encourage interactive learning through activities and student participation.	6 7%	1 1%	0 0%	72 81%	10 11%
Technology is effectively integrated into Kikamba teaching materials, enhancing accessibility and engagement.	72 81%	6 7%	0 0%	8 9%	3 3%
The learning of mother tongue languages in lower primary enhances understanding of concepts in Kiswahili and English	4 5%	1 1%	0 0%	7 8%	77 87%
Learning in mother tongue enhances better comprehension and cognitive skills.	5 6%	0 0%	1 1%	61 69%	22 25%
Learning mother tongue impacts pupils to understand and reason better thus improving general performance of education	5 6%	0 0%	1 1%	55 62%	28 32%
Mother tongue learning creates a sense of confidence to pupils	6 7%	1 1%	1 1%	51 57%	30 34%

Table 2: Interviews Results

SN	Finding	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed
1	Learners acquire good morals	7 70%	0 0%	3 30%
2	Kikamba teaching materials actively involve and motivate students to engage with the learning process.	8 80%	0 0%	2 20%
3	The Kikamba materials help reinforce students' cultural identity and promote cultural understanding.	7 70	1 10%	2 20%
4	The learning of mother tongue languages in lower primary enhances understanding of concepts in Kiswahili and English	6 60%	3 30%	1 10%
9	Learning in one's mother tongue enhances better comprehension and cognitive skills.	6 60%	1 10%	3 30%
10	Learning mother tongue impacts pupils' ability to understand and reason better, thus improving general performance.	6 60%	2 20%	2 20%
11	Mother tongue learning creates a sense of confidence to pupils	6 60%	1 10%	3 30%

5.1.1 Kikamba teaching materials actively involve and motivate students to engage with the learning process.

The findings showed that Kikamba teaching materials actively involve and motivate students to engage in the learning process. A vast majority of the respondents, particularly 87% (77 out of 89) of questionnaire respondents and 80% (8 out of 10) of interviewees, agreed that learners get actively involved and motivated to learn when exposed to Kikamba materials. Headteachers observed that Kikamba songs, stories, and poems capture learners' interest, making lessons lively, enjoyable, and easier to teach as learners laugh, ask questions, and participate more actively.

Some of the interviewees had this to say:

"When learners are presented with Kikamba songs and stories, they light up. They participate actively because they understand and identify with them. It makes learning interesting and fun for the learners." Headteacher A

"The moment Kikamba folktales or poems are introduced, the learners become more active. They laugh and participate and you can tell that they are really enjoying the lesson. This makes teaching easier." Headteacher C

"When Kikamba storybooks or songs, riddles and proverbs are used in class, the learners become very excited, contribute more, and ask questions." Headteacher E

These findings correspond to the observations of Pinnock and Vijayakumar (2009), who noted that mother tongue instruction promotes active classroom participation, and Oyewumi, Olatunji, Arinola, and Kolanjo (2024), who found out that indigenous language books increased learner engagement and motivation in Nigeria. This finding can be attributed to two

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main factors: cultural relevance, where materials reflect learners' experiences, traditions, and environments (Trudell, 2005) and language familiarity, which reduces cognitive load and eliminates comprehension struggles (Bamgbose, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2007).

Through the lens of the LMA by Mwaniki (2004), this reflects micro-level management intervention where instructional choices deliberately remove linguistic obstacles, foster learner participation, and enhance inclusive and engaging learning practices. By aligning content with learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Kikamba materials embody planned language management aimed at promoting equity and learning outcomes.

5.1.2 Kikamba materials reinforce students' cultural identity and promote cultural understanding.

The findings showed that 93% (83 out of 89) of questionnaire respondents and 70% (7 out of 10) of interviewees agreed that Kikamba materials reinforce students' cultural identity and promote cultural understanding. Headteachers confirmed this, noting that cultural concepts are more easily taught in Kikamba and that proverbs, songs, and riddles in the textbooks help preserve and transmit cultural values.

Headteacher A had the following to say: "*…culture concepts are easily taught and understood when we use Kikamba for instruction."*

"Through Kikamba materials and instruction, community practices and culture values are passed on easily to the learners. They are able to identify with them. It keeps Kikamba culture alive." Headteacher H

"Kikamba stories, proverbs, riddles, and songs in the textbooks strengthen their understanding of their culture." Headteacher I

These findings suggest that the textbooks integrate Kikamba heritage and traditions, therefore fostering learners' sense of identity and cultural pride. This finding is consistent with McCarty (2003), who found that embedding cultural content in the curriculum deepens learners' connection to their heritage, and with Khejeri (2014), who argued that mother tongue instruction enhances cultural appreciation. Similarly, Muthoka (2017) linked the decline of Kikamba use to the erosion of cultural identity among younger generations, while Mose and Kaschula (2019) affirmed that indigenous language use in early education promotes cultural identity.

Through the lens of LMA by Mwaniki (2004), this reflects language management that goes beyond communication to securing cultural and linguistic heritage. Kikamba materials thus serve not only instructional purposes but also facilitate transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and norms.

5.1.3 The content of Kikamba teaching materials is thorough and easily understandable by students.

The findings showed that Kikamba teaching materials are regarded as comprehensive. A majority of questionnaire respondents, 87% (77 out of 89), agreed that the content is thorough and easily understandable. This indicates that the materials are linguistically appropriate and enable learners to interact meaningfully with the content. This finding concurs with Oyewumi, Olatunji, Arinola, and Kolanjo (2024), whose study in Kwara State, Nigeria, revealed that indigenous language materials were more relatable and easier to understand, thereby enhancing learners' motivation and academic performance. When teaching and learning content is presented in a familiar language, it reduces cognitive load and makes learning more enjoyable.

From the Language Management Approach (LMA) perspective by Mwaniki (2004), the development of linguistically comprehensive Kikamba teaching materials demonstrates a deliberate intervention to minimise linguistic obstacles and improves learning outcomes. By tailoring content to learners' cognitive capacities and linguistic backgrounds, the materials demonstrate micro-level management necessary for enhancing equity in education.

5.1.4 Kikamba materials encourage interactive learning through activities and student participation.

The findings showed that Kikamba teaching and learning materials promote interactive learning and active learner participation. A vast majority of questionnaire respondents, 92% (82 out of 89), agreed that the materials encourage engagement through activities such as songs, stories, storytelling sessions, puns, riddles, proverbs, and games, which are both enjoyable and educative. These findings agree with Naddumba and Athiemoolam (2022), who found that learners were more engaged and confident when materials were presented in their mother tongue. Their study found out that learners enjoyed stories with illustrations, as well as songs and poems in their native language, which enhanced literary development and a deeper connection to the learning process. Similarly, Khanyile and Awung (2023) reported that mother tongue instruction enhances learner participation.

From the Language Management Approach (LMA) perspective by Mwaniki (2004), these findings indicate a language management strategy that removes linguistic barriers, encourages learner independence, and promotes participatory instructional practices. The use of culturally relevant and linguistically understandable materials reflects planned language management at the classroom stage, where language-related decisions are intentionally made to promote learning outcomes and support linguistic equity.

5.1.5 Technology is effectively integrated into Kikamba teaching materials, enhancing accessibility and engagement.

The findings showed that there is a notable gap in the incorporation of technology in Kikamba textbooks. The majority of questionnaire respondents, 88% (78 out of 89), disagreed that technology is effectively integrated into Kikamba teaching materials in ways that enhance accessibility and engagement. This indicates scarcity of digital or soft copy Kikamba resources, limiting broad and flexible access to Kikamba teaching and learning resources.

This finding is in line with Chesire, Ochieng, Mugisha, Ssenyonga, Oxman, Nsangi, Semakula, Nyirazinyoye, Lewin, Sewankambo, Kaseje, Oxman, and Rosenbaum (2022), who

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reported a lack of digital content for teaching critical thinking about health in Kenyan secondary schools, even where ICT infrastructure was available. This finding also resonates with the findings of Brooking, Mutamiri, and Mugari (2015), whose study in Zimbabwe showed that ICT can supplement educational resources more reliably and cost-effectively, thereby addressing shortages of teaching and learning materials. They further argue that ICT, now widely accessible through the internet, empowers education and can boost mother tongue education.

Viewed through the lens of the Language Management Approach (LMA), the absence of technology-driven Kikamba educational materials indicates a gap at both policy and implementation levels, where language management strategies have not been used to sufficiently respond to the emerging technological landscape. Purposeful planning is therefore needed to leverage ICT as a tool for enhancing indigenous language education. Developing accessible digital resources in Kikamba would expand opportunities for mother tongue learning.

5.1.6 The learning of mother tongue languages in lower primary enhances understanding of concepts in Kiswahili and English

The findings showed that the use of Kikamba textbooks facilitates learners' understanding of Kiswahili and English. The majority of the respondents supported this view. 94% (84 out of 89) of questionnaire respondents and 60% (6 out of 10) of interviewees agreed that early mother tongue instruction builds a firm foundation for the acquisition of subsequent languages.

Headteacher G affirmed: *"Use of mother tongue in early grades boosts the learner's confidence. It also makes learning other languages less intimidating, because when the learners know how to read in Kikamba, they transfer the same knowledge to Kiswahili and even English. We actually use Kikamba texts to teach the learners reading skills."*

The importance of Kikamba materials in concept transfer was also emphasised by Headteacher H:
"When new concepts are taught in Kiswahili or English, some learners struggle. When the same concepts had been learnt during a Kikamba lesson or the learners had interacted with them in a Kikamba text, they were able to connect quickly and then transfer that knowledge to Kiswahili and English. The learning of the two new languages becomes easier."

A KICD official (A) affirmed this link between mother tongue instruction and language development:
"*Research and classroom experience show that the teaching and learning of mother tongue in early grades assists learners in developing critical skills in the language. It is a foundation laid for learning the second language, which in our case could be Kiswahili or English."*

Two headteachers who had access to Kikamba materials and instruction also stressed the advantages:

"All my learners are fluent in Kikamba. I made sure they learnt it. They do not struggle with Kiswahili and English. It feels like Kikamba laid a firm foundation for those languages." Headteacher I

"Learners grasp basic ideas much faster when they learn in their mother tongue first. This enables them to follow Kiswahili or English lessons later on since they already comprehend the concepts. Exposure to the reading of stories in the Kikamba textbooks helps them build reading skills in Kiswahili and English." Headteacher J

These findings suggest that the foundational skills acquired in Kikamba are transferable, enabling learners to grasp abstract or complex concepts in Kiswahili and English more easily. When new ideas are connected to familiar experiences, learning is more effective. These findings resonate with previous research: Mogire (2016) reported improved comprehension of Kiswahili and English where mother tongue was used; Mose and Kaschula (2019) showed that mother tongue instruction in early grades enhances the learning of subsequent languages; and Muchemi (2024) found that learners taught in their mother tongue achieved stronger literacy and comprehension outcomes in Kiswahili and English than those taught in English from the beginning, particularly in rural contexts. From a Language Management Approach (LMA) perspective, Kikamba is used to facilitate linguistic transfer.

5.1.7 Mother tongue instruction enhances better comprehension and cognitive skills.

The findings show that the use of Kikamba textbooks in lower primary promotes learners' comprehension and development of critical thinking skills. A significant 93% (83 out of 89) of questionnaire respondents and 60% (6 out of 10) of interviewees agreed that mother tongue instruction enhances comprehension and cognitive growth. This is largely because Kikamba textbooks present content in a language learners speak fluently and easily understand.

Headteacher C had this to say:
"Teaching in learners' mother tongue makes learning easier because they grasp ideas quickly and remember them for a long time."
"Mother tongue instructions strengthen comprehension and also sharpen the learner's ability to think critically." (Headteacher H)
This finding agrees with Kobia (2007), who observed that learners comprehend better and learn faster when taught in a familiar language, and Trudell (2005), who found that native language instruction supports stronger comprehension and retention. Similarly, Piper, Zuilkowski, and Ong'ele (2016) reported that learners taught in indigenous languages demonstrated better conceptual comprehension across subjects. Muchemi (2024) asserts that mother tongue instruction provides a cognitive bridge for learners to effectively shift to Kiswahili and English.

From a Language Management Approach (LMA) perspective by Mwaniki (2004), these findings reflect a deliberate management strategy in which teaching and learning materials

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minimise linguistic barriers, strengthen cognitive development, and foster learning outcomes. By aligning textbooks with learners' linguistic capacities, Kikamba instruction shows planned language management that enhances equity and long-term academic success.

5.1.8 Mother-tongue learning impacts pupils to understand and reason better, thus improving general performance in education.

The findings showed that using Kikamba textbooks in mother tongue instruction in the early years of schooling enhances the general academic performance of learners. A notable 93% (83 out of 89) of questionnaire respondents and 60% (6 out of 10) of interviewees agreed that mother tongue instruction improves learners' understanding and reasoning, thereby boosting their general academic outcomes. Headteachers reinforced this view by noting that performance in grades one to three improved when lessons began in Kikamba before transitioning to Kiswahili or English, as learners became more confident and grasped content more easily.

"Performance in grades three and below improved substantially after teachers adopted the practice of starting lessons in Kikamba before switching to Kiswahili or English. The learners became more confident and grasped content more easily." Headteacher I

"Ever since the grade one teachers began using Kikamba for instruction in class, the learners seemed to understand more, and their grades per subject went up." Headteacher H

Similarly, a KICD officer observed that schools using mother tongue in the early years tend to perform better academically.

"I have observed that schools that carry out mother tongue instruction in early years of schooling tend to perform better." KICD Officer B.

This finding can be associated with the fact that mother tongue instruction removes language barriers enabling learners to access content more effectively (Brock-Utne, 2000). It also supports deeper intellectual engagement, as learners think, analyse and solve problems more effectively in a familiar language (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh and Wolff (2006). Similarly, Trudell (2005) found that learners educated in their native languages demonstrated better comprehension, retention and academic achievement than those taught exclusively in English. Makena and Nzabe **(**2025**)** further confirm that mother tongue instruction, supported by relevant materials leads to higher engagement and better comprehension which improve academic outcomes. From Language Management Approach (LMA) perspective by Mwaniki (2004), the use of Kikamba texts represents a management-oriented intervention that addresses language barriers within the education system. By situating instructing in a language familiar to learners, this strategy promotes inclusion, enhances performance and supports equitable learning outcomes.

5.1.9 Mother tongue learning creates a sense of confidence to pupils

The findings showed that mother tongue education enhances learner confidence. 91% (81 out of 89) of questionnaire respondents and 60% (6 out of 10) of interviewees stated that learning through the mother tongue builds learners' confidence. The use of Kikamba textbooks provided culturally relevant and linguistically familiar content, creating a secure environment where learners could express themselves, participate actively and engage confidently. Interview responses illustrate this:

"Pupils participate more actively when they are taught in Kikamba. They are not afraid of making mistakes because they comprehend what is happening. You can attest that there is confidence building in them." Headteacher G.

"Using Kikamba in class makes the learners express themselves freely and they answer questions more and correctly. The teacher's 'good', 'well done', 'excellent', 'very good', comments build their self-esteem." Headteacher J.

"Mother tongue instruction develops a familiar environment to the learner. This leads to confidence because they feel safe." KICD official A.

"Some pupils would stay quiet during lessons. Since we began using Kikamba for instruction, they raise their hands. They do not shy away meaning they believe in themselves more." Headteacher J.

"Learners do not feel lost when they start in a familiar language. This makes them bold enough to participate actively in class." Headteacher I.

These findings are in line with: Benson (2005), who argued that mother tongue education supports learners' confidence and self-esteem; Pinnock and Vijayakumar (2009), who noted that mother tongue instruction enables learners to participate confidently in class and Khejeri (2014), who found that learners expressed themselves confidently in their first language. Mother tongue instruction reduces emotional barriers to learning by creating a familiar linguistic environment that lessens anxiety and fear of mistakes. Vacalares (2023) further showed that learners taught in their mother tongue expressed themselves more confidently than those in English-only classrooms, who often felt nervous because of fear of errors and ridicule. Viewed through LMA, these findings demonstrate that the use of Kikamba creates a linguistically secure environment that empowers learners to participate actively. The confidence gained reflects successful language practices between teachers and learners.

5.1.10 Learners acquire good morals.

Interview data showed that 70% (7 out of 10) of interviewees agreed that learners acquired good morals through Kikamba instructions. This influence may be attributed to the way language transmits values through proverbs, sayings, stories, and riddles. Illustrative responses include:

"The society is highly influenced by the learning and teaching of mother tongue because learners not only acquire morals that are taught in class but also through proverbs, sayings, riddles, and stories in books. We can therefore tell that the teaching of mother tongue enables learners to acquire good morals." (Headteacher I)

"Kikamba textbooks contain narratives that have moral lessons." (Headteacher J)

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This finding suggests that mother tongue instruction serves as a medium through which learners acquire cultural values, social norms, and ethical frameworks. Moral education is effectively nurtured in environments aligned with learners' cultural and linguistic background. In African contexts, oral literature such as proverbs, riddles, narratives, and songs plays a key role in imparting moral lessons (Batibo, 2005; Heugh, 2011; Teklemariam, 2025; Osimen, Ehibor, Daudu, and Alofun, 2025). UNESCO's frameworks have long asserted that mother tongue instruction facilitates learning and transmission of cultural values (UNESCO, 2003). Benson (2005) highlights that mother tongue instruction enables the transfer of culturally embedded knowledge and behaviour.

Viewed through Language Management (LMA), this finding illustrates how language use in the classroom operates as a strategy for cultural and moral transmission. Teachers manage linguistic development and value formation among learners through Kikamba oral literature.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Kikamba teaching and learning materials are perceived to be highly effective in enhancing learner engagement, conceptual comprehension, cultural identity formation, learner confidence, and overall academic performance in lower primary education. Teachers consistently reported that instruction delivered in Kikamba facilitates clearer conceptual understanding, supports cognitive development, and enables smoother transfer of learning to Kiswahili and English as additional languages of instruction.

These outcomes strongly corroborate global evidence on mother tongue-based multilingual education. For instance, UNESCO (2016) emphasises that early education delivered in learners' first language significantly improves literacy acquisition, cognitive development, and long-term academic achievement, particularly in foundational stages of schooling. This alignment suggests that Kikamba instructional materials are functioning as a cognitively enabling medium rather than merely a communicative tool.

However, the study also reveals a critical structural limitation: Kikamba instructional materials are minimally supported by technological integration. Teachers reported limited use of digital platforms, e-learning tools, and multimedia resources in supporting mother tongue instruction. This indicates that while traditional pedagogical implementation is effective, the digital extension of Kikamba as a language of instruction remains underdeveloped, constraining both accessibility and learner engagement in technology-enhanced learning environments.

This finding aligns with emerging scholarship on the digital marginalisation of African indigenous languages. Recent studies indicate that despite increasing global digitisation of education, African languages remain significantly underrepresented in digital corpora, educational software, and language technology ecosystems (Mbogho, Awour, Kipkebut, Wanzare, and Oloo, 2025; Wanjawa, Wanzare, Indede, McOnyango, Ombui, and Muchemi, 2023). This exclusion limits their adaptability in modern instructional contexts and perpetuates a structural digital divide in education. Collectively, these studies suggest that the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction in Africa is increasingly contingent not only on classroom practice but also on its integration into digital education infrastructures.

From the perspective of the Language Management Approach (LMA) advanced by Mwaniki (2004), the findings indicate partial but uneven language management processes. At the micro level, classroom implementation of Kikamba instruction is effective, as evidenced by improved learner participation and comprehension. However, at the meso and macro levels, weaknesses emerge in the planning, resource provisioning, and technological adaptation of Kikamba instructional materials. This imbalance suggests that while language practice is being successfully managed at the classroom level, systemic support structures remain insufficiently developed.

Consequently, the study underscores the need for a more integrated language management strategy that extends beyond pedagogical delivery to include digital resource development, teacher ICT capacity building, and institutional investment in indigenous language technologies. Strengthening these dimensions would enhance the scalability, sustainability, and modern relevance of Kikamba as a language of instruction in lower primary education.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings generate important implications for policy, classroom practice, and curriculum development within the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) framework.

Policy Implications

There is a need to strengthen policy frameworks governing the development, standardisation, and dissemination of indigenous language instructional materials under the CBC. In particular, targeted investment should be directed toward improving the availability, quality, and consistency of Kikamba teaching and learning resources in both print and digital formats. This should be complemented by support for indigenous language publishing and gradual integration of digital learning technologies to enhance accessibility and sustainability.

Practice Implications

At the classroom level, continuous professional development should be prioritised to strengthen teachers' pedagogical competence in the effective use of Kikamba instructional materials. Training should extend beyond material utilisation to include culturally responsive teaching approaches and foundational digital literacy skills. In addition, structured collaboration among teachers through professional learning communities should be encouraged to support joint development, adaptation, and refinement of Kikamba instructional materials, thereby improving consistency and pedagogical quality.

Curriculum Development Implications

Curriculum developers should ensure stronger alignment between Kikamba instructional materials and CBC learning outcomes. Specifically, Kikamba resources should be designed

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not only to support language development but also to intentionally embed core CBC competencies, including communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and cultural identity. This would strengthen the role of mother tongue materials as integrated competency development tools rather than standalone language resources.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Kikamba teaching and learning materials are perceived to be effective in supporting early learning outcomes in lower primary education. These materials contribute positively to learner comprehension, classroom engagement, and foundational skill development. They also facilitate cognitive understanding and support the transition to additional languages of instruction, particularly Kiswahili and English.

However, their effectiveness is moderated by challenges related to material quality, availability, and limited integration of digital instructional technologies, which constrain their full pedagogical potential. The findings further suggest that Kikamba instruction plays a facilitative role in enhancing learner engagement and supporting foundational competency development when supported by appropriate instructional materials.

Overall, the study underscores the need to strengthen indigenous language resource development systems, improve the quality and accessibility of Kikamba instructional materials, and enhance teacher support structures. These improvements are essential for maximising the effectiveness of mother tongue education within the competency-based curriculum framework.

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