

# Towards Sustainable Preservation: Revitalising Indigenous African Instruments and Craftsmanship



Ntshengedzeni Evans Netshivhambe <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> University of South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

This study addresses a critical gap in the scholarship of indigenous African music by shifting the focus from preventing the extinction of musical traditions to ensuring the sustainability of indigenous African instruments within academic frameworks. The purpose of the research is to critique the prevalence of the long-prevailing academic approaches employed by Western scholars in African music studies, particularly their failure to emphasise the preservation, modification, and integration of indigenous African instruments in educational settings. These instruments are vital components of sustainable African music education. Using a multi-method approach that includes a review of relevant literature, performance analysis, and interviews with indigenous music practitioners, students, and community members, the study highlighted how previous research on African music studies has predominantly focused on documenting African cultural practices. However, it argued that this documentation does not ensure sustainability if the teaching and performance of these instruments are not integrated into academic and educational practices. The findings revealed that while documenting African music traditions has been a focus for over a century, these efforts are insufficient for sustaining the music if African instruments are not actively incorporated into music-making and pedagogical practices. The study underscores the need for institutions of higher learning and schools to prioritise the inclusion of indigenous African instruments within their curricula. The study contributes to the scholarship on indigenous African music by offering concrete recommendations for education policy and curriculum design. It emphasises the importance of balancing documentation with practical application and suggests that the sustainability of indigenous African music depends on active engagement with its instruments in both academic and performance contexts.

## Correspondence:

Ntshengedzeni Evans

Netshivhambe

Email: [netshen@unisa.ac.za](mailto:netshen@unisa.ac.za)

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## INTRODUCTION

Research on indigenous African music spans approximately 100 years, dating back to the early 20th century when the first scholarly expeditions began to emerge in this field.<sup>1</sup> Ethnomusicology has played a crucial role in facilitating the academic study and teaching of indigenous African music at universities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean Ngoya Kidula, "Ethnomusicology, the Music Canon, and African Music: Positions, Tensions, and Resolutions in the African Academy," *Africa Today*, 2006, 99–113.

<sup>2</sup> Kidula, "Ethnomusicology, the Music Canon, and African Music: Positions, Tensions, and Resolutions in the African Academy"; Evans Ntshengedzeni Netshivhambe, "Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society" (Unisa

Early researchers in this field undertook diverse endeavours, ranging from documenting the rich cultural traditions of African communities to collecting instruments and transcribing their folk music for scholarly publications.<sup>3</sup> They collected African musical instruments with a view to preserving them as artefacts in museums, to ensure the preservation and appreciation of this rich heritage for future generations.<sup>4</sup> Some early researchers within the context of African music, particularly those emerging from the mid-1950s era in America and Europe, who later came to Africa to conduct their research, contributed significantly to the field. The work of the American and European researchers was part of a broader movement within ethnomusicology, which sought to explore and understand the musical expressions of different societies, enriching the global appreciation and academic study of indigenous music practices.<sup>5</sup> The mid-1950s ushered in the formal establishment of the field known as ethnomusicology distinct from comparative and systematic musicology.<sup>6</sup> They sought to move beyond the traditional methods of merely collecting artefacts and folk melodies, instead aiming to develop a comprehensive understanding of music within its cultural context through a field research approach.<sup>7</sup> The discipline of ethnomusicology after the mid-1950s increasingly emphasised immersive, in-depth fieldwork within the cultures being studied, moving away from the earlier approach of simply collecting artefacts and folk melodies.<sup>8</sup> This prior method, often termed ‘armchair ethnomusicology’, involved gathering materials from the field to be analysed later by scholars in their home countries.<sup>9</sup> The hands-on, participatory method that involved the researcher being immersed fully in the culture was aimed to capture the intricate connections between music, culture, and daily life, providing richer and more authentic insights into Indigenous African music traditions.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with the approach of ethnomusicology as it was first established was that it was aimed at critiquing the dominance of Western music education. However, it continued to emphasise Western music approaches by comparing similarities and differences between Western music and any other form of music in the world.<sup>11</sup> Researchers often viewed the music they were studying through the lens of Western musical traditions, employing Western musical elements and frameworks to interpret and understand African music. The portrayal of African music through a Western lens which was Western-centric led to the development of an Afrocentric approach, which later promoted African knowledge from an authentic African perspective.<sup>12</sup> This critique eventually led to the establishment of African musicology, an approach deemed more appropriate for elevating and authentically understanding African music.<sup>13</sup> Nketia argues that wanting to have a platform to discuss African music matters led to the establishment of a journal that was focused on African studies that foregrounded African theories and philosophies of music-making in the early 1980s.<sup>14</sup> Mapaya (2014) postulates that African study necessitated the need for a new discipline since it did not seem to fit quite well with the status quo of other

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Press, 2023); Evans Ntshengedzeni Netshivhambe, “Keeping the African Sound Relevant,” in *Strategies for Survival at SIBIKWA 1988 – 2021, 2022b*, ed. P. Klotz and S. Ndaba (Routledge, 2022), 225–50.

<sup>3</sup> Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music*.79.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (University of Illinois Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Fredric Lieberman, “Should Ethnomusicology Be Abolished?: Position Papers for the Ethnomusicology Interest Group at the 19th Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, Washington DC, November 1976,” in *College Music Symposium*, vol. 17 (JSTOR, 1977), 198–206.

<sup>7</sup> Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*.

<sup>8</sup> Kidula, “Ethnomusicology, the Music Canon, and African Music: Positions, Tensions, and Resolutions in the African Academy.”

<sup>9</sup> Alan P. Merriam, “Characteristics of African Music,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 11 (1959): 13–19; Martin Clayton, “Ethnographic Wax Cylinders at the British Library National Sound Archive: A Brief History and Description of the Collection,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 5, no. 1 (1996): 67–92.

<sup>10</sup> Bruno Nettl and Philip V Bohlman, *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology* (University of Chicago Press, 1991); Alan P Merriam, “The Anthropology of Music” (Northwestern University Press, 1964); Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*; Philip Vilas Bohlman and Katherine Bergeron, *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> K. Agawu, “Contesting Difference: A Critique of Africanist Ethnomusicology,” in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Clayton, Martin, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, 2nd ed. (New York: : Routledge, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> M.K. Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto. Toward an African Renaissance* (Manchester: Polity Press, 2007); Catherine Gibson, “Afrocentric Organization Development? Shifting the Paradigm from Eurocentricity to Afrocentricity” (2000).

<sup>13</sup> Madimabe Geoff Mapaya, “African Musicology: Towards Defining and Setting Parameters of the Study of the Indigenous African Music,” *The Anthropologist* 18, no. 2 (September 17, 2014): 619–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2014.11891580>; Akin Euba, *JH Kwabena Nketia: Bridging Musicology and Composition: A Study in Creative Musicology* (Richmond: MRI Press, 2014); J.H. Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> K. Nketia, *Ethnomusicology and African Music – Collected Works, Modes of Inquiry and Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Accra: Afram Publications, 2005).

existing ‘ologies’.<sup>15</sup> This position by African scholars was also motivated by the fact that Western music was used as the benchmark or standard for comparison at universities, further elevating it to a dominant and superior status. As a result, African music was frequently assessed and valued based on its alignment to or divergence from Western musical norms, rather than being appreciated on its own terms and within its unique cultural context. Kidula explains that:

That position favored a European or Eurocentric agenda, placing its music as the standard measurement, thereby creating tensions, particularly for African continental researchers, musicians, and composers.<sup>16</sup>

The perspective held by scholars studying African music from the Euro-American countries allowed them to impose their own values and standards of music-making onto African traditions.<sup>17</sup>

African studies conducted by Euro-American researchers were often categorised more as ‘anthropology of music’<sup>18</sup> since they stemmed from the anthropogony practice perspective rather than strictly studies of music as an isolated practice with a focus on instrument pedagogy. The research conducted focused on community music rather than the specialised instrumental music performed by indigenous musicians. John Blacking, for instance, emphasised during his expedition to the Venda community that his primary interest lay in understanding the music as practised within the broader cultural context, rather than focusing exclusively on individual indigenous instrument players as musicians.<sup>19</sup> This approach underscored the importance of studying music not just as a technical skill but as an integral part of communal life and cultural expression among African people. This type of performance typically incorporates elements such as dancing, singing, handclapping, and drumming, emphasising the participation of community members over specialised indigenous instrument proficiency. The objective of this study is to critique these studies of cultural practices, which have shaped African music studies in many African universities while neglecting the use of indigenous African instruments as part of teaching and learning. Students study African music and graduate without learning any African instrument of their choice, since most African universities do not have teachers of African indigenous instruments, who can teach the students.<sup>20</sup>

The research will first discuss the ramifications of one-sided African music studies that focus on research and community music but neglect specialisation of indigenous African instruments as a specialty. Second, the research will discuss the various ways that indigenous African instrument players use to promote the teaching and learning of these instruments in schools and institutions of higher learning. The findings show that African studies in many African universities still follow the ethnomusicological route of documenting the cultural practices of African communities without focusing on the performative aspect of indigenous African instruments as part of teaching and learning. This model of teaching and learning marginalises traditional African instruments and has resulted in very little interest from students able to pursue studies of indigenous African instruments at a university level because most current studies are based on historical community practices rather than the sustainable practical application of performing with indigenous African instruments.

## METHODOLOGY

The design of enquiry for this study was a qualitative research approach that focused on capturing the nuances and intricacies involved in the construction and playing of indigenous African instruments. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives and techniques of both builders and players of these instruments, as part of a teaching and learning model. Interviews were conducted with indigenous

<sup>15</sup> Mapaya, “African Musicology: Towards Defining and Setting Parameters of the Study of the Indigenous African Music.”

<sup>16</sup> Kidula, “Ethnomusicology, the Music Canon, and African Music: Positions, Tensions, and Resolutions in the African Academy.”

<sup>17</sup> John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Catherine Dale, and Simha Arom, “Simha Arom and the Return of Analysis to Ethnomusicology,” *Music Analysis* 12, no. 2 (July 1993): 241, <https://doi.org/10.2307/854274>; Merriam, “The Anthropology of Music”; Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*.

<sup>19</sup> John Blacking, “Musicians in Venda,” *The World of Music* 21, no. 2 (1979): 18–38.

<sup>20</sup> Evans Netshivhambe, “Indigenous African Music Performance Re-Imagined in Public Spaces,” in *African Language Media*, ed. P. Mpofo, I.A. Fadipe, and T. Tshabangu (Routledge, 2023), 243–58; Netshivhambe, “Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society.”

instrument players who specialise in both the construction and performance of these traditional instruments. Insights were gathered from a diverse range of instrument builders, including those from commercial urban settings and community and rural areas. This provided a comprehensive understanding of the various methods and materials used in the construction of indigenous instruments. Additionally, performance analyses, interviews, and observations of the instrument-building process and playing techniques offered valuable insights into the sustainable practices needed for constructing these instruments. This immersive approach highlighted the importance of developing a well-thought-out plan for building indigenous African instruments, tailored for educational purposes, with a certain degree of standardisation.

By understanding the traditional methods and integrating them into modern educational frameworks, societies can ensure that these instruments are not only preserved but also effectively utilised in teaching and learning environments. This approach ensures that the rich heritage of African musical traditions is maintained and passed on to future generations in a practical and sustainable manner. By studying existing indigenous African instruments, it is possible to model new instruments that faithfully replicate the features and stylistic designs of the originals. The approach adopted in this research aims to preserve the look, feel, and design elements of the traditional instruments, as well as the notes they produce while ensuring that the newly built instruments adhere to a standard tuning system. For this research, primary data was collected through interviews, music song analysis, music performance recordings, and archival materials, including the analysis of lyrics or texts from popular music. Secondary data was obtained through a comprehensive review of literature related to popular music advocacy. A selection of music from a few indigenous South African instrument musicians was also included in the study to provide a representative repertoire sample. This methodology ensures that the new instruments maintain the originality and integrity of their indigenous counterparts, while also making them suitable for standardised educational purposes. By combining traditional craftsmanship with modern standards, societies can create instruments that are both culturally authentic and practically viable for teaching and learning in contemporary educational settings.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### The Implications of a One-dimensional Approach to African Music Studies

Euro-American researchers and scholars were particularly captivated by elements of African music that centred on community practices. This fascination often revolved around the polyrhythmic structures inherent in African music, its vibrant melodic palettes, unique singing textures, intricate dancing patterns, and various cultural performance features associated with dance. This became a unique site for these scholars because it offered a nuanced community music performance that was not prioritised in their societies. These aspects not only showcased the richness and diversity of African musical traditions but also highlighted the integral role of music in communal gatherings, celebrations, and everyday life across diverse African societies.<sup>21</sup> Rhythm has been a central focus in scholarly discussions about African music, with some researchers delving deeply into the complexities of African rhythmic patterns. This has included efforts to notate these rhythms and analyse their structural nuances. Such studies seek to unravel the intricate rhythmic structures that define African musical traditions, revealing how these rhythmic patterns serve not only as a foundation for African music but also as a reflection of cultural identity and social practices within African communities.<sup>22</sup> Merriam puts it this way: “Probably the most outstanding

<sup>21</sup> W. Anku, “Principles of Rhythm Integration in African Drumming,” *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 211–38; John M Chernoff, “The Rhythmic Medium in African Music,” *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (1991): 1093–1102; David Temperley, “Meter and Grouping in African Music: A View from Music Theory,” *Ethnomusicology* 44, no. 1 (2000): 65–96; Kofi Agawu, “The Invention of African Rhythm,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, no. 3 (October 1, 1995): 380–95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3519832>; A. M. Jones, “African Rhythm,” *Africa* 24, no. 1 (January 21, 1954): 26–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1156732>.

<sup>22</sup> Rose Brandel, “The African Hemiola Style,” *Ethnomusicology* 3, no. 3 (September 1959): 106, <https://doi.org/10.2307/924609>; Robert Kauffman, “African Rhythm: A Reassessment,” *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 3 (September 1980): 393, <https://doi.org/10.2307/851150>; Netshivhambe, “Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society”; Merriam, “Characteristics of African Music”; James Koetting and Roderic Knight, “What Do We Know About African Rhythm?,” *Ethnomusicology* 30, no. 1 (1986): 58–63; Anku, “Principles of Rhythm Integration in African Drumming”; Chernoff, “The Rhythmic Medium in African Music”; Ruth M Stone, “Commentary: The Value of Local Ideas in Understanding West African Rhythm,” *Ethnomusicology* 30, no. 1 (1986): 54–57; Simha Arom, “Time Structure in the Music of Central Africa: Periodicity, Meter, Rhythm and Polyrhythmics,” *Leonardo* 22, no. 1 (1989): 91, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1575146>.

characteristic of African music is its emphasis upon rhythm as well as upon a percussive concept of music performance.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition to rhythm, the structural elements of African music – such as polyphony, homophony, and heterophony – have been significant topics of academic discourse.<sup>24</sup> While some Euro-American scholars have concentrated on dissecting the components that characterise African music and identifying predominant features, others have explored the social dynamics surrounding music within African societies. This dual approach not only seeks to understand the musical intricacies and cultural significance of African music but also aims to uncover how music functions within social frameworks, shaping interpersonal relationships and community cohesion. As Agordoh states, there is a musical activity in many African societies that marks various community spaces, such as the celebration of birth through music, initiation schools, children’s songs, and many more, which have become the centre for research discourses.<sup>25</sup> The study of African music extends beyond its musical elements to illuminate its profound impact on social structures within society.

Scholars have explored how music serves as a dynamic force in shaping social relationships, community dynamics, and cultural identities among African people. Merriam characterised ethnomusicology as encompassing both musicological and anthropological dimensions, highlighting its dual role in not only analysing the musical aspects of African traditions but also uncovering the broader anthropological implications of music within social contexts.<sup>26</sup> This interdisciplinary approach deepens our understanding of how music functions as a powerful cultural and social medium, influencing behaviours, beliefs, and communal interactions across diverse African societies. All these African music studies do not focus on the indigenous instrument practice for a student who wants to specialise in performing an indigenous instrument as their main instrument.<sup>27</sup>

However, universities, often structured as colonial institutions of education, were originally designed with the concept of universality in mind, promoting the idea that all cultures should conform to a universal body of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> This approach tends to marginalise cultural customs and practices that do not fit within this universal framework due to the colonial legacy.<sup>29</sup> Instead, universities prioritise the dissemination and preservation of knowledge deemed universally significant, often at the expense of diverse cultural perspectives and traditions. This structure can perpetuate a form of cultural hegemony, where certain ways of knowing and learning are privileged over others, potentially overshadowing or undervaluing the rich and distinct cultural practices that exist outside of Western academic norms. Disciplines like Anthropology often emerged as the predominant and overarching methodologies for researching African music, primarily because ethnomusicology initially lacked a clearly defined and universally accepted research method.<sup>30</sup> Anthropology's established frameworks provided structured methodologies and techniques for studying cultural practices, including music, within African contexts. In contrast, ethnomusicology, while focusing on the study of music in its cultural context, struggled initially to establish a standardised approach to research.<sup>31</sup> This reliance on anthropological methods often influenced how African music was studied, emphasising cultural context, social dynamics, and

<sup>23</sup> Merriam, “Characteristics of African Music,” 13.

<sup>24</sup> Willie Anku, “Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music,” *Music Theory Online* 6, no. 1 (2000): 1–8.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander A Agordoh, “Music in African Communities,” *Africa in Contemporary Perspectives: A Textbook for Undergraduate Students*, 2013, 430.

<sup>26</sup> Merriam, “The Anthropology of Music.”

<sup>27</sup> Netshivhambe, “Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society.”

<sup>28</sup> Ronald Barnett, “University Knowledge in an Age of Supercomplexity,” *Higher Education* 40, no. 4 (2000): 409–22, 413. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1004159513741>

<sup>29</sup> Yusef Waghid, “Knowledge Production and Higher Education Transformation in South Africa: Towards Reflexivity in University Teaching, Research and Community Service,” *Higher Education* 43 (2002): 457–88.

<sup>30</sup> Fredric Lieberman, “Should Ethnomusicology Be Abolished?: Position Papers for the Ethnomusicology Interest Group at the 19th Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, Washington DC, November 1976,” in *College Music Symposium*, vol. 17 (JSTOR, 1977), 198.

<sup>31</sup> Merriam, “The Anthropology of Music”; Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*.

ethnographic fieldwork over specialised musical performance skills, analysis and theory development within the discipline.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Foundations of Ethnomusicology and its Methodological Approaches**

For many scholars, social anthropology and the anthropology of music were considered the most suitable approaches for studying African music.<sup>33</sup> This preference was influenced by the fact that many of these scholars were trained primarily as anthropologists, who, although they had a personal passion for or background in music, found anthropology provided a structured framework for researching and analysing music within cultural contexts, hence documenting their studies of African music from an anthropological viewpoint. Anthropology became the defining standard for studying African music, offering methodologies and theories that emphasised cultural context, social dynamics, and ethnographic fieldwork, which were seen as essential for capturing the broader meanings and functions of music within African societies.<sup>34</sup> Thus, while these scholars often approached their research with a love for music, it was within the disciplinary confines and methodologies of anthropology that they formalised their scholarly investigations into African musical traditions.

From its inception, the study of ethnomusicology in the late 1800s, as the study of music from diverse cultures entered academia in Europe and America under the discipline comparative musicology, yielded two distinct approaches among scholars.<sup>35</sup> One approach favoured studying music as a standalone art form, focusing on its aesthetic qualities, technical aspects, and intrinsic musical characteristics. This perspective tended to prioritise music's formal properties and its theoretical frameworks, often detached from its social and cultural contexts. In contrast, the other approach emphasised studying music as a manifestation deeply embedded within the social structures and cultural practices of the communities where it originated.<sup>36</sup> Scholars adopting the latter approach sought to understand how music functioned within its societal context, examining its roles in rituals, ceremonies, social interactions, and cultural identity formation. This methodological stance viewed music as inseparable from the broader cultural fabric and social dynamics of the communities under study. These contrasting approaches, shaped by Euro-American scholars, became foundational methodologies in the study of African music and other global musical traditions. They reflect differing priorities in research, with one focusing on the intrinsic qualities of music itself and the other exploring how music reflects and shapes social realities within diverse cultural contexts. This distinction meant that Euro-American scholars, in their approaches to studying African music, did not prioritise the study of individual instruments or composers in the same way Western classical music centred on the compositions of great composers.<sup>37</sup> Instead, their focus often emphasised understanding African music within its broader social and cultural contexts, exploring how it functioned as a communal practice and cultural expression.

In contrast to the Euro-American approach, Agawu argues that for African music to achieve meaningful development, it should centre on indigenous instruments and the perspectives of composers from within the African traditions themselves.<sup>38</sup> This perspective advocates for a shift in focus towards understanding and valuing the unique instruments, compositional techniques, and aesthetic principles that characterise African musical traditions. By centring African music on its indigenous instruments and composers, Agawu suggests that it can foster a deeper appreciation and advancement of African musical practices within global discourse. Many researchers studied the social dynamics and political implications of music within the cultural contexts they investigated. For instance, Blacking examined how chiefs among the Venda people determined the roles and significance of music within their communities.<sup>39</sup> His

<sup>32</sup> Merriam, "The Anthropology of Music"; Lieberman, "Should Ethnomusicology Be Abolished?: Position Papers for the Ethnomusicology Interest Group at the 19th Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, Washington DC, November 1976"; Nettl and Bohlman, *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*.

<sup>33</sup> Nettl and Bohlman, *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*.

<sup>34</sup> Merriam, "The Anthropology of Music"; Lieberman, "Should Ethnomusicology Be Abolished?: Position Papers for the Ethnomusicology Interest Group at the 19th Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, Washington DC, November 1976."

<sup>35</sup> Merriam, "The Anthropology of Music."

<sup>36</sup> Merriam, "The Anthropology of Music"; Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*; Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts* (University of Illinois Press, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* .

<sup>38</sup> Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music*.

<sup>39</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* .

research highlighted how music was intricately woven into the social fabric, with chiefs wielding significant influence over its practice and purpose. Building on this perspective, Musicking and Reily expand on Blacking's findings, suggesting that within these cultural performances, the chief's family members often play prominent roles.<sup>40</sup> This observation underscores the familial and hierarchical dimensions of music-making among the Venda, illustrating how social status and political authority intersect with musical expression.<sup>41</sup> Such studies illuminate the complex interplay between music, power structures, and community identity within African societies, providing valuable insights into the broader cultural significance of music as a social practice.

Blacking elucidates the significant influence wielded by chiefs and other influential figures within the community regarding the perception and role of music. His work highlights how these leaders shape societal attitudes towards music, often prioritising communal music practices over individual performances on indigenous instruments.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, players of indigenous instruments find themselves positioned at lower levels of the social hierarchy, as the community's emphasis on collective musical expression supersedes the recognition of individual instrumental skills. This dynamic underscores broader themes of social stratification and the communal value systems that govern music-making within African cultural contexts.<sup>43</sup> Petersen provides a clear account of the early initiatives in African music teaching and learning, dating back to the 1930s.<sup>44</sup> Scholars from Ghana, such as Ephraim Amu and later Nkwebana Nketia, played pivotal roles in advocating for the integration of African music into university curricula. Their efforts aimed to establish African music as a legitimate and essential field of study within higher education, challenging the dominance of Western musical traditions in academic settings. By promoting the inclusion of African musical practices, these scholars sought to foster a more inclusive and representative approach to music education that honoured and preserved Africa's rich cultural heritage.

### **The early integration of African music in higher education**

In the South African context, Petersen describes the beginnings of efforts to collect indigenous African music, both folk songs and instruments, which gained momentum with the pioneering work of Hugh Tracey.<sup>45</sup> Over a span of 25 years, Tracey dedicated himself to recording and preserving folk music using indigenous instruments. The collection of indigenous instruments was an initial move towards integrating these instruments into the academic curriculum, but such did not become a reality. His extensive fieldwork aimed to document and archive these musical traditions, contributing significantly to the preservation of South Africa's cultural heritage. However, Tracey's efforts were countered by other scholars who also focused their efforts on preserving South African music. Other South African scholars such as Percival Kirby, David Rycroft, and John Blacking.<sup>46</sup> Petersen also engaged in scholarly debates and alternative approaches to studying indigenous African music.<sup>47</sup> Their contributions included critical assessments of methodologies and interpretations, shaping the discourse around how best to understand and appreciate African musical traditions within academic and cultural contexts. Together, these scholars played crucial roles in laying the foundations for the systematic study and appreciation of indigenous African music in South Africa and beyond. Kirby's collection of South African instruments became a significant archive, now housed and curated by the University of Cape Town.<sup>48</sup> His efforts were instrumental in bringing indigenous instruments and transcribed performances closer to academic study within the university setting. This archive not only preserved and documented a diverse array of South African musical traditions but also provided scholars and students with valuable resources for studying and understanding the cultural significance and technical aspects of indigenous instruments. Kirby's work thus played a

<sup>40</sup> Suzel Reily, "Local Musicking and the Production of Locality," *GIS-Gesture, Image and Sound-Anthropology Journal* 6, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>41</sup> Netshivhambe, "Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society."

<sup>42</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* .

<sup>43</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* ; Netshivhambe, "Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society."

<sup>44</sup> Alvin Petersen, "Teaching African Musics: Personal Reflections in a South African University Setting," *The World of Music*, 2009, 51–64.

<sup>45</sup> Petersen, "Teaching African Musics: Personal Reflections in a South African University Setting." 54.

<sup>46</sup> Petersen, "Teaching African Musics: Personal Reflections in a South African University Setting." 54.

<sup>47</sup> Petersen, "Teaching African Musics: Personal Reflections in a South African University Setting." 54.

<sup>48</sup> Petersen, "Teaching African Musics: Personal Reflections in a South African University Setting."

pivotal role in integrating the African musical heritage of indigenous instruments into the academic sphere, contributing to a broader appreciation and recognition of South Africa's rich musical legacy, but the performative aspect of these instruments at South African universities is still not formalised.<sup>49</sup>

Efforts to integrate indigenous instruments into music education must consider their diverse building styles and playing techniques.<sup>50</sup> This approach would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of African musical traditions, ensuring that these instruments are not merely studied anthropologically as objects but also actively utilised and taught in educational settings. By bridging the gap between anthropological insights and practical pedagogical approaches, educators should enhance the appreciation and preservation of indigenous African instruments as vital components of music education and cultural heritage by including performances of indigenous African instruments in their curriculum.<sup>51</sup> Indigenous instruments have played a crucial role in maintaining the unique identity of African music, even though they have often been overshadowed by more communal music styles within many African cultures. This is largely because indigenous instruments are typically associated with individual performance, in contrast to the collective nature of communal music-making.<sup>52</sup> One significant challenge is the absence of a standardised model for building and teaching indigenous instruments in educational settings. This gap has hindered the incorporation of these instruments into formal music education curricula. Historically, when formal education systems were introduced to African communities, there was a strong emphasis on subjects like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These subjects were prioritised to promote specific educational and developmental goals, a trend that continues to this day.<sup>53</sup> As a result, indigenous musical traditions, including the construction and performance of native instruments, have not received the same level of institutional support or integration into school programmes. To ensure the preservation and advancement of African musical heritage, it is essential to develop educational models that incorporate the teaching and learning of indigenous instruments. This approach would not only honour the rich musical traditions of African cultures but also provide students with a more diverse and holistic educational experience.

This prioritisation of the STEM subjects naturally relegated the study of arts and culture to a lower rank within the educational hierarchy. African music, deeply embedded within the community structures of African societies, traditionally existed outside the realm of commodified art forms that necessitated formal study through financial transactions.<sup>54</sup> Instead, the transmission of musical knowledge, especially regarding indigenous instruments, occurred organically within communities. Instrument players typically learned through informal apprenticeships such as observation, often within their own families.<sup>55</sup> Knowledge and skills were passed down from one generation to the next, with family members serving as primary mentors. This community-centred approach ensured the preservation and continuity of musical traditions, fostering a rich and diverse musical heritage that was intimately tied to cultural identity and social practices.<sup>56</sup> To elevate the status of African music in education, there is a need to develop curricula that reflect its intrinsic cultural value from an instrument point of view.<sup>57</sup> By incorporating indigenous instruments and traditional teaching methods into formal education systems, society can honour and sustain these musical traditions while providing students with a more inclusive and culturally relevant educational experience. This model of learning has historically ensured the survival of African music across generations. As an art form passed down through oral traditions, African music relies heavily on

<sup>49</sup> Percival Kirby, *The Musical Instruments of the Indigenous People of South Africa* (NYU Press, 2013); Michelle Bigenho, "Why I'm Not an Ethnomusicologist: A View from Anthropology," *The New (Ethno) Musicologies*, 2008, 28–39.

<sup>50</sup> Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music*.

<sup>51</sup> Francine Morin, "Learning across Disciplines: An Approach to West African Music," *Music Educators Journal* 89, no. 4 (March 1, 2003): 27–34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3399901>.

<sup>52</sup> Netshivhambe, "Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society."

<sup>53</sup> Christine Hughes, "Legislative Wins, Broken Promises: Gaps in Implementation of Laws on Violence against Women and Girls," 2017; Kehdinga George Fomunyan, "Towards Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education: A Case for Higher Education in Africa," 2021; Heidi Ashton, "Cutting the STEM of Future Skills: Beyond the STEM vs Art Dichotomy in England," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 22, no. 2 (2023): 148–63.

<sup>54</sup> Laurie Anne Whitt, "Biocolonialism and the Commodification of Knowledge," *Science as Culture* 7, no. 1 (1998): 33–67.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Berliner, *The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe*, vol. 26 (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Olupemi E Oludare, "Yoruba Traditional Instrumental Ensemble and Indigenous Knowledge Systems," *Pathways to Alternative Epistemologies in Africa*, 2021, 205–19.

<sup>57</sup> Femi Adedeji, "Repositioning Indigenous African Musical Instruments for the Much-Needed Cultural Transformation of Music Education in Nigeria," *JOURNAL OF NIGERIAN MUSIC EDUCATION (JONMED)* 8 (2016).

aural methods of teaching and learning.<sup>58</sup> This aural transmission has been both a strength and a weakness. While it has allowed for a deeply personal and communal method of preserving musical heritage, it has also contributed to the decline and, in some cases, the extinction of certain indigenous African instruments.

### Challenges in Integrating Indigenous Instruments into Formal Education

The reliance on oral tradition means that the knowledge of how to play and build these instruments is vulnerable to being lost if not continually passed down; as Kalyoncu and Özata describe, the danger of oral tradition is a permanent deletion of knowledge.<sup>59</sup> University subjects do not rely on oral preservations but on literacy, which draws its theories and philosophies from documented studies that are written down. Unlike written music or standardised educational curricula, which provide a more permanent record, aural traditions require constant and active engagement from one generation to the next. If a generation fails to learn or pass on these skills, the knowledge can disappear, leading to the loss of unique musical traditions and instruments. To address this issue, it is crucial to develop formal educational programmes that integrate traditional aural methods with written and practical approaches.<sup>60</sup> By doing so, societies can create a more robust framework for preserving and revitalising indigenous African instruments and music. This integration would not only protect these cultural treasures but also enrich the educational landscape with the diverse and vibrant heritage of African music.<sup>61</sup>

There have been concerted efforts by scholars and entrepreneurs to model indigenous African instruments for educational purposes through a process of modernisation and standardisation. These initiatives aim to create consistent and reliable building methods for these instruments, making them more accessible for teaching and learning in schools and universities. Instruments such as the Marimba or xylophone, Kora, and, to some extent, the Mbira, have seen significant progress in this regard.<sup>62</sup> These instruments have been standardised with proper construction models, allowing for their inclusion in formal music education curricula because they possess fixed pitches that can be a point of reference for tuning other instruments.<sup>63</sup> This standardisation process ensures that students can learn to play these instruments using consistent techniques and quality materials, facilitating a more structured and effective learning experience.

By modernising and standardising these instruments, educators can preserve the rich musical traditions of Africa, while integrating them into contemporary educational settings. This approach not only enhances the visibility and appreciation of indigenous African instruments, but also enriches the musical education of students by exposing them to a broader range of cultural expressions and musical practices. This approach represents a shift towards sustainable preservation of African musical traditions, focusing on the practical application and teaching of these instruments, rather than solely discussing African music structures within communal spaces. While the intricate rhythmic structures, melodic and harmonic forms of African community music thrive in the settings where they are traditionally performed, they often fail to transition into formal teaching and learning environments.<sup>64</sup> This is largely due to their reliance on human participation, a deep understanding of dance rhythms, and the specific cultural context and language associated with each performance. Indigenous instrument performance, however, transcends cultural boundaries within Africa. Despite variations in names, construction designs, and cultural contexts, these instruments share common playing patterns and sound production techniques, as Agawu advocates

<sup>58</sup> Yolisa Nompula, "Valorising the Voice of the Marginalised: Exploring the Value of African Music in Education," *South African Journal of Education* 31, no. 3 (2011): 369–80; Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Lessons from the World: A Cross-Cultural Guide to Music Teaching and Learning*, (No Title) (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> Nesrin Kalyoncu and Cemal Özata, "Instrument Teaching in the Context of Oral Tradition: A Field Study from Bolu, Turkey," *Oral Tradition* 27, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>60</sup> Catherine E Milliron, "Next Time Won't You Sing with Me? The Role of Music Rooted in Oral Tradition as a Resource for Literacy Learning in the Twenty-First Century Classroom," *Channels: Where Disciplines Meet* 1, no. 2 (2017): 36.

<sup>61</sup> G. A. Gordon, "Marimbas in South African Schools: Gateway Instruments for the Indigenous African Music Curriculum" (Stellenbosch, 2020).

<sup>62</sup> Gordon, "Marimbas in South African Schools: Gateway Instruments for the Indigenous African Music Curriculum."

<sup>63</sup> M. Nzewi, "A Contemporary Study of Musical Arts Vol. 1," 2007,

[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hnuWTrOwp9kC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=%22musical+art%22+definitions+%2B+nzewi&ots=QI2VWgb5DQ&sig=VDVVBgX3kyUFMxvp2Dz-YASo\\_Yg](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hnuWTrOwp9kC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=%22musical+art%22+definitions+%2B+nzewi&ots=QI2VWgb5DQ&sig=VDVVBgX3kyUFMxvp2Dz-YASo_Yg); Mary J Akpakpan, Peremodoere Ayebatonye-Fatayi, and Eunice Ukamaka Ibekwe, "Socio-Cultural Functions Of Ibibio Traditional Musical Instruments," *Awka Journal Of Research In Music And Arts (AJRMA)* 16 (2023).

<sup>64</sup> Oludare, "Yoruba Traditional Instrumental Ensemble and Indigenous Knowledge Systems."

for the use of all these different names in academia.<sup>65</sup> This universality makes them more adaptable to standardised educational models. By focusing on the practical aspects of indigenous instruments, such as the Marimba, Kora, and Mbira, Dende bow, Tshitiringo (traditional flute), and many more, educators can create curricula inclusive of Africa's diverse musical heritage, while making these traditions accessible to a wider audience. This process not only preserves the unique qualities of these instruments but also integrates them into modern educational frameworks, ensuring that the rich legacy of African music is maintained and passed on to future generations. By doing so, there is a movement beyond theoretical discussions to enable the practical, hands-on learning that is essential for truly understanding and appreciating the depth and breadth of African musical traditions.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research findings highlight an urgent call from indigenous African instrument players and builders to prioritise the crafting of indigenous instruments for educational purposes. This urgency is particularly driven by the concerns of many elderly builders, who fear that the knowledge and traditions surrounding these instruments may not be passed on to future generations. The findings also emphasise that without a concerted effort to standardise the construction of indigenous African instruments for educational use, these instruments will continue to exhibit inconsistent tuning systems, even within the same family of instruments, thereby diminishing their potential for academic recognition and integration.<sup>66</sup> This inconsistency hinders their appeal to students in higher education, who might otherwise be interested in learning to play them. Many instrument builders expressed frustration over the lack of recognition and serious consideration given to these instruments, both within their communities and in academic settings. They are concerned that indigenous instruments are not being utilised effectively for teaching and learning purposes. Furthermore, master players and craftsmen of these instruments feel marginalised, because their extensive skills and knowledge are not leveraged in university environments, primarily because they do not possess formal music degrees, which are typically required for teaching positions in such institutions.<sup>67</sup> To address these issues, it is essential to develop standardised tuning systems and construction methods for indigenous African instruments that can be adopted in educational settings, which would allow these instruments to be used and accessible by many students.<sup>68</sup> This would not only preserve the cultural heritage and authenticity of these instruments but also make them more accessible and appealing to students. Additionally, incorporating the expertise of traditional instrument makers and players into academic programs, regardless of their formal qualifications, would enrich the learning experience and ensure the survival and growth of these musical traditions.

Most of these instruments are unable to be played together due to their construction, which does not adhere to any standard tuning system. They are often played solo and cannot replicate sheet music notation unless a clear tuning strategy is implemented. For instance, the Mbira, which has a fixed tuning, could serve as an example of an instrument with a standard tuning convention. However, because it is built by different individuals who do not conform to a single tuning system, Mbiras are often tuned differently. Some African instruments that can be incorporated easily alongside Western instruments seem to always be assigned a simple role because they are not technically built to perform better in such a mix.<sup>69</sup> Many Mbira players tune their instruments by ear, using a previous model as a tuning guide. This method poses a problem because if the reference Mbira is out of tune, all subsequent instruments tuned to it will also be out of tune. This inconsistency presents a significant challenge for the sustainable preservation and educational use of these instruments. Tracey notes that Chopi musicians possess the ability to tune their traditional instruments by ear, allowing them to seamlessly perform in harmony with other players.<sup>70</sup> However, without standardisation, most African instruments cannot be reliably used in ensemble settings

<sup>65</sup> Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music*.

<sup>66</sup> Ben A Aning, "Tuning the" Kora": A Case Study of the Norms of a Gambian Musician," *Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 3 (1982): 164.

<sup>67</sup> Netshivhambe, "Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society."

<sup>68</sup> Aning, "Tuning the" Kora": A Case Study of the Norms of a Gambian Musician."

<sup>69</sup> Luigi Antonio Irlandini, "Non-Western Musical Instruments and Contemporary Composition," *Projeto de Pesquisa, Universidade Do Estado de Santa Catarina (Udesc)*, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Hugh Tracey, "Measuring African Scales," *African Music: Journal of the African Music Society* 4, no. 3 (1969): 73–77, <https://doi.org/10.21504/amj.v4i3.1438>.

or for teaching purposes.<sup>71</sup> For example, two indigenous instrument players may find it impossible to perform together as a duet due to the tuning incompatibilities between their instruments.<sup>72</sup> To address this issue, it is crucial to establish standardised tuning systems for indigenous African instruments. Such has already been achieved with some indigenous African instruments, such as the Marimba (xylophone) and some Mbiras (kalimbas). This would not only facilitate their use in educational settings but also ensure their preservation and continued relevance. By adopting a standardised approach, we can create instruments that can be used together harmoniously, thereby enriching the musical education experience and preserving these cultural treasures for future generations.



*Figure 1. Two indigenous instrument players playing the same song using two different instruments.*

The instrument players in the picture above attempted to collaborate on a duet of the same song using their respective instruments. However, the challenge arose because one instrument had a fixed tuning, while the other could be tuned to accommodate the song. Unfortunately, the tuneable instrument could not sync with the fixed-tuning instrument. This issue is common with indigenous instruments that are not built according to any standard tuning system, relegating them to solo performances rather than ensemble settings. While some argue that certain instruments were designed for solo use rather than ensemble play, the problem remains that these instruments struggle to reproduce the same song consistently each time the song is played due to these tuning issues. Some entrepreneurs have recognised these performance challenges and have taken steps to modernise these instruments, aiming to standardise their tuning and construction. This modernisation effort is crucial, as it not only resolves performance issues but also makes these instruments more appealing to students interested in learning indigenous instruments in an educational setting.

<sup>71</sup> Irlandini, "Non-Western Musical Instruments and Contemporary Composition."

<sup>72</sup> Netshivhambe, "Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society."



*Figure 2. Two indigenous instrument players playing the same song with the same instrument, as a duet.*

The example in the picture above involves two Mbira players using the same type of instrument, each built by the same craftsmen. Despite their efforts, they struggle to play the same song in tune together. This scenario underscores the importance of developing a standardised tuning system to ensure these instruments can be used effectively, both in solo and ensemble contexts, thereby preserving their cultural heritage while enhancing their educational value. An instrument like the Mbira can reproduce the same song when played by two individuals, provided the instruments are tuned to the same key or built by the same maker. The primary difference between the players lies in their playing techniques rather than tuning challenges, as the Mbira features a fixed tuning system when set to the same key. For instance, during a performance of the popular community song ‘Ndi felani nga vhabvana tshikegulu’, two Mbira players were able to collaborate because both instruments were crafted by the same maker, despite each player having their own unique playing style. Addressing the common tuning issue would be highly beneficial in developing these instruments for educational purposes. Standardising the tuning process would ensure consistency across instruments, facilitating ensemble performances and enhancing their suitability for educational settings. This approach not only preserves the cultural authenticity of these instruments but also promotes their effective use in teaching and learning traditional African music.

An instrument like the Jaw Harp (Lugube Iwa Tsimbi) exemplifies how players can perform together seamlessly on a popular song without concerns about instrument tuning compatibility.<sup>73</sup> Recently, the researcher witnessed a performance by three players all using the same indigenous instrument, which was built and tuned according to a standard tuning system. This enabled them to play in perfect harmony as a trio, benefitting from their instruments being uniformly tuned. This ability to overcome tuning incompatibilities highlights how such instruments can become preferred choices for learners and university students. By adhering to a standardised tuning system, these instruments can consistently produce harmonious sounds, making them suitable for educational settings. During their performance, the players effortlessly played the same song while maintaining synchronisation and harmony, underscoring the advantages of standardised tuning in facilitating ensemble playing and enhancing the educational value of indigenous instruments. This underscores the significant impact that

<sup>73</sup> Netshivhambe, “Ignored or Invisible: The Status of Indigenous South African Instruments In the Venda Society.”

standardising indigenous instruments can have on their educational utility. One of the primary obstacles is that most instrument builders are indigenous practitioners who lack access to the necessary tools and resources for standardised construction. Consequently, each builder relies on whatever materials are available, leading to variations in instrument quality and tuning consistency.



*Figure 3. An example of indigenous instrument players playing a standardised jaw harp instrument.*

An instrument like the Jaw Harp, known as ‘Lugube Iwa Tsimbi’ in the Venda indigenous tradition, exemplifies how standardisation enhances ensemble performances and encourages collaborative music-making. The Jaw Harp is widely recognised globally and has been embraced by African cultures for traditional music purposes. Its availability in many music shops attests to its popularity and cultural significance. In a recent performance, three players showcased how the Jaw Harp can facilitate harmonious ensemble playing. Each player used the same instrument, built with uniform specifications, ensuring consistent sound production. This standardised approach to instrument construction promotes sustainability by combining indigenous craftsmanship with modern tools to improve instrument playability. This makes the instruments more appealing, especially to music students and enthusiasts, thereby fostering their preservation and continued cultural relevance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that the government should be the supporting structure to indigenous instrument builders by providing them access to professional equipment that can enhance the quality and consistency of their craftsmanship. It should create a thriving platform through arts and culture departments to empower indigenous instrument players to build instruments that are aimed at conforming to modern standards of playing. By equipping builders with modern tools, governments can facilitate the production of standardised indigenous instruments that are suitable for educational settings. These instruments should then be distributed to schools and learning centres to familiarise students with playing and appreciating indigenous music. Additionally, indigenous instrument players and builders should be encouraged to take on roles as teachers and mentors. By passing down their knowledge and skills to younger generations, these experts can ensure the continuity and preservation of indigenous instruments. This educational approach not only secures the future of these instruments but also fosters cultural pride and heritage among students. To achieve self-sustainability, it is crucial that these instruments are designed and constructed with education and pedagogy in mind. Builders should collaborate with educators to develop instruments

that are conducive to teaching and learning environments, incorporating standardised tuning systems and ergonomic designs. Furthermore, workshops and training sessions should be organised to empower academics and enthusiasts interested in creating enduring models of these instruments. These initiatives will encourage innovation and collaboration within the field of indigenous instrument building, ensuring that future generations have access to high-quality instruments for educational and cultural purposes. Instrument makers should be awarded degrees of proficiency based on their skills and competencies.

If proactive steps are not taken, Western classical music will continue to dominate music studies in schools and universities. To counter this, crafting indigenous instruments should be integrated into university curricula as a formal subject. This approach would empower students to explore and reimagine indigenous African instruments through the lens of teaching and learning. By engaging in the hands-on creation and construction of these instruments, students would not only gain practical skills but also develop a deeper appreciation for indigenous music traditions. This educational framework could inspire students to innovate and develop new approaches to instrument building, ensuring relevance and sustainability in educational settings. Moreover, fostering an environment where students can experiment with building indigenous instruments could stimulate entrepreneurial thinking. Graduates could potentially establish businesses centred on creating instruments tailored for educational purposes, thereby contributing to the preservation and promotion of indigenous music. Integrating indigenous instrument crafting into university programmes not only enriches music education, but also cultivates a generation of practitioners and entrepreneurs dedicated to sustaining and advancing indigenous music traditions in contemporary educational contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study addresses a crucial gap in the scholarship of indigenous African music by shifting attention from mere preservation to the active sustainability of indigenous instruments within academic frameworks. Through a critical examination of Western academic approaches and a multi-method analysis, the study reveals that documenting African music traditions alone is insufficient for sustaining them. Instead, it argues for the integration of indigenous instruments into educational practices as a vital step toward ensuring the future of African music. The research emphasises that sustainability depends on the active inclusion of these instruments in both teaching and performance contexts. The study critiques the longstanding academic focus on documenting African cultural practices while neglecting the practical teaching and performance of indigenous African instruments. Despite over a century of research, the continued emphasis on ethnomusicological documentation and community music has marginalised the role of African instruments in higher education. The findings reveal that many African universities still lack specialised training in indigenous instruments, leading to a disconnect between students' studies and hands-on experience with African music. The study advocates for a shift toward the active inclusion of indigenous instruments in education, emphasising the need to balance cultural documentation with practical application to sustain African music traditions. It is crucial for modern scholars to ensure that the sustainability of African music education emphasises the practical application of playing indigenous African instruments, including their construction and performance techniques. This approach contrasts with the historical focus on documentation and preservation, which has dominated African music studies at universities. By shifting toward hands-on learning and active engagement with these instruments, scholars and educators can foster a deeper understanding and ensure the continued vitality of African musical traditions. This study calls for a reorientation toward specialised instrument training to ensure a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to African music education.

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## **ABOUT AUTHOR**

Ntshengedzeni Evans Netshivhambe earned his Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees from Wits University, South Africa. He is a dedicated researcher, composer, and arranger focused on integrating African indigenous knowledge into higher education. He combines traditional African composition techniques with modern frameworks, enhancing African art music within academic curricula. His work celebrates Africa's cultural heritage, bridging tradition and contemporary scholarship. Evans' research promotes the respectful integration of African knowledge in education. His interests include music composition, Africanness, formalising indigenous African music knowledge, and professionalising indigenous instruments. He is passionate about profiling the stories and knowledge of the legends of our time.