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Negotiating Young Adulthood in Ugandan Literature: Identity in Kimenye's Moses Series and Namukasa's Stories

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This article examines the negotiation of young adulthood and identity formation in Ugandan literature through a close reading of Barbara Kimenye's Moses series and Glaydah Namukasa's short stories *The Pact* and *Girlie*. The study situates these works within broader African literary discourses on adolescence, transition, and socio-cultural belonging, with specific attention to the Ugandan postcolonial context. Drawing from postcolonial theory, youth studies, and identity construction frameworks, it interrogates how young protagonists navigate shifting roles, expectations, and self-concepts amidst the intersecting pressures of family, peers, education, and socio-economic change. Kimenye's Moses series, set primarily in a Ugandan boarding school, portrays adolescence as a space of playful rebellion, communal bonding, and gradual moral negotiation. The protagonist, Moses, becomes a focal point for exploring the tensions between institutional authority and youthful agency, revealing how humour and camaraderie serve as tools for self-assertion and social learning. In contrast, Namukasa's stories, set against contemporary urban and peri-urban backdrops, confront the challenges of girlhood and young womanhood, including issues of friendship, sexuality, betrayal, and socio-economic vulnerability. Through *The Pact* and *Girlie*, Namukasa foregrounds the gendered dimensions of young adulthood, showing how female protagonists navigate restrictive cultural scripts while asserting individual desires. By juxtaposing Kimenye's light-hearted, male-centred narratives with Namukasa's more intimate and gender-conscious portrayals, this article reveals how Ugandan children's and young adult literature collectively engages with themes of resilience, negotiation, and identity-making. It argues that these works challenge linear, Western-centric models of adolescence by depicting it as a socially embedded, culturally mediated, and at times precarious process. The analysis highlights how language, narrative voice, and character agency reflect both continuity and change in Ugandan youth experiences. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Kimenye and

Namukasa contribute significantly to African literary representations of young adulthood, offering nuanced portraits that resist reductive categorisations. Their works not only document the lived realities of Ugandan youth but also invite critical reflection on how identity is actively shaped within complex socio-cultural and historical landscapes. This intersectional reading underscores the role of Ugandan literature in expanding global understandings of adolescence and identity beyond dominant Euro-American frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

Situating the Study within Ugandan YAL Literary Scholarship, in the Post-colonial Epoch

Children's and young adult literature (YAL) in Uganda has undergone significant growth since independence in 1962, reflecting shifting social, cultural, and political realities. Early post-independence literary production largely focused on nation-building narratives and the reclamation of indigenous identity from colonial frameworks (Kiguli, 2010). Over time, Ugandan writers began to diversify thematic concerns, giving increased attention to childhood and youth as distinct life stages with unique cultural negotiations (Kiguli & Nansubuga, 2015). This shift paralleled global scholarly recognition of young adult literature (YAL) as a vital space for exploring identity formation, agency, and belonging (Nikolajeva, 2014). Within Uganda, this literary subfield remains underexplored, despite its role in mediating young people's engagement with societal norms and their negotiation of personal and communal identities.

Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series, first published in the 1960s, occupies a seminal place in East African children's literature, offering humorous yet socially observant portrayals of school life, peer relations, and moral dilemmas. Through the mischievous yet relatable protagonist, Kimenye crafts narratives that reflect both the aspirations and constraints of postcolonial Ugandan youth (Stratton, 1994). Her work captures a transitional historical moment, where traditional community values intersected with emerging modern educational and social structures. Similarly, Gladys Namukasa's short stories "The Pact" and "Girlie Surprise" (2008) engage contemporary realities, including peer influence, socio-economic pressures, and the gendered dimensions of youth experience. Both authors, though separated by decades, situate their young protagonists at the crossroads of cultural expectation and personal desire, providing rich material for examining how Ugandan literature constructs and contests youth identity.

This study situates itself within Ugandan literary scholarship that interrogates identity formation in children's and young adult narratives. It draws on postcolonial literary theory and identity studies to explore how Kimenye and Namukasa represent young adulthood as a liminal stage marked by negotiation, resistance, and adaptation. By juxtaposing the historical context of the *Moses* series with the contemporary concerns in Namukasa's fiction, the research foregrounds continuities and shifts in the literary negotiation of youth identity. In doing so, it contributes to filling a notable gap in African literary criticism, where the representation of young people's lived realities in Ugandan fiction remains a marginalised yet critical domain (Obbo, 2018; Wandera, 2021).

Examining identity negotiation during young adulthood is crucial in African literary discourse because this transitional stage shapes how individuals navigate personal, cultural, and socio-political realities within postcolonial contexts. In Ugandan literature, depictions of young adulthood—such as in Kimenye's *Moses* series and Namukasa's short stories—illuminate how characters contend with tensions between tradition and modernity, rural and urban influences, and inherited and self-fashioned identities. This focus not only captures the dynamism of identity formation in rapidly changing African societies but also foregrounds youth as active agents in redefining communal values, resisting marginalisation, and articulating their place in the national narrative (Nnodim, 2010; Stroud, 2015). By situating these portrayals within the broader discourse on African childhood and adolescence, scholars can better understand the literary strategies that negotiate belonging, agency, and transformation in post-independence Uganda.

Despite the growing corpus of Ugandan children's and young adult literature, there remains a notable paucity of comparative scholarship examining how different authors navigate the complexities of youth identity formation, particularly during the

transitional stage of young adulthood. While Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series has attracted attention for its humor and portrayal of everyday urban childhood, and Glaydah Namukasa's short stories such as "The Pact" and "Girlie Surprise" have been praised for their engagement with adolescent dilemmas in more intimate, contemporary contexts, these works are seldom analyzed in tandem to illuminate convergences and divergences in their constructions of youth identity within Uganda's shifting socio-cultural landscape (Ocan, 2022, 2023). Existing studies often treat Kimenye and Namukasa in isolation, overlooking the potential insights that a comparative reading could yield about intergenerational shifts in narrative strategies, thematic emphases, and representations of agency among young protagonists. This gap is significant because such comparative analysis not only bridges the divide between post-independence and 21st-century Ugandan narratives for youth but also deepens our understanding of how literature mediates cultural negotiations of adolescence and early adulthood in diverse temporal and socio-political contexts (Ocan, 2023).

In *Kimenye's Moses* series and Namukasa's short stories, the negotiation of identity during young adulthood emerges as a dynamic process shaped by socio-cultural expectations, peer influence, and personal agency, reflecting the complex realities of Ugandan youth. Kimenye crafts Moses as a witty, adaptable protagonist whose encounters with school life, authority, and friendship foreground the negotiation between individuality and community norms, illustrating how resilience and humour facilitate identity formation within shifting social spaces (Kimenye, 2002). Conversely, Namukasa's narratives depict young female protagonists navigating educational aspirations, gendered expectations, and intergenerational tensions, thereby emphasising the intersectionality of identity and the structural constraints that define young adulthood in Ugandan contexts (Namukasa, 2010). Together, these texts present identity negotiation

not as a linear journey toward selfhood but as a fluid, relational process, where young people engage in continual acts of self-definition in response to competing cultural scripts (Ocan, 2025).

Ugandan literary scholarship has increasingly recognised the significance of children's and young adult literature in articulating postcolonial identities, yet little comparative attention has been given to how different authors negotiate the complexities of young adulthood. This study addresses that gap by examining Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series and Namukasa's short stories, arguing that both foreground the socio-cultural specificity of Ugandan youth identity formation through narratives that balance individual agency with communal expectations. Framed within postcolonial theory, identity negotiation frameworks, and African childhood studies, "young adulthood" here is conceptualised as a transitional life stage shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional forces. Through qualitative textual analysis of purposively selected works, the study adopts a comparative approach to reveal how Kimenye uses humour and resilience to depict school life, authority, and peer relations, while Namukasa foregrounds gendered experiences, moral dilemmas, and socio-cultural constraints. The analysis demonstrates both convergences—in highlighting adaptability, moral growth, and communal belonging—and divergences—in tone, thematic emphasis, and gendered subjectivity—thereby extending African literary discourse on youth identity. The findings suggest that a culturally grounded reading of Ugandan narratives enriches postcolonial literary theory and calls for further research on the diverse trajectories of young adulthood in African contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series occupies a pivotal space in Ugandan literature by portraying the complexities of young adulthood within a postcolonial context. Scholars such as Kyobutungi (2022) have analysed Kimenye's works,

highlighting how her characters navigate issues of identity, autonomy, and vulnerability in a society that often marginalises the youth. Kyobutungi's research underscores the significance of Kimenye's portrayal of young adults, emphasising their struggles and resilience in the face of societal challenges. This focus on young adulthood in Kimenye's fiction contributes to a broader understanding of how Ugandan literature reflects and shapes the experiences of its youth.

In parallel, Glaydah Namukasa's works, particularly *Voice of a Dream*, further enrich the discourse on young adulthood in Ugandan literature. Namukasa's narratives explore the internal and external conflicts of young adult characters, emphasising their struggles with societal norms and personal aspirations. Her portrayal of young adults underscores the tension between individual desires and collective expectations, offering a critique of the structures that shape identity formation in Uganda.

Collectively, the works of Kimenye and Namukasa contribute significantly to the understanding of young adulthood in Ugandan literature. Their narratives not only highlight the personal journeys of young adults but also reflect the broader societal dynamics that influence identity formation. By examining these texts, scholars can gain deeper insights into the complexities of youth identity in postcolonial Uganda, shedding light on the enduring relevance of these literary works in contemporary discussions on youth, identity, and society.

Glaydah Namukasa's short stories, particularly "My New Home," (2013;2017), offer poignant explorations of young adulthood in contemporary Ugandan literature. Through the lens of a young boy grappling with the aftermath of his mother's alcoholism and death, Namukasa delves into themes of identity, resilience, and the complexities of familial relationships. The narrative's introspective tone and vivid portrayal of the boy's internal conflicts underscore the challenges faced by young individuals in navigating their identities amidst

societal and familial expectations. Namukasa's work contributes significantly to Ugandan literature by providing a nuanced perspective on the adolescent experience, highlighting the interplay between personal aspirations and the socio-cultural dynamics that shape them.

Existing scholarship on Ugandan young adult literature has extensively examined identity formation in isolation, particularly in Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series (Ocita, 2005) and Glaydah Namukasa's short stories (Serugo, 2013). However, there is a conspicuous lack of sustained comparative analysis that interrogates how young adult protagonists navigate the social, cultural, and moral landscapes of Uganda across these distinct literary registers. Most studies either focus on Kimenye's humour-infused episodic narratives or Namukasa's introspective portrayals of adolescence, neglecting the interplay between traditional, postcolonial, and contemporary pressures on identity negotiation. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of how generational, gendered, and socio-cultural factors coalesce in shaping Ugandan youth subjectivities, thereby constraining broader theoretical insights into African young adulthood in literature. Addressing this lacuna promises to illuminate the nuanced ways in which identity is performed, contested, and reconstructed within Ugandan narrative traditions.

Theoretical Framework

In examining young adulthood in Ugandan literature, Postcolonial Theory, particularly Homi Bhabha's (1994) conceptualisation of hybridity, offers a robust framework for understanding the negotiation of tradition and modernity in identity formation. Bhabha's notion of the "third space" illuminates how young protagonists navigate overlapping cultural, social, and historical influences, generating new, hybrid identities that neither fully conform to colonial legacies nor traditional norms. In Kimenye's *Moses* series, Moses embodies this hybridity through his playful yet astute engagement with school authority, peer

hierarchies, and communal expectations, reflecting a negotiation between inherited Ugandan social mores and emergent modern sensibilities (Kimenye, 2002). Similarly, Namukasa's short stories depict young adults contending with gendered expectations, educational aspirations, and globalised cultural influences, revealing identity as an ongoing process of adaptation and resistance (Namukasa, 2007). Employing Bhabha's framework enables a nuanced reading of these narratives as sites where young Ugandans reconcile conflicting demands of tradition and modernity, highlighting the dynamic interplay between cultural continuity, personal agency, and social change. This theoretical lens foregrounds the socio-cultural specificity of young adulthood in Uganda, emphasising that identity formation is neither linear nor monolithic but a negotiated space shaped by historical, political, and cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Kimenye, 2002; Namukasa, 2007).

Narrative Identity Theory, as advanced by McAdams (1993), posits that individuals construct and continuously revise their identities through the personal stories they tell about their lives, integrating past experiences with future aspirations to create a coherent sense of self. In the context of Ugandan young adult literature, particularly Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series and Glaydah Namukasa's short stories, this theoretical lens illuminates how protagonists negotiate the tensions between tradition and modernity while grappling with hybrid cultural identities. The narratives in these works serve not merely as plots but as mechanisms through which young characters articulate, reconcile, and experiment with multiple social and cultural influences, reflecting both inherited communal norms and emergent modern values. By foregrounding storytelling as a site of identity formation, Narrative Identity Theory underscores the dynamic processes through which these protagonists negotiate their evolving selves, rendering hybrid identities legible and intelligible within their socio-cultural contexts (McAdams, 1993). Consequently, these narratives reveal the

interplay between personal agency and societal expectations, illustrating how storytelling mediates the reconciliation of local traditions with modernity, shaping a nuanced understanding of young adulthood in Uganda.

Complementing this, Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory (1994) foregrounds the concept of hybridity, emphasising how colonially influenced societies negotiate the interstices between tradition and modernity. Bhabha's notion of the "third space" illuminates how Kimenye's and Namukasa's characters inhabit liminal positions, negotiating cultural ambiguity, and redefining identity beyond binary frameworks of coloniser/colonised or rural/urban. Where Narrative Identity Theory prioritises subjective meaning-making, Postcolonial Theory foregrounds sociopolitical and cultural structures, offering insight into the relational and performative dimensions of identity. The comparative advantage of McAdams lies in its micro-level focus on internalised storytelling and psychological coherence, whereas Bhabha provides a macro-level lens on cultural negotiation and hybridity, particularly relevant in postcolonial Ugandan settings where global modernity intersects with indigenous norms. Integrating both frameworks facilitates a comprehensive understanding of young adult identity as simultaneously internally narrated and externally negotiated within a complex, hybridised cultural landscape (Bhabha, 1994; McAdams, 1993; Serugo, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach complemented by comparative literary methods to examine identity formation in Ugandan young adult literature (Given, 2008). The texts analysed include selected novels from Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series and Glaydah Namukasa's short stories, *The Pact* and *Girlie Surprise*. This approach enables a nuanced exploration of character development, the negotiation of socio-cultural expectations, and the ways in which narrative voice

and language shape readers' understanding of youth identity. By integrating comparative literary techniques, the study highlights both convergences and divergences in representations of adolescence across different temporal, cultural, and stylistic contexts. Such an approach is particularly effective in unpacking the multidimensional nature of identity negotiation in Ugandan literature, foregrounding the interplay between individual agency and societal norms.

A central analytical focus of this study is character development and the markers through which identity is expressed. In Kimenye's *Moses* series, protagonists navigate everyday social challenges within school and community settings, with humour and episodic adventures shaping their self-perception and moral reasoning (Ocita, 2005). In contrast, Namukasa's protagonists in *The Pact* and *Girlie Surprise* confront more complex psychosocial realities, including peer pressure, gender expectations, and the negotiation of personal ambition within a restrictive socio-political environment (Serugo, 2013). By examining character arcs and pivotal narrative moments, the study illuminates the processes through which young adults in Uganda negotiate personal identity, revealing how both series use differing narrative strategies to depict maturation, resilience, and moral consciousness.

Cultural, gender, and socio-political influences constitute another critical dimension of analysis. The *Moses* series foregrounds communal and familial norms that guide behaviour, often reflecting a largely urban, school-centred culture, whereas Namukasa's narratives foreground gendered experiences and social stratification that affect young women's autonomy and identity formation (Serugo, 2013). Comparative analysis exposes how these factors intersect with age and social context to produce distinctive identity trajectories. Gender emerges as particularly salient, with Namukasa's protagonists negotiating societal expectations that restrict female agency, contrasting with Kimenye's

gender-neutral, humour-driven framing of adolescence. Such insights underscore the importance of socio-cultural context in shaping narrative constructions of youth identity, demonstrating the interaction between individual choice and structural constraints.

Narrative voice and language use further enhance the understanding of youth identity in these texts. Kimenye's use of direct, episodic storytelling and colloquial dialogue creates an intimate, accessible portrayal of adolescence, allowing readers to experience the protagonist's perspective firsthand (Ocita, 2005; Johnson, Denis, & Charles, 2022). Namukasa, however, employs more reflective, emotive language, often embedding social critique and intertextual references that complicate straightforward identification with the narrator (Serugo, 2013). Comparative attention to these narrative techniques reveals how stylistic choices mediate the reader's engagement with identity formation, highlighting the capacity of narrative form to shape perceptions of adolescence, agency, and social belonging.

Therefore, the combination of qualitative textual analysis and comparative literary methods provides a robust framework for examining youth identity in Ugandan literature. By focusing on character development, socio-cultural and gender influences, and narrative voice, the study reveals both convergent and divergent approaches to representing young adulthood in Kimenye's *Moses* series and Namukasa's short stories. These findings contribute to broader debates on African youth literature, offering insights into the ways in which narrative strategies mediate the negotiation of tradition, modernity, and selfhood in literary constructions of adolescence. Such a framework underscores the importance of context-sensitive literary analysis in capturing the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial societies.

ANALYSIS

The negotiation of school and peer relationships in Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* (1980) and Glaydah Namukasa's *The Pact* (2007) illuminates distinct approaches to adolescent identity formation in Ugandan literature. In Kimenye, humour and mischief operate as social lubricants, allowing protagonists to navigate hierarchies, assert agency, and construct a collective identity within the boarding school context. The playful pranks and comic scenarios not only reinforce camaraderie among peers but also subtly critique authority figures, reflecting the delicate balance between conformity and resistance in adolescent life. Conversely, Namukasa foregrounds internal conflict between loyalty and ambition, portraying young protagonists grappling with personal goals while negotiating expectations from peers and the wider community. This contrast underscores divergent narrative strategies in depicting adolescence: communal solidarity in Kimenye and introspective moral negotiation in Namukasa (Kimenye, 1980; Namukasa, 2007).

Family and community expectations emerge as critical axes around which young adult identities are negotiated in both texts. Parental authority and adherence to community norms function simultaneously as support and constraint, shaping decisions and moral reasoning. In Kimenye, the boarding school setting mediates familial influence, as students navigate autonomy under the watchful eyes of housemasters and peers, often deploying humour to negotiate limits. Namukasa, however, situates her characters in rural-urban transitional spaces where familial and community expectations are more immediate and palpable, generating tension between personal aspiration and social obligation. This contrast illustrates how spatial and institutional contexts mediate the interplay between autonomy and socialisation in Ugandan adolescent literature (Namukasa, 2007; Kimenye, 1980).

Urban boarding school life in Kimenye offers a unique lens for exploring peer culture and

adolescent agency. Students inhabit a highly structured, yet socially dynamic environment that encourages both conformity and subversion. Humour, mischief, and playful resistance are central tools through which characters assert individuality while maintaining group cohesion. By contrast, Namukasa's rural and transitional urban settings depict adolescence as a negotiation between emerging selfhood and embedded social structures. Here, identity formation is entangled with communal memory, kinship obligations, and socio-economic realities, highlighting how physical and cultural landscapes influence young adult experiences (Namukasa, 2007; Kimenye, 1980).

Gender and self-assertion are particularly salient in shaping the adolescent experience in both authors' works. Drawing on Nfah-Abbenyi's (1997) framework, which focuses on gender, Kimenye illustrates gendered expectations subtly through the distribution of mischief and leadership among boys and girls, often reaffirming social norms while allowing strategic agency. In Namukasa's *Girlie Surprise*, female protagonists actively resist domestic and societal limitations, negotiating spaces for self-expression and personal ambition. These narratives demonstrate the intersection of gendered socialisation and identity formation, foregrounding the negotiation of agency within restrictive cultural frameworks (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Namukasa, 2007; Ocan, 2025).

Narrative strategies and linguistic choices further differentiate the texts' portrayals of adolescence. Kimenye employs humour, irony, and colloquial English to convey the immediacy of school life and peer interactions, creating a participatory and immersive adolescent perspective. Namukasa, in contrast, utilises a realist, introspective, and occasionally moralistic tone, inviting readers into the inner conflicts and ethical dilemmas of her protagonists. These stylistic divergences reflect the authors' distinct aims: Kimenye emphasises social play and collective identity, whereas Namukasa foregrounds reflective engagement with moral and

social responsibility (Kimenye, 1980; Namukasa, 2007).

Thus, comparative analysis of Kimenye and Namukasa reveals nuanced mechanisms through which young Ugandan protagonists negotiate identity. School and peer dynamics, family and community expectations, gendered norms, and narrative voice converge to construct complex adolescent selves that oscillate between compliance and resistance. The interplay between humour, mischief, introspection, and moral tension elucidates the diverse ways in which Ugandan literature portrays the negotiation of young adulthood, bridging collective and individual experiences within culturally and spatially mediated contexts. Such insights underscore the value of literary analysis in understanding the intricate socialisation processes that shape youth identity in postcolonial Uganda.

DISCUSSION

Negotiating young adulthood in Ugandan literature is intricately tied to the intersections of personal and collective identity, where protagonists' self-understanding is both an individual and social process. In Kimenye's *Moses* series, humour, mischief, and school-based adventures serve as a lens through which personal identity is continuously negotiated against the backdrop of peer groups, familial expectations, and community norms (Kimenye, 1980). Similarly, Namukasa's *The Pact* explores the tension between loyalty and ambition, foregrounding the relational aspect of identity, where choices made by young adults are inseparable from their responsibilities to others (Namukasa, 2007). Both literary worlds reveal that personal identity in Ugandan youth is deeply relational; the individual is constantly situated within the matrix of social expectations, reflecting Eriksonian notions of identity formation as both personal and socially mediated (Erikson, 1968).

Socio-political history emerges as a critical shaping force in these narratives, influencing not only

character development but also the contours of adolescence itself. The Moses series situates boarding school life within postcolonial Uganda, capturing how colonial legacies, educational structures, and evolving social hierarchies frame adolescents' daily experiences (Kimenye, 1980). Namukasa, meanwhile, situates her stories within urban and semi-urban settings that reflect post-independence socio-political challenges, including class mobility, gender expectations, and familial pressures (Namukasa, 2007). These socio-historical backdrops highlight that identity formation is inseparable from historical contingencies; the personal dilemmas of young adults cannot be fully understood without reference to broader political and social forces, underscoring Bhabha's (1994) assertion that identity emerges in the liminal space between tradition and modernity.

Cultural specificity in these texts provides rich insights into uniquely Ugandan modes of negotiating adolescence, yet these narratives also reveal universal themes of belonging, autonomy, and self-definition. Kimenye's use of boarding school humour and mischief illuminates culturally grounded practices of friendship and rivalry, while Namukasa's focus on moral dilemmas and familial obligations resonates with global youth concerns about negotiating independence and loyalty (Kimenye, 1980; Namukasa, 2007). The balance between culturally embedded experiences and universal identity struggles suggests that while the socio-cultural context shapes the texture of adolescence, the underlying developmental tensions—such as peer influence, ambition, and ethical negotiation—transcend geographic and temporal boundaries (McAdams, 1993).

The narratives also underscore the dynamic interplay between collective and individual identity. In both authors' works, young protagonists often perform and experiment with identity within peer groups, using humour, mischief, or moral decision-making as strategies to assert individuality while maintaining social cohesion (Kimenye, 1980;

Namukasa, 2007). This dual negotiation reflects a broader postcolonial tension, where modernity's promise of individual self-expression coexists with communal norms that prescribe behaviour. By foregrounding these negotiations, the literature illuminates how adolescents inhabit both personal and collective spheres simultaneously, negotiating the boundaries between self-interest and social responsibility.

Gender emerges as a salient lens through which these intersections of identity are mediated. In Namukasa's narratives, female protagonists navigate complex societal expectations regarding ambition, friendship, and relational loyalty, while Kimenye's male-centred stories depict the pressures of conformity, risk-taking, and male camaraderie (Kimenye, 1980; Namukasa, 2007). These gendered experiences illustrate that identity formation is not only culturally and historically situated but also structured by power dynamics and social roles, reinforcing the argument that adolescent development cannot be divorced from the intersectional forces of gender, culture, and socio-political context (Crenshaw, 1991).

In conclusion, the literary examination of young adulthood in Ugandan texts reveals that identity formation is simultaneously personal, collective, culturally specific, and historically situated. Kimenye and Namukasa offer complementary perspectives on how adolescents negotiate selfhood within complex socio-political and cultural terrains. The interplay of humour, moral dilemmas, social expectations, and historical context underscores the multifaceted nature of youth identity, suggesting that Ugandan literature provides a nuanced model for understanding adolescence both within and beyond local contexts. These findings affirm the significance of integrating narrative identity theory and postcolonial perspectives in literary analyses of African youth, highlighting the intricate processes through which young adults construct and perform identity (McAdams, 1993; Bhabha, 1994).

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Ugandan young adult literature, as exemplified in Kimenyé's *Moses* series and Namukasa's short stories, presents a nuanced negotiation of identity that intertwines personal aspirations with collective cultural expectations. The analysis reveals that protagonists navigate complex intersections of tradition and modernity, urban and rural experiences, and familial and peer pressures, thereby illuminating the diverse pathways through which young Ugandans construct selfhood. By foregrounding humour, mischief, loyalty, and ambition, these narratives contribute significantly to Ugandan and broader African literary criticism, underscoring the vitality of youth perspectives in shaping literary discourse and challenging monolithic portrayals of African adolescence.

The findings carry important implications for both literary scholarship and educational policy. They suggest that literature serves not only as a mirror reflecting the lived realities of young people but also as a tool for fostering critical engagement with identity formation, social responsibility, and cultural negotiation. Integrating such literary texts into educational curricula could enhance students' understanding of their own developmental and social contexts, promote empathy across diverse backgrounds, and cultivate nuanced literacy that bridges traditional values and contemporary challenges. By recognising the intricate ways literature mediates youth experiences, educators and policymakers can better support holistic youth development in Uganda and across Africa.

Future research should extend these insights to emergent literary forms and digital-era narratives, particularly examining how contemporary Ugandan young adult fiction reflects the evolving social, technological, and cultural landscapes. Comparative studies across generations of writers and platforms—print, online, and multimedia storytelling—could illuminate shifts in identity construction, peer dynamics, and socio-political

engagement. Such work would not only expand understanding of Ugandan youth representation but also position African young adult literature within global discourses on adolescence, identity, and the transformative power of narrative in a rapidly changing world.

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