

Indigenosociomusicology and Curriculum Transformation: Advancing Decolonial and Inclusive Pedagogies in Music Education in a digital age

Dr Sakhiseni Joseph Yende, PhD

University of South Africa

College of Education

Department of Language Education, Arts & Culture

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7649-2799>

Music education in South African higher education institutions remains shaped by colonial epistemologies that marginalise Indigenous musical knowledge systems while privileging Western art music traditions. Efforts toward inclusion and transformation have often resulted in fragmented or tokenistic integration rather than substantive epistemic change. This study examines how curriculum transformation, inclusive pedagogies, and digitalisation intersect within music education, foregrounding indigenosociomusicology as a decolonial framework for reimagining knowledge production and pedagogical practice. Grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and the philosophy of ubuntu, indigenosociomusicology conceptualises music as relational, socially embedded, and culturally situated. A qualitative systematic review design guided by the PRISMA framework structured the study. Data were sourced from major academic databases, including EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, covering literature published between 2021 and 2026 alongside foundational works. A total of 372 records were identified, of which 30 studies met the inclusion criteria following rigorous screening and full-text assessment. Thematic analysis, supported by a critical interpretive approach, was employed to analyse patterns across the selected studies. Findings reveal persistent Eurocentric dominance, the decontextualised inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, and tensions associated with digital platforms, including issues of ownership and cultural misrepresentation. Emerging practices centred on community engagement, oral traditions, and experiential learning demonstrate pathways toward meaningful transformation. The study argues that curriculum reform requires epistemic re-centring rather than additive inclusion. Indigenosociomusicology is proposed as a transformative framework capable of advancing inclusive, contextually relevant, and epistemically just music education in African higher education.

Keywords: Indigenosociomusicology, decolonial pedagogy, Indigenous knowledge systems, curriculum transformation, epistemic justice

Introduction and background

Music education in South African higher education institutions continues to reflect deeply entrenched colonial epistemologies that privilege Western art music traditions while marginalising Indigenous African musical knowledge systems. This imbalance is not limited to curriculum content alone; rather, it is structural and pervasive, shaping what is recognised as legitimate knowledge, whose voices are amplified or silenced, and how music is taught, learned, and assessed within academic institutions. In this context, the dominance of Western frameworks continues to influence institutional practices, often positioning African musical traditions as secondary or supplementary. Scholars such as Agawu (2003;

2016) and Nketia (1986) have long critiqued this imbalance, arguing that Western analytical approaches frequently distort, oversimplify, or inadequately represent the complexity and contextual richness of African musical practices. This perspective is further reinforced by Mugovhani (2012, p. 5), who observes that:

The music of the other indigenous South African people was seen as primitive, ungodly and devoid of artistic excellence. It was therefore politically and academically not championed in public discourse. It was not perceived as a national asset and therefore could not be promoted through either education or formal training. Indigenous African music was therefore perceived as not meriting scientific research.

Such historical perceptions have had lasting consequences. They have entrenched systemic marginalisation, positioning Indigenous African music as inferior and unworthy of scholarly attention within formal education systems. As a result, generations of students have been exposed to curricula that undervalue their own cultural heritage, while privileging Western forms as the standard of excellence. This has contributed not only to epistemic exclusion but also to broader issues of identity, belonging, and cultural recognition within higher education.

International scholarship increasingly recognises the centrality of music in shaping cultural identity and social cohesion. Studies such as those by Di Paolo and Todino (2025) emphasise that music is not merely an artistic form but a vital cultural practice embedded within the lived experiences of communities. For instance, Di Paolo and Todino (2025, p. 2) write that:

Music is also a central element in the cultural identity of every society. It passes on traditions, values, and stories through generations, strengthening the sense of belonging and community. Music, therefore, presents itself as a form of cultural expression that reflects the historical and social context in which it is produced.

This perspective underscores the importance of situating music education within its cultural and social context, rather than treating it as an abstract or purely technical discipline. It also highlights the limitations of curricula that detach music from its cultural origins, as is often the case in Western-dominated academic frameworks.

Across the African continent, scholars have similarly argued for the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems into education. Authors such as Authority (2025) and Bond (2017) emphasise the importance of Afrocentric approaches that recognise the cultural significance of music within African societies. For instance, Authority (2025, p. 46) notes that:

Integrating music into Afrocentric education is a vital avenue for promoting cultural identity and pedagogical relevance. Music education, deeply intertwined with cultural practices, represents a unique opportunity to foster engagement among African and African diaspora students. Culturally

responsive pedagogy in music education has gained ground,

This argument highlights the role of music education as a site for cultural affirmation and identity formation. It suggests that when curricula are aligned with learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, they become more meaningful, engaging, and transformative. However, despite these insights, the translation of such principles into institutional practice remains uneven.

In the South African context, the democratic transition of 1994 marked a significant turning point, accompanied by strong calls for transformation across all sectors, including education. Scholars such as Carver (2020), McConnachie (2026), Mugovhani (2012), and Yende and Yende (2022) note that there has been sustained advocacy for redressing historical imbalances in the arts, culture, and Indigenous music that were shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies. These efforts have been reflected in policy frameworks and institutional discourses that emphasise inclusivity, diversity, and transformation. However, the extent to which these aspirations have been realised in practice remains a matter of critical concern.

McConnachie (2026, p. 2) argues that incorporating Indigenous African musical arts into university curricula requires approaches that are context-sensitive, sustainable, and culturally grounded. He further cautions that:

Presenting an indigenous art form out of context is a sensitive and challenging task. This is all too obvious when approaching indigenous African musical arts learning and teaching at a South African university based upon educational goals and values developed in the global north, in a country only recently released from the isolating policies of apartheid. But the task is important and finding an approach to incorporating a sustainable African performing arts programme into mainstream music studies in South African universities is essential.

This insight highlights a key tension in curriculum transformation: the challenge of integrating Indigenous knowledge within institutional structures that remain rooted in Western epistemologies. It suggests that without careful consideration of context, pedagogy, and purpose, attempts at inclusion may risk reproducing the very inequalities they seek to address.

Drawing from these perspectives, it becomes evident that meaningful curriculum transformation must extend beyond superficial or tokenistic inclusion. It requires a fundamental rethinking of pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, and knowledge systems to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are not merely added but are central to the educational experience. This involves recognising Indigenous knowledge systems as valid, dynamic, and essential contributors to academic discourse. Similarly,

Netshivhambe (2025, p. 404) provides a critical analysis of the dominance of Western music education, stating that:

The prominence of Western music education as the benchmark for gauging performance, composition, research, and teaching standards carries implications that extend beyond mere academic comparisons. This dominance reverberates across various facets of education, impacting not only learners and educators who aspire to engage with indigenous knowledge but also casting shadows of disenfranchisement and inadequacy upon their preferred realm of study. At its core, Western music education has established itself as the de facto standard by which musical achievement and proficiency are often measured. This hegemony extends beyond technical mastery to encompass aspects of creativity, research methodologies, and pedagogical strategies. This overarching presence casts a long shadow over alternative perspectives, such as indigenous knowledge systems, rendering them deviations from the norm rather than valuable contributions.

This critique underscores the pervasive nature of epistemic dominance and its implications for both teaching and learning. It reveals how Western frameworks continue to define standards of excellence, often marginalising alternative ways of knowing and being.

Despite extensive scholarship and policy advocacy, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of coherent theoretical frameworks that effectively integrate Indigenous musical knowledge into higher education curricula. Existing approaches often treat Indigenous music as supplementary content rather than as a foundational epistemology. Second, pedagogical practices continue to privilege Western modes of teaching and assessment, particularly written notation and individual performance, at the expense of oral, communal, and participatory traditions. Third, there is limited engagement with digital technologies as tools for preserving and disseminating Indigenous music in culturally appropriate ways. Finally, there is insufficient recognition of Indigenous knowledge holders as active contributors to curriculum development and knowledge production.

This study is motivated by the urgent need to address these gaps and to contribute to ongoing debates on curriculum transformation and decolonisation in South African higher education. It seeks to move beyond symbolic inclusion towards substantive epistemic change by proposing indigenosociomusicology as a transformative framework. By centring Indigenous knowledge systems, social context, and cultural relevance, this approach aims to reimagine music education in ways that are inclusive, contextually grounded, and responsive to the lived realities of African students. In doing so, the study contributes to broader efforts to advance epistemic justice, promote cultural affirmation, and reshape the future of music education in a digital and decolonial age.

Research questions

The following research questions were developed to understand the dynamics of curriculum transformation, inclusion, and epistemic justice in music education within South African higher education:

1. How does Eurocentric dominance shape music curricula in South African higher education?
2. How is Indigenous musical knowledge fragmented or decontextualised in current curricula?
3. What opportunities and contradictions does digitalisation present for Indigenous music education?
4. What transformative practices support inclusive and decolonial music pedagogies in higher education?

Conceptual Framework: Indigenosociomusicology

In this study, indigenosociomusicology was used to examine music education by centring Indigenous knowledge systems, social contexts, and cultural practices, while critically challenging Eurocentric frameworks and advancing inclusive, decolonial pedagogies. This approach provides a lens through which music is understood not simply as a technical or aesthetic discipline, but as a deeply embedded social and cultural practice (Ngubane & Makua 2021; Yende 2026). It shifts the focus from abstract musical analysis to lived experiences, communal participation, and culturally grounded knowledge production. For instance, Yende (2026, p. 66–67) writes that:

Indigenosociomusicology is grounded in several interrelated theoretical perspectives that together provide a robust framework for analysing African music. Ubuntu philosophy is central, emphasising relationality, empathy, and collective interdependence. It frames music as a communal practice, highlighting how performance, participation, and creation serve as mechanisms for sustaining social ethics, solidarity, and shared humanity. Music under this perspective is not merely aesthetic; it embodies moral codes and cultural wisdom transmitted across generations.

This statement highlights that African music should be understood as a lived and communal knowledge system, deeply rooted in social values, cultural continuity, and collective identity, rather than as an isolated artistic product. In this sense, music becomes a medium through which communities express shared meanings, preserve histories, and sustain ethical values across generations. This perspective is further supported by Ukpokodu (2016, p. 155), who explains that:

Ubuntu pedagogy is anchored by five principles which underpin and guide its possible and effective implementation as a transformative pedagogical strategy in diverse educational settings: understanding self and others; building positive relationships; getting the class to work together;

nurturing the minds of the students; teaching from a position of love and care; and utilising learners' linguistic resources to promote meaningful learning.

Ukpokodu's framework reinforces the importance of relational and human-centred approaches to teaching and learning. It suggests that pedagogy should prioritise collaboration, empathy, and inclusivity, while recognising the linguistic and cultural resources that learners bring into educational spaces. These principles align closely with the core tenets of indigenosociomusicology, particularly its emphasis on collective knowledge production and participatory learning.

Grounded in Ubuntu philosophy, indigenosociomusicology foregrounds interconnectedness, shared humanity, and the communal nature of knowledge. Scholars such as Nketia (1986), Nzewi (2007), and Mapaya (2014) have consistently argued that African music cannot be separated from its social, ritual, and cultural contexts. Rather than existing as an autonomous art form, it is intertwined with everyday life, spirituality, and community practices. Indigenosociomusicology builds on this understanding by challenging Western paradigms that treat music as abstract, individualised, and decontextualised technical knowledge.

Furthermore, this framework aligns with broader decolonial theories. Mignolo's (2011) concept of epistemic disobedience calls for a deliberate departure from dominant Western knowledge systems, while Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) advocates for epistemic freedom and the recognition of multiple ways of knowing. Indigenosociomusicology resonates with these perspectives by promoting a pluriversal approach to knowledge one that values diversity, plurality, and the coexistence of multiple epistemologies.

The use of indigenosociomusicology in this study is therefore justified by its ability to offer a contextually relevant and decolonial framework for analysing music education in African higher education. Unlike conventional Western approaches, which often isolate music from its cultural and social foundations, this framework recognises music as embodied, relational, and culturally situated. It enables a critical interrogation of Eurocentric dominance while simultaneously foregrounding Indigenous epistemologies and lived experiences. Importantly, indigenosociomusicology also supports the integration of pedagogical approaches that are aligned with African musical traditions. These include participatory learning, oral transmission, storytelling, and experiential engagement. Such approaches not only enhance student learning but also affirm cultural identity and promote inclusivity within the classroom. By valuing multiple forms of knowledge and expression, this framework contributes to the broader goals of curriculum transformation and epistemic justice. In this way, indigenosociomusicology provides a robust and transformative foundation for reimagining music

education. It moves beyond tokenistic inclusion to advocate for a fundamental restructuring of knowledge systems, pedagogies, and institutional practices. Ultimately, it offers a powerful pathway for advancing inclusive, decolonial, and contextually grounded music education in African higher education.

Design and Methods

Study Design

This study adopts a qualitative, systematic review design guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to examine indigenosociomusicology, inclusive pedagogies, and curriculum transformation in South African higher education music studies. A systematic review was selected for its capacity to enable transparent, structured identification, screening, and synthesis of existing scholarship, policy documents, and academic outputs. This approach facilitates a critical mapping of patterns, gaps, and emerging debates on decolonial and inclusive pedagogies in a digital age, while ensuring methodological rigour and replicability.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ERIC, LearnTechLib, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the University of South Africa Theses Repository. These databases were purposively selected due to their strong coverage of education, musicology, Indigenous knowledge systems, and interdisciplinary humanities scholarship.

The search process initially covered literature published between July 2021 and January 2022 and was subsequently updated to include studies published up to March 2026. This extended timeframe ensured the inclusion of both foundational and contemporary scholarship, allowing the study to capture evolving discourses on decolonial pedagogy and digital transformation.

A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used to optimise retrieval. Search terms included: “indigenosociomusicology”, “Indigenous knowledge systems AND music education”, “decolonial pedagogy AND music curriculum”, “African music education AND higher education”, “Ubuntu pedagogy AND teaching”, “curriculum transformation AND South Africa”, and “digital pedagogy AND Indigenous knowledge”. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, dissertations, conference proceedings, and relevant policy documents published in English.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following table 1 shows a clear inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the selection process to ensure relevance and quality. Studies were included if they focused on music education, Indigenous knowledge systems, or decolonial pedagogy; were situated within African or Global South higher education contexts; addressed curriculum transformation or inclusive pedagogies; and comprised empirical, theoretical, or conceptual contributions.

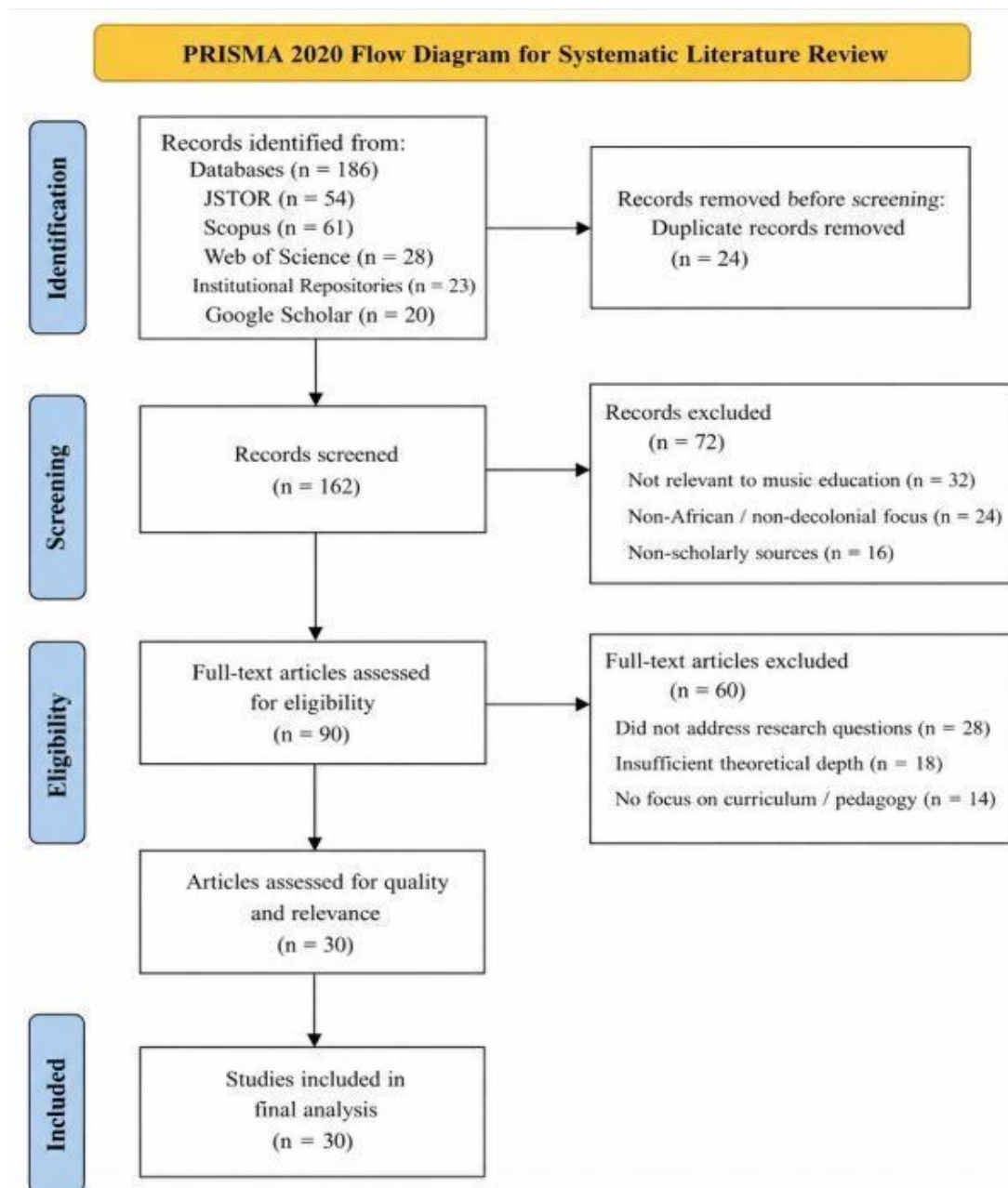
Studies were excluded if they were unrelated to music or higher education, focused solely on Western classical music without critical engagement, fell outside pedagogical or epistemological debates, or constituted non-scholarly outputs such as opinion pieces or blogs. Duplicate records retrieved across databases were also removed. Following title and abstract screening, a substantial number of studies were excluded due to limited engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems or curriculum transformation.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies focusing on music education, Indigenous knowledge systems, or decolonial pedagogy	Studies not related to music education or higher education
Research situated within African or Global South higher education contexts	Articles focusing solely on Western classical music without critical engagement
Publications addressing curriculum transformation or inclusive pedagogies	Non-academic sources such as opinion pieces and non-scholarly blogs
Empirical, theoretical, and conceptual studies relevant to the study focus	Studies outside the scope of pedagogy, curriculum, or Indigenous knowledge discourse
Literature published in English within the specified timeframe	Duplicate records retrieved across databases

Screening Process and Study Selection (PRISMA Flow)

The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the study selection process. A total of 372 non-duplicate records were identified through database searches. After title and abstract screening, 162 records were



excluded. The remaining 90 articles were subjected to full-text review, of which 60 were excluded based on predefined eligibility criteria, including lack of relevance and insufficient conceptual alignment. Ultimately, 30 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis.

Data Analysis

The selected studies were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis supported by critical interpretive approaches. Analysis proceeded through four stages: (1) familiarisation with the data through repeated reading; (2) initial coding of key concepts related to Indigenous knowledge,

pedagogy, and curriculum transformation; (3) development of broader themes; and (4) interpretive analysis.

Themes were identified both inductively and deductively. Deductively, indigenosociomusicology informed the analytical lens, foregrounding Ubuntu, relational epistemologies, and culturally embedded knowledge. Inductively, recurring themes emerged, including Eurocentric dominance, fragmented inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, digital tensions, and emerging transformative practices. This approach enabled a nuanced interpretation of how knowledge systems are constructed, legitimised, and enacted in music education.

Data Synthesis

Findings from the 30 studies were synthesised through a multi-layered process. Descriptive synthesis summarised key insights from each study, thematic synthesis grouped findings into conceptual categories, and interpretive synthesis linked these patterns to decolonial theory and Indigenous epistemologies. Guided by indigenosociomusicology, this process facilitated a critical interrogation of epistemic hierarchies and pedagogical practices within higher education.

Methodological Rigour and Trustworthiness

Rigour was ensured through adherence to PRISMA guidelines, systematic search procedures, and consistent application of inclusion criteria. Triangulation across diverse sources enhanced credibility, while reflexive analysis acknowledged the researcher's positionality within African music scholarship.

As the study relied exclusively on secondary data, no human participants were involved. Ethical integrity was maintained through accurate representation of sources, appropriate citation practices, and respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems.

Ethical Considerations

As this study is based on secondary data analysis of publicly available literature, no direct ethical clearance involving human participants was required. However, ethical scholarship was maintained through accurate representation of authors' work, appropriate citation practices, and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems.

Conclusion of Methodological Approach

The systematic review design provided a robust and transparent framework for examining indigenosociomusicology and curriculum transformation in music education. Through PRISMA-

guided selection and thematic analysis, the study was able to identify key patterns, contradictions, and emerging practices within the field. This methodological approach supports the study's broader aim of advancing inclusive, decolonial, and epistemically just pedagogies in African higher education.

Findings of the Study

Persistent Eurocentric Dominance

The findings of this study reveal a continued dominance of Eurocentric frameworks in music curricula within South African higher education. For instance, studies by scholars such as Mapaya (2014), Mugovhani (2012), Yende and Yende (2022) indicate that the South African music curriculum place Western music education and its traits more important and valuable more than indigenous music. This was well-captured by Yende and Yende (2022, p. 113) who point out that:

A Western monogenic music education curriculum was therefore adopted and promulgated. This problem is partly attributable to the apartheid government that encouraged classical Western music to the exclusion of other types of music that exist for the majority of the South African people, such as African indigenous music. The curricularisation of African indigenous music will confirm the legitimacy of decolonisation and Africanisation. The current curricular roots in the Western music curriculum are largely ignored.

Western notation systems, harmonic theory, and analytical approaches remain central to teaching and learning, shaping what is recognised as legitimate musical knowledge (Carver 2020). As a result, African music is frequently positioned as peripheral, often offered as elective modules rather than forming a core component of the curriculum (Mugovhani, 2012; Yende and Yende 2022). This marginal positioning limits students' engagement with Indigenous musical traditions and undermines their cultural relevance within academic spaces.

In addition, pedagogical practices tend to prioritise individual performance, technical proficiency, and formal assessment methods. These approaches contrast with African musical traditions, which are inherently communal, participatory, and embedded within social and cultural contexts (Netshivhambe 2024). The emphasis on individualism therefore reflects a misalignment between institutional practices and the lived musical realities of many African students.

This persistent dominance reinforces hierarchical knowledge systems that privilege Western paradigms while devaluing Indigenous epistemologies. It reflects Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) concept of the *colonisation of the mind*, where external frameworks shape perceptions of value, knowledge, and identity.

Consequently, students may internalise the notion that Western music represents the standard of excellence, while African music is seen as secondary or less sophisticated.

Fragmented Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge

It is prudent to mention that current curriculum reforms often fail to meaningfully integrate Indigenous knowledge, resulting in fragmented and superficial inclusion across institutions. Where Indigenous musical knowledge is included, it is often fragmented and lacks epistemological depth. Indigenous music is frequently decontextualised removed from its cultural, linguistic, and ritual foundations and presented merely as content to be studied rather than as a knowledge system in its own right (Izu 2025; Yende 2025). This reduction reduces rich, lived traditions into isolated topics, stripping them of their relational and communal significance. For instance, Izu (2025) writes that:

In fields such as music, some universities may attempt to integrate Indigenous content while others maintain a narrow focus on Western traditions, resulting in fragmented and uneven progress. Without national guidance or shared standards, transformation risks becoming symbolic rather than systemic, with limited impact on teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

This observation highlights the inconsistency across institutions and the absence of a unified framework guiding meaningful transformation. As a result, efforts to include Indigenous music often remain uneven, lacking depth and sustainability. Similarly, 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. Indigenous musical practices are not merely artistic expressions; they are embedded within broader systems of knowledge that encompass social relations, spirituality, and cultural identity.

Unlike Western pedagogical frameworks, which often compartmentalise music into technical elements and language into structural components, indigenous African traditions interweave language, rhythm, movement, and song into holistic cultural narratives (Mugovhani 2012; Yende 2025). This interconnectedness reflects a worldview in which knowledge is relational, embodied, and communal. However, when Indigenous music is inserted into curricula without its broader cultural context, it loses its epistemological integrity.

This reductionist approach detaches music from its social functions, symbolic meanings, and community-based practices. Consequently, Indigenous knowledge is not fully integrated into teaching, learning, or assessment processes. Students are often exposed to fragments of Indigenous music

without understanding its deeper cultural significance, limiting their engagement and appreciation. This pattern reflects Mhlambi's (2025) critique that African music scholarship continues to be framed through colonial lenses, which constrain its authenticity and transformative potential. Without a shift toward epistemic re-centring, the inclusion of Indigenous music risks remaining symbolic rather than substantive, thereby failing to achieve meaningful curriculum transformation.

Digital Opportunities and Contradictions

The digital age has introduced both significant opportunities and complex tensions in the preservation and dissemination of Indigenous music. On the one hand, digital archives, platforms, and technologies play an increasingly important role in documenting, storing, and safeguarding musical heritage (Chisa, 2012). These tools allow Indigenous music to be preserved beyond geographical and generational boundaries, making it accessible to wider and more diverse audiences, including scholars, educators, and communities. For instance, Li (2024, p. 184) writes that:

Digital knowledge environments have been growing progressively, and they have provided various opportunities and new ways for indigenous communities, academics, and teachers to work collaboratively to maintain and refresh traditional forms of music and also make it available for future generations. The convergence of music education and digital preservation provides various opportunities to reconsider the combination of indigenous music into both informal and formal educational contexts. In addition, traditional programs of music mostly emphasise the different ways of writing music and Western classical music.

Based on this statement, digital platforms enable collaborative knowledge production and expand opportunities for integrating Indigenous music into both formal and informal educational contexts.

At the same time, digitalisation introduces critical ethical challenges that cannot be overlooked. These include concerns around intellectual property rights, cultural ownership, and the commodification of Indigenous knowledge. In many cases, digital platforms operate within legal and economic frameworks that do not adequately recognise communal ownership or culturally embedded knowledge systems. This creates risks of exploitation, misrepresentation, and loss of control over Indigenous cultural materials. This view is supported by Yende and Mugovhani (2022, p. 84), who state that:

The salience and rapid advancement of AI in indigenous African cultural heritage have introduced tensions and conflicts. Some of these tensions and conflicts include data manipulation, intellectual property rights, and cyber-attacks that cause the exploitation of indigenous African cultural heritage.

AI has shortcomings regarding personal privacy and issues of human security. AI has sparked debate and attracted much criticism in most African countries. Indigenous African cultural heritage is holistic, and traditions and knowledge are portrayed in stories, music (songs), and designs not interlinked in AI.

Evidently, digital technologies may expose Indigenous knowledge systems to exploitation, misrepresentation, and ethical vulnerabilities that undermine cultural integrity and community ownership. Similarly, Chisa and Ngulube (2017, p. 9) write that:

The potential for moral rights to increase the copyright protection of indigenous musicians has not been fully explored. One important point about moral rights is that they are individuals' rights. There is still no legal recognition of communal ownership of indigenous cultural material.

This highlights a fundamental limitation within existing legal frameworks, which tend to prioritise individual ownership over collective cultural rights. As a result, Indigenous communities often lack adequate protection over their cultural expressions in digital spaces.

Furthermore, there is a significant risk of decontextualisation, where Indigenous music is detached from its cultural, social, and spiritual meanings when presented through digital formats. When removed from its original context, music may be reduced to mere content, losing its embedded significance and relational value. However, despite these challenges, digital technologies also offer transformative possibilities. They enable community-driven documentation, facilitate access to oral traditions, and support collaborative and participatory learning environments. When used ethically and contextually, digital tools can enhance inclusive pedagogies and contribute to the revitalisation and sustainability of Indigenous musical practices.

Emerging Transformative Practices

Despite persistent structural and epistemic challenges, the study identifies emerging transformative practices that signal a shift toward more inclusive and decolonial pedagogies in music education. One of the most notable developments is the adoption of community-engaged learning approaches, which actively connect students with cultural practitioners, local communities, and lived musical experiences (Kaur & Bhatia 2024; McConnachie 2026; Yende 2025). These approaches move beyond classroom-based instruction by situating learning within real-world cultural contexts, thereby enhancing authenticity and relevance. In their study, Kaur and Bhatia (2024, p. 97) write that:

Inclusive pedagogy serves every learner with individual differences, engaging everyone despite their socioeconomic status, capacities, native tongue, cultural background, religion, gender, racial background, disabilities etc., promotes their worth, egalitarianism, and equity for everyone.

It is evident that inclusive pedagogies prioritise equity, diversity, and participation, ensuring that all learners feel valued, represented, and meaningfully engaged in the learning process. In addition, there is a growing incorporation of oral traditions and storytelling as legitimate and effective pedagogical methods. These approaches recognise that knowledge in many African contexts is transmitted through narrative, performance, and communal interaction rather than solely through written forms (Mdhluli & Masipa 2026; Yende 2024). The integration of Indigenous languages further strengthens this approach by grounding learning in culturally relevant modes of expression. This perspective is supported by Mdhluli and Masipa (2026, p. 216), who state that:

Folktales present a compelling case for revitalizing African indigenous education by including folktales in school curricula, fostering collaboration with traditional knowledge keepers, and training teachers in oral storytelling approaches. These activities will not only boost students' cultural pride but will also help with the greater process of decolonizing African educational institutions. Schools in Kenya, for example, have effectively integrated storytelling sessions run by griots and village elders, preserving cultural history while fitting with current educational goals.

These practices demonstrate how storytelling and collaboration with knowledge holders can serve as powerful tools for cultural preservation and pedagogical transformation. Furthermore, experiential and participatory learning approaches are increasingly being adopted, aligning closely with African musical traditions that emphasise performance, embodiment, and communal engagement. Rather than privileging passive learning or technical abstraction, these approaches encourage active participation, collaboration, and creativity. Such developments resonate with Yende (2024), who highlights how Indigenous Zulu music sustains cultural continuity by bridging past, present, and future through lived, communal expression. Collectively, these emerging practices indicate a gradual but meaningful shift toward pedagogies that are contextually grounded, culturally responsive, and epistemically inclusive.

Discussion

This article has argued that music education in South African higher education remains deeply embedded in colonial epistemologies that privilege Western art music traditions while marginalising Indigenous African musical knowledge systems. It has also highlighted that despite ongoing transformation efforts, the integration of Indigenous knowledge often remains superficial, fragmented, and lacking epistemological depth. The findings of this article mention that curriculum structures,

pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices continue to reflect Eurocentric dominance, limiting the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous musical traditions.

Consistent with previous research (Agawu, 2003; Nketia, 1986; Mugovhani, 2012), the findings of the current article reveal the persistence of Western frameworks as the dominant standard in music education. Evidently, this dominance not only shapes curriculum content but also influences perceptions of legitimacy, value, and academic excellence. The article findings show that Indigenous music is frequently positioned as supplementary rather than foundational (Netshivhambe, 2025). These findings are in line with the studies by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Mignolo (2011), which highlight how colonial knowledge systems continue to shape educational institutions and epistemic hierarchies.

Scholars such as Nzewi (2007), Mapaya (2014), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) have long advocated for the recognition of African knowledge systems as legitimate and foundational to education. Again, the findings of the current article show that where Indigenous musical knowledge is included, it is often decontextualised and treated as content rather than as a comprehensive epistemological system. This finding corroborates with the results of Mhlambi (2025) and Izu (2025), who found that African music scholarship and curriculum transformation efforts are frequently constrained by colonial frameworks, resulting in limited pedagogical impact.

Using a framework of analysis that was largely informed by the central tenets of Yende's Indigenosociomusicology conceptual framework, this study has provided a critical lens through which to examine the intersection of music, society, and culture within educational contexts. This framework foregrounds the relational, communal, and culturally embedded nature of African musical practices, challenging the reductionist tendencies of Western pedagogical models. It also emphasises the importance of Ubuntu as a guiding philosophy that promotes interconnectedness, collective knowledge production, and human-centred pedagogy.

The current article has established that meaningful curriculum transformation requires more than the inclusion of Indigenous content; it necessitates a fundamental shift toward epistemic re-centring. This involves recognising Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate, authoritative, and central to teaching and learning processes. This finding is in congruence with the findings of previous studies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986) that advocate for epistemic freedom and the decolonisation of knowledge systems in African education.

Furthermore, the results of this article reveal that the digital age presents both opportunities and contradictions. While digital platforms enable the preservation and dissemination of Indigenous music

(Chisa, 2012; Chisa & Ngulube, 2017), they also raise ethical concerns related to ownership, commodification, and decontextualisation (Yende & Mugovhani, 2022). At the same time, emerging transformative practices such as community-engaged learning, oral traditions, and participatory pedagogies offer promising pathways for advancing inclusive and decolonial education (Mdhluli & Masipa, 2026; Yende, 2024). The discussion underscores the urgent need for systemic, contextually grounded, and epistemically just approaches to music education. It reinforces the argument that indigenosociomusicology provides a robust and transformative framework for reimagining curricula in ways that are inclusive, culturally relevant, and aligned with African realities.

Conclusion, New Insights, and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that curriculum transformation in South African higher education music programmes remains incomplete, largely due to the continued dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies and the marginal positioning of Indigenous African musical knowledge systems. While policy frameworks advocate for inclusion and transformation, the findings reveal that such efforts are often superficial, fragmented, and lacking in epistemological depth. Indigenous music is frequently incorporated as supplementary content rather than as a foundational knowledge system, resulting in limited impact on teaching, learning, and assessment practices. The study has shown that without a fundamental shift toward epistemic re-centring, curriculum reform risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative. By foregrounding indigenosociomusicology, this research has argued for a reconceptualisation of music education that recognises African musical practices as socially embedded, culturally situated, and epistemically valid.

A key insight emerging from this study is that meaningful transformation requires moving beyond content inclusion toward a deeper engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems as lived, relational, and community-based practices. The integration of Ubuntu philosophy highlights the importance of interconnectedness, collective knowledge production, and human-centred pedagogy in reimagining music education. Furthermore, the study reveals that the digital age, while presenting new opportunities for preservation and access, also introduces ethical complexities related to ownership, representation, and cultural integrity. This duality underscores the need for a balanced and contextually sensitive approach to digital integration. Another important insight is the growing emergence of transformative practices, including community-engaged learning, the use of oral traditions, storytelling, and Indigenous languages, as well as participatory and experiential pedagogies. These approaches demonstrate the potential to bridge the gap between institutional knowledge and students' lived cultural realities, thereby fostering inclusion, identity formation, and epistemic justice.

In light of these findings, the study recommends a comprehensive and systemic approach to curriculum transformation. Firstly, higher education institutions should prioritise epistemic re-centring by positioning Indigenous knowledge systems as core rather than peripheral to music curricula. Secondly, there is a need for professional development and capacity-building initiatives that equip educators with the knowledge and skills to implement Indigenous and decolonial pedagogies effectively. Thirdly, institutions should foster sustained partnerships with communities, cultural practitioners, and knowledge holders to ensure that teaching and learning are grounded in authentic cultural contexts. Fourthly, digital technologies should be used ethically and responsibly, with clear frameworks that protect cultural ownership and promote community agency. Finally, curriculum design should embrace multilingualism, participatory learning, and culturally responsive assessment methods. Collectively, these recommendations point toward a reimagined music education system that is inclusive, contextually relevant, and aligned with the principles of epistemic justice in African higher education.

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