

Indigenous music and code-switching in South African basic education: Analysis of *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi*

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Abstract

This article explores the pedagogical potential of indigenous South African music in multilingual classrooms, focusing on *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete (2005) and *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka (1987), with particular relevance to Grade 4–6 learners in the Intermediate Phase. Grounded in Code-Switching Theory, the study examines how the alternation between isiZulu and English operates as a communicative and stylistic resource within musical texts. Through thematic and textual analysis, four key themes emerged: language use for comprehension, cultural identity and heritage, learner engagement and motivation, and ethical reflection and social commentary. The findings indicate that *Sponky Ponky* predominantly employs isiZulu with selective English insertions, while *Umqombothi* is largely performed in English with recurring isiZulu refrains, demonstrating deliberate and context-specific code-switching practices that reflect South Africa's multilingual reality. However, the study also shows that these linguistic patterns do not automatically ensure comprehension or learning in Grade 4–6 classrooms, as meaning-making depends on teacher mediation, guided interpretation, and structured classroom activities that help learners unpack both linguistic and cultural content. In this phase, learners are still developing foundational literacy and interpretive skills, making scaffolding essential for meaningful engagement with the songs. The study therefore concludes that indigenous music with structured code-switching can serve as a valuable pedagogical resource when carefully integrated into teaching practice. Its effectiveness lies not in the songs alone, but in how educators use them to support language development, cultural understanding, and critical thinking within curriculum-aligned, learner-centered instruction in South African classrooms. It further highlights the importance of contextual appropriateness, ensuring that materials are aligned with learners' developmental stage and linguistic proficiency.

Keywords: code-switching, cultural pedagogy, Grade 4–6 classrooms, indigenous music, multilingual education

1. Introduction

It is prudent to foreground this article by acknowledging that Indigenous African music has long functioned as a vehicle for cultural expression, storytelling, and social commentary. As Mbaegbu (2015, p. 180) explains,

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African music serves multiple societal functions, including social control, social integration, information dissemination, inspiration, entertainment, moral instruction, and communal cohesion. It is also deeply embedded in spiritual life, often invoking themes of gratitude, repentance, and guidance for ethical living. In this sense, African music is not merely aesthetic but constitutes a living archive of cultural knowledge and identity, making it possible to trace African worldviews across generations and geographies (Mbaegbu, 2015; Qader & Qureshi, 2025). Qader and Qureshi (2025, p. 2) further emphasise that African music has evolved beyond entertainment into a dynamic cultural and political force that embodies resistance, identity formation, and social transformation, grounded in oral traditions and communal participation. These foundational perspectives position African music as both a cultural repository and an active agent of social meaning-making.

Within the South African context, indigenous music continues to play a significant role in expressing social realities, even in post-apartheid society. Chisa (2018) notes that music remains a key channel through which communities articulate lived experiences, social struggles, and collective aspirations. It functions as a bridge between past and present, preserving heritage while responding to contemporary realities. Similarly, Yende and Dhlamini (2025) argue that indigenous music contributes to the transmission of knowledge systems, moral values, and communal identity, reinforcing its relevance in both cultural and educational spaces. Importantly, participatory musical traditions in African societies foster shared meaning-making, where listeners and performers co-construct social understanding through rhythm, language, and performance (Izu, 2024; Qader & Qureshi, 2025).

In educational discourse, there has been growing recognition of the pedagogical value of indigenous music, particularly in multilingual learning environments. Studies by Izu and Somlata (2025) and Yende and Dhlamini (2025) highlight that music can support engagement, comprehension, and cultural awareness when integrated into teaching practices. In South Africa, where linguistic diversity is a defining characteristic of classrooms, music often reflects everyday communicative practices where isiZulu, English, and other languages coexist. One of the key linguistic features observed in such musical texts is code-switching, which involves alternating between languages within a single communicative event (Dlamini-Myeni & Sibiya, 2021). This linguistic practice is widely recognised in multilingual communities as a natural communicative strategy that reflects identity, social positioning, and contextual meaning-making.

Code-switching in music thus mirrors broader sociolinguistic realities in South Africa, where learners frequently navigate multiple linguistic repertoires. Integrating indigenous music into teaching aligns with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which emphasises multilingual literacy, oral communication, and cultural awareness. Within this framework, songs such as *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, and *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka, become particularly relevant. These songs demonstrate how code-switching can function as a stylistic and communicative resource that enhances accessibility, emotional expression, and cultural resonance across linguistic communities. As Izu and Somlata

(2025, p. 83) observe, code-switching is a prevalent linguistic phenomenon in multilingual societies and serves as a key medium of linguistic and cultural expression in South African contexts where English coexists with indigenous languages.

Despite the growing body of literature on African music and education, several gaps remain. Firstly, while existing research has extensively explored music's role in cultural identity, resistance, and historical memory, limited attention has been given to its specific pedagogical application within contemporary multilingual classrooms. In particular, there is insufficient empirical focus on how indigenous music can be systematically used to support learning processes in structured classroom environments (Sun & Sornyai, 2025; Yende & Dhlamini, 2025). Secondly, much of the literature focuses on musical performance, composition, or socio-political significance, while the relationship between linguistic practices in songs particularly code-switching and classroom learning remains underexplored. This gap is significant because it limits understanding of how learners might engage with linguistic diversity through musical texts in educational contexts.

Thirdly, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks that guide educators on how indigenous music can be effectively integrated into teaching and learning processes in ways that go beyond cultural appreciation to include cognitive, linguistic, and ethical development. While some studies acknowledge the educational potential of music, fewer provide structured approaches for its pedagogical implementation, particularly in relation to multilingual literacy development and curriculum alignment. This study is therefore motivated by the need to address these gaps by focusing specifically on how code-switching in indigenous music can be understood and potentially applied within educational contexts.

This research is grounded in the view that indigenous music is not only culturally significant but also pedagogically valuable when examined through its linguistic features. By analysing *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi*, the study explores how code-switching operates as a communicative strategy that reflects South African sociolinguistic realities. In doing so, it seeks to provide insights into how such musical texts can be interpreted and mediated within learning environments to enhance linguistic awareness, cultural understanding, and learner engagement.

Furthermore, there is a growing need to theorise the educational relevance of indigenous music in ways that align with national curriculum goals. CAPS emphasises the development of multilingual competence, critical thinking, and cultural literacy, all of which can be supported through meaningful engagement with music that reflects learners' lived linguistic environments. Within this context, indigenous music offers opportunities to connect formal curriculum content with familiar cultural expressions, thereby enhancing relevance and accessibility.

The study also acknowledges the broader role of indigenous music as a medium of empowerment and social continuity. Historically, African music has functioned as a tool for resistance, identity formation, and collective expression, and these functions remain relevant in contemporary society. By positioning music as both a cultural artifact and a communicative resource,

this research contributes to ongoing discussions on culturally responsive pedagogy, decolonised education, and inclusive teaching practices that recognise linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a barrier.

In conclusion, indigenous African music remains an underutilised yet highly significant resource within educational contexts. While its cultural and historical importance is well documented, its pedagogical potential particularly through the lens of code-switching requires further scholarly attention. This study addresses this gap by examining how selected songs reflect linguistic practices that are relevant to multilingual education in South Africa. It further highlights the need for careful contextualisation when considering how such musical texts can be used in classrooms. Ultimately, the study reinforces the importance of integrating culturally grounded materials into education in ways that support linguistic development, cultural awareness, and meaningful learner engagement.

1.1. Research questions

For this study, the researchers developed four primary research questions aimed at examining the role of indigenous music and code-switching in South African basic education. The focus is on analysing how *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, and *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka, may be pedagogically mediated to support language learning, cultural identity, and learner engagement in multilingual classroom contexts.

The research questions were designed to explore the ways in which indigenous music can:

1. facilitate comprehension and learning through the use of code-switching between isiZulu and English within selected songs,
2. promote cultural awareness and foster learners' engagement with African musical and linguistic heritage,
3. enhance learner participation, engagement, and motivation, particularly in intermediate and senior phase classrooms (Grades 4–9),
4. serve as a medium for social commentary, ethical reflection, and the transmission of communal values when appropriately contextualised by the teacher,
5. support the comprehension in multilingual classrooms for learners through code-switching between isiZulu and English in selected songs,
6. preserve cultural identity and indigenous heritage within South African classroom discussions for learners via selected songs,
7. enhance learner participation, engagement, and motivation during classroom teaching in Grades 4–9 settings.
8. How do *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi* communicate social commentary and communal values through teacher-mediated classroom discussion activities?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide context-specific insights into the pedagogical potential of indigenous music. It further aims to demonstrate how such musical texts, when carefully mediated, can support multilingual literacy and culturally responsive teaching practices within clearly defined South African classroom settings.

1.2. Theoretical framework

This article is underpinned by Code-switching Theory, a well-established sociolinguistic framework that examines the systematic alternation between two or more languages within a single discourse or communicative event. Perhaps, it is prudent to mention that Stell (2019, p.157), citing Weinreich (1953), writes that the post-war era saw the beginning of special attention to language alternation in speech. Vogt first the term "code-switching" in 1954, and it has since grown into a discipline that spans structural linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. The lines separating code-switching proper from language variation in general have become increasingly blurred.

Blom and Gumperz (1972) and Gumperz (1982) are known as foundational scholars who conceptualised code-switching as a contextualisation cue that signals social meaning in interaction, while Carol Myers-Scotton (1993) advances the Matrix Language Frame Model, explaining how one dominant language structures utterances while elements of another are embedded within it. Shana Poplack (2001, p. 2062) demonstrates that:

Code-switching refers to the mixing, by bilinguals (or multilinguals), of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of interlocutor or topic. Such mixing may take place at any level of linguistic structure, but its occurrence within the confines of a single sentence, constituent, or even word, has attracted most linguistic attention.

Similarly, Kipchoge (2024, p. 42) writes that:

Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation, is a linguistic phenomenon observed in multilingual communities worldwide. It serves various communicative functions, such as signaling group identity, accommodating listeners, and filling lexical gaps. The intricacies of code-switching practices vary across different countries, reflecting the unique sociolinguistic landscapes of each region.

In multilingual societies such as South Africa, code-switching is widely recognised as a natural communicative strategy used to negotiate meaning, identity, and social relationships. Within this study, Code-switching Theory provides a relevant analytical lens for examining how *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, and *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka, strategically alternate between isiZulu and English.

This theoretical orientation aligns strongly with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), particularly within the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6), where emphasis is placed on developing learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills across languages. In this phase, learners are often introduced to English as a First Additional Language while maintaining proficiency in their Home Language, creating a pedagogical space where code-switching naturally supports comprehension and meaning-making.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study as it enables an understanding of how linguistic alternation in these songs functions as a communicative and stylistic resource that enhances audience accessibility, conveys cultural meaning, and reflects sociolinguistic realities familiar to many learners. Furthermore, it provides a framework for interpreting how such code-switching practices can be pedagogically mediated in Grade 4–6 classrooms to support comprehension, cultural awareness, and learner engagement. Through guided instruction, teachers can use these songs to scaffold understanding, bridge linguistic gaps, and connect classroom content with learners' lived experiences, thereby fostering inclusive and contextually responsive teaching practices.

2. Methodology

In this article, a qualitative research methodology was employed, with textual analysis used to examine how selected indigenous songs can play an essential role in the classroom through code-switching practices. Qualitative research was considered appropriate for this study because it allows for in-depth interpretation of meaning, context, and sociocultural significance embedded in texts. The focus was not on measuring frequency or impact quantitatively, but on understanding how language use in indigenous music functions pedagogically within multilingual educational settings.

Textual analysis was selected as the primary analytical approach because it enables the examination of language as a socially and culturally situated practice. As Fürsich (2009, p. 240) explains:

Textual analysis is generally a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text. Text is understood as a complex set of discursive strategies that is situated in a special cultural context.

Based on this statement, textual analysis allows the researcher to move beyond surface meanings of song lyrics to interrogate the ideological, cultural, and linguistic assumptions embedded within them. This approach is particularly relevant for indigenous music, where language, identity, and social commentary are often interwoven through metaphor, idiomatic expressions, and code-switching. Furthermore, Baxter (2020, p. 239) notes that:

Textual analysis is a broad category of interpretive qualitative methods involving attaching conceptual categories to text; however, not all research involving text can be appropriately labeled textual analysis. Texts are combinations of words, images, and symbols that are rooted in, and signify, meaning in social life. Texts are imbued with the social structures and social process in which they are situated in time and space—they may create, sustain, or subvert phenomena in the social world.

It is evident that textual analysis is well suited to examining song lyrics as cultural texts that both reflect and shape social realities. In this study, songs are treated as texts that embody linguistic practices, cultural identities, and educational possibilities within the South African context.

2.1 Data Collection and Processing

The data for this study consisted of the lyrics of two selected indigenous songs, *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, as well as *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka. These songs were purposively selected due to their prominent use of code-switching between isiZulu and English. In line with the data collection, this method focuses on in-depth analysis of language use, emphasising context and seeking to understand underlying meanings and social dynamics of discourse through methods like discourse analysis and ethnography (Krzyżanowski, 2011). The lyrics were transcribed where necessary and read repeatedly to ensure familiarity and accuracy prior to analysis.

2.2 Rationale for Song Selection

The selection of *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, alongside *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka, is informed by their explicit use of code-switching between isiZulu and English as a compositional strategy. These songs are particularly relevant for Intermediate Phase learners (Grades 4–6) in isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language classrooms, where learners are developing proficiency across both languages. The rationale for their selection is not based on assumed universal cultural familiarity, but rather on their potential to be pedagogically mediated within specific classroom contexts. In *Sponky Ponky*, the predominance of isiZulu, interspersed with English elements, reflects contrasting rural and urban courtship practices, which may resonate differently with learners depending on their socio-cultural backgrounds. For instance, references such as “abafana abasakwazi ukushela intombi” and “aphela amasiko ethu” foreground tensions between traditional values and contemporary urban lifestyles, requiring contextual explanation by the teacher. In contrast, *Umqombothi* employs primarily English with a recurring isiZulu refrain (“We Madlamini, uph’umqombothi”), utilising repetition and call-and-response structures that support comprehension and participation. While both songs include elements of metaphor, repetition, and social commentary, these are unevenly distributed across languages and are not inherently accessible without instructional support. Therefore, their pedagogical value lies in how teachers facilitate meaning-making, using code-switching as a bridge to support language development, cultural understanding, and learner engagement within clearly defined multilingual classroom settings.

2.3 Instruments

In qualitative textual research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of analysis. Analytical tools included close reading, annotation of lyrics, and the identification of recurring linguistic patterns, metaphors, and instances of code-switching. These tools enabled systematic engagement with the data while remaining sensitive to context and meaning.

2.4 Data Analysis

Maguire and Delahunt (2017, p. 3351) note that “*data analysis is central to credible qualitative research.*” In this study, data analysis was guided by

textual and thematic analysis techniques, consistent with qualitative research principles. The analysis focused exclusively on the lyrics and idiomatic or metaphorical language of the selected songs, deliberately excluding discussion of musical composition or performance. Themes related to language use, cultural identity, pedagogical relevance, and meaning-making were identified, coded, and interpreted within the framework of Translanguaging Theory.

Subheadings were selected to reflect the needs of the study and to ensure methodological clarity. Under the subheading of data collection and processing, the stages of data collection were detailed, the analytical procedures were explained, and the tools and conventions of analysis were clearly articulated. This approach enhances transparency, rigour, and credibility in line with established qualitative research standards.

2.5 Ethics standard

In this study, it should be mentioned that in this articles, no human participants were involved, as the analysis focused exclusively on textual data.

3. Findings

3.1 A concise overview of Jabu Khanyile and Bayete persona

Jabu Khanyile (1957–2006) was a pioneering South African musician whose powerful voice and Afrocentric vision positioned him as a symbol of African unity and cultural pride. Born in Soweto, Khanyile's early musical influences were shaped by isicathamiya, reggae, and soul traditions, largely inspired by his father, a mineworker who performed a cappella, and his brother, who played in a reggae and soul band. Following the death of his mother, Khanyile left school at the age of fourteen to support his family, subsequently immersing himself in music. He began his career with local groups such as The Daffodils and later joined The Editions as a drummer before becoming their lead vocalist.

In 1977, he joined The Movers, and by 1984 became a member of Bayete, a band renowned for blending Afro-jazz and reggae into a distinctive African sound. After the group disbanded in 1992, Khanyile pursued a solo career, releasing music under the name Jabu Khanyile & Bayete, which further solidified his reputation both locally and internationally. His global recognition grew following his performance at a Royal Gala in honour of Nelson Mandela in 1996. Khanyile's contributions to African music were widely acknowledged, earning him Kora Awards in 1996 and 2000. He collaborated with prominent artists such as Youssou N'Dour, Angélique Kidjo, and Papa Wemba. Known for performing in traditional Zulu regalia and carrying a symbolic fly-whisk, he used music as a vehicle for Pan-Africanism, cultural affirmation, and social transformation, leaving a lasting legacy in African music.

3.2 Brief analysis of Sponky ponky lyrics

Table 1 presents selected excerpts from *Sponky Ponky* alongside their English translations to illustrate how code-switching between isiZulu and English functions as a meaning-making strategy in the song. The table

demonstrates how Jabu Khanyile and Bayete deliberately alternates between isiZulu and English to convey social commentary, cultural critique, and emotional expression within a multilingual musical framework.

isiZulu is predominantly used to articulate concerns about changing social values, shifting courtship practices, and the perceived erosion of ubuntu, while the limited English expressions appearing in only a few lines across the song foreground themes of intimacy, affection, and contemporary urban discourse. This uneven distribution of languages highlights isiZulu as the primary communicative medium, with English functioning as a supplementary stylistic and expressive resource.

By juxtaposing the original isiZulu lyrics with their English translations, the table demonstrates how linguistic alternation can support meaning-making when appropriately mediated through teaching, while also reinforcing cultural identity and reflecting selected multilingual practices found in South African contexts. However, such linguistic accessibility is not automatic and depends on contextual interpretation within specific classroom settings, particularly in Grade 4–6 learning environments where learners may have varying levels of proficiency in either language.

This analysis supports the view that code-switching in indigenous music operates as a deliberate communicative and stylistic strategy rather than a linguistic deficit, making *Sponky Ponky* a potentially valuable pedagogical resource for supporting language development, cultural understanding, and learner engagement in South African basic education.

Original Text (isiZulu / Code-switched lyric)	English Translation / Meaning
Ma-yo, ma-y-o, mayo! Sweetie lam	My dear, my love
Sponky ponky love, a lover that you can't resist	A playful, irresistible kind of love
Kuthe ngifik' eGoli ngabon' isimanga	When I arrived in Johannesburg, I saw something surprising
Abafana abasakwazi ukushel' intombi	Young men no longer know how to court a woman properly
Sebedla ngamabala okwengwe idla ngamabala	They rely on material displays to court women
Um' ungenamoto angeke uyithole intombi	Without a car, you will not get a girlfriend
Umungenamali angeke ik'qome intombi	Without money, you will not get a woman
Laf' elaMthaniya aphela amasiko oluntu	The land of Mthaniya has lost its traditions and cultural practices
Awubheke izingane zethu azikwazi nokushikila lokhu	Look at our children; they cannot even dance properly
Ukuqhenya, ukuqhosha	Pride and arrogance
Iziqhenye ngobuntombi bayo	She boasts about her virginity
Usuceli number phone	You just ask for a phone number

Yakunik' us'uqomile njalo	If she gives it, it means she has accepted a relationship
Wong'biza my fohloza, ung'biza uthululu	Call me my sweetheart; call me my beloved
Ung'thande baba wami ebuhleni nasebubini	Love me in both good and bad times
I think the word beauty it's never enough	English expression of emotional inadequacy
I think the word sweetie is never sweet enough	English expression intensifying affection
I think that lovie is not loving enough	English expression intensifying affection
Aphela amasiko oluntu, kwaphela ubuntu bethu	Our traditions are fading; our humanity is disappearing
Sweetie lami	My sweetheart
Ung'thande... ebuhleni nasebubini	Love me in good and bad times

Sponky Ponky exemplifies indigenous music that employs deliberate code-switching between isiZulu and English to convey social commentary, emotional meaning, and cultural critique. The isiZulu sections primarily foreground concerns about changing social values, courtship practices (*ukushela*), and the erosion of ubuntu, while English expressions are used sparingly to emphasise intimacy, affection, and contemporary urban romantic discourse. This linguistic distribution highlights a clear functional separation between the two languages rather than direct equivalence, as the English verses do not translate or explain the isiZulu cultural references, nor do the isiZulu sections clarify the English expressions. Instead, the song reflects sociolinguistic tension between rural/traditional and urban/modern value systems in South African society (Izu and Somlata, 2025; Yende & Dhlamini, 2025).

From a pedagogical perspective, the song's value does not lie in automatic comprehension through language mixing, but in teacher-mediated instruction where learners are guided to interpret key isiZulu cultural concepts such as *ukushela*, *ukushikila*, and *ubuntombi*. In Grade 4–6 classrooms, particularly within isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language settings, the song can support listening and discussion activities when scaffolded appropriately. Its repetitive structure, rhythmic patterns, and familiar lexical items can enhance learner engagement and oral participation. However, its effectiveness in supporting comprehension depends entirely on structured pedagogical mediation aligned with CAPS objectives for multilingual literacy, cultural awareness, and oral communication skills in South African basic education.

3.3 A concise overview of Yvonne Chaka Chaka persona

Yvonne Chaka Chaka, born Yvonne Machaka in Soweto in 1965, is a celebrated South African singer, songwriter, entrepreneur, and humanitarian known as the “Princess of Africa.” Her music career began in 1984, blending

pop and traditional African sounds with hits like Umqombothi, I Cry for Freedom, and Sangoma, earning international acclaim. Beyond music, she is a passionate advocate for health, education, women’s rights, and HIV/AIDS awareness, founding the Princess of Africa Foundation to support communities across Africa. Chaka Chaka has received numerous awards, including the World Economic Forum’s Crystal Award, and remains a global icon for humanitarianism, cultural pride, and social activism.

3.4 Brief analysis of Umqombothi lyrics

The song *Umqombothi* demonstrates the strategic use of code-switching between isiZulu and English to convey social meaning, communal identity, and cultural pride. The lyrics open with men calling out to MaDlamini, not in romantic pursuit, but requesting traditional African beer after work, positioning *umqombothi* as a symbol of unity and social cohesion (Aiseng, 2022; Chisa, 2018). The interaction is structured through distinct speaker-based code-switching: MaDlamini predominantly sings in English, while the men respond exclusively in isiZulu. The men begin with “We MaDlamini uph’umqombothi?” meaning “Hey MaDlamini, where is the beer?”, while MaDlamini responds in English: “I work hard every day to make my beer.” Before she completes her line, the men repeatedly interject with “Umqombothi,” reinforcing emphasis through isiZulu repetition. This pattern continues throughout the song, showing a clear division of linguistic roles.

Importantly, this is not translanguaging but structured code-switching between interlocutors, where meaning is co-constructed across two languages without shared linguistic mixing within individual utterances. MaDlamini occasionally inserts isiZulu phrases such as “nawu, madoda” (“here it is, men”) and “Wozani, ngithi wozani kwaMaDlamini” (“Come, come to MaDlamini’s place”), but her dominant language remains English, while the men consistently use isiZulu.

The chorus alternates predictably between isiZulu and English, enhancing rhythm, participation, and emotional resonance (Dlamini-Myeni & Sibiya, 2021; Izu & Somlata, 2025). IsiZulu expressions such as *uph’umqombothi* and *wozani* (“come”) function as communal calls rather than idiomatic metaphors. Collectively, the song constructs a space of cultural celebration where *umqombothi* symbolises ubuntu, sharing, and togetherness, offering valuable pedagogical material for exploring identity and language use in South African classrooms.

Original Text	English Translation / Meaning
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph’umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph’umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph’umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph’umqombothi	Where is the beer

I work hard every day	
To make my beer	
(Umqombothi)	(African traditional beer)
Wake up early every morning	
To please my people with African beer	
(Umqombothi)	(African traditional beer)
I make sure the fire burns	I make sure the fire burns
To make my beer	To make my beer
(Umqombothi)	(African traditional beer)
My special beer Umqombothi	My special beer Umqombothi
(Umqombothi)	(African traditional beer)
Is African beer	Is African beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (Magic beer)	Hey MaDlamini (Magic beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (African beer)	Hey MaDlamini (African beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
I work hard to make them happy	I work hard to make them happy
Every weekend (Umqombothi)	Every weekend (African traditional beer)
Makes them party to the rhythm	Makes them party to the rhythm
Makes them dance, this magic beer (Umqombothi)	Makes them dance, this magic beer (African traditional beer)
I wanna make you happy (Umqombothi)	(African traditional beer)
I wanna make you smile (Umqombothi)	(African traditional beer)
I wanna make you dance (Umqombothi), dance	I wanna make you dance (African traditional beer), dance
I'll make sure there's a party	I'll make sure there's a party
Where they drink my special beer	Where they drink my special beer
Umqombothi is magic beer	Umqombothi is magic beer
Umqombothi is African beer	Umqombothi is African beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (magic beer)	Hey MaDlamini (magic beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (African beer)	Hey MaDlamini (African beer)

Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (Magic beer)	Hey MaDlamini (Magic beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (African beer)	Hey MaDlamini (African beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini	Hey MaDlamini
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
Wozani ka Madlamini	Come all of you of Madlamini
Wozani ngithi wozani	Come, I say come
Wozani ka Madlamini	Come all of you of Madlamini
Come on I wanna make you happy	Come on I wanna make you happy
I wanna make you smile lets boogie together	I wanna make you smile lets boogie together
Umqombothi (Umqombothi)	African traditional beer (African traditional beer)
I work hard every day	I work hard every day
To please my people with African beer	To please my people with African beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (magic beer)	Hey MaDlamini (magic beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (African beer)	Hey MaDlamini (African beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (Magic beer)	Hey MaDlamini (Magic beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)

Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (African beer)	Hey MaDlamini (African beer)
Uph'umqombothi	Where is the beer
We Madlamini (Everybody)	Hey MaDlamini (Everybody)
Uph'umqombothi (Come and drink my)	Where is the beer (Come and drink my)
We Madlamini (Magic beer)	Hey MaDlamini (Magic beer)

3.5 Themes emerged from the research questions

The analysis of *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi* generated four key themes derived from the research questions: code-switching as a linguistic resource, cultural identity and heritage, teacher-mediated learner engagement in Grade 4–6 classrooms, and ethical reflection and social commentary. These themes are based on observable patterns of structured code-switching between isiZulu and English in the two songs, rather than assumptions of automatic pedagogical outcomes embedded in the lyrics. The first theme shows how the songs alternate between isiZulu and English in speaker-specific and verse-based patterns to construct meaning.

The second theme highlights representations of African cultural values such as ubuntu, communal interaction, and shifting social practices. The third theme emphasises that learner engagement is not inherent in the songs but emerges through teacher scaffolding and contextual classroom mediation. The fourth theme reflects the songs' engagement with social critique, particularly changing courtship norms and moral values. Overall, the themes demonstrate how code-switching operates as a communicative strategy that can be purposefully utilised in multilingual teaching contexts within South African basic education.

Theme	Sponky Ponky	Umqombothi
1. Code-switching for Learning and Comprehension	The song demonstrates structured code-switching between isiZulu (dominant in verses) and English (limited use in selected phrases). However, the English and isiZulu sections are not direct translations of each other; instead, they carry different semantic and cultural meanings. English phrases such as "My oh, my oh, my oh! Sweetie lami" provide emotional emphasis, while isiZulu verses	The song shows speaker-based code-switching, where MaDlamini predominantly uses English for narrative exposition ("I work hard every day to make my beer"), while the male chorus responds in isiZulu ("We MaDlamini," "Uph'umqombothi"). Meaning is constructed through interaction rather than linguistic equivalence, requiring teacher mediation for comprehension in Grade 4–6 classrooms (Izu & Somlata, 2025; García, 2014).

	communicate social critique around courtship and changing values (Chihobo & Makalela, 2025; Wei, 2018; Dlamini-Myeni & Sibiya, 2021; Yende & Dhlamini, 2025).	
2. Cultural Identity and Heritage	The isiZulu verses foreground shifting courtship practices, urban-rural cultural contrasts, and the erosion of traditional norms, particularly in urban spaces like Johannesburg. Rather than simply reinforcing identity, the song also critiques cultural transformation and materialism in contemporary society (Aiseng, 2022; Mbaegbu, 2015).	The song reflects African communal practices around <i>umqombothi</i> as a cultural product of labour and social gathering. However, its representation of gendered labour and tradition requires historical contextualisation, particularly in post-1994 South Africa, where women’s roles have diversified beyond traditional expectations (A23.1; Chisa, 2018; Izu, 2024).
3. Learner Engagement and Motivation	Repetition, rhythm, and alternating languages create auditory engagement, but meaningful participation depends on teacher scaffolding rather than inherent accessibility (Velasco & García, 2014; McKinney & Tyler, 2024).	Call-and-response structures such as “Wozani kwa MaDlamini” encourage participation, but are most effective in guided classroom contexts rather than automatically in mother tongue settings, especially where linguistic complexity is low (Qader & Qureshi, 2025; Sun & Sornyai, 2025).
4. Ethical Reflection and Social Commentary	The song critiques materialism, shifting social norms, and declining cultural values in courtship practices, prompting reflection on morality and identity (Yende & Dhlamini, 2025; Izu & Somlata, 2025).	The song symbolises communal labour and social gathering around beer production, but this representation reflects a historically situated gendered division of labour that requires critical classroom discussion rather than uncritical acceptance (Chisa, 2018; Aiseng, 2022).

3.6 Code-switching for Learning and Comprehension

Code-switching for learning and comprehension is a key feature in multilingual communication and is widely recognised as a pedagogically relevant linguistic practice in South African contexts (Gardner-Chloros, 2014; Omoniyi, 2013). It refers to the systematic alternation between languages to achieve communicative goals, such as clarification, emphasis, or social meaning-making. In Jabu Khanyile and Bayete's *Sponky Ponky*, code-switching is evident in the alternation between isiZulu and English, although the two languages do not function as direct translations of one another. Instead, isiZulu is primarily used for cultural critique and social commentary, while English is used for emotional expression and urban romantic discourse. For example, the chorus "May oh, mayo oh, may oh! Sweetie lam Sponky Ponky love, a lover that you can't resist" is largely in English, while verses such as "Ngithe ngaifik eGoli ngabon isimanga..." are in isiZulu, reflecting distinct communicative functions rather than linguistic equivalence.

Similarly, in *Umqombothi*, code-switching occurs through speaker-based linguistic distribution. MaDlamini predominantly uses English to narrate the brewing process ("I work hard, every day, to make my beer"), while the male chorus responds in isiZulu ("We MaDlamini, Uph'umqombothi"). This interactional structure reflects shared multilingual competence among speakers rather than linguistic blending. However, meaning-making is not automatic or inherently accessible across languages; instead, comprehension depends on listeners' prior knowledge of both isiZulu and English as separate linguistic systems. Therefore, the songs do not demonstrate one language facilitating understanding of the other, but rather show parallel communicative roles performed by each language within the same discourse (Izu & Somlata, 2025; Chihobo & Makalela, 2025).

In South African Grade 4–6 classrooms, particularly among isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language learners, these songs can be used as culturally relevant teaching resources when supported by explicit teacher mediation. Learners may already possess varying levels of proficiency in isiZulu, English, or both, depending on regional and socio-economic contexts. Code-switching in these songs can therefore be used to prompt discussion, vocabulary development, and oral language practice, but only when teachers actively scaffold meaning. As Kipchoge (2024, p.44) notes: "*In educational settings, code-switching can be a valuable pedagogical tool. Teachers in bilingual or multilingual classrooms often use code-switching to facilitate understanding and engagement among students. This practice allows them to bridge linguistic gaps and make learning more accessible.*" In this way, the pedagogical value of *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi* lies not in automatic comprehension, but in their potential to be mediated within structured classroom environments that reflect South Africa's multilingual education reality (Dlamini-Myeni & Sibiyi, 2021; Wei, 2018).

3.7 Cultural Identity and Heritage

Music in South Africa functions as a repository of cultural memory and identity, with indigenous songs often reinforcing social norms, values, and communal heritage. In Grade 4–6 South African classrooms, particularly within isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language

contexts, songs such as *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, as well as *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka, can be used as culturally responsive teaching resources when carefully mediated by the teacher. *Sponky Ponky* blends isiZulu and English to narrate urban experiences in Johannesburg, reflecting tensions between traditional courtship practices and contemporary materialistic values (Aiseng, 2022; Yende & Dlamini, 2025). In this context, isiZulu verses such as those addressing *ukushela* (courtship) and changing social norms provide opportunities for learners to engage with indigenous cultural knowledge, while English expressions introduce contemporary urban discourse. In classroom practice, this allows learners to explore how language reflects social change rather than assuming that meaning is automatically accessible across languages.

Similarly, *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka represents African communal life through references to beer brewing as a shared cultural practice associated with ubuntu and togetherness (Chisa, 2018; Izu, 2024). The isiZulu chorus, “We MaDlamini, Uph’umqombothi,” functions as a collective call that can be used in Grade 4–6 classrooms to encourage oral participation, repetition, and listening skills, while English verses describe the brewing process and social enjoyment of the drink. In a structured lesson, teachers may use these contrasting linguistic elements to guide learners in identifying how different languages serve different communicative purposes within the same text. However, comprehension is not automatic; it depends on teacher explanation, scaffolding, and learners’ prior exposure to both isiZulu and English in their respective school contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, these songs allow Grade 4–6 learners to develop early multilingual awareness by observing how isiZulu and English function side by side in authentic cultural texts. Teachers can use guided questioning, vocabulary unpacking, and group discussion to help learners interpret meaning, particularly in relation to cultural practices such as courtship in *Sponky Ponky* and communal labour in *Umqombothi*. This aligns with CAPS expectations for language development, oral communication, and cultural understanding in the Intermediate Phase. Importantly, these songs also open space for learners to critically reflect on whether cultural practices remain static or evolve over time, especially in urban versus rural contexts. In this way, indigenous music becomes a meaningful classroom resource for developing language skills, cultural awareness, and critical thinking in South African primary education (Mbaegbu, 2015; Aiseng, 2022).

3.8 Learner Engagement and Motivation

Learner engagement and motivation are significantly enhanced when music is used as a participatory and interactive tool in Grade 4–6 South African classrooms, particularly within isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language settings. *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete illustrates how structured code-switching between isiZulu and English can support classroom engagement when mediated by the teacher. The song

uses repetition and rhythm to sustain attention; however, it is important to distinguish between its linguistic layers. The English chorus, “My oh, my oh, my oh! Sweetie lam Sponky Ponky love,” introduces a playful and emotionally expressive tone, while the isiZulu verses are more reflective and socially critical, addressing urbanisation, changing courtship practices, and moral concerns. Therefore, rather than being uniformly playful, the song alternates between affective registers, which teachers can use to guide learners in identifying tone, meaning, and cultural commentary (Velasco & García, 2014).

In classroom practice, this contrast becomes a valuable teaching resource for Grades 4–6 learners, who are developing both linguistic awareness and critical thinking skills. Teachers can use the isiZulu sections to prompt discussion on cultural concepts such as *ukushela* (courtship) and changing social values, while the English sections can be used to explore emotional expression and contemporary urban discourse. This guided interpretation is essential, as comprehension is not automatic and depends on structured scaffolding, particularly in multilingual classrooms where learners have varying levels of proficiency in isiZulu and English. Through such mediation, learners actively engage in meaning-making rather than passively receiving information.

Similarly, *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka employs a call-and-response structure that is highly suitable for Grade 4–6 learners. The repeated chorus “We MaDlamini, Uph’umqombothi” encourages oral participation, group singing, and rhythmic response, making the classroom experience interactive and embodied. This structure supports memory retention, listening skills, and confidence in language use, particularly when learners are encouraged to repeat, respond, and perform in pairs or groups (Qader & Qureshi, 2025; Sun & Sornyai, 2025). However, its pedagogical effectiveness depends on teacher facilitation that links the lyrical content to learners’ lived experiences and language competencies.

In this way, both songs function as pedagogical resources that transform music into an active learning strategy rather than passive entertainment. When carefully integrated into CAPS-aligned lessons, indigenous music can enhance learner motivation, foster collaboration, and support language development through structured engagement with code-switched texts. This approach encourages learners to connect linguistic forms with cultural meaning, thereby strengthening both cognitive and socio-cultural learning outcomes in South African primary education (McKinney & Tyler, 2024).

3.9 Ethical Reflection and Social Commentary

Indigenous music serves as a powerful medium for ethical reflection, social critique, and the transmission of communal values within Grade 4–6 South African classrooms, particularly in isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language contexts where learners are developing both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. As Izu (2025, p. 5) notes,

“Indigenous music, as a culturally situated form of knowledge, storytelling, and communal memory, is critical in expressing identity, values, spirituality, and historical continuity.” Similarly, Kuwor (2025, p. 38) explains that “African music serves as an effective repository of indigenous knowledge systems, collective memory, and social philosophy... functioning as a holistic art form that sustains and transmits cultural values across generations.” In classroom practice, these perspectives highlight the pedagogical value of indigenous songs as texts for guided interpretation, discussion, and moral reasoning rather than as self-explanatory learning tools.

In *Sponky Ponky* by Jabu Khanyile and Bayete, structured code-switching between English and isiZulu constructs layered meanings that can be unpacked in Grade 4–6 lessons. The English chorus (“Ma-yo Ma-yo Ma-yo... My oh, my oh, my oh! Sweetie lam Sponky-ponky love, a lover that you can’t resist”) introduces emotional and expressive language associated with contemporary urban romance, while the isiZulu verses (“Ngithe ngiafik eGoli ngabon isimanga...”) provide social critique of urbanisation, materialism, and changing courtship practices. In a classroom setting, teachers can use these shifts to guide learners in distinguishing between emotional expression and social commentary, thereby supporting interpretive listening skills and vocabulary development in both languages (Yende & Dhlamini, 2025). The song thus becomes a text for analysing how language reflects shifting moral and social landscapes.

Similarly, *Umqombothi* by Yvonne Chaka Chaka foregrounds communal ethics through its depiction of labour, sharing, and social celebration. The chorus “We MaDlamini, Uph’umqombothi” and the English narrative lines (“I work hard every day, to make my beer”) reflect a structured alternation of languages that teachers can use to explore themes of responsibility, cooperation, and cultural practice. In Grade 4–6 classrooms, such content can be linked to Life Skills and Languages CAPS objectives by prompting learners to reflect on values such as respect, cooperation, and community participation. However, these meanings must be explicitly mediated by the teacher, as comprehension is not automatic and depends on learners’ linguistic backgrounds and prior knowledge.

Together, both songs demonstrate how indigenous music can be used in South African classrooms to support ethical reflection and cultural learning through structured code-switching. When carefully scaffolded, they enable learners to engage with moral issues, cultural identity, and social responsibility while developing listening and interpretive skills in isiZulu and English. In this way, indigenous music becomes a meaningful pedagogical resource for fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and value formation in Grade 4–6 education (Dlamini-Myeni & Sibiya, 2021; García, 2014; Izu & Somlata, 2025).

4 Discussion

This article has argued that indigenous music, particularly through songs such as *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi*, has the potential to serve as a pedagogical resource in South African Grade 4–6 classrooms rather than functioning as a universally applicable teaching tool across “basic education”

in general. This clarification is important because the thematic and linguistic content of the two songs is context-specific: *Sponky Ponky* deals with courtship practices (*ukushela, ukushikila*), urban–rural cultural shifts, and moral commentary, while *Umqombothi* focuses on communal beer brewing, social gathering, and gendered labour. These themes are more appropriately aligned with Intermediate Phase learners (Grades 4–6) who are developing interpretive reading, oral language skills, and basic critical thinking, rather than Foundation Phase learners, who require more concrete and age-appropriate content.

The analysis further demonstrates that what occurs in both songs is structured code-switching between isiZulu and English, rather than a pedagogical system designed to ensure comprehension across languages. In *Sponky Ponky*, Jabu Khanyile and Bayete alternate between English in selected expressive segments and isiZulu in socially reflective verses, but the two languages do not function as direct translations of each other. Instead, isiZulu conveys cultural critique and moral reflection, while English expresses emotional tone and urban romantic framing. Similarly, in *Umqombothi*, MaDlamini predominantly uses English for narrative description, while the male chorus responds in isiZulu, producing a speaker-based linguistic structure. Importantly, comprehension is not automatically achieved through linguistic alternation; learners would still require teacher mediation, explanation, and contextual scaffolding in a Grade 4–6 classroom. This means that meaning-making depends on instructional design rather than on the songs alone.

Within South African Grade 4–6 isiZulu classroom contexts, particularly in multilingual schools, these songs can be used as textual artefacts for language awareness, vocabulary development, and cultural interpretation. Teachers may guide learners to identify isiZulu idioms, explore English emotional expressions, and discuss how language reflects cultural change. However, such use must be carefully structured because learners' linguistic backgrounds vary significantly across rural, semi-urban, and urban settings. In isiZulu Home Language classrooms, for instance, English segments may function as discussion prompts rather than comprehension aids, while isiZulu sections support deeper cultural engagement. In English First Additional Language classrooms, isiZulu segments may require explanation and translation before interpretation can occur. Therefore, the pedagogical value of the songs lies not in inherent accessibility, but in how teachers design learning activities around them.

The findings also show that *Umqombothi* reflects communal participation through its call-and-response structure, particularly in Grade 4–6 oral language lessons where learners can engage in repetition, chanting, and group response activities. Similarly, *Sponky Ponky* allows learners to explore changing social values and identity formation through guided discussion. However, these outcomes are instruction-dependent rather than text-inherent, meaning that learner engagement, motivation, and comprehension cannot be assumed without classroom implementation and teacher facilitation.

Furthermore, alignment with CAPS should be understood in terms of curriculum potential rather than automatic fulfilment of outcomes. While both

songs can support oral communication, listening skills, cultural awareness, and language development, their effectiveness depends on appropriate grade-level selection, lesson planning, and scaffolding strategies. In Grade 4–6 classrooms, CAPS-aligned use would involve structured questioning, vocabulary unpacking, role-play, and guided interpretation tasks that help learners connect language to cultural meaning.

In conclusion, this article establishes that indigenous music with structured code-switching can function as a valuable teaching resource in Grade 4–6 South African classrooms, provided it is carefully mediated by teachers. Rather than if the songs themselves guarantee comprehension or learning outcomes, their value lies in their pedagogical activation within classroom practice, where language, culture, and meaning are explicitly taught, unpacked, and contextualised for learners.

5 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this article, it is recommended that Grade 4–6 South African classroom contexts, particularly isiZulu Home Language and English First Additional Language settings, integrate indigenous music that uses structured code-switching, such as *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi*, into teaching and learning. Educators should use these songs to support multilingual literacy development, listening comprehension, vocabulary enrichment, and learner engagement through guided classroom activities. The focus should be on teacher-mediated interpretation, since meaning is not automatically shared through language alternation but must be scaffolded through explanation and discussion.

In Grade 4–6 classrooms, songs with ethical reflection and social commentary can support critical thinking, moral reasoning, and social awareness. Learners can be guided to explore isiZulu and English expressions to understand cultural change, identity, and communal values in context. Curriculum developers should ensure alignment with CAPS by selecting age-appropriate materials and designing structured learning activities that reflect South Africa’s multilingual realities. Overall, indigenous music with code-switching offers valuable opportunities for culturally responsive and language-rich learning when carefully implemented in Intermediate Phase classrooms.

In conclusion, this article has shown that indigenous music such as *Sponky Ponky* and *Umqombothi* can be a valuable teaching resource in Grade 4–6 South African classrooms when it is carefully selected and appropriately mediated by teachers. The analysis has demonstrated that both songs make use of structured code-switching between isiZulu and English; however, this does not automatically ensure shared understanding or learning. Instead, meaning is constructed through classroom explanation, discussion, and guided interpretation.

The study has also highlighted that the educational value of these songs lies in how teachers use them rather than in the lyrics alone. Cultural themes, social commentary, and ethical messages embedded in the songs need to be unpacked for learners to meaningfully engage with them. In Grade 4–6

classrooms, this makes teacher support essential for linking language, culture, and comprehension in a way that is age-appropriate and accessible.

A key insight from this study is that indigenous music should not be viewed as self-teaching material but as a resource that becomes meaningful through pedagogy. Another important insight is that code-switching in music reflects real multilingual communication practices, but its classroom value depends on how it is integrated into structured learning activities. Overall, the findings suggest that when used thoughtfully, these songs can enrich language learning, support cultural awareness, and make classroom experiences more engaging for learners in the Intermediate Phase.

The usage of GenAI: GenAI was not used at any stage of this research paper.

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