

“DON’T TEACH THAT IT’S TOO INDIGENOUS”: THE MARGINALISATION, SILENCING, AND RESISTANCE OF INDIGENOUS MUSIC IN HIGHER EDUCATION

“NÃO ENSINE QUE É INDÍGENA DE MAIS”: A MARGINALIZAÇÃO, O SILENCIAMENTO E A RESISTÊNCIA DA MÚSICA INDÍGENA NO ENSINO SUPERIOR

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Abstract

South Africa’s musical arts and culture have historically faced systemic marginalisation, first under colonial rule and later during apartheid from 1948, when the government dismissed indigenous musical traditions as primitive, ungodly, and lacking artistic merit. Despite political independence in 1994, post-apartheid educational policies have struggled to fully redress these historical imbalances, particularly in higher education, where curricula continue to prioritise Western classical and global popular music. Indigenous music, a vital component of South Africa’s cultural heritage, remains peripheral and often silenced in formal teaching and learning. This systematic review examines the positioning, exclusion, and resistance of indigenous music within South African university curricula, drawing on scholarly literature, policy documents, and empirical studies. Findings highlight the persistent privileging of non-indigenous repertoires, reflecting broader socio-cultural hierarchies and epistemic biases that constrain recognition of local knowledge systems and limit students’ cultural expression. The review further identifies strategies of resistance employed by educators and students, including curriculum adaptation, integration of community-based musical practices, and advocacy for institutional reform. Gaps remain in research, particularly regarding indigenous pedagogies, teaching resources, and assessment practices that affirm cultural identity. By foregrounding marginalisation, silencing, and resistance, this study contributes to debates on decolonising higher education and promoting epistemic diversity in music programs. The review concludes with recommendations for

Resumo

As artes e a cultura musicais da África do Sul enfrentaram historicamente uma marginalização sistêmica, primeiro sob o domínio colonial e depois durante o apartheid a partir de 1948, quando o governo descartou as tradições musicais indígenas como primitivas, profanas e sem mérito artístico. Apesar da independência política em 1994, as políticas educacionais pós-apartheid têm lutado para corrigir plenamente esses desequilíbrios históricos, particularmente no ensino superior, onde os currículos continuam a priorizar a música clássica ocidental e a música popular global. A música indígena, um componente vital do patrimônio cultural da África do Sul, permanece periférica e frequentemente silenciada no ensino e na aprendizagem formais. Esta revisão sistemática examina o posicionamento, a exclusão e a resistência da música indígena nos currículos universitários sul-africanos, com base em literatura acadêmica, documentos de políticas públicas e estudos empíricos. Os resultados destacam a persistente priorização de repertórios não indígenas, refletindo hierarquias socioculturais mais amplas e vieses epistêmicos que restringem o reconhecimento dos sistemas de conhecimento locais e limitam a expressão cultural dos estudantes. A revisão identifica ainda estratégias de resistência empregadas por educadores e estudantes, incluindo a adaptação curricular, a integração de práticas musicais comunitárias e a defesa de reformas institucionais. Persistem lacunas na pesquisa, particularmente no que diz respeito às pedagogias indígenas, aos recursos didáticos e às práticas de avaliação que afirmam a



policy, curriculum reform, and professional development, advocating for culturally responsive, inclusive approaches that celebrate South Africa's unique musical heritage while empowering educators and students alike.

Keywords: Arts and Culture. Curriculum. Indigenous Music. Marginalised. Teaching and Learning.

identidade cultural. Ao destacar a marginalização, o silenciamento e a resistência, este estudo contribui para os debates sobre a descolonização do ensino superior e a promoção da diversidade epistêmica nos programas de música. A revisão conclui com recomendações para políticas públicas, reforma curricular e desenvolvimento profissional, defendendo abordagens culturalmente responsivas e inclusivas que celebrem o patrimônio musical único da África do Sul, ao mesmo tempo que empoderam educadores e estudantes.

Palavras-chave: Artes e Cultura. Currículo. Música Indígena. Marginalizados. Ensino e Aprendizagem.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is prudent to foreground this article by emphasising that indigenous music constitutes a vital component of South Africa's cultural heritage, yet it remains marginalised in higher education. Historically, colonial and apartheid regimes dismissed indigenous musical traditions as primitive, ungodly, and lacking artistic merit, leaving a legacy that continues to influence contemporary curricula. The marginalisation of indigenous music reflects broader social and cultural hierarchies, where Western knowledge systems and cultural expressions are prioritised over local practices. This historical context is crucial for understanding why indigenous music has yet to gain recognition as a legitimate and central part of university-level music education. Mugovhani (2012) highlights that:

Since 1994, the post-apartheid South African government has been vigorously advocating for the redress of the past imbalances in the arts and culture of the people of South Africa. Consequently, one of the missions and visions of the new post-apartheid South African government has been geared towards the promotion of previously marginalised people's arts and culture and bringing them on par with those that have been receiving government backing during the previous 'apartheid' dispensation.

Based on this statement, it is evident that the post-apartheid government recognised the urgent need to restore dignity, value, and visibility to the arts and culture of previously oppressed communities. The promotion of indigenous musical heritage

forms part of a broader effort to address historical injustices and support cultural plurality. This viewpoint is further reinforced by other scholars who emphasise the importance of redressing past educational and cultural inequities through proactive curricular reforms.

Despite these policy commitments, the practical integration of indigenous music in higher education remains limited. Curricula in many universities continue to prioritise Western classical music and global popular music, leaving indigenous music marginalised or treated as peripheral content. This exclusion has long-term consequences, including the potential erosion of cultural knowledge, diminished opportunities for students to engage meaningfully with local music traditions, and a weakened sense of cultural identity among future generations.

Several scholars have engaged with the challenges faced by South African higher education in implementing indigenous music education during and after the apartheid era. For instance, Mugovhani (2012) provides a detailed historical account, explaining that the apartheid government, which held power from 1948 to 1994, severely oppressed South Africans across all cultural realms, including traditional music experiences and practices. The apartheid regime sought to impose a rigid separation of communities and ethnicities, discouraging the development of a unified, multicultural national identity.

Buthelezi (2016) supports this perspective, asserting that during apartheid, people's lives were divided along racial and ethnic lines rather than encouraged to live in an integrated, culturally plural society. According to Buthelezi, apartheid affected every aspect of society, including politics, religion, culture, and education, reinforcing the systemic marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and practices. The historical privileging of Western knowledge systems, coupled with the suppression of indigenous forms of expression, has left a deep imprint on the South African education system.

Since 1994, the Department of Education has emphasised the transformation of educational curricula across multiple subjects, including music. However, implementing these changes has proven difficult due to the persistence of colonial legacies that are deeply ingrained in South African society (Yende & Yende, 2022). The education system continues to reflect Eurocentric paradigms that often disregard the existence and value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which are inherently multicultural and deeply rooted in local traditions.

The problem persists because an indigenous music curriculum in South African higher education has not yet been adequately developed. The current music curriculum remains largely inherited from colonial frameworks, where Western music culture is considered superior to African indigenous culture and music (Mugovhani, 2012). Mugovhani (2018) warns that if Eurocentric epistemologies are not dismantled, the indigenous African music curriculum will never be fully developed or archived within higher education. He emphasises that this failure threatens the preservation of indigenous African music, potentially leading to its extinction in society (Netshivhambe, 2017:107).

Consequently, African indigenous music receives insufficient support in higher education and is rarely offered as a core module within existing music programs (Yende and Yende, 2022). This lack of institutional recognition limits students' exposure to and understanding of their own cultural heritage, undermining efforts to promote epistemic diversity and culturally responsive education. Mkhombo (2019:97) highlights the complex nature of African music, noting that:

Indigenous isiZulu music and indigenous African music in general, is as old as the traditional cultures and indigenous performances that have been an essential part of the life experience of the majority of the amaZulu nation. Music reaffirms and enhances the social meaning of the institutions that it embellishes. Some musical traditions may have a long history, others a shorter one, and all are somewhat stable and unstable at the same time.

This observation underscores that African music is both a stable cultural practice and a dynamic, evolving form of expression. It is deeply intertwined with social and cultural life, yet its marginalisation in formal education threatens its sustainability and relevance for future generations.

Since the call for decolonisation and Africanisation of curricula, South African universities have had opportunities to revise and restructure their programs. One key element of this process involves the inclusion of African indigenous music curricula. Universities such as the University of Venda, University of Zululand, and University of Fort Hare are particularly well-positioned to promote African indigenous music, as they are situated in regions where indigenous cultural heritage thrives (Netshivhambe, 2017; Mugovhani, 2018). Higher education institutions should prioritise the curricularisation of

indigenous music to ensure that students engage meaningfully with local cultural knowledge, while also fostering a sense of cultural pride and identity.

Despite the growing emphasis on decolonisation and Africanisation, several gaps remain in the literature and practice of indigenous music education. First, pedagogical approaches for teaching indigenous music are under-researched, with limited guidance on effective strategies that affirm cultural identity and engage students in participatory learning. Second, the development of structured curricula and assessment frameworks for indigenous music remains incomplete, leaving educators without clear guidance on implementation. Third, professional development opportunities for educators are scarce, limiting their capacity to deliver culturally responsive music education. Finally, documentation and preservation of indigenous music practices remain insufficient, posing challenges for sustaining these traditions in higher education and broader society.

This article is motivated by the need to examine the marginalisation and silencing of indigenous music in South African higher education, as well as the strategies of resistance employed by educators and students to preserve and promote these musical traditions. By exploring historical and contemporary challenges, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on decolonising music curricula and promoting epistemic diversity within higher education. It foregrounds the importance of culturally responsive approaches that celebrate South Africa's unique musical heritage, empower educators and students, and ensure the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge for future generations. The study also aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators seeking to integrate indigenous music meaningfully into higher education programmes.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the review of literature and the historical and contemporary marginalisation of indigenous music in South African higher education, four research questions were developed to guide this study. These questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and strategies related to the teaching and preservation of indigenous music in universities.

1. How is indigenous music currently positioned within South African higher education curricula?
2. What are the key challenges that educators and students face in teaching and learning indigenous music?
3. What strategies of resistance and innovation are employed to promote indigenous music within higher education?
4. How can higher education institutions support the preservation and promotion of indigenous music for future generations?

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is grounded in Afrocentric philosophy, which emphasises the importance of Africans addressing African problems through curricula that are culturally relevant and contextually meaningful. Afrocentricity positions African people, culture, and history at the centre of knowledge production, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms in education. Importantly, Afrocentric philosophy should not be misunderstood as a mere “black version” of Eurocentric thought. Rather, it constitutes a distinct intellectual perspective that asserts the agency, dignity, and centrality of African experiences and worldviews.

According to Asante (2015), Afrocentricity is a philosophical approach that “prioritises the agency of African people, culture, and history in the presentation, analysis, and solution of African problems.” This perspective shifts the focus from externally imposed frameworks to indigenous epistemologies, enabling African scholars, educators, and learners to interpret knowledge and address societal issues from within their own cultural and historical contexts. By centring African voices and experiences, Afrocentricity seeks to redress centuries of marginalisation and misrepresentation, offering a pathway for culturally responsive education and sustainable social transformation.

Reed, Lawson, and Gibbs (2005) support this understanding, asserting that Afrocentricity represents a transformation of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours. They further suggest that Afrocentricity is “the first and only reality for African people – a simple rediscovery.” This description positions Afrocentricity as both an epistemic

framework and a corrective tool, enabling African communities to reclaim their historical, cultural, and intellectual heritage. Through this lens, education becomes a vehicle for empowerment, identity formation, and the affirmation of African knowledge systems, rather than a mechanism for the perpetuation of Eurocentric epistemologies. Chukwuokolo (2009: 39) further elaborates on the principles of Afrocentrism, stating that:

Afrocentrism, which means African centeredness, does not violently confront any person or people, but is a resolute attempt to put the records right. It is about placing African people within their own historical framework. It is a demand that the contributions of Africans in all areas of civilisation be reflected in world history.

This statement highlights a key feature of Afrocentric philosophy: it is corrective rather than confrontational. The approach seeks to re-centre African contributions and experiences within global discourses, challenging historical erasures and biases while promoting recognition of the continent's rich intellectual and cultural heritage. In the context of higher education, this perspective provides a framework for examining how curricula can be restructured to reflect African realities, particularly in fields such as music, where indigenous knowledge systems have historically been marginalised.

Applying Afrocentric philosophy to this article is particularly relevant because it offers both a conceptual and practical basis for exploring the marginalisation, silencing, and resistance of indigenous music in South African higher education. The framework recognises the importance of designing curricula that are culturally affirming, locally relevant, and capable of fostering a sense of belonging among students. It foregrounds the role of educators as agents of transformation, encouraging them to create pedagogical strategies that validate African knowledge systems while challenging inherited Eurocentric assumptions.

Furthermore, Afrocentricity is consistent with broader movements to decolonise education and promote epistemic diversity. By emphasising African agency and historical consciousness, the philosophy supports curriculum reforms that integrate indigenous musical practices, epistemologies, and performance traditions. It also aligns with the need for institutional policies that prioritise culturally responsive teaching, professional

development for educators, and inclusive assessment practices. In this sense, Afrocentricity is not merely a theoretical orientation but a practical guide for curriculum design and implementation.

The researcher chose to adopt Afrocentric philosophy as the framework for this study for several reasons. First, it provides a culturally grounded lens through which the ongoing challenges faced by higher education institutions in teaching indigenous music can be analysed. Second, it offers a normative guide for envisioning transformative curricula that centre African knowledge and cultural expression. Third, it validates the experiences of educators and students who navigate the tensions between Eurocentric curricular structures and indigenous musical practices, recognising their strategies of resistance and innovation. Finally, the philosophy underpins the broader goal of preserving and promoting indigenous music as an integral part of South Africa's cultural heritage, ensuring that higher education contributes meaningfully to the intergenerational transmission of African knowledge systems.

4 DESIGN AND METHODS

4.1 Study design

A systematic, descriptive review design was adopted for this study to examine the marginalisation, silencing, and resistance of indigenous music within South African higher education. A descriptive review's main objective is to ascertain the degree to which a body of knowledge on a certain study issue makes any discernible patterns or trends in relation to pre-existing hypotheses, theories, methods, or discoveries (King & He, 2005; Paré et al., 2015). Descriptive reviews, which include searching, screening, and categorising papers, adhere to a methodical and transparent process, according to Petersen, Vakkalanka, and Kuzniarz (2015). The review sought to synthesise the body of knowledge regarding the representation of indigenous music in university curricula, the difficulties encountered by teachers and students, and the methods used to incorporate indigenous musical practices into formal education. Through methodical literature analysis, knowledge on the historical, cultural, and epistemic elements influencing curriculum design and implementation was acquired.

The information sources used for this review included peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, book chapters, conference proceedings, and policy documents. These sources provided both theoretical and empirical perspectives on the teaching of indigenous music in higher education, as well as broader discussions on curriculum decolonisation and Africanisation.

4.2 Search strategy

A systematic search was conducted using the advanced search functions of multiple academic databases. University library portal, Proquest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ERIC, LearnTechLib, Google Scholar, and national thesis repositories were accessed to identify relevant literature. According to Higgins and Green (2011), search strategies used in systematic reviews should be clear, repeatable, and make an effort to find all documents that satisfy the predetermined eligibility requirements for review inclusion. Theoretically, search strategies used to find grey literature can be based on these criteria. In this article, search terms were used in various combinations, including: “indigenous music”, “African music education”, “higher education curriculum”, “music decolonisation”, “Africanisation of education”, and “cultural heritage in music”. Additional search filters included a publication date range from 2000 to 2025, and English language publications. The initial review was conducted between July 2025 and September 2025.

Given the limited availability of literature specifically addressing indigenous music in South African higher education, the search was broadened to include international studies on indigenous and community-based music education, as well as comparative studies in other African contexts. This approach ensured that both local and global perspectives were considered, providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

5 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Meline (2006) emphasises that establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria is a necessary procedure for creating rigorous research protocols. These criteria define the

essential characteristics of the target population and ensure that the literature reviewed is directly relevant to the research questions. Inclusion criteria allow the study to focus on sources that address the central objectives, while exclusion criteria remove studies that fall outside the intended scope, thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of the review.

For this study, the inclusion criteria were designed to capture literature that explored key aspects of indigenous music in higher education. Specifically, studies were included if they examined: teaching or integrating indigenous music in university curricula; obstacles and challenges encountered in teaching indigenous music; curriculum reform or strategies for decolonising music education; and the conservation and promotion of indigenous musical knowledge.

Exclusion criteria were applied to remove studies that did not align with the research focus. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on primary or secondary education, did not address music education, lacked relevance to African or indigenous contexts, or were non-scholarly publications such as opinion pieces or news articles. The following table 1 summarised the **inclusion and exclusion criteria used in this article**.

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria Type	Criteria	Rationale
Inclusion	Teaching or integrating indigenous music in higher education	Focus on curricular practices in universities
	Obstacles and challenges in teaching indigenous music	Identifies barriers affecting implementation and learning
	Curriculum reform or decolonisation strategies	Captures approaches to inclusive and culturally relevant curricula
	Conservation and promotion of indigenous musical knowledge	Highlights strategies for preserving indigenous traditions
Exclusion	Focused solely on primary or secondary education	Outside higher education scope
	Did not address music education	Not relevant to study objectives
	Lacked relevance to African or indigenous contexts	Ensures cultural and contextual relevance
	Non-scholarly publications	Maintains academic rigour

Applying these criteria enabled a systematic selection of literature, ensuring that the review comprehensively addresses the marginalisation, silencing, and resistance of

indigenous music in South African higher education, while also identifying gaps and informing strategies for curriculum reform.

After reviewing titles and abstracts, 328 articles were excluded as irrelevant to the study objectives. Of the remaining 73 articles, 35 met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final review. An additional five articles were identified through citation tracking and database alerts, bringing the total number of sources reviewed to 40.

6 DATA EXTRACTION AND ANALYSIS

Key information was extracted from each included source, including the author(s), year of publication, study context, methodology, focus on indigenous music, curriculum relevance, and key findings. The extracted data were then synthesised thematically to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and strategies related to the marginalisation and promotion of indigenous music in higher education.

Themes that emerged included the historical legacy of Eurocentric music curricula, the lack of institutional support for indigenous music, the role of educators and students in resisting marginalisation, and examples of successful curriculum adaptation. This thematic synthesis provided a foundation for understanding the current status of indigenous music in South African higher education and informed the development of recommendations for policy, curriculum reform, and professional development.

Ethical Considerations

As this study involved a review of publicly available literature and policy documents, no formal ethical clearance was required. However, all sources were cited appropriately, and care was taken to accurately represent the findings and perspectives of the original authors.

Emergent Themes from the Literature

The following table demonstrates how key themes emerged from the existing literature in response to the research questions. Each theme reflects recurring findings and insights from previous studies on indigenous music in South African higher education.

Table 2*Emergent Themes from Existing Literature*

Research Questions	Emergent Themes and Description
How is indigenous music currently positioned within South African higher education curricula?	Positioning of Indigenous Music in Higher Education Curricula: Focuses on the marginalisation of indigenous music, dominance of Western classical curricula, and limited integration of African music practices (Mugovhani, 2012; Buthelezi, 2016; Netshivhambe, 2017).
What are the key challenges that educators and students face in teaching and learning indigenous music?	Challenges in Teaching and Learning Indigenous Music: highlights barriers including lack of resources, insufficient institutional support, and persistence of Eurocentric epistemologies (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022).
What strategies of resistance and innovation are employed to promote indigenous music within higher education?	Strategies of Resistance and Innovation: captures efforts such as curriculum adaptation, incorporation of community-based practices, and advocacy for inclusive and decolonised curricula (Mkhombo, 2019; Mugovhani, 2012; Semali & Stambach, 1997).
How can higher education institutions support the preservation and promotion of indigenous music for future generations?	Support for Preservation and Promotion of Indigenous Music: explores approaches for sustaining indigenous music, including policy reform, professional development, and promotion of culturally responsive pedagogies (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024).

Theme 1: Positioning of Indigenous Music in Higher Education Curricula

The debate on the need for the positioning of indigenous music within South African higher education curricula remains a contested and evolving subject. For instance, Mugovhani (2018) highlights that if Eurocentric epistemologies are not dismantled, then the indigenous African music curriculum will never be developed and archived in South African higher education. This means that future generations in Africa, especially in South African communities, will continue to experience a problem with the preservation of indigenous African music, and this could lead to the extinction of indigenous music in society. The implication of Mugovhani's assertion is that the continued dominance of Western epistemologies in music education undermines efforts to promote the inclusion of African musical heritage in academic spaces.

Despite national calls for transformation and decolonisation, music programmes in many universities continue to privilege Western classical and global popular music traditions over local forms. For instance, Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024:579) mention that "the music curricula at many universities in South Africa have revealed that the curriculum is biased, often highlighting Western at the expense of African music." This demonstrates that the transformation agenda, particularly in higher education, has yet to

fully realise its promise of inclusivity and representation. Instead, Western musical paradigms continue to shape the way music is taught, researched, and valued in South African universities, leaving indigenous forms at the margins. The debate on the need to shift from Western orthodoxy towards Africanised indigenous music education has gained increasing attention across the African continent (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024; Yende & Yende, 2022). This growing body of scholarship advocates for the repositioning of indigenous music as a legitimate, autonomous, and vital field of academic inquiry that reflects African epistemologies, histories, and artistic expressions. Scholars argue that the inclusion of indigenous musical arts and culture is not merely an act of cultural restoration but an essential step towards epistemic justice and curriculum transformation. Carver (2017:119) mentions that:

In post-apartheid South Africa, the need to overhaul a grotesquely unequal education system, and to establish a system of national education that is in line with the democratic ideals of the new South African Constitution, has made educational reform a priority. However, the university student protests of 2015 and 2016 demanding a free, decolonised education, indicate that little meaningful change has taken place, and that equality in education is a remote goal. While the student calls for decolonisation demanded immediate change, the process of meaningful curriculum change cannot be achieved with a quick fix solution; by, for example, simply substituting ‘Western’ with ‘African’ content.

Based on this statement, it is evident that curriculum transformation is a complex, long-term process that requires structural and ideological change rather than superficial replacement of content. True decolonisation demands a critical re-evaluation of how knowledge is produced, legitimised, and disseminated within the academy. The inclusion of indigenous music in higher education, therefore, necessitates a paradigm shift that recognises the intrinsic value of African knowledge systems and artistic practices. This view is supported by Yende and Yende (2022:112), who mention that:

The role of higher education is to ensure that indigenous African music in universities is liberated from the Western music values and can embrace the indigenous African music of South Africa.

Integrating indigenous music into higher education helps dismantle colonial legacies, validate local artistic knowledge, and affirm cultural identity among students.

Such integration not only diversifies the curriculum but also provides learners with opportunities to engage meaningfully with their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

However, the pace of reform has been slow, with most curricula still reflecting colonial hierarchies of knowledge that position African music as peripheral or supplementary. These structural continuities highlight the resistance to epistemic change within South African higher education. Meaningful inclusion of indigenous musical traditions remains critical to advancing curriculum decolonisation and developing an Africanised educational framework that genuinely reflects South Africa's diverse cultural heritage. A transformed curriculum should, therefore, celebrate plurality in musical thought and practice, while empowering educators and students to challenge inherited Eurocentric paradigms and co-create knowledge that speaks to African realities.

Theme 2: Challenges in Teaching and Learning Indigenous Music

The challenges surrounding the teaching and learning of indigenous music in South African higher education must be understood within the broader context of colonial legacies and the slow pace of curriculum decolonisation. Despite ongoing debates about the need for transformation, many institutions continue to reproduce Eurocentric frameworks that marginalise indigenous forms of knowledge and expression. Perhaps it is prudent to note that Govender and Naidoo (2023: 59) highlight that:

While there have been several calls for decolonising the curriculum in South Africa (SA), little has been achieved at the level of policy development and implementation. There appears to be a reluctance to embark on the decolonising journey, largely resulting from the continuing dominance of European hegemony in almost all facets of the lives of decolonised people, especially evident in the education curriculum. A fundamental problem of coloniality at the global level, including in Africa, is its misrepresentation of the world of the colonised, represented in the historical norms, symbols, gender and racial stereotypes and the 'objectification' of the colonised. A key part of the misrepresentation occurs in the colonial legacy of the Eurocentric curriculum.

It is essential to mention that the teaching and learning of indigenous music in South African higher education remain constrained by a complex interplay of structural, pedagogical, and ideological challenges. Despite sustained calls for transformation and curriculum decolonisation, indigenous music continues to occupy a marginal position

within formal music programmes. Several scholars have agreed that the teaching and learning of indigenous music in South African higher education remain constrained by multiple challenges. These include inadequate institutional support, scarcity of teaching resources, and limited formal documentation of indigenous musical knowledge (Mugovhani, 2012; Oparinde & Govender, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016; Yende & Yende, 2022).

The dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies has long influenced the structure of music education, privileged Western classical and popular traditions while neglecting local musical expressions. Mugovhani (2012) observes that the existing music curriculum, inherited from colonial frameworks, continues to value Western musical culture over indigenous African traditions. This imbalance positions indigenous music as supplementary rather than foundational within the academic hierarchy. As a result, students and educators often internalise a sense of inferiority towards African musical knowledge, reinforcing historical hierarchies of power and knowledge production (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024).

Another major challenge lies in the limited pedagogical training available for educators who wish to teach indigenous music. Many lecturers are trained predominantly in Western musical theory and notation, making it difficult to adapt teaching methods that align with indigenous epistemologies (Yende & Yende, 2022). Indigenous music, which is often transmitted orally and experientially, does not easily conform to conventional academic modes of assessment and notation. Consequently, educators frequently rely on Western pedagogical models that inadequately represent the contextual, performative, and spiritual dimensions of indigenous music traditions (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024). The scarcity of formal documentation further complicates curriculum development. Much of indigenous musical knowledge resides in communities and is transmitted through participation and performance rather than written texts (Yende & Yende, 2022). Without sufficient archival or research resources, universities struggle to design robust, evidence-based indigenous music courses. Moreover, the lack of collaboration between higher education institutions and local communities' limits opportunities for experiential learning and authentic engagement with indigenous music practitioners (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024).

Institutional apathy and systemic underfunding compound these challenges. Indigenous music is often treated as an elective subject rather than a core area of study, leading to insufficient allocation of financial and human resources. This lack of recognition undermines efforts to build sustainable academic pathways for indigenous music scholarship. The persistence of colonial legacies, coupled with institutional inertia, perpetuates the marginalisation of African knowledge systems in higher education. Addressing these issues requires a deliberate and sustained commitment to restructuring music curricula, training educators in indigenous pedagogies, and fostering partnerships with community custodians of musical knowledge. Without these interventions, the teaching and learning of indigenous music will remain constrained, and the broader goal of achieving a decolonised and inclusive higher education system in South Africa will remain unrealised.

Theme 3: Strategies of Resistance and Innovation

Perhaps, it is essential to mention that for decades South African indigenous musical arts and culture have been marginalised in higher education (Mkhombo, 2019; Mugovhani, 2012). This marginalisation undermines the preservation, appreciation, and transmission of indigenous knowledge systems that are integral to South Africa's cultural identity. The dominance of Western music traditions within academic institutions has resulted in the undervaluing of African musical expressions and pedagogies. This imbalance has hindered the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in formal learning spaces and contributed to the erosion of traditional practices. Addressing this marginalisation requires deliberate curriculum transformation that validates and integrates indigenous musical forms as legitimate and vital components of higher education. In his study, Netshivhambe (2024: 103–104), speaking about the importance of preserving indigenous musical instruments, recommends that:

Builders should collaborate with educators to develop instruments that are conducive to teaching and learning environments, incorporating standardised tuning systems and ergonomic designs. Furthermore, workshops and training sessions should be organised to empower academics and enthusiasts interested in creating enduring models of these instruments. These initiatives will encourage innovation and collaboration within the field of indigenous instrument building, ensuring that future generations have access to high-quality instruments for

educational and cultural purposes. Instrument makers should be awarded degrees of proficiency based on their skills and competencies.

Based on this statement, it is evident that preservation of indigenous music requires active collaboration between academia, communities, and instrument builders. Such partnerships ensure the continuity of indigenous knowledge through practical engagement and skill development. The recognition of craftsmanship as an academic and cultural competency highlights the potential for universities to bridge the gap between traditional artistry and formal education.

In response to the marginalisation of indigenous music, educators and students have developed diverse strategies of resistance and innovation (Mkhombo, 2019; Mugovhani, 2012; Netshivhambe, 2024). These include integrating community-based performances into academic programmes, adapting curricula to accommodate indigenous forms of expression, and promoting collaborative research with local artists (Carver, 2020; Mkhombo, 2019; Mugovhani, 2012; Semali & Stambach, 1997). Carver (2020) contends that while African musical traditions may provide prospective curricular content, integrating community-based knowledge into the formal curriculum is difficult, resulting in the IAM stream's poor take-up. This challenge underscores the tension between institutional academic structures and indigenous ways of knowing, which are often oral, experiential, and collective in nature. Overcoming this divide requires universities to rethink pedagogical models and assessment criteria to better reflect African epistemologies. Yende and Yende (2022: 112) mention that:

South African universities have eventually been afforded opportunities to revise and restructure their curricula, and one decolonising and Africanising element to include in the curricula is an African indigenous music curriculum. Institutions of higher education such as the University of Venda, University of Zululand, and University of Fort Hare can play an essential role in promoting an African indigenous music curriculum as they are based in places where indigenous cultural heritage thrive.

Based on this statement, it is clear that universities located within regions rich in cultural heritage have a unique responsibility to lead efforts towards curriculum decolonisation and Africanisation. These institutions can serve as cultural hubs, drawing from local traditions and community knowledge to enrich academic teaching and

research. Their geographical and cultural proximity to indigenous communities positions them well to pioneer innovative models of curriculum development that reflect the lived experiences and artistic practices of African societies.

Some universities have begun to incorporate African instruments, oral traditions, and indigenous pedagogies into teaching practices. Such initiatives challenge dominant Western paradigms and foster a more inclusive and contextually relevant learning environment that values local knowledge systems and affirms cultural identity within higher education. The integration of indigenous music into academic programmes represents a meaningful step towards epistemic justice, as it empowers students to connect with their heritage while cultivating a sense of belonging within the academy. Sustained efforts to institutionalise these approaches are essential for developing a truly Africanised education system that respects and promotes the continent's diverse musical heritage.

Theme 4: Support for Preservation and Promotion of Indigenous Music

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in preserving and promoting indigenous music for future generations. This statement was supported by Mugovhani (2018), who mentions that the role of higher education should be to ensure that the curricularisation of African indigenous music is prioritised. The inclusion of indigenous music within academic programmes not only promotes cultural continuity but also restores dignity to knowledge systems that were historically marginalised. Embedding African indigenous music into higher education curricula is therefore central to fostering cultural identity, national pride, and academic inclusivity. Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to serve as custodians of cultural heritage, bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and formal education through teaching, research, and community engagement. Hence, Netshivhambe (2024: 99) highlights that:

It is crucial to develop formal educational programmes that integrate traditional aural methods with written and practical approaches. By doing so, societies can create a more robust framework for preserving and revitalising indigenous African instruments and music. This integration would not only protect these cultural treasures but also enrich the educational landscape with the diverse and vibrant heritage of African music.

This statement suggests that the preservation and revitalisation of indigenous African music require a multifaceted approach that values both oral traditions and

contemporary educational methodologies. Integrating traditional knowledge into structured academic frameworks enables students to engage with indigenous music not only as a cultural artefact but also as a living, evolving practice. Such an approach ensures that the transmission of indigenous musical knowledge remains relevant and dynamic within modern education systems. It also highlights the need to balance the authenticity of traditional practices with the rigour of academic inquiry.

This process requires policy reform, sustained investment, and curriculum frameworks that foreground African knowledge systems (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024; Yende & Yende, 2022). Professional development for educators is equally essential to ensure the effective transmission of indigenous musical knowledge. Carver (2020: 187) mentions that:

Curriculum writers should aim for better alignment between different African music courses. In South Africa, this includes the articulation between secondary and tertiary courses and between tertiary courses themselves. Better collaboration between curriculum writers and a unified theoretical approach offer the possibility of agreed standards. African music graduates with a shared body of knowledge would positively impact primary and secondary music education.

It is evident that alignment and coherence across the educational pipeline are crucial for developing a strong foundation in African music education. Strengthening the articulation between educational levels ensures continuity and prevents the fragmentation of indigenous musical knowledge (Netshivhambe, 2024; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024). It also promotes the establishment of clear academic pathways for students interested in pursuing indigenous music studies, thereby professionalising the field and enhancing its academic legitimacy.

Research by Carver (2020), McConnachie (2016), Netshivhambe (2024), Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024), and Yende and Yende (2022) collectively reinforces the idea that a unified approach to curriculum design and policy implementation is essential for advancing the inclusion of indigenous music in higher education. Such an approach not only promotes scholarly engagement but also creates opportunities for innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration. The preservation of indigenous music should be understood as both an educational and cultural imperative, requiring coordinated action

among educators, policymakers, and communities. This cooperation can lead to the development of sustainable academic programmes that nurture creativity while maintaining fidelity to indigenous epistemologies.

Collaborative partnerships with communities and cultural organisations can also strengthen preservation efforts. Universities have the responsibility to engage with local musicians, cultural practitioners, and heritage institutions to ensure that academic representations of indigenous music remain authentic and community informed. Embedding indigenous music into the core curriculum rather than treating it as an elective ensures that it becomes a valued and integral part of the academic experience. Such inclusion promotes cultural sustainability, fosters mutual respect between academia and indigenous communities, and contributes to a decolonised and inclusive South African higher education system. Through these efforts, higher education can play a transformative role in preserving, revitalising, and celebrating the diverse musical heritage of the African continent.

7 DISCUSSION

This article has argued that the positioning, teaching, and preservation of indigenous music in South African higher education remain central to the broader debates on curriculum decolonisation and cultural sustainability. It has also highlighted that despite decades of policy calls for transformation, indigenous musical arts and culture continue to occupy a marginal position within university music programmes. Historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid have entrenched Eurocentric epistemologies, privileging Western classical and global popular music over local forms. The persistence of these frameworks has constrained the development of curricula that authentically reflect African cultural heritage, resulting in the ongoing marginalisation and silencing of indigenous music within higher education.

The findings of this article mention that several factors impede the teaching and learning of indigenous music. Consistent with previous research (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende & Yende, 2022), the current findings reveal that inadequate institutional support, scarcity of resources, and limited documentation of indigenous musical knowledge restrict educators' ability to integrate local music traditions into formal programmes.

Evidently, the dominance of Western pedagogical models and assessment methods marginalises African approaches to music education, positioning indigenous music as supplementary rather than central to academic learning. The article findings show that educators often lack training in indigenous repertoires, and students have limited opportunities for experiential learning with community practitioners, which undermines both cultural transmission and curriculum transformation. These findings are in line with the studies by Oparinde and Govender (2019) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016), which highlight the structural and epistemic challenges in African music education.

Scholars such as Carver (2020) and Netshivhambe (2024) have emphasised the importance of collaborative approaches that integrate community-based performances, traditional instruments, and oral pedagogies into academic programmes. Again, the findings of the current article show that such strategies of resistance and innovation are already being employed in some universities, including the University of Venda, University of Zululand, and University of Fort Hare. This finding corroborates the results of Semali and Stambach (1997) who found that curriculum adaptation and engagement with local communities enhance the visibility and legitimacy of indigenous knowledge in formal education. Integrating these practices into structured academic curricula enables students to connect with their cultural heritage while simultaneously acquiring the technical and theoretical skills needed for professional development.

The current article has established that higher education institutions have a pivotal role in promoting the preservation and sustainability of indigenous music. This finding is in congruence with the findings of Mugovhani (2018), Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024), and Yende and Yende (2022) that highlight the necessity of policy reform, investment in infrastructure, and professional development for educators to ensure the effective transmission of indigenous musical knowledge. The results of this article reveal that embedding African music into the core curriculum rather than offering it as an elective enhances its cultural and academic legitimacy. Collaborative partnerships with communities and cultural organisations further strengthen preservation efforts by ensuring that academic engagement with indigenous music remains authentic, participatory, and responsive to local contexts.

The findings of this article demonstrate that meaningful curriculum transformation requires both structural and epistemological shifts. Institutions need to

dismantle Eurocentric hierarchies, validate indigenous pedagogies, and develop coherent academic pathways that bridge secondary and tertiary education, as emphasised by Carver (2020). Evidently, sustainable preservation of African music in higher education relies on integrating traditional knowledge with formal pedagogical strategies, promoting cross-institutional collaboration, and recognising indigenous musical expertise as a valid academic competency. Overall, this study reinforces the view that decolonising the music curriculum is not only a cultural imperative but also an educational necessity, ensuring that future generations of students can engage with, preserve, and innovate within South Africa's rich indigenous musical heritage.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education institutions should prioritise the integration of indigenous music into the core curriculum to ensure that African musical traditions are preserved and valued. Curriculum design must reflect local knowledge systems, combining traditional oral methods with practical and written approaches to create a holistic learning experience. Professional development programmes for educators are essential to equip them with the skills and confidence to teach indigenous repertoires effectively. Collaboration with local musicians, cultural practitioners, and community organisations should be strengthened to ensure authenticity and promote experiential learning. Universities should invest in resources, including instruments, recordings, and documentation, to support teaching and research in indigenous music. Policy reform and sustained institutional support are necessary to embed these initiatives long term. Promoting indigenous music as a central element of higher education not only enhances cultural preservation but also fosters inclusivity, empowers students to connect with their heritage, and contributes to a decolonised and contextually relevant educational environment.

9 CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the persistent marginalisation of indigenous music within South African higher education and underscored the critical need for curriculum

transformation. Historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid have entrenched Eurocentric frameworks that prioritise Western musical traditions, often at the expense of local cultural expressions. The exclusion of indigenous music from mainstream academic programmes not only diminishes cultural heritage but also limits students' opportunities to engage meaningfully with African knowledge systems. This study has shown that the integration of indigenous musical arts and culture is essential for developing an Africanised curriculum that reflects the diversity, richness, and historical depth of South Africa's musical traditions. Such integration ensures that students are exposed to multiple epistemologies, validating local forms of knowledge while challenging dominant Western paradigms that continue to shape teaching and learning practices in higher education.

The findings reveal that challenges in teaching and learning indigenous music persist due to limited resources, insufficient institutional support, and the lack of formal documentation of traditional knowledge. Educators often face difficulties in delivering indigenous content effectively, while students encounter few opportunities for experiential engagement with community practitioners. Nevertheless, innovative strategies of resistance and adaptation are emerging. These include embedding community-based performances into curricula, fostering collaborative research with local artists, and developing culturally responsive pedagogical approaches. Universities such as the University of Venda, University of Zululand, and University of Fort Hare have demonstrated how local cultural contexts can be leveraged to support curriculum Africanisation, highlighting the potential for higher education to play a transformative role in preserving and promoting indigenous music.

Sustained efforts are required to ensure the preservation and promotion of indigenous music for future generations. Higher education institutions must prioritise policy reform, resource allocation, and professional development to support the teaching of African musical traditions. Collaborative partnerships with communities and cultural organisations are essential for maintaining the authenticity and vibrancy of indigenous knowledge. Integrating indigenous music into the core curriculum, rather than offering it as an elective, strengthens its cultural and academic legitimacy while fostering inclusivity and epistemic diversity. Ultimately, embedding indigenous music in higher education contributes to the decolonisation of curricula, empowers students to connect with their

heritage, and affirms the value of African musical arts as a living, evolving, and respected component of South Africa's cultural and educational landscape.

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Authors’ Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study’s findings are fully available within the article.

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