

## **Music Education in Nigerian Schools: Structural Constraints, Policy Deficiencies, and Pathways for Educational Reform**

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### **Abstract**

Music education plays a significant role in cultural preservation, creativity development, talent cultivation, and national advancement. However, despite its recognised educational and socio-cultural value, music education in Nigeria has continued to experience persistent challenges that have adversely affected its growth and effectiveness at various levels of the educational system. This paper examines the structural, administrative, and policy-related challenges confronting music education in Nigerian schools and assesses their implications for sustainable educational and cultural development. The purpose of the study is to identify the major factors responsible for the declining status of music education in Nigeria and to propose strategies for its revitalisation. The study adopts a qualitative literature-based methodology involving the review and analysis of scholarly publications, government policy documents, curriculum reports, and contemporary discussions on music education in Nigeria and selected international contexts. Data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring issues and best practices relevant to educational reform. The findings reveal that curriculum marginalisation, inadequate funding, poor infrastructural facilities, shortage of qualified music teachers, weak policy implementation, negative societal perceptions of music as a viable profession, and limited integration of digital technologies remain major impediments to effective music education. These issues have contributed to declining student participation, reduced opportunities for talent development, inadequate preservation of indigenous musical heritage, and limited preparedness of learners for engagement in the global creative economy. The study further demonstrates that countries such as South Africa and Finland have achieved greater success through policy consistency, sustained investment, specialist teacher training, and effective curriculum implementation. The implications of the findings suggest that strengthening music education can enhance cultural sustainability, promote creativity and innovation, generate employment opportunities, and contribute to national socio-economic development. The paper recommends curriculum reform, increased funding, recruitment of specialist teachers, technological modernisation, and stronger government commitment to policy implementation. It concludes that revitalising music education is essential for preserving Nigeria's cultural identity and fostering sustainable national development.

**Keywords:** Music education; curriculum reform; educational policy; cultural preservation; creative economy.

## **Introduction**

Music is a universal cultural phenomenon that permeates virtually every aspect of human life. Across societies, it serves as a medium for communication, artistic expression, socialisation, education, religious worship, and cultural transmission. Beyond its aesthetic functions, music contributes significantly to individual and societal development by preserving collective memory, reinforcing cultural identity, and facilitating the transmission of values across generations. Consequently, music education has become increasingly recognised as an important component of holistic education capable of fostering creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and cultural literacy.

In African societies, music occupies a central position in communal life and cultural continuity. Among Nigerian ethnic groups, musical practices are deeply embedded in social, religious, political, and ceremonial activities. Indigenous musical traditions function not only as entertainment but also as repositories of history, philosophy, moral instruction, and indigenous knowledge systems. Through songs, chants, drumming traditions, and performance practices, communities preserve and transmit cultural values and social norms. The educational significance of these traditions underscores the need for a music curriculum that reflects both indigenous and global musical experiences. However, the historical dominance of Western-oriented music instruction within formal education has often limited the integration of indigenous musical knowledge into school curricula (Ogisi, 2022).

The educational value of music extends beyond cultural preservation. Studies in music education have consistently demonstrated that engagement with music enhances learners' cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social development. Musical participation promotes creativity, problem-solving abilities, communication skills, self-expression, and collaborative learning, competencies that are increasingly required in contemporary knowledge economies. Recent scholarship further emphasises the role of music education in nurturing creative capacities and fostering innovation among learners within rapidly changing educational environments.

Prior to the introduction of Western education, Nigerian societies maintained organised systems of indigenous music education through apprenticeship, observation, participation, and performance. These traditional pedagogical approaches enabled the transfer of musical knowledge from one generation to another and ensured cultural continuity. The arrival of Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century introduced formal music instruction through church schools where hymnody, choral singing, music theory, and instrumental training became part of the educational experience. While these developments laid the foundation for contemporary music education in Nigeria, subsequent curriculum reforms have not sufficiently elevated the status of music within the national educational system.

Contemporary music education in Nigeria faces significant challenges. Music is currently embedded within the broader Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) curriculum at the basic education level, a structure that often limits specialist instruction and

reduces opportunities for practical musical engagement. Recent studies have identified factors that made it difficult to adequately and sufficiently execute the programme (Unoma & Ogunleye, 2025). These challenges are particularly worrisome given the growing significance of the creative economy globally and within Nigeria.

The music industry constitutes an important component of Nigeria's creative sector, contributing to employment generation, cultural diplomacy, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. Recent policy initiatives by UNESCO and the Nigerian government have emphasised the need to strengthen cultural and creative industries through skills development, institutional support, and digital innovation. Yet, the sustainability of the music industry depends largely on the quality of music education available to future generations.

Against the foregoing background, there is a compelling need to examine the challenges confronting music education in Nigeria and explore sustainable strategies for its revitalisation. This paper, therefore, investigates the structural, policy-related, and pedagogical constraints affecting music education in Nigerian schools, and proposes measures for repositioning the discipline as a catalyst for cultural preservation, creative development, and national transformation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory (HCT), a theory primarily developed by Theodore Schultz (1961) and further expanded by Gary Becker (1964). The theory emerged from attempts by economists to explain variations in economic growth and productivity that could not be accounted for solely by investments in physical capital such as land, machinery, and infrastructure. Schultz argues that investment in education, training, health, and skills acquisition constitutes an investment in human beings, thereby increasing their productivity and contribution to economic development. Becker subsequently refines the theory by emphasising that education enhances individuals' knowledge, competencies, and productive capacities, which in turn generate economic and social returns for both individuals and society.

The central premise of Human Capital Theory is that education is not merely a social service but an investment that develops human capabilities and improves economic productivity. The theory posits that societies that invest substantially in quality education, professional training, technological skills, and knowledge development are more likely to experience innovation, economic growth, and sustainable development. Human capital is, therefore, defined as the stock of knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate personal and societal productivity (OECD, 2024).

Recent educational discourse continues to affirm the relevance of Human Capital Theory in explaining the relationship between educational investment and national development. UNESCO's Global Framework for Culture and Arts Education recognises arts and music education as essential components of quality education

capable of developing creativity, critical thinking, innovation, collaboration, and cultural competencies required in contemporary societies. UNESCO (2024) further emphasises that culture and arts education contributes significantly to learners' academic achievement, social development, and lifelong learning outcomes.

The applicability of Human Capital Theory to the Nigerian educational context is particularly significant. Nigeria's educational system continues to grapple with inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, weak policy implementation, and limited integration of technology. These challenges have constrained the development of the human resources required for national growth and global competitiveness. Studies on human capital development in Nigeria indicate that sustained investment in educational quality, infrastructure, curriculum development, and teacher capacity is critical for improving educational outcomes and workforce readiness (Nwachukwu, 2024).

Within music education specifically, Human Capital Theory provides a useful lens for understanding the consequences of the marginalisation of music in Nigerian schools. Music education develops creativity, innovation, communication skills, cultural literacy, entrepreneurship, and artistic competencies that are increasingly valuable within the global creative economy. However, Nigeria is unable to maximise the economic, cultural, and social benefits associated with its vibrant music and creative industries.

The theory supports the argument that strengthening music education through curriculum reform, increased funding, specialist teacher recruitment, technological integration, and effective policy implementation constitutes an investment in human capital development. Such investment will not only preserve Nigeria's rich musical heritage but also equip learners with the knowledge and skills required for meaningful participation in the creative economy and broader national development.

### **Historical Development of Formal Music Education in Nigeria**

The period between 1985 and the late 1990s was characterised by educational policies aimed at expanding access to arts education in Nigeria. During this period, numerous primary and secondary schools provided music instruction, while colleges of education and universities expanded their programmes for training music teachers. Institutions such as the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the University of Lagos, and Obafemi Awolowo University played significant roles in advancing music scholarship and teacher education in the country.

Scholars and music educators also advocated for the integration of indigenous Nigerian musical traditions into formal education as a means of complementing the inherited Western-oriented curriculum. This movement reflected growing awareness of the need to preserve Nigeria's cultural heritage through education. Despite these efforts, the implementation of music education policies remained inconsistent due to inadequate funding, insufficient educational resources, and weak government support (Ogisi, 2022).

### **2000–2010: Curriculum Reforms and the Introduction of Cultural and Creative Arts**

Beginning in 2000, significant changes emerged with the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and accompanying curriculum reforms. One of the most notable developments was the introduction of Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) at the junior secondary school level. Under this arrangement, music was merged with fine arts and theatre arts into a single subject. Although the integration was intended to encourage interdisciplinary learning and broaden students' exposure to the arts, it substantially reduced the visibility and instructional time allocated to music education. As a result, many schools adopted the practice of assigning a single teacher to teach all three disciplines, often without specialisation in music. Consequently, the quality of music instruction declined, and opportunities for practical musical training became increasingly limited. This policy shift contributed significantly to the weakening of music education at the basic education level (Unoma & Ogunleye, 2025).

### **2011–Present: Persistent Structural Challenges and the Marginalisation of Music Education**

Since 2011, music education in Nigeria has continued to face numerous systemic and structural challenges. Recent studies identify inadequate funding, shortage of qualified music teachers, poor teaching facilities, limited access to musical instruments, and deficiencies in curriculum implementation as major obstacles to effective music education. In many public schools, music is no longer taught as a stand-alone subject, while parents, school administrators, and policy makers increasingly prioritise science- and technology-related subjects over the arts.

Furthermore, music education receives limited policy attention despite the substantial contributions of Nigeria's creative and entertainment industries to national economic development (Lawal, 2025). Recent scholarship also reveals persistent problems in curriculum implementation. Lawal (2025) argues that institutional instructional culture significantly influences the effectiveness of music curriculum delivery. Similarly, Onu and Keke (2024) contend that the music component of the Cultural and Creative Arts curriculum remains structurally deficient because music specialists are often excluded from curriculum planning and implementation processes.

In addition, Unoma and Ogunleye (2025) identify inadequate subject specialisations, insufficient teaching resources, and ineffective pedagogical approaches as major impediments to meaningful music education. The marginalisation of music education in Nigeria is evident in several respects. First, music has largely lost its status as an independent subject at the basic education level because of its incorporation into Cultural and Creative Arts. Second, many schools lack specialist music teachers and adequately equipped music laboratories. Third, public perception frequently regards music as an extracurricular activity rather than a serious academic discipline. Finally, policy makers continue to allocate minimal resources to music education despite its cultural, social, and economic importance.

These developments have contributed to declining student enrolment and participation in music programmes, reduced opportunities for talent development, and diminished capacity for nurturing future professionals in Nigeria's creative industries (Olisaeke & Davou, 2020).

## **Discussion of Finding**

### **Curriculum Marginalisation**

The instability of music education within the Nigerian curriculum remains a fundamental constraint. Curriculum, as defined Aninwene (2003), is the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience, under the school for the learner's continuous and willful growth in personal and social competence. A curriculum is expected to include objectives, content, methods, and evaluation.

In Nigeria, however, curriculum planning tends to prioritise sciences, vocational subjects, and languages at the expense of the arts, particularly music education. Although music is formally included in the national curriculum, its implementation remains inconsistent across schools. The subject is frequently marginalised, or merged under Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA), thereby limiting specialist instruction. Weak policy implementation has also resulted in the absence of functional music programmes in several schools, leaving many students without basic competencies in music theory, notation, sight-reading, and performance.

### **Infrastructure and Resource Deficits**

Music education is both theoretical and practical, requiring adequate infrastructural support. Many Nigerian schools lack essential facilities such as music studios, rehearsal halls, classrooms, libraries, practice rooms, recording studios, and technological equipment.

Required resources include pianos, harmoniums, electronic keyboards, Western and indigenous instruments, textbooks, audiovisual materials, film projectors, and music scores for instruction. Where available, instruments are often outdated or poorly maintained due to weak maintenance culture and inadequate funding. This significantly undermines teaching quality and students' professional development.

### **Funding Challenges**

Music education is capital-intensive and requires substantial financial investment for effective delivery. Despite this, funding remains one of the most critical challenges in Nigeria. Government allocations to arts education are insufficient, and music departments in many institutions operate with minimal budgets that cannot support teaching, research, or practical training.

### **Societal Perceptions and Career Stigma**

Negative societal attitudes toward music education constitute a major constraint. Many Nigerians perceive performing artistes as individuals of questionable

character. It is often assumed that musicians and actors may become “rascals, drug addicts, drunkards, spendthrifts, or womanisers” (Olaniyan, 2002). Idamoyibo (2002) similarly notes that music is associated with undesirable behaviours such as drug addiction, flamboyant dressing, and immoral conduct. These perceptions are inherited from traditional beliefs that regard musicianship as a product of laziness or intellectual inadequacy. This stigma discourages talented students from pursuing music as a course of study, leading to low enrolment. In many cases, students who fail to gain admission into other disciplines are redirected into music, reinforcing the perception that music is a “second-choice” subject. Parents also often discourage children from studying music in favour of professions such as medicine, law, and engineering.

#### Shortage of Qualified Music Educators

The shortage of trained music educators is a persistent challenge. Although music is a core subject in the Junior Secondary School curriculum, Faseun (2001) notes that many schools do not offer it at all. Where it exists, instruction is often handled by teachers from unrelated disciplines.

Anyanwu (2005) observes that many music teachers lack adequate knowledge of both musical content and pedagogy. Similarly, due to the unavailability of specialists, music is frequently taught by non-specialist teachers who assign it low priority on the timetable. This results in superficial instruction focused mainly on ceremonial performances rather than structured learning.

#### Weak Foundational Preparation

Weak foundational training at primary and secondary school levels contributes significantly to poor performance at higher levels. Although children possess indigenous musical exposure, formal development is often lacking due to poor implementation of music education in earlier schooling stages. As a result, students entering tertiary institutions frequently lack basic skills in harmony, counterpoint, sight-reading, orchestration, ear training, and instrumental performance.

Admission practices further worsen the situation, as students without adequate background knowledge of music are sometimes placed in music programmes after failing to secure admission into other disciplines. Such students often experience frustration, fear, and academic difficulty, leading to low confidence and poor perception of their intellectual ability.

#### Technological Gaps in Music Pedagogy

Modern music education is increasingly technology-driven, incorporating digital audio workstations, notation software, virtual instruments, and online learning systems. Globally, artificial intelligence and digital technologies are transforming music pedagogy through adaptive learning and personalised instruction. However, Nigerian institutions largely rely on outdated teaching methods with minimal technological integration. This gap places the country at a disadvantage in the global

creative economy where digital competence is increasingly essential for music production, education, and professional practice.

The table below presents the state of music education in Nigeria in comparison with South Africa and Finland.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>South Africa</b>	<b>Finland</b>
Curriculum Status	Weak	Moderate	Strong
Specialist Teachers	Limited	Moderate	Strong
Funding	Low	Moderate	High
Technology	Limited	Moderate	Advanced

South Africa provides an important African example. Music is incorporated within the Creative Arts curriculum under the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), making it a structured component of basic education. Although South African scholars have identified challenges related to curriculum implementation and teacher preparation, music remains formally recognised within national educational objectives, and contributes to learners' cultural, creative, and social development. Yende (2023) argues that music education occupies a recognised position within South Africa's basic education framework and continues to receive curricular attention through ongoing reforms aimed at strengthening teacher qualification and curriculum delivery. Similarly, Carver (2026) notes that the South African music curriculum continues to serve as a vehicle for cultural diversity, social inclusion, and musical knowledge development despite implementation challenges. Furthermore, studies on CAPS indicate that music is systematically embedded within the Creative Arts curriculum from the foundation phase onward, ensuring sustained learner exposure to music education.

Finland, being a western country in this context, represents one of the world's most successful educational models, and places substantial importance on arts education. Music is a compulsory component of basic education and is regarded as an essential element of holistic child development. The Finnish educational system emphasises creativity, cultural participation, collaboration, emotional development, and lifelong learning. Music instruction begins in the early years of schooling and continues throughout compulsory education. Municipalities are required to implement the national curriculum, which includes music as part of the comprehensive educational experience provided to all learners, Department of Basic Education. (2022).

In Nigerian educational system, music often disappears in practice because schools lack specialist teachers and resources, and frequently regard music as a peripheral subject. In contrast, South Africa's curriculum explicitly preserves music as an identifiable learning area with prescribed outcomes and assessment procedures. Also, in Finland, schools are generally supported by specialist teachers, adequate facilities, and a curriculum that recognises music as a means of fostering creativity, innovation, and social cohesion. Although both countries integrate music with other arts

disciplines, South Africa's policy framework provides greater institutional recognition and curricular coherence, and the latter has been a sustained culture of musical literacy and participation among learners. (Department of Basic Education, 2022). The foregoing implicates the need for the Nigerian government replicate the policy of the two examples of countries given as well as the effective policy models of other countries.

### **Implications of Neglecting Music Education in Nigeria**

The global expansion of the music industry has demonstrated that music education thrives where governments provide clear curricular direction, specialist teacher preparation, adequate funding, and sustained policy commitment. Comparative educational experiences from South Africa and Finland confirm that strong institutional support enhances music pedagogy, improves learning outcomes, and strengthens national creative capacity. In both contexts, music is treated as a distinct academic discipline rather than a subsidiary component of broader arts curricula.

In contrast, Nigeria has continued to position music within the Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) framework, which has contributed significantly to the marginalisation of music within the education system. Consequently, recent Nigerian scholarship has consistently advocated the reinstatement of music as a core and independent subject within the Universal Basic Education (UBE) curriculum. Such reforms are considered essential not only for safeguarding cultural heritage but also for strengthening participation in the global creative economy and expanding the nation's music industry (Ayeyemi, Ogunrinade & Falusi, 2024).

The implications of continued neglect of music education in Nigeria can be examined under cultural, educational, economic, and social dimensions.

#### **Cultural Implication: Erosion of Indigenous Musical Heritage**

A major consequence of neglecting music is the gradual erosion of indigenous music traditions and cultural heritage. When music education is weak or poorly implemented, younger generations become increasingly disconnected from traditional music knowledge systems, performance practices, and indigenous identity markers. This weakens intergenerational transmission of cultural values embedded in songs, rhythms, and oral traditions, thereby threatening the survival of Nigeria's diverse music heritage.

#### **Educational Implication: Decline in Creativity and Talent Development**

From an educational perspective, neglecting music education contributes to reduction in creativity, innovation, and talent development among learners. Music education is a key driver of creative thinking, improvisation, and cognitive flexibility. Therefore, its marginalisation limits students' exposure to structured artistic expression, and reduces opportunities for developing artistic and performative competencies. In a global knowledge economy where creativity is a critical skill, this limitation undermines learners' holistic development, thereby reducing their competitiveness.

#### **Economic Implication: Weakening of the Creative Industries**

Economically, inadequate attention to music education weakens Nigeria's capacity to fully develop its creative industries. The global music sector now contributes significantly to employment generation, tourism, digital content production, entertainment, and media economies. However, when foundational music education is weak, the pipeline for skilled professionals (such as performers, composers, producers, educators, and music technologists), is constrained. This reduces Nigeria's ability to maximise revenue from its rapidly growing entertainment industry, and limits participation in international creative markets.

#### **Social Implication: Reduced Cultural Cohesion and Value Formation**

Socially, music has historically functioned as a medium for ethical instruction, emotional expression, peacebuilding, and social integration. Weak music education reduces its capacity to contribute to moral development and communal cohesion among students. As a result, opportunities for using music as a tool for fostering unity, discipline, and emotional intelligence are diminished, thus weakening its role in shaping socially balanced individuals.

#### **Recommended Directions**

The challenges confronting music education in Nigeria require a structured and phased response that addresses immediate instructional deficiencies while laying a foundation for sustainable long-term development. A coherent intervention can be articulated through three interconnected levels - short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies.

At the short-term level, priority should be given to teacher training and curriculum review. Music must be firmly repositioned as a core subject at both junior and senior secondary school levels. Curriculum planners should collaborate directly with professional music educators to redesign curricula that are functional, contextually relevant, and responsive to contemporary educational demands. Within this process, deliberate integration of indigenous Nigerian music traditions alongside foundational and contemporary music knowledge is essential. In addition, continuous professional development through workshops, seminars, and refresher programmes should be implemented to strengthen teachers' pedagogical competence and subject mastery.

In the medium term, emphasis should shift toward infrastructure development and technology integration. Government investment should be increased to ensure that music departments are adequately equipped with instruments, teaching materials, and functional learning environments comparable to other academic disciplines. Where such departments are absent, new ones should be established and staffed by qualified music educators. Concurrently, schools should adopt music technology as part of standard instruction, incorporating digital audio workstations, notation software, multimedia resources, and virtual learning platforms to enhance creativity, accessibility, and global relevance.

In the long term, sustainable improvement will depend on comprehensive policy reform and the establishment of a national music education strategy. This should provide a stable policy framework that guarantees funding, standardisation, and accountability across all levels of education. Media institutions should be systematically integrated into music education delivery, not only as entertainment platforms but also as structured educational tools supporting instructional broadcasting. Furthermore, sustained promotion of both indigenous and Western music performance traditions through festivals, competitions, workshops, concerts, and cultural exchange programmes should be institutionalised to reinforce creativity, cultural identity, and artistic excellence.

### **Conclusion**

The study establishes that the effectiveness of music education in Nigeria is significantly constrained by systemic weaknesses in governance, resource allocation, professional capacity, and societal valuation of music as a discipline. A key finding is that these constraints are not isolated but interrelated, collectively undermining the ability of music education to fulfil its pedagogical, cultural, and developmental functions within the national education system.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the need for a coordinated national response that redefines music education as a strategic educational priority rather than a peripheral subject. This requires clearer policy articulation, enforceable implementation mechanisms, and sustained institutional commitment to curriculum relevance, teacher quality assurance, and equitable resource distribution. The findings also suggest that fragmented interventions are insufficient without a unified framework that aligns educational practice with national cultural and creative development goals.

Future research should direct attention toward empirical evaluation of curriculum implementation outcomes across different educational levels, as well as comparative studies examining successful music education models in culturally diverse and technologically advanced contexts. Further studies into the relationship between music education, youth creativity, and employment outcomes within Nigeria's creative economy should be undertaken. Such studies would provide a stronger evidence base for policy refinement and long-term sectoral planning.

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