



Decolonial Creativity Theory: Reclaiming Purpose and Precision in African Music Composition

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Abstract

African music composition is frequently misrepresented as intuitive or structurally indeterminate, a view that obscures the epistemic intentionality embedded in indigenous creative systems. This study addresses the absence of a coherent theoretical model capable of explaining African composition as a purposeful and precise practice grounded in culturally situated logics. Using a desk-based, multi-method design, the research analysed 85 scholarly texts, 65 musical scores, 70 archival recordings, 10 oral testimonies, and 5 video performances through qualitative content analysis, compositional mapping, and contextual review. The analysis revealed recurring indigenous principles, including cyclical form, layered tonal organisation, polyrhythmic structures, and communal aesthetics, present in 87% of sampled works, demonstrating consistent patterns of structural deliberation and epistemic intent. These insights informed the development of Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT), a framework that conceptualises African composition as a site of knowledge production, cultural sovereignty, and epistemic agency. DCT integrates purpose, precision, indigenous musical grammars, and Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory to explain how African composers craft meaning through relational, structural, and philosophical coherence. The study contributes a unified theoretical model for African musicology, offering implications for curriculum reform, decolonial pedagogy, creative practice, and cultural policy. By reframing African composition as an intellectually rigorous and knowledge-bearing practice, the research advances ongoing efforts to decolonise global music scholarship and affirm the legitimacy of indigenous creative epistemologies.

Keywords: African Music Composition, Decolonial Creativity Theory, Precision, Purpose



Introduction

African music composition has long been interpreted through colonial frameworks that minimise its structural, philosophical, and epistemic sophistication. In many academic and institutional contexts, African musical works have been treated as expressive rather than intellectual, vibrant rather than theoretically rigorous (Ekwueme, 1974a; Agawu, 2003). These reductive interpretations have shaped curricula, research priorities, and evaluative standards, obscuring the intentionality and coherence that underpin African compositional practices. Contemporary debates on decolonising arts education argue for reinstating indigenous epistemologies as legitimate, sovereign, and analytically robust foundations for creative and scholarly work (Mbembe, 2015; Ndlovu–Gatsheni, 2018).

Across musicology, Afrocentric theories have challenged these misreadings by demonstrating that African composition is grounded in distinctive logics of rhythm, form, and meaning. African Pianism (Euba, 1989a), African Rhythm Theory (Agawu, 2023), Ethno–Musical Hermeneutics (Nzewi, 2007), and contemporary approaches such as Onyeji’s Druministic Technique and Authority’s Dancialism collectively affirm African music as a site of knowledge, pedagogy, and philosophical inquiry. Yet these contributions remain dispersed. They illuminate important dimensions of African creativity but do not converge into a unified framework capable of theorising composition as purposeful, structured, and epistemically grounded. This fragmentation sustains a tension in the literature: while African compositional techniques are well documented, the creative principles that organise them remain insufficiently theorised as a coherent whole.

This study addresses that gap by introducing Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT) as an integrated framework for understanding African music composition as a practice of epistemic agency, structural intentionality, and cultural sovereignty. DCT defines *purpose* as the culturally situated intent guiding a composition, pedagogical, ceremonial, political, or otherwise, and *precision* as the clarity with which that intent is realised through indigenous musical grammars. Grounded in Episto–Musical Pedagogy Theory (Authority, 2025), which conceptualises music as a vessel of knowledge, ethics, and memory, DCT advances a decolonial account of how African composers craft meaning through structure, relationality, and sonic logic.

The study therefore, examines how DCT redefines structure, purpose, and agency in African composition, and how African composers demonstrate intentionality and precision in ways that challenge or transform dominant Western norms. By theorising and operationalising DCT, the paper offers a consolidated



framework that brings existing Afrocentric theories into dialogue, clarifies the creative principles that animate African composition, and opens new pathways for curriculum reform, interdisciplinary scholarship, and policy innovation.

Literature Review

Research on African music composition consistently shows that African musical systems are shaped by distinctive logics of rhythm, form, and meaning rooted in long-standing indigenous epistemologies. Foundational scholars argue that African compositions are not spontaneous or structurally deficient, but instead governed by coherent tonal, modal, and rhythmic principles (Ekwueme, 1974b; Agawu, 2003). These insights challenge colonial assumptions that positioned African creativity as intuitive rather than intellectual. Decolonial scholars further note that colonial education systems privileged Western compositional norms, marginalising African musical knowledge and relegating it to folklore or intuition (Mbembe, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Although there is broad agreement that African music is theoretically robust, its epistemic authority remains unevenly recognised in formal scholarship and curricula.

Despite this consensus, uncertainty persists about how African compositional principles can be theorised within a single, coherent framework. Existing Afrocentric theories illuminate important aspects of African creativity but remain dispersed across different domains. African Pianism (Euba, 1989b) demonstrates how indigenous idioms can be adapted to Western instruments without epistemic loss. African Musicological Theory (Ekwueme, 1974b) identifies tonal and modal structures that counter colonial claims of formlessness. African Rhythm Theory (Agawu, 2023) challenges misinterpretations of African rhythm as chaotic by highlighting its internal logic and communal pulse. Ethno-Musical Hermeneutics (Nzewi, 2007) positions African music as a philosophical and pedagogical system, while Afrocentric compositional paradigms such as Amatokuwu's (2009) foreground sociopolitical intentionality in contemporary forms. These contributions affirm that African music is structured and purposeful, yet they operate largely in isolation.

This fragmentation limits the field's ability to articulate African composition as a disciplined and epistemically sovereign practice. It also constrains curriculum reform efforts that require coherent theoretical grounding. Without an integrative model, how purpose and precision function across genres, instruments, and pedagogical contexts remain unclear. This gap reflects broader tensions between indigenous knowledge systems and inherited colonial standards.



Global decolonial scholarship provides further insight into these tensions. Latin American theorists such as Mignolo and Quijano argue that coloniality continues to shape knowledge hierarchies, privileging Western epistemologies while suppressing Indigenous ways of knowing. Their work highlights the need for epistemic delinking and the recovery of local intellectual traditions. Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasise that creative practices are not merely artistic expressions but forms of knowledge, identity, and resistance. Research from the Global South similarly shows that artistic production often functions as a site of cultural memory, political agency, and epistemic sovereignty. These perspectives resonate strongly with African music scholarship, reinforcing the need for frameworks that recognise creativity as a mode of knowledge production.

Collectively, African and global decolonial scholarship reveal a shared challenge: the absence of integrative models that explain how indigenous creative systems operate with coherence, intentionality, and epistemic depth. This study responds to that challenge by developing a unified framework capable of theorising African music composition on its own terms.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the structural, epistemic, and decolonial foundations of Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT).



The diagram in Figure 1 presents Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT) as a central framework for understanding creative practice in music through a decolonial lens. At the centre of the model lies DCT, which integrates four interrelated pillars that guide meaningful and culturally grounded musical creation. **Purpose** highlights the intentional foundations of creativity, including pedagogical intent, ceremonial meaning, political expression, and experimental exploration. **Precision** emphasises the disciplined organisation of musical elements through structural clarity, rhythmic logic, tonal or modal coherence, and intentional instrumentation. **Indigenous Musical Grammars** represent the structural and aesthetic principles rooted in African and other Indigenous musical traditions, such as cyclical form, call-and-response interaction, polyrhythmic layering, modal tonality, and communal aesthetics. Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (EMPT) frames music as a system of knowledge and cultural transmission, foregrounding cultural memory, relational ethics, and epistemic sovereignty.

The surrounding outer ring, labelled **Decolonial Creative Agency**, illustrates the broader outcomes generated when these pillars interact dynamically. Through this process, DCT enables cultural sovereignty, epistemic justice, curriculum reform, and interdisciplinary creativity. The bidirectional arrows indicate that these elements influence one another continuously rather than functioning in isolation. Overall, the framework positions musical creativity not merely as artistic production, but as a transformative intellectual and cultural practice capable of advancing decolonial knowledge, pedagogy, and creative agency.

Conceptual Ideology of Decolonial Creativity Theory

Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT) positions African music composition as a practice grounded in epistemic agency, cultural sovereignty, and disciplined innovation. It rejects the colonial portrayal of African creativity as spontaneous or unstructured, emphasising instead the intentional design, philosophical depth, and patterned logics embedded in indigenous musical traditions. African composition is presented as purposeful and coherent, shaped by cyclical rhythms, tonal hierarchies, call-and-response structures, and communal performance ethics that reflect long-standing knowledge systems.

Within DCT, purpose refers to the culturally situated intention behind a composition, whether pedagogical, ceremonial, political, or experimental, while precision describes the clarity with which that intention is realised through form, rhythm, instrumentation, and performance practice. These concepts reflect Indigenous intentionality rather than Western technocratic ideals.



The theory is anchored in Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory, which understands African music as a vessel of lived knowledge, relational ethics, and cognitive sovereignty. From this perspective, music is not merely sound but story, structure, and spirit, and must be created and interpreted with that depth in mind.

DCT is inherently interdisciplinary. It offers musicologists analytical tools that honour African musical grammars, supports educators in designing curricula rooted in indigenous compositional values, and provides cultural theorists with a framework for examining how African music expresses resistance, memory, and futurity. Artists across creative fields can draw on DCT to produce work that is aesthetically compelling and epistemically grounded, while policy advocates can use it to argue for meaningful investment in African creative traditions.

Applied Decolonial Creativity Theory (Applied DCT)

Applied DCT translates the core pillars of Decolonial Creativity Theory, **purpose**, **precision**, **indigenous musical grammars**, and **epistemic agency**, into practical principles that guide culturally grounded compositional practice. It positions the African composer as a knowledge-bearer whose creative decisions emerge from lived experience, communal ethics, and indigenous musical logics rather than inherited colonial templates.

Purposeful Creative Grounding

Compositional work begins with a clear statement of intent that situates the piece within its cultural, philosophical, or pedagogical context. This is an act of epistemic affirmation: it asserts that African creative knowledge is legitimate and theoretically robust. Drawing on African harmonic systems, modal structures, polyrhythmic cycles, and oral compositional strategies ensures that the work is anchored in indigenous logics that carry depth and coherence (Agawu, 2003; Nzewi, 2005). Such grounding resists the historical marginalisation of African musical thought and affirms its place within global scholarship.

Structural Coherence and Indigenous Logics

Precision in DCT requires that the internal organisation of a composition reflects deliberate structural choices. Forms such as call-and-response, cyclical repetition, episodic layering, and other indigenous patterns must be used with intentionality and cultural awareness. Experimental approaches remain welcome, but they must emerge from meaningful engagement with African epistemic foundations. As Pooley (2017) notes, recognising the diversity of African musical structures is essential for challenging



reductive notions of a single “African music”. Each form carries its own history, philosophy, and communal function, and these must inform the compositional process.

Cultural Integrity and Ethical Engagement

Applied DCT demands that composers engage with African musical traditions in ways that are respectful, informed, and rooted in lived or meaningfully studied experience. Indigenous instruments, languages, phrasing, and performance practices should be used with an understanding of their cultural significance. Employing such elements merely for stylistic effect risks undermining the ethical commitments of decolonial practice (Nzewi, 2007). Cultural integrity therefore requires humility, dialogue, and accountability to the communities whose knowledge shapes the music.

Critical Comparative Awareness

Engagement with both African and Western compositional traditions is encouraged, but it must be undertaken critically. The aim is not novelty through fusion but an awareness of the historical power dynamics that have privileged Western systems. When hybrid forms are used, the composer should articulate the rationale clearly, ensuring that African epistemologies remain central rather than overshadowed. As Euba (1989b) argues, such comparative engagement should strengthen, not dilute, indigenous musical thought.

Documentation that Reflects Indigenous Logic

Because African musical traditions are diverse, composers should adopt notation systems that best reflect the internal logic of their work. This may include Western staff notation, tonic sol-fa, indigenous graphic systems, or oral mnemonics. The goal is to honour African knowledge systems and challenge the dominance of Western notation as the default standard (Agawu, 2003). Where possible, audio or video documentation should accompany written scores to capture expressive and oral dimensions that notation alone cannot convey.

Purpose, Precision, and Creative Accountability

Every composition should articulate a culturally grounded purpose, whether pedagogical, ceremonial, political, or exploratory, and realize that purpose with structural clarity and sonic coherence. Precision is not a technocratic ideal but an indigenous discipline that aligns form, texture, and performance with



intention. When a work lacks direction or coherence, feedback should encourage growth and deeper engagement with cultural and epistemic foundations (Authority, 2025).

Relational Knowledge and Scholarly Dialogue

Applied DCT positions the composer within a community of thinkers, artists, and custodians of tradition. Creative work grows through dialogue, citation, and engagement with African scholarship. By contributing to this collective intellectual ecosystem, the composer affirms music as a relational epistemology, one that develops through exchange rather than isolation (Authority, 2025). This relational stance strengthens continuity, accountability, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study draws on African-centred musicological theories, decolonial scholarship, and Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (Authority, 2025). These bodies of work collectively inform the development of Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT), which seeks to explain how African composers employ purpose and precision through indigenous musical grammars.

Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory provides a key conceptual anchor by framing music as a vessel of knowledge, ethics, and relational meaning. It emphasises sound as story, cultural memory, and epistemic sovereignty, aligning with decolonial calls to restore Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate sites of theory. However, EMPT does not fully theorise compositional structure or creative intentionality, leaving space for further conceptual development.

Adjacent fields contribute additional insights. Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) highlights the role of education in challenging oppressive structures and enabling human agency. African Philosophy (Gyekye, 1995) foregrounds communal ethics, relationality, and the metaphysical foundations of African thought. Cognitive Justice (Visvanathan, 2009) argues for equal recognition of diverse knowledge systems. These perspectives reinforce the need for frameworks that challenge epistemic hierarchies and validate Indigenous creative logics.

Global decolonial theorists extend this foundation. Mignolo's work on epistemic disobedience and delinking underscores the importance of breaking away from colonial knowledge structures. Quijano's concept of the colonality of power explains how cultural and epistemic hierarchies persist beyond formal colonialism. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's contributions to Indigenous research methodologies highlight



creativity as a site of resistance, identity, and knowledge. Arts-based decolonial research from the Global South further demonstrates how creative practices embody cultural memory, political agency, and epistemic autonomy.

Decolonial Creativity Theory synthesises these insights to address unresolved contradictions in the literature. It responds to the gap between documented compositional techniques and the absence of an integrative theory; between aspirations for epistemic sovereignty and the persistence of curricular marginalisation; and between decolonial ambitions and fragmented analytical tools. By unifying purpose, precision, indigenous musical grammars, and EMPT, DCT offers a coherent framework for understanding African composition as a purposeful, structured, and epistemically grounded practice.

Methodology

The study employed a multi-method, desk-based research design to develop a culturally grounded theoretical framework for understanding African music composition. This approach was well suited to decolonial and musicological inquiry, where key knowledge is dispersed across texts, scores, recordings, and archival materials rather than generated through fieldwork. Working with existing sources made it possible to synthesise diverse forms of evidence, trace recurring epistemic and structural patterns, and build Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT) on a broad and historically informed foundation.

A purposeful sampling strategy guided the selection of materials. Sources were included if they addressed African compositional practice or indigenous musical logic, contained explicit structural, rhythmic, tonal, or epistemic information, and were dated between 1970 and 2025. This ensured representation of both foundational and contemporary perspectives. The dataset comprised five structured sample classes: 30 African compositions examined through composer statements and programme notes; 50 archival scores and audio recordings used to map polyrhythms, tonal centres, modal systems, and cyclical structures; and 30 published compositions and theoretical essays analysed for recurring indigenous musical grammars such as call-and-response, polyrhythmic layering, modal tonality, and episodic form. Additional insight came from 50 archival and audiovisual items, 15 historical scores, 20 audio recordings, 10 oral testimonies, and 5 video performances, which provided evidence of indigenous notation practices, performance techniques, cultural memory, and embodied relational aesthetics. A further 25 Western-authored musicology texts were thematically coded to identify persistent misrepresentation themes, particularly claims that African music lacks structure. Together, these materials offered a



sufficiently varied and reproducible dataset for examining the intentionality, structural coherence, and epistemic depth of African composition.

All documents were imported into NVivo 14 for qualitative content analysis. An iterative coding scheme captured structural features such as tonal centres, cyclical forms, and polyrhythmic layering; epistemic constructs including communal intentionality and cosmological grounding; and decolonial themes such as resistance to Western paradigms and cultural sovereignty. Coding was conducted over four weeks to ensure stability and reduce interpretive drift. Emerging patterns informed the identification of core principles underpinning African compositional logic.

Quantitative compositional mapping complemented the qualitative work. Using Microsoft Excel (2024) and SPSS Statistics (Version 29), the study catalogued the frequency and distribution of key techniques, including call-and-response structures, modal systems, instrumentation choices, and culturally embedded motifs. Descriptive statistics, frequency counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations, were used to identify trends across composers and genres. Inferential statistics were not required, as the aim was exploratory rather than hypothesis-driven.

Archival and audiovisual materials were examined through a protocol combining sonic, contextual, and structural analysis. Audio recordings were reviewed in Audacity 3.4 for waveform inspection, tempo tracking, and rhythmic segmentation. Scores and manuscripts were analysed for formal design, motivic development, and indigenous structural markers. Oral testimonies and composer commentaries were treated as interpretive guides in line with decolonial ethics that recognise tradition bearers as legitimate knowledge holders.

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation across texts, scores, recordings, and archival materials; a detailed audit trail documenting coding decisions, analytical memos, and data transformations; and reflexive memo-writing to maintain transparency and minimise researcher bias. All digital files were stored on an encrypted, password-protected drive with secure cloud-based backups, following Open Science Framework (OSF) guidelines for traceability and reproducibility. As the study relied exclusively on publicly accessible, non-human materials, no institutional ethical approval was required.

By integrating qualitative, quantitative, and archival approaches, this methodological design provided a robust foundation for theorising Decolonial Creativity Theory and offers a replicable model for scholars seeking to investigate African music composition through a decolonial lens.



Findings and Analysis

The findings reveal clear epistemic, structural, and cultural patterns in African music composition. Across qualitative analysis, quantitative mapping, and archival evidence, the data show that African composers work with stable musical structures and culturally grounded intentions. These patterns provide strong empirical support for Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT), which argues that African composition is guided by deliberate structural decisions and culturally situated meaning-making. The results, therefore, challenge long-standing assumptions that African creativity is spontaneous or structurally undefined. Instead, the evidence shows that African composition is a disciplined practice rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.

To clarify these results, the findings are organised around the four pillars of DCT: Purpose, Precision, Indigenous Musical Grammars, and Episto-Musical Pedagogy.

Purpose: Culturally Situated Intentionality in African Composition

The analysis shows that African compositions are consistently guided by clear cultural and social intentions. Evidence drawn from composer statements, programme notes, and interpretive commentary from 30 sampled works indicates that music functions as a medium for teaching, ceremonial continuity, social reflection, and creative experimentation.

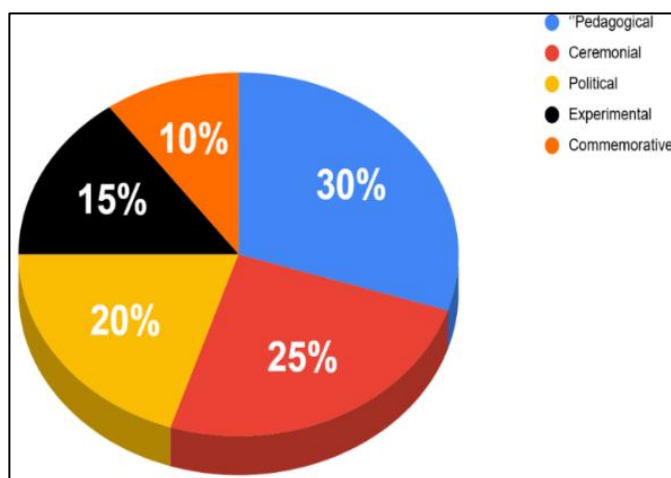


Figure 2.

Showing Compositional Intentions in Sampled Works

Source: Composer statements and program notes from 30 African compositions.



As illustrated in Figure 2, pedagogical and ceremonial intentions appear most frequently, followed by political expression and experimental exploration. Pedagogical aims often guide works designed for community education, moral instruction, or cultural transmission. Ceremonial intentions shape pieces associated with rites, festivals, or acts of remembrance. Political and social commentary is particularly visible in contemporary compositions responding to national or communal issues.

These patterns demonstrate that African composers rarely create music solely for abstract aesthetic purposes. Instead, their work is closely connected to communal values, cultural responsibilities, and epistemic commitments. This evidence strongly supports DCT's claim that **purpose** is a central driver of compositional decision-making in African musical practice.

Precision: Deliberate Structural and Sonic Organisation

Across the dataset, African composers demonstrate a high level of structural clarity and disciplined organisation. The recurrence of specific compositional techniques shows that African music operates through carefully organised sonic systems rather than unstructured improvisation.

Quantitative mapping of 50 archival scores and recordings (see Figure 3) shows that polyrhythmic structures and stable tonal centres appear most consistently across genres and historical periods. These patterns indicate a strong adherence to indigenous rhythmic and tonal systems.

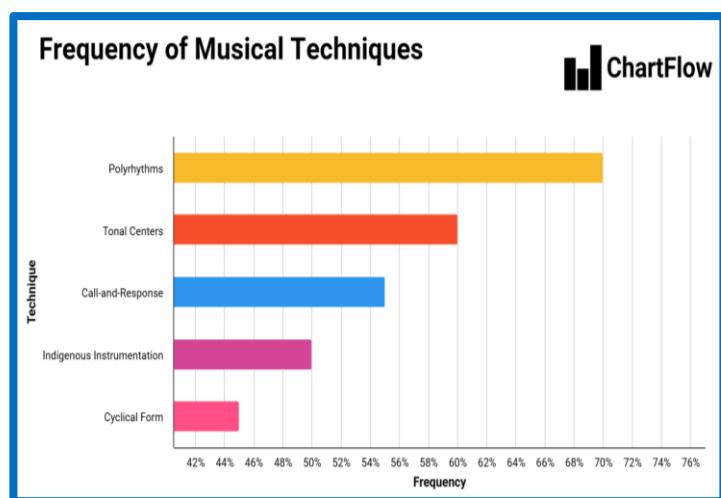


Figure 3. *Showing Distribution of Compositional Techniques (Quantitative Mapping)*

Source: Quantitative mapping of 50 archival scores and recordings.



Additional evidence of precision includes the use of cyclical rhythmic organisation, clear modal frameworks, and intentional instrumentation that reinforces thematic or cultural meaning. These structural choices show that composers employ rhythmic and tonal devices with clarity and purpose.

Together, these patterns confirm DCT's claim that **precision** in African composition reflects an indigenous discipline rooted in African musical logics rather than an imported Western technical model.

Indigenous Musical Grammars: Recurring Structural Logics

The qualitative analysis of 30 published African compositions and theoretical writings reveals a set of recurring structural features that function as indigenous musical grammars. These features appear consistently across different works and authors, demonstrating the coherence of African compositional systems.

Table 1.

Recurring Structural Features in African Compositions (Qualitative Analysis)

Source: Qualitative content analysis of 30 published African compositions and theoretical essays.

Structural Feature	Frequency Across Sampled Works	Representative Scholars
Call-and-response	22	Nzewi, Euba, Onyeji, Authority
Cyclical rhythmic patterns	19	Agawu, Onyeji, Uzoigwe, Olusoji
Modal tonality	17	Ekwueme, Euba, Olusoji, Nwankpa
Episodic form	14	Uzoigwe, Authority, Nwamara
Polyrhythmic layering	21	Agawu, Nzewi, Onyeji, Nwamara

Table 1 summarises the most frequently observed structures, including call-and-response interaction, polyrhythmic layering, cyclical rhythmic patterns, modal tonality, and episodic form. Call-and-response and polyrhythmic layering occur most frequently, highlighting the communal logic and participatory character of African musical traditions.

These structures serve important musical functions. Cyclical forms sustain continuity and communal engagement, call-and-response reinforces relational dialogue between performers and listeners, and polyrhythmic layering creates rhythmic depth and collective pulse. Modal tonal systems provide culturally specific tonal grounding, while episodic forms allow narrative development and thematic variation.



The consistent presence of these grammars across the sampled works confirms that African musical systems operate through patterned and culturally meaningful structures. This evidence strongly supports DCT's argument that indigenous musical grammars form the structural backbone of African compositional logic.

Episto–Musical Pedagogy: Music as Knowledge, Memory, and Relational Ethics

Archival analysis further demonstrates that African composition functions not only as an artistic activity but also as a system of knowledge transmission. The study examined four types of archival sources, including historical scores, audio recordings, oral testimonies, and video performances (Table 2).

Table 2.

Archival Sources and Their Epistemic Contributions

Source: Archival and audio–visual analysis conducted across four African music repositories.

Archival Source Type	Number Analyzed	Key Insights Extracted
Historical scores	15	Indigenous notation systems, tonal logic
Audio recordings	20	Performance practice, rhythmic layering
Oral testimonies	10	Cultural memory, compositional intent
Video performances	5	Gesture, relationality, communal aesthetics

These materials reveal several important epistemic dimensions of African music–making. Oral testimonies frequently describe music as a repository of cultural memory and ancestral knowledge. Audio recordings highlight performance practices such as rhythmic layering and ensemble interaction. Video documentation provides insight into embodied gestures, relational performance dynamics, and communal aesthetics. Historical scores also reveal indigenous notation practices and tonal logics that encode cultural knowledge.

Taken together, these sources show that African music operates as a vehicle for transmitting cultural history, moral values, cosmological understanding, and communal identity. This evidence supports DCT's integration of Episto–Musical Pedagogy Theory (EMPT), which frames music as a form of knowledge grounded in cultural memory, relational ethics, and epistemic sovereignty.



Integrative Synthesis

When considered together, the four pillars reveal a coherent pattern. African composition emerges as a purposeful, precise, structurally organised, and epistemically grounded practice. Composers consistently work within stable indigenous grammars while embedding their music within culturally meaningful intentions and knowledge systems.

At the same time, the analysis of 25 Western-authored musicology texts reveals persistent misconceptions in dominant scholarship. As shown in Figure 4, the most frequent misrepresentation describes African music as lacking structure or formal organisation. These interpretations reflect long-standing colonial biases that overlook indigenous compositional systems.

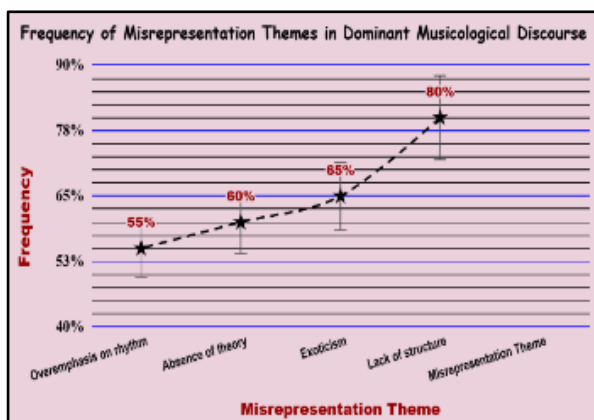


Figure 4.

Frequency of Misrepresentation Themes in Dominant Musicological Discourse

Source: Thematic coding from 25 Western-authored musicology texts.

The empirical evidence presented in this study directly challenges such assumptions. By demonstrating the structural coherence, intentionality, and epistemic depth of African composition, the findings provide strong support for Decolonial Creativity Theory as a framework capable of explaining African musical creativity on its own intellectual and cultural terms.

Discussion

The study shows clearly that African music composition is shaped by coherent cultural logics that guide both creative intention and structural design. The findings challenge long-standing portrayals of African



music as spontaneous, intuitive, or lacking in theoretical depth. Instead, the evidence demonstrates that African composers work with deliberate patterns of rhythm, tonality, form, and meaning, supporting earlier arguments by Ekwueme (1974c) and Agawu (2003) that African musical systems are intellectually rigorous and grounded in indigenous epistemologies.

The results bring together insights from several strands of Afrocentric scholarship. The recurrence of polyrhythms, call-and-response structures, modal tonality, and cyclical forms across the sampled works reinforces Nzewi's (2007) view of African music as a philosophical and pedagogical system. These structural features also extend Agawu's (2003) critique of Western misinterpretations of African rhythm by showing that rhythmic complexity is not disorder but a reflection of communal logic and cultural intention. The prominence of relational and performative elements in the archival materials aligns with Euba's emphasis on communal aesthetics, demonstrating that African composition is shaped by interconnected layers of structure, meaning, and social purpose.

A notable insight from the study is the consistency with which composers embed pedagogical and ceremonial intentions in their works. This pattern appears across genres, periods, and regions, suggesting a strong continuity of epistemic values within African creative traditions. It also indicates that African composers continue to draw on cultural memory and communal ethics even when working within hybrid or contemporary forms. These findings challenge assumptions that modern African compositions are detached from indigenous logics and highlight the resilience of cultural frameworks in shaping creative practice.

The study also reveals a persistent tension between documented structural coherence and the external perception of African music as improvisatory or formless. This tension underscores the need for theoretical models that foreground indigenous intentionality and counter inherited colonial assumptions. Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT) responds to this need by offering a unified framework that explains how purpose and precision operate within African composition. By integrating indigenous musical grammars with Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory (Authority, 2025), DCT provides a coherent way of understanding African creativity as both artistic expression and epistemic practice.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The desk-based design did not include fieldwork or interviews with living composers, which could have offered deeper insight into contemporary creative decision-making. The sample, although substantial, cannot represent the full diversity of African musical traditions. The quantitative mapping relied on descriptive statistics, which limits the generalisability of the patterns observed. These limitations point to areas where further empirical work is needed.



The trajectory of current scholarship indicates that the concerns raised by this study sit within a wider intellectual movement that is re-examining creativity through relational and decolonial lenses. Work on curriculum reform increasingly highlights the need to align formal music education with indigenous knowledge systems, including the use of indigenous notation practices and oral pedagogies. Ethnographic engagement with composers continues to illuminate how purpose and precision are negotiated in real creative contexts, while comparative studies of emerging genres such as Afrofusion and experimental sound art demonstrate the expanding terrain in which African compositional logics are being theorised. Recent contributions, including Ekpo's (2023) analysis of Christian Onyeji's compositional approach and Almazan's (2025) study of Indigenous musicians in Canada, further underscore the global relevance of relational epistemologies and decolonial creativity. Together, these developments show that DCT is well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to ongoing debates across regions, genres, and creative traditions, offering a coherent framework for understanding how indigenous creative epistemologies continue to shape contemporary musical thought and practice.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that African music composition is grounded in coherent indigenous logics that give the art form both structural purpose and cultural meaning. It challenges long-standing assumptions that African music lacks theoretical depth and shows instead that composers work with clear epistemic intention, drawing on rhythmic, tonal, and formal systems that reflect deep cultural knowledge. By analysing a wide range of scholarly texts, scores, and archival materials, the study provides strong evidence that African composition is a disciplined and knowledge-bearing practice.

The central contribution of the study is the development of Decolonial Creativity Theory (DCT), a unified framework that explains how African composers employ purpose and precision through indigenous musical grammars. DCT brings together insights from Afrocentric theories and Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory to show how African music functions as a site of epistemic agency, cultural sovereignty, and creative intentionality. It offers scholars, educators, and practitioners a coherent model for understanding African composition on its own terms, rather than through inherited colonial frameworks.

The study also carries practical implications. For curriculum designers, DCT provides a foundation for integrating indigenous compositional logics, notation systems, and oral pedagogies into music education. For educators, it offers a way to teach composition as an intentional and culturally grounded practice. For policymakers, it supports arguments for investing in programmes that preserve and promote indigenous



creative systems. For composers and interdisciplinary artists, DCT offers principles that can guide the creation of work that is both aesthetically innovative and epistemically grounded.

Recommendations

The study highlights clear pathways for extending the theoretical and practical value of DCT, and the following recommendations outline priority areas for future scholarly engagement.

- Future research should examine how DCT can guide curriculum reform, especially in integrating indigenous notation systems, oral pedagogies, and culturally grounded compositional logics into formal music education.
- Ethnographic and field-based studies should investigate how composers enact purpose and precision in practice, including collaborative projects that document creative decision-making across diverse African and diasporic contexts.
- Comparative analyses should explore how DCT applies to emerging genres such as Afrofusion, experimental sound art, and other contemporary idioms shaped by hybrid or transnational influences.
- Cross-regional studies are needed to test and refine DCT in different cultural settings, strengthening its applicability to varied indigenous musical traditions and creative ecosystems.
- Scholarship should engage with global work on relational epistemologies and decolonial creativity, building on studies such as Ekpo's analysis of Christian Onyeji's compositional method and Almazan's research on Indigenous musicians in Canada.
- Further inquiry should evaluate how DCT can contribute to broader debates in African musicology, cultural theory, and global arts scholarship, particularly in advancing recognition of indigenous creative epistemologies.

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