



# Camouflaged Colonisation? Afrocentric Epistemologies and the Limits of Decolonisation in South African Musicology

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## Abstract

This article investigates the implementation of decolonisation in South African higher education, with specific reference to musicology and curriculum studies, aiming to challenge the persistent dominance of Eurocentric knowledge. Despite growing attention to decolonial agendas, African epistemologies in musicology remain marginalised, and curricula frequently prioritise Western theories and frameworks. Superficial reforms risk symbolic rather than transformative change, leaving colonial knowledge hierarchies largely intact. This study addresses the gap in understanding how authentic Afrocentric epistemic integration can be achieved within South African university music curricula. Guided by Decolonial Theory, Afrocentricity, and Epistemic Justice which emphasise recognising, validating, and centring indigenous knowledge systems, the research underscores the need for curriculum transformation. A descriptive qualitative literature review was conducted, analysing 25 peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations on decolonisation, Afrocentricity, and music education. Databases searched included JSTOR, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Sources were screened for relevance, and themes were synthesised around the integration of African music systems, the influence of Western frameworks, and strategies for promoting Afrocentric epistemic transformation. Findings reveal that African musical knowledge and indigenous pedagogies are often included superficially and interpreted through Western lenses. Afrocentric approaches, such as ubuntu pedagogy, demonstrate potential to Africanise curricula, enhance student engagement, and preserve cultural heritage. Effective decolonisation requires structural support, policy alignment, faculty development, and the repositioning of African knowledge as foundational. The study concludes that meaningful decolonisation in South African musicology demands both epistemic and structural reforms, offering a framework for developing culturally responsive, transformative, and genuinely Afrocentric curricula.

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## Introduction

In South African higher education, decolonisation has become a prominent framework for addressing the long-lasting effects of colonialism and apartheid on knowledge creation, institutional cultures, and curricula. According to Mahabeer (2025, p. 62), decolonising South African education is a crucial step in redressing historical injustices and establishing more equitable learning environments by valuing diversity, considering a range of experiences, and complicating the narrative of domination. This calls for a critical examination of the dominant Westernised and Eurocentric knowledge systems that privilege particular epistemologies over Indigenous ways of knowing. Based on this statement, it is evident that decolonisation is widely understood as an ethical and political project aimed at disrupting entrenched epistemic hierarchies and broadening the scope of legitimate knowledge within the academy. It foregrounds the need to question how Western epistemologies have historically been normalised as universal, while Indigenous African ways of knowing have been marginalised or rendered invisible. Heleta (2016, p. 1) further highlights that:

Since the end of the oppressive and racist apartheid system in 1994, epistemologies and knowledge systems at most South African universities have not considerably changed; they remain rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western worldviews and epistemological traditions. The curriculum remains largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege.

This persistent Eurocentric dominance provides context for the emergence of student-led movements. As a concept, decolonisation in South African higher education became part of everyday academic discourse and increasingly influenced policy discussions during and after the 2015 and 2016 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. In their study, Yende and Rostislava (2022, p. 139) point out that:

Apart from the student protests about fee increases, the students also demanded decolonisation of the curricula, financial sustainability in the face of shrinking government funding, and transformation of universities to address inequalities such as gender and race.

Drawing from the insights of these scholars, decolonisation has been positioned as a corrective to Eurocentric epistemic dominance across disciplines, including musicology and curriculum studies. Despite its progressive framing, decolonisation in South African higher education remains conceptually unstable and unevenly implemented. This concern is substantiated by Du Plessis (2021, p. 60), citing Le Grange (2016), who observes that:

After 26 years of democracy in South Africa, our schools and universities tend to offer a view of the country that is rooted in colonial and apartheid thinking. The curriculum in universities remain largely Westernised, more of a white European view of what should be included into our curriculum.

It is evident that, while decolonisation is widely discussed, its implementation often fails to challenge the enduring dominance of Western epistemologies. In many cases, decolonisation is advanced without a substantive commitment to Afrocentricism or Africanisation (Yende & Rostislava, 2022). Within disciplines such as musicology and curriculum studies, African musical knowledge, indigenous pedagogies, and oral traditions are frequently incorporated superficially, serving as supplementary content rather than shaping the core of curricula. Meanwhile, Western theoretical frameworks continue to define disciplinary boundaries, assessment standards, and notions of academic legitimacy.



This uneven and performative application of decolonisation raises critical questions about its transformative potential (Heleta, 2016; Yende & Rostislava, 2022). Rather than dismantling entrenched epistemic hierarchies, current practices risk reproducing colonial power under a new guise. Genuine decolonisation, therefore, requires a deliberate shift toward African-centred knowledge systems that reposition indigenous epistemologies as foundational rather than peripheral within higher education (Dastile, 2013; Mbembe, 2015).

International decolonial scholarship is largely shaped by postcolonial and Global South theories developed outside Africa, which have significantly influenced debates on curriculum reform. For instance, Mills (2022, p. 478) observes that:

Despite a century of anti-colonial organising, postcolonial theorising and decolonial activism, Euro-American ways of organising and classifying knowledge continue to define the work of African universities. Citation data is just the latest of many external framings of African academic knowledge.

Evidently, global decolonial discourses often frame African knowledge through Eurocentric lenses, inadvertently limiting the transformative potential of locally grounded epistemologies.

Continental African scholarship, by contrast, emphasises African epistemologies, indigenous knowledge systems, and linguistic justice as central to knowledge transformation (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2025; Kipyegon et al., 2025; Munyaradzi, 2024). Munyaradzi (2024, p. 14) notes that:

African scholarship contributes pivotally to the intellectual legacies in knowledge production at the national, continental and global levels. It equally plays a key role in elevating the African philosophies and epistemologies in a world where producers of epistemologies of the global South are confronting the coloniality of knowledge, power and being. It is imperative to provide conceptual understanding of African scholarship.

Similarly, Maringe (2023, p. 1) highlights the conceptual ambiguity of decolonisation, stating that:

Decolonisation is an amorphous term with meanings ranging widely from attempts to indigenise the curriculum; to making education a basic human right which is free; to Africanising the curriculum; to removing all colonial vestiges and symbols from education; to centralising the use of local languages as official languages of communication and as the medium of instruction; to creating pedagogic and epistemic justice in education and to promoting inclusivity in education.

This underscores the multiplicity of interpretations surrounding decolonisation, which often complicates its practical implementation. Interestingly, this concern is echoed in Kipyegon et al. (2025, p. 14), who note that: "Colonial legacies and Western frameworks have historically shaped African music, often misrepresenting its inherent knowledge and making it vulnerable."

South African scholarship contributes significantly through analyses of curriculum decolonisation, music education reform, and epistemic justice (Mapaya, 2014; Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024). Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024, p. 579) observe that:

...the music curricula at many universities in South Africa have revealed that the curriculum is biased, often highlighting Western at the expense of African music. For example, the curricula focus on the works of composers such as Haydn, Bach and Mozart, at the expense of great musicians from Africa like the late Lucky Dube, Dorothy Masuka and Miriam Makeba.



The studies presented thus far provide evidence that, while decolonisation is widely discussed, its practical effect is often limited. In musicology, scholars have called for the inclusion of indigenous music systems, African analytical frameworks, and community-based pedagogies. However, across these bodies of work, African knowledge is frequently framed as additive, interpreted through Western musicological concepts, or validated through Eurocentric academic conventions, thereby limiting its transformative impact.

Collectively, this literature demonstrates that although decolonisation is intended to challenge entrenched Eurocentric dominance, its uneven implementation in African higher education, particularly in musicology and curriculum studies, often reinforces colonial epistemic structures while superficially incorporating African knowledge systems.

Despite growing scholarship, there is a lack of systematic reviews interrogating how decolonisation operates across South African higher education, musicology, and curriculum studies. Few studies critically examine the tension between decolonisation and Afrocentrism or analyse how Western epistemic norms continue to shape supposedly decolonised curricula. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how musicology reproduces colonial hierarchies through notation systems, assessment practices, and canon formation. This gap obscures the extent to which decolonisation may function as a camouflaged continuation of colonisation.

This study critically examines whether decolonisation in musicology and curriculum studies at South African universities promotes epistemic justice or maintains colonial knowledge hierarchies. Through a systematic review of relevant literature, the article identifies conceptual contradictions and resistance to Afrocentric approaches while advocating for African-centred epistemic transformation. It focuses on how university music curricula incorporate African musical knowledge and indigenous pedagogies, assessing whether decolonial efforts achieve substantive change rather than symbolic inclusion. The research questions explore the extent to which decolonisation in these fields enables genuine Afrocentric epistemic transformation and challenges the persistent dominance of Western knowledge frameworks. Therefore, the following research questions were developed to understand the extent to which decolonisation in South African higher education, particularly within musicology and curriculum studies, facilitates genuine Afrocentric epistemic transformation and addresses the lingering dominance of Western knowledge frameworks:

1. How does decolonisation affect Afrocentric epistemologies in South African higher education musicology?
2. To what extent are African music systems integrated into university curricula?
3. How do Western frameworks influence the teaching of African music knowledge?
4. What strategies support genuine Afrocentric transformation in musicology and curriculum studies?

### **Literature Review**

This literature review examines scholarship on decolonisation, curriculum transformation, and musicology in South African higher education. It explores frameworks that conceptualise decolonisation as both structural and epistemic, emphasising the integration of African knowledge systems and indigenous pedagogies into curricula (Mugovhani, 2012). Special attention is given to musicology, where approaches such as ubuntu pedagogy demonstrate potential to Africanise teaching and learning (Agawu, 2025; Yende, 2024). The review highlights the need for epistemic justice and critically evaluates how decolonial initiatives challenge Eurocentric dominance and promote authentic Afrocentric curriculum transformation.



### **Decolonisation Frameworks in Higher Education**

Decolonisation in higher education has been theorised as both a structural and epistemic intervention, aimed at transforming not only curricula but also institutional governance, research priorities, and academic culture (Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021; Sayeed, 2024). Sayeed (2024, p. 204) asserts:

The language of decolonisation and decoloniality necessitates that Extension curricula offer insights into the role and relevance of indigenous knowledge systems as potential solutions. Decolonising the Extension curriculum goes beyond including perspectives of African scholars; it requires embracing reflexive practice, altering the methodologies being taught, and thereby enhancing the skill set of Extension workers. This, in turn, enables more effective engagement with rural communities.

This statement suggests that meaningful decolonisation is not merely about including African perspectives but involves reshaping methodologies, fostering reflexivity, and recognising the practical relevance of indigenous knowledge. By doing so, higher education can equip professionals to engage effectively with local communities, ensuring that decolonial efforts have a tangible, context-specific impact rather than remaining symbolic gestures.

However, the potential of decolonisation is frequently undermined when it becomes a superficial trend. Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021, p. 1) caution:

...there is an increasing risk of turning ‘decolonisation’ into a buzz term tied to a trend. We fear that decolonisation within academia, in UK HEIs, is becoming an empty term, diluted and depoliticised, allowing for superficial representations that fail to address racial, political and socio-economic intersectionalities.

This underscores that curriculum reform alone is insufficient if underlying assumptions of knowledge production and validation remain unchallenged. Institutional inertia, entrenched hierarchies, and a lack of policy alignment, faculty development, and resource support often dilute the transformative potential of decolonisation, resulting in reformist rather than genuinely transformative outcomes. Effective decolonial praxis, therefore, requires structural change, methodological innovation, and a sustained commitment to epistemic justice across all levels of higher education.

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Musicology**

Indigenous African musical knowledge is increasingly recognised as a critical site for decolonial intervention. Recent scholarship foregrounds the epistemic value of oral traditions, community performance practices, and non-Western notation systems (Agawu, 2025; Tan, 2021; Yende, 2024). Yende (2024, p. 7) highlights that:

...in the context of music education, ubuntu-gogy provides an approach that has the potential to Africanise the curriculum and pedagogy by incorporating indigenous musical practices, oral traditions, and cultural values into the teaching and learning process. This method not only enriches students’ educational experiences but also helps to preserve and promote Africa’s diverse musical heritage. The Africanisation of music education through ubuntu-gogy provides a transformative framework for reimagining education in Africa. As this approach centres African values, knowledge, and perspectives, this approach has the potential to not only decolonise music education but also contribute to the broader project of reclaiming and revitalising Africa’s rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Based on this statement, it is evident that African musical knowledge, when integrated authentically, can challenge Eurocentric paradigms and promote epistemic justice in higher education. Scholars



emphasise that these forms of knowledge are not merely cultural artefacts but represent sophisticated theoretical and analytical frameworks that broaden the conceptual foundations of musicology (Agawu, 2025; Ekpo, 2023; Tan, 2021).

Furthermore, participatory and community-based pedagogies are increasingly advocated as effective strategies to embed African music knowledge within university curricula. Such approaches foster experiential learning, situate knowledge in local contexts, and validate the intellectual and cultural significance of African musical traditions. By centring indigenous practices and perspectives, higher education can move beyond tokenistic inclusion and contribute meaningfully to the decolonisation and Africanisation of music education.

### **Curriculum Transformation and Epistemic Justice**

Curriculum transformation in postcolonial contexts necessitates the deliberate centring of historically marginalised epistemologies. Scholars increasingly frame this process through the lens of epistemic justice, which calls for curricula that recognise and validate diverse worldviews, languages, and cultural expressions (Geuskens, 2018). Geuskens (2018, p. 16) conceptualises epistemic justice as a normative principle that can be used not only to guide ethical knowledge practices but also to critically interrogate the social structures through which knowledge is produced, legitimised, and circulated. From this perspective, curriculum transformation becomes an evaluative exercise that exposes whose knowledge is privileged and whose is systematically excluded within higher education institutions.

Dutta (2022, p. 61) further deepens this understanding by locating epistemic justice within broader struggles for liberation and decoloniality. According to Dutta, epistemic justice is fundamentally concerned with “turning the gaze on to power; rejecting hierarchies of knowledge, methods, and evidence; excavating and naming silences; exposing logics and discourses that are weaponized against oppressed and colonized people; (re)claiming the power to narrate one’s stories; centering the experiences and analyses of subaltern peoples as legitimate knowledge; reclaiming historical memory; contesting disciplinarity; and revitalizing language, arts, and cultural practices.” This framing underscores the political and ethical dimensions of curriculum reform, positioning decolonisation as an intervention that challenges entrenched epistemic hierarchies rather than merely diversifying content.

In practical terms, achieving epistemic justice requires reconceptualising assessment practices, teaching resources, and course content to meaningfully reflect African knowledge systems. Empirical studies in African universities demonstrate that when indigenous epistemologies are authentically integrated and supported institutionally, students show higher levels of engagement, identity affirmation, and critical reflexivity (Khoo et al., 2020; Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda, 2019; Chigonga & Makamure, 2018; Moyo, 2021). These findings suggest that epistemically inclusive curricula not only enhance educational relevance but also promote deeper intellectual development. However, the literature also cautions that superficial or symbolic inclusion of African content, without structural reform, risks reproducing the very hierarchies that decolonisation aims to dismantle (Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021; Sayeed, 2024; Geuskens, 2018). This underscores the need for higher education institutions to combine curriculum transformation with policy alignment, faculty development, and resource support to ensure that decolonial initiatives have substantive, rather than tokenistic, impact.

Despite expanding scholarship on decolonisation and curriculum reform, notable gaps persist. Few studies systematically examine the integration of Afrocentric epistemologies within musicology curricula, and there remains limited empirical research assessing the pedagogical effectiveness of indigenous knowledge systems in higher education. Moreover, African knowledge is frequently



treated as supplementary and interpreted through Western theoretical frameworks rather than positioned as foundational. These gaps highlight the need for critical analyses that evaluate whether decolonisation initiatives genuinely disrupt Eurocentric dominance or merely repackage colonial frameworks under transformative rhetoric.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by a combination of Decolonial Theory (Mignolo, 2011; Ngūgī wa Thiong’o, 1986; Quijano, 2007), Afrocentricity (Asante, 2007; Diop, 1981; Mazama, 2001), and Epistemic Justice (Fricker, 2007; Dotson, 2014; Hill Collins, 2017) to critically examine the implementation of decolonisation in South African higher education, with specific reference to musicology and curriculum studies. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional lens for interrogating how knowledge is produced, legitimised, and transmitted within historically Eurocentric academic structures.

Decolonial Theory provides the foundational lens for understanding how coloniality continues to shape knowledge production, curricula, and disciplinary hierarchies in higher education (Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011). It foregrounds the persistence of colonial power relations long after the end of formal colonial rule, particularly through the privileging of Western epistemologies as universal and superior. This view is supported by Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012, p. 3), who define decolonisation as “meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands,” emphasising that decolonisation must begin with a transformation of consciousness. Drawing on this perspective, the study examines whether current curricular reforms in musicology truly disrupt the dominance of Western epistemologies or instead maintain existing colonial hierarchies by including African content only superficially, a concern highlighted by Omodan (2025), who argues that symbolic inclusion of African knowledge can reproduce rather than transform Eurocentric academic structures.

Afrocentricity, as articulated by Asante (2007), complements decolonial theory by repositioning African epistemologies, histories, and cultural knowledge at the centre of analysis rather than at the margins. Chawane (2016, p. 86) argues that Afrocentric approaches are necessary because African civilisations and knowledge systems were systematically distorted, erased, or excluded through colonial violence and Eurocentric scholarship. Drawing on these insights, Afrocentricity in this study is understood as a philosophical and methodological stance that demands that African ways of knowing be treated as foundational to curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment. In the context of musicology, this framework legitimises indigenous musical forms, oral traditions, community-based performance practices, and African analytical frameworks as rigorous scholarly knowledge, rather than as ethnographic supplements to Western music theory.

Epistemic Justice (Fricker, 2007) is incorporated to evaluate whether decolonisation initiatives meaningfully address historical exclusion in higher education. This framework highlights two interconnected dimensions. *Testimonial justice* concerns whose voices are recognised as credible knowers, particularly the marginalisation of African scholars, practitioners, and communities. *Hermeneutical justice* addresses structural gaps in interpretive frameworks that render African knowledge unintelligible or undervalued within dominant academic paradigms. By applying epistemic justice, the study assesses whether African knowledge systems in musicology are integrated in ways that transform institutional structures or whether they remain constrained by Western theoretical lenses.



This study develops a robust conceptual framework for assessing curricular materials, pedagogical approaches, and disciplinary standards in South African musicology by integrating Decolonial Theory, Afrocentricity, and Epistemic Justice. This integrated approach makes possible a critical analysis of whether decolonisation initiatives promote true epistemic transformation or perpetuate colonial hierarchies under the pretence of reform.

### **Design and Methods**

This section outlines the research design, methodology, and analytical approach used to investigate how decolonisation is conceptualised and implemented in South African higher education, with a focus on musicology and curriculum studies. It explains the systematic procedures for identifying, selecting, and analysing relevant literature and situates the review within a theoretical framework that guides interpretation and synthesis.

### **Study Design**

This study employed a systematic qualitative literature review guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to examine how decolonisation is conceptualised and operationalised in South African higher education, with reference to musicology and curriculum studies. The PRISMA approach ensured transparency, methodological rigour, and replicability in the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant literature (Page et al., 2021; Sarkis-Onofre et al., 2021). The review was theoretically informed by Decolonial Theory, Afrocentricity, and Epistemic Justice, which shaped both the selection and interpretation of sources (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

### **Information Sources and Search Strategy**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases accessible through university library portals, including Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ERIC, ProQuest, and selected institutional thesis repositories. The search was conducted between June 2024 and January 2025. Search terms were applied in various combinations using Boolean operators, including: “*decolonisation of higher education*”, “*Afrocentricity*”, “*epistemic justice*”, “*indigenous knowledge systems*”, “*Africanisation of curriculum*”, “*musicology*”, “*African music education*”, and “*South African higher education*”. The search was limited to English-language publications produced between 2000 and 2025 to capture both seminal and contemporary scholarship.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

The eligibility criteria were designed to align with the study’s central problem: whether decolonisation in South African higher education promotes epistemic justice or sustains colonial power structures. To address this focus, the review prioritised literature that critically engages with decolonisation in relation to musicology and curriculum studies, with particular attention to Afrocentric epistemic transformation.

Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, doctoral theses, and policy-related publications that explicitly address decolonisation, African epistemologies, curriculum transformation, or indigenous knowledge systems in higher education. Studies focusing on musicology, music education, and culturally responsive or Afrocentric pedagogies in university contexts were prioritised, as they directly inform the investigation of epistemic change within disciplinary curricula.

Exclusion criteria removed sources that lacked engagement with decolonial or Afrocentric frameworks, treated Western epistemologies as neutral or universal without critique, or focused solely



on primary or secondary education without clear relevance to higher education. Studies addressing cultural content without examining epistemic or structural transformation were also excluded.

These criteria ensured that the selected literature directly addressed the study’s aim of exposing conceptual contradictions, identifying resistance to Afrocentricism, and evaluating whether curriculum reforms in university music programmes enable genuine epistemic justice or reproduce colonial knowledge hierarchies.

### Identification and Selection of Studies

The initial search across the selected databases identified 520 records, with an additional 12 from other sources, yielding a total of 532. After removing duplicates, 482 records remained for screening. Titles and abstracts were assessed for relevance, resulting in the exclusion of 395 records that were off-topic or did not meet the inclusion criteria. A total of 87 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility; 25 met all inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis.

The selection process adhered to PRISMA guidelines, ensuring a transparent and replicable approach to identifying, screening, and including relevant literature. Figure 1 illustrates the structured flow of records through the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, consistent with PRISMA standards.

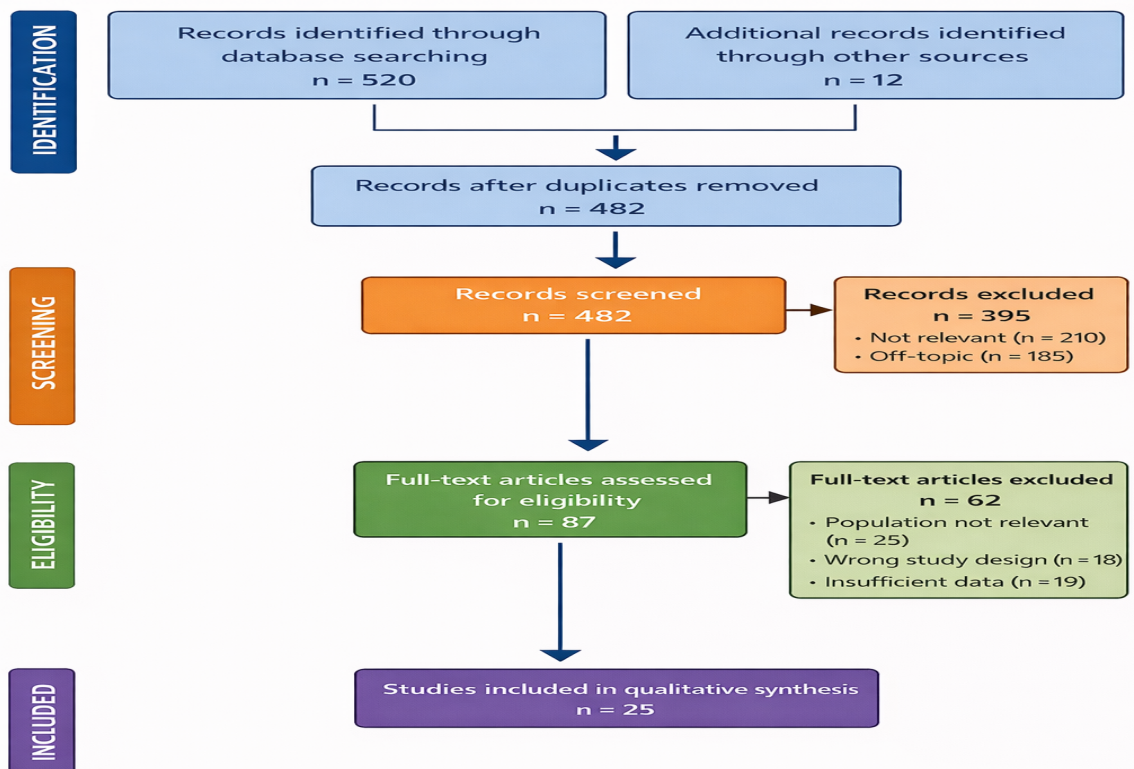


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of database search and article screening

### Data Analysis and Synthesis

The 25 included studies underwent thematic qualitative analysis. Data were coded according to key analytical categories, including epistemic positioning of African knowledge, curriculum design,



pedagogical practices, institutional structures, and power relations in knowledge production. The synthesis focused on identifying patterns, tensions, and gaps in the literature, particularly concerning whether decolonisation efforts in musicology represent substantive epistemic transformation or symbolic inclusion.

This PRISMA-guided approach strengthened the credibility of the review and provided a systematic basis for evaluating decolonisation practices in South African higher education.

*Table 1: Thematic Analysis of the Literature*

Research Questions	Themes Emerged	Key Literature / References
How does decolonisation affect Afrocentric epistemologies in South African higher education musicology?	Decolonisation and Afrocentric Epistemologies in South African Musicology	Mahabeer (2025), Heleta (2016), Sayeed (2024), Yende & Rostislava (2022), Wazyatawin & Yellow Bird (2012).
To what extent are African music systems integrated into university curricula?	Integration of African Music Systems within University Curricula	Yende (2024), Agawu (2025), Tan (2021), Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024), and Mapaya (2014) emphasise the inclusion of African musical knowledge and practices within university curricula as a key step toward decolonisation. Complementing this focus, Bruinders (2023), Walker (2019), Yende (2024), Harrop-Allin (2025), and Ngoma (2024) examine transformative pedagogical approaches, including ubuntu pedagogy, community music, and decolonial teaching methods, that seek to reposition indigenous African music as central to teaching, learning, and research in South African higher education.
How do Western frameworks influence the teaching of African music knowledge?	Western Theoretical Dominance Shaping African Music Knowledge	Eurocentric frameworks dominate South African musicology, marginalising African musical knowledge. Carver (2020), Netshivhambe (2024), Nompula (2011), Mugovhani (2012), Pooley (2018), and Du Plessis (2021) highlight constraints on epistemic transformation.
What strategies support genuine Afrocentric transformation in musicology and curriculum studies?	Strategies Enabling Genuine Afrocentric Epistemic Curriculum Transformation	Makhanya (2026), Menon, et.al., (2025), Ncanywa, et.al (2022), Sayeed (2024) emphasise Afrocentric pedagogies, epistemic justice, curriculum reform.

### **Decolonisation and Afrocentric Epistemologies in South African Musicology**

Over the past three decades, decolonisation debates in South African higher education have influenced musicology by prompting greater recognition of African musical knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogies. University programmes have increasingly incorporated African repertoires, community-based performance practices, and indigenous pedagogical approaches, thereby affirming student identity and enhancing curricular relevance (Mapaya, 2014; Agawu, 2025). These developments represent measurable progress toward Afrocentric epistemic inclusion and challenge the historical marginalisation of African musics within formal academic study.

Decolonial and Afrocentric scholars argue that such shifts have expanded the conceptual scope of musicology by legitimising oral traditions, participatory learning, and locally grounded analytical frameworks (Asante, 2007; Chawane, 2016). In some institutions, partnerships with communities and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems have fostered more contextually responsive teaching and learning. These initiatives indicate that decolonisation has begun to reposition African



musical knowledge from the margins toward greater visibility and legitimacy within higher education.

However, the literature also identifies persistent limitations. Heleta (2016) and Du Plessis (2021) note that colonial epistemologies continue to shape curriculum design, assessment standards, and disciplinary norms, often positioning African knowledge as supplementary rather than foundational. Pooley (2018) further observes that African musics are frequently interpreted through Western theoretical frameworks, constraining deeper epistemic transformation. These tensions suggest that while Afrocentric epistemologies have gained ground, structural and methodological barriers continue to limit their full integration.

In direct response to Research Question 1, the evidence indicates that decolonisation in South African university musicology has facilitated partial Afrocentric epistemic transformation by improving representation, relevance, and pedagogical innovation. However, it has not yet fully displaced Eurocentric knowledge frameworks, revealing a hybrid landscape in which meaningful gains coexist with enduring colonial structures that require further institutional and epistemic reform.

### **Integration of African Music Systems within University Curricula**

Over the past decades, South African universities have made significant strides in integrating African music systems into higher education curricula. Studies show that several institutions have actively incorporated indigenous musical practices, oral traditions, and community-based learning into musicology programmes, reflecting both curricular and pedagogical innovations. Bruinders (2023) documents the transformation of African music at a South African university, demonstrating how the curriculum was restructured to foreground indigenous musical knowledge alongside Western traditions. Walker (2019) similarly highlights how music research in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) has increasingly engaged with local repertoires and analytical frameworks, providing students with more culturally relevant learning experiences.

Yende (2024) examines the integration of ubuntu pedagogy into music curricula, showing that African-centred pedagogical approaches can democratise learning, encourage collaborative participation, and enhance students' understanding of indigenous musical forms. Harrop-Allin (2025) emphasises community music as a transformative educational strategy, illustrating how partnerships with local communities enable students to engage with living African musical traditions, while Ngoma (2024) explores approaches to decolonising the teaching of Indigenous African Music (IAM), highlighting methods that foreground African performance practices, theoretical frameworks, and transmission systems as legitimate knowledge sources. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Afrocentric epistemologies have achieved measurable gains in representation, pedagogy, and research within South African university music programmes.

Despite these advances, gaps remain in the depth and consistency of integration. Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024) and Mapaya (2014) note that African music is still often positioned as supplementary content rather than foundational disciplinary knowledge. Agawu (2025) and Kipyegon et al. (2025) argue that Western analytical frameworks continue to dominate, potentially distorting the epistemic foundations of African musical systems. Scholars such as Mahabeer (2025) and Le Grange (2016) caution that without structural and epistemological transformation, curriculum inclusion risks being symbolic rather than genuinely transformative.

In conclusion, while existing research documents significant progress in incorporating African music systems into South African university curricula, meaningful epistemic transformation requires that African musical knowledge be repositioned as central, with teaching, assessment, and research



practices aligned to indigenous epistemologies. This approach ensures that decolonisation moves beyond representation toward a substantive restructuring of knowledge production and transmission within musicology.

### **Western Theoretical Dominance Shaping African Music Knowledge in South Africa**

In South African higher education, Western theoretical frameworks continue to shape how African music knowledge is taught, analysed, and validated, limiting the transformative potential of decolonisation. While global and continental studies offer valuable insights, South African scholarship provides context-specific evidence of this dominance. Carver (2020) highlights how Eurocentric pedagogical practices influence curriculum design and assessment in South African music programmes, privileging Western analytical models over local epistemologies. Netshivhambe (2024) further observes that African musical knowledge is often positioned as supplementary rather than foundational, constraining students' engagement with indigenous systems.

Pooley (2018) emphasises that decolonial musicology in South Africa must reject the assumption that African musics conform to Western representational norms, advocating instead for approaches that recognise local performance practices, oral traditions, and cultural logics. Mugovhani (2012) and Nompula (2011) reinforce this point, showing that African music is frequently interpreted through Western theoretical lenses, reproducing epistemic hierarchies and marginalising indigenous knowledge. This persistent influence affects both curriculum content and broader knowledge production, reinforcing assumptions about what counts as legitimate scholarship and whose voices are recognised.

Addressing these challenges requires interventions that go beyond inclusion to reconceptualise epistemological foundations. Curricula, assessment practices, and pedagogical approaches must foreground African musical systems as primary sources of knowledge, enabling students to critically engage with local traditions on their own terms. By explicitly situating Western dominance within the South African context, this study highlights both the progress and ongoing gaps in Afrocentric epistemic transformation in university musicology, providing a foundation for more rigorous, contextually grounded decolonial praxis.

### **Strategies Enabling Genuine Afrocentric Epistemic Curriculum Transformation**

Scholars highlight both achievements and ongoing challenges in integrating African music knowledge into South African higher education. Studies document measurable progress: Carver (2020), Mugovhani (2012) and Ngoma (2025) show how African music systems, culturally responsive pedagogies, and community-based practices have been successfully incorporated into university curricula, enhancing student engagement, identity affirmation, and contextual relevance. Yende (2024) demonstrates the effectiveness of ubuntu pedagogy, which combines indigenous musical practices, communal learning, and African value systems, while still acknowledging that some curricula retain Western analytical frameworks alongside these innovations.

Afrocentricity, as articulated by Makhanya (2026), Menon et al. (2025), Ncanywa et al. (2022), and Sayeed (2024), provides a conceptual and methodological framework for positioning African knowledge as foundational rather than supplementary. Epistemic justice strengthens this approach by addressing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices that historically silenced African scholars or misrepresented indigenous knowledge (Fricker, 2007; Dutta et al., 2022). Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) caution that decolonisation risks depoliticisation if it does not confront institutional power, structural inequalities, and policy gaps.



Together, these strategies combining curriculum redesign, faculty development, community engagement, and assessment reform advance decolonisation beyond symbolic inclusion, ensuring that African music knowledge is both acknowledged and positioned at the centre of higher education, while still recognising areas that require deeper epistemic transformation.

### **Discussion**

This article has argued that decolonisation in South African higher education, particularly within musicology and curriculum studies, represents a critical epistemic intervention aimed at challenging entrenched Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies. It has also highlighted that, while decolonial rhetoric is increasingly visible, its implementation often remains symbolic, reproducing rather than dismantling colonial epistemic structures. The findings of this article indicate that African musical knowledge, oral traditions, and community-based pedagogies are often incorporated superficially into curricula, thereby limiting the transformative potential of decolonial efforts. Consistent with previous research (Heleta, 2016; Du Plessis, 2021), the study reveals that coloniality continues to shape knowledge validation, disciplinary norms, and what is considered legitimate scholarship in higher education. Evidently, without structural epistemic repositioning, decolonisation risks remaining performative rather than substantive.

The findings further demonstrate that meaningful integration of African epistemologies requires centring indigenous musical systems and Afrocentric analytical frameworks as foundational rather than supplementary (Asante, 2007; Chawane, 2016; Mapaya, 2014). These results align with studies by Pooley (2018) and Agawu (2025), which show that Western instruments, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical conventions often distort African musical knowledge, undermining decolonial intentions. Scholars such as Mignolo (2011) and Grosfoguel (2011) emphasise that coloniality persists through hierarchical structures that privilege Western epistemologies while marginalising local knowledges. The current study also confirms that Afrocentric approaches, such as **ubuntu**gogy, provide transformative potential by situating learning within African cultural, musical, and communal contexts, corroborating Yende (2024), who found that embedding indigenous pedagogies into music curricula enhances student engagement, identity affirmation, and critical reflection.

Using a framework informed by Decolonial Theory, Afrocentricity, and Epistemic Justice, the study examined the extent to which South African musicology curricula genuinely disrupt Eurocentric dominance. By doing so, the article demonstrates that authentic decolonisation requires more than additive curricular changes; it necessitates restructuring knowledge hierarchies, institutional policies, and assessment frameworks. The analysis was informed by a nexus of scholarship examining the interplay between decolonisation, epistemic justice, and indigenous musical knowledge.

Cumulatively, the study establishes that meaningful decolonisation is both epistemic and structural. This finding aligns with Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani (2024) and Tan (2021), who emphasise community-based pedagogies and authentic engagement with African knowledge systems. Superficial inclusion of African content without structural and epistemic reform risks reproducing the hierarchies decolonisation seeks to dismantle. South African universities must therefore invest in faculty development, policy alignment, and resources to enable genuine Afrocentric transformation. These findings contribute to an emerging body of literature advocating a holistic understanding of decolonisation as both an epistemic and pedagogical intervention, with the potential to reclaim African knowledge systems within higher education.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article demonstrates that decolonisation in South African higher education musicology is a complex and multifaceted process that extends beyond curriculum reform to challenge entrenched epistemic hierarchies. The findings reveal that while African musical knowledge, oral traditions, and community-based pedagogies are increasingly acknowledged, their inclusion often remains superficial, reflecting symbolic rather than transformative change. Consistent with prior studies (Heleta, 2016; Pooley, 2018), the article highlights that genuine decolonisation requires positioning African epistemologies as foundational, thereby restructuring the production, validation, and transmission of knowledge.

A key insight emerging from this study is the potential of Afrocentric pedagogies, such as ubuntu pedagogy, to simultaneously enhance learning outcomes and preserve Africa's musical heritage. By centring indigenous knowledge systems, higher education can cultivate epistemic justice, foster critical engagement, and empower students to navigate and challenge Western-dominated academic frameworks. This article contributes to the discourse by demonstrating that decolonisation is most effective when approached holistically, integrating epistemic, pedagogical, and institutional reforms. Future research should investigate practical strategies for embedding Afrocentric epistemologies across disciplines, ensuring that decolonial initiatives in South African higher education move beyond rhetoric to achieve substantive, transformative outcomes that genuinely reclaim African knowledge and cultural heritage.

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