

Exploring picture stories and repetition in L2 acquisition through two isiNguni language songs: A cognitive analysis

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Abstract

Despite South Africa's rich multilingual landscape, second language (L2) acquisition in formal education often marginalises culturally embedded tools such as indigenous music and picture-based storytelling. This oversight limits learner engagement and slows cognitive development in L2 classrooms, particularly for African languages which include the isiNguni languages. This article examines the pedagogical value of repetition and picture stories in two isiNguni language songs as tools to support L2 acquisition. Drawing on Paivio's Dual Coding Theory, which emphasises the cognitive advantages of combining verbal and visual stimuli, the study argues that such integration can enhance learners' memory retention and conceptual understanding. A systematic, descriptive literature review was conducted, screening 401 non-duplicate articles retrieved from seven academic databases. Fifty articles were selected for final thematic analysis. The findings indicate that repetitive linguistic structures in songs like *Jerusalem* and *Ndiyagodola* not only strengthen auditory memory but also promote cultural identity and contextual language comprehension. When paired with visual aids such as animated sequences or storyboards, these songs support deeper engagement with abstract language elements, especially for L2 acquisition students. The emotional resonance and familiarity of indigenous musical content further enhance learner motivation and retention. While international studies confirm the effectiveness of multimodal and culturally contextualised approaches in L2 learning, there is a notable scarcity of similar research within the South African context. This study's novelty lies in its integration of Dual Coding Theory with culturally grounded isiNguni songs and visual storytelling, offering a context-specific, multimodal framework for enhancing L2 acquisition in African languages an approach largely absent in current literature.

Keywords: Culturally responsive pedagogy; dual coding theory; indigenous music; picture-based storytelling; second language acquisition; isiNguni languages

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1. Introduction

It is prudent to foreground this article by providing a brief background on second language acquisition (SLA), so that the study of the cognitive role of picture stories and repetition in L2 learning using two isiNguni language songs as case studies can be properly contextualised. SLA has evolved into a major interdisciplinary field, drawing on psychology, linguistics, child language acquisition, and language instruction (Gass, Behney & Plonsky, 2020). Over the decades, it has expanded to incorporate sociocultural and cognitive dimensions, reflecting the increasing complexity of global linguistic landscapes. The continued growth of SLA parallels the rise of globalisation and the prominence of English as a lingua franca; however, this global trend has at times overshadowed the pedagogical development of African languages as L2s (Lane & Kennedy, 2024; Seleke, et.al, 2025). Recognising the interplay between global language trends and local linguistic realities is therefore critical in designing inclusive and contextually relevant strategies that align with learners lived experiences.

Lane and Kennedy (2024) emphasise that SLA is a multifaceted process influenced by interdependent variables, including social contact, cognitive development, and learner motivation. In multilingual societies, religious and cultural contexts further shape language acquisition by affecting how learners engage with linguistic and conceptual content. This was supported by Xia, Shin and Kim (2024) who point out the importance of situating L2 learning within learners' cultural frameworks to enhance retention and engagement. While first language (L1) acquisition is typically a natural process, second language learning varies depending on age, exposure, and learning environment (Lane & Kennedy, 2024; Seleke, et.al, 2025; Xia, et.al, 2024). Even highly proficient L2 learners may not be perceived as native speakers, a perception influenced by linguistic proximity, motivation, and learning goals (Kersten, 2022). Consequently, this article aligns with scholarship advocating for a shift away from native-like benchmarks toward a model of proficiency that values functional, culturally relevant communicative competence.

Despite growing research in SLA, most studies focus on European languages, particularly English, leaving African languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa underrepresented in empirical studies (Gobodwana, 2024; Seleke, et.al, 2025). This neglect undermines decolonisation efforts and the cognitive and cultural benefits of multilingual education. Research on culturally embedded tools particularly picture stories and repetition in music for stimulating cognitive development in L2 learning remains limited. While multimodal approaches are beginning to gain attention (Khohliso, et. al, 2024; Sikhwari & Thenga, 2025), few studies specifically explore the intersection of African indigenous music, visual storytelling, and SLA. This article addresses this gap by examining two widely popular isiNguni songs, *Ndiyagodola* and *Jerusalem*, to investigate how repetition and visual elements can enhance cognitive engagement, cultural identity, and social cohesion in multilingual classrooms (Khohliso, et. al, 2024; Seleke, et.al, 2025; Sikhwari & Thenga, 2025). The study's novelty lies in applying Dual Coding Theory to integrate musical repetition with picture stories, establishing a culturally grounded, multimodal framework tailored for African language acquisition. This approach advances both theoretical understanding and practical pedagogy,

offering a model that enhances memory retention, learner engagement, and culturally responsive L2 instruction.

1.1. Research questions

For the article, the researchers developed four primary research questions that sought to bring an understanding of how repetition and picture-based storytelling in two isiNguni language songs can facilitate second language acquisition:

1. How do picture stories in the selected isiNguni language songs support memory and language retention in L2 acquisition?
2. How does repetition in the selected isiNguni language songs support linguistic structure retention and communication in L2 acquisition?
3. How does the use of culturally relevant materials influence learner engagement and language retention, and further promote language inclusion and social cohesion in L2 classrooms?
4. What pedagogical recommendations can be drawn from the integration of music, repetition and visuals in isiNguni L2 acquisition classrooms?

1.2. Literature review

Learning a second language (L2) involves a complex interplay of cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions. It requires the development of new linguistic knowledge and abilities, often under substantial cognitive load as learners process and retain unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar structures, and phonology. In multilingual societies such as South Africa, the teaching and learning of indigenous languages particularly isiNguni languages like isiZulu and isiXhosa face persistent challenges. These include a shortage of engaging, culturally responsive materials and a gap between policy ideals and classroom realities (Chizwina et al., 2025; Diko & Celliers, 2024; Xeketwana, 2021). Chizwina et al. (2025, p. 1) affirm that:

“Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African government has made significant strides towards promoting linguistic diversity and equity in education to ensure everyone has equal opportunities. Before 1994, South Africa had not embraced diversity and inclusion in the languages used.”

Despite progressive language-in-education policies, implementation remains uneven. Indigenous languages are often marginalised in teaching and learning environments (Mabela & Ditsele, 2024). This disconnect has prompted scholars and educators to explore innovative approaches, such as the integration of multimodal resources particularly music and visual storytelling to foster meaningful L2 acquisition (Wang, 2022; Yende, 2022).

Studies by Chen et al. (2024), Guhn et al. (2020), and Havrilova et al. (2022) reveal that the inclusion of music in language education improves vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and comprehension. Similarly, Yende (2023) asserts that music creates an optimal learning environment by supporting various language skills and nurturing cultural understanding. Howe (2021) highlights music's repetitive and rhythmic features, which

promote retention and contextual learning. Ghafar (2024) draws attention to the role of visual narratives such as picture stories in contextualising language, enabling learners to internalise content more effectively.

1.2.1. The Role of Music in Second Language Acquisition

Music's utility in L2 learning is well-documented across various disciplines. Yende (2023) emphasises that music is not only a motivational tool but also a pedagogical strategy capable of transforming the classroom into an immersive language environment. Ngadni and Hui (2025) further support this view, citing music's therapeutic and mnemonic qualities as beneficial in managing learning anxiety and improving retention. Chatterjee (2023) also stresses the importance of rhythm, melody, and repetition in enhancing pronunciation and memory. Sadiqzade (2024) concurs, emphasising music's cognitive benefits, particularly in vocabulary retention and language structure acquisition. Kumar et al. (2022, p. 4) state:

“Studies have shown that the use of songs has been particularly effective in teaching the English language to young learners. The reason behind this can be supported by Piaget's understanding of egocentric language that explains the fondness of children for songs as they enjoy repeating themselves since they love hearing themselves and have little or no concern for the recipient.”

This child-centred perspective validates the use of songs in early L2 development, particularly for their entertainment value, linguistic repetition, and cultural relevance. Argyriou (2025) emphasises that music is often underutilised as a linguistic resource in educational settings, even though it plays a vital role in preserving oral traditions, fostering cultural identity, and maintaining historical memory within African contexts. Music in the classroom has the potential to serve not only as an engaging teaching tool but also as a bridge between language learning and cultural understanding. Supporting this perspective, Izi (2020, p. 80) asserts that “songs are a conduit for transmitting cultural values because they contain cultural meanings,” enriching both linguistic and cultural learning.

1.2.2. Visual Narratives and Picture Stories in Cognitive Development

Visual narratives including picture books, storyboards, and comics are powerful aids in language education. Shabiralyani et al. (2015) explain that visual tools simplify complex ideas and make content more accessible. Cohn (2019) elaborates on how visual sequences scaffold learners' understanding of narrative structure and enhance interpretive skills. Picture stories stimulate mental imagery, link language to visual representations, and activate prior knowledge, thereby facilitating schema formation and memory retention (Yasin & Mohamad, 2024). These tools are especially effective for L2 learners as they provide concrete contexts for abstract language concepts and improve recall through visual associations. Despite their proven effectiveness, their use within African language classrooms remains under-researched, particularly when combined with culturally rooted materials such as indigenous songs.

1.2.3. Multimodal and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in African Language Learning

Multimodal learning, defined by Gilakjani et al. (2011), incorporates various modes visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and textual to cater to diverse learner preferences. Ying (2024) supports this inclusive framework, noting that it fosters creativity and deeper engagement. Wandah et al. (2024) add that multimodal approaches enhance retention and inclusivity, especially in multilingual classrooms. Culturally responsive pedagogy recognises students' cultural backgrounds as foundational to learning. Maseko (2017) stresses the importance of using indigenous languages and culturally familiar resources to validate learners' identities. Songs and images rooted in learners' lived experiences have the potential to transform classrooms into inclusive and engaging spaces. However, such practices remain insufficiently explored within South African indigenous language instruction.

1.2.4. South African isiNguni Languages: A Linguistic and Educational Context

South Africa's isiNguni languages isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, and siSwati share high mutual intelligibility, reflecting deep linguistic connections across communities. Historically, materials developed for one isiNguni language were often adapted for others, highlighting a tradition of shared pedagogical resources. For example, isiZulu was widely taught across different isiNguni communities even before isiNdebele and siSwati gained official recognition, and early siSwati newspapers were published in isiZulu (Mthembu, 2020). This linguistic kinship provides a strong rationale for integrating culturally embedded learning materials across languages. The current study focuses on picture stories and repetition within isiNguni songs, specifically *Jerusalem* (isiZulu) and *Ndiyagodola* (isiXhosa), to explore their potential in supporting second language (L2) acquisition. Such an approach aligns with contemporary theories that advocate for shared language practices and translanguaging strategies to foster inclusive, culturally responsive learning (Makalela, 2016).

Despite growing interest in the role of music and visual narratives in language learning, there remains a scarcity of research on their combined cognitive effects in African indigenous language contexts. Few studies examine how picture stories and musical repetition, rooted in cultural content, can enhance L2 learning. Similarly, the pedagogical potential of mutual intelligibility among isiNguni languages has not been fully leveraged. This study addresses these gaps by analysing how two culturally grounded isiNguni songs function as multimodal tools, supporting memory retention, conceptual understanding, and learner engagement in L2 classrooms.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this article is Schema Theory, specifically Dual Coding Theory. Scholars concur that Schema Theory, first proposed by Frederic Bartlett in 1932 and then developed by scholars such as Richard Anderson, suggests that mental models or "schemas" that assist people in organising and interpreting information improve understanding and learning (McVee et al., 2005; Sadoski & Paivio, 2013). McVee et al. (2005)

provided support for this claim, pointing out that as reading researchers adopted early cognitive scientists' work on the function of schemas in reading, schema theory gained popularity in the 1970s. The field changed in the 1980s and 1990s when scholars began to structure studies of literacy using sociocultural ideas, especially those of L. S. Vygotsky (McVee et al., 2005).

In relation to this, Dual Coding Theory, developed by Allan Paivio (1971, 1986), suggests that humans process information through two distinct but interconnected cognitive channels: the verbal and the visual (Paivio, 2014). According to Paivio (2014), when learners receive input through both verbal (e.g., spoken or written language) and non-verbal (e.g., images or music) modes, learning becomes more effective due to the complementary activation of these systems.

This theory is particularly relevant to this study, which explores how picture stories and repetition in isiNguni language songs like *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo and *Ndiyagodola* by Ringo Madlingozi, aid cognitive development in L2 acquisition. The songs serve as multimodal texts where linguistic input is reinforced through rhythm, melody, imagery, and repetition aligning closely with the principles of Dual Coding Theory. The combination of auditory (song lyrics), visual (associated picture stories), and repetitive elements can foster deeper encoding, retention, and recall in L2 learners, thereby enhancing the overall learning process. It is evident that by integrating Dual Coding Theory, this article underscores the cognitive benefits of using culturally relevant, multimodal resources in language learning contexts, particularly in African languages such as the isiNguni languages.

2. Design and Method

This study employed a systematic, descriptive literature review to explore how picture stories and repetition in isiNguni language songs influence cognitive development in second language (L2) acquisition. Descriptive reviews identify patterns and trends in existing literature through a transparent process of locating, screening, and classifying relevant studies (Kunisch, et.al, 2023). Sources included periodicals, dissertations, government reports, and peer-reviewed articles accessed via the University of the Western Cape library portal. Databases searched were Proquest, EBSCOhost, LearnTechLib, JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, and the Thesis Repository. This method ensured a rigorous and comprehensive examination of the topic, capturing insights from education, linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies. By systematically synthesising findings, the study highlighted recurring themes in the use of picture stories and repetition in isiNguni songs as tools for L2 learning.

The descriptive review approach was selected for its structured process, which allowed for transparent evaluation of studies and identification of theoretical, methodological, and practical insights. Advanced searches using terms such as “L2 acquisition,” “dual coding theory,” “picture stories,” “repetition in music,” and “isiZulu songs” were refined with Boolean operators. The search focused on peer-reviewed English publications from 2018 to 2025. Initially concentrating on South African literature, the scope expanded internationally due to limited local research, resulting in 401 non-duplicate

articles screened and analysed to inform a contextually grounded framework for L2 pedagogy.

2.1. Inclusion and exclusion

A total of 401 records were identified through database searching across seven databases and repositories, with no duplicates removed. All 401 records were screened by title and abstract, resulting in the exclusion of 255 articles that were irrelevant to adult learners or the focus of the study. Subsequently, 146 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which 130 were excluded (details of exclusions can be provided). This process yielded 90 studies included in the qualitative synthesis, with a final set of 50 studies selected for detailed analysis and development of themes and findings.

Figure 1 represents the literature collection process.

Step	Number of Articles	Notes
Records identified through database searching	401	From 7 databases and repositories
Records after duplicates removed	401	No duplicates reported
Records screened (title/abstract)	401	
Records excluded	255	Irrelevant to adult learners or study focus
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	146	Remaining after screening
Full-text articles excluded	130	(Details can be added)
Studies included in review	90	Included for qualitative synthesis
Studies included in final analysis	50	Studies used to develop themes and findings

Source: Researchers

Two isiNguni songs, *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo and *Ndiyagodola* by Ringo Madlingozi, were selected for their cultural significance, linguistic depth, and use of repetition and narrative structure key in exploring cognitive development in second language (L2) acquisition. These songs illustrate how learners engage cognitively with familiar storytelling and repeated language patterns, supporting memory retention, contextual understanding, and emotional engagement. Thematic analysis guided by Clarke and Braun (2023) and a triangulated design integrating lyrics, literature, and dual coding and schema theories enhanced credibility. This study highlights culturally grounded, multimodal strategies as effective tools in L2 learning.

2.2. Presentation of Selected Case Studies

This study analyses two isiNguni language songs: *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo and *Ndiyagodola* by Ringo Madlingozi selected for their repetition, narrative structure, cultural references, and linguistic depth. These features support second language acquisition (SLA) by enhancing cognitive development, vocabulary retention, and contextual comprehension. The pedagogical rationale demonstrates how the songs engage learners both cognitively and culturally, distinguishing them from others in the genre. *Jerusalema* provides clear models of present tense in affirmative and negative forms, while *Ndiyagodola* illustrates the imperative mood in isiNguni languages, offering authentic and culturally grounded resources for teaching grammar through music.

Table 1

Presentation of the criteria used for selecting the two songs

Criterion	Description	Distinctive Feature
Linguistic Richness	Songs contain varied vocabulary and complex sentence structures.	Offers learners exposure to authentic isiNguni language use.
Repetitive Structures	Lyrics include recurring phrases and choruses.	Supports memory retention and cognitive reinforcement in L2 learning.
Cultural Resonance	Content reflects local traditions, values, and cultural themes.	Enhances learners' cultural identity and engagement.
Broad Familiarity	Widely known and popular among diverse age groups.	Emotional connection facilitates motivation and contextual understanding.

Source: researchers

3. Findings

3.1. A concise overview of Master KG persona

Master KG, born Kgaogelo Moagi on 31 January 1996 in Tzaneen, Limpopo, is a renowned South African musician, songwriter, and producer, best known for his global hit *Jerusalema* featuring Nomcebo Zikode. Celebrated for promoting African music and culture worldwide, he blends traditional Bolobedu house rhythms with contemporary electronic beats, creating a sound that is both innovative and culturally grounded. Following *Jerusalema's* viral success and global dance phenomenon, he continued with collaborations like *Shine Your Light* featuring Akon and David Guetta, achieving millions of streams. Based in Johannesburg, Master KG leverages his platform to foster African identity, cultural appreciation, and cross-cultural dialogue.

Jerusalema Lyrics by Master KG ft Nomcebo Zikode

IsiZulu Lyrics	English Translation
Jerusalema ikhaya lami Ngilondoloze Uhambe nami Zungangishiyi lana	Jerusalem, my home keep me safe Walk with me Please don't leave me here
Jerusalema ikhaya lami Ngilondoloze Uhambe nami Zungangishiyi lana	Jerusalem, my home Keep me safe Walk with me Please don't leave me here
Ndawo yami ayikho lana Mbuso wami awukho lana Ngilondoloze Zuhambe nami	My place is not here My kingdom is not here Keep me safe Please walk with me
Ndawo yami ayikho lana Mbuso wami awukho lana Ngilondoloze Zuhambe nami	My place is not here My kingdom is not here keep me safe Please walk with me
Ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze Zungangishiyi lana	Keep me safe, keep me safe, keep me safe Please don't leave me here
Ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze Zungangishiyi lana	Keep me safe, keep me safe, keep me safe Please don't leave me here
Ndawo yami ayikho lana Mbuso wami awukho lana Ngilondoloze Zuhambe nami	My place is not here My kingdom is not here Keep me safe Please walk with me
Ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze Zungangishiyi lana	Keep me safe, keep me safe, keep me safe Please don't leave me here
Ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze, ngilondoloze Zungangishiyi lana	Keep me safe, keep me safe, keep me safe Please don't leave me here

3.2. A concise overview of Ringo Mandlingo

Sindile Ringo Madlingozi, born on 12 December 1964 in Peddie, Eastern Cape, is a celebrated South African Afro-soul singer, songwriter, record producer, and former Member of Parliament for the Economic Freedom Fighters. He first gained national recognition in 1986 when his band Peto won the Shell Road to Fame competition, and later co-founded Gecko Moon, achieving success with the crossover hit *Green-Green*. His solo debut, *Vukani* (“Wake Up”), fused traditional isiXhosa rhythms with contemporary Afro-pop, establishing his distinctive “Ringo” sound. Over his career, Madlingozi has released numerous acclaimed albums, earning multiple South African Music and Kora Awards. Beyond music, he served in parliament, engaged in philanthropy supporting children and HIV/AIDS initiatives, and remains a vocal advocate for racial and social justice in South Africa.

Xhosa	English
Ingab'uphi we sthandwa sam?	Where is my beloved? I wonder where you are my beloved
Kuyabanda apha ekhaya	It's cold here at home
Zobuya nini oh dali wam?	When will you return, my dear?
Mmh ndiyagodola (ndiyagodola)	Mmh, I'm cold (I'm cold)
Eh ingubo ezininzi mama	Oh, so many blankets, mama
Oh azindincedi (we sthandwa sam)	Oh They don't help me (my beloved)
Awu mama (wo sthandwa sam)	Oh mama (my beloved)
Noba sendizifudumeza	Even when I warm myself
Oh akusebenzi (wo sthandwa sam)	It doesn't work (my beloved)
Ingab'uphi we sthandwa sam?	I wonder where you are my beloved?
Kuyabanda apha ekhaya	It's cold here at home
Uzobuya nini oh dali wam?	When will you return, oh my dear?
Mmh ndiyagodola (ndiyagodola)	Mmh, I'm cold (I'm cold)
Khawundixelele mama	Please tell me, mama
Hayi hayi hayi hayi bo	No, no, no, no
Awundikhumbuli na wena?	Don't you miss me?
Hayi hayi hayi hayi bo	No, no, no, no
Mna nd'khumbul' ingoma yethu yo yo	I miss our song, yo yo
Sofa silahlane mna nawe (ndiyagodola)	We will be separated by death, me and you (I'm cold)
Khawundibonise mama	Please show me, mama
Hayi hayi hayi hayi bo	No, no, no, no
Ndiyilahlephi na le ngoma	Where did I lose the song?

Xhosa	English
Hayi hayi hayi hayi bo	No, no, no, no
Ubusuku bude hayi ukutya akungeni	The night is long, and I can't eat
Sofa silahlane mna nawe (ndiyagodola)	We will be separated by death, me and you (I'm cold)

4. Discussion

The article aimed to examine how picture stories and repetition could enhance L2 acquisition in an African language context where two isiNguni language songs were used to contextualise the study. Themes that emerged from the findings are discussed next.

4.1. Cognitive Development through Repetition and Visuals

Scholars such as Alabi (2024) and Qasserras (2024) emphasise that songs, when carefully selected and appropriately utilised, are highly effective tools for language learning. The choice of music can make learning both enjoyable and memorable, requiring an awareness of genre and educational purpose. Songs like *Jerusalema* and *Ndiyagodola* feature repetitive clauses such as *ngilondoloze* (“keep me safe”) and *ndiyagodola* (“I’m cold”), which reinforce auditory memory and strengthen cognitive links. According to Dual Coding Theory, pairing verbal repetition with imagery improves encoding and retrieval, thereby enhancing comprehension and recall (Wooten & Cuevas, 2024). Asking students to create drawings inspired by verbs like *ukugodola* (“to be cold”) or *ukulondoloza* (“to keep safe”) increases language accessibility for both young and adult learners.

Visual narratives, including storyboards and animations, anchor meanings within familiar cultural contexts, particularly for abstract expressions. Visual aids—defined as sensory objects or images that initiate and support learning—make lessons more concrete, accurate, and engaging (Alabi, 2024). Scholars such as Baskota (2021) note that these tools stimulate interest and aid teacher explanations, using resources like charts, images, models, and tangible objects. Cognitive science further shows that music and language share hierarchical structures in brain processing, reinforcing the value of combining culturally relevant songs and visual aids to improve second language acquisition outcomes.

4.2. Linguistic and Cognitive Elements for Acquisition

Songs rich in formulaic expressions and emotive vocabulary provide ideal input for second language (L2) acquisition. Music naturally engages multiple brain regions involved in language processing, supporting pronunciation, grammar comprehension, and memory retention (Sadiqzade, 2024; Villatte et al., 2025). For instance, the repetition of phrases such as *ikhaya lami* (my home), *indawo yami* (my place), and *umbuso wami* (my kingdom) in *Jerusalema* highlights key grammatical patterns in isiNguni languages. Unlike English, where the possessive adjective precedes the noun, isiNguni languages position the noun before the possessive adjective a distinction that often challenges L2 learners. Additionally, possessive adjectives must agree with

noun class and number, as shown by the prefixes *l-ami*, *y-ami*, and *w-ami*, corresponding to noun classes five, nine, and three, respectively. Similarly, the isiXhosa song *Ndiyagodola* reinforces these rules with phrases such as *s'thandwa sam* (my love), *dali wam* (my darling), and *ingoma yethu* (our song), introducing further noun classes and illustrating singular nouns with plural possessive adjectives. These repeated linguistic patterns provide learners with consistent, contextualised exposure to complex grammatical structures, enhancing comprehension and memory retention.

Beyond possessive adjectives, the songs exemplify other grammatical features. The clause *ndiyagodola* (I am cold) demonstrates present indicative tense formation, while imperatives such as *ngilondoloze* (keep me safe) and *ndixelele* (tell me) show how subject pronouns attach to verb stems, with vowel changes signalling mood. Combining repetition, rhythm, and melody makes grammatical patterns accessible and memorable. Repetitive phrases like *zungangishiyi lana* ("please don't leave me here") align with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, supporting naturalistic learning. Multimodal approaches integrating music, rhythm, and visual stimuli reduce cognitive load, enhance retention, and foster inductive grammar learning, making these songs a culturally relevant and powerful tool for L2 acquisition (Villatte et al., 2025; Sadiqzade, 2024).

4.3. Cultural Relevance Enhances Engagement and Retention

Several scholars (Chen, Mohammadi, & Izadpanah, 2024; Yende, 2023) emphasise that incorporating culturally authentic songs into language instruction significantly enhances learner motivation, emotional engagement, and knowledge retention. According to Yende (2023), when students are encouraged to share their own cultural and musical backgrounds under guided facilitation, they develop a stronger sense of ownership over their learning journey. This approach transforms the classroom into a dynamic space where music functions not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a medium for self-expression and identity formation. Music becomes especially powerful when it reflects learners' lived experiences and emotions. For instance, isiNguni songs such as *Ndiyagodola* convey profound emotions of longing, depicting a home grown cold in the absence of a beloved and repeatedly questioning when they will return. Similarly, *Jerusalema* communicates yearning and the protection of one's home and loved ones, reinforcing themes of belonging and love. Despite differences in style and context, these songs share emotive narratives that resonate with learners' personal histories, fostering empathy and deepening their connection to the language (Yende, 2023).

The emotional resonance embedded in these songs supports vocabulary acquisition while aiding learners in internalizing cultural and linguistic nuances. Engaging with language through culturally relevant musical narratives promotes semantic depth, contextual understanding, and intercultural competence (Chen, Mohammadi, & Izadpanah, 2024). This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which highlights how social context and cultural tools such as music scaffold meaningful learning. Integrating culturally grounded musical content into L2 instruction thus makes learning more engaging, sustainable, and reflective of learners' real-

world identities, bridging linguistic development with cultural awareness (Yende, 2023).

4.4. *Pedagogical Benefits of Music and Visuals*

Music and visuals are powerful and versatile pedagogical tools in second language (L2) education, offering rich, multisensory experiences that support a wide range of learning styles. Songs in particular contribute significantly to the development of essential language skills. According to Kumar et al. (2022), music supports language acquisition not only through repeated exposure to vocabulary and sentence structures but also by enhancing listening comprehension, phonological awareness, and language association and assimilation skills. Importantly, songs create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment that reduces learner anxiety, making students more open to participating and experimenting with the language. Music can be integrated flexibly into various stages of the lesson for example, as warm-up activities, lesson transitions, or review segments to sustain learners' interest and engagement. Songs like *Jerusalema* serve as excellent resources for developing prosody, rhythm, pronunciation, and intonation. When paired with visual elements such as animations, illustrations, or video clips, learners are better able to contextualize the language, associate words with meanings, and remember key concepts.

Adams' (2024) concept of the spiral curriculum emphasizes the importance of revisiting and expanding upon prior knowledge in a structured manner. Music and visuals support this pedagogical approach by allowing for repeated exposure in varied, engaging forms. Furthermore, music lowers affective barriers to learning, promoting a positive emotional climate that encourages learner participation (Hendricks, Smith, & Stanuch, 2014). When teachers incorporate culturally embedded songs alongside visuals, they create inclusive, dynamic classrooms where students can connect cognitively, emotionally, and socially with the content.

4.5. *IsiNguni language songs and social cohesion*

The results of this article revealed that isiNguni language songs serve not only as linguistic resources but also as powerful cultural bridges that foster social cohesion within and beyond South African communities. Recent scholarship affirms that Zulu music, often characterised by lyrical content in isiZulu, plays a vital role in preserving linguistic heritage and transmitting cultural identity (Izu & Somlata, 2025; Yende, 2024). These songs operate as oral texts, serving purposes such as storytelling, historical reflection, social critique, and the articulation of collective values. Through the deliberate embedding of metaphors, idioms, and traditional proverbs, isiNguni musicians maintain the vitality and relevance of indigenous languages for younger generations, ensuring their intergenerational continuity in both formal and informal settings.

Songs like *Jerusalema* exemplify this phenomenon. Although the track has achieved global recognition, its roots remain firmly embedded in isiZulu language and spirituality. Its accessible melody, unifying dance, and linguistic authenticity have attracted both local and international audiences, stimulating cross-cultural curiosity and appreciation. Contemporary research

underscores that indigenous music functions as a vessel for communal memory and moral guidance, embodying the philosophy of *ubuntu* shared humanity and interconnectedness (Ajitoni, 2024). In educational contexts, integrating isiNguni songs into L2 acquisition curricula can promote intercultural understanding, challenge linguistic bias, and foster belonging. These contributions position indigenous music as a catalyst for inclusive, empathetic, and socially cohesive learning environments.

5. Conclusions

This article has explored the role of multimodal resources, particularly culturally relevant songs and picture stories, in enhancing second language (L2) acquisition among learners of isiNguni languages. The findings underscore the cognitive and pedagogical benefits of integrating Dual Coding Theory and Schema Theory into language education. Songs such as *Jerusalema* and *Ndiyagodola* are not merely artistic expressions but effective educational tools that engage both auditory and visual learning channels. Their combination of melody, rhythm, imagery, and linguistic repetition strengthens memory, promotes deeper comprehension, and fosters learner engagement. Music grounded in learners' cultural contexts contributes to more inclusive classrooms by bridging home and school languages, validating learners' identities, and improving academic outcomes. Evidence from this study indicates that exposure to language through familiar cultural formats, such as traditional music and visual storytelling, significantly enhances motivation, retention, and affective engagement (Ajitoni, 2024; Chizwina et al., 2025). Grounded in learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, song-based instruction supports the affective filter and input hypothesis, facilitating language acquisition while reflecting the principles of Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasises collective identity, social cohesion, and collaborative learning.

Furthermore, principles from Dual Coding and Schema Theory are evident as the interplay between sound, image, and memory strengthens cognitive pathways and supports deeper conceptual understanding in language processing (Ghafar, 2024; Howe, 2021). The findings align with contemporary research advocating for integrating indigenous languages into education to preserve linguistic identity and enhance academic performance (Diko & Celliers, 2024; Havrilova et al., 2022). This study demonstrates that combining music and visual narratives transforms L2 learning into a culturally enriching and cognitively stimulating process, offering a practical framework for curriculum designers to embed local culture into teaching practices while promoting holistic, learner-centred education (Chizwina et al., 2025). Pedagogically, learners' cognitive engagement is maximised when teaching leverages familiar cultural artefacts and multimodal inputs. The novelty lies in applying isiNguni songs with visual storytelling as structured L2 learning tools, largely absent in current South African research, with implications for promoting culturally responsive, inclusive, and holistic multilingual classrooms that foster confidence, motivation, and language competence.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers made the following recommendations: 1) Integrate culturally relevant music, such as isiNguni songs, into language learning to enhance learner engagement and comprehension. 2) Employ multimodal teaching strategies that combine audio (music), visual (storytelling/pictures), and kinaesthetic elements to accommodate diverse learning styles. 3) Provide training for teachers in the effective use of music and multimodal resources for language instruction. 4) Incorporate local languages and cultural expressions into the curriculum to promote linguistic diversity and cultural identity. 5) Develop learning materials that reflect learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

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