

Chapter 6

Enhancing Language Learning Through Indigenous Lobedu Folk Songs

Maletšema Ruth Emsley

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6638-871X>

University of Limpopo, South Africa

Mantsha Cecilia Modiba

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0663-0719>

University of Limpopo, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Integrating culturally relevant content from the indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and languages can enhance engagement and understanding of language teaching and learning. Although South Africa's Constitution (1996) recognises 12 official languages and encourages the documentation, preservation, and promotion of minority languages and dialects, the commitment to promoting cultural diversity and inclusion of these languages is still meagre, especially among the marginalized indigenous rural communities. This chapter argues that folk songs as part of the IKS can help to improve language and other creative skills since they incorporate poetic elements such as rhythm, metaphor, and wordplay. The chapter adopted a decolonial lens and the repetition as a rhetorical tool for emphasis and persuasion, rhythm, balance, memory, and learning to explore the Lobedu folk song "Ka totoma".

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INTRODUCTION

It is extensively acknowledged that Western colonialism and imperialism have long suppressed the indigenous African epistemologies and cultural practices that could have made meaning to language learning and literacy. But again, “before the advent of computer games every society had a way of entertaining the young ones through a lot of traditional games. Indigenous games have historically been used to stimulate learning of literacy and numeracy skills in schools and communities in various parts of the world” (Mwinsa & Dagada, 2024, p.1), and folk songs and folk games are some of the ways which entertain and prepare children holistically towards a rewarding life in the future (Obeng et al, 2022). Scholarship has foregrounded the reclaiming of indigenous epistemologies that were historically marginalised by colonial systems, but the efforts to revitalise languages such as Lovedu to advance language learning and literacy through games is minimal. This chapter focuses on the acknowledgment of the indigenous epistemologies to expand on the use of Lovedu folk songs in pedagogy, literacy and research. It brings attention to critical contributions of folk songs to the language learning and literacy. Furthermore, when viewed through decolonial pedagogy, African folk songs can transform educational dialogue and inclusivity making language learning more practical and learner-centred because of their power to challenge colonial practices as they are culturally responsive. The chapter argues that folk songs, just like Western songs, Lovedu folk songs can enhance language learning through games. We do not deny that digital game-based approaches are increasingly recognised as vital for literacy development; however, the musical and folk content embedded in such games often reflects Western philosophies that marginalise indigenous African traditions as stressed by de Jager (2022) and Mwinsa and Dagada (2024).

Game-based learning has myriad definitions. It can also mean borrowing of certain gaming principles and applying them to real-life settings to engage users (Trybus 2015). Trybus (2015) advises that GBL is not just creating games though, it is designing learning activities that can incrementally introduce concepts and guide users towards an end goal. This chapter supports the foregoing definition as it is structured around the delimitations outlined in the discussion. The chapter supports that GBL transcends game creation. GBL involves structured, incremental activities guiding teachers and learners toward set objectives in language and literacy. In other words, it is an intentional design of educational experiences where learning is carefully planned (Mwinsa & Dagada, 2024). This chapter aims to explore the role of folk song as a game-based learning technique by focusing on Lovedu traditional folk song. Traditional songs function as more than just learning tools; they enhance language acquisition, instil moral values and strengthen cultural identity while encouraging creativity and active participation in young children (Rahman et

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