British Journal of Contemporary Education
ISSN: 2997-3198
Volume 6, Issue 1, 2026 (pp. 15-34)
www.abjournals.org

MISUSE OF NOMENCLATURE IN MUSIC DISCOURSES: REASSESSING THE ROLES OF MUSICIANS AND MUSICOLOGISTS IN 21ST-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP AND CULTURE

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Cite this article:

Authority, O. A. U. (2026), Misuse of Nomenclature in Music Discourses: Reassessing the Roles of Musicians and Musicologists in 21st-Century Scholarship and Culture. British Journal of Contemporary Education 6(1), 15-34. DOI: 10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

Manuscript History

Received: 12 Nov 2025

Accepted: 18 Dec 2025

Published: 8 Jan 2026

ABSTRACT: *This study interrogates the persistent conflation of professional identities between musicians and musicologists in contemporary discourse, illuminating the implications of the misuse of nomenclature within academic and cultural contexts. Grounded in qualitative content analysis, the research critically evaluates published texts, institutional documents, and expert commentaries to demarcate the distinctive roles, epistemic boundaries, and contributions of musicians and musicologists in the 21st century. Drawing from disciplinary identity theory and field theory, the investigation reveals that while musicians primarily engage in creative production and performative interpretation, musicologists operate within a research-oriented framework, generating theoretical, historical, and analytical insights. The findings indicate that terminological ambiguity not only distorts public and academic perceptions but also undermines disciplinary legitimacy and pedagogical clarity. Furthermore, the study highlights trends in hybrid professional identities and the challenges posed by interdisciplinary practices, especially in higher education and arts administration. The article concludes by advocating for a more nuanced nomenclatural paradigm that reflects the functional and epistemological distinctions between practitioners and scholars in music. Such a recalibration holds promise for curriculum reform, scholarly publishing, and professional accreditation, thereby fostering greater coherence in the global musicological landscape and advancing intellectual integrity across domains of music practice and research.*

KEYWORDS: Ambiguity, Conflation, Epistemic, Nomenclature, Paradigm.

Article DOI: 10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO
DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

British Journal of Contemporary Education
ISSN: 2997-3198
Volume 6, Issue 1, 2026 (pp. 15-34)

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine walking into a university concert hall where a pianist is rehearsing Chopin, while down the corridor a scholar is poring over manuscripts of African drumming traditions. Both individuals are deeply immersed in music, yet their roles are often collapsed into a single label: "musician." This everyday conflation, whether in public discourse, institutional documents, or even academic writing, illustrates the persistent ambiguity that clouds the distinction between those who create and perform music and those who study, analyze, and theorize it. Such blurred boundaries are not merely semantic; they carry significant implications for disciplinary identity, legitimacy, and pedagogy.

In the 21st century, the porousness between creative practice and academic inquiry has intensified, leading to what scholars describe as "terminological slippage" in music discourses (Agawu, 2003; Nettl, 2005). Musicians, traditionally associated with performance, composition, and cultural transmission, are increasingly seen as overlapping with musicologists, whose primary orientation lies in research, interpretation, and theoretical analysis (Cook, 1998). While this hybridity enriches the field, it also complicates how professional identities are understood and institutionalized. As Kwabena Nketia (1998) observed, African traditions often integrate performance and scholarship seamlessly, but Western academic frameworks have historically enforced a bifurcation that privileges analytical inquiry over creative practice.

The misuse of nomenclature has consequences beyond semantics. It undermines the legitimacy of musicological scholarship, dilutes professional clarity, and complicates curriculum development in higher education (Idolor, 2005; Jorgensen, 2010). For example, when universities equate performance training with musicological study, students may graduate with gaps in research literacy or misaligned professional expectations. Similarly, editorial practices in scholarly publishing often fail to differentiate between practitioner and scholar, perpetuating epistemic confusion (Bowman, 2001).

This article, therefore, seeks to critically examine the conceptual and functional distinctions between musicians and musicologists, with particular attention to how these roles are constructed, perceived, and institutionalized in contemporary society. Drawing upon Abbott's (1988) Disciplinary Identity Theory, which explores how professions compete for jurisdiction over knowledge and tasks, and Bourdieu's (1993) Field Theory, which situates professional identities within broader structures of power and cultural capital, the study interrogates the epistemological boundaries that define each role.

The objectives of this inquiry are fivefold: (1) To interrogate the historical and contemporary misuse of the terms "musician" and "musicologist" within academic and cultural discourses. (2) To clarify disciplinary boundaries by distinguishing the functional and epistemological orientations of each role. (3) To expose the implications of conflated identities for academic legitimacy, curriculum development, and public perception. (4) To recommend contextually appropriate terminology that reflects cultural sensitivity and scholarly rigor. (5) To advocate for terminological precision in scholarly publishing and peer-review practices.

Methodologically, this study employs qualitative content analysis of institutional documents, published texts, curricula, and expert commentaries across African and Western contexts. This comparative lens ensures that both indigenous epistemologies and Eurocentric frameworks are

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DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

considered, highlighting tensions, hybrid identities, and interdisciplinary practices. Through systematic coding, triangulation, and theoretical grounding, the findings aim to illuminate emerging trends and contradictions, ultimately advocating for a recalibrated nomenclature that preserves disciplinary integrity while embracing the realities of contemporary scholarship and culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the persistent conflation between musicians and musicologists, it is useful to trace how these identities have been historically defined, reshaped, and institutionalized across different cultural and academic contexts. The story of these roles is not linear; rather, it reflects shifting epistemologies, colonial legacies, and evolving professional boundaries.

(a.) Early Definitions

The word *musician* has long referred to those engaged in the creation, performance, and interpretation of music. In ancient Greece, musicians were celebrated not only as entertainers but also as conveyors of moral and spiritual values. Plato and Aristotle both emphasized music's ethical and educational functions, situating musicianship within broader philosophical debates about virtue and society (West, 1992). During the medieval and Renaissance periods, musicianship was further codified through guilds and patronage systems, which emphasized technical skill, artistry, and service to religious or aristocratic institutions (Atlas, 1998).

By contrast, the identity of the *musicologist* is relatively modern. The term *Musikwissenschaft* ("science of music") was introduced in the 19th century by Friedrich Chrysander to denote a scholarly approach to music distinct from its performance (Samson, 2001). Guido Adler's seminal essay in 1885 divided musicology into historical and systematic branches, laying the foundation for disciplinary boundaries that continue to shape the field today (Adler, 1885/1981). Musicologists thus emerged as analysts, historians, and theorists, tasked with producing music knowledge rather than performing it.

In African contexts, however, the distinction between musicians and musicologists was less rigid. Traditional African practitioners often embodied both roles simultaneously. As J. H. Kwabena Nketia (1974) observed, elder musicians functioned as cultural historians, theorists, and performers, transmitting knowledge through oral pedagogy. This holistic model challenges Western bifurcations and underscores the need for culturally sensitive nomenclature that reflects indigenous epistemologies.

(b.) Evolution of Roles

The 20th century witnessed significant transformations in both musicianship and musicology. Musicians expanded their scope through technological innovations, global collaborations, and genre hybridization. Conservatories and professional ensembles institutionalized musicianship, while the rise of popular music industries redefined musicians as both artists and entrepreneurs (Lewis, 2008).

Musicologists, meanwhile, diversified into subfields such as ethnomusicology, cognitive musicology, and sociomusicology. Bruno Nettl (2005) emphasized the importance of cultural

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DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

context and fieldwork, while Susan McClary (1991) introduced feminist critique, reshaping musicology into a more interdisciplinary and critical enterprise. African scholars, such as Meki Nzewi (2007) and Akin Euba (1999), advanced African musicology by integrating indigenous epistemologies and challenging Eurocentric paradigms.

Despite these developments, the boundaries between musicians and musicologists became increasingly porous. Hybrid identities, composer-theorists, performer-researchers, and scholar-artists emerged, particularly within universities and arts administration. While this interdisciplinarity enriched musical discourse, it also complicated terminological clarity and professional recognition (Brown, Merker & Wallin, 2000).

(c.) Institutionalization of Music Disciplines

The formal separation between performance and scholarship was entrenched in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Conservatories such as the Paris Conservatoire (founded in 1795) and the Leipzig Conservatory (1843) prioritized performance training, while universities like Oxford and Harvard cultivated musicology as a scholarly discipline rooted in historical and theoretical analysis (Weber, 2004). The founding of the International Musicological Society (IMS) in 1927 further institutionalized musicology as a research field distinct from performance (Bohlman, 1993).

By the mid-20th century, ethnomusicology departments in the United States expanded the scope of musicological inquiry beyond Western classical traditions. Institutions such as UCLA and Indiana University became hubs for ethnomusicological research, emphasizing fieldwork, cultural immersion, and comparative methodologies (Nettl, 2005). These developments entrenched the epistemological divide between creative and analytical domains, even as interdisciplinary practices began to blur them.

(d.) Colonial and Postcolonial Influences

Colonial education systems in Africa and Asia imposed Eurocentric frameworks that categorized music roles according to Western binaries: composer versus scholar, performer versus theorist. In Nigeria, missionary schools and colonial curricula privileged Western classical music while marginalizing indigenous epistemologies (Sadoh, 2010). This hierarchy often positioned musicologists as more intellectually legitimate than traditional musicians.

Postcolonial scholars challenged these imposed categorizations. Akin Euba's concept of *African Pianism* (1989) and Meki Nzewi's theory of African music as a science of sound (2007) redefined musicological identity through indigenous paradigms. Their work emphasized oral transmission, communal participation, and spiritual dimensions, elements often excluded from Western frameworks. These interventions highlight the need for nomenclature that reflects both tradition and transformation, particularly within African and global contexts.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on two complementary theories, Abbott's (1988) Disciplinary Identity Theory and Bourdieu's (1993) Field Theory, to interrogate how professional roles in music are defined, legitimized, and contested. Abbott's framework helps us understand how professions compete for jurisdiction over knowledge and tasks. In the context of music, this means examining how musicians, musicologists, and hybrid scholar-practitioners claim authority over different aspects of musical production, interpretation, and pedagogy. Bourdieu's Field Theory adds a structural lens, situating these roles within broader systems of power, cultural capital, and institutional recognition. It allows us to see how professional identities are shaped not only by expertise but also by the social and academic fields in which they operate.

Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for analyzing the epistemological boundaries that separate, and sometimes blur, the categories of musician, musicologist, and hybrid practitioner. They help explain why nomenclature matters: not just as a semantic issue, but as a reflection of deeper struggles over legitimacy, recognition, and access to institutional resources.

The methodology aligns closely with this theoretical framework. Using qualitative content analysis, the study examines published texts, institutional documents, and expert commentaries to trace how these roles are constructed and represented. The taxonomy that emerges is not imposed but inductively derived from patterns in the data, reflecting the dynamic interplay between individual agency and structural positioning. By applying these theories, the study advances a clearer, more ethically grounded vocabulary for describing professional identities in music, one that respects both tradition and transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study is rooted in qualitative content analysis, chosen for its capacity to illuminate how disciplinary identities are constructed and contested through language. Rather than treating musicianship and musicology as fixed categories, the research explores how professional roles are framed, legitimized, and sometimes blurred across scholarly texts, institutional documents, and expert commentaries.

The approach is interpretive and constructivist. It does not seek universal definitions, but instead traces how meaning is co-produced through context, authorship, and institutional framing. The taxonomy proposed, distinguishing Musicians, Musicologists, and Hybrid Scholar-Practitioners, emerged inductively from patterns observed in the data, rather than being imposed from the outset.

Three types of sources were analyzed. First, published scholarship by African and global musicologists provided insight into how disciplinary boundaries are theorized. Second, institutional documents, such as university program brochures and accreditation guidelines, revealed how roles are formalized and communicated. Third, expert commentaries, including interviews, lectures, and reflective essays, offered firsthand perspectives on hybrid identities and epistemic tensions. Nigerian scholars were prioritized to ensure cultural specificity and to foreground African intellectual agency.

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The analytical process unfolded in stages. Relevant texts were selected based on thematic relevance and authorial credibility. These texts were then coded for recurring descriptors, terms like "composer," "researcher," "pedagogue," and "ethnomusicologist," which signaled epistemic orientation. Using thematic coding, roles were grouped into three categories based on function, output, and orientation. Comparative case studies, including figures, such as Nwankpa, Adeogun, Onyeji, Igbi, Nwamara, Nzewi, and Euba, were used to test the taxonomy's clarity and applicability. NVivo-15 software supported the coding process, but manual interpretation remained central to ensure depth and nuance.

This methodology aligns with the study's theoretical framework, which draws on Bourdieu's field theory, decolonial epistemology, and narrative identity. The findings section builds directly on the coded categories, offering visual frameworks and policy recommendations that reflect the taxonomy's practical relevance.

Although the study did not involve direct human subjects, it engages deeply with indigenous knowledge systems and lived scholarly identities. Ethical care was taken to cite African scholars accurately, avoid extractive framing, and respect the cultural contexts of musical practice. Interpretations were cross-checked against authorial intent wherever possible, and the taxonomy was designed to empower rather than essentialize.

(a.) Limitations

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available texts and institutional documents, which may not fully capture the informal or emergent dimensions of hybrid identity, especially within underrepresented or non-academic communities. The taxonomy, while grounded in rigorous analysis, remains context-sensitive and may require adaptation when applied across different cultural or disciplinary terrains. Additionally, the absence of direct interviews or ethnographic fieldwork constrains the depth of experiential insight.

(b.) Reflexivity Statement

As a researcher committed to ethical transparency and cognitive justice, he acknowledges his positionality in shaping this inquiry. The decision to foreground African scholars and prioritize Nigerian case studies reflects both a scholarly imperative and a personal commitment to decolonial praxis. Throughout the process, the researcher remained attentive to power dynamics embedded in citation, representation, and categorization. Rather than claiming neutrality, he embraced a reflexive stance, recognizing that all scholarship is situated, and that clarity in nomenclature must serve not only academic precision but also the dignity and agency of those it describes.

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www.abjournals.org

EPISTEMOLOGICAL SHIFTS

The way music has been understood, both as an art and as a field of study, has always reflected broader intellectual currents. Each historical moment reshaped not only how music was practiced but also how musicians and musicologists were named, valued, and distinguished. These epistemological shifts are central to understanding why nomenclature remains contested in the 21st century.

(a.) From Enlightenment Rationalism to Romantic Expression

During the Enlightenment, music was increasingly theorized as a rational and mathematical construct. Scholars and philosophers treated music as a system of order, aligning it with ideals of balance, symmetry, and reason. Lydia Goehr (1992) describes this period as one in which the "imaginary museum of musical works" emerged, codifying music into abstract structures that could be analyzed apart from performance. This rationalist framing elevated the role of the theorist and analyst, while musicians were often positioned as executors of pre-defined works.

Romanticism disrupted this paradigm by shifting emphasis toward emotional expression and individual creativity. Musicians were celebrated as inspired creators whose performances embodied subjective depth, while musicologists began to narrate music's cultural and philosophical meanings through historical and aesthetic lenses. This tension between rationalist analysis and Romantic expressivity laid the groundwork for the modern distinction between performer and scholar.

(b.) Modernism and the Rise of Systematic Musicology

The modernist era introduced fragmentation, abstraction, and experimentation, prompting musicologists to adopt empirical and interdisciplinary methods. The transition from speculative philosophy to empirical analysis was evident in the rise of systematic musicology, which incorporated tools from acoustics, psychology, and eventually cognitive science (Cook & Everist, 1999). This shift distanced musicology further from performance-oriented practices, reinforcing the divide between those who create music and those who study it. Yet, as scholars such as Ekwueme (2004) and Nzewi (1991) remind us, African traditions continued to resist such compartmentalization, insisting on the inseparability of practice, theory, and cultural meaning.

(c.) Interdisciplinary Convergences

By the late 20th century, musicology increasingly intersected with disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and gender studies. Bruno Nettl (2005) advocated ethnographic approaches that foregrounded cultural context and participant observation, while Susan McClary (1991) introduced feminist critique, challenging the gendered assumptions embedded in canonical works. These interdisciplinary convergences expanded musicology's methodological toolkit, enabling scholars to interrogate music as a social, political, and psychological phenomenon.

African scholarship further complicated these boundaries. Meki Nzewi (1997) and Akin Euba (2001) advanced indigenous epistemologies, arguing that African music must be understood through oral transmission, communal participation, and spiritual dimensions. Their interventions highlight how Western disciplinary categories often fail to capture the holistic

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nature of African musical practice, where the performer is simultaneously a historian, a theorist, and a philosopher. This blurring of roles complicates nomenclature and underscores the need for culturally sensitive distinctions.

(d.) Canon Formation and Revisions

Historical musicology played a central role in constructing the Western classical canon, privileging works by European male composers, such as Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Joseph Kerman (1983) critiqued this canon for its exclusionary tendencies, noting how curricula and concert programming reinforced Eurocentric hierarchies.

Recent efforts to decolonize music curricula have sought to revise this canon by including African art music, Indigenous traditions, and diasporic genres. Kofi Agawu (2003, 2020) argues for a redefinition of musical modernity that embraces African composers, such as Joshua Uzoigwe and Fela Sowande, whose works challenge Eurocentric aesthetic norms. These revisions underscore the need for terminological precision that reflects diverse epistemologies and cultural contexts. Without such precision, the contributions of non-Western musicians risk being misclassified or undervalued within global scholarship.

(e.) Professional Identity and Accreditation

The evolution of professional titles and qualifications has further complicated the distinction between musicians and musicologists. The rise of doctoral programs in musicology formalized scholarly credentials and reinforced academic legitimacy (Jørgensen, 2010). Meanwhile, certification programs for musicians validated performance expertise but often lacked theoretical rigor, creating asymmetries in how professional authority was recognized.

Hybrid identities have emerged, with individuals holding both performance and research credentials. Yet the conflation of titles, such as “Dr.” or “Professor” with musicological authority, can obscure functional distinctions. Georgina Born (2010) calls for a relational musicology paradigm that accounts for interdisciplinary practice and institutional context, recognizing that musicians and musicologists increasingly inhabit overlapping spaces.

These epistemological shifts, rationalist codification, Romantic expressivity, modernist empiricism, interdisciplinary convergence, canon revision, and professional accreditation directly inform this study’s findings. They reveal that terminological ambiguity is not accidental but rooted in centuries of shifting intellectual frameworks and institutional practices. The persistence of hybrid identities and interdisciplinary overlaps makes nomenclatural clarity more urgent than ever, particularly in higher education and scholarly publishing.

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Volume 6, Issue 1, 2026 (pp. 15-34)

CONTEMPORARY DISTINCTIONS

The 21st century has brought with it a profound reconfiguration of what it means to be a musician or a musicologist. These roles, once clearly demarcated, now overlap in ways that both enrich and complicate professional identity. Historical trajectories, from Enlightenment rationalism to postcolonial critique, have shaped these distinctions, and today they manifest in new forms of practice, pedagogy, and scholarship.

(a.) Musicians in the 21st Century

The role of the musician has expanded far beyond the traditional boundaries of performance and composition. Musicians today are not only interpreters of musical works but also creators of cultural meaning, curators of sonic experiences, and agents of social engagement. They are expected to master their instruments or vocal techniques, engage with diverse genres, and adapt to evolving digital platforms for production and dissemination. This includes proficiency in music theory, improvisation, and collaborative performance, as well as skills in music production, social media engagement, and audience development (Bowman, 2001; Kwami, 1994).

In African contexts, musicians continue to serve as custodians of cultural heritage and innovators of sonic expression. Meki Nzewi (1991, 1997) emphasizes that African musicians embody "creative practice and philosophical depth," often integrating performance with storytelling, ritual, and pedagogy. This holistic role challenges Western compartmentalization and affirms the musician's place as a multidimensional cultural actor. Similarly, Akpabot (1986) and Ekwueme (2004) highlight how Nigerian musicians function as both cultural historians and community leaders, ensuring continuity of indigenous knowledge systems while innovating within contemporary genres.

Moreover, musicians increasingly contribute to interdisciplinary projects, educational outreach, and civic initiatives. Their work fosters emotional resonance, social cohesion, and cultural continuity, making them indispensable to both artistic ecosystems and societal development (Omibiyi, 1983; Omojola, 2017). In this way, musicians have become cultural entrepreneurs, navigating the intersections of art, commerce, and community, while simultaneously shaping public discourse through their creative output.

Figures 1 & 2 – Showing musician/s (e.g., performer/s with instrument/s) and a musicologist (e.g., a researcher in a library with sheet music)

Source*: Original idea, created via Copilot.*

Article DOI: 10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO
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(b.) Musicologists in the 21st Century

Musicologists, by contrast, operate within an intensive research framework that prioritizes theoretical inquiry, historical analysis, and cultural critique. Their primary contributions lie in generating knowledge about music's structures, contexts, and meanings across time and space. Susan McClary (1991) notes that musicologists interrogate "how musical narratives reflect and construct social identities," thereby positioning music as a site of intellectual and ideological engagement.

The field of musicology has diversified into subdisciplines, such as ethnomusicology, cognitive musicology, popular music studies, and eco-musicology. Bruno Nettl (2005) advocates for "fieldwork and cultural immersion" as essential methodologies, particularly in ethnomusicological research. African scholars, such as Akin Euba (2001) and J. H. Kwabena Nketia (1998), have advanced indigenous epistemologies, challenging colonial legacies and redefining musicological inquiry through African lenses. Their work demonstrates that musicology in African contexts must account for oral transmission, communal participation, and spiritual dimensions, elements often excluded from Western frameworks.

Contemporary musicologists engage in archival research, score analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration. They contribute to scholarly publishing, curriculum development, and policy advocacy, often serving as consultants in media, education, and cultural institutions (Idolor, 2005; Jørgensen, 2010). Importantly, musicologists are increasingly involved in digital humanities, using computational tools to analyze musical data and visualize historical trends (Utz, 2021). This technological integration expands the scope of musicological research and facilitates broader dissemination of scholarly insights.

While some musicologists maintain performative or compositional practices, their primary orientation remains analytical and reflective. George Lewis (2008) contends that the musicologist's role is to "interrogate the conditions under which music is produced and received," thereby contributing to critical discourse and intellectual rigor in the arts. This duality, where scholars may also perform, and performers may also theorize, illustrates the hybrid identities that complicate nomenclature today.

(c.) Linking to Findings

These contemporary distinctions directly inform the findings of this study. They reveal that musicianship and musicology, though historically separated, now intersect in ways that blur professional boundaries. The persistence of hybrid identities, performer-researchers, scholar-composers, and cultural entrepreneurs underscores the urgency of recalibrating nomenclature. Without terminological precision, the legitimacy of both practice and scholarship risks being undermined, and pedagogical clarity in higher education remains elusive.

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Volume 6, Issue 1, 2026 (pp. 15-34)

www.abjournals.org

OVERLAPPING ROLES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

The 21st century has witnessed a growing entanglement between the worlds of musicianship and musicology. What were once distinct professional identities, one rooted in creative practice and the other in scholarly inquiry, now overlap in ways that both enrich and complicate the discourse. This overlap has given rise to persistent misconceptions that distort public and academic understanding of each role, while simultaneously highlighting shared competencies that blur disciplinary boundaries.

(a.) Common Misconceptions

One of the most enduring myths is the assumption that musicologists are simply "failed musicians." This stereotype, rooted in reductive views of scholarly practice, undermines the intellectual rigor of musicological inquiry and perpetuates a hierarchy that privileges performance over analysis (Tarasti, 2002). Such a view ignores the fact that musicologists contribute unique insights into the cultural, historical, and theoretical dimensions of music, insights that cannot be reduced to performance alone.

Equally problematic is the belief that musicians lack theoretical or historical knowledge, suggesting that their contributions are limited to creativity and execution. Many contemporary musicians possess advanced knowledge of theory, history, and cultural context, often engaging in scholarly discourse through program notes, masterclasses, and collaborations with academics. George Lewis (2008), for example, demonstrates how performer-composers can simultaneously advance theoretical critique and artistic innovation. Similarly, Meki Nzewi (1991, 1997) emphasizes that African musicians embody philosophical depth, integrating performance with storytelling, ritual, and pedagogy.

Another misconception is that musicologists remain detached from live music or creative processes. Ethnomusicologists, in particular, frequently immerse themselves in fieldwork that involves performance, improvisation, and cultural participation. Bruno Nettl (2005) underscores the importance of cultural immersion and participant observation, while J. H. Kwabena Nketia (1998) reminds us that African traditions do not separate theory from practice; scholars and performers often inhabit the same identity.

These misconceptions are reinforced by institutional language and media representations that conflate the terms "musician" and "musicologist." Program brochures, academic profiles, and cultural commentaries often use the terms interchangeably, erasing the epistemic specificity of each role (Cowell, 1965; Idolor, 2005). Such terminological ambiguity contributes to disciplinary confusion and undermines both pedagogical clarity and professional legitimacy.

(b.) Overlapping Skills and Responsibilities

Despite their distinct orientations, musicians and musicologists share several overlapping competencies that reflect the evolving nature of music practice and scholarship. Both engage in critical listening, score analysis, and interpretive decision-making, though for different purposes. Musicians apply these skills to enhance performance authenticity and expressivity, while musicologists use them to generate analytical insights and historical narratives (McClary, 1991; Utz, 2021).

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Both professions also contribute to curriculum development, public education, and cultural preservation. Musicians often serve as educators in conservatories and community programs, while musicologists design academic syllabi, curate exhibitions, and advise cultural institutions (Euba, 2001; Omibiyi, 1983). In African scholarship, this overlap is particularly pronounced, as figures like Nzewi and Euba advocate for integrative models that honor indigenous knowledge systems and creative praxis.

Technological fluency represents another shared domain. Musicians and musicologists alike utilize digital tools for composition, transcription, and analysis. The rise of digital humanities has enabled musicologists to visualize musical data and collaborate with performers in multimedia projects (Utz, 2021). Similarly, musicians employ software for recording, editing, and disseminating their work, often engaging with scholarly platforms to contextualize their output.

Finally, both roles are increasingly involved in interdisciplinary research, drawing from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and gender studies to enrich their understanding of music's social functions and aesthetic dimensions (Brown, Merker, & Wallin, 2000; Nettl, 2005). This convergence reflects a broader shift toward hybrid professional identities that challenge rigid disciplinary boundaries and call for a recalibrated nomenclature.

(c.) Linking to Findings

These overlapping roles and persistent misconceptions directly inform the findings of this study. They reveal that terminological ambiguity is not simply a matter of semantics but a reflection of deeper historical and cultural trajectories. The persistence of hybrid identities, including those of performer-researchers, scholar-composers, and cultural entrepreneurs, underscores the urgency of developing a nomenclatural paradigm that preserves disciplinary integrity while acknowledging the realities of interdisciplinary practice.

CASE STUDIES AND IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE NOMENCLATURE

The blurred boundaries between musicians and musicologists become most visible when examining individual careers. Case studies provide concrete illustrations of how professional identities are constructed, perceived, and sometimes misrepresented. They also emphasize the importance of accurate nomenclature in preserving disciplinary integrity and avoiding epistemic confusion.

(a.) Musicians as Creative Practitioners

Musicians are primarily engaged in creative production, performance, and interpretive expression. Their contributions are situated within artistic praxis rather than scholarly inquiry.

Take, for instance, **Lang Lang**, the celebrated Chinese pianist whose global performances exemplify interpretive mastery and technical brilliance. His artistry is deeply informed by historical repertoire, yet his orientation remains rooted in performative practice rather than academic analysis (Taruskin, 2005).

Similarly, **Angélique Kidjo**, the Grammy-winning Beninese singer and songwriter, fuses Afrobeat, jazz, and Western pop to create a body of work that reflects cultural hybridity and

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advocacy. While her music engages with issues of identity and globalization, her role remains that of a practitioner rather than a theorist (Nzewi, 1991).

In Nigeria, **Femi Kuti** continues the politically charged legacy of Afrobeat pioneered by his father, Fela Kuti. His saxophone-driven performances are culturally embedded and socially transformative, but they are not framed within musicological discourse (Euba, 2001).

These figures are sometimes mischaracterized as musicologists because of their deep cultural engagement and musical literacy. Yet their primary orientation is performative, underscoring the need for terminological precision that distinguishes artistic practice from scholarly inquiry.

(b.) Musicologists as Scholarly Analysts

By contrast, musicologists operate within a research-oriented framework, producing theoretical, historical, and analytical scholarship. Their contributions lie in generating knowledge about music's structures, contexts, and meanings.

Susan McClary exemplifies this role. Known for her feminist critique of Western art music, she interrogates how musical narratives reflect and construct social identities (McClary, 1991). Her work is emblematic of musicological inquiry, not musical performance.

In Africa, **J. H. Kwabena Nketia** stands as a pioneering figure whose scholarship on indigenous African music systems laid the foundation for ethnomusicological studies across the continent. His work is analytical and archival, distinguishing him from performers (Nketia, 1998).

Bruno Nettl, one of the most influential ethnomusicologists of the 20th century, shaped the study of non-Western traditions through extensive fieldwork and theoretical contributions. His scholarship demonstrates the epistemic orientation of musicology, rooted in analysis and interpretation rather than performance (Nettl, 2005).

These scholars are often conflated with musicians because of their deep musical knowledge. Yet their contributions are epistemic, not performative, and their authority derives from research rather than artistic practice.

Figures 3 & 4 – Showing musician/s in performance settings and musicologists who also double as musicians in performance and research settings, highlighting their distinct contributions and expertise.

Source: *Original concept designed using Copilot.*

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www.abjournals.org

(c.) Hybrid Identities and Interdisciplinary Praxis

The 21st century has witnessed the rise of hybrid identities that blur the boundaries between musicians and musicologists. These figures embody both creative and scholarly orientations, complicating nomenclatural clarity.

George E. Lewis, for example, is a composer, performer, and scholar whose work integrates improvisation, African American aesthetics, and academic critique. His book *A Power Stronger Than Itself* (2008) exemplifies this duality, situating his creative practice within a broader intellectual framework.

In Nigeria, **Meki Nzewi** represents another hybrid identity. As both composer and musicologist, his writings on African musical practice are simultaneously theoretical and experiential, challenging Western disciplinary boundaries (Nzewi, 1997).

Similarly, **Akin Euba** advanced the concept of "African Pianism," a paradigm that bridges performance and analysis. His work exemplifies the fusion of creative and scholarly domains, demonstrating how African epistemologies resist rigid separations between practitioner and scholar (Euba, 2001).

These hybrid figures complicate nomenclatural clarity, underscoring the need for a taxonomy that accommodates interdisciplinary praxis. Their careers reveal that while musicianship and musicology can overlap, each role retains distinct epistemological orientations that must be acknowledged to preserve disciplinary legitimacy.

Table 3: Showing Comparative Framework: Nigerian Hybrid Music Scholars

Scholar	**Scholarly Contributions (Research/Teaching)**	**Creative Contributions (Composition/Performance)**
Christian Onyeji	Developed *Research-Composition* method; advanced African art music pedagogy (Onyeji, 2008)	Composed *Drummistic Piano Works* and choral pieces, integrating indigenous idioms
Alvan-Ikoku Nwamara	Research on African musical identity, heritage, and institutionalization of music education (Nwamara, 2019)	Over 350 compositions, including *Nwanyi Akiti*; winner of national competitions (Nwamara, 2020)
Stephen Olusoji	Published on theory and pedagogy; advanced Nigerian curriculum development	Composed *Nigerian Dances for Piano* and *Melorhythmic Pieces* performed internationally (Olusoji, 2015)
Mudiakevwe Igbi	Research on indigenous traditions, highlife, and church music; organological studies (Igbi, 2019)	Composed works integrating Plateau State idioms into art music
Onyee Nwakpa	Scholarship on performance analysis and cultural studies; ethos in Nigerian music (Nwankpa, & Okunade, 2023)	Composed *Reconciliation Symphony* blending African idioms with Western techniques (Nwankpa, 1994)
Oluranti Adeogun	Doctoral work on Nigerian music education policy; applied Bourdieu's field theory (Adeogun, 2005)	Composed works integrating Yoruba traditional idioms into his work

Article DOI: 10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO
DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

(d.) Linking to Findings

These case studies illustrate why accurate nomenclature is essential. Musicians, musicologists, and hybrid figures each contribute uniquely to the musical arts, but their roles must be clearly distinguished to preserve disciplinary legitimacy. Nigerian scholars such as Onyee Nwakpa, Alvani-Ikokwu Nwamara, Stephen Olusoji, Christian Onyeji, Mudiakevwe Igbi, and Oluranti Adeogun exemplify hybrid identities, combining rigorous scholarship with creative practice. Nwakpa integrates performance analysis with composition, Nwamara advances institutional scholarship while producing a prolific body of works, Olusoji bridges pedagogy and composition, Onyeji pioneers research-composition methods rooted in African idioms, Igbi fuses indigenous traditions with academic frameworks, and Adeogun unites policy critique with contemporary art music. Alongside earlier figures such as Meki Nzewi and Akin Euba, who long demonstrated the productive tensions of interdisciplinary praxis, these scholars embody the dual orientation of African musicology, simultaneously creators and theorists. Together, they underscore the urgency of recalibrating nomenclature to reflect both tradition and transformation, ensuring that hybrid contributions are recognized without erasing the epistemological distinctions between practice and scholarship.

IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE NOMENCLATURE

The language we use to describe professional identities in music is not a trivial matter. Words carry authority, and when they are misapplied, they shape perceptions, policies, and practices in ways that can distort reality. Accurate nomenclature is therefore essential for maintaining disciplinary legitimacy and epistemological clarity. Mislabeling musicians as musicologists, or vice versa, does more than confuse terminology; it undermines the credibility of scholarship by conflating artistic intuition with methodological rigor (Tarasti, 2002). It also obscures the distinct contributions of each domain, leading to misaligned expectations in publishing, funding, and institutional recognition (Cowell, 1965). As Utz (2021) observes, terminological ambiguity dilutes the authority of musicological critique in policy, curriculum, and cultural discourse. Precision in naming fosters clearer professional boundaries, enabling collaboration and specialization without erasing the unique epistemic orientations of each role.

(a.) Educational Implications

The consequences of imprecise nomenclature are particularly visible in education. When students are trained in performance but believe they are engaging in musicological inquiry, they often graduate with gaps in research literacy and critical analysis (Lewis, 2008). Institutions also struggle to evaluate hybrid competencies without clear frameworks, creating challenges in assessment and accreditation. As Ambriz (2013) notes, the absence of terminological clarity can leave graduates entering academia or industry with uncertain professional identities, affecting employability and scholarly output. Brown, Merker, and Wallin (2000) further emphasize that blurred boundaries between practice and scholarship complicate curriculum design and student identity formation. A recalibrated nomenclature would support differentiated learning pathways, ensuring that performance training and scholarly inquiry are both valued but not conflated.

Article DOI: 10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO
DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

British Journal of Contemporary Education
ISSN: 2997-3198
Volume 6, Issue 1, 2026 (pp. 15-34)

(b.) Contribution to Scholarship

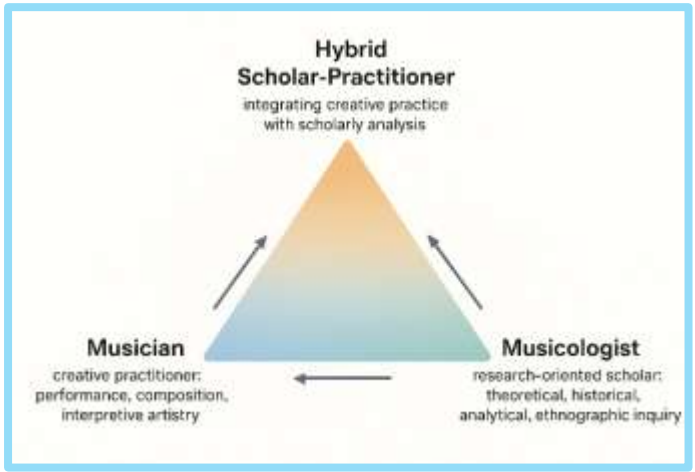
This study contributes to musicological scholarship by clarifying disciplinary identity and reinforcing epistemic boundaries. By delineating the orientations of musicians and musicologists, it advances Bourdieu's (1993) field theory, situating professional roles within broader structures of power and institutional logic. It also informs curriculum reform by providing a framework for rethinking music education to reflect functional distinctions and hybrid realities. Finally, it advocates for terminological rigor in scholarly publishing, improving peer-review protocols and citation practices.

Ultimately, accurate nomenclature is not simply about semantics; it is about intellectual integrity and cultural sensitivity. By recalibrating the way we classify musical professionals, we can foster greater coherence in global musicological discourse and ensure that both practice and scholarship are recognized for their distinct but complementary contributions.

PROPOSING THE 'TAXONOMY OF MUSICAL IDENTITIES'

To preserve disciplinary legitimacy and pedagogical clarity, this study proposes a triangular taxonomy (i.e., *Taxonomy of Musical Identities*) that formally distinguishes professional identities in music. A *Musician* is defined as a creative practitioner whose primary orientation lies in performance, composition, and interpretive artistry, often serving as a custodian of cultural heritage and a producer of sonic meaning. A *Musicologist* is defined as a research-oriented scholar trained in theoretical, historical, analytical, or ethnographic inquiry, contributing to the intellectual framing of music through rigorous academic methods. A *Hybrid Scholar-Practitioner* is defined as an individual who embodies both roles, integrating creative practice with scholarly analysis, producing compositions, performances, and simultaneously advancing research, pedagogy, or policy. This tripartite taxonomy acknowledges the distinct epistemological orientations of each category while accommodating the realities of interdisciplinary praxis, ensuring that nomenclature reflects both tradition and transformation in global musicological discourse.

Figure 5: Showing the Taxonomy of Musical Identity



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www.abjournals.org

The image presents a triangular musical taxonomy chart showing the relationship between three identities: **Musician**, **Musicologist**, and **Hybrid Scholar-Practitioner**. Each role occupies one corner of the triangle: Musician on the lower left (creative practitioner: performance, composition, interpretive artistry), Musicologist on the lower right (research-oriented scholar: theoretical, historical, analytical, ethnographic inquiry), and the Hybrid Scholar-Practitioner at the top (integrating creative practice with scholarly analysis). A soft gradient fills the triangle, symbolizing the fluid overlap between creative practice and scholarly inquiry. Arrows around the triangle illustrate how individuals may move between these roles, highlighting the dynamic continuum connecting performance, composition, research, and integrated hybrid scholarship.

(a.) Policy Recommendation on Nomenclature Standards in Music Disciplines

Purpose
To ensure disciplinary clarity, professional legitimacy, and pedagogical coherence, universities and scholarly associations shall adopt standardized nomenclature to distinguish between *musicians* (creative practitioners) and *musicologists* (research-oriented scholars).

Policy Statement

(i.) **Terminological Precision**

- The term *musician* shall be reserved for individuals primarily engaged in creative production, performance, and interpretive artistry.
- The term *musicologist* shall be reserved for individuals trained in research-oriented frameworks, contributing to theoretical, historical, analytical, or ethnographic scholarship.

(ii.) **Formal Titles and Prefixes**

- Musicologists holding doctoral or professorial qualifications shall be designated with standardized prefixes, such as **Dr. Mus.** (Doctor of Musicology) or **Prof. Mus.** (Professor of Musicology).
- These titles shall be used in academic publications, institutional records, and professional accreditation to distinguish scholarly authority from artistic practice.

(iii.) **Educational and Accreditation Standards**

- Curricula shall explicitly differentiate pathways in performance and scholarship, ensuring students understand the epistemological distinctions between musicianship and musicology.
- Accreditation bodies shall require institutions to adopt nomenclature standards in program descriptions, degree titles, and faculty appointments.

(iv.) **Implementation and Review**

- Universities and associations shall conduct language audits of institutional documents, program brochures, and scholarly publications to ensure compliance.

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- This policy shall be reviewed every five years to account for evolving interdisciplinary practices and hybrid professional identities.

Rationale

Accurate nomenclature strengthens disciplinary boundaries, prevents misclassification of professional identities, and enhances collaboration between practitioners and scholars. It safeguards the intellectual integrity of musicology while affirming the cultural and artistic contributions of musicians.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the persistent conflation of the terms *musician* and *musicologist*, revealing the epistemological, functional, and institutional distinctions that define each role in the 21st century. Musicians are primarily engaged in creative production, performance, and interpretive artistry, while musicologists operate within a research-oriented framework, contributing to theoretical, historical, and analytical discourses through rigorous academic inquiry. Case studies of figures, such as Angélique Kidjo, Susan McClary, Kwabena Nketia, and George Lewis, illustrate how these identities are often blurred in public and institutional discourse, leading to misconceptions that undermine disciplinary legitimacy and pedagogical clarity.

The findings of this research demonstrate that terminological ambiguity is not merely a semantic issue but a structural one. Mislabeling practitioners as scholars, or scholars as practitioners, distorts the integrity of music scholarship, complicates curriculum development, and impedes professional accreditation. As Nettl (2005) argues, disciplinary clarity is essential for sustaining the credibility of ethnomusicology and related fields. Similarly, McClary (1991) shows how scholarly inquiry requires distinct methodological rigor that cannot be reduced to performance practice. Without accurate nomenclature, the authority of musicological critique in policy, publishing, and education risks dilution (Utz, 2021).

To address these challenges, this article advocates for a recalibration of disciplinary boundaries through the adoption of more precise and contextually appropriate nomenclature. Just as other professions employ formal prefixes to signal expertise, such as *Esq.* for lawyers or *PE* for engineers, musicology requires its own markers of scholarly identity. This study proposes the use of **Dr. Mus.** (Doctor of Musicology), **Prof. Mus.** (Professor of Musicology), **Mus. Pract.** (Music Practitioner), **Mus. Res.** (Music Researcher), and **Mus. Hyb.** (Hybrid Musician-Scholar) as standardized titles for trained musicologists. These designations would distinguish research-oriented scholars from practitioners, while also honoring the intellectual and cultural weight carried by titles in both Western and African traditions (Nketia, 1998).

Such precision is not merely linguistic; it is foundational to the advancement of musicology as a legitimate and impactful field within the global academic and cultural landscape. By clarifying professional identities, institutions can foster greater coherence in curriculum design, scholarly publishing, and accreditation standards. Ultimately, accurate nomenclature strengthens collaboration between musicians and musicologists, ensuring that both practice and scholarship are recognized for their distinct yet complementary contributions to the musical arts.

Article DOI: 10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO
DOI URL: https://doi.org/10.52589/BJCE-UFWWSNJO

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