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### Naming as Cultural Epistemology: Knowledge, Belief, and Identity in Lango Personal Naming

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#### Keywords:

*Lango naming practices, Ethnolinguistics, Indigenous knowledge systems, African onomastics, Cultural identity, Symbolic interactionism, Northern Uganda.*

This epistemological study examined Lango personal naming practices among Northern Uganda's Lango people as rich cultural narratives that encode identity, ecology, and spirituality. Employing a qualitative design grounded in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, we analysed 131 personal names collected from 78 purposively selected elders, clan leaders, traditional birth attendants, linguists, and cultural custodians. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, key informant sessions, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis, conducted in Leb Lango and translated for thematic content analysis using open, axial, and selective coding. The findings organised names into eleven thematic domains: birth circumstances and physical conditions; environmental and ecological contexts; hardship, suffering, and resilience; joy, blessing, and prosperity; social conflict and relationships; spiritual and apotropaic functions; power, warfare, and strength; time, sequence, and birth order; place and spatial context; personality and destiny; and rituals, symbolism and kinship. Within these domains, names operate as micro-histories—descriptive, situational, and symbolic cultural artefacts that preserve lived realities and collective memory. Illustratively, Oceng/Aceng signifies daylight birth and social visibility; Alele encodes rainfall and ecological fertility; Okech/Akech reflects famine and resilience; while Owiti/Awiti embodies apotropaic protection through symbolic rejection. Contrasting with Western naming systems that often emphasise aesthetics, Lango anthroponymy reveals profound socio-cultural depth, embedding environmental awareness, emotional experience, and metaphysical beliefs into identity formation. Theoretically informed by symbolic interactionism, Geertzian thick description, and indigenous knowledge systems, the study positions Lango child naming as an epistemological practice through which knowledge is produced, transmitted, and sustained across generations. The study contributes to African onomastics by highlighting the specificity of Lango naming practices, particularly their agrarian ecological consciousness, unreserved acknowledgement of adversity, and protective metaphysical orientation. It underscores the urgent need for systematic documentation, integration of indigenous naming knowledge into educational

curricula in Northern Uganda, and expanded comparative research across Nilotic societies to preserve and advance this dynamic and meaningful identity system.

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## INTRODUCTION

Personal naming practices in African societies constitute a deeply embedded cultural system through which identity, history, and social meaning are constructed and communicated. Unlike many Western naming conventions that often prioritise aesthetics or familial continuity, African anthroponymy is profoundly descriptive, situational, and symbolic, reflecting lived experiences and collective memory (Mbiti, 1991). Among the Lango people of Northern Uganda, personal names function not merely as identifiers but as narrative devices encoding information about birth circumstances, environmental conditions, social relationships, and spiritual beliefs. Each name represents a micro-history, preserving the context of a child's birth and situating the individual within broader cultural, ecological, and cosmological frameworks.

Despite the richness of African naming systems, scholarly attention to specific ethnic traditions such as those of the Lango remains limited. Existing literature on African onomastics has largely focused on broader linguistic or regional analyses (Agyekum, 2006; Koopman, 2002), often overlooking localised cultural nuances that provide

deeper insight into the relationship between language and society. This gap is particularly significant in the context of rapid social transformation, where globalisation, formal education, and religious change increasingly influence naming practices, potentially leading to the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. Without systematic documentation and analysis, the cultural meanings embedded in Lango names risk being marginalised or lost altogether.

Lango naming practices reveal a complex interplay between individual experience and collective interpretation, where names act as symbolic representations of social realities. For instance, names derived from birth conditions capture the phenomenological aspects of human existence, while those linked to environmental events reflect a deep ecological consciousness rooted in agrarian life. Similarly, names associated with hardship, conflict, or resilience provide insight into historical and social challenges, transforming personal adversity into shared cultural narratives. Spiritual and apotropaic names further demonstrate the centrality of metaphysical beliefs, illustrating how naming functions as both a protective mechanism and a means of negotiating unseen forces. In this way, the naming system operates as a

multidimensional framework through which the Lango interpret and organise their world.

The present study sought to systematically analyse 131 Lango personal names by categorising them into coherent thematic domains and examining the cultural meanings embedded within them. Specifically, the study identified patterns in naming practices; explored the socio-cultural, ecological, and spiritual contexts reflected in these names, and contributed to broader theoretical discussions in African onomastics and linguistic anthropology. By these analyses, the research positions naming as an epistemological practice through which knowledge is produced, preserved, and transmitted across generations.

The study was grounded in symbolic interactionism, which emphasises the role of shared symbols in the construction of social meaning (Blumer, 1969). Within this framework, names are understood as culturally negotiated symbols that derive significance through collective interpretation and usage. The interpretivist paradigm further informed the analysis by prioritising the understanding of subjective meanings and cultural contexts (Geertz, 1973), allowing names to be examined as texts that require contextual interpretation. Additionally, the study drew on perspectives from indigenous knowledge systems, which recognise local cultural practices as legitimate forms of knowledge production (Battiste, 2002). These theoretical orientations collectively supported an analytical approach that views Lango names not merely as linguistic elements but as complex cultural artefacts embedded within social, historical, and spiritual realities.

By providing a comprehensive thematic analysis of these names, this study contributes to the preservation and scholarly recognition of indigenous Lango personal child naming systems. It highlighted the importance of language as a repository of cultural knowledge and underscored the need for more localised and context-sensitive research within African studies. Ultimately, the

study demonstrated that Lango's personal child naming practices represent a sophisticated and dynamic system of meaning-making, offering valuable insights into how communities understand identity, experience, and existence.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative ethnolinguistic research design grounded in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms. The design is informed by the understanding that social reality is socially constructed and must be interpreted within its cultural context (Geertz, 1973). Geertz's "thick description" approach was particularly influential in interpreting naming practices as symbolic systems embedded in meaning webs. The study also draws on Durkheim's sociological view of naming and classification as collective representations that reflect and reinforce social order (Durkheim, 1912). Given that naming practices are culturally situated, a qualitative ethnographic design enabled an in-depth exploration of meanings embedded in Lango personal names as lived cultural expressions.

### Study Area

The study was conducted among the Lango-speaking communities in Northern Uganda, primarily in Lira, Alebtong, Apac, Dokolo, Otuke, and Kole districts. These communities maintain strong indigenous linguistic and cultural systems despite modernisation pressures. The persistence of oral traditions in this region aligns with Finnegan's (1970) observation that African oral literature remains a critical repository of history, identity, and social memory. The study area, therefore, provided a rich ethnographic site for examining how naming practices function as cultural archives of experience.

### Study Population

The study population included Lango elders, clan leaders, traditional birth attendants, linguists, and cultural custodians. Elders were prioritised due to

their role as repositories of oral tradition and historical memory. This aligns with Mbiti's (1969) assertion that African societies are deeply rooted in communal memory preserved through oral transmission, where elders function as "living libraries." Both male and female participants were included to capture gendered dimensions of naming practices and interpretations.

### **Sampling Technique and Sample Size**

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants with specialised knowledge of Lango anthroponymy, particularly individuals recognised within their communities as custodians of naming traditions, oral history, and cultural memory. The target population comprised adult members of the Lango ethnic group in Northern Uganda who possess experiential and transmitted knowledge of indigenous naming practices, including elders, clan leaders, traditional healers, and other cultural informants. This population was identified through preliminary community consultations and recommendations from local leaders, ensuring that participants were information-rich cases relevant to the study objectives.

Snowball sampling further facilitated access to less visible but highly knowledgeable cultural custodians who may not hold formal positions of authority but are recognised within social networks as credible sources of indigenous knowledge. Initial respondents were therefore instrumental in identifying additional participants, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of data collection.

A total of 78 participants were engaged in the study. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, consistent with grounded ethnographic methodology, ensuring that no new naming categories emerged from additional data collection. This sample size is considered adequate and appropriate for a qualitative ethnographic inquiry, where the primary aim is depth of understanding rather than statistical generalisation. In qualitative

research, sample adequacy is determined by informational richness and the attainment of data saturation rather than numerical representativeness (Creswell, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that no new naming categories, patterns, or conceptual insights emerged from additional interviews.

The combination of purposive and snowball sampling ensured that participants were both relevant and diverse in their cultural knowledge, while also capturing variations across clans, age groups, and social roles. Elders were particularly appropriate respondents due to their custodial role in preserving and transmitting Lango anthroponymic knowledge, while younger participants provided complementary perspectives on contemporary naming shifts. This approach ensured methodological rigour, cultural authenticity, and depth of insight into the lived meanings embedded in Lango personal names.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary analysis. In-depth interviews were used to elicit personal, familial, and lineage-based narratives behind names, capturing emic interpretations of meaning and lived experiences. Key informant interviews with clan leaders, elders, and cultural custodians were conducted to validate linguistic etymologies, historical continuity, and cultural significance of naming practices. FGDs facilitated collective meaning-making, allowing participants to compare interpretations, resolve semantic variations across clans, and reach culturally shared understandings of contested meanings. Documentary analysis included a review of oral literature archives, ethnographic records, and previous linguistic studies on Lango and related Nilotic groups. The study was informed by Finnegan's (1970) argument that oral traditions function as dynamic repositories

of cultural knowledge, continuously reshaped through performance and transmission.

Key inclusion criteria required participants to be (i) fluent speakers of Leb Lango, (ii) members of Lango clans with demonstrated knowledge of naming practices, (iii) aged 18 years and above, and (iv) recognised by their communities as knowledgeable in cultural history, genealogy, or oral traditions. Individuals who were unable to provide informed consent or lacked familiarity with traditional naming systems were excluded. Screening of participants was conducted through preliminary consultations with local council leaders, clan elders, and community gatekeepers, followed by informal verification interviews to confirm knowledge depth and relevance.

Data collection was carried out over a defined fieldwork period of six months, allowing sufficient time for seasonal variation in narratives and repeated engagement with key informants for clarification and validation. Interviews and FGDs were conducted in Leb Lango to ensure linguistic authenticity, then audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English while maintaining semantic equivalence through back-translation checks.

Keywords that guided the data collection included “origin of names,” “clan naming systems,” “spiritual naming,” “circumstantial names,” “birth-related names,” and “historical events associated with names.” These keywords helped structure interview guides while still allowing flexibility for emergent themes. This multi-method approach ensured methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility, depth, and cultural authenticity of the findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The process involved transcription, translation, coding, categorisation, and interpretive synthesis. Open coding identified recurrent semantic patterns, which were grouped into thematic categories such as ecological context, spiritual belief systems, social

relations, and existential experiences. This analytical approach is consistent with Geertz’s (1973) interpretive anthropology, which emphasises meaning-making through symbolic systems. Axial coding refined relationships between categories, while selective coding produced higher-order analytical groupings reflecting the underlying cultural logic in naming practices. The interpretation further draws on Durkheim’s (1912) notion that classification systems reflect collective moral and social order, particularly evident in how names encode experiences of birth, hardship, and spirituality.

To enhance rigour, data management and coding were supported using qualitative data analysis software NVivo (version 12), which facilitated systematic organisation of transcripts, efficient retrieval of coded segments, and visualisation of emerging thematic relationships. The use of NVivo improved transparency, auditability, and consistency in the analytical process, while also enabling iterative comparison across participants and data sources. This combination of manual interpretive analysis and computer-assisted qualitative data analysis ensured a robust and structured approach to identifying patterns and meanings embedded in Lango naming practices.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

To ensure rigour, the study employed triangulation of methods and data sources, combining interviews, FGDs, and documentary evidence. Member checking was conducted with selected participants to validate interpretations of naming meanings. Peer debriefing with linguists and anthropologists enhanced analytical credibility. Trustworthiness was further strengthened through prolonged engagement in the field, allowing immersion in the cultural context, consistent with ethnographic standards. Dependability was ensured through detailed documentation of coding procedures, while confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations in participant narratives.

**Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study objectives in accessible language. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Cultural sensitivity was prioritised, particularly when handling sacred, spiritual, or taboo naming explanations. Respect for elders and clan authority structures guided all interactions. The study also aligns with Mbiti’s (1969) ethical emphasis on communal respect and relational accountability in African knowledge systems.

**RESULTS**

**Birth Circumstances and Physical Conditions**

This category (Table 1) captures names derived from immediate physiological and situational

conditions surrounding childbirth. Among the Lango, birth is not treated as a purely biological event but as a culturally significant moment that imprints identity. Names in this group encode observable realities such as physical anomalies, birth position, and delivery setting. These names function as mnemonic devices that preserve birth narratives across generations, transforming individual experiences into collective knowledge. The emphasis on bodily conditions also reflects indigenous medical awareness and attentiveness to neonatal outcomes. Furthermore, such naming practices legitimise and normalise difference by integrating unusual birth conditions into socially meaningful identities, thereby reducing stigma and reinforcing communal acceptance.

**Table 1: Child Naming According to Birth Circumstances and Physical Conditions**

Name	Meaning
Acur/Achur/ Acura/Achura	A child born after a time of trouble, scarcity, or intense jealousy/rumours (jealousy often denoted by ‘nyeko’). The child’s name relates to the experience of enduring these challenges.
Alunga	A child born during difficult labour. Literally the mother walked about the compound or a child born after a long pregnancy.
Angole	A child’s name meaning ‘I have been left’ or ‘I am left behind’. Given to a child born after a long interval, or to a mother who has lost previous children.
Gulu	A child’s name derived from Lango word <i>gulu</i> . Associated with the phrase ‘ <i>gulu-gulu</i> ’ - the sound produced by running water in a river or stream. Given to a child born near a rapidly flowing river or stream with intense, noisy <i>gulu-gulu</i> sounds. Note that the <i>gulu</i> is also a Lango word for a pot.
Atepo	A child born around September and October, a period when goats are most active and generally ‘in heat’ with he-goats mounting the she-goats, flagging their tails, and with increased vocality, mee-mee-mee-mee noise.
Lutoo/ Lutto	A child’s name derived from Lango noun <i>luto</i> or <i>lut</i> , which refers to a net, particularly a long, heavy net used in ancient traditional, communal hunting to catch antelopes and other game. Given to a child in honour of a patriarch who was a renowned hunter or a skilled maker of these vital hunting nets.
Obong/Abong/ Obongo/Abongo	A child born with an unusually shaped head at birth, later corrected by traditional midwifery, symbolises initial anxiety followed by parental relief and family reassurance.
Odwee/Odwe	A name is derived from Lango word for the moon or month – <i>dwee</i> or <i>dwe</i> . This name is traditionally given to a child born at night under a bright moon (‘radiance of the moon’) or during a specific lunar event.
Odoc/Adoc	A child born in a breech position with feet emerging first is often associated with danger, resilience, and memorable childbirth experiences within cultural memory.

Name	Meaning
Ogong	A child born with prominent knuckles or with a specific physical characteristic in the hands, like a congenital hand difference. Knuckles are the prominent, rounded joints in the fingers, specifically where the fingers bend and connect to the main part of the hand.
Ojara/Ajara	A child born with extra fingers or toes, representing physical uniqueness interpreted culturally, is sometimes associated with symbolic or spiritual explanations within the community.
Ojok/Ajok	A child born with visible deformities is often interpreted through biological and spiritual lenses, including beliefs about supernatural influence or transformation by unseen forces.
Okongo/Akongo	A child born in a communal setting, such as a gathering or beer hall, highlights collective witnessing and the social nature of childbirth experiences.
Okul	Like Ojok or Ajok, Okul is also a name given to children born with special features, such as extra fingers or toes.
Okunyo	A child name meaning 'taking, obtaining, being taken or finding something after a period of searching'. Given to a child born under special circumstances as a sign of relief or a gift obtained after a long wait.
Ooko/Aoko	A child unexpectedly and usually unintentionally born outside the home environment, reflecting urgency, unpredictability, and resilience in unplanned and often challenging childbirth circumstances.
Ouma/Auma	A child born in a precarious position on the ground, often facing downward during delivery, marks an unusual birth position.
Owino/Awino	A child born with the umbilical cord wrapped around the neck signifies a lucky survival from a potentially life-threatening complication during childbirth.
Opono/Apono	A child whose mother's pregnancy was concealed or invisible to the community until delivery.
Oyite	A child born with noticeable ear abnormalities, highlighting unique physical distinctions.
Oyuru	A name that refers to a child born while the placenta is still present or to a child born in a specific manner involving the amniotic sac.

### Environmental and Ecological Context

Names in this category (Table 2) reflect the intimate relationship between the Lango people's child naming and their natural environment. These names encode ecological signals such as rainfall, agricultural cycles, seasonal rhythms, and environmental disruptions. By embedding environmental markers into personal identity, the naming system serves as a repository of ecological

knowledge and temporal orientation. It illustrates how nature is not external to society but deeply intertwined with human existence. Agricultural references highlight the centrality of subsistence practices, while phenomena such as locust invasions demonstrate how environmental crises are memorialised. This category reveals that naming functions as an indigenous ecological archive, preserving climate patterns and environmental experiences across generations.

**Table 2: Child Naming According to Environmental and Ecological Context**

Name	Meaning
Abak	A child's name associated with early morning or the dawn, often given to children born during this time, signifying a new beginning or light.
Adonyo	A child born during the weeding season, reflecting agricultural labour cycles and emphasising the family's survival on subsistence farming.
Alele	A child born during heavy rainfall symbolises fertility, renewal, agricultural productivity, and the powerful, sometimes destructive forces of nature within ecological systems.
Nam /Anam	A child born in a large river (like the Nile) or a lake. <i>Nam</i> generally means lake or river in Leb Lango.
Nyanga	A child's name that denotes the strength of a crocodile ( <i>Nyang</i> in Leb Lango). <i>Nyang</i> are highly feared due to their master-of-ambush hunting style, intense aggression, and ability to view humans as prey.
Obia/Abia	A name derived from Lango word <i>obia</i> , which refers to spear grass. Given to children born, found or captured in this specific grassy environment. These children usually grow to be very resilient, like <i>Obia</i> .
Obonyo/Abonyo	A child born during a locust invasion, marking an ecological crisis and preserving the collective memory of environmental disruption, food insecurity, and communal resilience.
Odero/Adero	A child born during times of abundance or harvest, representing prosperity, fulfilment, food security, and collective family well-being.
Odwar/Adwar	A child born during hunting periods symbolises engagement with natural environments and livelihood reliance on wild resources.
Ogwal/Egwal	A child born when frogs were croaking loudly, marking rainy seasons and reflecting ecological rhythms associated with fertility, renewal, and environmental abundance.
Ogweng/Agweng	A child born during the season of white ants (termites), which appear during the rainy season, signifies abundance and plenty.
Okomo/Akomo	A child born during planting season symbolises hope, growth, productivity, and anticipation of bumper future harvests.
Okot/Akot	A child born during a heavy downpour or rainy season reflects the life-giving value of water within agrarian livelihoods. May also mean a child born with a sparkling umbilical cord.
Okullu/Akullu	A child born near a stream or water source symbolises life, continuity, sustenance, and ecological interconnectedness within the natural environment.
Olwoch/Alwoch	A child born during overcast weather (cloudy, misty or foggy conditions) symbolises calmness, subtle beginnings, quiet environmental transitions, and atmospheric uniqueness during birth.
Ooro/Aoro	A child born during a drought or dry season (verb <i>oro</i> means dry season or drought in Leb Lango).
Orono	A child born during a period of drought or a dry season (verb <i>oro</i> means dry season or drought in Leb Lango).
Owidi/Owiddi	A child born during a period of abundance/harvest. Can also mean a child born during a time of wandering or when the community was dispersed.

**Hardship, Suffering, and Resilience**

This category (Table 3) embodies the emotional and existential dimensions of Lango naming practices.

Names here reflect periods of adversity, including famine, poverty, bereavement, and repeated child mortality. Rather than concealing suffering, the Lango naming system openly acknowledges

hardship, transforming pain into identity and resilience. These names serve both commemorative and therapeutic functions, allowing families to process grief while asserting survival. The recurrence of themes such as endurance and loss underscores the historical realities of vulnerability

within the community. Importantly, these names are not purely negative; they signify strength, continuity, and the capacity to overcome adversity. Thus, naming becomes a mechanism for emotional expression and social resilience.

**Table 3: Child Naming that Reflects Hardship, Suffering, and Resilience**

Name	Meaning
Abalo/Abal	A child named in response to false accusations, reflecting social tension, injustice, emotional distress, and contested relationships within the family.
Aciro	A child born during a period of hardship reflects endurance, resilience, and the family's struggle through challenging circumstances.
Aganya	A child's name meaning is hard to get, hard to persuade, stubborn, or unyielding. Conveying the idea of resilience and firmness.
Akecha	A child's name synonymous with Okech or Akech, generally meaning born during a time of famine, hunger, or great hardship.
Anyuru	A name meaning born during periods of drought, crop failure, or food shortages. Serves as a historical record, reminding the family of a difficult time they survived.
Apenyo	A name given to a child born after a long period of waiting or difficulty in conceiving, signifying that the parents 'asked' or 'prayed' for the child. It is derived from the Lango verb <i>penyo</i> , which means 'to ask' or 'to question'.
Atany/Atenyo	A child's name meaning 'I have left it, or I have abandoned it. Signifying that the parents have decided to move on from the previous situation of hardship, sorrow, or bad experiences relating to death or childbearing difficulties.
Epila	A child born during a time of struggle. In some contexts, it can be interpreted as the one who has to work hard or a child born after a long struggle/period of waiting.
Etem/Atem	A child's name that relates to the concept of 'trying, testing, temptation, or experimenting'. It stems from Lango verb <i>temo</i> (to try/test/tempt). Given to a child born during a difficult time of trials and temptations.
Ojang/Ejang	A child born during a period of scarcity, or when there was famine/hunger, or during a severe dry season. Similar to the name Akech or Okech.
Ocan/Acan	A child associated with poverty or deprivation, symbolising economic hardship and the family's perseverance through challenging living conditions and scarcity.
Ochola/Achola	A child born after the death of a father or fatherly relative, marking grief, mourning, and continuity of life within the context of loss.
Obura/Abura	A child born during funeral rites (derived from Lango word <i>buru</i> , meaning ashes) symbolises the coexistence of death and life and the continuity of lineage despite moments of communal grief.
Odyek	A child who survives after multiple infant deaths symbolises resilience, persistence, and hope for continuity. Like <i>Odyek-odyek</i> (hyena), he/she is born a survivor.
Okabo	A child's name signifying a gift to the family, often after a period of struggle or lack of children.
Okech/Akech Oketch/Aketch	A child born during a time of famine, scarcity, and hunger, symbolises survival challenges and resilience. The Lango root word <i>kec</i> means hunger or famine.
Olanya	A child's name reflecting maternal abandonment, encoding emotional hardship and social neglect of identity.
Oleng/Olengo	The name of a child born under specific, difficult, or unusual circumstances.

Name	Meaning
Omedi	A child's name is linked to lamentation. It reflects resilience, strength, and hope. Given to a child born after a family experienced significant loss or when parents finally succeeded after multiple trials.
Onen	A child's name signifying endurance, reflecting a history of repeated challenges and demonstrating strength throughout difficult life experiences.
Ongom/Angom	A child named out of fear of repeated loss, symbolising vulnerability and protective intentions against recurring misfortune or death within the family.
Onyik/Oyik	A child born after many siblings have died expresses deep parental grief, remembrance, and emotional acknowledgement of repeated bereavement experiences.
Opudu	A child's name associated with resilience, recovery or overcoming difficulties related to rebuilding family life after a family breakdown.
Otika	A child's name associated with persistent misfortune, reflecting cultural expressions of vulnerability, suffering, and perceived closeness to death or recurring adversity.
Oyet/Ayet	A child born during maternal suffering, representing emotional or physical hardship experienced by the mother during pregnancy or childbirth processes.
Otoo/Atoo/ Otto/Atto	A child born shortly after the death of a relative symbolises continuity of lineage and emotional transition from mourning to renewed life.

### Joy, Blessing, and Prosperity

In contrast to hardship-related names, this category (Table 4) reflects positive emotional states and social aspirations. Names associated with joy, abundance, and divine blessing highlight moments of fulfilment, gratitude, and hope. These names often emerge after periods of difficulty, marking transitions from suffering to prosperity. They also

reveal the central role of spirituality, as many names attribute blessings to divine intervention. Additionally, concepts such as wealth and value are socially constructed, with children themselves regarded as forms of prosperity. This category demonstrates the dual nature of Lango naming practices, balancing narratives of struggle with expressions of optimism and celebration, thereby reinforcing a holistic worldview.

**Table 4: Child Naming that Reflects Joy, Love, Blessing, and Prosperity**

Name	Meaning
Achonga	A child's name meaning he/she was chosen, selected, or was looked/waited for. Reflecting that the child was specially desired or arrived after a long wait.
Adea	A child regarded as a divine gift, gratitude, blessing, and spiritual fulfilment often follow periods of hardship.
Agea	A child's name denotes life's blessings, renewal, gratitude, and recognition of deeper meaning in existence.
Amule	A child who is considered a joy, a comfort, or a reward is often after a period of hardship, sorrow, or waiting.
Amwonya	A child named meaning love and affection. Indicating a child who is loved, beloved, highly favoured, or one who brings affection.
Awili	A child born after a long wait, and meant to bring joy or to be treasured.
Awongo	A child's name denoting wealth, prosperity, and continuity.
Ekom	A child whose birth inspired praises and celebrations, reflecting joy, gratitude, and fulfilment.

Name	Meaning
Etia/Etii	A child's name meaning a 'gift, present or something bestowed'. Reflecting a blessing to the family after specific hardships or long waits.
Obua/Bua	A child's name that denotes peace, harmony, emotional stability, calmness and balanced social relations.
Odero/Adero	A child's name symbolising abundance and prosperity, often associated with successful harvest seasons, and wealth accumulation.
Ogole/Agole	A name relating to a child born or appearing suddenly, bringing sudden joy or noise. Linked to the concept of 'taking or carrying' away the loneliness of the parents.
Okori	A child's name that means living or dwelling in grace. Unmerited favour or blessing of God, often given when a child is born after a difficult time or loss.
Okuja/Akuja	A child's name meaning a gift from God, or a child who is high in status, noble, or protected by the divine.
Olwit	A child perceived as lucky, reflecting fortune, divine favour, and unexpected positive outcomes in life experiences.
Omara	A name derived from Lango root word for love – <i>amari</i> . Denotes a child born out of love and harmony, representing unity, affection, and strong emotional bonds between parents and family members.
Omene	A child given a name symbolising sustained life, abundance, and a deep connection to the natural resources.
Owani/Wani	A child's name denoting the joy, the blessing and the gift of the third-born son.
Owello/Awello	A child's name derived from the Lango root- <i>welo</i> , which means a visitor or a guest, a bringer of continued blessings.
Owera	A child whose legitimacy is unquestioned symbolises purity, clarity of lineage, social pride, and confidence in paternal identity within family structures.
Oyugi/Ayugi	A child's name that was highly anticipated, planned for, and welcomed. Associated with abundance, prosperity, and fulfilment of emotional needs within the family, thus the Lango old adage ' <i>kuc dong yugi</i> '.

### Social Conflict and Relationships

Names in this category (5) reflect the complexities of social life, particularly family dynamics, legitimacy, and interpersonal conflict. They encode experiences such as abandonment, disputed paternity, delayed childbirth, and marital instability. By assigning such names, the Lango community acknowledges social tensions while integrating them into collective identity. These names also

function as social commentary, subtly communicating histories of conflict and reconciliation. Importantly, they highlight the centrality of kinship structures and reproductive expectations within the society. The presence of both conflict and harmony within this category underscores the dynamic nature of social relationships and the role of naming in mediating these experiences.

**Table 5: Child Naming that Reflects Social Conflict and Relationships**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Akwongo	A child's name is linked to regret or unresolved circumstances, reflecting emotional tension, parental reflection, and lingering dissatisfaction within family or relational experiences ('lamentation').
Apil	A child associated with taboo, refusal, or cultural prohibition, reflecting tension between social norms, expectations, and protective strategies against perceived misfortune.
Ayita	A child's name meaning 'I have been told' or 'it is said'. Deeply signifying a story about the family's circumstances at the time of the child's birth, like gossip, rumours, or social interactions, suggesting the child was born while the parents were being talked about or in response to a rumour.
Egang	A child born before formal marriage rites reflects transitional social norms, evolving marital practices, and the negotiation of legitimacy within family structures.
Odoki	A child born at the maternal home reflects temporary separation from the father and complex family dynamics involving kinship and residence patterns.
Ogena	A child born during harmony and trust between parents symbolises relational stability, mutual understanding, and positive emotional climate within the household.
Ogwang/ Agwang/ Egwang	A child born outside wedlock symbolises social ambiguity, independence, and negotiation of legitimacy within accepted cultural and kinship frameworks. Considered as a 'wolf'.
Ojwang/ Ajwang	A child initially denied or abandoned by the father reflects rejection, legitimacy struggles, and eventual reintegration or acceptance within family structures.
Ongwech/ Angwech	A child born during conflict or displacement represents instability, forced migration, and resilience during periods of social and political crisis.
Okune	A child born after parents have endured significant mockery, gossip, or 'nonsense' spoken about their inability to produce a child. It serves as a defiant response to those rumours, and a reward against negative chatter.
Oryem	A child born after the mother was chased from home symbolises domestic conflict, separation, and resilience within disrupted family environments.

### Spiritual and Apotropaic Names

This category (Table 6) highlights the metaphysical dimension of Lango naming practices, where names function as spiritual instruments. Apotropaic names are particularly significant, as they are used to ward off evil, misfortune, or death (death prevention). These names reflect a worldview in which spiritual forces actively influence human life. Concepts such

as divine will, angels, and rebirth demonstrate a rich cosmological system. Naming thus becomes both protective and expressive, mediating relationships between the physical and spiritual realms. The recurrence of ritual and symbolic language indicates that names are not merely descriptive but performative, actively shaping the child's perceived destiny and safeguarding their well-being.

**Table 6: Spiritual and Apotropaic Child Naming**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Abwola	A child's name derived from the Lango verb <i>bwolo</i> (to lie, to deceive). By naming a child 'Abwola', it is believed that evil spirits or bad luck will not take the child, thinking it is worthless or non-existent.
Adoko/Adoka	A child's name meaning "go back" or "return," suggesting the child is told to go back to the spirit world, thereby tricking it into staying.
Ageta	A child perceived as angelic symbolises purity, innocence, spiritual closeness, and association with divine or supernatural realms within cultural belief systems.
Agwada	A derogatory child naming that portrays the child as worthless, shapeless, ugly, to deceive malicious evil spirits of death that the child is worthless, and pass it by and spare the child's life.
Anywar	A child's name meaning throw it away. A death prevention name confuses the evil spirit world into thinking the child is worthless and not worth snatching.
Arach/Aracha	A child's name meaning 'I am bad, or I am evil' derives from Lango word <i>rac</i> . It is a death-prevention, sorrowful name to ward off evil spirits from snatching the child.
Angunya	A disagreeable, weird, and strange child name derived from female private parts, <i>nyung</i> to make the child appear unworthy or undesirable to evil spirits or the Death God, thereby fooling them and ensuring the child lives.
Atul	A strange child name derived from female private parts <i>tul</i> given to a child to signify that he/she is a survivor of spiritual misfortunes or to discourage the spirit of misfortunes and death from taking the child, confusing the evil world as unimportant, or not worth taking.
Ayena	A child associated with angels, reflecting grace, protection, divine favour, and spiritual significance within cosmological interpretations of human existence.
Bongonyinge (short. Ebong)	A child's name meaning he/she has no name, or his/her name is not known. A death-protection name (a waiting name) that acts as a spiritual shield for the child, confusing the spirit of death into thinking the child is not valuable or not truly part of the family, thus sparing the child's life. Ebong often said too, of truth, wisdom, attractive speaker.
Erem	A child likened to hidden treasure, symbolising value, mystery, rarity, and deeper spiritual or symbolic significance beyond immediate physical appearance.
Nyeko	A child's name meaning jealousy or envy implies that the child is staying despite the jealousy of others or that the child has survived the jealous actions of spirits.
Obel	A boy child born after many people died in the family/clan and given as a sacrifice to the devil so that the devil does not take any more.
Odong/Adong	A child's name meaning the one left behind or remains. It is often given to a child born after previous siblings have died, suggesting the child is the only one left to continue the family line.
Ocuc/Ocuci	A child's name meaning 'black beyond black' portrays intense darkness or unclean descriptors. Given to a child when a family has experienced consecutive infant deaths or stillbirths, as a strategy to fool evil spiritual forces or death into thinking the child is not worth taking, or is already belonging to the darkness.
Odongpiny	A child's death protecting name is often given when a family has lost previous children. A name with a subtle connotation that the child is less valuable, or just the small remnant left behind. This is to fool spirits or death, implying that since the child is nothing valuable or just leftovers.
Ogwok	A child's name derived from Lango name of a dog ' <i>gwok</i> ', symbolically meaning survival. Given to children born after a mother has lost several previous infants. The

Name	Meaning
	intent is to hide the child from death or evil spirits by giving them a name considered lowly or unattractive.
Okema	A name expressing vulnerability to death, used symbolically to redirect misfortune, deceive harmful forces, and protect the child from spiritual threats.
Okwany	A child name that expresses the grief and desperation of parents who have faced a high infant mortality rate, acting as a desperate plea for the child's survival. It is a form of spiritual trickery to deceive evil spirits or the spirit of death, persuading them that the child is not valuable.
Okwera/Akwera	A child's name derived from the Lango verb <i>kwero</i> (to refuse, deny, or forbid). It is often given to children born in situations that violate traditional customs, social norms, or taboos. Example when the father denies the pregnancy.
Olobo/Alobo	A child's name derived from the Lango word <i>lobo</i> , meaning earth, soil, or land. Given to a child born after the parents have lost several infants previously. By naming the child after the soil, it is believed that the spirits of death or the earth that 'swallowed' the previous children will be confused or deterred from taking the new baby, as the name makes the child seem insignificant or already part of the soil.
Omong/Among/ Amongi	A child's name associated with ancestral spiritual connection and lineage. Often given to children to honour ancestors, seek their blessings, or acknowledge a perceived connection to them.
Omia	A child's name representing acceptance of divine will, emphasising faith, destiny, submission, and recognition of spiritual authority in shaping life events.
Oming	A child's name associated with <i>Jok Oming</i> , who is described in Lango oral history as a powerful spirit or 'god of war' associated with Ngai Hill (Got Ngai).
Onek/Anek	A child's name meaning 'I am killing them (often used when parents are overwhelmed, aiming for the opposite). The name acts as a form of reverse psychology or a scare tactic intended to shame or trick the spirits of death or spiritual forces responsible for earlier losses.
Ongeng	A name given to a boy born after a series of deaths or to a child believed to have survived against the odds, effectively blocking death.
Opollo/Apollo	A child's name symbolising 'heavenly' elevation or divinity, representing greatness, transcendence, and perceived connection to higher spiritual or cosmic realms.
Otile/Tile	Similar to names like Ojok/Ajok (born with extra fingers or unusual features), Otile/Tile refers to a child born with physical abnormalities or distinct bodily marks too.
Owiti/Awiti	A child symbolically "cast away" to deceive harmful forces, representing protective naming practices aimed at safeguarding life through ritual symbolism.

### Power, Warfare, and Strength

This category (Table 7) reflects historical and symbolic representations of power, authority, and social hierarchy within Lango society. Many names draw from warrior imagery, emphasising bravery, conquest, and protection. These names likely originate from periods when warfare and territorial defence were central to community survival. Even

in contemporary contexts, such names retain symbolic significance, representing strength, resilience, and leadership. Animal metaphors, such as the elephant, reinforce notions of power and dominance. This category demonstrates how naming practices encode political and historical realities, preserving memories of conflict while projecting ideals of courage and authority onto individuals.

**Table 7: Child Naming Symbolically Representing Power, Warfare, and Strength**

Name	Meaning
Abaca	A child born with high energy, strength, resistance, and kicking- a sign of future bravery.
Adilo	A child naming that translates to watchfulness, alertness, awareness or arousal. It represents vigilance, proactiveness and ability to strike early.
Akona	A child associated with defeating unusual or formidable enemies symbolises bravery, tactical skill, and exceptional capability in overcoming challenges.
Akora	A child regarded as an exalted one symbolises a sense of honour and reverence.
Akota	A child characterised by strength, energy, and warrior-like vigour, reflecting vitality and courage.
Aluko	A child representing survival after conflict or raids, symbolising resilience, endurance, and successful navigation of dangerous or hostile environments.
Apea	A child symbolising conquest, representing authority, dominance, and the ability to capture or overcome adversaries.
Ario	A child's name derived from Lango word for 'two' ( <i>aryo</i> or <i>ario</i> ), signifying the second born. The name is associated with Obol Ario, recorded in oral history as a warrior who played a key role in assisting historical figures like Kabalega and Mwangi during their retreat.
Atal	A child's name meaning unconquerable, immovable, or resilient. Implying strength and endurance.
Atyam	A child's name symbolising overcoming vulnerability, reflecting transformation from weakness to strength and resilience.
Away	A child representing loyalty and protection, symbolising commitment to community defence, cooperation, and integration within collective social systems.
Awira	A child name symbolising deceptive strength, reflecting cunning, strategic behaviour, and complex moral interpretations of survival and conflict engagement.
Dokotum	A child naming symbolising exceptional warrior strength, representing bravery, dominance, and the ability to defeat enemies.
Ejor	A child's name that signifies a tough, strong, and daring person.
Etum	A child's name often associated with Lango traditional ancient spear. It signifies strength, protection, and warrior heritage. It serves as a reminder of ancestral strength and the warrior tradition of the Lango, who are known for their history of battles and bravery.
Etwop	A child's name meaning 'one who embraces, one who holds, or one who punishes'. It denotes a character trait perceived as strong, protective, or having a firm grasp on life.
Obote	A child associated with the strength of an elephant, symbolising power, influence, endurance, and commanding presence within the community.
Okwir	A child linked to a feared or respected lineage, representing inherited authority, social status, and recognition of powerful ancestral heritage.
Olweny	A child born during times of conflict, war, or severe struggle. The name commemorates these difficult periods or fights.
Ongu/Angu	A child's name related to war or a warrior. Given to a child born during times of conflict or war. In this context, the name implies the child is expected to be a protector, strong, or a survivor.

### Time, Sequence, and Birth Order

Names in this category (Table 8) emphasise temporal identity, situating individuals within chronological and familial sequences. The time of

birth, whether morning, evening, or night, serves as a key determinant of identity, reflecting the cultural importance of temporal markers. Additionally, twin naming systems and birth order conventions reveal

structured kinship patterns and social organisation. These names provide insight into how the Lango conceptualise time not merely as a linear construct but as a meaningful context shaping identity. By

embedding temporal information into names, the society ensures continuity of memory and reinforces the significance of familial positioning.

**Table 8: Child Naming that Reflects Time, Sequence, and Birth Order**

Name	Meaning
Akena	A child born during the day or day-born. Culturally, the name resonates with themes of light, hope, and new beginnings, which are universally cherished values. The association with daylight symbolises clarity and positivity, making it a meaningful choice within the Lango naming tradition.
Ayao/Ayaa	A name given to a girl born after several consecutive boys (at least three boys before her), often indicating she is the only girl and among them, making her a highly treasured only girl among male siblings.
Ekwang	A child born during the daylight hours, specifically at the door entrance of a house.
Ocen/Acen	The second-born twin. Some people ironically consider the second-born twin the ‘older’ twin because he/she is thought to have pushed the first twin out.
Oceng/Aceng/ Ochieng/Achieng	A child born during broad daylight symbolises visibility, openness, clarity, and full social recognition within the community’s daily life and interactions. People bearing such names usually do not tolerate nonsense.
Odongo/Adongo	Second follower after the set of twins. Precisely born after Okello/Akello.
Okao/Akao	A firstborn child symbolises leadership, responsibility, primacy, and a central role within family hierarchy and inheritance structures.
Okeng	A name given to a boy child born after several girls.
Okello/Akello	The child born immediately after a set of twins. Okello if male and Akello if female. It signifies a ‘follower’ or the one who came after the twins.
Omodi	A child born at dawn, representing renewal, beginnings, and temporal transition into daily life activities and symbolic new phases of existence.
Omollo/Amollo	A child born before sunrise symbolises anticipation, quiet emergence, and transition from night into the beginning of daily social and productive activities.
Onyanga	A child born in the morning marks temporal identity associated with freshness, clarity, and early stages of daily social engagement.
Opio/Apio	The firstborn twin, holding special cultural significance, is often associated with symbolic primacy within twinship traditions.
Otieno/Atieno	A child born during evening hours symbolises calmness, closure of daily activities, and transition into rest, reflection, and family bonding time.
Owor/Awor	A child born during nighttime hours is often associated with mystery, quietness, and the liminal transition between darkness and the anticipation of a new day.

**Place and Spatial Context**

This category (Table 9) demonstrates how geographical and spatial experiences are embedded in personal identity. Names reflect specific locations such as markets, bush areas, streams, or places of displacement. These spatial markers provide contextual information about birth environments and social circumstances. They also

highlight patterns of mobility, migration, and conflict, indicating how space is experienced and remembered. By incorporating location into naming, the Lango preserve environmental and social geography within personal identity. This practice underscores the interconnectedness of place and personhood, where identity is shaped not only by time but also by spatial context.

**Table 9: Child Naming According to Place and Spatial Context**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Aguti	A name given to a child born behind the house or in the backyard, rather than inside the main house.
Atubo	Similar to names like Atim, Otim, Alum or Olum, Atubo signifies a child born away from the main home, often during times of journey, migration, or when families were living in temporary, rural conditions.
Atyang	Implies one who was born on the pathway or born outside (not in the main house).
Nyangkori	A name given to a child born near a path or track associated with a crocodile. Literally, the daughter or the son of a crocodile.
Ojede	A child born in confinement or isolation symbolises restriction, hardship, and resilience within constrained or controlled physical environments.
Okongo/Akongo	A child born in a social gathering reflects collective life and shared experiences within socially active environments.
Okullu/Akullo	A child's name derived from Lango word <i>kulu</i> for water well, stream, or river. Name given to a child born, captured or found abandoned near a water source, symbolising life, continuity, and sustenance.
Olum/Alum	A child born unexpectedly in the wilderness rather than within a structured, normal, secure home environment. The name derives from Lango word ' <i>lum</i> ', which means grass.
Ooko	A child born outdoors unexpectedly symbolises urgency, adaptability, and resilience in unplanned and uncontrolled spatial environments.
Apita	A child born in the bush or during a time when the family was in a hidden or remote location, often linked to conflict or movement.
Oryem	A child born at the maternal home indicates displacement, family separation, and complex relational and spatial dynamics within kinship systems.
Otim/Atim	A child born away from ancestral land due to migration, displacement, and adaptation to new or unfamiliar environments.
Owila/Awila	A child born in a marketplace represents economic activity, social interaction, and communal exchange spaces.
Oyepa/Ayepa	A child born in an open public space reflects communal witnessing, shared experience, and public awareness of birth events.
Oyo/Oyoo/ Ayo/Ayoo	A child born along the road or while in transit symbolises vulnerability and unpredictability associated with birth.

### Personality, Character, and Destiny

Names in this category (Table 10) project expectations about individual behaviour, social roles, and future trajectories. Rather than merely describing present conditions, these names are forward-looking, shaping identity through anticipated traits such as leadership, sociability, or wisdom. They reflect cultural values and ideals,

reinforcing desirable behaviours within the community. In this sense, naming becomes a performative act that influences personal development and social perception. The presence of destiny-oriented names also indicates a belief in predetermined or guided life paths, linking individual identity to broader cultural and moral frameworks.

**Table 10: Child Naming Reflecting Personality, Character, and Destiny**

Name	Meaning
Acai/Acayo/ Acaye	The child's name means 'I have allowed it or I have accepted it', suggesting a story of resignation, or acknowledgement of a divine will by the parents after many losses or challenging circumstances. The name signifies a quiet strength, resilience, or a decision to stop fighting against fate.
Adupa	A child's name meaning one who is always smart and intelligent.
Agwer/Agwero/ Agwar/Egwar	A child's name meaning one who is a scavenger, a hunter, or someone who gathers things. Denoting someone who scouts, searches, hunts, and brings resources/things home.
Alani	A child's name meaning peace, gentleness, and calmness, reflecting harmonious family personality traits.
Emor	A child destined for leadership, symbolising vision, authority, and responsibility.
Okae	A child characterised by approachability, friendliness, openness and sociability.
Okidi/Akidi	A child's name meaning 'to give birth to'. The Lango root word <i>kidi</i> for rock is often interpreted to mean the child is as firm or as valued as a stone. Seen one who will carry forward the family lineage.
Okite/Akite	A child believed to have a stubborn or strong-willed character. He/she caused the mother a difficult or complicated pregnancy.
Okodi/Okode	A child's name meaning someone who lifts others, trustworthy, a supporter, and or a comforter (someone to lean on).
Olang	A child name meaning to be born or to give birth, suggesting a rooted family history and the importance of ancestry.
Olulung	A name generally implying someone who is gathered and put together. In a cultural sense, someone who was collected or brought home.
Ouni	A child with a complex personality, reflecting emotional depth, duality, and the ability to be both aggressive and forgiving.
Owiny	A long-awaited child symbolises hope, fulfilment, emotional investment, and the overcoming of infertility or prolonged delay in childbirth.

### Ritual Symbolism, Cultural Practices, Kinship and Ancestral Continuity

This category (Table 11) captures names rooted in ritual actions, symbolic meanings, and cultural beliefs. These names often emerge from specific ceremonial practices, such as blessing rituals or umbilical cord handling. They reveal the procedural aspects of Lango culture, where rituals are integral to marking life transitions. Symbolism plays a central role, with names encoding deeper meanings related to protection, continuity, and cosmology. This category highlights the performative nature of culture, where naming is both an outcome of ritual and a continuation of it. It reinforces the idea that identity is constructed through culturally sanctioned practices.

Naming children after family members is a widespread tradition among the Lango, used to honour relatives, preserve heritage, and transmit enduring family values across generations. Common patterns involve naming the first son after the paternal grandfather and the first daughter after the maternal grandmother, thereby establishing a strong genealogical and emotional connection to ancestral legacies. Subsequent children may be named after the remaining grandparents, parents, aunts, or uncles, reflecting extended kinship ties.

In many cases, children are also deliberately named after deceased relatives to sustain memory, continuity, and symbolic presence, rather than after living individuals, reinforcing lineage identity and intergenerational cultural transmission. For

instance, a child named Anyii/Anyi often refers to a debt or a ‘repayment’ in a metaphorical sense, frequently given when a child is named after a deceased relative to repay or continue their presence in the family.

**Table 11: Child Naming Rooted in Rituals, Symbolism, Cultural Practices, Kinship and Ancestral Continuity**

Name	Meaning
Adeka	A child ritually blessed using symbolic plants, reflecting purification, protection, and cultural practices aimed at safeguarding life and well-being.
Anyii/Anyi	A child’s name meaning ‘debt or a repayment’ in a metaphorical sense, is frequently given when a child is named after a deceased relative to repay or continue their presence in the family.
Erac/Arac	A child whose name reflects perceived imperfection or imitation, symbolising identity negotiation, self-awareness, and cultural interpretations of appearance or behaviour.
Odur/Adur	A child associated with the ritual handling of the umbilical cord, reflecting cultural beliefs surrounding birth, protection, and symbolic separation from the maternal body.
Okumu/Akumu	A child born under unusual circumstances is often interpreted through ritual or symbolic frameworks relating to conception and spiritual meaning.
Obol	A child dedicated as an offering, representing ritual sacrifice, devotion, and connection to spiritual or ancestral forces within cultural belief systems.
Onyilo	A child symbolising rebirth and continuity, reflecting cosmological beliefs about life cycles, ancestral return, and generational succession.
Ongwedi/ Angwedi	A name given to a child born of a woman who was hitherto thought to be barren or had had miscarriages or deaths of infants.
Oteng/Otengo/ Ateng	A name given to a boy child signifying the birth of a male child after multiple female children in the family.

## DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESULTS

The findings of this study demonstrate that Lango personal names constitute a highly structured ethnolinguistic system through which lived experiences, ecological conditions, social relations, and cosmological beliefs are encoded into identity. Across the categories presented, naming emerges as a form of cultural narration that transforms individual biography into collective memory. This supports Geertz’s (1973) conceptualisation of culture as a system of “webs of significance” in which meaning is publicly constructed and symbolically communicated. In this sense, Lango names function as condensed cultural texts rather than arbitrary labels.

The evidence that names reflect birth circumstances and physical conditions aligns strongly with

Finnegan’s (1970) observation that African oral traditions preserve biographical and historical information through performative linguistic forms. Similar patterns have been documented among the Akan, where names reflect the circumstances of birth and social expectations (Obeng, 1998). However, the Lango system appears more elaborative in its attention to physiological detail and environmental immediacy, suggesting a more fine-grained ethnographic encoding of birth experiences. This indicates that naming is not merely descriptive but also documentary, preserving intimate birth histories within personal identity.

Environmental and ecological naming further illustrates the embeddedness of human life within nature, consistent with Mbiti’s (1969) assertion that African ontologies are fundamentally ecological

and relational. The incorporation of rainfall, seasons, agricultural cycles, and ecological disruptions reflects what Vansina (1985) describes as oral tradition functioning as a repository of environmental memory. Compared to pastoral systems such as the Maasai, where cattle-centred identity dominates, the Lango case reveals a more agrarian ecological consciousness, where crop cycles and environmental hazards such as locust invasions become central identity markers. This demonstrates a localised ecological epistemology that links survival, memory, and identity formation.

Names associated with hardship and suffering reveal a cultural logic in which adversity is not concealed but integrated into identity formation. This resonates with Mbiti's (1990) argument that African societies interpret suffering communally rather than individually, thereby transforming personal loss into shared existential meaning. In contrast to many Western naming systems, where negative connotations are often avoided, Lango naming practices normalise hardship as part of social existence. This supports Durkheim's (1912) theory that collective representations stabilise social order by transforming individual experiences into socially meaningful categories. In this way, suffering becomes not only bearable but socially intelligible.

Conversely, names associated with joy, blessing, and prosperity demonstrate the spiritual and moral dimensions of gratitude within Lango society. This finding is consistent with Nketia's (1977) analysis of Akan naming practices, where names often express thanksgiving to divine forces following periods of hardship. However, the Lango case reveals a dual interpretation of prosperity that blends both spiritual causality and socio-economic achievement, reflecting a more pluralistic cosmology. This suggests that well-being is not solely attributed to divine intervention but is also linked to human agency and communal resilience.

Names reflecting social conflict and relationships further highlight the role of naming as a mechanism

of social commentary and regulation. Similar to Suzman's (1994) findings among the Zulu, Lango names often encode tensions surrounding legitimacy, kinship, and interpersonal conflict. However, unlike many societies where such tensions are implicit or concealed, Lango naming practices openly memorialise social discord. This openness supports Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) structural-functional view that kinship systems serve as mechanisms for regulating and stabilising social relationships through symbolic expression. Naming thus becomes a public record of social negotiation.

The spiritual and apotropaic dimension of naming reflects a worldview in which human life is deeply embedded in a spiritually charged universe. This aligns with Mbiti's (1969) assertion that African ontologies are fundamentally spiritual, where invisible forces actively shape human destiny. Comparable observations have been made by Fortes (1987), who shows that among the Tallensi, names can function as protective devices against misfortune. In the Lango context, names serve not only as spiritual safeguards but also as existential statements that negotiate vulnerability, protection, and continuity of life.

Names associated with power, warfare, and strength reflect historical experiences of conflict, survival, and social hierarchy. This finding is consistent with Vansina's (1985) argument that oral traditions preserve collective memories of migration and warfare. Similar patterns are observed among the Nuer, where Evans-Pritchard (1940) documents naming systems tied to cattle raiding and martial identity. However, the Lango system extends beyond literal warfare into symbolic representations of strength, often using animal metaphors such as elephants to signify endurance and authority. This indicates a shift from historical militarism to symbolic expressions of power.

Temporal naming practices demonstrate that time in Lango culture is relational and experiential rather than abstract and linear. This supports Mbiti's

(1969) influential argument that African conceptions of time are event-based. The use of birth order, time of day, and twin naming parallels findings among the Yoruba (Abiodun, 1991), although the Lango system places stronger emphasis on immediate temporal markers, suggesting a more granular temporal classification system embedded in daily life. Time, therefore, becomes an experiential category encoded into identity.

Spatially derived names further reveal the importance of place in identity formation. Consistent with Tuan's (1977) concept of "topophilia," the findings demonstrate that place is not merely geographic but emotional and social. Feld and Basso (1996) similarly argue that landscapes are culturally constructed through narrative and memory. The Lango case extends this understanding by embedding micro-geographies such as markets, streams, and bush environments directly into naming practices, indicating a highly localised spatial consciousness.

Names associated with personality, character, and destiny reflect cultural expectations regarding social behaviour and moral development. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, whereby social structures are internalised and reproduced through symbolic systems. Geertz (1973) also emphasises that cultural symbols shape human perception and action. However, unlike rigid determinism, Lango naming allows for interpretive flexibility, suggesting that destiny is culturally framed but not fixed.

Ritual and symbolic naming practices confirm Durkheim's (1912) theory that ritual reinforces collective consciousness. Finnegan (1970) similarly emphasises the performative nature of oral traditions in African societies. In the Lango context, naming is both ritual and narrative, simultaneously reflecting and producing cultural meaning. The boundary between sacred and everyday life is fluid, indicating an integrated cosmology in which ritual symbolism permeates ordinary social experience.

Finally, kinship-based naming among the Lango reflects a broader African pattern in which names function as repositories of genealogy, memory, and social identity. Similar to the Lango practice of naming firstborns after paternal and maternal grandparents, the Akan of Ghana also assign "day names" and lineage-linked names to reinforce ancestry and continuity (Arko-Achemfuor, 2018). Among the Baganda, naming after deceased relatives sustains spiritual presence and reinforces clan cohesion (Kagwa, 1934). However, while some societies emphasise circumstantial or calendrical naming, Lango naming is more strongly anchored in genealogical succession and deliberate ancestral recall.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Lango naming practices are not arbitrary linguistic labels but deeply structured cultural systems that encode ecological knowledge, social organisation, spiritual belief, and historical memory. While strongly consistent with broader African ethnolinguistic patterns described by Mbiti (1969), Finnegan (1970), and Geertz (1973), the Lango system is distinguished by its fine ecological specificity, openness in representing social conflict, and integration of lived experience into identity formation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results and discussions above, we conclude that Lango's personal naming practices constitute a complex ethnolinguistic system through which social experience, ecological conditions, spirituality, and historical memory are encoded into identity. Names are not merely identifiers but function as cultural texts that narrate lived experiences such as birth circumstances, environmental conditions, social relations, and moral expectations. The study finds that naming is both a reflective and generative process that links individuals to family, community, and the natural and spiritual world. It further establishes that Lango names preserve indigenous knowledge, document social realities, and reinforce cultural values.

Overall, the system is dynamic, deeply relational, and remains a key medium for sustaining Lango cultural identity.

We recommend that Lango naming practices be systematically documented through community-based ethnographic archives and digital repositories in order to safeguard indigenous knowledge and prevent its erosion in the face of modernisation and ongoing language shift. Such efforts would ensure that the cultural, historical, and linguistic significance embedded in these naming systems is preserved for future generations. Furthermore, we recommended that cultural heritage content related to indigenous naming systems be incorporated into local school curricula in Northern Uganda, as this would strengthen cultural identity, promote intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and enhance appreciation of ethnolinguistic heritage among younger populations. In addition, we call for expanded interdisciplinary and comparative research on Nilotic naming systems to deepen scholarly understanding of the ways in which ecological, spiritual, and social meanings are encoded in African personal names, thereby contributing to broader discussions on identity, language, and cultural continuity.

### Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by its reliance on oral narratives and retrospective interpretations, which are inherently susceptible to memory bias and the influence of evolving contemporary perspectives on historical name meanings. As a result, some interpretations may reflect present-day understandings rather than original cultural contexts. This limitation suggests that the findings cannot be generalised to the entire Lango population without caution. Furthermore, the study faced challenges related to translation, as certain indigenous linguistic expressions and cultural nuances may have been partially lost, altered, or simplified when translated into English for analysis, potentially affecting the depth and accuracy of interpretation.

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The authors declare that there are no competing financial or non-financial interests that could have influenced the research, analysis, or interpretation of the findings presented in this manuscript. The study was conducted with full academic independence and integrity. The authors confirm that no personal, professional, or institutional relationships exist that may be perceived as potential conflicts of interest related to the content of this work.

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