Indigenous Music as a Catalyst for Linguistic Diversity and Multilingualism in South African Schools: An Epistemological Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the role of indigenous music in supporting linguistic diversity and multilingualism within South African schools. Rooted in distinct ethnic and linguistic communities, indigenous musical traditions offer rich cultural resources that can enhance language learning and identity formation. Despite their cultural importance, these musical practices remain underutilised in formal education to promote multilingualism. Using qualitative content analysis of scholarly literature, the study employs a Cultural Epistemology framework to examine how indigenous music serves as a medium for knowledge transmission and language preservation. The findings reveal the pedagogical potential of incorporating indigenous musical practices in multilingual classrooms, showing that music can support language retention while fostering cultural pride and community connection among learners. The findings demonstrated that indigenous music plays a pivotal role in enhancing both learning and cultural identity, particularly within the intermediate phase of

learning (Grades 4 to 6) in rural and peri-urban South African schools. The article encourages educators and policymakers to recognise the value of indigenous music as an innovative tool for nurturing linguistic diversity. Collaborative between schools and communities is crucial for developing inclusive, culturally responsive curricula that honour South Africa's diverse linguistic landscape. This paper contributes to ongoing debates on decolonising education and presents a fresh perspective on harnessing traditional cultural assets to enrich multilingual education. Further research and practical initiatives are recommended to unlock the full potential of indigenous music in fostering a more inclusive and vibrant linguistic future.

Keywords: *Cultural epistemology, Indigenous music, Multilingualism, South African education, Teacher training*

Introduction

Perhaps, it is prudent to foreground this section by pointing out that multilingualism is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by varying cultural, social, and educational contexts. At its core, it is the ability of individuals or communities to communicate and construct meaning across multiple languages (Chibike et al., 2025; Mathe &Motsaathebe, 2025). In South Africa, multilingualism holds profound sociopolitical and cultural significance. The country officially recognizes eleven languages, reflecting its diverse histories and cultural legacies (Aiseng, 2022; Kaschula, 2021; Modupe &Leketi, 2024). This linguistic plurality is more than a matter of communication, it is central to South Africa's multicultural identity. Consequently, educational strategies and inclusive policies must support the sustainability of indigenous languages in formal learning environments (Southwood & Van Dulm, 2015). Within this study, multilingualism is not merely seen as the coexistence of languages but as an educational and cultural approach that upholds linguistic equity, affirms cultural identity, and enables learners to remain connected to their mother tongues while learning additional languages.

Indigenous music is vital for preserving and transmitting linguistic and spiritual heritage in a multilingual context. Traditional South African music including chants, harmonies, drumming, and communal singing— carries narratives, language patterns, social norms, and cultural values that are passed through generations (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2024). As an embodied cultural practice, it supports language retention and continuity, offering a space where heritage is actively sustained (Yende, 2023). Diko (2024) emphasises that indigenous music extends

beyond artistic expression; it is embedded within spiritual, communal, and educational contexts both locally and globally. This study recognises indigenous music as an epistemological asset a medium through which knowledge is created and shared. Its cultural and linguistic content strengthens learners' ties to their heritage and enables the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

However, indigenous languages and musical traditions have suffered from systemic marginalisation. Colonialism and apartheid devalued indigenous languages, positioning them as inferior to English and Afrikaans, which were associated with power and progress (Mugovhani, 2012; Aiseng, 2022). These legacies persist, as English continues to dominate formal education and public discourse, placing additional pressure on indigenous languages and cultures (Aiseng, 2022). According to Yende (2023), indigenous music once essential for transmitting language and culture—is now marginalized in education systems that favour e dominant languages. Despite this, indigenous music remains a critical tool in multilingual classrooms. It provides learners with a familiar, affirming space that fosters pride and supports inclusive education.

Recent studies underline the pedagogical and cognitive benefits of integrating indigenous music into language education. Huang (2023) and Mugovhani (2012) highlight that traditional music acts as an oral storytelling method, preserving cultural memory and historical consciousness. Linguistic features embedded in songs help reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures, aiding language learning (Aiseng, 2022; Kaschula, 2021). Additionally, Yende (2023) finds that music boosts memory, attention, and other cognitive functions crucial for language acquisition. These insights underscore the value of using culturally grounded, interactive tools like music to support multilingual education and move beyond rote memorisation.

Despite these advantages, research at the intersection of indigenous music and multilingual education in South African schools remains limited. Existing literature often addresses music's educational benefits or its role in cultural preservation separately, without unifying these elements. This lack of integration prevents a holistic understanding of how indigenous music can simultaneously promote language learning, cultural identity, and academic success.

Cultural Epistemology Theory helps bridge this gap by emphasising that all knowledge is rooted in specific cultural systems (Smith, 2012; Mignolo, 2009). From this perspective, indigenous music is not just a

form of artistic expression but a living knowledge system an archive of language, values, norms, and history. Echeverria and Sparling (2024) argue for recognising music as a legitimate epistemology that carries and transmits intergenerational knowledge. Reframing indigenous music in this way shifts it from the margins to the centre of educational discourse, particularly in multilingual instruction. This epistemological approach challenges dominant Western education models that favour written, formal, and decontextualised learning. Nzewi (2014) critiques this Eurocentric approach, advocating for African musical epistemologies that integrate language, rhythm, narrative, and spirituality. Incorporating such approaches into the curriculum validates cultural identities and supports deeper learning.

This study focuses on the intermediate phase of education (Grades 4–6) in rural and peri-urban South African schools, where learners often speak indigenous languages at home but are taught primarily in English or Afrikaans (Yende, 2023). This mismatch creates barriers to learning and weakens identity formation. In such contexts, indigenous music offers a culturally grounded way to bridge these gaps and reinforce multilingual identities. South African education policies like the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) affirm the importance of multilingualism and cultural inclusion (Department of Basic Education, 2011, 2019). They promote mother-tongue instruction and inclusion of indigenous languages. However, practical implementation is inconsistent. Embedding indigenous music into the curriculum presents a viable way to meet these policy objectives. Creating inclusive, linguistically rich teaching materials requires collaboration among educators, cultural experts, and policymakers.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to explore the epistemological role of indigenous music in preserving linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism:

a) What role does indigenous music play in preserving linguistic diversity in South African schools?

b) What impact does indigenous music have on promoting multilingualism within South African schools?

c) What epistemological insights can be drawn from indigenous music's role in fostering linguistic and cultural awareness, particularly through the lens of Cultural Epistemology Theory?

d) What are community perceptions of the link between indigenous music, language, and identity?

e) What is the role of indigenous music as a pedagogical tool, specifically in the intermediate phase of learning (Grades 4 to 6) within rural and peri-urban South African schools?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Cultural Epistemology Theory, which explores how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and understood through cultural practices and language. Cultural epistemology sits within the broader field of epistemology the philosophical study of knowledge and focuses specifically on the relationship between culture and knowledge formation. Epistemology, a term coined by J.F. Ferrier in the 19th century, explores fundamental questions such as: What is knowledge? How is knowledge acquired? And where is knowledge found? (Sulistyono, Purwasito, Warto & Pitana, 2021). Cultural Epistemology builds on these questions by emphasising that knowledge is not neutral or universal but is deeply shaped by cultural, historical, and social contexts (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Demerath, 2002; Xu, 2022). Michel Foucault is widely regarded as a foundational thinker in this field. His work on power/knowledge relations and how knowledge is produced within specific cultural frameworks illustrates that what societies know and value is influenced by their cultural practices and power structures (O'Farrell, 2013; Powell, 2015; Heizmann & Olsson, 2015). While the term "Cultural Epistemology" is not attributed to a single individual, it draws from diverse traditions including postcolonial theory, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy.

In the context of this study, Cultural Epistemology offers a valuable lens for understanding indigenous music as a medium of knowledge transmission. Indigenous music encapsulates linguistic, historical, and social knowledge embedded within cultural rituals, oral traditions, and performance practices. As a repository of communal knowledge and a dynamic educational resource, Cultural Epistemology is especially relevant in South Africa's multilingual environment. The theory explains

how language learning and identity formation are intertwined with cultural practices. Indigenous music, therefore, does more than entertain; it connects learners to their cultural heritage, supports language preservation, and fosters multilingualism through culturally meaningful engagement.

This theoretical framework guided the study's analysis by focusing on how indigenous music functions epistemologically,how it transmits knowledge, reinforces linguistic structures, and shapes learners' cultural identities. It helped frame the research questions around the epistemic role of indigenous music in preserving linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism in South African schools. The study's findings are interpreted through this lens, highlighting indigenous music as a living archive of knowledge and a pedagogical tool that embodies cultural ways of knowing, enriching the educational experience and fostering linguistic and cultural sustainability.

Research methodology

This article employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in content analysis to investigate the epistemological role of indigenous music in promoting multilingualism and preserving linguistic diversity in South African schools. The study uses an inductive analytical approach to identify and interpret themes through detailed textual analysis. According to Patton (2002), qualitative content analysis distills raw material into categories or themes through interpretation and logical inference. Berg (2001) similarly argues that while the process is largely inductive, the use of theoretical insights at the outset of analysis is often beneficial for framing concepts and identifying analytical priorities.

A qualitative content analysis framework has been selected for its capacity to explore the social, cultural and pedagogical dimensions encoded within indigenous music. Content analysis is a powerful tool for understanding how indigenous music functions in multilingual education, given its historical, spiritual, and linguistic significance, making content analysis a powerful tool to draw out how it functions within multilingual education settings.

The study involved a comprehensive literature review, drawing from a wide range of academic sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters. These were accessed through scholarly databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. Sources were selected based on relevance to indigenous music, language

diversity, cultural identity, and multilingual education within the South African context. Emphasis was placed on identifying both historical perspectives and contemporary interpretations of the role of music in educational and linguistic practices.

Data analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. These stages enabled a rigorous and systematic approach to uncovering recurring ideas, values, and ideological underpinnings related to indigenous music and its contribution to language development and cultural affirmation. Analytical engagement was guided by theoretical perspectives on indigenous knowledge systems and multilingual pedagogies, which helped in developing themes while also allowing new insights to emerge.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed theoretical triangulation. Rather than relying on a single perspective, different theoretical lenses were applied to interpret the data and assess its implications. Triangulation in this context did not involve multiple data sources or methods but was instead a process of integrating diverse scholarly interpretations to cross-validate emergent themes. This approach addressed concerns of bias and subjectivity by drawing on a range of epistemological viewpoints, thereby strengthening the credibility and analytical depth of the research. Triangulation facilitated a more nuanced understanding of how indigenous music operates not only as a cultural artefact but also as a pedagogical medium that enriches language education. The incorporation of multiple perspectives provided a robust foundation for examining the interrelationship between music, identity, and language in South African schools.

Ethical Considerations

This study employed a qualitative research methodology centred on content analysis of existing literature and secondary data sources. As no primary data collection involving human participants was conducted, there was no requirement for formal ethical clearance. The research process involved a systematic analysis of publicly available texts, respecting intellectual property and citing all sources appropriately. Despite the absence of direct participant involvement, the study maintained rigorous ethical standards by accurately representing the original authors' work and avoiding misinterpretation. Should future

research expand to include empirical data collection, such as interviews or community engagement, formal ethical approval and informed consent procedures would then be necessary to protect participants' rights and privacy.

Contextualising the results of this article

This section interprets how indigenous music functions in South African education to preserve language, promote multilingualism, and reinforce cultural identity. Drawing from Cultural Epistemology Theory, which sees knowledge as culturally situated and mediated through expressive practices, the section analyses how music serves as both a pedagogical and epistemological tool. Rather than simply listing scholars' contributions, the discussion evaluates how their work interacts, overlaps, and diverges, particularly concerning education, language revitalisation, and community agency.

Indigenous Music as a Tool for Preserving Linguistic Diversity

Indigenous music serves as a powerful medium for preserving linguistic heritage, yet its deeper epistemological role within educational contexts remains underexplored. Grounded in Cultural Epistemology Theory, which views knowledge as socially and culturally situated, indigenous music is more than artistic expression it is a pedagogical tool that transmits knowledge through oral traditions, rhythm, and performance. Yende (2024) highlights that traditional songs help learners access ancestral languages, fostering memory and cultural connection. This aligns with the view that music enhances knowledge retention through culturally resonant and emotionally engaging forms. Fishman's (1991) Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theory suggests revitalisation efforts should begin at home, but Alyami (2023) notes that integrating music in schools can create continuity between home and institutional domains. Thus, music becomes a bridge linking community knowledge with formal education.

Conversely, scholars like Mapaya (2014) and Mugovhani (2012) support including musical interventions in the curriculum, but they often treat music as supplementary rather than essential content. This underestimates its ontological value in African societies, where music, identity, and language are intertwined. Indigenous songs should therefore be viewed not as add-ons but as vital repositories of community-specific

epistemologies. Furthermore, Echeverria and Sparling (2024) highlight that music plays a key role in shaping a speaker's identity, adding an emotional dimension to language learning. Through indigenous music, learners not only study language but also emotionally connect with it, fostering linguistic consciousness and deeper cultural ties. Therefore, incorporating indigenous music in schools is not just symbolic it is an epistemological imperative. It supports linguistic diversity, affirms indigenous knowledge systems, and embodies culturally situated learning. Such integration challenges Eurocentric models by validating indigenous modes of knowing and teaching, making music a central tool for sustaining endangered languages in education.

Promoting Multilingualism through Indigenous Music

The integration of indigenous music in South African classrooms extends beyond celebrating diversity; it actively cultivates multilingual development within a pedagogical framework rooted in culturally situated knowledge. While Mkhombo (2019) emphasises music's roles in cultural preservation, emotional expression, and social cohesion, a fuller understanding emerges when viewed through Cultural Epistemology Theory, which frames music as a culturally embedded practice that mediates and generates knowledge across linguistic contexts. This theoretical lens reconceptualises multilingualism fostered by music as an epistemic process. Learners encounter languages not only as sounds but as lived experiences interwoven with memory, ritual, and identity. Netshivhambe (2023) supports this by showing how indigenous music nurtures self-worth, multicultural sensitivity, and artistic awareness. These outcomes arise from the performative and narrative qualities of music, which encode distinct knowledge systems tied to linguistic communities.

Recent work by Chibike et.al. (2025) and Mathe and Motsaathebe (2025) show that media products are powerful cultural artefacts that promote multilingualism and multiculturalism. Their work shows how media ranging from radio broadcasts to digital platforms functions as a contemporary space where indigenous languages and cultural expressions are preserved, disseminated, and revitalised. This aligns with indigenous music's role in classrooms, as both traditional and media-mediated practices contribute to sustaining linguistic diversity in modern educational and social settings.

According to Yende (2024), including multilingual indigenous songs in formal curricula exposes learners to various African languages.

Cultural Epistemology Theory helps us see these songs as oral archives epistemological artefacts that embed social values, historical memory, and linguistic nuance. They enable learners to internalise cultural logics and language structures through embodied engagement rather than abstract instruction. Educational programmes with multilingual singing like choirs featuring traditional songs from various linguistic groups turn learning spaces into sites of epistemic participation. These performances do more than encourage inclusivity; they enact what Cultural Epistemology Theory describes as "cognitive participation in cultural narratives," where learners engage with language as a vessel of communal worldview, encompassing understandings of nature, spirituality, and social relations (Netshivhambe, 2023; Mugovhani, 2012).

Furthermore, the multisensory and collaborative nature of indigenous music dissolves rigid separations between language acquisition and cultural expression. From a cultural epistemological perspective, indigenous music facilitates a dynamic, dialogic approach to multilingual education treating language as a living, expressive epistemic system intimately linked to identity and knowledge production. The media's growing role in this process, as shown by recent studies, highlights the importance of combining traditional and contemporary cultural practices to support sustainable multilingual education.

Epistemological Perspectives on Indigenous Music and Language Awareness

When viewed through the lens of Cultural Epistemology Theory, indigenous music transcends its pedagogical function to become a culturally embedded system of knowledge. This theory asserts that knowledge is not universal but shaped by cultural contexts, conveyed through oral traditions, symbolic practices, and embodied experiences. Nzewi (2014) emphasises the epistemic power of indigenous African musical arts, describing them as a "super-ordinary force" that fosters values such as collective identity and intercultural respect. These values reflect cultural epistemology's recognition of affective and performative practices as legitimate forms of knowing. Unlike Western pedagogical frameworks, which often compartmentalise music into technical elements and language into structural parts, indigenous African traditions interweave language, rhythm, movement, and song into holistic cultural narratives. Mugovhani (2012) critiques this fragmentation in Western education, highlighting how African knowledge systems rely on the

interconnectedness of oral traditions, music, and language. Within this framework, songs are more than just linguistic tools; they are a repository of cultural memory, ethical teachings, and communal worldviews.

Learning traditional songs is thus a process of engaging with cultural logic and values rather than merely acquiring vocabulary or pronunciation. This immersive approach promotes epistemic awareness, allowing learners to experience knowledge through relational, symbolic, and affective channels. Nzewi's claim that ancestral musical epistemologies can "heal human divisions" gains relevance here, as Cultural Epistemology Theory challenges Eurocentric knowledge systems that marginalise oral and performative traditions. Yende (2024) further argues that indigenous music allows learners to access the philosophical and metaphorical layers of language, enhancing their understanding of social norms and communal values. Ultimately, indigenous music serves as both a content area and a method of instruction, offering a culturally grounded form of epistemological engagement. Integrating it into education becomes a transformative act, legitimising African knowledge systems often excluded from mainstream curricula and advancing decolonial and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Indigenous music enhances learning and cultural identity in intermediate rural South African schools

In the intermediate phase of learning (Grades 4 to 6) within rural and peri-urban South African schools, indigenous music functions as a culturally grounded pedagogical tool that supports multilingualism, cognitive development, and cultural affirmation. Through traditional songs, chants, and storytelling, learners are exposed to indigenous languages in a meaningful and engaging way, enhancing vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and linguistic confidence (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende, 2023). These musical forms encode oral histories, social values, and linguistic structures, serving as accessible repositories of communal knowledge (Kaschula, 2021; Huang, 2023). Incorporating indigenous music helps learners connect with their cultural roots, fostering a sense of pride and identity in contexts where dominant languages have historically overshadowed indigenous ones (Aiseng, 2022; Diko, 2024). As Echeverria and Sparling (2024) argue, music functions as a way of knowing—an epistemological framework through which cultural knowledge is transmitted.

This aligns with the principles of Cultural Epistemology Theory, which emphasises the inseparability of knowledge from its cultural contexts (Smith, 2012; Mignolo, 2009). In addition, the use of music in the classroom supports active learning, collaboration, and emotional engagement, all of which are particularly valuable for learners in resource-constrained rural and peri-urban settings (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2025; Chibike et al., 2025). Community involvement through music-based learning—especially when elders and cultural practitioners participate—further strengthens intergenerational learning and cultural sustainability (Mudau, 2024; Netshivhambe, 2023). Thus, indigenous music is not only a medium of language learning but also a tool for holistic education, reinforcing cognitive skills, cultural values, and social cohesion.

The Interconnection Between Indigenous Music, Language, and Identity: Community Perceptions

Claims that indigenous music fosters language preservation and cultural identity often lack depth unless analysed through Cultural Epistemology Theory. This theory posits that knowledge is not universal but emerges from culturally situated practices. Within this framework, music is more than just expression it is a living epistemological system. Scholars like Mudau (2024), Netshivhambe (2023), and Yende (2024) emphasise the role of indigenous music in education, but their arguments gain deeper significance when understood through this lens. For instance, Mudau's support for traditional music in schools reflects more than cultural reproduction it represents community-driven knowledge transmission. However, educational programs often treat indigenous music superficially, using traditional songs without engaging with the epistemic frameworks embedded within them. This approach risks tokenism, especially when schools involve community elders without acknowledging the ontological assumptions behind the music. Cultural Epistemology Theory cautions against reducing cultural practices to decorative or symbolic elements and advocates viewing music as a cognitive act and a mode of knowledge transmission.

Moreover, community-school collaborations, praised in the literature, must be critically evaluated. These efforts can reinforce indigenous knowledge only if they resist institutional co-optation. Power dynamics such as decisions over song selection and representations of "tradition" must be addressed. Without this, indigenous music may become a

nostalgic performance rather than a tool for identity reclamation. Yende (2024) and Mudau (2024) document how indigenous music fosters intergenerational connections, yet such engagement must not be idealised. The role of music in community education aligns with Cultural Epistemology Theory, which frames knowledge as relational and co-produced. When music is treated as a contested knowledge site, it opens possibilities to confront historical erasure and linguistic marginalisation. Reframing indigenous music as a central knowledge system, not a cultural add-on challenges colonial educational legacies and positions music as an agent of epistemic and cultural restoration.
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Discussions

This study critically examines the epistemological significance of indigenous music in sustaining linguistic diversity and fostering multilingualism within South African schools. Indigenous music is framed not merely as a cultural or pedagogical tool but as a dynamic epistemic system that produces, transmits, and renews knowledge embedded in language, identity, and community. Grounded in Cultural Epistemology Theory, which posits that knowledge is rooted in cultural practices and communal experiences rather than abstract universalism (Nzewi, 2014; Demerath, 2002), indigenous music offers an alternative way of knowing relational, embodied, and context-specific challenging Western paradigms that marginalise African knowledge forms (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Dei, 2012).

In South Africa, with its complex multilingual heritage shaped by apartheid-era language hierarchies, indigenous music functions as a vital repository for endangered languages and cultural memory (Kaschula, 2021; Modupe &Leketi, 2024; Motsaathebe, 2025). Consistent with existing research, the study affirms that music encodes linguistic structures, oral histories, and communal values (Mapaya, 2014; Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2024). From a cultural epistemological perspective, indigenous music does more than support language; it transmits embodied linguistic knowledge, interweaving song, rhythm, and narrative to sustain languages at risk of erosion (Echeverria & Sparling, 2024; Mudau, 2024). This challenges the reductive treatment of indigenous languages in education as isolated subjects, arguing instead that they are living systems tied to culture (Manyike& Shava, 2018).

Integrating indigenous music into education represents a critical epistemic intervention against prevailing monolingual, Anglophone

biases in policies like CAPS and the Language in Education Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Heugh, 2013). While these policies formally support multilingualism, their implementation often lacks grounding in indigenous epistemologies (Southwood & Van Dulm, 2015; Le Cordeur, 2013). Framing indigenous music as cultural epistemology bridges formal schooling with community-based knowledge, offering holistic and culturally resonant language experiences (Nzewi, 2014; Yende & Yende, 2024). Demerath's (2002) notion of "epistemological cultures" is relevant here, where learning arises through embodied social practice rather than abstract instruction alone.

Particularly within the intermediate phase (Grades 4 to 6), indigenous music plays a central role in cognitive and socio-emotional development. This study finds that in rural and peri-urban schools, music anchors language learning in familiar cultural forms (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2024). Far from being peripheral, music becomes a pedagogical strategy, enabling learners to connect with their linguistic heritage and supporting multilingual competencies (Kaschula, 2021; Aiseng, 2022). Song and rhythm embed grammar, vocabulary, and cultural content in emotionally resonant ways, promoting both cognitive retention and inclusive pedagogy. Yende (2023) confirms that incorporating traditional songs, chants, and dance enhances language retention and fosters intergenerational knowledge exchange. Recognising indigenous languages in the classroom validates learners' identities and deepens their engagement with school content. More broadly, music cultivates cultural identity and promotes social cohesion, both critical for achieving epistemic justice in multilingual classrooms (Mudau, 2024; Ugoji, 2022). Nzewi (2014) conceptualises indigenous musical arts as cognitive and spiritual forces, extending learning beyond rote memory to encompass relational and affective dimensions.

However, there is a danger in superficial incorporation of indigenous music, reducing it to performance rather than recognising its full epistemological value (Heizmann & Olsson, 2015; Powell, 2015). Educators must be trained to understand and implement indigenous epistemologies meaningfully. Manyike and Shava (2018) stress the importance of preparing teachers to create transformative multilingual pedagogies that are grounded in local knowledge systems. The study also engages broader critiques of linguistic dominance and translanguaging in postcolonial education. Indigenous music creates a site for epistemic sovereignty, allowing learners to assert their linguistic identities and resist hegemonic ideologies (Aiseng, 2022; Huang, 2023; Yende & Yende,

2024). As Xu (2022) argues, such epistemic diversity enriches cross-cultural education and disrupts the universalising tendencies of Western knowledge systems.

While policy frameworks like LiEP and CAPS support mother-tongue instruction, systemic barriers such as insufficient resources and entrenched hierarchies hinder implementation (Heugh, 2013; Southwood & Van Dulm, 2015). Embedding indigenous music in curricula offers an actionable, epistemologically coherent means to achieve policy goals by promoting cultural affirmation, linguistic equity, and community engagement (Netshivhambe, 2023; Manyike& Shava, 2018). Beyond classrooms, indigenous music supports cultural resilience amid globalisation and language homogenisation. Community-based music initiatives ensure the intergenerational transmission of identity and language, echoing Ugoji's (2022) observation that cultural collaboration fosters cohesion and memory. As Diko (2024) and Sulistyono et al. (2021) contend, music becomes a living archive, resisting cultural erasure and sustaining plurality.

In conclusion, indigenous music should be embraced not merely as enrichment but as an essential epistemological tool in multilingual education. This study affirms its role in restoring linguistic diversity, promoting epistemic justice, and fostering inclusive, culturally sustaining educational environments (Dei, 2012; Nzewi, 2014; Yende & Yende, 2024). Future research and educational policy must centre indigenous epistemologies to transform South Africa's multilingual education system in ways that are equitable, authentic, and grounded in lived cultural experience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this article, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Integrate Indigenous Music into CAPS Curriculum:** Revise CAPS to explicitly include indigenous music as a key pedagogical tool for language learning and cultural knowledge, ensuring alignment with Cultural Epistemology Theory and the Language in Education Policy.

2. **Strengthen Community-School Partnerships:** Formalise collaborations between schools and local indigenous musicians and elders to

co-create culturally authentic teaching materials and support language transmission, aligned with LiEP's community engagement goals.

3. **Enhance Teacher Training:** Develop targeted professional development programmes that equip educators with knowledge of indigenous epistemologies and practical skills to integrate indigenous music in multilingual classrooms.

4. **Incorporate Indigenous Music in Language Acquisition Frameworks:** Create multilingual teaching frameworks using indigenous music to scaffold language learning, fostering linguistic proficiency alongside cultural and epistemic awareness.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that indigenous music plays a pivotal role in preserving linguistic diversity and fostering multilingualism within South African schools. Crucially, the research goes beyond viewing indigenous music as a cultural artefact, instead framing it through Cultural Epistemology Theory as a living, dynamic knowledge system deeply embedded within communities. This theoretical perspective enhances understanding by conceptualising indigenous music as more than artistic expression; it functions as a repository of cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge that shapes learners' identities and epistemic awareness.

Applying Cultural Epistemology Theory reveals how indigenous music mediates knowledge transmission in multilingual classrooms by intertwining language and culture in pedagogically meaningful ways. Integrating indigenous musical practices into educational curricula is important not only for language acquisition but also for fostering cultural consciousness and social cohesion. Indigenous music thus serves as a vital conduit through which learners engage with their heritage, affirm their identities, and develop multilingual competencies within an inclusive educational environment.

The findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice in South Africa. The study highlights the need for curricula that authentically incorporate indigenous epistemologies, moving beyond superficial inclusion toward recognising indigenous music as an epistemic resource capable of enriching pedagogy. This calls for collaborative efforts between educators, cultural practitioners, and communities to co-

create teaching approaches that reflect the lived realities and knowledge systems of learners.

Furthermore, the study suggests that community involvement is essential for sustaining the epistemological and cultural functions of indigenous music. Partnerships with elders and custodians of musical traditions enhance authenticity and bridge formal education with community knowledge systems, fostering intergenerational language and culture transmission. This collaborative model aligns with broader efforts to decolonise education and promote culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Reflecting on these insights, indigenous music emerges as a transformative educational tool that challenges dominant Eurocentric frameworks by centring African epistemologies and cultural expressions. Its integration can contribute to a more equitable and culturally affirming multilingual education system that values diverse ways of knowing and being. Ultimately, this study advances scholarly and practical understanding by demonstrating that indigenous music is indispensable for nurturing linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and social cohesion in South African schools, reinforcing the critical role of Cultural Epistemology Theory in framing these processes.

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