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**FADING NOTES IN THE STUDIO: INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIETAL  
NEGLECT OF MUSIC EDUCATION AMONG CALABAR YOUTHS**

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**Abstract**

Despite Calabar's growing reputation as a hub of musical creativity, the foundations of music education are gradually eroding. Many talented youths now prefer studio fame to classroom learning, while institutional and societal forces deepen the crisis. This paper investigates how non-music lecturers' negative attitudes, parental illiteracy about the value of music education, and administrative negligence in admission policies collectively discourage enrolment in music departments, especially at the University of Education and Entrepreneurship (UEE). The study aims to expose these structural and cultural barriers that limit the growth of formal music study despite a thriving informal music economy. Using a qualitative method involving interviews with students, studio managers, and lecturers, the paper applies Human Capital Theory and Cultural Production Theory to interpret the findings. Results reveal that while studio exposure enhances creativity, lack of academic grounding, poor interdepartmental support, and biased admission practices stifle professionalism and artistic sustainability. The paper concludes that the crisis of musical illiteracy in Calabar is not just a youth issue but a systemic failure. It recommends administrative reforms that balance admission quotas, awareness campaigns for parents, and interdisciplinary collaboration to ensure music regains its rightful educational and cultural value.

## **Introduction**

Calabar, the once-celebrated cultural heartbeat of Cross River State, now echoes with a troubling rhythm, young musicians flood local studios, perform in carnivals, and showcase remarkable instrumental skills, yet many refuse to pursue formal music education. This emerging crisis has created a generation of talented but uncertified musicians whose creativity thrives on instinct rather than structured knowledge. The lure of quick fame, monetary rewards, and social media visibility has overshadowed the deeper pursuit of musical literacy. The problem is compounded by multiple forces. Non-music lecturers often discourage students from applying to music departments, perceiving it as a “less serious” discipline. Parents, driven by educational illiteracy and societal bias, push their children toward “professional” fields such as law, medicine, or accounting. At the administrative level, some admission officers and institutional leaders fail to balance departmental intake, favouring science or business courses over the arts. As a result, institutions like the University of Education and Entrepreneurship (UEE), Akamkpa record dwindling enrolment in music programmes despite a growing entertainment economy. Human Capital Theory (Abrha & Weldeyohans, 2025) argues that education and skill training increases an individual’s productivity and long-term economic value; neglecting formal training, therefore, limits both personal and industry growth. Cultural Production Theory (Bourdieu, 1993) further explains that creative work is shaped by institutional structures, access to knowledge, and symbolic recognition. When music education is devalued, cultural production becomes stunted, producing performers rather than scholars or innovators. Two contrasting examples illustrate this gap. Nigerian musicians like Cobhams Asuquo and Asa (Bukola Elemide) benefitted from structured musical learning. Cobhams developed foundational skills while Asa studied jazz and contemporary music, and that made it easier for the duo to gain global recognized

compositions and production works (<https://disciplines.ng/alumni-stories-from-music-schools/>). Both artists demonstrated how formal music education training can deepen theoretical understanding and thus support international collaboration. In contrast, several Calabar-based artists and studio producers, though talented, but struggle with complex musical note, arrangements, theoretical understanding and sometimes international collaborations, due to lack of formal music education (Naijassador, 2025). The salient questions here include: are there no institutions that offer music education in Cross River State? are talented youths not aware of music education as a course to be studied? are their parent or society depriving them from studying music education or are they admission officers ignorantly diverting their interest? Well, this paper investigates the institutional and societal neglect that discourages Calabar youths from studying music, examining how educational attitudes, administrative bias, and cultural misconceptions contribute to the silent crisis of musical illiteracy.

### **Music Education**

Etim (2020) notes that “many Cross River studio managers possess high creative energy but lack technical competence in harmony, notation, and sound design, leading to repetitive sounds and limited export potential (p.74). These studies collectively highlight a systemic undervaluation of formal music education within the entertainment ecosystem, as music education has long been recognized as the foundation of sustainable creativity; with scholars like Nketia (1974) and Agawu (2003) maintaining that African music is not just performance but cultural philosophy encoded in sound. Yet, as Okafor (2005) observes, Nigeria’s modern youths increasingly separate talent from education, relying on digital tools alone rather than combining both theory and skills.

Music education remains a vital component of human capital formation, developing creativity, discipline, communication skills and socio-emotional intelligence among learners

(Olorunyomi, 2019). In Calabar, many talented youths engage in music production, carnival performance, and entertainment without formal music training. This disconnection between innate talent and structured education limits their professional versatility, employability (a colleague once discussed a funeral performer who thrilled the audience to be recommended for employment, and when I asked for his certificate, the earth remain silence) and economic value in Nigeria's creative economy (Okafor, 2020). Beyond the innate talent, the structured education gives an individual a platform to expressing and sustaining the innate talent. It is therefore necessary to encourage talented individuals in the society to enrol into studying music education, which requires linking music education to broader human capital goals such as self-employment, leadership, cultural entrepreneurship, and innovation, through community awareness, and school-based orientation/counselling programmes.

### **Human Capital Development and Cultural Production Theories**

Abrha & Weldeyohans' Human Capital Theory (2025) emphasizes that investment in education yields both personal and societal returns. As applied to Calabar youths, the theory suggests that music education enhances employability, diversifies creativity, and strengthens cultural industries. However, Bourdieu's Cultural Production Theory (1993) reveals that creative fields are often shaped by unequal access to cultural capital, formal learning, institutional support, and professional recognition. Studies such as Ekwueme (2011) warn that when societies undervalue formal music training, they risk producing performers without preservationists or innovators.

### **Musical Illiteracy and Studio Culture**

The rapid growth of studio culture in Calabar, fuelled by digital production and informal training, has fostered creativity but deepened musical illiteracy among emerging artists (Eze & Nwosu, 2021). Many youths prioritize fame over foundational theory, harmony, and notation, leaving them disadvantaged in formal and some sort of international collaborations.

While studio practices encourage experimentation, the neglect of musical theory contributes to creative limitations known as “fading notes”, where initial enthusiasm and sound innovation fade over time due to lack of theoretical foundation. To bridge this divide, musical courses are flexible and some can be taught on digital platforms, it can also accommodate the integration of studio practices with academic theory, allowing producers and performers to upgrade their skills without abandoning their livelihoods.

### **Fading Notes in the Studio**

The phenomenon of “fading notes in the studio” describes the gradual decline in musical quality, originality, and sustainability among untrained producers who rely solely on digital templates or recycled beats (Idongesit, 2023). Many Calabar youths begin with passion but lose consistency because they lack compositional literacy, vocal arrangement techniques, and the discipline nurtured in formal music education. This fading creativity reflects a wider challenge in Nigeria’s cultural economy, where informal learning environments are vibrant but short-lived without institutional reinforcement (Ekanem & Bassey, 2022). To counteract this trend, universities and cultural institutions should create “Studio-to-School” initiatives, where successful local producers are encouraged to enrol or collaborate in academic music programmes. Such partnerships will strengthen theory-practice integration, sustain creative growth, and promote long-term enrolment in formal music institutions among the Calabar youths.

### **Calabar Youths and Cultural Production:**

Calabar’s vibrant youth population plays a central role in Nigeria’s cultural production, especially through the Calabar Carnival, where music, dance, and costume artistry blend into a powerful expression of identity (Bassey, 2022). Yet, most of these youths operate outside formal educational systems. By linking cultural industries with academic credit, creating diploma or sandwich programmes for carnival performers, and offering performance-based

scholarships, universities can transform informal creativity into formal competence and sustainable career pathways.

### **Challenges: Institutional Neglect and Policy Challenges**

Institutional neglect marked by administrators' inattention, admission officers' inclinations, inadequate funding, obsolete equipment and poor interdepartmental cooperation, have undermined music education in Cross River State (Udo & Ekanem, 2020). Administrators should therefore enact internal policies mandating at least a minimum of 20 students per academic year across departments especially when o'level suits into studying the course, ensuring an almost equitable enrolment and balanced departmental growth. In addition, students whose primary discipline accommodates elective from related courses can deliberately be directed to adopt elective in music education. Staff who lack knowledge of music should refrain from discouraging students, instead, collaborate as a unified academic community to promote interdisciplinary respect. Admission officers should act professionally, prioritizing institutional development over personal interests to avoid biases that weaken some departments. Furthermore, for all hands to be on deck, both the Association of Nigerian Musicologists (ANIM) and the Society for Music Educators of Nigeria (SOMEN) should actively advocate for the reinstatement of music in primary and secondary school curricula, a development that will restore the educational pipeline for tertiary music programmes.

### **Parental Influence and Social Perception**

Parents significantly shape career decisions. In many Cross River homes, music is still viewed as an unserious or low-income path (Effiong, 2021). This perception discourages youths from pursuing their passion academically. To counter this, universities and cultural ministries should highlight success stories of educated musicians, such as Cobhams Asuquo and Asa, who blended training with talent by developing foundational skills, studying jazz and contemporary music, to achieve global recognition. A certain tricycle driver once halts to

exchange pleasantries with a promising youth, whom he lamented over his limitations to go further after his first records, then I asked if he has gone through school, the response is negative, however, I schooled him into telling him to enrol for music education, and the rest is history. Societal orientation can reposition music education as a respectable and profitable career, boosting parental support and youth enrolment.

### **Admission Bias and Student Morale**

Admission bias often excludes talented candidates lacking prior theoretical exposure or instrument access (Okon & Akpan, 2019, p. 36). Admission officers should therefore adopt inclusive recruitment models that value raw talent and creative potential, ensuring balancing for all the accredited departments to be carried along. Undoubtedly, low enrolment in an academic community where there are in flocks of students can be demoralizing on the staff let alone the students' morale when compared with students in other departments, this could make some of them to play truancy in class attendance, it is therefore imperative for a seasoned admission officer to think outside the box. For students already in such departments, be assured that the creative labour market remains largely underexplored, offering room for growth.

### **Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews among studio managers, music lecturers, non- music lecturers, student, parents and societal young musicians within University of Education and Entrepreneurship, Akamkpa and Calabar metropolis. Data were analyzed thematically to explore patterns of perception, motivation, and institutional behaviour. Observations were also made during studio sessions and carnival rehearsals to understand real-time interactions between trained and untrained musicians.

### **Stakeholders Identified**

Calabar Youth Musicians – self-taught artists and performers.

Studio Managers and Producers – gatekeepers of local sound creation.

Music Lecturers – educators shaping formal learning.

Non-Music Lecturers – influencers of interdepartmental perception.

Parents and Guardians – financial and emotional decision-makers.

Institutional Administrators and Admission Officers – policy enforcers determining departmental balance.

Cultural Agencies and Government Bodies – sponsors of music and carnival programmes.

### **Interview Questions and Sample Responses**

**Q1:** Why do many talented Calabar youths avoid studying music formally?

**A1:** “Parental influence, wrong counselling among non-music staff, some of the youths feel school slows them down (education is a scam). They believed what matters is the vibes and the money from night shows. But when they meet bigger studios or foreign collaborations, they realize they cannot read or write scores”, (students and Studio Managers’ responses).

**Q2:** How do institutional policies affect enrolment in music programmes?

**A2:** “Admission officers prioritize other courses. Administrators pay less attention to it, sometimes we have qualified candidates but discouraged along the process. sometimes parent and administrators view music as a hobby for only entertainment, and not a discipline” (administrators, parents, agency, and lecturers’ responses).

### **Findings and Discussion**

- The study found that economic urgency drives most youths toward immediate financial gain rather than long-term investment in education. Institutional neglect, particularly from admission officers and administrative bias, creates barriers that make music departments unattractive or inaccessible. Parental ignorance about the prospects of music as a profession and further discourages enrolment.

- Non-music lecturers often discourage students, arguing that “music has no future.” This internal bias erodes respect for the discipline and reduces its visibility in academic discourse. Additionally, studio managers admitted that while informal skills bring short-term success, lack of theoretical understanding hampers quality production, arrangement, and innovation.
- These findings support Human Capital Theory, showing that neglecting education reduces creative productivity. They also align with Cultural Production Theory, as institutional and social forces which art forms are legitimized. Ultimately, Calabar’s music scene, though vibrant, risks being trapped in creative stagnation without educational reinforcement.

### **Results**

85% of interviewed youths preferred studio work over school.

70% of studio managers had no formal music education.

60% of music lecturers reported administrative neglect or bias in admissions.

90% of parents surveyed viewed music as a “risky career and unprofessional.”

These results confirm a widespread cultural and institutional misunderstanding of music’s educational and economic value.

### **Conclusion**

The crisis of musical illiteracy in Calabar is not merely a youth problem but a reflection of systemic undervaluation. When non-music lecturers discourage, parents misunderstand, administrators and admission officers prioritize some arts courses over the others, the entire educational ecosystem weakens. Obviously the Calabar’s carnival sounds and studio hits may be loud, but without structured learning, the melody of sustainability fades. Music education does not replace talent, it refines and sustains the talented.

## Recommendations

- Institutional Policy Reform: Admission officers should ensure every accredited department, including music, meets minimum enrolment quotas.
- Awareness Campaigns: Universities and ministries should sensitize parents and secondary schools on music's career potential.
- Interdisciplinary Support: Non-music lecturers should be engaged in arts appreciation and avoid watering down any department they have little or no knowledge about.
- Studio–School Partnerships: Improve on students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) by linking UEE's music students with music and broadcasting studios.
- Scholarships and Grants: Offer financial incentives for talented but uncertified youths to study music formally.
- Public Recognition: Feature trained musicians as role models during state events and carnivals.

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