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Neglected Narratives: Underrepresentation of Indigenous and Minority Voices in Drama Education in Kenya

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Drama education in Kenya, situated within the broader postcolonial context, has gained prominence through curriculum reforms such as the competency-based curriculum, which prioritises learner-centred, creative pedagogies aimed at fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social justice engagement. Despite this, indigenous and minority voices remain persistently underrepresented in secondary school drama syllabi, teaching materials, and performances. Anchored in postcolonial theory, particularly Ngugi wa Thiong'o's concept of epistemic decolonisation, this study investigated how curricular content, teacher training, and institutional biases privilege Eurocentric and elite African narratives while marginalising oral, vernacular and community-rooted performance traditions. The study employed a qualitative approach. For data, it analysed drama curricula, set texts, and festival performance practices, complemented by interviews with purposively sampled teachers of drama in Kenya. Findings revealed a dominant curricular bias towards Western canonical texts, significant teacher training deficits in indigenous dramaturgy, scarcity of published indigenous scripts and culturally tailored teaching resources, and festival adjudication criteria favouring polished theatricality over cultural authenticity. These systemic exclusions hinder student identity affirmation, cultural legacy, and the transformative potential of drama education. The study recommends curricular revision to incorporate diverse cultural narratives, comprehensive decolonial teacher training and support for indigenous playwriting and theatrical adaptations.

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INTRODUCTION

Across much of Africa, drama education has become central to recent curriculum reforms designed to foster learner-centred and creative pedagogies. In Kenya, for instance, the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) signals a renewed commitment to nurturing critical thinking, collaboration, and cultural awareness in young people through the expressive arts (Mule, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2020). Drama, with its emphasis on performance, embodiment, and social interaction, is widely recognised as a uniquely powerful medium for exploring questions of identity, community, and social justice (Khaemba, 2014; Mugo & Ayodo, 2022). There is a growing consensus among scholars and educators that well-conceived drama education can cultivate not only artistic skills but also vital dispositions for civic participation and personal growth. However, despite its transformative potential, drama education remains largely tethered to canonical works and pedagogical traditions that marginalise indigenous and minority voices.

For all the rhetoric around creativity and cultural inclusivity, the practical realities in many secondary school classrooms diverge markedly from these ideals (Athimoolam, 2018). In Kenya and similar postcolonial contexts, drama syllabi, prescribed texts, and assessment criteria continue to be dominated by Eurocentric canons and urban, elite African narratives, often at the expense of the lived experiences and expressive traditions of minority and indigenous communities (Seroto & Higgs, 2024; Getahun, 2020). This enduring imbalance persists despite policy pronouncements on multiculturalism and the need to reflect local diversities; as a result, curricular and pedagogical

choices tend to marginalise oral, ritual, and community-oriented performance forms, particularly those rooted in vernacular languages and rural or marginalised cultures.

His study emerges from a concern that, while structural reforms have opened new pathways for creative learning, profound exclusions endure beneath the surface. Drawing on postcolonial theoretical critiques, such as those by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1986), who interrogate the epistemic dominance of colonial forms, this paper foregrounds the question of who is represented and whose knowledge is valued in contemporary drama education. Existing research underscores how educational institutions and policy frameworks often prioritise conformity to dominant linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural norms, inadvertently perpetuating the erasure of marginalised voices (Athimoolam, 2018). The plural and dynamic expressive cultures of Kenya’s diverse communities, many of which operate through oral, participatory and multilingual performative modes, are systematically overlooked in favour of English-language, text-based traditions.

Socially, this underrepresentation has far-reaching consequences, perpetuating identity conflicts, cultural dislocation, and diminished learner engagement, especially among students from minority backgrounds (Ismaila & Akakpo, 2024). Educationally, it undercuts the transformative potential of drama, reducing it to a sanitised, technical exercise rather than a participatory art, capable of fostering intercultural understanding and social transformation. Culturally, the neglect of indigenous forms sustains hierarchies of knowledge and undermines ongoing efforts toward epistemic decolonisation. According to Kinyanjui (2021), the continued privileging of Western and standard-

language drama in classrooms reproduces colonial hierarchies of knowledge and silences the cultural plurality that characterises Kenya's population.

Additionally, there is a challenge of teacher training and preparation, especially with emerging educational reforms. Oloo (2023) emphasises that teachers often struggle to include indigenous traditions because they "operate within institutions that value conformity to dominant norms." This reflects wider institutional challenges, including textbook standardisation, centralised exam requirements, and resource scarcity (Okumu, 2019; Wambugu & Changeiywo, 2022). According to Ndandara and Hambandima (2021), teacher education programmes have largely failed to prepare educators for culturally responsive drama teaching, reinforcing monocultural norms in instruction. Research also suggests that the dominance of English as the primary medium in drama further excludes vernacular traditions and multilingual performance forms (Wanjala, 2022). Kagendo (2024) argues that the failure to include local languages in curricula constitutes a systematic silencing of cultural voices. Consequently, students from minority backgrounds seldom see their identities affirmed in classroom texts or festival performances.

This paper seeks to investigate the structural and pedagogical factors that contribute to the exclusion of indigenous and minority narratives from secondary school drama education in Kenya, with a broader eye to postcolonial African contexts. It explores how curriculum content, teacher training, and institutional biases shape what is considered legitimate drama and who gets to be represented on the school stage. It further examines the consequences of this exclusion for student identity formation, cultural literacy, and national cohesion. By articulating the stakes of narrative inclusion for learners, educators, and society at large, this study aims to inform more equitable and culturally responsive approaches to education reform.

Problem Statement

The study critically explores the persistent exclusion of indigenous and minority narratives in secondary school drama education within Kenya's current curriculum and pedagogy, despite ongoing reforms like the introduction of CBC that emphasises learner-centred and culturally responsive education. While drama education is increasingly recognised as pivotal for fostering critical thinking, identity exploration, and social justice awareness (Khaemba, 2014; Mugo & Ayodo, 2022), in practice, drama syllabi and prescribed texts remain dominated by Eurocentric and elite African frameworks. This dominance sidelines the rich oral, ritual, and community-based performance traditions of Kenya's diverse ethnic and minority groups, which are foundational forms of expression and cultural knowledge. The privileging of English and text-based drama further marginalises multilingual and vernacular traditions, deepening cultural erasures and limiting learners' opportunities to engage with drama as a participatory, identity-affirming medium. Moreover, teacher training programmes inadequately prepare educators to incorporate indigenous performance forms or challenge institutional norms that favour dominant cultural expression. This systemic marginalisation impedes cultural pluralism, restricts student engagement and identity formation, and perpetuates colonial hierarchies within educational spaces (Wanjala, 2022; Kinyanjui, 2021). Building on this, the study explored the extent to which curricula and teacher training deliberately integrate indigenous and minority narratives and how the exclusion of these narratives impacts student identity formation and cultural literacy.

Research Questions

The study sought to address the following research questions:

- To what extent do curricular and teacher training programmes reflect deliberate

inclusion of indigenous and minority narratives?

- What are the consequences of the exclusion of indigenous and minority narratives for student identity and cultural literacy?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the postcolonial theory, with emphasis on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986) views on epistemic decolonisation. It was also informed by other theoretical concepts associated with postcolonial drama and education, such as cultural plurality, cultural authenticity versus theatrical polish, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Postcolonial theory, as articulated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) and other foundational thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, critiques the enduring legacy of colonial power structures and epistemologies embedded within education and the arts. Central to this theory is the notion of epistemic decolonisation, which is the process of challenging and dismantling Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies that continue to marginalise indigenous and minority cultural forms and ways of knowing (Poshohi, 2020). Wa Thiong'o's critique of the dominance of colonial languages and literatures in African education is especially relevant to this paper, as it emphasises the importance of reclaiming indigenous languages and oral traditions as sites of knowledge and identity. Postcolonial theory thus promotes cultural plurality, recognising multiple, coexisting knowledge systems and expressive traditions within African societies that have historically been subjugated or systematically erased by colonial narratives.

Within the context of drama education, the Postcolonial theory helps to explain and interrogate curricular hegemony, namely the predominance of Eurocentric, urban elite, and English-language drama texts and pedagogies that shape what is deemed as legitimate for study and performance. This hegemony systematically sidelines indigenous oral, ritual, and community-based performance

traditions deeply rooted in Kenya's ethnic diversity. The distinction between cultural authenticity and Eurocentrically defined theatrical polish in drama or theatrical performances further refines this critique: mainstream drama festivals and assessment systems often valorise polished, technically refined performances aligned with Western theatrical conventions, thereby devaluing the raw, participatory, and contextually rich indigenous expressions. This tension highlights systemic and institutional biases that prioritise formal aesthetics over cultural significance and community relevance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature highlights a persistent cultural bias within drama education in postcolonial contexts, where Eurocentric frameworks and colonial legacies continue to shape curriculum content and pedagogical practices. Gallagher *et al.* (2017), in their comprehensive overview of drama in education and applied theatre, trace the evolution of drama's role from morality and socialisation toward more critical and reflective postcolonial engagements. They emphasise that in many postcolonial settings, drama education often reproduces colonial power structures by privileging Western dramatic traditions and marginalising indigenous, vernacular, and community-based performance forms. This reinforces hierarchical knowledge systems and limits the potential for drama to serve as a transformative medium for cultural affirmation and social justice. The authors advocate for a shift toward more inclusive, decolonised drama pedagogy that respects multiple cultural narratives and expressive styles, recognising drama's capacity to challenge dominant discourses and foster identity formation and critical consciousness. Their analysis aligns with broader concerns identified in African contexts, such as Kenya, where drama curricula are critiqued for their failure to integrate indigenous cultural expressions meaningfully, thereby perpetuating exclusion and silencing of minority voices.

The literature on drama education in Kenya reveals significant empirical insights into the systemic underrepresentation of indigenous and minority voices, anchored in curricular and cultural dynamics. Kinyanjui (2021), in her study on curriculum and cultural identity in East African secondary education, provides a compelling audit of Kenyan drama curricula, which reveals the dominant privileging of Eurocentric and elite African narratives. Her research highlights how prescribed texts and teaching materials predominantly reflect Western theatrical traditions, sidelining indigenous oral and performative forms central to many Kenyan communities. Kinyanjui argues that this curricular bias reproduces colonial epistemologies, imperilling the cultural identities of learners from marginalised groups. Her findings emphasise the persistent colonial legacies in curriculum content that fail to validate local cultural expressions, thus limiting opportunities for cultural affirmation and identity formation within the educational context. This work identifies a crucial gap: while policy frameworks espouse multiculturalism, actual curricular practices often sustain exclusionary narratives, requiring more focused investigation into how curricular reforms might effectively integrate diverse cultural voices.

Building on curriculum-focused critiques, Oloo (2023) provides qualitative empirical evidence from the perspectives of drama teachers in Western Kenya, addressing barriers to inclusive arts education. Through interviews and classroom observations, Oloo documents how teachers encounter institutional and pedagogical challenges that inhibit the incorporation of indigenous performance traditions into their teaching. Many educators report limited training in culturally responsive drama pedagogy, feelings of inadequate content knowledge, and institutional pressures to conform to standardised curricula and assessment criteria that favour Western canons. Oloo's study illuminates how these constraints constrain teacher agency and contribute to the marginalisation of minority narratives. Furthermore, it underlines the

critical role of teacher preparation and institutional support in fostering culturally inclusive drama education. However, although this study provides rich contextual data on teacher experiences, there remains a need for further research that links teacher perspectives to actual curricular content and performance frameworks in order to fully understand structural exclusions.

Wanjala (2022) turns attention to the cultural politics of school drama festivals and their role in shaping representations of identity in Kenyan schools. His analysis of drama festival adjudication criteria and performance patterns reveals a strong preference for theatrical polish and technical sophistication aligned with Western theatrical aesthetics, often at the expense of cultural authenticity and vernacular expression. Wanjala argues that festival culture reinforces hegemonic norms by privileging performances that replicate elite cultural standards, thereby sidelining indigenous and minority artistic expressions. While grassroots community theatre occasionally counters this trend, the institutional structures of festivals and competitions perpetuate a sanitised version of culture that prioritises form over substance. This study exposes the tension between authenticity and theatricality in institutional recognition and points to an important gap in festival adjudication that needs addressing to promote genuine cultural inclusion in drama education.

Teacher preparation and professional development remain critical areas of concern in Kenyan arts education, particularly in drama and related expressive disciplines. Wafula (2020) highlights significant gaps in how educators are trained to appreciate, rethink, and diversify arts education, including drama. The study emphasises that many teacher education programmes inadequately equip trainees to serve as effective choral conductors, trainers, or directors, which reflects a broader issue of insufficient pedagogical support for arts educators in Kenya. Wafula notes that this lack of comprehensive training limits teachers' capacity to

incorporate culturally diverse and contextually relevant materials, including indigenous narratives and performance traditions. Consequently, educators often rely on limited, conventional repertoires that do not fully reflect Kenya's rich, multi-ethnic cultural landscape. These shortcomings in teacher preparation resonate with broader institutional deficits, wherein training systems have yet to embrace innovative or inclusive pedagogies that validate marginalised artistic expressions.

Complementing the above findings, Okumu (2019) explores how educational theatre in Kenya frequently sidelines marginalised voices, drawing attention to systemic barriers that impede the integration of indigenous and minority narratives in school drama programs. The article outlines that despite a growing recognition of theatre's potential as a tool for social empowerment and cultural affirmation, prevailing curricular and institutional frameworks continue to favour dominant, often Westernised forms of drama. Okumu argues that this is partly due to entrenched hierarchies in educational theatre training and assessment, where marginalised groups' expressive modes are trivialised or rendered invisible. Furthermore, the study underscores how limited access to resources and a lack of institutional support constrains teachers' ability to adapt and innovate their drama teaching practices. This marginalisation hampers not only artistic diversity but also the broader educational goals of inclusiveness and identity formation.

Expanding on institutional challenges, Wambugu and Changeiywo (2022) examine the difficulties Kenyan teachers face in implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which theoretically advocates for learner-centred and culturally responsive education. Their research reveals that teachers often encounter significant obstacles such as inadequate training, lack of instructional materials, and pressures from standardised testing frameworks. These challenges

result in hesitancy and inconsistency in adopting new pedagogical approaches that could foreground indigenous knowledge systems and performance traditions. The authors also highlight systemic issues such as overcrowded classrooms and insufficient ongoing professional development support, which further undermine efforts to implement inclusive curricula effectively. These institutional constraints critically impact drama education, where culturally authentic and participatory teaching methods require sustained support and flexibility to thrive.

The issue of language dominance and its role in cultural exclusion has been explored by Kirk (2016) in her study on film production and aesthetics in Pakistan. Kirk illustrates how imposed linguistic hierarchies marginalise vernacular languages and cultural expressions, effectively classifying them as "uncivilised" and thus aesthetically subordinate within dominant media forms. Although her study is situated outside the African context, the parallels are striking for postcolonial education systems, including Kenya's drama education landscape. Kirk's analysis foregrounds how language functions as a gatekeeper of cultural legitimacy, shaping who can participate meaningfully in cultural production and whose narratives are deemed worthy of representation. This framework is directly applicable to the Kenyan drama curriculum, where English as the dominant medium often displaces indigenous languages and oral traditions. However, Kirk's study focuses heavily on media production realms rather than educational settings, which points to a notable gap in the investigation of language dominance within classroom drama practices and syllabus content. This highlights the need for context-specific research on how linguistic hierarchies influence drama pedagogy and student identity formation in Kenya's schools.

In the Kenyan context, Maina (2022) addresses the interconnection between language use and cultural heritage from a Kenyan perspective, highlighting the intrinsic value of vernacular languages as

carriers of indigenous knowledge and identity. Maina argues for revitalising and integrating local languages in formal education to sustain cultural heritage and promote authentic self-expression. Her critique of language policy reveals tensions between national linguistic priorities and the lived linguistic diversity of Kenyan communities. Importantly, Maina points out that sidelining vernaculars contributes to cultural alienation and reduces opportunities for learners to engage meaningfully with their heritage. Despite this valuable insight, Maina's work deals mainly with broader language and cultural policy issues without focusing explicitly on drama education or performance arts contexts. As such, the study leaves open questions about how these language dynamics manifest within drama curricula and affect learners' experiences in drama classrooms and festivals. This lacuna calls for targeted research investigating vernacular language inclusion and its role in fostering cultural affirmation through drama education.

Komu (2016), in his comprehensive history of Kenyan theatre, provides an insightful account that links cultural and political forces to the evolution of theatrical forms in Kenya. His research reveals how colonial and postcolonial political imperatives have shaped what theatrical content is publicly valorised, often privileging urban, elite narratives at the expense of rural and indigenous performative traditions. Komu traces the endurance of these patterns in contemporary theatre and drama education, where institutional frameworks and festivals tend to uphold Eurocentric aesthetics and language norms as standards of quality. While Komu's rich historical and political analysis foregrounds systemic domination in theatrical practice, there is limited exploration of how these dynamics specifically impact classroom drama curricula or teacher preparation. The study also stops short of deeply analysing the implications for learners' cultural identity or the potential of educational reform to challenge hegemonic theatre practices. This gap underscores the present study's emphasis on pedagogical and institutional factors

mediating inclusion and exclusion within school drama.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach to explore in-depth the underrepresentation of indigenous and minority narratives within Kenya's secondary school drama education. Data was majorly collected using content analysis of key curriculum-related materials, including drama training syllabi documents, drama set texts, and adjudication materials such as approved theatre performances and scoresheets from drama festivals. These documents provided rich contextual data on curriculum emphases, performance criteria and official expectations that shape drama pedagogy. To complement data from content analysis, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 8 conveniently selected teachers of drama in 8 purposively selected secondary schools in Western Kenya. The teachers provided data on their experiences, challenges and strategies regarding the inclusion or exclusion of indigenous performance traditions in drama education. The data was analysed and presented thematically. Informed consent was administered to every teacher who was willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Teachers' confidentiality and anonymity was observed. The study also observed anonymity by not disclosing the schools that participated in the study. During content analysis, documents were obtained with authorisation from the relevant sources, carefully reviewed and returned to the owners without damage.

RESULTS

Curriculum Bias

The study findings from a content review of the curriculum and interviews with teachers, focusing specifically on drama education in Kenya's secondary schools, revealed the heavy privileging of Western and elite African narratives and the subsequent marginalisation of indigenous perspectives. Analysis of the set plays prescribed

and commonly performed from recent years reveals a clear pattern of consistent selection of predominantly Western canonical texts. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht, and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People* are examples of drama texts approved by the state for critical study in secondary schools in recent years. From the interviews, teachers affirmed that, even when African plays are selected, focus is often on elite African narratives, "often written in English and reflecting urban or elite experiences." Similarly, drama festivals never miss performances of especially French and English plays, such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Moliere's *Tartuffe*. This pattern was evidenced by an analysis of the official 2025 Kenya National Drama and Film Festival listings (Teachers Arena, 2025), which revealed significant emphasis on theatrical performances grounded in Western dramaturgy and polished performance techniques over indigenous storytelling or ritualistic modes.

During interviews, the teachers revealed that drama educators often approach African set plays through interpretive frameworks shaped by Western literary criticism and performance norms. They observed that the academic study of African dramatic texts in the classroom tends to emphasise textual analysis, characterisation, and thematic exposition in ways mirroring the critical study of Western plays. The teachers noted a lack of differentiated pedagogical methods suited to indigenous performance traditions or oral-centred storytelling, which demand more participatory and embodied approaches rather than text-based critique. Consequently, indigenous narratives are treated as literary objects rather than living cultural expressions, diminishing their authenticity and relevance for learners.

This lack of differentiation implies several critical consequences: It perpetuates epistemic dominance by valuing Western theatrical polish and textuality above community-rooted cultural expressions; it undermines learner engagement and cultural

affirmation among students from marginalised backgrounds; and it limits the opportunity for drama education to serve as a space for epistemic decolonisation and identity formation. These findings affirm concerns voiced in the literature and theoretical framework, underscoring how the interplay of curricular content, teacher training, and institutional assessment prioritises Eurocentric narratives and theatrical aesthetics at the expense of indigenous Kenyan expressive traditions (Kinyanjui, 2021; Oloo, 2023; Wanjala, 2022).

Teacher Training Deficits

The study findings revealed that teacher training deficits, particularly regarding the use of indigenous performance traditions or facilitating multilingual, community-based drama, contribute to significant gaps in Kenyan drama education programmes in secondary schools. An analysis of teacher training curricula from the University of Nairobi (Theatre and Film Studies) and Mount Kenya University (Film, Creative and Performing Arts) showed that formal theatre and drama programmes offer a broad spectrum of courses, ranging from the history and theory of theatre to technical production and script making and interpretation. However, these documents revealed limited explicit emphasis on training teachers in indigenous, oral, or vernacular performance forms. These programmatic limits contribute to a workforce of drama teachers who are often academically trained in general theatre arts but unprepared for epistemic decolonisation required to valorise indigenous narratives meaningfully in the classroom.

During interviews, the teachers highlighted the real-world consequences of the above-mentioned training deficits. Many of them admitted facing challenges in incorporating indigenous performance traditions. They cited primarily insufficient content knowledge and lack of institutional support as major barriers. As one teacher reported, "Our training was mostly about Western plays and performance techniques; hardly any focus was given on local folktales or oral traditions." Another teacher noted

the pressure to conform to exam syllabi and national festival expectations that prioritise polished, English-language drama. Teachers also noted that their attempts to innovate was hampered by a lack of resources and the absence of indigenous scripts to support community-based drama projects.

Resource Inequality

An indigenous script is a dramatic text authored by members of a local or indigenous community. In this case, an authentic African indigenous script is rooted in the authoring community's oral traditions, histories, languages and cultural knowledge systems. It represents the lived experiences, vernacular expressions, customary rituals, and storytelling modes unique to the community of origin. An indigenous script may entail adaptations of folktales, ritual dramas re-enacting community historical events, or performances that incorporate indigenous languages and performative conventions. Appropriate teaching materials aligned with such local forms would therefore include the scripts themselves, multimedia resources detailing cultural contexts, lesson plans supporting traditional storytelling methods, audio-visual recordings of community performances, and guides for culturally responsive pedagogy that respect intellectual property rights and cultural sensitivities.

However, the study found that such resources are direly scarce in Kenya's drama education context. One teacher remarked, "We try to include stories from our local communities, but there are no published scripts or standardised materials to guide us, and we lack training on how to create or adapt such content." Analysis of drama syllabi and teaching materials revealed a predominant dependence on imported, canonical texts often authored by Western or urban playwrights, with very few published scripts reflecting indigenous perspectives. A discussion with teachers and other experts in higher education revealed that many factors could account for this state of affairs. Topmost is the lack of systematic support and

funding for indigenous playwrights and local theatre practitioners. Additionally, it was noted that market dynamics and publishing priorities favour commercially viable texts over culturally specific, vernacular-based works, leading to underproduction and limited circulation of indigenous drama materials. Meanwhile, institutional inertia and curricular bias continue to elicit teacher training and examination systems overlooking indigenous scripts. Lastly, some teachers indicated that intellectual property and cultural sensitivity issues often complicated the documentation and dissemination of indigenous oral theatrical traditions.

Festival Structures

An analysis of approved plays and adjudication scoresheets indicated consistent preference for performances that showcase technical sophistication, stagecraft and linguistic fluency in English or French, which are aligned with Western theatrical norms. The criteria tended to overshadow performances that emphasise vernacular languages, oral traditions, and community-oriented modes of expression. In a study of the literariness of performances in Kenya's festivals, Odutsa (2023) argues that while cultural creative dances and traditional storytelling forms are present, they are frequently critically appraised through the lens of 'artistic quality' that privileges formal aesthetics and intellectualism instead of embodied, authentic cultural narratives.

Affirming the above views, the drama teachers indicated that festival themes and expected plays are largely determined by the Ministry of Education and associated governing bodies, which sets a top-down agenda emphasising national unity, technical excellence, and curricular alignment. The teachers reported limited agency in choosing festival content, often constrained to select works and themes pre-approved by official bodies, which tend to reinforce dominant cultural narratives. As one teacher explained, "The Ministry gives the theme ...and leaves little room for us to incorporate local,

minority stories or vernacular forms.” These findings reveal that festival structures operate as gatekeepers of drama education content, imposing standards that favour theatrical polish grounded in Eurocentric aesthetics.

DISCUSSION

From the study findings, it is evident that despite curricular intentions to foster creativity and cultural expression, the reality in most drama classrooms is one of narrow representation. Teachers frequently draw from a limited pool of texts and plays, often written in English and grounded in Western dramatic structure (Wa Thiong’o, 1986). This preference is partly driven by examination requirements and the influence of national festivals, which tend to reward polished, technically sophisticated performances rooted in dominant linguistic and cultural codes (Wanjala, 2022).

The study also revealed that training deficits and poor institutional support contribute to the marginalisation of indigenous drama education. As Oloo (2023) notes, many drama teachers feel ill-equipped to incorporate indigenous performance genres such as oral poetry, storytelling, ritual drama, or movement-based expression rooted in minority traditions. Teacher training programmes, modelled after colonial pedagogies, offer little guidance on how to facilitate culturally diverse, multilingual, or participatory forms of drama. Okumu (2019) observes that “training institutions continue to emphasise literary analysis over embodied performance,” thereby sidelining indigenous aesthetics.

Moreover, as revealed in the study, institutional structures such as national festivals, textbook publishers, and policy frameworks reinforce normative understandings of drama that marginalise minority narratives (Wambugu & Changeiywo, 2022). Plays by or about indigenous communities, if included at all, are often filtered through the lens of exoticism or tokenism, rather than treated as

serious cultural expressions deserving of academic and artistic respect.

The underrepresentation of indigenous and marginalised voices has real implications for students. Learners from marginalised communities rarely see their cultures, languages, and worldviews reflected in classroom content, which can lead to disengagement, identity conflict, and a sense of cultural erasure (Kagendo, 2024; Mugo & Ayodo, 2022). Conversely, more inclusive drama education has been shown to enhance learner agency, foster intercultural understanding, and build a richer, more authentic artistic literacy (Kinyanjui, 2021; Oloo, 2023). A promising shift has emerged through grassroots theatre and community drama projects, which serve as informal platforms for indigenous expression and youth empowerment (Ndandara & Hambandima, 2021). However, without systemic curricular support and institutional legitimacy, such efforts remain peripheral.

CONCLUSION

Drama education in postcolonial Africa offers a unique space to reimagine identity, history, and community. Yet, this potential remains undercut by the persistent exclusion of indigenous and minority narratives. If drama is to serve as a truly inclusive and transformative pedagogical tool, then education systems must move beyond symbolic gestures of multiculturalism and undertake structural reforms in curriculum, teacher training, and resource development. By validating and integrating the diverse expressive forms of Kenya’s marginalised communities, drama education can become not just a site of performance, but a site of justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the systemic underrepresentation of indigenous and minority voices in Kenyan drama education, it is imperative to revise the drama syllabi to incorporate plays, folktales, and performance traditions from the country’s diverse ethnic communities and marginalised groups. Such curricular inclusion should go beyond tokenistic

multiculturalism to authentically represent the linguistic, ritualistic, and oral expressive forms that embody Kenya's rich cultural plurality. This revision would not only broaden learners' cultural horizons but also foster a stronger sense of identity and belonging among students from minority backgrounds. Additionally, teacher training programmes, both pre-service and in-service, must be decolonised by integrating indigenous knowledge systems and culturally responsive drama pedagogies. Equipping educators with the skills and content knowledge to engage with local performance traditions will empower them to create inclusive and participatory learning environments that validate learners' cultural realities.

Furthermore, institutional support should prioritise the development and dissemination of indigenous theatre by funding and publishing scripts authored by local playwrights from marginalised communities, thereby expanding the repertoire available for classroom use. This would help overcome the current scarcity of culturally tailored teaching materials and enable schools to diversify their drama offerings meaningfully. Finally, reforming assessment and festival criteria is critical to reshaping the cultural politics of drama education. Judging school drama performances should move beyond emphasising technical polish and Western theatrical standards to include cultural relevance, authenticity, and inclusivity as core evaluative dimensions. Such reforms would incentivise schools and teachers to embrace indigenous and minority narratives more fully, fostering a drama education landscape that is just, pluralistic, and reflective of Kenya's vibrant cultural heritage.

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