

COUNCIL ON TEACHING
Follow Up Report for
Teaching in Higher Education Conference Award

Name: **Beatrice Mkenda**

Department/Unit: **French and Italian**

Conference Attended: **African Language Teachers Association**

Date of Conference: April 10th -12th, 2025

Place: University of Pittsburg, Center for African Studies

Award Amount: **500.00**

Briefly summarize how your attendance at the conference enhanced your professional development and allowed you to gain a better understanding of teaching in your discipline or trends in higher education in general.

The conference brought together over 400 scholars, students, and stakeholders from various parts of the world. Representatives from countries including the United Kingdom, China, Canada, Zambia, Mali, Tanzania, Ghana, Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, and the United States were in attendance. Numerous presentations covered a wide range of topics, including African languages, pedagogy, cultural studies, literature, translation, linguistics, and more.

I presented on the topic, *Cultural Understanding in the Foreign Language Classroom: Learners' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning Materials*. The presentation was well received, and I received valuable, constructive feedback from audience members during the parallel session. Currently, I am refining my paper for publication based on this feedback. Additionally, I participated in a panel discussion about teaching computers to understand African languages. This project, a collaboration with colleagues from Princeton University, aims to ensure the reliability and authenticity of African studies content in AI, especially in the representation of less commonly taught languages.

A highlight of the event was being invited at the last minute to introduce one of the keynote speakers, Dr. Zoliswa Mali, a University of Iowa alumna. I have had the privilege of working with Dr. Mali at the University of Florida's Intensive African Languages Summer Program. Her remarkable keynote address, titled *African Language Programs: Past, Present, and Future*, left the audience deeply reflecting on the state and trajectory of African language programs in higher education.

I also attended several insightful presentations, including sessions on integrating technology in foreign language teaching, strategies for effective language instruction, and

the use of songs and music in the classroom. My favorite session was about using music to teach languages, a method I frequently employ in my own classes.

Overall, attending this conference was an enriching and rewarding experience. I am grateful to the Council on Teaching and the Department of French and Italian at the University of Iowa for supporting my participation. This opportunity not only expanded my professional network but also provided me with invaluable ideas and resources from fellow African languages and African studies scholars.

How have you been able to share what you learned about teaching with the campus?

I shared with my students' various strategies that language teachers commonly use to engage learners and enhance their understanding in the language classroom. These strategies included interactive activities, the use of authentic materials, and incorporating cultural elements into lessons to make learning more meaningful and relatable.

In my courses, I also integrated a Swahili song by sharing a link with the students. The song served as both an engaging resource and a practical tool for reviewing Swahili tenses and their negations. My students thoroughly enjoyed listening to the song, as it not only reinforced their grammar skills but also provided them with a deeper connection to Swahili culture and its rich musical heritage. This approach highlighted the power of music in language learning, demonstrating how it can make abstract grammatical concepts more accessible and enjoyable for learners.

I also shared the key highlights from the conference with my colleagues in the Swahili program, on the current African languages' discussions. These included insights into the challenges and opportunities in promoting African languages within academic and global contexts, as well as the innovative approaches to preserve and teach African languages.

I also shared the ongoing discussion on AI into language instruction particularly on how African languages are being represented in digital spaces. These conversations sparked meaningful dialogue among my colleagues, inspiring ideas for curriculum enhancement and collaborative projects to further strengthen the Swahili program and its contributions to the broader field of African language studies.