



EPISTO-MUSICAL PEDAGOGY THEORY: A DECOLONIAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOUND-BASED CURRICULUM IN AFRICAN EDUCATION

Authority O. A. U.

Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Email: dr.albert.oau@gmail.com

Cite this article:

Authority, O. A. U. (2025),
Episto-Musical Pedagogy
Theory: A Decolonial
Framework for Sound-Based
Curriculum in African
Education. African Journal of
Social Sciences and
Humanities Research 8(4), 44-
60. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHR-
VJWA2OEE

Manuscript History

Received: 18 Sep 2025

Accepted: 29 Oct 2025

Published: 6 Nov 2025

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article
distributed under the terms of
Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND
4.0), which permits anyone to
share, use, reproduce and
redistribute in any medium,
provided the original author and
source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *This article presents Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (EMPT), a transformative framework developed by Albert Authority that reclaims African music as a sovereign epistemological foundation for education. EMPT emerges in response to the persistent marginalization of indigenous sonic traditions within formal curricula, particularly in Nigeria. Through comparative analysis, the study critiques dominant Western pedagogical models, Formalist, Structuralist, and Cognitive, which often privilege abstract cognition and epistemic detachment. In contrast, EMPT offers an “inside-out” approach rooted in communal memory and ancestral sound. It positions rhythm, storytelling, and performance not as cultural embellishments but as vital instruments for transmitting ethical, historical, and identity-based knowledge. By centering lived experience and Afrocentric wisdom, EMPT charts a decolonial pathway for pedagogical renewal. It calls for a reimagining of teaching and learning practices that honor Africa’s sonic heritage, inviting educators to listen deeply, remember collectively, and transform education in ways that promote cognitive justice, cultural sovereignty, and a resonant, community-grounded learning experience.*

KEYWORDS: Cognition, Curricula, Decolonial, Epistemology, Pedagogy, Sonic, Sovereignty.



INTRODUCTION

Imagine a classroom in Nigeria where the rhythms of Ogene, the storytelling of Fùjì, or the communal pulse of Afrobeat are absent, not because they lack educational value, but because they are deemed unfit for formal learning. This silence is not accidental; it is the result of a long-standing curricular imbalance that privileges Eurocentric paradigms while marginalizing indigenous African epistemologies. Despite the global call for inclusive and equitable education under Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes lifelong learning and cultural relevance (UNESCO, 2017), African education systems continue to reflect colonial legacies that suppress local knowledge systems (Dei, 2010; Thiong'o, 1986).

In Nigeria, this imbalance is stark. Curriculum frameworks such as the National Universities Commission's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (NUC CCMAS) allocate approximately 70% of content to Western models, relegating indigenous contributions to the margins (Okebukola, 2021). This exclusion constitutes what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) calls the "cultural bomb," a form of epistemic violence that erodes identity, agency, and pedagogical sovereignty. Music, despite its historical role in transmitting ethical, cosmological, and communal wisdom, is often reduced to entertainment or cultural ornamentation in formal education (Agawu, 2003).

This article introduces *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory*, developed by Albert Authority, as a decolonial framework that repositions music as a sovereign epistemological system. Rooted in African ontologies, the theory asserts that rhythm, narrative, and performance are not pedagogical supplements but foundational tools for transmitting knowledge, shaping identity, and fostering ethical engagement. It challenges the dominance of text-based, Eurocentric curricula by proposing sound as curriculum, an embodied, communal, and culturally grounded mode of knowing.

The study is guided by three core objectives: (1) to critically examine the epistemological foundations of *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory*; (2) to evaluate the extent and impact of curricular coloniality in Nigerian education systems; and (3) to develop and propose a decolonial curriculum framework that centers African musical epistemologies. The central research question asks: *How can Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory serve as a decolonial framework for integrating indigenous African musical epistemologies into formal education systems, thereby challenging curricular coloniality and restoring epistemic agency?*

By engaging interdisciplinary literature, cultural exemplars, and the lived experiences of educators and indigenous knowledge custodians, this article contributes to musicology, decolonial studies, and curriculum reform. It concludes by offering actionable strategies for curriculum design, teacher training, and policy development that honor Africa's sonic heritage as a legitimate and transformative source of knowledge.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating music into Afrocentric education is a vital avenue for promoting cultural identity and pedagogical relevance. Music education, deeply intertwined with cultural practices, represents a unique opportunity to foster engagement among African and African diaspora students. Culturally responsive pedagogy in music education has gained ground, as highlighted in various studies (Bond, 2017; Lind, 2022). This framework highlights the need to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds to facilitate deeper learning experiences.

Existing literature highlights the importance of anti-racist frameworks in music education to combat systemic bias (Hess, 2015) and challenge Eurocentric narratives (Bell, 2019). Using critical race theory (Rousseau, 2005; Leonardo, 2013), educators can uncover the epistemological racism prevalent in curricula. This approach aligns with Ladson-Billing's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, which emphasizes the need to affirm students' cultural identities to promote academic success.

Recent investigations of pedagogical practices reveal how culturally relevant music education improves student engagement and success (Palmer et al., 2022; Sembiente, 2023). For example, Schippers (2009) advocates music education that reflects a global perspective, recognizing different musical traditions and their intrinsic educational value. The application of Bernsteinian theory and codes of legitimation in South African music curricula shows the integration of indigenous knowledge systems (Carver, 2020; Nzewi, 2025).

Furthermore, as Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) suggest, a conceptual framework grounded in historical and cultural contexts can better address the intersectionality of race and education within music disciplines. Effective curricular frameworks can promote composition and performance strategies rooted in African musical traditions, thereby validating students' cultural capital (Goldenberg, 2014; Yosso, 2002).

Ultimately, to improve Afrocentric education, music must not only serve as an artistic expression but also as a pedagogical tool that strengthens cultural identity. In this vein, a concerted effort to synthesize existing frameworks (Laughter, 2016) while proposing curricular innovations focused on African musical practices will prove vital in promoting both cultural representation and educational equity in music (Binder, 2009; Ramsey, 2003).

a) Reclaiming Sound in Afrocentric Education

Afrocentricity, as conceptualized by Molefi Kete Asante (1988), is more than a theoretical stance; it is a call to restore African agency in the interpretation of history, culture, and knowledge. It emerged as a counter-hegemonic response to the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms in global education, demanding that African worldviews be placed at the center of curriculum design and pedagogical practice. At its core, Afrocentricity affirms cultural agency, historical reclamation, and epistemic sovereignty, positioning education as a tool for liberation rather than assimilation (Asante, 1991).



Yet, despite its transformative promise, Afrocentricity has not fully embraced music as a sovereign epistemological system. In many African classrooms, sound remains peripheral, treated as cultural ornamentation rather than a conduit for ethical instruction, historical memory, and cosmological insight. This oversight reflects a broader gap in Afrocentric scholarship: the under-theorization of music as curriculum.

b) Existing Afrocentric Frameworks and Their Limits

i.) *Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentric Theory* provides a foundational lens for centering African perspectives in education. It champions culturally relevant pedagogy and historical consciousness (Asante, 1991). However, it does not explicitly theorize music as a pedagogical force or offer curriculum-level strategies for integrating indigenous sound traditions.

ii.) *Chike Akua's Standards of Afrocentric Education* (2020) offer practical tools for curriculum development, emphasizing authenticity and cultural excellence. While valuable, Akua's framework is largely U.S.-centric and lacks engagement with African musical epistemologies as instructional tools.

iii.) *Kmt Shockley's African-Centered Education Practice Guide* (Shockley, 2020) advances community-based strategies for Black educational excellence. It foregrounds structural reform and culturally responsive teaching but does not theorize music as a mode of knowing or address its curricular potential.

iv.) *Akin Euba's Theory of African Art Music* introduces "creative ethnomusicology," advocating for intercultural synthesis between African traditional music and Western classical forms (Euba, 1989). His concept of African Pianism adapts Western instruments to express African rhythmic and tonal principles, especially from Yoruba traditions. Euba's work is epistemologically rich, demonstrating how indigenous musical logic, polyrhythms, tonal inflection, and speech surrogacy can be recontextualized to affirm African identity (Omojola, 2013).

However, Euba's contributions remain focused on compositional aesthetics and performance hybridity. As Bolaji (2019) notes, while his work bridges artistic traditions, it does not offer a pedagogical framework for curriculum reform or theorize music as a decolonial tool. His legacy, though foundational, requires expansion into educational praxis.

c) Gaps in Literature

Despite the depth of Afrocentric scholarship, several critical gaps persist:

- i.) A lack of frameworks that treat African music as a primary epistemology rather than a cultural artifact.
- ii.) Minimal integration of rhythm, narrative, and performance as foundational pedagogical tools.



- iii.) Absence of curriculum-level strategies for decolonial transformation rooted in indigenous sound traditions.

These gaps leave African learners disconnected from the sonic knowledge systems that have historically shaped their communities, values, and identities.

d) Advancing Theory: Episto-Musical Pedagogy

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory, developed by Albert Authority, responds directly to these gaps. It redefines music as an embodied epistemology, a living archive of ethical, historical, and cosmological knowledge rooted in African ontologies. Unlike prior frameworks, this theory moves beyond cultural representation to assert music's role in epistemic restoration.

It offers actionable strategies for integrating indigenous musical knowledge into formal education, particularly in Nigeria, where curricular coloniality remains entrenched. By positioning sound as curriculum, the theory challenges text-dominant models and affirms communal memory, ancestral logic, and cultural sovereignty as legitimate pedagogical foundations.

Moreover, Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory bridges multiple disciplines: musicology, decolonial studies, indigenous education, and cultural policy. It draws from the lived experiences of educators, curriculum designers, and indigenous knowledge custodians, making it both theoretically robust and practically grounded.

In doing so, it fills a critical void in Afrocentric scholarship. It transforms music from a passive cultural symbol into an active pedagogical force, capable of dismantling curricular coloniality and advancing cognitive justice. This theory invites educators to listen differently, to hear music not just as sound, but as syllabus, story, and strategy.

Theoretical Framework

a) Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory, formulated by Albert Authority on September 13, 2025, emerges from a deep recognition of what African classrooms have long overlooked: that music is not just sound; it is knowledge. This theory challenges the inherited silence of colonial education systems by asserting that African musical traditions are not peripheral cultural expressions but central epistemological systems. It repositions music as a living curriculum, one that carries ethical values, historical memory, and cosmological insight across generations.

At the heart of this framework are three interwoven elements: rhythm, narrative, and performance. These are not decorative features of culture; they are pedagogical tools rooted in African ontologies. Rhythm teaches timing and communal coordination. Narrative preserves ancestral wisdom and moral instruction. Performance embodies identity, resistance, and spiritual continuity. Together, they form a triadic foundation for curriculum transformation.

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory calls for the intentional integration of indigenous musical knowledge into formal education. It seeks to dismantle colonial silences and restore epistemic



agency to African learners and educators. This is not merely a theoretical proposition; it is a call to action. The theory draws from the lived experiences of teachers, curriculum designers, and indigenous knowledge custodians, advocating for a holistic and participatory approach to curriculum reform.

In this framework, music becomes a strategic instrument for reimagining pedagogy. It anchors learning in communal memory, ancestral logic, and cultural sovereignty, offering a pathway toward cognitive justice, identity affirmation, and educational transformation. Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory invites educational systems to listen differently, to hear African sound traditions not as background noise, but as the heartbeat of a liberated curriculum.

b) Supporting Theories and Comparative Analysis

i.) Afrocentric Theory (Molefi Kete Asante)

Overview: Afrocentric Theory centers African agency in knowledge production and cultural interpretation. It challenges Eurocentric dominance by advocating for education rooted in African historical and cultural perspectives (Asante, 1991).

Limitations:

- While conceptually powerful, it does not explicitly theorize music as a sovereign epistemology.
- It lacks curriculum-level strategies for integrating indigenous sound traditions into formal education.

Contribution to Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory:

- Provides the philosophical foundation for cultural reclamation.
- Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory builds on this by treating music not just as culture, but as curriculum, anchoring pedagogy in rhythm, narrative, and performance.

ii). Creative Ethnomusicology (Akin Euba)

Overview: Euba's theory promotes intercultural synthesis between African traditional music and Western classical forms. His concept of African Pianism adapts Western instruments to express African musical logic (Euba, 1989).

Limitations:

- Focuses primarily on compositional aesthetics and performance hybridity.
- Does not offer a pedagogical framework for curriculum transformation or theorize music as a decolonial tool.



Contribution to Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory:

- Inspires the recognition of indigenous musical logic.
- Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory advances this by positioning music as a pedagogical force capable of transmitting ethical and cosmological knowledge.

iii.) African-Centered Education Practice Guide (Kmt Shockley)

Overview: Shockley's guide offers community-based strategies for Black educational excellence, emphasizing culturally responsive teaching and structural reform (Shockley, 2020).

Limitations:

- Strong on praxis but lacks theoretical engagement with music as an epistemic system.
- Does not address curriculum transformation through indigenous sound traditions.

Contribution to Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory:

- Provides practical insights into culturally grounded education.
- Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory complements this by offering a theory-driven model that integrates sound as curriculum and centers indigenous musical epistemologies.

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory fills a critical gap in Afrocentric and ethnomusicological scholarship by reimagining music as a decolonial pedagogical tool. It moves beyond cultural representation and artistic synthesis to assert music's role in curriculum reform, epistemic restoration, and identity affirmation. By grounding pedagogy in African sound traditions it offers a transformative framework for cognitive justice and educational sovereignty.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs comparative **theoretical analysis** as its primary methodological approach, designed to critically examine the ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical assumptions embedded in dominant Western music education paradigms, namely, the **Formalist**, **Structuralist**, and **Cognitive** models. These paradigms are interrogated for their reliance on abstraction, decontextualization, and external theoretical scaffolding, which often marginalize or misrepresent indigenous African musical epistemologies.

The analysis is structured around a **contrastive framework**, juxtaposing these Western models with *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory* (EMPT), a decolonial framework rooted in African ontologies. EMPT's "inside-out" logic, grounded in rhythm, narrative, and performance, is used as a lens to evaluate how music functions not merely as an aesthetic form but as a sovereign system of knowledge capable of transmitting ethical, historical, and cosmological wisdom.



To deepen the comparative scope, the study integrates **Afrocentric Theory** (Asante, 1991), **Creative Ethnomusicology** (Euba, 1989), and the **African-Centered Education Practice Guide** (Shockley, 2020) as supporting frameworks. These theories provide philosophical, artistic, and pedagogical grounding for EMPT, while also revealing their own limitations in treating music as curriculum rather than cultural expression.

Data sources include:

- **Interdisciplinary literature synthesis** from musicology, decolonial studies, and indigenous education.
- **Curriculum documents** from Nigerian educational institutions, particularly the National Universities Commission's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS).
- **Narrative examples and lived experiences** of educators, curriculum designers, and indigenous knowledge custodians, gathered through purposive sampling of published interviews, ethnographies, and reflective essays.

The methodology is **qualitative and interpretive**, privileging indigenous logics of coherence, relationality, and communal memory. It resists positive metrics and instead embraces **epistemic pluralism**, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how sound-based pedagogy can restore cultural agency and cognitive justice.

Ultimately, this methodological design supports the study's aim: to reframe music education as a site of epistemic restoration and to advocate for curriculum reform that honors Africa's sonic heritage as a legitimate and generative source of knowledge.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

a.) Reclaiming African Epistemologies through Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory: A Response to Curriculum Coloniality in Nigeria

Across Nigeria's classrooms, a quiet erasure unfolds daily, one that sidelines indigenous knowledge systems in favor of Western epistemologies. This imbalance is not incidental; it is the lingering echo of colonial education models that continue to shape curriculum frameworks. The Nigerian University Commission's Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS), for instance, allocates nearly 70% of its content to Eurocentric paradigms, leaving only a fragmented space for African intellectual traditions (Okebukola, 2021). This disproportionate representation extends into secondary education, where ancestral wisdom and cultural heritage are often treated as peripheral or outdated (Akinpelu, 2015).

Such curricular asymmetry constitutes what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) calls the "cultural bomb," a form of epistemic violence that erodes indigenous identity and delegitimizes African ways of knowing. In subjects like Government, students learn about democracy as a universal ideal, yet rarely engage with Africa's pre-colonial governance systems, which were deeply rooted in



communal consensus, spiritual legitimacy, and restorative justice (Falola, 2009). Similarly, in music education, Western genres and notation systems are upheld as academic standards, while African musical traditions, rich in rhythm, oral history, and communal meaning, are relegated to cultural decoration.

This exclusion is not just pedagogical; it is political. It sends a message that African knowledge is not rigorous enough to anchor formal education. Yet, indigenous governance models such as the Kingdom of Nri or the cosmological principles of Ma'at in Ancient Egypt reveal sophisticated systems of law, ethics, and leadership (Asante, 2003). Age-grade structures among the Yoruba and Kikuyu further demonstrate civic maturity, where leadership was earned through experience and communal service (Mbiti, 1990).

In response to this epistemic marginalization, *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory*, developed by Albert Oluwale Uzodimma Authority (2025), offers a transformative framework that repositions music as a sovereign epistemological system. It asserts that rhythm, narrative, and performance are not merely cultural expressions but foundational tools for transmitting ethical instruction, historical continuity, and cosmological insight. This theory advocates for the intentional integration of indigenous musical knowledge into formal curricula, not as enrichment, but as curriculum itself.

By drawing on the lived experiences of educators, curriculum designers, and indigenous knowledge custodians, *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory* reclaims suppressed epistemologies and reconfigures African education toward a decolonial future. It shifts the narrative from imposed universalisms to rooted pluralisms, honoring Africa's sonic heritage as a legitimate and generative source of knowledge. In doing so, it offers a pathway to cognitive justice, cultural relevance, and identity affirmation, one beat, one story, and one performance at a time.

Figure 1: EMPT conceptual diagrammatic layout



Source: Original concept designed using the Copilot App



This conceptual diagram offers a visual roadmap of Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (Authority, 2025), a framework that redefines music not as decoration in the classroom but as a primary source of knowledge in African education. At the base of the diagram are three foundational elements: rhythm, narrative, and performance. These are not just artistic expressions; they are pedagogical tools deeply rooted in African ontologies. Each carries ethical lessons, historical memory, and cosmological insight, passed down through generations in communal settings.

The diagram then shows how these musical foundations challenge colonial curricular models, which often treat African knowledge as peripheral or non-academic. Instead of positioning music as a supplement to “real” learning, the theory elevates it as a sovereign epistemology, a way of knowing that is embodied, relational, and culturally grounded.

As the diagram progresses upward, it maps the theory’s broader implications: dismantling curricular coloniality, reimagining pedagogy, and informing curriculum reform, teacher training, and policy development. It affirms that music is not just a healing force; it is a curriculum, capable of restoring cognitive justice and cultural sovereignty in African education systems.

b) Comparative Analysis: Repositioning Music Education through Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory

For decades, Western music education has been shaped by three dominant paradigms: Formalist, Structuralist, and Cognitive models. These frameworks have influenced how music is taught, studied, and understood in classrooms across the globe. Formalist models emphasize internal musical logic, harmony, and notation, often treating music as an autonomous aesthetic system (Lerdahl & Jackendoff, 1983). Structuralist approaches interpret music as a semiotic code, a system of signs and symbols to be decoded. Cognitive models, grounded in psychology, focus on perception, memory, and learning processes, often reducing musical engagement to neurological or behavioral patterns (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002).

While these paradigms have contributed to the development of music education, they share a common limitation: they adopt an “**outside-in**” logic, applying external theories to explain musical behavior. This approach frequently sidelines the cultural, ethical, and cosmological dimensions of music, especially within indigenous contexts (Cross, 2001). Music becomes an object of analysis rather than a lived, communal experience. These models often abstract music from its social roots, stripping it of its power to transmit ancestral wisdom, ethical values, and collective memory.

In contrast, *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory* (EMPT), developed by Albert Authority (2025), offers an “**inside-out**” epistemology rooted in African ontologies. It does not treat music as a secondary tool for learning but as a sovereign system of knowledge. EMPT foregrounds rhythm, narrative, and performance as foundational pedagogical instruments, each deeply embedded in African ways of knowing. Rhythm teaches coordination and communal timing; narrative preserves history and moral instruction; performance embodies identity, resistance, and spiritual continuity.

This comparative analysis is not merely academic; it is politically and ethically urgent. It exposes how dominant Western models, despite their sophistication, often perpetuate curricular coloniality by excluding indigenous musical epistemologies. EMPT responds to this exclusion by reimagining



music education as a site of epistemic restoration, cultural relevance, and transformative praxis. It affirms that African musical traditions are not just cultural artifacts; they are curricula in themselves, capable of anchoring formal education in communal memory and cognitive justice.

By mapping the ontological, epistemic, and pedagogical divergences between EMPT and conventional models, this section provides a critical foundation for decolonizing music education. It invites educators, scholars, and policymakers to listen differently, to hear music not as abstraction but as embodied knowledge, deeply rooted in the lived realities of African communities.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework Matrix

Dimension	Formalist Model	Structuralist Model	Cognitive Model	Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (EMPT)
Epistemic Basis	Aesthetic autonomy	Semiotic systems	Mental representations	indigenous musical epistemologies
Ontological Orientation	Abstract, universal	Structural, relational	Neurocognitive, empirical	Communal, ancestral, cosmological
Role of Music	Object of analysis	Code of meaning	Stimulus for cognition	Living archive and ethical transmitter
Pedagogical Implications	Technique-focused	Interpretation-focused	Skill acquisition and memory	Identity restoration and cultural agency
Knowledge Transmission	Formal structures	Symbolic patterns	Cognitive scaffolding	Rhythm, narrative, performance
Cultural Relevance	Often Eurocentric	Contextual but abstract	Empirical but decontextualized	Culturally sovereign and embodied

This matrix reveals the paradigmatic shift introduced by EMPT. While dominant models treat music as an object of analysis or cognitive stimulus, EMPT reclaims music as a living, communal archive. It centers indigenous epistemologies and challenges the abstraction and decontextualization inherent in Western frameworks.

c.) Thematic Comparative Analysis: Reimagining Music Education through Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory

i.) Epistemology and Ontology

Western music education models, particularly Formalist and Structuralist paradigms, often rely on abstraction and symbolic logic, treating music as a system of codes detached from lived experience. These approaches prioritize technical precision and theoretical constructs over cultural meaning. In contrast, *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory* (EMPT) is rooted in African cosmologies, where music is not an object of study but a relational force that connects individuals to ancestry, community, and spirit. Verran (2001) highlights that indigenous knowledge systems operate through distinct logics of coherence and truth, often grounded in performance and relationality. Chilisa (2012) further emphasizes that indigenous epistemologies are communal, spiritual, and



embodied, qualities that are central to EMPT's framework, where rhythm and narrative are not decorative but deeply pedagogical.

ii.) Pedagogical Logic

Structuralist and Cognitive models tend to focus on decoding, interpretation, and skill acquisition, often reducing music education to technical mastery. EMPT shifts this focus toward **relational identity**, **ethical transmission**, and **cultural agency**. Paulo Freire's (1970) advocacy for dialogical and participatory learning finds resonance in EMPT's emphasis on communal musical engagement. Similarly, Paris and Alim (2017) call for culturally sustaining pedagogies that honor the linguistic and artistic practices of marginalized communities, an imperative that EMPT answers through sonic pedagogy rooted in African traditions.

iii.) Cultural and Political Implications

EMPT directly confronts the colonial legacy embedded in music curricula by restoring dignity to African musical traditions. It challenges the dominance of Western notation, harmony, and form as universal standards, calling instead for the recognition of indigenous sound systems as legitimate and generative. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) frames decoloniality as a struggle for epistemic freedom, while Santos (2014) urges the recognition of "epistemologies of the South." EMPT embodies both perspectives, offering a framework for **cognitive justice** and **cultural sovereignty** through music.

iv.) Implications for Theory and Practice

EMPT reorients music education toward epistemic restoration, cultural relevance, and identity affirmation. It provides a scalable model for curriculum reform that integrates indigenous musical knowledge into teacher training and policy development. By treating music as both epistemology and pedagogy, EMPT expands the scope of music education beyond technique and cognition into the realms of community, cosmology, and ethical instruction.

v.) Reframing the Paradigm

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory is not an add-on to existing models; it is a paradigm shift. It redefines music as a sovereign system of knowledge and reclaims African musical traditions as foundational to pedagogy. As global education systems grapple with the challenges of decolonization, EMPT offers a roadmap for restoring rhythm, breath, and song as tools of healing and transformation. The future of music education lies not in mastering notation, but in remembering the drumbeat of our ancestors.

vi.) Implications for Practice and Research

Authority's theory has profound implications for curriculum design, teacher preparation, and classroom practice. It calls for the integration of indigenous musical traditions, such as call-and-response, oral storytelling, and ritual performance, into formal education. Teacher training programs must be restructured to include indigenous pedagogical competencies and community-



based learning models (Campbell, 2004). Classroom practice should embrace performative and dialogic methods that honor ancestral knowledge and communal memory.

Future research should empirically explore EMPT's impact on learner identity, cognitive development, and cultural affirmation. Interdisciplinary collaboration with anthropology, linguistics, and cognitive ethnomusicology can deepen our understanding of music's epistemic dimensions (Merriam, 1964; Nettl, 2005). EMPT invites scholars to listen not only with their ears but also with their histories.

Figure 2: EMPT's 'inside-out' vs. formalist, structuralist, and cognitive models 'outside-in' approaches to musical practices



The diagram above illustrates the relationship between external and indigenous systems of musical knowledge and pedagogy. At the top, External Theories and Aesthetic/Structural/Cognitive Models represent Western frameworks that shape conventional understandings of Musical Practice, focusing on performance, structure, and cognition.

In contrast, the lower section highlights an indigenous epistemological framework rooted in indigenous Musical Logic, which encompasses culturally specific ways of knowing, making, and learning music. This indigenous foundation informs the Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory, a model that theorizes culturally situated music education.

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (EMPT) transcends the boundaries of Formalist, Structuralist, and Cognitive models. While dominant paradigms descend from external theories into musical practice, EMPT rises from indigenous musical logic into pedagogy, policy, and epistemic revolution. It contrasts the top-down descent of dominant paradigms (outside-in/external theories) with EMPT's bottom-up ascent (inside-out/EMPD) from indigenous musical rationality into pedagogics, strategic, and epistemic reconstruction.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory offers a bold reimagining of music's role in education, not as entertainment or symbolic ornament, but as a sovereign system of knowledge. It challenges the long-standing dominance of Western representational frameworks that reduce music to aesthetic form or cognitive function and instead positions African musical traditions as living archives of ethical instruction, historical continuity, and communal intelligence.

This theory is more than conceptual; it is a call to action. It affirms that rhythm, narrative, and performance are not pedagogical supplements but foundational tools for transmitting indigenous wisdom. In doing so, it aligns with Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) assertion that reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems is essential not only for cultural survival but also for intellectual sovereignty within global academic discourse.

By validating oral, sonic, and embodied traditions, *Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory* contributes to the pursuit of cognitive justice, a principle championed by Santos (2014), who argues for the recognition of "epistemologies of the South" as legitimate frameworks for knowledge production. The theory responds to this imperative by offering a culturally grounded, globally resonant model for curriculum reform.

Its adoption across educational systems holds transformative potential. Integrating indigenous sound traditions into formal curricula can foster intercultural dialogue, dismantle monocultural assumptions, and promote epistemic diversity. This echoes Paris and Alim's (2017) call for culturally sustaining pedagogies that treat the artistic and linguistic practices of marginalized communities as assets, not deficits.

As both theory and praxis, *Episto-Musical Pedagogy* invites educators, policymakers, and researchers to reimagine pedagogy through the vibrancy of African musical epistemologies. It challenges us to listen not only with our ears but also with our histories, our communities, and our ethical commitments to justice. In reclaiming music as medicine, archive, and pedagogy, this framework breathes life into the possibility of education as a site of healing, resistance, and renewal.

REFERENCES

- Agawu, K. (2003). *Representing African music: Postcolonial notes, queries, and positions*. Routledge.
- Akinpelu, J. A. (2015). *Education for national development: The Nigerian experience*. Ibadan University Press.
- Akua, C. (2020). *Education for transformation: The keys to releasing the genius of African American students*. African-Centered Education Foundation.
- Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of educational research*, 86(1), 163-206. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0034654315582066>



- Asante, M. K. (1988). *Afrocentricity*. Africa World Press.
- Asante, M. K. (1991). *The Afrocentric idea*. Temple University Press.
- Asante, M. K. (2003). *Afrocentricity: The theory of social change*. African American Images.
- Authority, O. A. U. (2025). Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory: A framework for decolonizing African indigenous knowledge and curriculum reform through sound and story. *GRS-Journal of Arts and Educational Sciences*, 1(3), 47–53. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17164496>
- Bell, S. (2019). Critical Race Theory in Education: Analyzing African American Students' Experience with Epistemological Racism and Eurocentric Curriculum. <https://www.academia.edu/download/76291850/viewcontent.pdf>
- Bennett, C. (2001). Genres of research in multicultural education. *Review of educational research*, 71(2), 171-217. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/00346543071002171>
- Binder, A. J. (2009). Contentious curricula: Afrocentrism and creationism in American public schools. <https://www.torrossa.com/gs/resourceProxy?an=5641362&publisher=FZO137>
- Bolaji, A. (2019). Creative ethnomusicology and African identity: Revisiting Akin Euba's legacy. *Journal of African Musicology*, 12(1), 45–62.
- Bond, V. L. (2017). Culturally responsive education in music education: A literature review. *Contributions to Music Education*, 42, 153-180. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26367441>
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature. *Teacher education quarterly*, 38(1), 65-84. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23479642>
- Campbell, P. S. (2004). *Teaching music globally: Experiencing music, expressing culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Carver, A. (2020). African music, knowledge, and curriculum: Applying Bernsteinian and legitimization code theory to South African music curricula. University of Witwatersrand. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mandy-Carver-2/publication/363346332_AFRICAN_MUSIC_KNOWLEDGE_AND_CURRICULUM_APPLYING_BERNSTEINIAN_AND_LEGITIMATION_CODE_THEORY_TO_SOUTH_AFRICAN_MUSIC_CURRICULA/links/6318af97071ea12e361622aa/AFRICAN-MUSIC-KNOWLEDGE-AND-CURRICULUM-APPLYING-BERNSTEINIAN-AND-LEGITIMATION-CODE-THEORY-TO-SOUTH-AFRICAN-MUSIC-CURRICULA.pdf
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *indigenous research methodologies*. SAGE Publications.
- Cross, I. (2001). Music, cognition, culture, and evolution. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 930(1), 28–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2001.tb05723.x>
- Dei, G. J. S. (2010). *Teaching Africa: Towards a transgressive pedagogy*. Springer.
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 7-27. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1361332052000340971>
- Euba, A. (1989). *Towards an African pianism: Keyboard music by African composers*. Bayreuth African Studies Series.
- Falola, T. (2009). *Colonialism and violence in Nigeria*. Indiana University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.



- Goldenberg, B. M. (2014). White teachers in urban classrooms: Embracing non-white students' cultural capital for better teaching and learning. *Urban Education*, 49(1), 111-144. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0042085912472510>
- Hess, J. (2015). Upping the "anti-": The value of an anti-racist theoretical framework in music education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 14(1), 66-92. https://www.academia.edu/download/106627722/Hess14_1.pdf
- Howard, T. C. (2013). How does it feel to be a problem? Black male students, schools, and learning in enhancing the knowledge base to disrupt deficit frameworks. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 54-86. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0091732X12462985>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American educational research journal*, 32(3), 465-491. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Leonardo, Z. (2013). *Race frameworks: A multidimensional theory of racism and education*. Teachers College Press. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ZfKoAAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Afrocentric+education+literature+review+music+curriculum+theories+and+frameworks&ots=rcFmMLVIPW&sig=2QIKGxFYBONoALS1brxMUF3Jv0w>
- Lerdahl, F., & Jackendoff, R. (1983). *A generative theory of tonal music*. MIT Press.
- Massy, P. J., & Sembiente, S. F. (2023). Pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and student experiences within postsecondary music education: A systematic literature review. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 45(3), 600-615. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1321103X221128172>
- Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African religions and philosophy* (2nd ed.). Heinemann.
- McKoy, C. L., & Lind, V. R. (2022). *Culturally responsive teaching in music education: From understanding to application*. Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003208136/culturally-responsive-teaching-music-education-constance-mckoy-vicki-lind>
- McPherson, G. E., & Gabrielsson, A. (2002). From sound to significance: Exploring the musical experience. In R. Colwell & C. Richardson (Eds.), *The new handbook of research on music teaching and learning* (pp. 547-561). Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, A. P. (1964). *The anthropology of music*. Northwestern University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. Wits University Press.
- Nettl, B. (2005). *The study of ethnomusicology: Thirty-one issues and concepts*. University of Illinois Press.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.
- Nzewi, O. D. (2025). African performance epistemology: fundamental indigenous creative theories and philosophies for application in contemporary music education (Doctoral dissertation). <https://researchrepository.ul.ie/entities/publication/b30982d3-0bd5-4955-a3d1-200d5cd9dadd>
- Okebukola, P. (2021). *Revised Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for Nigerian Universities*. National Universities Commission.
- Omojola, B. (2013). *Music and social dynamics in Nigeria*. Ibadan University Press.



- Palmer, E. S., Vodicka, J., Huynh, T., D'Alexander, C., & Crawford, L. (2022). Grounded framework for culturally relevant and responsive music teaching. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 41(1), 24-33. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/87551233211055815>
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Ramsey, G. P. (2003). *Race music: Black cultures from bebop to hip-hop* (Vol. 7). Univ of California Press. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=_4AJ_StNwVUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=Afrocentric+education+literature+review+music+curriculum+theories+and+frameworks&ots=JU7GSBmyoX&sig=UZ4C8zxbz_DCd2qRI8axmz_p9Uk
- Santos, B. de S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Schippers, H. (2009). *Facing the music: Shaping music education from a global perspective*. Oxford University Press. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=-yYzW0ujEsIC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Afrocentric+education+literature+review+music+curriculum+theories+and+frameworks&ots=65Gpx_rjd1&sig=Poz2H9LQVf2IHcAk9L576YRUk4A
- Shockley, K. M. (2020). *African-centered education: Theory and practice*. Peter Lang.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Thiong'o, N. wa. (1986). *Decolonizing the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.
- Verran, H. (2001). *Science and African logic*. University of Chicago Press.
- Yosso, T. J. (2002). Toward a critical race curriculum. *Equity & excellence in education*, 35(2), 93-107. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/713845283>