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Indigenous isiZulu Music in Transition: A Systematic Review and Linguistic Perspective on Its Cultural and Educational Significance

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous isiZulu music represents a vibrant oral tradition through which the linguistic, cultural, and spiritual heritage of Zulu-speaking communities is preserved and transmitted. Yet, in the context of contemporary South Africa, its role is undergoing significant transformation due to rapid urbanisation, globalisation, and the continued marginalisation of indigenous knowledge within formal education systems. This study undertakes a systematic literature review (SLR) of 41 peer-reviewed sources published between 2000 and 2024, encompassing the fields of ethnomusicology, linguistics, and education. Following PRISMA guidelines, the review is grounded in Critical Indigenous Theory, Sociolinguistics, and Decolonial Pedagogy to investigate how isiZulu music contributes to identity construction, language preservation, and educational development. The review identifies four key thematic areas: (1) the continuity and adaptation of cultural practices, (2) the role of isiZulu music in the linguistic transmission of indigenous knowledge, (3) the exclusion of indigenous music from formal curricula, and (4) the emergence of hybrid musical forms among Zulu youth. The findings affirm the enduring relevance of isiZulu music in sustaining heritage and promoting linguistic vitality but also reveal systemic barriers, including a lack of policy support and limited teacher training. These limitations hinder the effective integration of indigenous content in school curricula. The study recommends the inclusion of isiZulu music within the Creative Arts curriculum, stronger partnerships between schools and indigenous knowledge holders, and the development of culturally

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responsive education policies. By positioning isiZulu music as a valuable linguistic and pedagogical asset, the review contributes meaningfully to debates on curriculum transformation and decolonisation in South African education.

Keywords: Curriculum; Decolonisation; Indigenous Knowledge; isiZulu Music; Linguistic Transmission

1. Introduction

Indigenous isiZulu music constitutes a vibrant and enduring cultural form that embodies the sonic, spiritual, and linguistic heritage of Zulu-speaking communities in South Africa. Historically rooted in communal rituals, storytelling, and oral performance, it has long functioned as a vessel for cultural transmission, identity affirmation, and resistance against socio-political marginalisation[1]. Through its integration of proverbs, songs, praise poetry, myths, and riddles, isiZulu music reflects a deeply embedded oral tradition that conveys the values, collective memory, and epistemological frameworks of Zulu society[2]. These performative genres not only celebrate the achievements of past generations but also shape the moral and social consciousness of current and future generations. They instil a sense of patriotism, communal pride, and social cohesion, elevating the cultural status of the group and affirming its uniqueness within the broader South African cultural mosaic[3]. However, rapid socio-political changes in post-apartheid South Africa marked by urbanisation, technological advancement, and globalisation are reshaping this tradition in complex and multifaceted ways. While isiZulu music continues to thrive within religious, ceremonial, and rural contexts, its role, form, and pedagogical function are being significantly reconfigured in contemporary educational and cultural landscapes[3]. This shift raises pressing questions about the preservation, relevance, and transformation of indigenous music traditions in a rapidly changing society.

A growing body of scholarly literature has engaged with the stylistic and ethnomusicological dimensions of isiZulu music, particularly in relation to well-known genres such as *uMaskandi*[4], gospel[5], ceremonial music. These studies have illuminated the aesthetic qualities and social functions of indigenous music, with scholars highlighting the ways in which these forms encode and express indigenous knowledge systems[2]. For example, through its lyrical content, isiZulu music serves as a repository of language, customs, beliefs, and historical narratives that are essential to Zulu

identity[6]. The rhythms, melodies, and performative elements provide not only entertainment but also a powerful mode of storytelling that transmits intergenerational knowledge and communal values[2].

In addition to its epistemological significance, isiZulu music plays a vital role in fostering a sense of cultural identity and collective belonging[7]. The music reinforces the distinct customs and worldviews of Zulu communities, affirming their cultural sovereignty and resilience in the face of homogenising forces. Artists draw upon musical performance to express solidarity, pride, and continuity with ancestral heritage, thereby strengthening cultural cohesion within the Zulu nation[8]. Recent studies have further explored the rise of musical hybridity in South Africa, noting the emergence of cross-cultural fusion genres that blend traditional isiZulu elements with contemporary musical styles[9]. For instance, genres such as *Afro-fusion*, *kwaito*, and modern gospel demonstrate how traditional motifs are creatively reinterpreted to appeal to younger, urban audiences. This hybridity reflects both the multicultural fabric of the nation and the adaptive strategies of musicians striving to maintain cultural relevance in a globalised music industry[7].

Despite these valuable contributions, much of the existing scholarship remains largely descriptive or focused narrowly on the musicological and ethnographic aspects of isiZulu music[6]. There is a notable absence of interdisciplinary research that integrates linguistic analysis with educational inquiry, particularly regarding the role of isiZulu music in formal and informal learning contexts. Few studies have interrogated the linguistic features of isiZulu song lyrics as carriers of indigenous knowledge, nor have they adequately examined how these features support language learning, critical thinking, and identity formation in educational settings[10]. Moreover, there is limited research addressing the representation or lack thereof of isiZulu music within the South African school curriculum, particularly within the Creative Arts subject area[11]. While the national curriculum framework emphasises inclusivity and the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems, the actual implementation

of these principles remains inconsistent, especially in rural and under-resourced schools. Aside from a few exceptions, the integration of indigenous music into teacher training programmes and classroom practice has not received sufficient scholarly attention[10]. This oversight is concerning, given the urgent need to align educational content with the cultural realities and linguistic backgrounds of South African learners.

This study is motivated by the urgent need to bridge these scholarly and practical gaps through a systematic review. By critically mapping and analysing existing literature from a linguistic and educational lens, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving significance of isiZulu music in contemporary South Africa. Importantly, this research offers practical value to educators, cultural policymakers, and music practitioners, providing insights that can inform curriculum development, cultural preservation strategies, and inclusive pedagogy. In doing so, it supports the broader decolonial project within the humanities and education, advocating for the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate and vital to national cultural identity and educational reform.

In addition to advancing theoretical understanding, this study holds practical implications for educators, curriculum developers, cultural policymakers, and music practitioners. Therefore, by identifying how isiZulu music can be more effectively utilised as a linguistic and pedagogical resource, the study contributes to curriculum reform efforts that aim to decolonise South African education. It also highlights the need for stronger collaborations between schools and communities, as well as for the development of culturally grounded teaching materials and teacher training initiatives that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the nation. Therefore, this review seeks to contribute to filling this gap by answering the following research questions:

a) How is indigenous isiZulu music represented across cultural, linguistic, and educational literature?

b) Which isiZulu linguistic features transmit indigenous knowledge through music in scholarly discussions?

c) How is indigenous isiZulu music included in Creative Arts education in South Africa?

d) What does current research suggest for future inclusive, interdisciplinary, education policy development?

In sum, this research provides a relevant and essential contribution to the conversation on indigenous music, language conservation, and curriculum reform. It highlights the many benefits of isiZulu music as a tool for pedagogical innovation, linguistic enrichment, and cultural continuity by offering a methodical synthesis of pertinent literature. The results provide opportunities for meaningful interaction with local customs at a time of global change, while also reinforcing the significance of indigenous knowledge systems in forming South African schooling.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the centrality of music in African societies as a vehicle for cultural expression, identity formation, and language transmission, indigenous isiZulu music remains significantly underrepresented in formal education and scholarly discourse in South Africa[10–13]. This marginalisation is a lingering effect of colonial and apartheid-era policies that devalued indigenous knowledge systems in favour of Eurocentric paradigms. As a result, younger generations are increasingly disconnected from their linguistic and cultural heritage, particularly in urban and institutional contexts. Furthermore, while some studies have acknowledged the importance of indigenous music, few have systematically examined how isiZulu musical forms such as *uMaskandi*, *amaHubo*, and sacred vocal polyphony function as tools for cultural preservation and educational transformation[13,14]. There is a pressing need to investigate how these musical traditions adapt, survive, and innovate within a rapidly changing society marked by globalisation, digitalisation, and curriculum reform. Addressing this gap is essential for promoting inclusive education, linguistic diversity, and decolonial pedagogical practices.

3. Indigenous Music and Cultural Preservation

Perhaps, it is prudent to foreground this section by point out that recent scholarship affirms the enduring role of indigenous music in preserving African cultural identity and knowledge systems[13,15]. Indigenous songs are not merely artistic expressions; they are repositories of communal memory, ethics, and worldview[2]. IsiZulu musical genres such

as *uMaskandi* and *amaHubo* encode ritual practices, oral histories, and philosophical insights that continue to shape collective identities. Traditional music in KwaZulu-Natal functions as a cultural archive that sustains intergenerational dialogue. These findings align with the theoretical premise that music is a living text through which cultural norms, values, and histories are communicated and contested[2,12]. The erosion of indigenous music in formal institutions signals a broader crisis of cultural alienation among Zulu youth[10], calling for the reintegration of such traditions into contemporary education and public discourse.

4. Language Transmission Through Music

The use of isiZulu in traditional music facilitates linguistic preservation, particularly in oral genres. Through song, idioms, proverbs, and regional dialects are retained even in diasporic communities[15,16]. Musical forms often resist linguistic assimilation, allowing indigenous expressions to thrive despite dominant languages in media and education. Scholars further argue that music serves as an informal learning tool that cultivates mother-tongue proficiency among children outside of formal schooling[12,13]. This supports broader claims about the role of music in linguistic resilience, particularly in rural and marginalised contexts. A recent comparative study shows that communities with active musical traditions show higher retention of vernacular speech and cultural concepts[13,15], underscoring the intertwined nature of language and cultural sustainability through music.

5. Theoretical framework

This study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws upon Critical Indigenous Theory, Sociolinguistics with a particular focus on ethnolinguistic vitality and Decolonial Pedagogy[17]. These frameworks are well-suited for investigating indigenous isiZulu music as a repository of cultural identity, linguistic heritage, and educational relevance[18]. Their combined application provides a nuanced analytical lens through which to explore how isiZulu music functions across social, linguistic, and pedagogical contexts in post-apartheid South Africa.

5.1. Critical Indigenous Theory

Critical Indigenous Theory centres the knowledge systems, worldviews, and lived experiences of indigenous communities while challenging the hegemony of Eurocentric paradigms[19]. It critiques dominant critical theory traditions that often marginalise or erase Indigenous perspectives, instead asserting the epistemological validity of indigenous cultural expressions. In this context, isiZulu music is interpreted not simply as a folkloric or aesthetic tradition, but as a living archive of ancestral knowledge, communal memory, and moral instruction[20]. This framework allows for an interpretation of isiZulu music on its own cultural terms acknowledging the music's embeddedness in Zulu cosmology, spirituality, and social relations. Like Indigenous studies in general[21], Critical Indigenous Theory alerts us to the risks of essentialising indigenous identity and instead embraces the complexity, plurality, and political agency embedded in indigenous cultural forms. It thus guides this study in respecting the autonomy and richness of isiZulu musical traditions, recognising them as integral to broader movements for cultural sovereignty and decolonisation.

5.2. Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Sociolinguistics examines the social functions of language and the ways in which language reflects and shapes group identity, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings[22]. Within this study, the lens of ethnolinguistic vitality is particularly instructive. Ethnolinguistic vitality refers to the capacity of a language to be maintained and transmitted within a given community across generations[23]. Music, as a communal and performative medium, plays a critical role in sustaining the isiZulu language and reinforcing group solidarity. Through idioms, proverbs, praise poetry, metaphor, and rhythm, isiZulu songs convey cultural values and encode social norms, effectively acting as a mechanism for cultural education[23,24]. Applying this lens, the study is able to assess how isiZulu music reinforces or reconfigures language use and linguistic identity in the face of dominant languages and global media. This perspective is vital in understanding how the linguistic features of isiZulu music contribute to both knowledge transmission and cultural resilience.

5.3. Decolonial Pedagogy

Decolonial Pedagogy challenges the colonial foundations of formal education and advocates for culturally relevant, inclusive, and situated teaching and learning practices[25]. In the South African context, where the legacy of apartheid education continues to shape curriculum and policy, this framework is particularly relevant. Decolonial Pedagogy interrogates how indigenous knowledge systems including music are often marginalised within the school system, and it calls for a transformation that validates local knowledge and cultural heritage[26]. In this study, Decolonial Pedagogy provides the tools to critically examine how isiZulu music is (or is not) represented in the Creative Arts curriculum, as well as how teacher training and classroom practices either support or inhibit its integration. It frames the study's educational analysis within the broader imperative of epistemic justice, recognising that curriculum transformation must include the restoration of indigenous cultural forms.

5.4. Synthesis of the Frameworks

Together, these three theoretical lenses offer a comprehensive and interconnected foundation for the study. Critical Indigenous Theory anchors the cultural legitimacy of isiZulu music; Sociolinguistics explores how language within music sustains identity and intergenerational knowledge; and Decolonial Pedagogy addresses how these cultural and linguistic dimensions are operationalised or excluded within educational policy and practice. The convergence of these frameworks allows the study to examine isiZulu music not only as a cultural artefact but also as a pedagogical tool and a linguistic resource. Weaving these perspectives together enables a holistic response to questions of identity, language preservation, curriculum development, and cultural decolonisation affirming the centrality of indigenous isiZulu music in shaping more inclusive and contextually grounded educational futures in South Africa.

6. Methodology

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to explore the evolving cultural, linguistic, and educational significance of indigenous isiZulu music. An SLR is a structured, methodical approach to identifying, eval-uating, and synthesising existing research to answer a focused research question[27]. The review drew on both historical and contemporary scholarly perspectives to understand how isiZulu music has transitioned over time, particularly in relation to its role in transmitting indigenous knowledge and its integration into South African education. To ensure transparency and replicability, the review process adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews) guidelines. The SLR approach provided a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process for identifying, analysing, and synthesising relevant literature. To ensure methodological consistency, the study adhered to the PRISMA guidelines[28].

6.1. Design of the Study

This qualitative systematic review was designed to synthesise evidence across multiple disciplines, including ethnomusicology, education, sociolinguistics, and African studies. The study aimed to capture a nuanced understanding of how indigenous isiZulu music contributes to knowledge transmission, language preservation, and curriculum development within a decolonial framework.

6.2. Procedure

The review was conducted in three key phases: searching, screening, and analysis.

6.2.1. Phase 1: Searching

The literature search targeted high-quality, peer-reviewed studies published between 2005 and 2025, capturing recent developments while acknowledging historical foundations. Four major academic databases were used for the search: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar[29,30]. These were selected for their extensive coverage of education, linguistics, ethnomusicology, and social sciences. A combination of Boolean operators ('AND', 'OR') was used with the following.

6.3. Data Collection

6.3.1. Phase 2: Screening

The initial database search retrieved a total of 1026 records. After the removal of 252 duplicate entries, 754 ti-

tles and abstracts were screened based on relevance to the research topic. At this stage, studies that did not focus on indigenous isiZulu music, or lacked educational, linguistic, or cultural insights were excluded. This initial screening narrowed the pool significantly, ensuring that only those studies aligning with the research questions were considered for full-text analysis.

Following the abstract screening, 542 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility using a clearly defined set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria focused on topic relevance, methodological rigor, publication type, linguistic focus, and time frame (2005–2025). Articles had to explore themes such as isiZulu music, oral traditions, indigenous education, or cultural transmission. Excluded studies were those that dealt with Western classical music, lacked academic rigor, or were not accessible in full text.

6.3.2. Instruments

The main tools used were a pre-determined protocol for inclusion and exclusion, a coding framework for thematic analysis, and PRISMA guidelines to track and report the review process. A data extraction matrix was employed to systematically record information such as publication year, author(s), study focus, methodology, and key findings[17,31]. The inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in this study are summarised in **Table 1**.

Ultimately, 33 studies met all inclusion criteria and were selected for in-depth analysis. These final sources represent a balanced mix of peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, book chapters, and policy documents that provide a rich, interdisciplinary foundation for understanding the role of isiZulu music in knowledge transmission and education.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic Relevance	Focus on indigenous isiZulu music (e.g., Maskandi, Amahubo, Zulu gospel, ceremonial music)	Studies not related to isiZulu music or focused solely on Western/non-African traditions
Linguistic Focus	Analysis of isiZulu music's language use—proverbs, idioms, praise poetry, or storytelling	Articles that mention music but exclude linguistic or epistemological insights
Educational Context	Studies addressing isiZulu music in formal/informal education, curriculum, or indigenous pedagogy	Studies on music education lacking indigenous or isiZulu focus
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, book chapters, theses, or official curriculum/policy documents	Blogs, magazines, newspapers, non-scholarly sources
Language	Published in English or isiZulu	Works in other languages without English/isiZulu translation
Time Frame	Published between 2005 and 2025	Studies before 2005 unless seminal
Availability	Full text available	Abstract-only records; inaccessible full texts

Source: Researcher.

6.4. Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic narrative analysis, which allowed for the identification and interpretation of key patterns across the selected studies. This method facilitated a deeper understanding of how isiZulu music functions within cultural and educational contexts. Four central themes emerged: cultural continuity, language transmission, curriculum marginalisation, and musical hybridity.

These themes highlight the multifaceted role of isiZulu music in sustaining cultural identity, promoting indigenous language learning, and challenging Eurocentric norms in education. Through interdisciplinary interpretation, the analysis revealed significant conceptual and policy gaps in the integration of indigenous music into formal curricula. The findings underscore isiZulu music's potential as both a medium of cultural expression and a powerful tool for curriculum transformation, supporting broader efforts to decolonise education and affirm African knowledge systems within South African schools.

6.4.1. Phase 3: Analysis

The final phase of the systematic review involved a structured thematic narrative analysis of the 41 studies that met the inclusion criteria. Guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews) framework, this phase ensured a transparent and replicable process. The process and flow of study selection are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

The analysis drew from Critical Indigenous Theory, Sociolinguistics, and Decolonial Pedagogy to interpret the data through an interdisciplinary lens. Each study was carefully reviewed to identify and synthesise patterns that reflect the educational, linguistic, and cultural significance of indigenous isiZulu music.
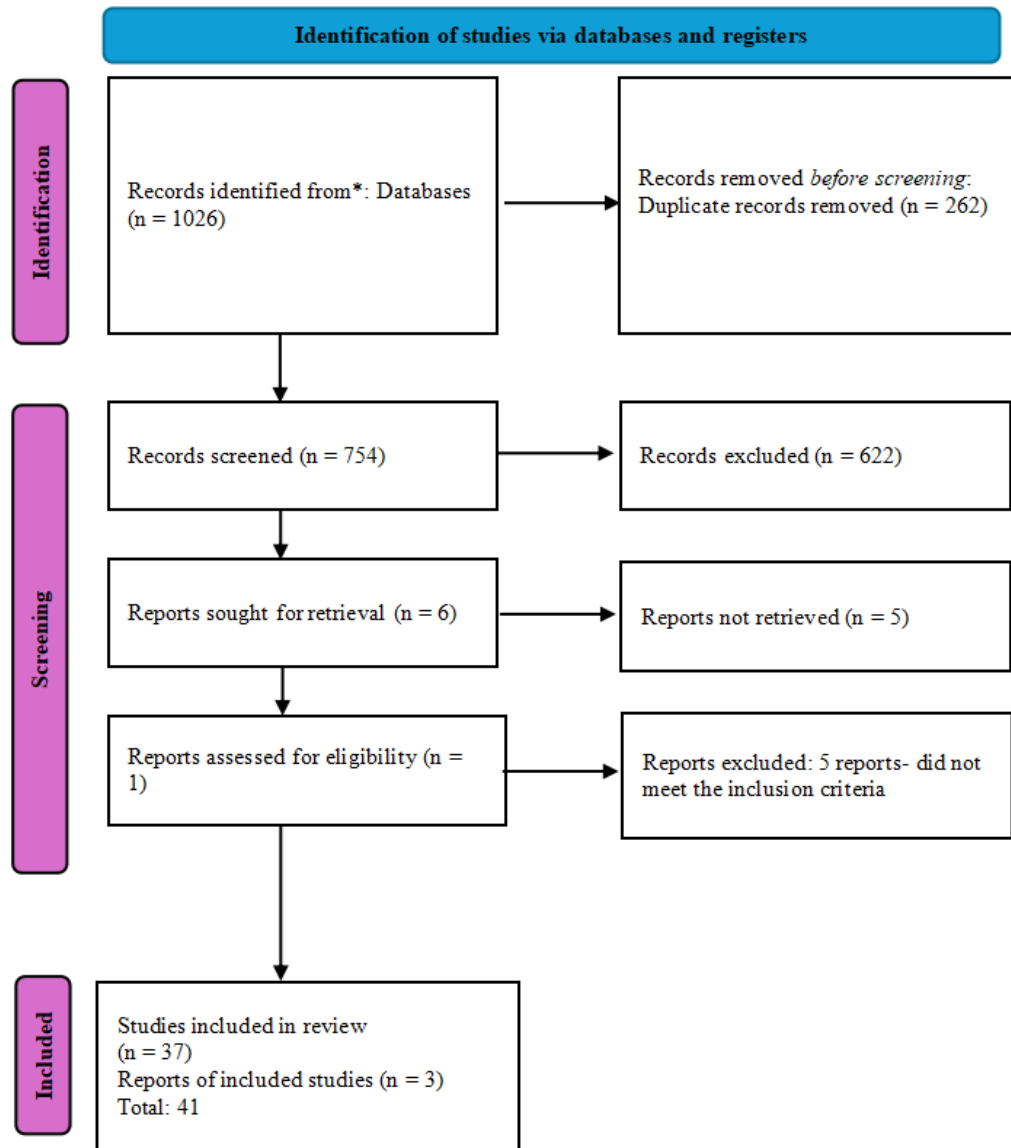

Figure 1. PRISMA chart for reporting systematic reviews [32].

7. Results of the Emergent Themes

The thematic narrative analysis of the 41 selected studies revealed four central and interrelated themes: Cultural Continuity and Change, Linguistic Transmission, Curriculum and Pedagogy, and Hybridity and Identity. Each theme reflects how indigenous isiZulu music functions as a dynamic site for cultural expression, educational praxis, and identity negotiation within contemporary South African contexts.

7.1. Cultural Continuity and Change

The tension between adaptation and cultural preservation emerged as a central theme throughout the literature. Indigenous isiZulu music remains a powerful repository of ancestral values, collective memory, and ritual significance, particularly within rural and religious contexts. One notable example is Zulu chanting, which transcends mere melody to embody an enduring cultural and historical heritage that

continues to influence succeeding generations [1,13]. Indigenous isiZulu music forms part of a broader corpus of African musical traditions that have been extensively studied for their unique musical elements and performance practices within their original cultural settings [2,9].

Despite this cultural grounding, isiZulu music is evolving in response to rapid urbanisation, technological advances, and socio-political transformations in post-apartheid South Africa. Globalisation has had a profound impact on the musical landscape, facilitating dynamic interactions among diverse musical influences. Scholars highlight how digital technologies have become integrated into indigenous and international musical genres, reshaping how traditional music is produced and consumed [33]. The reviewed studies demonstrated both resilience and vulnerability: elders tend to preserve ritualistic practices such as *Amahubo* (traditional hymns), while younger musicians experiment with modern formats and cross-genre fusions to maintain cultural relevance.

7.2. Linguistic Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge

The literature consistently emphasises the role of isiZulu music as a vessel for indigenous knowledge transmission through rich linguistic devices. Proverbs, idiomatic expressions, praise poetry (*izibongo*), and metaphor are deeply embedded within traditional musical forms, making music a vital tool for language preservation and cultural continuity [6,15]. For instance, u*Maskandi* proverb "*Izandla ziyagezana*" (hands wash each other) captures communal values and interdependence, illustrating how lyrics function as repositories of social ethics [4]. These musical forms serve as *epi-poetic* texts where language, environment, and bodily performance intertwine, generating layered meanings that transcend generation. Indigenous praise poetry, with its dense use of idioms and metaphor, exemplifies the inseparability of language and culture and acts as a mnemonic device for preserving oral history and social values [13,15]. Several studies highlighted how isiZulu lyrics in *uMaskandi* and gospel genres act as informal educational texts, reinforcing indigenous cosmology, moral frameworks, and resistance narratives. This theme directly responds to research inquiries about how linguistic structures in music carry indigenous knowledge.

7.3. Curriculum and Pedagogy

A significant gap exists in the formal inclusion of isiZulu music within South Africa's Creative Arts curriculum. While the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) officially recognises indigenous knowledge systems as important, implementation is inconsistent and often superficial [10,14]. Few studies have explored how isiZulu music is integrated into classroom learning, and where inclusion occurs, it frequently lacks pedagogical depth or meaningful community involvement. For example, CAPS revisions post-1994 emphasise indigenous cultural content, yet only about 15% of rural schools actively incorporate isiZulu music into their teaching practices [10,12]. Teacher preparedness and resource constraints remain major challenges for effective curriculum delivery. Consequently, transmission of indigenous music in many rural settings relies heavily on local knowledge holders rather than formal educators, revealing a disconnect between policy and lived cultural practice.

7.4. Hybridity and Identity

Indigenous isiZulu music remains a vital carrier of ancestral values, communal memory, and ritual practice, especially in rural and religious contexts. Forms such as Zulu chanting extend beyond melody to reflect deep-rooted cultural identities [6,34]. While the music preserves tradition, it is simultaneously evolving due to urbanisation, globalisation, and technological change in post-apartheid South Africa. Studies show how elders maintain traditional practices like Amahubo (ritual hymns), while younger musicians adopt digital tools and genre fusions to ensure cultural relevance [35]. This duality illustrates both the resilience and vulnerability of isiZulu musical heritage. Linguistically, isiZulu music serves as a repository of indigenous knowledge. Through proverbs, idioms, izibongo (praise poetry), and metaphors, the music transmits history, ethics, and cultural values. Lyrics in uMaskandi and gospel often act as informal educational texts that reinforce indigenous cosmologies and resistance narratives.

Despite its value, isiZulu music remains marginal in formal education. Literature critiques the superficial incorporation of indigenous music into the Creative Arts curriculum [10,12]. Implementation challenges particularly in teacher training underscore the gap between curriculum intentions

and lived realities. Younger artists creatively merge traditional isiZulu elements with genres like gospel and hip-hop. This musical hybridity fosters cultural continuity and innovation, enabling identity expression across generations.

8. Discussions

This study set out to investigate the educational, cultural, and linguistic value of indigenous isiZulu music, guided by three research questions. In response to Research Question 1 "How does indigenous isiZulu music contribute to the preservation of cultural memory and linguistic heritage?" the findings confirm that isiZulu musical practices, such as *amahubo*, *amaqoqwana*, *Maskandi*, and sacred vocal polyphony, are not only artistic forms but repositories of indigenous knowledge systems. These forms encode memory, ritual, and values through oral traditions including proverbs, idiomatic expressions, praise poetry (*izibongo*), and narrative song structures. These findings are consistent with earlier scholarship that emphasizes the multifunctionality of African music as both a linguistic and cultural archive [36,37]. The inclusion of traditional sayings and ritual expressions in songs highlights music's pedagogical function in reinforcing communal identity and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

To address Research Question 2 "In what ways does isiZulu music facilitate the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge?" this study foregrounds how musical forms serve as vessels for communal epistemologies. Proverbs embedded in *uMaskandi* lyrics, for example, transmit moral instruction and societal norms, making the performance of music an educational act [6]. This finding echoes existing studies that demonstrate the mnemonic and didactic qualities of African oral performance traditions [6,38–40]. These examples further validate the theoretical framing of the study in Critical Indigenous Theory and Decolonial Pedagogy, which call for the reclamation and activation of indigenous ways of knowing as a response to colonial epistemicide.

Rather than treating linguistic and cultural preservation as separate themes, this discussion integrates them, recognising their interdependence. Indigenous isiZulu music represents a holistic expression wherein language, ritual, and culture are mutually reinforcing. Songs like *amahubo omshado*

or *amahubo wesintu* convey both the linguistic nuances of isiZulu and the socio-cultural significance of rites such as weddings, funerals, and initiations. This convergence substantiates the work of several scholars who argued for the centrality of language in cultural sovereignty [6,41].

Research Question 3 asked: "How do processes of hybridity affect the integrity and innovation of isiZulu music in contemporary contexts?" Findings suggest that musical hybridity evident in genres like gospel, Kwaito, and Afro-soul infused with isiZulu elements does not necessarily dilute tradition. Instead, it enables cultural negotiation and innovation. Artists blend Western instruments with isiZulu tonality or remix folk songs with digital production tools, illustrating adaptive strategies that sustain relevance across generations. While some critics might argue that such hybridity compromises authenticity, this study supports [33] conception of hybridity as a space of productive tension and cultural renewal.

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on secondary data may inadvertently exclude emerging or undocumented community practices. In-depth ethnographic research involving practitioners, elders, and educators could offer richer, ground-level perspectives on the lived dynamics of isiZulu music. Moreover, a more focused linguistic analysis such as tracing phonological shifts or neologisms in lyrics would strengthen claims about language evolution and retention. Pedagogically, the study highlights a disconnect between the national curriculum and the cultural realities of learners. CAPS reports indicate that fewer than 15% of rural schools include isiZulu music as part of their formal curriculum [10–12]. This gap underscores the need for systemic reform to create a more culturally responsive educational framework. However, informal efforts by teachers to incorporate indigenous songs suggest grassroots resistance and a movement toward decolonised pedagogy.

This study advances the understanding that indigenous isiZulu music is not only a cultural artefact but an evolving educational resource. It plays a critical role in preserving memory, transmitting knowledge, and fostering innovation. As such, curriculum developers, policymakers, and cultural practitioners must view music as a vital instrument in the broader project of cultural reclamation and educational transformation in South Africa.

8.1. Recommendations

Based on these findings and reflecting on the study, the following recommendations are made:

a) This study recommends the formal integration of isiZulu music into the national Creative Arts curriculum, starting with a pilot in 10 schools across KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng by 2027, supported by a R500,000 grant from the Department of Basic Education. This pilot should develop culturally relevant teaching materials that align with national outcomes while reflecting indigenous knowledge.

b) Teacher training programmes must incorporate a mandatory 10-hour module on isiZulu musical forms, language, and culturally responsive pedagogy within initial and ongoing professional development.

c) To address curriculum gaps, schools should establish partnerships with local elders, praise poets, and traditional musicians. These collaborations will support experiential learning and promote intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

d) Finally, isiZulu music should be nationally recognised through annual Indigenous Music Awards and inclusion in Heritage Month events. These measures will elevate its status as an essential part of South Africa's intangible cultural heritage, fostering preservation and contemporary relevance.

8.2. Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The reliance on secondary data, though useful for thematic breadth, may overlook emerging grassroots practices and the lived experiences of contemporary musicians. Future research should include ethnographic methods such as interviews and participant observation to capture evolving community dynamics. Furthermore, a deeper linguistic analysis particularly of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic shifts in isiZulu song lyrics would offer more precise insights into language change and preservation. The exclusion of non-Zulu indigenous music also narrows the comparative scope of the findings.

8.3. Implications

This article highlights the urgency of integrating indigenous isiZulu music into educational and cultural policy frameworks as a means of safeguarding intangible heritage. Its findings suggest the need for curriculum designers to embrace indigenous music not merely as content, but as a pedagogical tool that affirms learners' identities and fosters cultural responsiveness. Policymakers should prioritize funding and support for community-led music education initiatives, while arts institutions must re-evaluate how indigenous forms are represented and preserved. Furthermore, this study opens space for interdisciplinary collaborations between educators, ethnomusicologists, and cultural practitioners to co-create inclusive, contextually grounded learning experiences.

9. Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that indigenous isiZulu music sustains cultural memory and linguistic resilience, serving as a vital medium for expressing identity and transmitting knowledge across generations. Rooted in ancestral traditions yet responsive to contemporary influences like urbanisation and digital media, isiZulu music remains a living, adaptive cultural force within Zulu-speaking communities.

Despite its significance, isiZulu music is insufficiently recognised and integrated within formal education, particularly in the Creative Arts curriculum, where its inclusion often lacks cultural depth and continuity. This highlights the need for educational policies that fully embrace indigenous knowledge systems as essential to meaningful teaching and learning. Looking beyond education, future research should investigate the potential of digital platforms and new media technologies to preserve and promote isiZulu music, especially among younger audiences. Such exploration could support broader cultural revitalisation, enhance global accessibility, and foster innovative expressions of tradition in an increasingly interconnected world. In summary, preserving and celebrating isiZulu music is crucial not only for enriching South Africa's cultural heritage but also for empowering communities and ensuring the continuity of indigenous wisdom in diverse and evolving contexts.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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