Decline of Native Alagwa Personal Names: Transition from Tradition to Modernity

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Traditionally, Alagwa parents named their children using names derived from the Alagwa language, reflecting their cultural identity. However, this practice has become increasingly unstable due to the influence of Muslim and Christian missionaries. This article explores the transformation of personal names as a reflection of a significant sociocultural shift, an area rarely addressed within the Alagwa community. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and an examination of village and school registers, the findings reveal a predominance of Arabic names, along with some Christian and Swahili names. Changes in naming practices are influenced by sociocultural factors such as religious beliefs, education, the limited use of Alagwa in formal domains, and intermarriages. Additionally, pronunciation and orthographic challenges have contributed to the adoption of foreign naming conventions. This shift has led to the incorporation of foreign names, replacing Alagwa indigenous names, and the loss of lexical items, signalling a cultural and linguistic change in Alagwa.

Keywords: *decline, native, personal names, Alagwa, transition, tradition, modernity.*

1 Introduction

This paper focuses on Alagwa, a Southern Cushitic language spoken in Tanzania —Kondoa and Hanang districts. Alagwa is spoken by an estimated 52,816 people (LoT 2009) and is surrounded by a diverse linguistic landscape that includes Burunge, Gorwaa, and Langi languages, as well as Sandawe and Datooga communities (Mous 2016), along with Swahili and Arabic (Alphonce 2022). The proximity of these groups has fostered significant linguistic and cultural exchanges with Arabic and Swahili, notably influencing naming practices. Personal naming practices are dynamic and evolve in response to cultural interactions, changing societal norms, and broader global shifts. As integral components of a community's linguistic culture, names are significantly influenced by contact with dominant societies, media, and the effects of colonialism, missionary activities, religious ideologies, and globalisation. These shifts are not confined to a single region or ethnicity. They are evident across various African communities, including Tanzania, where both historical and contemporary factors are reshaping names and their cultural significance. Religion, particularly the spread of Islam, has played a central role in these transformations. Islamisation has led to the replacement of traditional African names with Arabic or Islamic names in many communities. For instance, Bashir & Ali (2024) document a shift in the Tagoi naming system from a dual African structure to a fully Islamic/Arabic system, driven by Islamisation and Arabisation. Similarly, Fakuade et al. (2018) note the decline of indigenous names within the Batonu community due to Islamic influence, altering their cultural identity. These shifts underscore the tension between religious conversion and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Fakuade et al. (2018) propose strategies such as "weak-open reversal" and "reversal by syncretism" to preserve cultural identity while incorporating Islamic elements. Colonialism and Westernisation have similarly had profound effects on naming practices across Africa. Agbontaen-Eghafona (2007) highlights that colonialism and Christianity led to the widespread

adoption of foreign names, particularly among Christianised populations. In Nigeria, Oluwadoro (2016) observes that Pentecostal communities increasingly adopt Christian names to align with global religious movements, affecting their cultural identity. This trend is also evident in the Yoruba Pentecostal community, where many individuals change their names to biblical ones (Olanisebe 2017). During apartheid in South Africa, Western names were widely adopted, leading to the integration of foreign names within Zulu communities (Ngubane & Thabete 2013).

Although efforts have been made to reclaim African names post-apartheid, the continued influence of Western culture raises questions about the authenticity of this transformation (Moyo 2012). These shifts reflect the complex socio-cultural, economic, and political forces reshaping African naming practices. Globalisation and media have played a significant role in spreading foreign naming practices, especially through education systems and media consumption.

Across Nigeria, globalisation and Pentecostal Christianity are reshaping personal naming practices. In Calabar, young people increasingly adopt European or Westernised names to challenge ethnic stereotypes and align with global cultural identities (Mensah et al. 2020). Among the Igbo, traditional names are in decline due to the influence of Western culture, media, and Pentecostalism (Ukaegbu & Okon 2024). A similar trend is evident in southwestern Nigeria, where Pentecostal parents prefer anglicised, alphabetically patterned names that often mirror those of their pastor's children. Here, the sound of a name is valued more than its meaning, and traditional naming ceremonies, such as the eight-day celebration, are gradually being replaced by baptismal rituals shortly after birth (Oluwadoro 2016). Collectively, these shifts reflect a redefinition of cultural identity, as indigenous names give way to globalised alternatives.

The Machame-Chagga community of Tanazania has similarly experienced a decline in the use of traditional names, with English, Christian, and Islamic names becoming more prevalent (Lusekelo & Muro 2018). The influence of Westernisation and foreign religions, particularly through formal schooling, has contributed to the gradual loss of indigenous names, further highlighting the global impact on African naming practices. Modern religious beliefs and language contact have continued to shape naming practices. Teri (2024) discusses how Kiswahili, modern religious beliefs, and mispronunciations have influenced naming practices within Iraqw communities, with names increasingly reflecting Kiswahili and Arabic influence. Mwalyoyo (2024) observes a similar erosion of traditional Safwa names due to modern influences, including religion, which further weakens cultural identity. The decline of traditional naming practices extends beyond personal names to place names. Alphonce & Sane (2019) document the gradual replacement of indigenous place names by foreign names in Tanzania's Hanang District. This shift reflects broader cultural dislocation caused by colonialism, religious conversion, and globalisation, highlighting the external forces reshaping the cultural landscapes of African communities.

Despite extensive research on shifts in naming practices, the decline of native Alagwa names remains understudied. While Mous (2016) explores the influence of Islam on Alagwa culture after Sultan Salim Kimolo's conversion in the late 19th century, and Alphonce (2022) discusses the integration of Swahili and Arabic loanwords into Alagwa, neither directly addresses the decline in personal naming practices. However, both recognise the impact of linguistic and cultural contact. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the extent of the shift, the factors contributing to the decline of native Alagwa names, and their broader cultural

and linguistic impact. Understanding this shift will offer valuable insights into the ongoing cultural and linguistic changes within the community.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 introduces the study, while Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework. Section 3 describes the methodology, and Section 4 presents the findings, including the phonemic inventory of Alagwa, traditional and modern naming practices, and the factors driving the shift in naming practices. Section 5 concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications.

2 Theoretical Framework

The study employed Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explore the dynamics of Alagwa naming practices, focusing on the transition from tradition to modernity. SIT, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), examines how individuals derive their identity from group memberships and how these affiliations influence their behaviours and choices, including naming practices. According to SIT, people categorise themselves and others into groups, shaping their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions based on group membership. In the context of the Alagwa community, the shift from traditional to modern names reflects the evolving social identities within the community. As individuals navigate their cultural landscape, they may adopt modern names to align with broader social norms or integrate into new cultural environments (Hogg & Abrams 1988). This transition reveals the impact of external influences, such as globalisation and urbanisation, on both personal and collective identities (Schwartz, Cote & Arnett 2010). Social Identity Theory provides insight into the motivations behind these naming choices, emphasising the role of group dynamics in shaping individual attitudes towards traditional names, which are often viewed as symbols of cultural heritage (Abrams & Hogg 2004). In contrast, modern names are increasingly seen as symbols of progress or adaptation to contemporary societal values. The death of traditional naming practices within the Alagwa community has contributed to the loss of these culturally significant names in favour of foreign names. Traditional names carry cultural, circumstantial, historical, and familial lineage significance, and naming children after deceased relatives helps preserve these connections by honouring, commemorating, and remembering them. As naming practices evolve, traditional ties to ancestors may weaken, resulting in the erosion of the semantic domain of names, as well as cultural and social identity. Understanding this transition highlights the shift from tradition to modernity and underscores the continued importance of names in shaping the language, culture, and social identity of the Alagwa people.

3 Methodology and Sources of Data

This study was conducted in Kondoa and Hanang districts, focusing specifically in villages inhabited by the Alagwa people. It employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the decline of personal naming practices, uncovering the reasons behind this shift and its implications for Alagwa culture, language, and identity. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and village and primary school registers. The names from these registers served as the unit of analysis, providing a snapshot of contemporary naming practices. Since historical naming data spanning several decades were unavailable, the study focuses on recent naming trends rather than long-term historical comparisons. The

selection of registers prioritised villages and schools in Alagwa communities. A screening of names was conducted with the assistance of 26 Alagwa native speakers knowledgeable about local names, their orthographic representation, and their familiarity with the name bearers. The registers were examined for first (given/birth) names, second (middle) names, and third (surname) names to analyse current naming practices and spelling conventions. Individuals with only foreign names (primarily Arabic and Swahili) were excluded from the analysis, as the study focused on three-part naming patterns. In such cases, consultants were asked whether the person was ascribed Alagwa ethnicity or identified as Alagwa, rather than assuming ethnic classification based on names alone. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with the 26 informants provided deeper insights into traditional Alagwa naming practices and their decline. Participant observation was used to observe the actual use of names in spontaneous conversations in informal settings such as family gatherings, playgrounds, markets, groceries, and kiosks. Moreover, the study examines traditional naming customs, exploring their transformation and gradual decline in response to external naming influences.

4 Findings and Discussions

This section begins with the Alagwa phoneme inventory and presents results based on the transition of naming practices, highlighting modern naming practices among the Alagwa. It also discusses the triggers of the shift in naming practices and personal names.

4.1 *Phoneme inventory*

Before analysing and discussing the findings, it is important to first familiarise ourselves with the Alagwa phonemic and graphemic systems to ensure clear understanding. The Alagwa language possesses a five-vowel system consisting of [a], [e], [i], [o], and [u], along with a set of contrastive long vowels. It distinguishes seven places of articulation for consonants: labial, alveolar, palatal, velar (and rounded velar), uvular (and rounded uvular), pharyngeal, and glottal. Notably, only stops exhibit voice opposition (Mous 2016). Although Alagwa shows a one-to-one correspondence between its phonemes and orthography, eight consonant sounds lack such correspondence, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Consonant phonemes which lack correspondence with orthography

Phoneme	**Orthography**	**example**	**gloss**
/ɟ/	*j*	[nɟad]	‘two’
/ʕ/	*/*	[ʕa:ʕ]	‘cry’
/ʔ/	'	[doʔo]	‘house’
/ʧ/	*ch*	[tʃa:ja]	‘salt’
/ɲ/	*ny*	[ɲaraw]	‘scorpion’
/ɬ/	*sl*	[ɬagwaj]	‘spoon’
/tɬ/	*tl*	[tɬubaj]	‘rain’
/ħ/	*hh*	[ħa:la]	‘well’

4.2 *Alagwa traditional naming practice*

The study reveals that Alagwa traditional personal names as symbolic resources reflect their ideological and sociocultural system. The community values naming rituals as a significant cultural practice when welcoming a new member. These rituals mark the individual's entry into the community and reflect the importance of names in connecting personal identity with cultural heritage. They play a key role in maintaining traditions and reinforcing social cohesion. The naming process is accompanied by rituals, one of which involves bathing the child. This act of bathing serves to symbolise the purification of both the child's name and behaviour. After having a shower, a child is clothed in a white costume for the purpose of */abakweesa* 'make a child white, purify', which is accompanied by wearing a necklace made by a child's aunt or grandmother by using white beads. These symbolise cleaning, wishing good luck, congratulating, and welcoming a child as a new member into the family and community. Naming a child is purely a task of the parents, grandparents, older relatives (aunts, uncles) of the family, and midwives. Name givers, especially members of the family, choose names from the clan lineage of either the father or the mother of the child. This informs us that the Alagwa naming system follows both patrilineal and matrilineal structures. This practice contrasts with that of the Iraqw, whose naming practices strictly adhere to a patrilineal system (Alphonce 2023). It also differs from Cushitic practices, which predominantly follow a patrilineal system (Schlee 1994). The Alagwa may have adopted the matrilineal naming system from neighbouring Langi people through interaction and intermarriage. As a result, a mother can name her child after a family member to commemorate or venerate them. In the past, children inherited the names of ancestors to honour, preserve, and reincarnate those names, as well as to seek protection from their ancestors. Similar reasons have been attributed to the naming practices of the Iraqw (Alphonce 2023).

Alagwa personal names convey various socio-cultural information embedded within them. They carry deep historical, political, socio-cultural, and environmental significance. This means name givers consider these broad and diverse forces surrounding pregnancy and a child's birth. More specifically, in most cases, the choice of a name for a newborn is influenced by clan lineage, circumstances during pregnancy or birth, social or family welfare, the surrounding environment (including physical landscape, flora, and fauna), notable individuals, significant events, daily activities, the timing of the birth, and a child's unique complexities, among other factors. In other words, personal naming practices are an integral part of the tradition and socio-culture of Alagwa society, as the names given to children reflect their cultural identity, experiences, historical events, conflicts, philosophy, social organisation, values, and norms. The examples of Alagwa traditional personal names and their sources are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Traditional personal names in Alagwa

	Source of Names	Personal Name
1	Family or clan lineage names	*Kwangwari*, *Isabe*, *Hhangire*, *Nayu*, *Nahhay*, *Soya*
2	Circumstances of pregnancy	*Hotay* 'dormant pregnancy'
3	Day-to-day events/activities	*Doosla* 'cultivation' *Slakatu* 'hunting', *Dinu* 'honey'
4	Events and hardship	*Qwarii* or *Qwartay* 'hunger'
5	Seasons, time, and duration	*Labaa* 'dawn', *Yahhii* 'rain', *Seemasi* 'drought', *Amasi* 'night'
6	Ceremonial names	*Fu'umay* 'meat, ceremony', *Ni/ima* 'dance'
7	Ritual names	*Umasay* 'medicine' *Sankaa* 'offerings for ancestor'
8	Flora	*Sikoroo* 'type of fruit', *Qwaray* 'type of tree,
9	Fauna	*Doofa* 'rhino', *Sere/a*, 'buffalo', *Qulalimo* 'bird sp.'
10	Behaviour	*Oni* 'drunkard', *Sontsii* 'polite', *Nuqya* 'talkative',
11	War and conflicts	*Ga/alee* 'bow', *Gora* 'victory'
12	Colour, physical appearance	*Daa/ati* 'white', *Bo/u* 'black', *Ninaa* 'small'
13	Place of birth	*Kweraa* or *Kwerii* 'bush', *Lohi* 'pathway' or *Lohay* 'migrate'

As shown in Table 2, Alagwa naming practices traditionally depend on family or clan lineage. In other words, personal naming practices are an integral part of Alagwa society's traditions and socio-culture, as names reflect their culture, experiences, historical events, conflicts, philosophy, social organisation, values, norms, and reputations. Personal names were also derived from and intended to describe the circumstances, environmental, and geographical directions in which people resided and lived. As a result, some individuals were named after prominent community events and objects, as well as national and global occurrences, such as war, with names like *Ga/alee* 'bow'. Similarly, children were traditionally named after animals, such as *Doofa* 'rhino' and after plants, such as *Sikoroo* 'type of fruit', and *Qwaray* 'type of tree'. Others reflect behaviour and/or physical appearance, such as *Oni* 'drunkard', *Ninaa* 'small', *Bo/u* 'black, dark', and *Sontsii* 'polite'. Some names are derived from seasons of the year and time of day, such as *Labaa* 'dawn', *Amasi* 'night' and *Yahhii* 'rain'.

The Alagwa traditionally used a three-name system or more for self-identity, where individuals would introduce their given (first) name, their father's name, their grandfather's name, and possibly their clan's name. Only the first or given name was assigned to a child at birth. Clan names were not historically used as surnames, but they were introduced in formal contexts, such as government records, religious, and educational settings, due to missionary work, colonisation, and subsequent bureaucratic structures. However, this study reveals that, currently, children are increasingly being given foreign names instead of traditional ones. This practice has consequently masked the Alagwa cultural and linguistic identity. In the past, it was possible to identify the Alagwa person by their personal names because the names were typically derived from the lexicon of the language and contained the sounds of the language.

The Alagwa have had prolonged contact with the Langi people, a Bantu-speaking community in the Kondoa area. They came into contact with the Arabs, who introduced Islam in the area at the end of the 19th century. Although the interaction with the Langi people through intermarriages and living in the same geographical area contributed to changes in the culture of naming, Islam became the major cause of name changes since the Alagwa abandoned their traditional religion and converted to Islam. For instance, the Alagwa great leader, Sultan Salim Kimolo, converted to Islam and later became the chief of the wider area, including Langi,

under British administration (Mous 2016). Chief Kimolo's conversion to Islam opened the way for many Alagwa people to adopt a new religion, culture, and language (Arabic). This was followed by education, whereby some names were either misspelt or had some of their parts dropped during registration, since most of the teachers in schools were non-Alagwa. The following sections present the descriptive analysis and discussion of naming and name shift, and the reasons for the shift.

4.3 *Contemporary naming practice among Alagwa*

The study reveals that Arabic and European names are gradually replacing traditional names in Alagwa. The register books of primary school children who graduated in 2020 predominantly contain Arabic names, while a few had English names. These Arabic names enter Alagwa via Islam, which requires converts to change their original names and assume new names of Arabic origin. Names like *Ali, Ramadhani, Abdala, Ashura, Hawa, Sophia, Rukia,* etc., are commonly found among children, reflecting the influence of Islamic naming practices, along with some influence from Swahili and Christian names, despite Christianity not being significant in the Alagwa area.

The examination of Alagwa names in 26 school registers provides a comprehensive view of the prevalence and distribution of both traditional and foreign names within the community. The list is organised in descending order based on the number of native Alagwa names in the "3rd Name/Surname" column, making it easier to identify areas with the highest prevalence of traditional names. Surnames are given particular emphasis as they typically feature a higher frequency of native names compared to first and second names, offering a clearer representation of the use of traditional names in the Alagwa community. In this context, total Names refers to all names recorded in the register; 1st Name represents the pupil's given name (first names), 2nd Name indicates the pupil's father's name, and 3rd Name corresponds to the pupil's surname. Therefore, columns four through six in Table 3 show only the count of traditional names, excluding categories like modern or foreign names.

Table 3: Alagwa personal names gathered in different schools

SN	School	Total	1st Name	2nd Name	3rd Name
1	Isabe	114	-	-	20
2	Matangarimo	55	-	-	16
3	Humay	32	-	-	13
4	Waraanga	60	-	-	12
5	Thawi Juu	32	-	-	12
6	Gisambalang	80	-	-	11
7	Sirop	62	-	-	10
8	Thawi	61	-	-	10
9	Gaara	43	-	1	10
10	Kwamadebe	43	-	1	10
11	Kwadosla	50	-	-	9
12	Kwa Yondu	48	-	-	9
13	Dorasi	48	-	1	8
14	Ororimo	51	-	1	7
15	Kikilo	45	-	-	7
16	Kwahengo	40	-	-	7

17	Mwembeni	35	-	-	7
18	Soera	77	-	1	6
19	Hondomairo	45	-	-	6
20	Beruberu	36	-	-	6
21	Kwadinu	32	-	-	4
22	Matangalimo	25	-	-	4
23	Chubi	29	-	-	3
24	Isari	36	-	-	2
25	Waama	60	-	-	1
26	Sakaami	29	-	-	1
	Total Names	**1268**	**0**	**5**	**209**
			0.0%	**0.4%**	**16.5%**[1]

Table 3 shows that, out of 1268 names, no traditional Alagwa first names are present. Only five second names are traditional Alagwa names, while the remainder are foreign. The percentages at the bottom of columns four, five, and six represent the proportion of traditional names within each category (1st Name, 2nd Name, and 3rd Name) relative to the total number of names recorded. Traditional first names make up 0.0%, second names 0.4%, and third names 16.5%. This demonstrates a significant decline in traditional names, particularly in the first and second name categories, with a slightly higher but still limited presence in surnames. The absence of traditional first names among children is particularly concerning, as it suggests that these names are on the verge of disappearing. The researcher reached saturation in examining the school registers when no traditional first names were emerging. If this trend persists, traditional first names will likely disappear within one or two generations, highlighting the endangerment of Alagwa cultural heritage and identity.

One might assume that Alagwa children who do not attend school could have traditional names. However, this is unlikely, as nearly all Alagwa children attend school due to government regulations ensuring access to primary education. Naming practices occur at birth, before schooling begins, and are influenced by factors such as religion, politics, and modernisation. Therefore, the decline in traditional names is more closely tied to these broader societal changes than to school attendance. For example, a consultant who named his daughter after his mother to commemorate her was challenged by the Sheikh, illustrating how external influences contribute to the decline of traditional names and hinder efforts to reclaim Alagwa cultural practices.

The analysis of the registers shows that most names are Arabic, with a few Christian, Swahili, or political party names such as *Uhuru*, 'independence', *CCM* (Chama cha Mapinduzi), and *TANU* (Tanganyika National Union). This indicates that Swahili and political affairs have a significant influence on naming in Alagwa. Although traditional names used as surnames (third names) make up a relatively high percentage, they predominantly reflect both ordinary/generic names and names of clans[2]. This means that in contemporary naming practices, a few Alagwa people still use clan names, while others have abandoned names such as *Hhimay, Nahho, Dosla, Na/asi, /Adiya,* etc., which were derived from circumstances of birth,

[1] The percentages reflect the distribution of names across each category (1st Name, 2nd Name, 3rd Name) relative to the total number of names (1268).

[2]Names shared by a group of people who are blood-related. Such names are like *Kwangwari*, *Isabe*, *Hhangire*, *Nayu*, *Nahhay*, *Soya,* or *Msoya,* etc.

the environment, occupation, and rituals. The decline in the use of indigenous Alagwa names indicates that these names are endangered and at risk of extinction.

The analysis reveals that most male first names reappear as third names or surnames, suggesting they are inherited from the religious or foreign names of grandparents. This seems to indicate that name inheritance is confined to foreign names and non-inherited traditional names. Examples of such names include ***Athumani*** *Abdala* ***Athumani****,* ***Maulidi*** *Ally* ***Maulidi****,* and ***Omari*** *Salimu* ***Omari***. This is because inheriting indigenous names is one of the means of preserving them since the language is not well documented (Alphonce 2023). Abandoning traditional names leads to a loss of vocabulary and/or the introduction of foreign or hybrid words in the semantic field of names.

Since the second and third names obtained from school registers were all male names due to the practice of children using their father's name, an additional 119 names of females aged 4 to 60+ were collected through semi-structured interviews. This was done to determine whether the trend of declining traditional names observed in male names also applies to female names. The analysis reveals striking results: only 9 out of 119 names were indigenous Alagwa names. Of these, three belonged to females aged 60+, while the remaining six were for females aged 4 to 13. This could reflect a conscious effort by some parents to maintain individual preference for indigenous naming practices.

The data presented in Table 4 indicate a relatively low frequency of Alagwa personal names across the schools, with only 5 instances of second names and 209 instances of third names or surnames recorded across the 26 schools. This may reflect a combination of cultural and administrative factors. Although school policies do not require using common Tanzanian names and allow students to use their traditional Alagwa names, the low prevalence of Alagwa names suggests that students may choose more widely recognised Tanzanian names in official or social settings. This choice could stem from a desire to conform to broader societal expectations or from the perception that traditional names are less visible outside the Alagwa community. Additionally, the absence of Alagwa teachers in many schools may have contributed to the misspelling or improper recording of traditional names. The following Table 4 illustrates the change in spelling and pronunciation of traditional names because of mispronunciation and misspelling.

Table 4: Change in pronunciation and spelling of names

Original Name	**Modified Name**	**Changes in Spelling and Pronunciation**
Dosla	Dosa	*sl /ɬ/* becomes *s /s/*
Hhintay	Hintay	*hh /ħ/* becomes *h /h/*
Soqore	Sokore	*q /q/* becomes k /k/
Hapii	Happi	*ii* shortened and compensated by adding /p/
Buruka	Buluka	*r* becomes /l/
Xabau	Habau	*x* becomes */h/*
/Ankway	Ankway	/ grapheme for /ʕ/ is dropped
Xintsu(a)(i)	Hinchu	*ts* becomes *ch /tʃ/*
Sing'ana	Singana	*/ŋ/* replaced by */ng/*
Orii	Orry	*ii* becomes /j/ and compensated by /r/
Aislu	Aithu	*sl /ɬ/* becomes *th, /θ/*
Kwangwari	Kwankwari	*/ŋg/* becomes */ŋk/*

The analysis revealed both non-standard and divergent pronunciation and spelling that deviate from Alagwa conventions (see Table 1), particularly for certain phonemes and sounds. Names are now spelt according to Swahili phonological orthographic practices. As seen in Table 4, *sl* /ɬ/ is written and pronounced as either /s/ or /θ/; *hh* /ħ/ becomes *h* /h/; *x* becomes *h* /h/; /ŋg/ becomes /ŋk/; and there is addition of /m/ in *Msoya*. The addition of /m/ in *Msoya* does not appear to result from pronunciation difficulties but rather from coincidence, suggesting a more complex linguistic phenomenon that warrants further investigation.

Other changes are reflected in the orthography of *q,* which is written as *k* and pronounced as /k/, and the grapheme *ts*, written as *ch* and pronounced as /tʃ/, represents an ejective sound, i.e., /ts/. However, *ts* is retained in the name *Hhintsu* > *Hintsu*. In certain contexts, /ts'/ is also preserved, indicating that the change or shift is inconsistent and does not follow a systematic linguistic pattern.

Changes also involve dropping of both phonemes and graphemes, particularly the grapheme (/) for the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, the grapheme for the velar nasal /ŋ/, and the grapheme *h* for /h/. In the orthography, the graphemes for the glottal stop and the voiced pharyngeal fricative are not employed, as they are unfamiliar to the speakers and do not align with the standard Latin alphabet used in Swahili orthography.

Compensation is another strategy that has been attested in the data. For instance, the loss of long /i:/ is compensated by adding an extra *r* and a glide *y* in *Or**ii*** > ***Orry*** and with an addition of *p* in *Hap**ii*** > ***Happi***. For instance, for *Happi* and *Orry,* English spelling conventions may have played a role too. These shifts in the pronunciation and spelling of traditional personal names affect both the graphemes and phonemes of native names.

The shift in pronunciation and spelling has also been observed in some place names, like *Thawi* instead of *Tlawi* (/tɬ/ > /θ/), *Soera* instead of *So/era* (/ʕ/ dropped), and *Sakaami* instead of *Saka'ami* (with the loss of the glottal stop). This is in line with Alphonce and Sane (2019), who unveiled the shift in pronunciation and spelling in most of the Hanang district toponyms.

Changes in pronunciation often lead to modifications in spelling because names are typically written as they are pronounced by non-native speakers. Consultants reported that teachers frequently write names based on Swahili pronunciation, especially when native sounds are difficult to articulate. As one consultant explained:

> Teachers write the native name as pronounced in Swahili because some sounds are difficult … also, I simplify my pronunciation when someone is writing my name, which alters the spelling because I do not know how to write it in Alagwa convention.

Pronunciation changes were determined through consultant reports, as speakers indicated they adjust their pronunciation when introducing their names to non-native speakers who struggle with specific sounds. For instance, one consultant shared, "*I simplify Dosla to Dosila when introducing my name to non-natives who find it difficult to pronounce.*" Thus, native speaker accommodation strategies are one of the reasons for changes in pronunciation. This shift in pronunciation and spelling reflects the loss of Alagwa's unique language features. The adoption of foreign names and changes to traditional Alagwa names signal a transition from a traditional to a modern naming system, eroding cultural identity. As names carry linguistic markers of ethnic belonging, these changes lead to hybrid names.

4.4 *Triggers of the shift in naming practices and personal names*

This section explores the different ways Alagwa names and naming practices have changed, including alterations in pronunciation and spelling, the impact of intermarriage, the adoption of naming practices from other groups, changes in who gives names, evolving naming rituals, and shifting attitudes towards naming. Each of these aspects contributes to the transition from traditional to modern naming practices.

The use of traditional Alagwa names has declined, and novel forms have emerged as a result of the deviant pronunciation and spelling of Alagwa personal names. The primary sources of this deviation stem from a simplification process aimed at accommodating non-Cushitic speakers and the unfamiliarity with Alagwa orthography and sound conventions by both Alagwa and non-Alagwa speakers. Speakers often adjust the pronunciation of their names by replacing native sounds and graphemes with those more familiar to Swahili speakers, making the names easier to pronounce and write. This tendency reflects a pattern of accommodation by Alagwa speakers towards non-native speakers. To simplify pronunciation for non-native speakers, some native speakers pronounce names differently, such as saying *Amu* instead of */Amu* or *Hansa* instead of *Hhansla*. In the former, the grapheme (/) representing the voiced pharyngeal fricative [ʕ] is dropped, while in the latter, the grapheme (hh) is written and pronounced as /h/, and (sl) is written and pronounced as /s/. In these cases, native speakers consciously simplify pronunciation to help non-native speakers more easily pronounce and write Alagwa names.

Additionally, non-native speakers' unfamiliarity with certain Alagwa graphemes and phonemes often leads to difficulties in pronunciation and spelling, resulting in both phonological and orthographical modifications. These changes arise from the phonological and orthographic limitations of Alagwa, making the adapted names sound less like native names and more like hybrid forms. The Alagwa language contains graphemes absent in Swahili, such as (sl), (tl), (hh), (/), (ˈ), (x), (ts), and (q). While (sl), (tl), (hh), (x), (ts), and (q) are replaced with more familiar graphemes and sounds, the voiced pharyngeal fricative (/) and the glottal

stop (ˈ) are omitted due to the lack of direct counterparts in Swahili. As a result, hybrid names emerge, where the original Alagwa phonological and orthographic structures are altered, creating new forms that differ from traditional names. Notably, much like Arabic-sourced names, Alagwa names undergo phonological simplifications when adapted to local speech patterns by non-native speakers. These simplifications include processes such as the deletion of the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/ and the substitution of the voiceless pharyngeal fricative /ħ/ with /h/, illustrating parallels in the adaptation of foreign names across different linguistic contexts.

Moreover, many Alagwa speakers are unfamiliar with the standardised orthographic conventions of their language, especially concerning the aforementioned graphemes, due to limited literacy. Alagwa uses an official harmonised orthography for Southern Cushitic languages, as outlined by Alphonce (2022), Mous (2016), and Kießling and Mous (2003). However, the lack of literacy materials in Alagwa has exacerbated this challenge. As a result, many Alagwa speakers are unable to write their names correctly or correct misspellings when they occur. This simplification process, combined with the challenges posed by unfamiliar orthographic conventions for both native and non-native speakers, has contributed to a shift in the native linguistic forms of personal names.

The rise of intermarriage between the Alagwa and other ethnic groups has introduced diverse naming traditions that differ from Alagwa customs. In mixed marriages, parents often choose neutral or externally influenced names rather than traditional names. This integration of naming practices reduces the transmission of indigenous names across generations, contributing to their decline. Interaction and intermarriage with the Langi, a Bantu-speaking group, have significantly contributed to the decline of traditional names and naming practices. Langi individuals who marry into the Alagwa community, being unfamiliar with Alagwa sounds and orthography, often simplify pronunciation and alter the spelling of traditional names. Additionally, intermarriage has influenced Alagwa naming practices, leading to the incorporation of both patrilineal and matrilineal elements. Unlike the strictly patrilineal system of the Southern Cushitic Iraqw (Alphonce 2023), the Alagwa now allow children to be named after members of either the father's or mother's clan, particularly in families where the mother is Langi. This shift introduces matrilineal influences into Alagwa naming traditions. Furthermore, Langi naming customs, in which children receive names from both the paternal and maternal clans, have influenced the Alagwa even in families where both parents are Alagwa. Similarly, this naming approach has spread to the Burunge people, who, like the Alagwa, have had prolonged contact with both the Langi and the Gogo. This flexibility allows mothers to name children in honour of their family members, a practice traditionally uncommon among Cushitic groups (Schlee 1994; Alphonce 2023), where children are typically named after the father's clan lineage.

The decline of Alagwa names is closely tied to the erosion of traditional cultural practices, particularly rituals like sacrifices and offerings. In these rituals, traditional names are considered essential, and their decline has contributed to the decreased use of these names. However, a few Alagwa individuals who continue to observe these rituals maintain a dual naming system, using both traditional and modern names. As one consultant put it,

> We have abandoned the practice of rituals that use traditional names… As a result, many traditional names have fallen into disuse, although a few remain with those who still perform the rituals.

This highlights the importance of traditional names in rituals and worship, while modern names are used in Islamic and Christian practices. The use of both traditional and modern names reflects a blending of old and new traditions, helping preserve the continuity of traditional names amid shifting modern religious names. However, this practice is carried out by only a few Alagwa, who are often not publicly known, as practising traditional rituals is regarded as shameful or as paganism in the eyes of modern religions.

The decline in traditional naming practices is driven by the erosion of family-based customs due to the adoption of Islam and Christianity. Traditionally, Alagwa names were given by family members, such as parents, grandparents, and sometimes traditional midwives, based on clan lineage or circumstances surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. These practices included rituals like purifying the child with water and placing a white bead around their neck. However, as religious leaders, such as sheikhs and pastors, have taken over the naming role, the family's involvement has diminished. This shift has replaced traditional names and rituals with religious ceremonies like baptism in Christianity and purification rituals in Islam, distancing the community from its cultural heritage. This shift is further supported by a consultant's statement:

> One has to choose a name belonging to the denomination. You can consult your religious leader if the name is affiliated with that denomination. They sometimes give a name for the child, but we also choose names from religious texts. A name that does not affiliate with the denomination is not accepted.

This illustrates how religious authority now dictates naming practices, further sidelining traditional customs.

Negative attitudes towards traditional names have significantly contributed to their decline. The younger generation often finds these names difficult to pronounce and lacking formal orthography, making them less practical in modern contexts. The absence of written materials and a standardised orthography further hinders their preservation. As one informant shared, "*I did not feel comfortable introducing my mother by the name of Dosli; I said Halima, though she is not."* This reflects how traditional names are often seen as embarrassing, even in personal introductions, leading to a preference for more familiar, widely recognised names.

Traditional names are also perceived as outdated and tied to rural customs. One informant remarked: "*Young people don't want our traditional names; they say they are old and for the elderly."* Many are surprised when a young person still has a traditional name. This highlights a generational divide, where younger individuals view these names as symbols of a past lifestyle and avoid them, reflecting a broader shift towards modernity.

Social pressures further reinforce the preference for foreign names, particularly Islamic or Christian ones, which are associated with prestige and modernity. These names are also considered more suitable for religious practices such as prayers, funerals, and burials. As one elder explained: "*I wanted Islamic names because I will get a religious burial service... You know, the traditional burial does not have a burial prayer.*" This accentuates the practical benefits of religious names, suggesting that traditional ones are increasingly viewed as incompatible with modern religious practices.

Traditional names are also stigmatised as being linked to paganism. One informant shared: "*People used to ask, What is your pagan name? and your religious name? … If you tell them your traditional name, they ask, Aren't you baptised? Are you still pagan?"* These

remarks reveal how traditional names carry negative religious connotations, leading to their rejection in favour of those that align with dominant beliefs.

The findings reveal that naming practices among the Alagwa are influenced by the belief that names can shape a child's character and future. Names that denote or symbolise negative traits such as alcoholism, theft, laziness, tyranny, murder, a troubled mind, greed, witchcraft, or quarrelsomeness are deliberately avoided. Similarly, names of individuals known for such traits are also shunned. Both the meaning of a name and its association with a person's behaviour influence naming decisions. One interviewee explained:

> We could never name our child after my late uncle. He was a drunkard and often fought with people. If we gave his name to the baby, we feared the child would grow up just like him. Instead, we chose the name Mohamed so that our child would grow with good character and blessings.

To encourage positive qualities and ensure prosperity, families increasingly choose foreign religious names, particularly those of prophets, saints, celebrities, or respected figures. This reflects a desire to associate the child with favourable attributes, believing such names can bring success and well-being. However, this belief is not supported by empirical evidence, indicating that these practices are rooted in cultural perceptions rather than proven outcomes.

Another factor contributing to the decline of traditional Alagwa names is the perception that they lack aesthetic appeal. Interviewees reported that such names are considered less beautiful than Swahili or foreign names. In particular, Alagwa names featuring consonant clusters such as *tl*, *sl*, or *hh* are perceived as difficult or awkward-sounding, lacking the soft, melodic qualities associated with non-indigenous names. This phonetic preference has contributed to a shift away from traditional naming practices. For instance, one interviewee recounted how a young couple named their newborn *Amina* instead of the traditional name *Hhangire*, explaining that "Amina sounds smooth and sweet, whereas *Hhangire* feels heavy on the tongue." Such sentiments reflect a growing tendency to favour names perceived as more pleasant and internationally acceptable.

Another contributing factor is the decline of traditional festivals and naming customs. In the past, Alagwa naming practices were reinforced through cultural events and festivals, which offered opportunities to honour deceased relatives by naming children after them. However, as these traditions have declined, so has the practice of bestowing ancestral names. The community's focus has shifted to external social events, such as national and international celebrations, leading to the adoption of names from these sources. Names associated with political movements (e.g., *CCM*, *TANU*), historical figures (e.g., *Nyerere*), religious events (e.g., *Ramadan*, *Maulid*), and Swahili weekday names (e.g., *Alhamisi*, *Jumanne*, *Jumapili*) have increasingly replaced traditional Alagwa circumstantial names. The gradual abandonment of name inheritance rituals has further accelerated the loss of indigenous names, as children are now often given names without historical or familial connections.

Globalisation and the spread of foreign religions have significantly contributed to the decline of traditional Alagwa names. Increased exposure to foreign cultures, celebrities, and global communication through media and education has made modern, cosmopolitan names more appealing to younger generations. Names from Western, Arabic, and Swahili-speaking cultures are now preferred over traditional ones, often due to the perception that they carry greater social prestige or international recognition. Religious influences further discourage traditional names, as both Islamic and Christian communities favour religious naming. Many

individuals adopt such names to avoid associations with paganism, creating a growing disconnect from their cultural heritage. This pressure highlights how religion shapes identity and cultural practices, generating tension between preserving heritage and conforming to social expectations. The trend is reinforced by the influence of Islam, which discourages the use of traditional Alagwa names. For example, during an interview, a man reported that after converting to Islam, he renamed his son *Mohamed* instead of giving him a traditional name, explaining that "*an Islamic name is the only one allowed in that context."* Together, these forces have accelerated the abandonment of indigenous naming conventions. The preference for foreign names stems from their association with modernity, prestige, and social acceptability, while traditional names are increasingly viewed as outdated and tied to practices no longer deemed relevant.

Another important trigger is migration and urbanisation. As Alagwa individuals increasingly migrate to urban areas for education, employment, and better living conditions, there is a growing tendency to adopt names that are more recognisable, pronounceable, and socially acceptable within broader Tanzanian society. Traditional names, which may be perceived as rural or unfamiliar in urban settings, are often replaced by Swahili, Arabic, or Christian names, facilitating social integration and improving access to opportunities. One interviewee shared: My children who moved to towns and cities like Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Dodoma did not give their children Alagwa names. This is also true for those living in towns.

Media influence also plays a significant role in shifting naming practices. Increased exposure to television, radio, social media, and other forms of mass communication introduces Alagwa youth to popular culture figures, celebrities, and fictional characters who bear non-traditional names. These influences contribute to a preference for global or Swahili-based names, which are seen as more fashionable, prestigious, or aspirational, further accelerating the decline of indigenous Alagwa naming customs. For example, a mother from the Alagwa community mentioned that she named her son *Obama,* after the famous U.S. president, rather than using a traditional name. Many similar cases were reported during interviews.

4.5 Implications of declining Alagwa personal naming practices

The death of traditional naming practices in this community, similar to trends across other African societies, has led to significant linguistic and cultural shifts. One key consequence is the loss of lexical richness, as indigenous names and their meanings are increasingly replaced by foreign ones. This shift mirrors global trends, where the transition from tradition to modernity is marked by the adoption of Western, colonial, and religious practices (Ngubane & Thabethe 2013). Religious institutions have played a central role in displacing traditional naming rituals in favour of those linked to Christianity and Islam (Dwi 2020; Fakuade et al. 2019). Currently, globalisation and media are playing a great role in introducing the new generation to foreign names that fit their preferences and flavour.

The introduction of foreign names disrupts the social fabric of Alagwa naming practices. Indigenous names, once tied to family lineage, ethnicity, and circumstances, lose their cultural significance when replaced by modern names. This change is common across many African communities, where ancestral names are being replaced by foreign, often religious names (Fakuade et al. 2019) and dominant languages like Kiswahili in the case of Alagwa. Missionaries and religious leaders have significantly influenced this shift, with baptismal names increasingly supplanting indigenous ones. Adopting foreign names reflects

an aspiration to align with modern religious trends, where such names are associated with modernity, progress, and higher social status (Arega 2016; Fakuade et al. 2019; Teri 2024).

This transition diminishes the linguistic depth of the Alagwa language and weakens the intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge. As traditional naming rituals and other ceremonies where traditional names are used fade away, younger generations have fewer opportunities to connect with their heritage embedded in traditional personal naming practices. This mirrors the broader weakening of cultural ties due to colonialism and religious imperialism, leading to the negative perception that traditional names are outdated and unsuitable for modern society (Moyo 1996; Agbontaen-Eghafona 2007). The loss of these practices erodes the transmission of cultural and historical knowledge once embedded in names, as also reported by Lusekelo & Muro (2018), as well as environmental knowledge tied to personal naming practices.

The shift also affects phonological patterns and orthographic conventions of the Alagwa language. Traditional names use distinct sounds and orthographic conventions of the Alagwa language, but these are being replaced by other forms. This change diminishes the uniqueness of Alagwa sounds and graphemes and erodes indigenous phonetic and graphemic structures. This is similar to Teri's (2024) findings in the Iraqw language, where changes in sound patterns and graphemes resulted in a loss of linguistic distinctiveness in names, which could help with identity.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory (SIT), this shift in naming practices can be seen as a redefinition of social identity. Alagwa individuals, seeking integration into modern social structures, may align with globalised norms, leading to a loss of identity marked by indigenous names and the adoption of a global identity. This aligns with findings that adopting foreign names is a means of identifying with perceived modern, cosmopolitan, or religious groups (Hogg & Abrams 1988). This change reflects evolving social dynamics, where traditional names are seen as less relevant and outdated in a rapidly modernising and globalised world. As a result, the cultural identity of younger generations weakens. Personal names, once markers of ethnic, familial, and historical connections, lose their significance as they are replaced by foreign names. As noted by Mensah et al. (2020) and Fakuade et al. (2019), this shift signals the loss of the cultural and social knowledge that names once embodied. Another impact of the decline of traditional personal naming practices is the disruption of indigenous knowledge transmission embedded in these naming rituals. The displacement of traditional names represents a break in the transmission of indigenous knowledge related to naming rituals and the meaning and origin of names (Fakuade et al. 2018; Arega 2016). It also weakens cultural bonds and disrupts knowledge-sharing mechanisms tied to names (Lusekelo & Muro 2018; Teri 2024; Mwalyoyo 2024; Mensah et al. 2020).

To address the impacts of this decline, several practical steps can be taken. Reviving indigenous naming rituals through community workshops can reconnect the Alagwa with their cultural heritage and foster positive attitudes toward traditional names. Religious leaders should be encouraged to support the use of indigenous names among converts, as these names often carry similar meanings to those used in religious settings. Additionally, documenting traditional names along with their meanings, sounds, and graphemes in both digital and physical archives will ensure their preservation for future generations. Community awareness campaigns, including cultural festivals and rituals, can further highlight the value of indigenous naming practices. These efforts will help safeguard Alagwa names, reinforce cultural identity, promote language preservation, and sustain indigenous traditions in a rapidly modernising society.

The limited use of traditional Alagwa names in formal registers reflects a broader transformation driven by a generational shift in naming practices and changing sociocultural attitudes toward religious and cultural identity. These factors are closely intertwined: most Alagwa children today no longer receive traditional names at birth, as they are increasingly replaced by names deemed more modern or prestigious within dominant religious frameworks. This departure from traditional naming is reinforced by perceptions that indigenous names are incompatible with Islamic and Christian beliefs. As a result, even those who bear traditional names often avoid using them in religious settings, where they are viewed as conflicting with faith-based identity. While formal institutions like schools do not explicitly prohibit traditional names, cultural and religious pressures discourage their use, reducing their visibility in official and public domains. This marginalisation in formal registers accelerates the erosion of traditional Alagwa names and signals their potential disappearance within the community.

Although comprehensive data across Tanzanian ethnic groups is limited, evidence suggests the decline is particularly acute among the Alagwa. Current data show that none of the individuals listed in surveyed registers bear traditional Alagwa names. In contrast, Teri (2024) notes that a small number of traditional names are still used among the Iraqw, another Cushitic-speaking group. While naming patterns among Bantu communities are less systematically documented, Mwalyoyo (2024) observes a rising preference for Swahili, religious, and English-influenced names among the Safwa. Similarly, Lusekelo and Muro (2018) report that among the Machame, individuals often retain both childhood names and baptismal names, indicating a level of dual-name retention that contrasts with the more complete shift observed among the Alagwa.

5 Conclusion

The decline of traditional personal naming practices within the Alagwa community has had significant linguistic and cultural consequences. Naming practices play a crucial role in preserving language and transmitting cultural values, as they are deeply embedded in ceremonies and rituals. Their loss contributes to broader cultural erosion, weakening the community's connection to its heritage. This study shows that the abandonment of traditional names has been influenced by factors such as modern religions, globalisation, and interethnic marriages. Older generations, particularly during burial ceremonies, have adopted religious names to avoid discrimination, accelerating the decline of indigenous naming. As modern religious identities become more dominant, future generations risk growing further disconnected from their cultural roots. Despite these challenges, a small but growing movement within the Alagwa community is working to reclaim traditional names, offering hope for cultural and linguistic revitalisation. For this movement to succeed, key obstacles must be addressed, especially the reluctance of religious leaders to accept traditional names. Promoting open dialogue and raising awareness about the cultural significance of names can help underscore their role in identity preservation. Community leaders can propose compromise solutions, such as using traditional names alongside religious ones, to balance spiritual and cultural identities. Additionally, reviving naming rituals and systematically documenting traditional names are practical steps the Alagwa can take to safeguard their heritage in an increasingly globalised world.

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In SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics [online]. 2025, vol. 22, no. 1 [cit. 2025-06-30]. Available on web page http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL58/07.pdf. ISSN 1336-782X