

An examination of the educational and instructional facets in isiXhosa children's oral songs

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Abstract

It is incontrovertible that African, and in particular, isiXhosa children's oral songs play a significant role in the educational and instructional facets given their propensity to contribute to children's cognitive development when used and applied meticulously. Bearing that in mind, this article aimed to unravel two selected children's oral isiXhosa songs in respect of their didactic and pedagogical components. The principal objective, among others, was to determine their latent interplaying meanings. The sociocultural theory of learning was deployed to examine the two songs while the songs themselves served as a primary source of data subsumed under qualitative research methodology. The examination and discussions maintained that isiXhosa children's oral songs contain educational and instructional dimensions that may not be privy to everyone, and as such, it is consequential that they continue to be probed. The closing remarks underlined the deficit in the evaluation of isiXhosa children's songs concerning their didactic and pedagogical facets.

Keywords: children; didactic; isiXhosa oral songs; pedagogical; sociocultural learning

Introduction

The use of songs in education in the South African milieu is not a peculiar phenomenon, and in many cultures around the country, traditional songs have played a consequential role in the education of children. amaXhosa are ethnic group of people naturally found in South Africa, and spread in other parts of the world. In the amaXhosa culture of South Africa, oral children's songs as an indigenous component are a rudimentary facet of the education system, serving both didactic and pedagogical purposes (Dlamini, 2020; Loots, 2022). The didactic facet of amaXhosa oral children's songs refers to their instructional content or pertinence (Mellizo et al., 2023). These songs are constructed and assembled to teach children about a variety of pertinent subjects, including history, social norms, and value systems. For instance, some songs may teach children about the importance of respecting and heeding elders, while others may recount historical events or teach about the natural world. The pedagogical facet of amaXhosa oral children's songs relates to their utilization as a teaching tool. These songs are conventionally used by amaXhosa educators - members of the community - as a way to discourse with children in the learning process and to buttress lessons.

In spite of their significance in amaXhosa culture, the didactic and pedagogical facets of amaXhosa oral children's songs have received limited scholarly deliberation. Essentially, the South African government has been animatedly promoting the preservation and promotion of indigenous cultural heritage, including traditional songs and music (Diko, 2023b). In 2019, the South African government launched the Living Legends Legacy Programme (LLLP), which aims to celebrate and honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the country's cultural heritage, including music and songs (Diko, 2023b, p. 213). Children's music and songs are no exception to this

endeavor. The government has also devoted itself to supporting the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DSAC), which is commissioned with advancing and preserving South Africa's diverse cultural pedigree. In addition, the government has funded various initiatives and research projects aimed at documenting and preserving indigenous songs and music against the odds of post-colonialism that sought to devalue the South African school of thought and practice in respect of these songs.

Songs are an important feature of human expression that has existed for thousands of years in South Africa. At their epicenter, songs are musical compositions that combine melody and lyrics to convey a message, tell a story, or evoke emotions in the listener (Fell et al., 2023). They are habitually structured around a series of verses and a chorus and may include other musical elements such as a bridge or instrumental interludes (Modise, 2023). Songs are found in virtually every culture around the global village, and serve a wide range of functions. They are often used for entertainment purposes, providing listeners with a form of gratification and leisure pursuit. However, songs can also serve more profound purposes, such as expressing cultural identity, transmitting knowledge, or conveying political or social messages (Modise, 2023).

In many cultures, songs are also used for religious or spiritual purposes, providing a means of connecting with the divine or expressing faith (Mellizo et al., 2023). From a scientific perspective, songs have been the subject of attention in a variety of fields, including psychology, neuroscience, and musicology (Wells, 1996; Mapaya, 2014; Osibodu, 2023). Researchers have investigated the effects of music and lyrics on emotions, cognition, and behavior, as well as the underlying neural mechanisms involved in processing and perceiving music (Mapaya, 2014). Additionally, scholars have analyzed the cultural and historical significance of songs, exploring how they reflect and configure social norms, values, and identity (Gunner, 2006).

And by the way, what is a song? A song which is known as *ingoma* in the isiXhosa language is a musical anatomy that typically consists of a combination of lyrics (words) and melody (tune) (Loots, 2022). It is a form of artistic verbalization that can convey a parade of emotions, ideas, or messages through the use of both verbal and musical features (Nwosu et al., 2021; Modise, 2023). Songs can be located in a wide variety of musical genres, from folk and pop to classical and hip-hop, and can be performed by solo artists, groups, or choirs (Nwosu et al., 2021). In addition to lyrics and melody, songs often include other musical components such as harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation (Diko, 2023b). The lyrics of a song can be sung in a particular language or dialect and may contain poetic or metaphorical language.

With this introduction and contextual background in mind, the aim and objective of this article are to examine the functions of amaXhosa children's songs to gain insights into how these songs serve as a means of cultural transmission, socialization, and education among young children in the South African milieu. By examining the didactic and pedagogical facets of children's songs, it is hoped that the general society can understand how they contribute to the development of language, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills in children. Furthermore, scrutinizing the functions of children's songs can provide insights into the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of different communities, as these songs often mirror the social norms and expectations of the communities in which they are contextualized. By understanding the lyrics and contexts in which these songs are sung, researchers can gain a profound understanding of the cultural heritage and identity of different communities.

Problem statement

It is significant to note that oral children's songs and music in South Africa, like in many other African countries, have faced several challenges and issues, including the erasure and distortion of cultural heritage, the dwindling of traditional music genres, and the lack of recognition and support from mainstream society. In South Africa, oral children's music and songs have often been associated with rural and marginalized communities and have been overshadowed by the hegemony of Western songs and music genres in mainstream media and popular culture. This has resulted in a deficit in the popularity and visibility of these songs and music, and has led to the displacement of many traditional music genres and practices. Also, the commercialization of music and the focus on profit-making has often led to the subjugation or oppression of children's oral music genres and the prioritization of music that conforms to mainstream tastes and preferences. By the same token, traditional music in South Africa has continued to be viewed as worthless and insignificant.

Literature review

Cultural transmission

Oral children's songs serve as a means of cultural transmission by imparting cultural value systems, beliefs, and practices from one generation to the next. These songs are profoundly rooted in local traditions and mirror the exclusive cultural heritage and identity of different communities (Slater, 1986; Owel et al., 2019). Through the transmission of songs from older generations such as parents and grandparents, children are immersed in an inheritance and legacy of cultural knowledge and wisdom that has been accumulated and bequeathed through generations. Through the repetition and performance of traditional songs, children internalize the cultural norms and prospects of their community and develop a sensory faculty of identity and belonging (Allen et al., 2023). In addition, oral children's songs serve as a model of socialization, helping children to learn the customs and etiquette of their society (Owel et al., 2019). Many children's songs contain messages about appropriate behavior, respect for authority, and social norms that children are expected to embrace and honor. By singing these songs, children learn the appropriate ways to interact with others and develop the social commands essential for successful participation in their community.

By the same wavelength, oral children's songs serve as a means of traditional and cultural education, teaching children about their environment, history, and traditions as embraced by Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) (Diko, 2022b). Several children's songs embody information about local flora and fauna, historical events, and important figures in their community. By learning about these topics through song, children develop an extraordinary comprehension of their cultural legacy and the world around them (Li & Han, 2023). Moreover, the musical and rhythmic nature of these songs can aid in memory retention, making them – songs – an invaluable instrument for teaching and learning in traditional societies where written texts may be less common.

In support of the scholarly discourses just above and as part of the review of literature, it is further worth noting that the former queen of the United Kingdom (UK) – Queen Elizabeth II – has a long history of supporting and promoting cultural heritage and the arts, including music and traditional folk songs for children and adults (The Royal Family, 2020). The queen was also known to express her appreciation for music and cultural traditions in her public statements and speeches (Balog, 2022). For instance, in her Christmas message in 2020, the queen referred to the importance of music and songs in bringing people together (*Ubuntu/Mmadu/Ubinadamu*) and providing comfort during

difficult times (The Royal Family, 2020). While she may not have made specific comments about oral children's songs or related research, the queen's support for cultural heritage and the arts more broadly is well-known. The queen's public statements and speeches often reflected her appreciation for the role of music and cultural traditions in promoting social cohesion and well-being. In her very same Christmas message in 2020, for example, the queen noted that music has the power to "lift our spirits and bring us together in hope." She also acknowledged the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the ways in which traditional and modern songs, and the arts have provided comfort and solace during this difficult time.

Moreover, the queen had a long-standing interest in the arts and supported various cultural initiatives throughout her reign. She was a patron of numerous arts organizations, including the Royal Opera House (ROH) and the Royal Ballet (RB), and has been known to attend musical performances and cultural events. In 2019, the Queen launched the Queen's Commonwealth Trust (QCT), which supports young artists and cultural entrepreneurs from across the Commonwealth (The Royal Family, 2020). Through these initiatives, the queen demonstrated her commitment to promoting cultural heritage and supporting the arts as a means of fostering social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding. Children's traditional songs have not been secluded in this entire process.

Socialization

Children's oral songs play an important role as an agent of socialization, helping to transmit cultural values, beliefs, and practices from one generation to the next. Through oral songs, children learn about their cultural heritage, including the myths, legends, and historical events that have configured their communities (Swall et al., 2020). Children also learn important social and moral values, such as honor for senior members of the community, cooperation, and kindness, which are often ingrained in the lyrics and themes of oral songs (Miranda, 2013). Additionally, oral songs provide a way for children to learn about and connect with their community and cultural ancestry. By singing and performing oral songs together, through the process of socialization, children develop a sense of belonging and solidarity with their peers and with the broader community (Khasanova, 2020). Oral songs also act as a means of ethnic verbalization, allowing children to express their creativity and individuality while also reinforcing cultural traditions and norms through the process of social interaction.

In many cultures, children's oral songs also have specific roles and functions, such as marking important life events, celebrating festivals, and performing religious rituals (Gunner, 2006). Among other determinants, children learn songs in more informal settings such as during playtime or while working alongside their parents or other community members (Brown et al., 2022). All these are instrumentality of socialization in children and other organs of social anatomy. Through participation in these events, children learn about the significance of these practices and their place within their community and culture. Ultimately, the role of children's oral songs as an agent of socialization is crucial in preserving cultural heritage and promoting social cohesion. By transmitting cultural values and beliefs from one generation to the next, oral songs help to ensure the continuity and vitality of cultural traditions and practices.

Education

Children's oral songs have been recognized as a powerful agent of education, particularly in traditional societies where formal schooling is not widely available or accessible. Oral songs convey important cultural and historical information, as well as

social values and norms, through catchy tunes and memorable lyrics that are effortless for children to learn and remember (Kirby et al., 2023). One way in which oral songs serve as an agent of education is through their role in transmitting language and literacy skills. Children's songs often use simple, repetitive language patterns that can help young minds to develop their vocabulary and grammar skills. Equally, many children's songs are designed to be interactive, encouraging children to sing along and participate actively in the learning process (Khasanova, 2020). Through these activities, children can develop their language skills in a merriment and engaging way.

In addition to promoting language and literacy skills, children's oral songs can also pronounce important cultural values and traditions. Traditional societies often use songs and music to pass down historical and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. Children's songs may celebrate important events, such as harvests or festivals, or convey messages about respect for parents and grandparents, community values, and other important social norms (Allen et al., 2022). By learning these songs, children develop a deeper understanding and veneration of their ethnic heritage and the social world concerning them. Therefore, it is coherent that children's oral songs serve as an important facet of education in traditional societies, helping to transmit language, literacy, and cultural knowledge among generations. By using captivating tunes and absorbing lyrics, these songs can make learning fun and accessible for young learners, promoting language development, cultural understanding, and social cohesion.

Research methodology and theoretical aspect

In this article, two children's oral songs were preferred. These songs were elicited from an online platform named Xhosa Family on YouTube (please see the link under the reference list). The online platform has recorded several amaXhosa children's songs. Some of these songs are familiar to the author as they form part of traditional literature and popular culture. Each song is approximately one minute in length for the very reason that most children's oral isiXhosa songs are precise and short. These songs are in the isiXhosa language; however, the English translations have been provided. The two preferred songs are:

- i. *Iphiinja yam?* (Where has my little dog gone?).
- ii. *Imanzi ilokhwe yam* (My dress is wet).

These songs are considered hereunder as a primary source of data examined. The reason to appoint these children's oral songs is that they form part of oral or traditional literature, and therefore, their function and significance rest on their ability to play a didactic and pedagogical influence. In fact, Diko (2023b, 2023c & 2023d) refers to this technique to research as a qualitative research methodology that appreciates and recognizes oral or traditional literature as a primary source of data. Similarly, Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) proclaim that qualitative research methodology can be used to evaluate oral literature by examining literary works in-depth and interpreting them through various lenses such as historical, cultural, and social perspectives. To this, Diko (2023d) states that through the qualitative research methodology, researchers can identify patterns, themes, and interplaying messages in children's oral songs, and attain insight into the cultural, historical, and social context in which they were constructed and produced. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of oral literature and its significance, as well as shed light on the cultural and social issues that it addresses. By using qualitative research methodology as a flexible technique to research, scholarly investigators can explore the complexities and nuances of African literature and provide a deeper

understanding of its meaning and significance. In a nutshell, the selected isiXhosa children's songs are used as a primary source of data.

With that in mind, the article uses a sociocultural theory of learning which executes in the examination of these selected children's oral songs. The sociocultural theory of learning is a theoretical framework that draws attention to the social and cultural context of learning. This theory was developed by the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, who believed that learning is a social activity that occurs through interactions with others and within a cultural context (Mao & Lee, 2022). According to the sociocultural theory of learning, individuals acquire knowledge and skills by participating in social and cultural practices, such as language, rituals, traditional game songs, and customs (Diko, 2020). The theory also underpins the role of language in learning, as language is seen as a key tool for communication, problem-solving, and the transmission of cultural knowledge in oral literature. This denotes that language in oral children's songs is an important component owing to the reality that they (oral songs) are produced through the use of language and different narratological aspects.

In the scrutinization of isiXhosa children's oral songs, the sociocultural theory of learning provides and sanctions a significant framework for conceptualizing the educational value of these songs within their cultural context and beyond. The sociocultural theory of learning further examines the significance or meaning of the structure of the children's oral songs. Children's oral songs are a form of cultural practice that is acutely imprinted in the social and cultural traditions of many communities, including in Africa (Phala, 2023). As such, sociocultural theory braces the importance of probing these songs within their cultural context, as they are a central vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge and values to the next generation (Diko, 2020).

According to the sociocultural theory of learning, children's oral songs can play a significant role in promoting cognitive development and learning, as they provide opportunities for children to participate in cultural practices and engage in multi-collaborative learning with others (Kugara et al., 2023; Majola et al., 2023). Through singing and reciting oral songs, children develop language skills, memory, and attention, and learn important cultural values and traditions. This is in addition to their cognitive development. The sociocultural theory also underscores the role of adults and more knowledgeable peers in guiding and supporting children's learning (Kugara et al., 2023). In the milieu of children's oral songs, adults and older children may act as models and mentors, providing guidance and feedback to younger children as they learn the songs and the cultural values they embody. This approach highlights the importance of intergenerational learning and collaboration in the transmission of cultural knowledge. The deployment of this theory in this article lies on the following reasons:

- i. Sociocultural theory underpins that learning is not an individual process but rather a social and cultural one.
- ii. It emphasizes the propensity of language in learning, as language is seen as a key tool for communication, problem-solving, and the transmission of cultural knowledge and other human components such as reasoning. Children's oral songs provide a rich source of language input, as they involve singing, reciting, and memorization of words and phrases.
- iii. It additionally values cultural diversity and recognizes the importance of cultural practices in configuring the way that individuals think, learn, and communicate.

In essence, the preferred children's oral songs and the sociocultural theory will operate in a symbiotic interrelationship in a bid to gratify the aims, and objectives as well as address the problem statement.

Data analysis and discussions

This section is dualistic in that data analysis and discussions are driven symbiotically.

IsiXhosa version	English translated version
<i>Iphi, iphiinja yam?</i>	Where has my little dog gone?
<i>Iphi, iphiinja yam?</i>	Where has my little dog gone?
<i>Iindleb'ezimhlophe</i>	White ears
<i>Nomsila omde</i>	Long tail
<i>Iphi, iphiinjani yam?</i>	Where has my little dog gone?
<i>Iphi, iphiinjani yam?</i>	Where has my little dog gone?
<i>Iphi, iphiinjani yam?</i>	Where has my little dog gone?
<i>Iindleb'ezimhlophe</i>	White ears
<i>Nomsila omde</i>	Long tail
<i>Iphi iphiinja yam?</i>	Where has my little dog gone?

Table 1: Iphiinja yam? (Where has my little dog gone?)

The didactic and pedagogical component of children's songs refers to the educational and instructional value that these songs offer to children. Children's songs often convey important cultural, social, and moral values, and they are used as a tool for teaching children about the world around them. The didactic and pedagogical components of children's songs can take many forms. For example, some children's songs may be used to teach children about the natural world, such as animal sounds, plant names, or weather patterns. As certified in Table 1 above, the song teaches children about the significance of valuing animals; but not only that, instead the importance of honoring what children have been given by their senior peers or elders. In the song above, the child, as a main character, is expected to know what the dog looks like, and when it becomes lost, they need to take responsibility for it because animals are as important as humans. The sociocultural theory of learning informs the ability of children to be responsible citizens. The details that the child provides in this song indicate that the lost or misplaced dog is valued so much that the child is able to provide clear details of the missing dog – responsibility and accountability. The importance of inculcating respect and honor for animals lies in that social and cultural learning to value animals helps children to develop affinity, concern and compassion for other living beings. This can lead to a greater sense of respect for animals and a desire to protect them from harm, especially in countries where animals are often hurt and harmed through hunting with fewer regulations to safeguard them. On the other hand, children's songs such as *Iphiinja yam* (Where has my little dog gone?), underline that animals play a crucial role in ecosystems, and teaching children to value animals helps them to understand the importance of preserving natural habitats and protecting biodiversity. When children learn to value animals as in the case of *Iphi, iphiinja yam* (Where has my little dog gone?), they are more probable to handle and consider them with kindness and respect. This can help to avert animal cruelty and promote responsible behavior toward animals. On the same wavelength, caring for animals can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience, and teaching children to value animals can encourage them to develop healthy habits such as responsible pet ownership and a love for nature.

In addition to their content, the didactic and pedagogical aspects of children's songs often involve repetition, call-and-response patterns, and other techniques that help children to memorize the lyrics and internalize the values and knowledge that they convey. For instance, in the song above *Iphi, iphi inja yam?* is a repeated phrase that develops the pattern or theme of the song.

IsiXhosa version	English translated version
<i>Imvula, imvula</i>	Rain, rain
<i>Imvula, imvula</i>	Rain, rain
<i>Chapha, chapha, chapha</i>	Dripping, dripping, dripping
<i>Imanzi ilokhwe yam</i>	My dress is wet
<i>Chapha, chapha, chapha</i>	Dripping, dripping, dripping
<i>Imanzi ilokhwe yam</i>	My dress is wet
<i>Gqum, gqum kuyaduduma</i>	Snap, snap it is raining
<i>Gqum, gqum kuyaduduma</i>	Snap, snap it is raining
<i>Imanzi ilokhwe yam</i>	My dress is wet
<i>Imanzi ilokhwe yam</i>	My dress is wet

Table 2: *Imanzi ilokhwe yam* (My dress is wet)

The children's song above inholds a similar structure as the earlier song in that there is a repetition of certain words such as *chapha* and *imanzi ilokhwe yam*. This denotes that repetition is a common feature of children's oral songs (and in particular the two selected songs) and plays an important role in their significance. For instance, repetition takes many forms, such as repeating a word or phrase multiple times, repeating a melody or rhythm, or using call-and-response patterns. These are evident in the song *Imanzi ilokhwe yam* (My dress is wet) on account that the repeated words and phrases produce an observable melody and tune. One of the main functions of repetition in children's oral songs is to aid in memorization which is underpinned by the socio-cultural theory of learning. Repetition makes it effortless for children to recount the lyrics, melody, and rhythm of a song, which is important in oral cultures where written texts may not be readily available or accessible. Also, the repetition in the children's song merits the didactic and pedagogical component which is responsible for cognition, development and understanding. By the same token, repetition helps to articulate important cultural values, social norms, and historical knowledge that are conveyed through the lyrics of the song.

Repetition can also create a sense of familiarity and comfort for children, making them feel more connected to the song and its cultural context. This can be particularly important in the case of lullabies and other soothing songs, which use repetition to create a sense of security and calmness for young minds. Furthermore, repetition in children's oral songs also promotes social interaction and collaboration among children. For example, call-and-response patterns as evident in the two selected songs encourage children to respond to one another, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. This aids to develop important social and cognitive skills, such as turn-taking, active listening, and cooperation.

Further important to appreciate about the two songs is the parallelism in their length – this means that they are short. The rationale for children's songs being short rests in

that making children's oral songs short and concise is important for several significant reasons. First, attention span. Children have a limited attention span (Bartan, 2020), and short and concise songs are more likely to hold their attention and keep them engaged. This is particularly important for younger children who may have difficulty sustaining their focus for long periods of time. Second, memorization. Short and concise songs are easier for children to memorize, which is crucial in oral cultures where written texts may not be readily available or accessible. By means of illustration, several children's oral songs remain unrecorded, and therefore, it is prudent that they are preserved using indigenous verbal methodologies such as keeping them short for memorization. This aids children to retain important cultural knowledge and values that are conveyed through the lyrics of the song. Third, participation. Short and concise songs are more accessible for children to participate in. They can easily join in singing and dancing along with the lyrics and rhythm. This can foster a sensory faculty of community and shared experience among children and promote their social and emotional development. In the songs referred to in this article, it is apparent that the songs are concise, and it is easy for anyone who understands the isiXhosa language to participate in them. Fourth and last, is adaptability. Short and concise children's songs are easier to adapt and modify for different contexts, such as changing the lyrics to reflect different cultural or historical events (Ntombela, 2016). This can help to keep the songs relevant and meaningful for future generations. In essence, the noteworthiness of making children's oral songs short lies in their ability to hold children's attention, facilitate memorization, encourage participation, promote adaptability, and convey important cultural knowledge and values. By understanding the value of length and concision in children's oral songs, researchers and educators can gain insight into the ways in which these songs contribute to didactic and pedagogical development of children.

With the data above and its discussions, isiXhosa children's oral songs, often considered simple, catchy tunes with repetitive lyrics, play a crucial role in a child's development and sociocultural learning as well as cognition. They facilitate language development and literacy skills. Children who are exposed to songs and nursery rhymes at a young age are likely to develop phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. The melody and repetition of lyrics help children to remember and recall information, which is essential in developing memory and learning abilities. Moreover, children's songs foster social and emotional development. Singing and dancing with others can enhance children's social skills and help them to develop positive relationships. They convey messages of love, kindness, and social values, which help children understand and manage their emotions, develop empathy, and learn social skills. Furthermore, singing and dancing can be a fun and enjoyable experience for children, promoting their emotional well-being and happiness.

Conclusion

The didactic and pedagogical aspects of children's songs are important features of research given that they have significant implications for children's cognitive and linguistic development. In this article, it has been underlined that children's songs can be an effective tool for language learning, as they provide a fun and engaging way for children to learn new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation. In addition, singing songs have been debated in the sense that it helps children develop their phonological awareness, which is an important skill for reading and writing. Furthermore, it has been stressed that the use of music and songs can enhance children's motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes through the sociocultural theory of learning. Therefore, by

incorporating children's songs into the curriculum, teachers can create a more stimulating and interactive learning environment, which can improve children's attention, memory, and retention of information. In addition, singing songs in a group can help children develop social skills, such as cooperation, turn-taking, and listening. In closing, researching the didactic and pedagogical aspects of children's songs can provide valuable insights into how to design effective music-based educational programs for children. By understanding the mechanisms through which children's songs facilitate cognition and development, educators and other stakeholders can develop evidence-based strategies for teaching language, literacy, and other skills using music.

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