Policy Gaps and Opportunities for Integrating Indigenous Music into South African Higher Education Curricula

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Abstract

Integrating Indigenous music into South African higher education curricula is essential for advancing curriculum transformation, redressing historical marginalisation, and promoting cultural inclusion. However, despite increasing policy recognition of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), it remains unclear whether national frameworks provide sufficient structural support for meaningful curricular change. This article critically examined four key policy documents, the 1997 White Paper on Higher Education, the 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, the 2016 Policy Framework for Social Inclusion in Post-School Education and Training, and the 2017 Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, to assess their capacity to enable or constrain the integration of Indigenous music. Drawing on a qualitative document analysis guided by Weimer and Vining's policy analysis framework and informed by a conceptual framing of Indigenous music and Indigenous education, the analysis systematically evaluated policy intent, implementation feasibility, and institutional alignment. The findings revealed that while the policies symbolically endorse transformation and cultural diversity, they lack curriculum-level mandates, funding mechanisms, and participatory structures involving Indigenous cultural practitioners. The article argues for coherent, actionable, and inclusive policy strategies that move beyond rhetorical recognition towards practical support, positioning Indigenous music as a vital knowledge domain within higher education transformation.

Keywords: Indigenous music; curriculum transformation; higher education policy; cultural inclusion; Indigenous Knowledge Systems

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Introduction

The ongoing call to decolonise and Africanise South Africa's higher education system has intensified scrutiny of the Eurocentric content, structures, and epistemologies that continue to dominate university curricula (Chikoko 2021; Heleta 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Among the many dimensions of this debate is the marginalisation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly within formal disciplinary structures. Indigenous music, as a culturally situated form of knowledge, storytelling, and communal memory, is critical in expressing identity, values, spirituality, and historical continuity (Lebaka 2019a; Netshivhambe 2023). Despite its cultural and pedagogical value, however, Indigenous music remains largely peripheral to the South African university curriculum, often excluded, tokenised, or treated as a form of cultural heritage rather than academic knowledge (Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani 2024; Yende and Yende 2022).

Numerous scholars have highlighted this exclusion, arguing that the lack of Indigenous musical content in higher education denies students access to cultural roots and reinforces epistemic injustice (Chisa 2018; Green 2007; Isabirye 2021). Isabirye (2021) contends that Indigenous music embodies artistic expression and embedded pedagogies, oral memory, and social regulation, dimensions that can enrich contemporary learning environments if integrated meaningfully. Similarly, Yende and Yende (2022) critique the absence of traditional Maskandi music in university-level music programmes, describing it as a failure of Africanisation efforts within curriculum design. The argument that Indigenous music must be included in the academic mainstream is also tied to broader calls for curriculum relevance, cultural restoration, and knowledge plurality (Heleta 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Despite these growing demands from scholars and communities, the extent to which national education and cultural policy frameworks provide for including Indigenous music in higher education remains underexamined. While some studies have interrogated the role of Indigenous music in identity formation, cultural continuity, and basic education (Isabirye 2021; Lebaka 2019b), and others have critiqued transformation delays in university curricula (Green 2007; Heleta 2016), few have explored the policy architecture itself, specifically how national frameworks either enable or constrain the systematic curricular integration of Indigenous music.

Since 1994, the South African government has introduced several policies to drive equity, redress, and transformation across the post-school education system. These include the 1997 White Paper on Higher Education, the 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training [PSET], the 2016 Policy Framework for the Realisation of Social Inclusion in PSET, and the 2017 Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage. Each document signals support for diversity, inclusion, and Indigenous knowledge. However, as Cindi (2021) notes, although integrating IKS is endorsed in policy, practical implementation often lacks clarity and guidance. Similarly, Msimango

(2023) highlights insufficient training, resources, and curricular support for Indigenous music in schools, indicating a gap between policy intention and actual practice.

This article addresses this gap by critically examining how existing South African policy frameworks engage with integrating Indigenous music into university curricula. It asks: To what extent do current higher education-related policy documents provide concrete support for the curricular inclusion of Indigenous music? This article adopts Weimer and Vining's (2017) policy analysis framework to answer these questions and guide its analysis, applying qualitative document analysis to four significant national policies. The analysis focuses on assessing goal clarity, implementation feasibility, and institutional alignment, while also interrogating how policy silences, ambiguities, or omissions impact the practical inclusion of Indigenous music in higher education settings.

Analytical Framework

As stated, this article employed Weimer and Vining's (2017) policy analysis framework to assess whether national policy documents have the adequacy and potential to integrate Indigenous music into South African higher education. Weimer and Vining identify several key criteria for evaluating public policy, namely goal clarity, effectiveness of policy instruments, feasibility of implementation, political acceptability, and cost-effectiveness. In this article, these criteria are adapted to interrogate the selected policies according to whether they (i) clearly articulate the objective of integrating Indigenous music or related Indigenous knowledge forms; (ii) propose concrete instruments or mechanisms for implementation; (iii) identify responsible institutions and allocate necessary support (institutional or financial); (iv) include monitoring or evaluation mechanisms; and (v) demonstrate alignment with institutional capacity and broader systemic constraints.

This framework enables a systematic and comparative examination of how national policy documents address the curricular inclusion of Indigenous music, whether through direct reference, implied intent, or strategic omission. It moves the analysis beyond content description to evaluate the policy architecture, identifying structural gaps and implementation barriers.

Conceptual Framework: Indigenous Music and Indigenous Education

This article is anchored on two interrelated concepts: Indigenous music and Indigenous education. These provide the analytical lens for examining the extent to which South African policy frameworks support integrating Indigenous music into higher education curricula.

Indigenous music refers to musical practices rooted in local communities' histories, identities, and epistemologies (Chisa and Ngulube 2017; Yende 2025). It embodies cultural memory and serves as a medium for transmitting values, oral histories, and

collective knowledge across generations (Lebaka 2019b). Beyond artistic expression, Indigenous music is a repository of lived experience and a vehicle for sustaining cultural heritage (Gwerevende and Mthombeni 2023). In the South African context, it reflects diverse traditions, such as Venda, Tsonga, and Nguni musical forms, which have historically been marginalised within formal education systems.

Indigenous education encompasses teaching and learning processes grounded in community traditions and world-views (Jaiswal 2025; Onwuatuegwu and Paul-Mgbeafulike 2023). It prioritises intergenerational knowledge transmission, experiential learning, and integrating cultural practices into educational content and pedagogy (Jaiswal 2025). Unlike Western-oriented education systems, Indigenous education values relationality and the co-construction of knowledge between elders, practitioners, and learners.

Framing the analysis through these concepts highlights the gap between policy rhetoric and practical implementation. When Indigenous music is excluded from higher education curricula, or included only symbolically, it reinforces colonial hierarchies that privilege external epistemologies over community knowledge systems. Conversely, embedding Indigenous music within higher education through policies that engage community stakeholders can foster transformation, cultural revitalisation, and more equitable knowledge production. This conceptual framing, therefore, guides the article's critique of South African policy documents, linking cultural sustainability to systemic curriculum reform.

Methodology

This article employed a qualitative document analysis approach to examine selected South African higher education policy documents and their treatment of Indigenous music integration. This approach was chosen because it enables researchers to systematically uncover the underlying assumptions, values, and silences embedded in policy texts (Morgan 2022). This makes it especially valuable when exploring cultural inclusion and curriculum transformation issues. Bowen (2009) and Morgan (2022) opine that document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents to extract meaning, develop understanding, and support empirical inquiry. It is particularly well-suited for policy research, where the objective is to assess what policies say and how they articulate intent, allocate responsibility, and support implementation. It is also valuable for contexts where direct engagement with policymakers or communities may be limited, such as this research, allowing for a deep, contextual understanding of how policies shape and constrain educational practices.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

This article examined four national policy documents that govern or influence higher education in South Africa. These documents were selected based on their relevance to

curriculum development, cultural inclusion, and the recognition of IKS within the post-school education in South Africa. The selected policies include the 1997 White Paper on Higher Education, the 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, the 2016 Policy Framework for the Realisation of Social Inclusion in Post-School Education and Training, and the 2017 Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage. Each document is foundational in shaping the trajectory of higher education reform or explicitly references the importance of inclusivity, transformation, or incorporating Indigenous knowledge within educational contexts.

Other policy documents, such as the IKS policy (2004) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Arts and Culture (Senior Phase), were considered during the scoping phase of this article. However, these were deliberately excluded from the final policy analysis. The IKS policy, while foundational in recognising Indigenous knowledge as a national asset, does not provide curriculum-level directives or higher education-specific mechanisms for implementation. Similarly, the CAPS document is situated within the basic education sector and, although relevant to early-stage music education, falls outside the focus of this article, which is limited to the post-school and higher education context. These exclusions were made to ensure alignment with the article's aim of examining curriculum policy support for Indigenous music at the tertiary education level.

The documents were identified using purposive sampling, a widely accepted qualitative technique that deliberately selects data sources based on their relevance to the research question and conceptual framework (Palinkas et al. 2015; Patton 2015). This approach is particularly appropriate in policy research, where the aim is to gather information-rich cases that can yield insights into specific institutional or systemic phenomena. In this article, the inclusion criteria were guided by the documents' official status, national policy authority, and potential influence on curriculum planning in higher education. Although not all policies reference Indigenous music explicitly, they were selected for their broader treatment of IKS and cultural representation, core issues underpinning this article's focus on curricular inclusion in South African universities.

Figure 1 below shows the PRISMA flow diagram summarising the step-by-step process followed to identify, screen, and select the policy documents for this research.

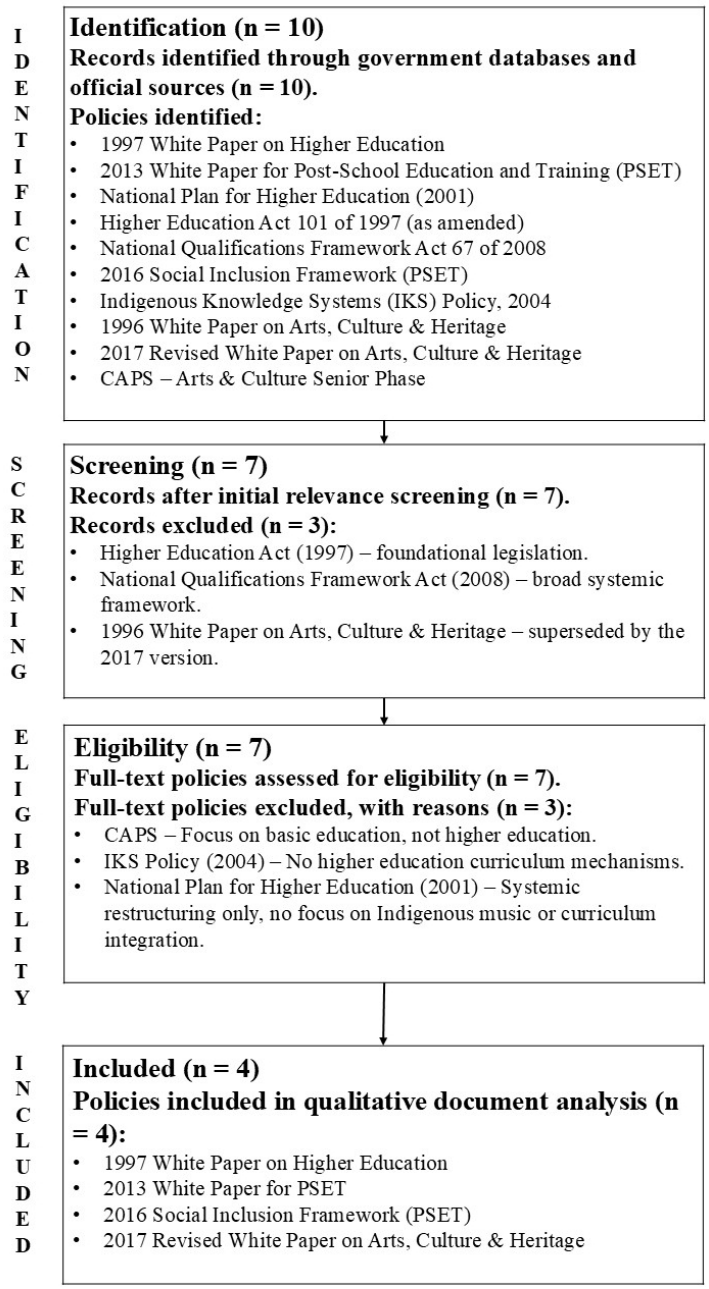

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram for policy document selection

The flow diagram shows each stage of the selection process. During the initial screening, three policies were removed because they were either foundational legislative instruments or had been superseded by newer versions. A full-text review of the remaining documents led to the exclusion of three more policies, either because they

focused on basic education or lacked directives related to higher education curriculum transformation. The final four policies included in the analysis address higher education transformation, inclusivity, and the role of IKS, making them the most appropriate for achieving the aim of this article.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed a qualitative, interpretive approach based on Weimer and Vining's (2017) policy analysis framework. Document analysis was employed as the primary method for systematically reviewing and interpreting the content of the selected policy texts. As Bowen (2009) notes, document analysis is a valuable strategy for examining written material to extract meaning, develop understanding, and identify patterns, especially in policy and educational research. It enables researchers to assess policy documents' content and underlying assumptions critically.

Each policy was reviewed thoroughly to facilitate familiarisation with its language, structure, and objectives relating to curriculum transformation, IKS, and social inclusion. This was followed by a deductive coding process guided by the evaluative dimensions proposed by Weimer and Vining (2017), which include clarity of policy goals, feasibility of implementation, specification of responsible institutions, allocation of resources, and monitoring or evaluative mechanisms. The use of deductive coding in this context aligns with established practices in qualitative policy analysis, where theoretical or conceptual models guide the coding of policy content (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006).

Through iterative engagement with the texts, excerpts relating to Indigenous knowledge and curriculum inclusion were coded and analysed for alignment with the selected framework. Once individual policy analyses were completed, a comparative reading was undertaken to identify recurring policy patterns, silences, and inconsistencies. This process allowed for a deeper understanding of how Indigenous music, as a culturally situated knowledge domain, is addressed across multiple policy instruments. Analytical consistency was ensured by revisiting earlier documents as new interpretive insights emerged, a reflexive approach that strengthens credibility in document-based qualitative inquiry (Bowen 2009; O'Leary 2014).

Ethical Considerations

As this article involved the analysis of publicly available policy documents and did not include human participants, no ethical clearance was required. However, academic integrity and citation practices were strictly observed when analysing and referencing official texts.

Policy Analysis and Findings

The 1997 White Paper on Higher Education

The 1997 white paper on higher education (Department of Education [DoE] 1997) was a foundational policy document that marked the first comprehensive attempt to transform South Africa's higher education system after apartheid. It set out to address the inequities and exclusions inherited from the past and to realign higher education with the values of democracy, equity, and development. The policy advanced an inclusive vision, asserting that higher education institutions must be responsive to South African societal needs and committed to promoting a more representative and participatory system.

The broad and aspirational framing of the 1997 white paper reflected the political realities of the post-apartheid transition. At the time, the government needed to drive rapid systemic transformation while respecting institutional autonomy, which was strongly valued by universities. The policy was deliberately phrased in general terms to avoid direct conflict, creating room for diverse interpretations and introducing goal ambiguity around how transformation should be operationalised, especially at the curriculum level.

While the 1997 white paper on higher education outlines broad transformational goals, such as equity, access, and institutional responsiveness and highlights the development of Indigenous languages as part of a national language framework, it does not make any reference to Indigenous music or provide detailed mechanisms for integrating IKS into the curriculum transformation agenda. Cultural inclusion is generally referred to, and the document outlines no concrete strategies for embedding Indigenous cultural expressions in university curricula. For instance, the policy emphasises "responsiveness to societal interests and needs" (DoE 1997, 11) and calls "to diversify the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programmes that will be required to meet national and regional needs in social, cultural and economic development" (DoE 1997, 17). While these aspirations indicate a willingness to broaden the scope of higher education, they are presented as systemic aims rather than curriculum-level mandates, and they stop short of instructing how specific forms of knowledge, such as Indigenous music, should be integrated into academic programmes.

Applying Weimer and Vining's policy analysis framework, the 1997 white paper demonstrates goal ambiguity about including Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. The values of transformation and diversity are present, but the policy fails to specify how such goals should be operationalised at the curriculum level, particularly concerning Indigenous epistemologies. This lack of clarity on meaningful cultural integration weakens the policy's ability to guide institutional action and implementation.

In practice, the 1997 white paper's ambiguity or broad wording leaves decisions about integrating Indigenous music and other underrepresented knowledge systems to individual institutions and departments. This has resulted in inconsistencies across the higher education sector, where some universities take steps towards cultural inclusion while others maintain a narrow focus on Western traditions. Without shared national guidelines, these efforts risk being symbolic rather than systemic, as there are no clear standards for curriculum design, teaching approaches, or assessment.

A further limitation of the 1997 white paper is its silence on the financial resources needed to support transformation. Without dedicated funding streams, universities are left to implement culturally inclusive curricula using existing, often strained budgets, which significantly limits the scope and sustainability of initiatives such as Indigenous music curriculum development.

Regarding implementation feasibility, the policy provides no guidance on how universities should integrate underrepresented knowledge systems. It does not designate implementing agencies, offer funding instruments, or suggest performance indicators. This results in a symbolic orientation whereby cultural inclusion is acknowledged rhetorically but left to the discretion of individual institutions. As the 1997 white paper highlighted, institutional autonomy is framed as a condition for effective self-governance, not a defence against transformation. However, as Heleta (2016) and Cindi (2021) observe, this emphasis on institutional self-management, while linked to public accountability, has contributed to the uneven implementation of transformation goals across higher education in South Africa.

Additionally, the policy does not provide precise mechanisms for engaging Indigenous communities and cultural knowledge holders in decision-making processes. This lack of participatory structures limits the legitimacy and relevance of transformation initiatives, as key stakeholders whose knowledge forms the basis of Indigenous music remain excluded from shaping the policies that affect them.

The 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET)

The 2013 white paper for PSET, developed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), outlines a vision for a coherent, expanded, and inclusive post-school education and training system in South Africa. It highlights the need for transformation that addresses historical inequalities while preparing citizens for full participation in a democratic society and a globalised economy. The policy emphasises that the system must be "responsive to the needs of individual citizens and of employers in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives" (DHET 2013, xvi).

The aspirational tone of the policy reflects the complex political context at the time of its development. Post-apartheid South Africa grappled with transformation pressures and the need to maintain institutional autonomy. This balancing act resulted in the

policy's broad framing, prioritising systemic expansion and inclusivity while avoiding prescriptive curriculum directives that might have sparked resistance from powerful higher education institutions. As a result, while its vision is progressive, its lack of specificity creates space for diverse interpretations and weakens its ability to guide cultural and curricular change.

Despite this progressive vision, the White Paper does not explicitly reference IKS or mention Indigenous music. While the document stresses inclusion, social justice, and curriculum responsiveness, it offers no direct guidance on incorporating Indigenous cultural expressions or knowledge into curriculum design or implementation.

The policy does acknowledge the importance of a diverse post-school system and institutional differentiation. For instance, "White Paper 3 and the National Plan for Higher Education recognise the importance of a diverse higher education system with different institutional missions and programmes" (DHET 2013, 29). However, this reference to diversity operates at a systemic and structural level, with no accompanying directive to promote epistemic inclusion or culturally responsive curricula. As a result, the potential role of Indigenous knowledge, particularly in disciplines like music, remains absent from the policy's curricular and implementation priorities.

Applying Weimer and Vining's policy analysis framework, this reflects goal ambiguity. Although the policy broadly supports inclusion and responsiveness, it does not clearly define what Indigenous knowledge integration would entail in practice. It provides no curriculum design standards, teaching strategies, or delivery frameworks to support implementation.

In practice, this ambiguity or lack of curriculum-level guidance means that decisions about Indigenous knowledge integration are left to individual institutions, creating inconsistencies across the sector. 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.

From the standpoint of implementation feasibility, the policy offers no straightforward assignment of institutional responsibilities for advancing cultural inclusion. While the policy addresses funding at a systemic level, it does not establish dedicated streams or mechanisms to support curriculum innovation. This makes it difficult for universities to develop and sustain programmes focused on Indigenous music or other marginalised knowledge systems. It lacks performance indicators, earmarked funding, or support mechanisms for including Indigenous knowledge or cultural programmes. While institutional autonomy is preserved, the absence of enabling national frameworks means that implementation is left to the discretion of individual institutions. This creates the risk of symbolic rather than substantive transformation. Green (2007) critiques the

superficial incorporation of IKS in South African universities, noting that it often remains marginal to dominant academic structures and lacks epistemological parity.

The 2013 white paper's focus on the education sector, without reference to related cultural policies, contributes to fragmentation between education, arts, and culture strategies. This lack of alignment undermines holistic transformation and limits opportunities for integrating culturally significant fields such as Indigenous music. A more integrated, cross-sectoral approach, for instance, through interdepartmental task forces or shared policy platforms, could help bridge these gaps and foster collaboration between the education and cultural sectors.

Moreover, while the policy indicates that it was developed through consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (DHET 2013, vii), it does not specify whether Indigenous communities, cultural practitioners, or traditional knowledge holders were involved in that process. The lack of clarity about stakeholder representation suggests that Indigenous voices were not meaningfully included, limiting the policy's legitimacy and relevance. In contrast, international models, such as New Zealand's co-governance structures for Māori education, demonstrate how participatory policymaking can support culturally responsive curricula and strengthen accountability (Barnes 2023; Jones 2023). The absence of such detail suggests that participatory curriculum planning, particularly involving those with lived experience and cultural authority in IKS, was not central to the policy's development. This omission weakens the policy's transformative intent, as it creates expectations of cultural inclusion without embedding the collaborative models, institutional infrastructure, or accountability mechanisms required to realise such goals in practice.

The 2016 Policy Framework for Social Inclusion in the PSET System

The *Policy Framework For the Realisation of Social Inclusion in the Post-School Education and Training System*, developed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET 2016), was designed to foster inclusive environments within post-school institutions. It is grounded in principles such as human rights and equality, inclusivity and social justice, respect, and transformation, with the broader aim of redressing historical patterns of exclusion (DHET 2016, 23). The policy positions social inclusion as an outcome and a systemic process, asserting that inclusivity must be mainstreamed across institutional policies, structures, and operations.

The policy adopts a general values-driven tone to maintain harmony across a diverse higher education sector rather than prescribing detailed actions. While this flexibility allows institutions to interpret and implement the framework in context-specific ways, it also contributes to ambiguity about how cultural knowledge and diverse epistemologies should be incorporated into teaching and curricula.

The framework strongly advocates for transforming teaching and learning practices. It calls for the "critical engagement and improvement of current teaching and learning

practices as well as pedagogical design of curriculum in the context of social inclusion and transformation of the entire PSET sector" (DHET 2016, 28). This statement reflects a broad commitment to pedagogical transformation but does not explicitly mention Indigenous music or IKS.

From a policy analysis perspective, this reflects what Weimer and Vining (2017) would describe as a goal–means disconnect. Although the policy articulates inclusive values, it stops short of prescribing operational strategies for integrating diverse cultural content. The document encourages institutions to undertake infrastructure development, training programmes, and awareness-raising initiatives to advance social inclusion (DHET 2016, 28). However, it does not outline curriculum-level actions tailored to cultural knowledge domains such as Indigenous music.

In practice, this results in varied interpretations across institutions. Some universities may take proactive steps to embed cultural content, while others continue with conventional approaches, leading to fragmented outcomes. For instance, the absence of a national framework in fields such as music makes it difficult to establish benchmarks for culturally representative curricula or performance standards. This variability dilutes the potential impact of inclusion efforts, which risk remaining nominal rather than truly transformative.

Moreover, while the policy generally refers to stakeholders, such as students, staff, and disability-focused groups, it does not reference Indigenous communities or cultural knowledge holders as participants in curriculum development or institutional transformation efforts. This omission weakens the policy's participatory ethos and leaves a critical gap in efforts to effectively include epistemologies traditionally marginalised in higher education. This omission suggests a gap in representation, as those whose knowledge forms the basis of Indigenous cultural practices are not actively involved in decision-making. This lack of direct engagement weakens the framework's credibility. Within South Africa, structures like the National Arts Council or provincial cultural forums could provide platforms for such participation, ensuring that policies align with local cultural realities and expertise.

Regarding implementation feasibility, the framework calls for values-driven leadership and institutional commitment, noting that the DHET and institutions must work collaboratively to promote social inclusion (DHET 2016, 35). It proposes the development of social inclusion indicators and introduces the Social Inclusion Review and Improvement Model (SI-RIM) (DHET 2016, 30) as a monitoring tool for institutional performance. Additionally, the policy provides for establishing a National Social Inclusion Forum (NSIF) to guide and monitor implementation, with representation from government, social inclusion groups, civil society, and public institutions (DHET 2016, 35).

However, while these mechanisms promote systemic inclusivity, they do not address knowledge content diversification or the inclusion of Indigenous cultural practices within curriculum frameworks. The policy also omits dedicated funding provisions, leaving universities to stretch limited budgets to achieve inclusion objectives. This lack of targeted financial support makes it challenging to develop sustained programmes, such as partnerships with local cultural experts or initiatives to integrate Indigenous music into curricula.

The 2017 Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage

The *Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (2017)*, developed by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC 2017), was initiated to modernise and address the limitations of the 1996 version. It specifically responds to issues such as fragmented implementation and weak attention to intangible heritage, aiming to reposition the sector to effectively accelerate transformation and integrate with national development priorities (DAC 2017, 6). The policy emphasises the significance of arts education at all levels and acknowledges IKS and oral traditions as key to fostering cultural sustainability and national identity. It argues that arts education should be integrated across all levels of education and training to foster "critically engaged and culturally aware citizens" and to support the development of "creative talent" within both the schooling and tertiary sectors (DAC 2017, 48–49).

This focus on intangible heritage represents an important policy shift, recognising that cultural expressions such as music, dance, and oral traditions are central to the nation's identity and social cohesion. However, by prioritising symbolic acknowledgement over operational clarity, the policy reflects the broader challenge of translating cultural values into actionable education strategies.

While the policy advocates for improved coordination between the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the DHET, and the DAC to align arts education strategies, it stops short of providing explicit curricular directives for integrating Indigenous music into university programmes. It notes that the DAC is responsible for ensuring that disciplines of the arts and cross-cutting cultural fields "are accommodated in the education system" and proposes a national arts education strategy (DAC 2017, 49). However, this strategy is not operationalised in curriculum design, content development, or institutional implementation at the higher education level.

The lack of clarity has practical consequences for universities. Without clear national guidelines, the integration of Indigenous music tends to occur ad hoc, dependent on individual departments' willingness and capacity. In some institutions, this leads to small-scale initiatives driven by committed academics, while cultural inclusion is overlooked entirely in others. Such inconsistency undermines efforts to position Indigenous music as a recognised field of study, leaving it vulnerable to marginalisation within the broader creative arts ecosystem.

Applying Weimer and Vining's (2017) policy analysis framework, the 2017 revised white paper reflects goal ambiguity about higher education curriculum transformation. Although it underscores the importance of IKS and performance traditions, it lacks targeted policies or mechanisms to support their integration into academic programmes. The vision is broad and aspirational, yet practical implementation steps, such as curriculum guidelines, funding commitments, or monitoring frameworks, are missing.

Another challenge lies in the misalignment between cultural policy and higher education policy. While the DAC identifies arts education as a priority, there is no mechanism to link this with the DHET's responsibilities for curriculum development at universities. This disconnect results in duplication of efforts in some areas and neglect in others, preventing a unified approach to Indigenous music education at the tertiary level. Stronger interdepartmental governance structures could help bridge this gap by clarifying roles and responsibilities.

Regarding implementation feasibility, the policy identifies entities such as the National Arts Council and provincial departments as key players in promoting the arts. Still, it does not allocate funding or develop accountability structures for including Indigenous music in tertiary curricula. Without ring-fenced funding for higher education initiatives, institutions must compete for general arts development grants, which tend to favour mainstream creative economy projects rather than academic programmes. The focus remains on sector-wide development and the creative economy, with the tertiary education sector viewed as a potential partner, rather than a mandated actor. The absence of enforceable strategies makes the curricular integration of Indigenous music largely discretionary.

Discussion

The review of four national policy documents reveals a consistent pattern: while the policies acknowledge the importance of transformation, cultural inclusion, and IKS, they do not translate these ideals into concrete, curriculum-level mechanisms for integrating Indigenous music into higher education. Across all four documents, symbolic recognition is evident, but actionable support, such as implementation frameworks, funding, or institutional mandates, is largely absent.

At the core of these challenges is persistent goal ambiguity, which blurs the path from vision to practice. This disconnect is most visible in what Weimer and Vining (2017) term goal ambiguity. For instance, the 2013 white paper for PSET affirms inclusion and institutional diversity but does not define how Indigenous content, especially music, should be reflected in curricula. Similarly, the 2016 social inclusion framework speaks broadly to equity and cultural responsiveness but lacks discipline-specific directives or tools for integrating Indigenous epistemologies. Such persistent ambiguity undermines practical progress, as universities are left without clear expectations or guidelines for embedding Indigenous music in teaching and learning. This mirrors challenges

highlighted by Garuba (2015), who warns that curriculum reform which merely adds marginalised knowledge to existing structures, without rethinking the underlying epistemic framework, risks being symbolic rather than transformative.

Compounding this ambiguity is the fact that implementation feasibility is also weak across the policies. None designates institutional responsibilities, performance indicators, or curriculum development support specifically for Indigenous music. For example, the 2017 *Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* encourages partnerships between the arts and education sectors and highlights the role of national bodies like the National Arts Council. However, it does not assign these bodies curriculum-related tasks for higher education or fund integration efforts. This leaves the inclusion of Indigenous music dependent on individual institutional will rather than systemic coordination. Comparative experiences show that targeted national mechanisms can make a tangible difference. In Ghana, the national syllabus for basic education deliberately includes traditional drumming and dance, with schools encouraged to involve community experts to ensure cultural authenticity (Acquah and Mensah 2021). This approach illustrates how structured curricula can move cultural inclusion beyond rhetoric by linking formal education with local traditions.

Equally critical is the absence of mechanisms for meaningful community participation. Although Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions are acknowledged, especially in the 2017 white paper, none of the policies provides mechanisms for involving Indigenous communities or cultural practitioners in shaping curricular content. This reflects what Heleta (2016) critiques as the continued marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge in South African higher education, where transformation is often rhetorical and Indigenous epistemologies are welcomed in discourse but not meaningfully integrated or supported through structural mechanisms. Direct participation of Indigenous stakeholders is essential for authenticity and cultural sensitivity. Mugovhani (2012) stresses that universities cannot achieve meaningful transformation in music education without engaging local communities, who are custodians of these traditions. Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024) illustrate this through their work with Nguni instruments, where collaboration with community experts bridged informal knowledge systems and formal higher education. Such engagement strengthens curricula, supports intergenerational knowledge transfer, and challenges colonial hierarchies that privilege external perspectives over Indigenous voices.

Finally, the policies lack coherence and alignment across sectors, limiting their collective impact**.** The 2017 revised white paper promotes cultural sustainability and recognises Indigenous performance, but is not aligned with the higher education-focused 2013 or 2016 frameworks. The resulting siloed approach limits the systemic integration of Indigenous music. Each policy operates within its domain, culture, education, and social inclusion, without cross-sectoral strategies to unify these efforts at the curriculum level. A more coordinated approach could include joint task forces between the DAC and the DHET, and the development of a shared national curriculum

framework for Indigenous arts education. Dedicated funding streams, similar to the National Arts and Culture Council's project-based grants but tailored to higher education, would provide the resources necessary for sustained implementation. Such measures would help shift the integration of Indigenous music from isolated, institution-driven efforts to a nationally supported and monitored priority.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article examined the extent to which selected South African policy frameworks support integrating Indigenous music into higher education curricula. Through a critical analysis of four national policies, the 1997 white paper on higher education, the 2013 white paper for PSET, the 2016 social inclusion framework, and the 2017 revised white paper on arts, culture and heritage, it became evident that while IKS are increasingly acknowledged in policy discourse, Indigenous music remains structurally unsupported. Each policy signals a commitment to cultural inclusion and transformation, yet falls short of articulating concrete mechanisms, funding models, or curriculum-level mandates that would translate these commitments into action. The policies collectively exhibit goal ambiguity, offering aspirational language but lacking enforceable directives for implementation. None of the documents assigns responsibility for curriculum development related to Indigenous music, nor do they include monitoring tools or dedicated budgetary support. Moreover, Indigenous communities and cultural practitioners are not identified as co-creators of curricular content, a shortfall that perpetuates the marginalisation of their epistemologies within academic institutions. Fragmentation across sectors further complicates matters, as cultural and education policy efforts proceed in parallel rather than in concert.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that these policies reflect genuine attempts to address historical inequities and promote transformation in higher education and cultural sectors. The recognition of IKS, even at the level of rhetoric, signals an emerging policy awareness that creates a foundation on which future reforms can build. Initiatives such as the proposed National Social Inclusion Forum (NSIF) and references to cross-sector collaboration demonstrate an openness to systemic change, even if these structures are not yet fully operational.

To address these gaps, future policy efforts must move beyond rhetorical recognition to provide concrete support for curricular change. First, national departments, particularly the DAC and DHET, should collaborate to develop a co-ordinated policy directive that mandates the integration of Indigenous music into relevant higher education programmes. This should include a dedicated funding stream and technical guidance for institutions tasked with implementation. Operationally, this collaboration could take the form of interdepartmental working groups that include representatives from both departments, higher education institutions, and national cultural councils. These groups would be tasked with developing shared curriculum guidelines, aligning performance

indicators, and facilitating training workshops for academic staff and cultural practitioners.

Second, Indigenous musicians, elders, and cultural experts must be legitimate stakeholders in curriculum planning to ensure that the knowledge integrated into academic programmes reflects lived cultural realities and not external interpretations. Their participation could be structured through formal advisory panels at both institutional and national levels, enabling continuous dialogue and review of curriculum content to ensure authenticity and accountability.

Third, the proposed National Social Inclusion Forum (NSIF) and similar bodies should include higher education and cultural curriculum specialists to facilitate cross-sectoral alignment and shared accountability.

Fourth, policy coherence must be strengthened by aligning cultural, educational, and social inclusion frameworks, ensuring that transformation is supported systemically rather than left to institutional discretion.

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