REIMAGINING MUSIC EDUCATION FOR JOB CREATION AND SELF-RELIANCE IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

Alegbeleye Friday Joseph
Department of Music
Federal College of Education, Okene, Kogi State
friday.alegbeleye@yahoo.com | 08032243728

Abstract

This study examined how music education in North Central Nigeria can be reimagined to support job creation and self-reliance among youth, drawing on qualitative interview data from students and lecturers in four tertiary institutions offering music programmes in the region. Using a qualitative research design, purposively selected samples of 63 music students and 12 music lecturers were interviewed. They provided their perceptions of the entrepreneurial adequacy of current music curricula, the competencies students possess and require, and the barriers constraining music-based enterprise. The findings are interpreted through Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory, and both are used to recommend a way forward for entrepreneurship-integrated music education in the region. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed a consistent gap between the largely theoretical and performance-oriented content of existing programmes and the practical, business-related competencies needed for self-employment in music. Both students and lecturers identified curriculum rigidity and limited industry collaboration as central constraints. There was a convergence of strong support for the deliberate integration of business management, copyright and royalties' education, digital marketing, and experiential, project-based learning into music programmes. The study concludes that reimagining music education along these lines can meaningfully advance job creation and self-reliance among music graduates in North Central Nigeria.

Keywords: music education, entrepreneurship, job creation, self-reliance, North Central Nigeria

Introduction

Music occupies a central place in Nigerian social and cultural life, yet its economic potential as a driver of youth employment remains underexplored in North Central Nigeria. The region, comprising Kogi, Nasarawa, Kwara, Plateau, and Benue States, is home to more than thirty ethnic groups with a rich diversity of musical traditions. Agriculture, mining, and trade have historically anchored the regional economy, but recurring conflict, insecurity, and underinvestment in education have constrained economic growth and left youth unemployment persistently high across the region.

Nationally, the Nigerian music industry where genres like Afrobeats, hip-hop, highlife, and gospel have built global recognition, has grown into a significant contributor to the creative economy. The music industry has generated employment in music production, performance, artist management, and digital distribution. This growth has been concentrated in urban centers such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja, with North Central Nigeria contributing comparatively little to the industry's commercial expansion despite its cultural richness. A key structural reason for this gap is that music education in the region continues to be delivered as a conventional academic subject, oriented toward theory, notation, and performance. There is also the challenge of limited attention to the entrepreneurial competencies required to convert musical talent into sustainable livelihoods.

This study investigated that gap directly, through the perspectives of the people closest to it. That is, the music students and lecturers in four tertiary institutions across North Central Nigeria. It examined how these institutions' current curricula are perceived to prepare, or fail to prepare, students for self-employment; what entrepreneurial competencies students already possess and wish to acquire; what barriers constrain music-based enterprise; and what changes students and lecturers believe would make music education a more effective instrument of job creation and self-reliance**.**

Notwithstanding a vibrant musical culture, several interlocking challenges constrain the growth of the music sector in North Central Nigeria. High youth unemployment persists across the region, driven in part by a mismatch between the skills young people acquire in school and the competencies demanded by contemporary labour markets. Existing music education programmes are frequently under-resourced and structurally weak, with emphasis on theory and performance while offering little exposure to entrepreneurial subjects. Aspiring musicians and music entrepreneurs face considerable difficulty accessing start-up capital, equipment, and mentorship, because they lack skills in business planning, marketing, copyright management, or digital monetization. This limits their capacity to translate training into enterprise. The local music industry remains underdeveloped relative to its potential, such that talented individuals frequently migrate toward informal or unrelated work rather than building sustainable careers within the sector. This study provides evidence from students and lecturers to establish how these constraints exist as lived experiences and this in turn provided a foreground for the solutions proposed in the work.

Equipping young people with entrepreneurial competencies alongside musical skills responds directly to the demands of a contemporary job market in which formal wage employment is increasingly scarce. A reimagined music curriculum can provide a credible pathway to self-employment, thereby enhancing both individual livelihoods and community-level economic resilience. Strengthening linkages between music education institutions, local businesses, and government agencies can, over time, help build a sustainable local music ecosystem in which artists, producers, and educators mutually reinforce one another's success. An entrepreneurship-oriented approach to music education need not come at the expense of cultural preservation; rather, it can encourage innovation that keeps traditional musical forms economically and culturally relevant to successive generations.

Beyond its regional focus, the study contributes to Nigeria's efforts at economic diversification by foregrounding the creative economy, and specifically the music industry, as a credible contributor to gross domestic product and employment. It also has implications for curriculum reform through the illustration of how entrepreneurship can be embedded within a subject historically treated as purely artistic. By grounding its conclusions in the direct testimony of students and lecturers across four institutions, the study offers evidence that other Nigerian regions, and comparable contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, can draw upon when adapting their own creative-education systems.

Literature Review

A growing body of scholarship supports the proposition that embedding entrepreneurship within education enhances student engagement, stimulates innovation, and better equips learners for the demands of contemporary labour markets (Oyinlola et al., 2024; 3. Egbetokun, Olofinyehun & Adelowo, 2024; Madugu, Kawu & Jimoh, 2023). Within music education specifically, practical and entrepreneurially oriented training has been associated with more successful transitions into music-industry careers (Ogunrinade & Ogunrinade, 2025; Lawal, Soretire & Ogunye, 2024; Onwuegbuna & John, 2024). In the Nigerian educational system, curriculum authorities have similarly called for reforms that align music education with market realities and dual technical–entrepreneurial competencies (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2020).

Several recent empirical studies reinforce this position. Ekunwale (2022), employing ethnographic and qualitative methods supplemented by descriptive statistics, found that music education can foster job creation and self-reliance among Nigerian youth, and recommended that the government provide facilities and equipment while training music personnel to promote entrepreneurship. Using a descriptive research design, Agbidi (2024) similarly found that music education can generate employment across performance, teaching, and music-therapy domains, and recommended that music education be prioritized in Nigerian schools alongside dedicated government resourcing for music entrepreneurship. Udok (2025), using an empirical survey instrument administered to students in selected Nigerian higher institutions, found that music education can enhance entrepreneurial skills but that inadequate instruments and resources constrain this potential, recommending improved provisioning and stronger developmental feedback mechanisms. Earlier, Nnamani (2017) used a descriptive design to show that music entrepreneurship programmes can generate employment and promote self-reliance, recommending the introduction of such programmes across Nigerian institutions with accompanying resource support.

Collectively, these studies converge on three findings that motivated the present study. First, music education carries substantial, currently under-realized potential to generate employment across a range of sub-sectors, including production, performance, teaching, therapy, and artist management. Second, resource constraints, particularly inadequate instruments, infrastructure, and funding, consistently emerge as a principal barrier to translating that potential into outcomes. Third, existing recommendations converge on the need for structural reform: prioritising entrepreneurship within curricula, strengthening institutional resourcing, and building partnerships between educational institutions and industry. What remained comparatively underexplored in the North Central Nigerian context was direct, comparative testimony from students and lecturers themselves on how these gaps are experienced and what would resolve them; the present study addresses that gap.

Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory, originating from Moore's (1993) conception of business ecosystems and subsequently refined by Wurth, Stam and Spigel (2023) in relation to regional entrepreneurship, emphasizes the interdependence of the actors and conditions that enable entrepreneurship to flourish. Applied to music education, the theory directs attention to four interacting elements: individuals (students, educators, and practicing entrepreneurs), institutions (music schools, colleges, and industry partners), resources (funding, mentorship, and infrastructure), and context (the prevailing cultural, social, and economic environment). A central implication is that curriculum reform alone is unlikely to be sufficient; sustainable outcomes require the coordinated development of institutions, resource flows, and supportive context alongside curricular change.

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist Learning Theory holds that learners construct knowledge most effectively through active engagement and social interaction rather than passive instruction (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). Applied to music education, this suggests that entrepreneurial competence is best developed experientially, through composing, producing, performing, and collaborating in settings that mirror real industry conditions, rather than through decontextualized lectures on business principles (Pennill et al., 2022; Bell, 2019). Contextual learning, in which instruction is explicitly linked to industry needs and real-world application, is similarly emphasised as a mechanism for deepening both musical and entrepreneurial competence.

These theories suggest that an effective entrepreneurship-integrated music curriculum must simultaneously build ecosystem-level conditions, such as institutional partnerships, mentorship networks, and access to resources, and provide experiential, contextually grounded learning opportunities within the classroom and studio. As the findings below demonstrate, this dual emphasis closely aligns with what students and lecturers at the sampled institutions identified as necessary.

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how music students and lecturers in North Central Nigeria perceive the entrepreneurial adequacy of current music education and the changes needed to strengthen it. The study population comprised music students and lecturers in tertiary institutions offering music education programmes in North Central Nigeria. A purposive sample of 63 music students and 12 music lecturers was drawn from four institutions: the University of Jos (UNIJOS), Plateau State; the University of Abuja (UniAbuja); the Federal College of Education, Okene, Kogi State; and Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. Participants were purposively selected because they were directly engaged in music teaching and learning within these institutions and were therefore well placed to speak to the entrepreneurial content, adequacy, and limitations of current programmes.

Data were collected through structured, open-ended interview questions administered separately to students and lecturers. The collection process involved a mix of methods appropriate to each site, including face-to-face interviews and self-administered written and online responses. The student instrument comprised ten questions addressing motivation for studying music, perceived preparedness for employment, entrepreneurial skills acquired, areas of entrepreneurial interest, barriers to starting a music-related business, the practical orientation of coursework, prior income-earning experience through music, desired curriculum additions, perceived importance of entrepreneurship training, and expectations of institutional support. The lecturer instrument comprised a parallel set of ten questions addressing the current state of music education, curriculum adequacy for self-employment, competencies graduates should possess, barriers to integrating entrepreneurship into music education, the contribution of music education to youth employment, the importance of industry partnerships, effective pedagogical methods, necessary institutional support, the role of government, and expected outcomes of full entrepreneurship integration.

The responses from the interview were analysed thematically by grouping them into recurring categories, and organised into themes that cut across both the student and lecturer datasets. This made it easy for points of convergence and divergence between the two groups to be identified. Due to the qualitative nature of the data collected, findings are reported descriptively, using representative responses to illustrate each theme, rather than as numerical frequencies. Participants were informed of the study's purpose prior to their involvement, and their participation was voluntary. Responses were recorded and reported without attaching identifying information to individual participants; findings are presented only in aggregate, by respondent category (student or lecturer) and, where relevant, by theme, rather than by name or individually identifiable detail. Care was taken to represent both student and lecturer perspectives fairly and without distortion in the thematic analysis presented above.

Results

Motivations for Studying Music

Students reported a range of motivations for enrolling in music programmes, spanning intrinsic interest and talent development, ambitions toward professional performance, parental encouragement, and aspirations to teach music. Notably, there is the explicit hope that music would provide employment opportunities. The presence of employment-oriented motivation alongside more traditional artistic and pedagogical motivations suggests that many students enroll for music programmes with a mindset that music is a potential source of livelihood, not merely as an academic endeavour for the sake of earning a certificate.

Perceived Preparedness for Employment

Students’ responses were consistent in judging their current training as academically and artistically adequate but entrepreneurially deficient. Responses characterized the curriculum as preparing students "*academically but not for business,*" emphasizing theory and performance "*but not entrepreneurship*," and leaving students without instruction in "*how to earn income from music*". Several students called explicitly for "*more practical industry training*". Lecturers offered a corresponding assessment from the aspect of institutional contribution. They described the curriculum as mainly preparing students for teaching, with entrepreneurship receiving "*little* *attention*". The majority of the lecturers also shared a view that more industry-oriented courses are needed.

Entrepreneurial Skills Currently Acquired

Both lecturers and students indicated that entrepreneurial skill development within the current curriculum is minimal and largely incidental rather than deliberately taught. Some students explained that they develop entrepreneurial skills from organizing basic events within the campus. Also, they mentioned that their leadership training was gained informally through roles assigned to them at ensemble rehearsals. This led to them explicitly noting the absence of "*formal training in music business*" that is commensurate with what is needed to thrive in the music industry. Their account is consistent with the lecturers' own account of the curriculum as strong in theory but weak in practical entrepreneurship.

Areas of Entrepreneurial Interest

Students expressed interest in a wide range of music-related entrepreneurial pathways, including music production, artist management, event management, music teaching, digital music distribution, instrument repair, music therapy, and choir management. The high percentage of those who expressed such interests indicates that student demand for entrepreneurship training is to enable students to graduate from performance-based activities for scores alone to full value chain integration into the music industry. This way, they can utilize their entrepreneurship training in creative production as well as technical and therapeutic services.

Barriers to Music-Related Enterprise

The barriers identified by students stem from resource and access limitations. Specifically, they mentioned a lack of start-up capital, inadequate equipment, limited access to recording studios, lack of mentorship, limited business knowledge, and poor government support. Lecturers identified inadequate funding, lack of equipment, a rigid curriculum, limited staff expertise in entrepreneurship, poor industry collaboration, and institutional bureaucracy. These specific barriers cut across the institutions as they were repeated among students and lecturers alike. This suggests that constraints operate at both the individual level, where students lack capital, mentorship, and access, and the institutional level, where curricula, staffing, and funding structures have not been adapted to support entrepreneurship. Curiously, the lecturers did not mention lack of expertise as a constraint. This could either mean that they have the subject knowledge but no commensurate support from their institutions, that existing policies constrain them from exploring options outside of the curriculum, or that there is some bias in their report.

Practical Orientation of Coursework

Students consistently described their coursework as "*mostly theoretical*," with practical sessions that were "*too few*" and carried "*low unit weight*". Several of them noted a need for more field experience, access to sound equipment, musical instruments, and links to interact with practicing industry professionals. This account aligns with lecturers' description of the curriculum as "*outdated*" and constrained by "*limited facilities*," notwithstanding the presence of "*dedicated and resourceful lecturers*".

Existing Income-Generating Activity

Many students reported already earning income from music before graduation, through church performances, private keyboard tuition, event singing, and band performance. Their experiences indicate that informal entrepreneurial activity is occurring despite the limitations evident in formal training. A few students reported never having earned income from music, suggesting uneven access to informal income-generating opportunities among the sampled student population.

Desired Curriculum Additions

The students interviewed identified a clear and specific set of curriculum gaps based on their personal experiences in the classroom. They therefore called for the introduction of music business, copyright and royalties, digital marketing, music production, branding, financial management, social media promotion, and grant writing. This, they stated, should not be taught in theory alone but in practical form. Lecturers independently identified an overlapping set of competencies that graduates should possess before graduation. This includes business management, marketing, copyright knowledge, financial literacy, digital distribution, networking, communication skills, and leadership. All the gaps and recommended additions are significant indications and basis for curriculum reform.

Perceived Importance of Entrepreneurship Training

Students were emphatic about the value of entrepreneurship training. In fact, one student described it as an "*extremely important*" means of increasing employability, encouraging self-reliance, and reducing dependence on scarce government jobs. Two lecturers with over fifteen years of teaching experience reinforced this view from a systemic perspective. They linked entrepreneurship integration to reduced unemployment, increased self-reliance, more successful music businesses, a stronger local music industry, greater innovation, and improved economic development.

Institutional and Pedagogical Recommendations

Almost all the students made an appeal to their institutions to provide modern studios, partner with music industries, invite successful entrepreneurs as guest contributors, provide start-up grants, and organise entrepreneurship competitions. Lecturers who spoke from a pedagogical and structural standpoint identified project-based learning, experiential learning, business simulations, internships, collaborative projects, industry workshops, and student-run enterprises as the teaching methods best suited to developing entrepreneurial skills. They further identified recording studios, ICT facilities, business incubation centers, government grants, and staff development programmes as the institutional support required to sustain entrepreneurship-integrated music education. In addition, they called on government to pursue curriculum reform, increase funding to schools, provide graduate grants to support students venturing into creative industries, implement relevant policy, and infrastructure development.

Discussion

The findings paint a consistent picture across two independent respondent groups from four institutions, showing that current music education in North Central Nigeria is perceived as academically sound but entrepreneurially deficient. Both students and lecturers describe a curriculum leaning toward theory and performance, with practical, business-oriented content scarcely present. The findings are strengthened by corroboration from both the demand side (students seeking employable skills) and the supply side (lecturers responsible for designing and delivering the curriculum).

The barriers reported by the two groups are complementary, as students emphasize personal, capital, equipment, access, and mentorship constraints, while lecturers emphasise institutional and structural, curriculum rigidity, staff expertise, and industry linkage constraints. Viewed through the lens of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory (Moore, 1993; Wurth, Stam & Spigel, 2023), these barriers appear bi-dimensional: individual-level resource access and institutional-level policy. This suggests that curriculum reform alone, without accompanying investment in equipment, funding, and industry partnership, is unlikely to resolve the entrepreneurship gap that both groups have described.

The strong endorsement of project-based learning, internships, business simulations, and student enterprises by lecturers in particular is consistent with Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). The theory holds that entrepreneurial competence is best developed through active, contextually grounded engagement rather than passive instruction. Notably, several students reported already generating income from music informally, through church performances, private tuition, and gigs, prior to any formal entrepreneurship training. This suggests that students are already engaging in the kind of experiential, real-world music-business activity that a constructivist pedagogy would formalize and extend. The study therefore indicates that a curriculum built around such experiences would build on existing student practice, leading to a more refined and improved knowledge acquisition.

These findings extend earlier studies in Nigeria by Onwuegbuna & John (2024), Lawal, Soretire & Ogunye (2024), and Udok (2024), which established, on a general level, that music education can foster entrepreneurship and employment. With this present study, there is specificity through identification from direct respondent testimony regarding which competencies (copyright and royalties, digital marketing, financial management, grant writing) and which pedagogical methods (internships, simulations, student enterprises) students and lecturers in North Central Nigeria regard as priorities. This geographical specificity makes it possible for more actionable steps to be taken to redesign the curriculum rather than general recommendations to improve on or prioritize entrepreneurship.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to examine how music education in North Central Nigeria can be reimagined to support job creation and self-reliance among youth. The findings show a clear gap between the theoretical and performance-based orientation of current music education and the entrepreneurial competencies students need and want. They also show that students and lecturers largely agree on what would close that gap. These findings indicate that reimagining music education along entrepreneurial lines is both a curricular and an institutional undertaking, and that addressing one dimension without the other is unlikely to be sufficient.

On this basis, the study recommends that institutions offering music education in North Central Nigeria should revise their curricula to include dedicated courses in music business, copyright and royalties, digital marketing, and financial management, in direct response to the specific gaps identified by students and lecturers in this study. Institutions should adopt experiential teaching methods, including internships, business simulations, industry workshops, and student-run enterprises, consistent with the pedagogical preferences expressed by lecturers. Institutions should establish formal partnerships with music industry practitioners and organizations to provide mentorship, internship placements, and curriculum input, addressing the industry-collaboration gap identified by lecturers. Government at state and federal levels should support curriculum reform with corresponding investment in studio and ICT infrastructure, business incubation centres, and start-up grants for graduating students. Finally, continued research should track the outcomes of any resulting curriculum reforms, particularly graduate employment and self-employment rates, to build a longitudinal evidence base beyond the perceptions captured in this study.

References

Bell, R. (2019). Adapting to constructivist approaches to entrepreneurship education in the Chinese classroom. *Studies in Higher Education, 44*(11), 1969–1981. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1655724

Egbetokun, A., Olofinyehun, A. & Adelowo, C. (2024). Built to last? The long-term impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial attitude. *Entrepreneurship Education*, 7(1), 41–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41959-024-00114-9

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National Policy on Education* (6th ed.). NERDC Press

Gorman, G., Hanlon, J., & King, W. (1997). Some research perspectives on entrepreneurship education, enterprise education, and education for small business management: A ten-year literature review. International Small Business Journal, 15(3), 56–77.

Johnson, E. B. (2002). *Contextual teaching and learning: What it is and why it's here to stay*. Corwin Press.

Kourilsky, M. L., & Walstad, W. B. (1998). Entrepreneurship and small business education in American high schools. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 23(2), 41–52.

Lawal, D. T., Soretire, E. A., & Ogunye, O. (2024). Music education, digital economy and the fate of a music graduate in 21st century Nigeria. *Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists, 18*(1), 24–36.

Madugu, U., Kawu, B. A., & Jimoh, M. O. (2023). Influence of entrepreneurship education on students' innovation and creativity in nigerian public universities. *Journal of Economics Finance and Management Studies*, *6*(8), 3938-3946. https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v6-i8-43

Moore, J. F. (1993). Predators and prey: A new ecology of competition. Harvard Business Review, 71(3), 75–86.

OECD (2024). *Africa's Development Dynamics 2024: Skills, Jobs and Productivity*. AUC, Addis Ababa/OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/df06c7a4-en.

Ogunrinade, D., & Ogunrinade, S. (2025). The role of music entrepreneurship on economic development of music students in selected Nigerian higher institutions. *Covenant Journal of Entrepreneurship*, *9*(1), 9–22. https://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/index.php/cjoe/article/view/4879

Oliver, P. G., & Oliver, S. (2022). Innovative online learning in entrepreneurship education: The impact of embedding real-life industry practice in the virtual learning environment. *Industry and Higher Education*, 36(6), 693–703. https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222221121283

Olusoji, S. O. (2013). The relevance of music education to the Nigerian educational system. *African Journal of Teacher Education (AJOTE), 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.21083/ajote.v3i1.2189

Onwuegbuna, I., & John, M. U. (2024). Entrepreneurial skills and musical arts education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. *Journal of Nigerian Music Education, 15.* 199-219.

Onyenye, T. P., Uche, A. M., & Okafor, J. E. (2025). The place of music education in Nigeria economic development. AE-FUNAI Journal of Music and the Arts (AFUJMA), 2. 106-113.

Oyinlola, M., Kolade, O., Okoya, S. A., Ajala, O., Adefila, A., Adediji, A., Babaremu, K., Tijani, B., Adejuwon, J., Wambui, F., & Akinlabi, E. T. (2024). Entrepreneurship and innovation in Nigerian universities: Trends, challenges and opportunities. *Heliyon*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29940.

Pennill, N., Phillips, K., & Phillips, M. (2022). Student experiences and entrepreneurship education in a specialist creative arts HEI: A longitudinal approach. *Sociological Research in Music Education Advances*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41959-022-00085-9

Piaget, J. (1970). *Genetic Epistemology*. Columbia University Press

Piaget, J. (1973). *To Understand is to Invent: The Future of Education*. Grossman Publishers.

Udok, E. C. (2024). A study on music and entrepreneurial skills among students in selected public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Current Innovations in Education, 7*(1), 137–142.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wurth, B., Stam, E., & Spigel, B. (2023). Entrepreneurial ecosystem mechanisms. *Foundations and Trends in Entrepreneurship*, *19*(3), 224-339. https://doi.org/10.1561/0300000089