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FROM CLASSROOM TO CAREER IN GHANA: RETHINKING MUSIC EDUCATION IN A CULTURE OF ECONOMIC ASPIRATION

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Abstract

This study examines the prevalent undervaluation of music education in Ghana, where formal training in the arts is frequently perceived as economically imprudent and socially peripheral. This paper employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating document analysis, surveys, and interviews with music graduates, to investigate the perceptions, structures, and funding of music education within Ghana's educational system. This research utilises Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Decolonial Education Theory to identify significant patterns of underfunding, social stigma, and curricular exclusion. Research indicates that music graduates often face financial difficulties and social stigma, despite acknowledging personal development and their contributions to their communities. The exclusion of music as a fundamental subject in national curricula has intensified these perceptions, separating music education from Ghana's overarching development strategy. Comparative policy reforms in Africa suggest that music education can enhance

cultural identity, foster social cohesion, and contribute to the development of the creative economy. The paper concludes by presenting practical strategies for repositioning music as a developmental asset instead of a non-essential luxury.

Keywords: Music education, Ghana, Capability approach, Curriculum reform, Decolonial theory, Educational policy, Creative economy

Introduction

The notion that pursuing music education yields minimal financial benefits is a prevalent sentiment in many regions globally. Graduates in music and related artistic fields typically make far less money than those in other fields, according to several studies conducted in various nations. Music was classified near the bottom (ranked 152 of 159) in the United States, according to a 2021 study of 159 college majors, which revealed that "visual and performing arts were the least valuable degrees, with average pay of $35,500 (World Economic Forum 2021)." On the other hand, STEM majors were at the top of the earnings list, with recent grads typically earning around $90k. Other nations share this difference. According to the Sutton Trust, creative arts graduates in the UK earn the least, £14–15k per year, compared to medical, engineering, and finance. UK graduates in medicine or engineering fields receive starting salaries approximately 50% higher, with a premium of around £8,000, compared to graduates from music or other arts programs. (Britton et al. 2019).

Other national surveys further support this trend. For example, recent research conducted in Australia has revealed that the average incomes of arts and creative workers are significantly lower than those of other professionals. For example, arts workers earn an average of A$63k, while they earn an average of A$100k in different industries. Additionally, underemployment and the need to hold multiple jobs are common among arts graduates. According to one study, 82% of Australian artists had to work at other jobs to supplement their income

because their art wasn't enough to support them (Cadzow 2025). The notion of music as a "low-pay" professional path is influenced by the fact that, generally, across various situations, music and arts education yield significantly lower financial returns in terms of wages and stable employment compared to other disciplines.

According to Bartleet et al. (2019), the music industry faces considerable financial risks, particularly within popular and classical music genres. The authors argue that artists must manage creative risks and navigate an unpredictable market, leading to frequent financial instability for musicians. Miksza and Hime (2015) found that music educators generally reported higher incomes compared to musicians. Approximately 75% of music instructors earned between $20,000 and $60,000, which remains below the national average salary for teachers. Conversely, slightly more than 10% of musicians indicated earnings exceeding $60,000, while the majority reported incomes within the $10,000 to $20,000 range. This indicates a lack of financial stability within the music industry. According to Gómez-Zapata et al. (2021), the music education program offers significant academic and social benefits, including increased cultural participation, improved academic performance, and a higher quality of life. These elements may facilitate long-term personal growth, potentially leading to enhanced financial prospects in the future.

Economic considerations can often exacerbate scepticism about the financial sustainability of music education in African and other Global South cultures. An ancient joke that highlights how occupations in the arts are sometimes written off as unfeasible in terms of status and wealth is that in many African households, "you are either a doctor, engineer, lawyer, or nothing (Mumo 2021)." Parents and society in regions like West Africa often discourage people from pursuing careers in music, favouring occupations that are seen as more secure or profitable. The fact that the music and artistic industries frequently lack structural financial backing and security in these areas is the reality that underlies this mindset. For instance, only roughly one in seven musicians (14.6%) has any kind of pension or retirement savings, according to a recent study of Ghanaian musicians that found significant economic uncertainty in the industry (Collins-Sowah et al. 2013). The

great majority—more than 85%—do not make contributions to a pension plan, primarily due to a lack of funds.

This indicates significant irregularities or inadequacies in the incomes of music practitioners in Ghana, supporting the notion that a career in music does not ensure future financial stability. Leaders in Ghana's creative sector argue that the nation has historically undervalued the crucial role of the creative arts in development, resulting in persistent underinvestment (Ghana News Agency, 2018). Ultimately, the result is a societal narrative that music and arts education are luxury items that are difficult to purchase, with little financial return unless one has personal or family wealth. Cultural policymakers are gradually challenging this narrative; however, the stereotype of the underappreciated (or underemployed) musician remains very much in place. Even international organisations recognise the vulnerability of creative livelihoods; according to UNESCO's 2022 report, the pandemic led to a decline in revenue and employment in the cultural sector, exacerbating the already insecure working conditions faced by artists worldwide. This precariousness translates into a strong caution against pursuing a profession in music instruction, particularly in developing nations. Thus, from Ghana to other countries, the dominant opinion is consistent with the worldwide trend: music education is frequently viewed as a poor financial investment that should be avoided until major reforms are implemented to support the creative sectors.

Comparative wage statistics, societal preconceptions, and African contexts all support the idea that music instruction has low economic benefits. The 2020–2025 research shows that in many civilisations, the arts (and music in particular) are valued for their cultural and personal benefits but depreciated financially. The "starving artist" myth persists because it often represents the experiences of music graduates compared to their counterparts in other fields (Grand Canyon University, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2021). As a result, parents, students, legislators, and even artists themselves now view music and arts education as a financially risky endeavour with little to no financial benefit. Although the data reveals the significant financial discrepancies, it remains challenging for schools and music advocates

to counter these assumptions by highlighting success stories and advocating for enhanced support systems.

In Ghana, this perception has become deeply ingrained in the culture and is evident in daily public discourse. The expression "*Ghana music no dey pay*" reflects a widespread sentiment in Pidgin, suggesting that pursuing a music career is not financially viable and discouraging formal education or professional engagement in this field. A video by a Ghanaian artist in 2024, which claimed that "*Ghana music no dey pay*," gained significant attention, emphasising a sentiment that has been reiterated multiple times within the industry (Riot Radio 2024). This cliché reflects the prevalent misconception that a career in music does not yield financial success.

It is suggested that formal music education lacks financial viability, as expressed by the saying, "*music we no go chop*," indicating that one cannot sustain a livelihood solely through music. Pundits frequently express on social media and radio that pursuing a music career in Ghana constitutes "*thankless employment*," characterised by inadequate compensation, thereby perpetuating this cynicism (Graphic Online, 2024)—experiences recounting the challenges he faced in supporting his crowdfunding efforts. Numerous individuals are deterred from pursuing degrees in music due to ongoing public discourse about the low salaries within the music industry.

In addition to financial issues, music and arts education face a pervasive intellectual and academic stigma. The educational value of music and arts is often met with scepticism. A widespread notion exists that individuals lacking talent in core academic subjects should refrain from engaging in creative arts, such as music. Andersson (2023) challenges these claims. He emphasises that all human groups exhibit creativity, suggesting that it is not solely a characteristic of those deemed "skilled" (see Addaquay 2025). Conversely, Piirto (2011) notes that musical ability often runs in families, suggesting that artistic genius may have a hereditary aspect. The examples of the Mozart and Bach families indicate that individuals engaged in the creative arts may possess a higher likelihood of being gifted. Some argue that music and arts education lack academic value and should be reserved for

the "gifted." However, research suggests that artistic ability may be influenced by genetics and that creativity is a universal human characteristic.

In Ghana, this academic stigma is exacerbated by significant cultural bias. A 2024 editorial from Ghana discusses the "erroneous idea that the arts are the province of school dropouts." Informing parents of a desire to pursue music or the arts in Ghana may result in being perceived as "an outcast," as there is a prevailing belief that individuals in these fields are destined to become "paupers" (Aikins 2024). There has been an incorrect interpretation regarding the family's financial resources. In other terms, formal music instruction is perceived as a final option for students who struggle academically and do not qualify for "prestigious and profitable" careers such as accountancy, law, or medicine.

This stigma is commonly expressed in talk shows and households, where parents and experts advise children against pursuing artistic endeavours. Unlike science or business, structured discourse often depicts music and related topics as superfluous or trivial. A prevalent misconception persists that dance and music are activities designated for those deemed "less talented" in academic subjects, suggesting that individuals who do not excel in mathematics or literature are relegated to music. This concept has gained such prevalence that educators refer to it as a myth that requires correction. Insults of this nature frequently occur in public discourse and contribute to the perception that formal music education is socially and intellectually subordinate.

The language used in Ghanaian public discourse has evolved to satirise the discipline itself. The term "*Dondology*," employed pejoratively to refer to the academic examination of traditional drumming (specifically the dondo drum) or music broadly, serves as a notable illustration. Research on Ghanaian music and dance has been dismissed by specific segments of the public as irrelevant, as noted in a 2025 article by the Ghana News Agency. The term "*Dondology*" is often used disparagingly. Referring to an individual as a graduate of *"Dondology"* in informal discourse or on television serves as a method of derision for possessing a degree perceived as lacking practical utility.

This mockery implies that a graduate of such calibre wasted time studying a trivial and obscure subject. Notable actor David Dontoh commented on the "controversy" surrounding the use of "*dondology*" as an insult and encouraged Ghanaians to revive pride in the study of indigenous music (Ghana Agency News, 2025). The issue became significant enough that experienced figures in the arts publicly criticised the mockery. The term "*dondology*," used humorously, highlights a prevalent societal trend: the trivialisation of formal music education, perceived as insignificant unless it yields notable recognition or financial benefit

Public narratives often characterise music degrees as suboptimal investments, yielding low returns and limited career opportunities. A January 2024 article from Ghana characterised music degrees as "a tremendous waste of time and money" unless the individual aims to pursue a career in teaching. It has been identified as one of the "Top 10 degrees to avoid" (Patstune Ghana 2024). The assertion is made that obtaining employment in this field in Ghana is significantly difficult, with music being classified as one of the least valuable degrees available. The analysis observed that a significant number of music majors are engaged in leading worship at churches, a role characterised by modest compensation. It further questioned the rationale behind pursuing a degree that may lead to substantial unemployment following considerable investment.

Public sentiment is often expressed on social media, highlighting cases such as a university music graduate who takes on the role of a church organist or faces unemployment. This mockery often emphasises the distinctions between various fields and prominent individuals. Many of Ghana's prominent musicians have achieved considerable wealth and recognition without possessing formal music degrees. The 2024 article emphasises this point by listing successful artists like Shatta Wale, Sarkodie, and Samini, all of whom attained notable success without a university degree. The implication is that formal education in music may be unnecessary for success and could be an impractical path, as individuals who opt to "drop out" or forgo tertiary education seem to perform better in the music industry.

Ghanaian public discourse consistently undermines formal music education through proverbs, viral memes, and media commentary. These indicate significant economic concerns and cultural stereotypes linking music training to low income, reduced status, and restricted career advancement.

This paper aims to examine societal narratives and policy legacies by analysing the marginalisation of formal music education in Ghana within cultural discourse and institutional design. This paper examines the historical exclusion of music from core curricula through the lens of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Decolonial Education Theory, highlighting its wider developmental consequences. This document advocates for a renewed national vision that re-establishes music education as a means for fostering identity, cultural continuity, and socio-economic development.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations for Reclaiming Music Education: Cultural Capital, Praxis, and Postcolonial Perspectives

The marginalisation of music education in Ghana can be analysed through various theoretical frameworks. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital offers a sociological framework for analysing the valuation of specific forms of knowledge and culture, particularly those associated with the elite, within formal education systems. This idea, when applied to music education, contends that traditional school curricula have denigrated indigenous or popular musics while elevating "refined" musical preferences (such as Western classical music) as a form of capital. Attempts to "elevate" pupils' tastes by introducing them to high-end music may unintentionally perpetuate cultural and social disparities. (Bates 2021). This manifests as a persistent preference for European musical traditions introduced during colonial education, rather than indigenous musical forms, in Ghana's postcolonial setting. According to Bourdieuian theory, the low status of music education is an educational habitus that places a lower value on local arts, which is rooted in social inequality and a colonial past.

Philosophical discussions in music curriculum theory further clarify the importance (or lack thereof) of music in education. Bennett Reimer and other music educators promoted an aesthetic education concept for a large portion of the late 20th century, contending that the main reason music should be taught in schools is to help students develop their aesthetic sensibility by exposing them to great musical compositions. However, the aesthetic justification has come under scrutiny for being ambiguous and having a limited, quantifiable effect. Regelski (2022) notes that the assumption that music listening provides inherent educational benefits has resulted in "legitimation crises," prompting school boards to question the tangible value of music in the curriculum. In response, praxial philosophies of music education—most notably those expressed by Thomas Regelski and David Elliott—rethink music as a tool for practical human endeavours, or "musicking," as opposed to a subject of artistic reflection. According to proponents of praxial theory, music education should prioritise students' active creation of music, inventiveness, and practical musicianship skills that they can apply in their daily lives and within their communities. This method emphasises music's educational value through performance, creation, and social participation.

Praxialists argue that by conceptualising music as a social praxis, music education can yield outcomes such as personal discipline, teamwork, and cultural literacy, which are both observable and socially esteemed, thus challenging the notion of music as a "luxury" subject. In the context of Ghana, these theoretical insights suggest that a music curriculum centred on practical musicianship, community music-making, and local culture may garner increased respect, aligning with societal values and expectations (see Addaquay 2024).

On the other hand, this study analyses Amartya Sen's capacity approach within the framework of music education programs designed for social development (Jitduangprem 2023). Three case studies—including El Sistema in Venezuela—are examined by Jitduangprem to demonstrate how music projects could increase the actual freedoms and capacities of impoverished young people. The author discovers that Sen's conception of justice and human capacity aligns with the objectives of

these musical initiatives, which are to uplift underprivileged communities. Notably, the article contends that music education can "grow and engage the capability of poor people to have the freedom to access economic and other resources for quality of life." The paper emphasises the importance of music education in human development and social justice in the Global South through Sen's ideas of agency and freedom.

Beagle's (2021) study, conducted in South Africa employs Sen's capability approach in conjunction with critical pedagogy to structure an arts-based teaching intervention within higher education. The article describes a university "Workplace Preparation" subject that used creative arts to help underprivileged pupils. Research shows that arts education increases student engagement, voice, and agency in the classroom. Again, the author mentions that Melanie Walker's capacity approach emphasises diversity and egalitarian education. The research finds that adding culturally appropriate arts (music, drama, visual art) to the curriculum increased the program's "capability" to provide more fair and empowering learning experiences. Engagement, belonging, and empowerment increased among students. This source explains how a capabilities lens justifies arts education reforms by focusing on students' functionings and agency to "enable involvement and emotions of belonging" for marginalised learners.

Cassim (2020) critiques the Eurocentric nature of design curricula in South African higher education through the lens of decolonial theory in arts education. The article presents playful learning as an element of the decolonisation initiative within a communication design program. Cassim critiques design education's methodology and curricular material (e.g. Western-based design-for-development courses). A case study shows how play-based learning disrupted colonial classroom dynamics. The study suggests that "playful learning in design higher education" can foster localised design knowledge and practice. The paper supports decolonial education theory by defining design as a culturally-situated profession rather than a Western export. It even contextualises the academic decolonisation discussion. Cassim found that local knowledge, intersubjective interactions, and student agency through play might

"favour localised practise" and unlock design education students' self-realization. This source demonstrates how to decolonise an arts curriculum in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasising local culture and student empowerment, making it applicable to music/arts education reform.

Wamwa Mwanga's (2025) recent journal article offers a theoretical critique of the management of "world music" and diversity initiatives within higher music education, drawing on a decolonial perspective. The author contends that contemporary approaches to teaching music diversity remain entrenched in colonial frameworks, with Western institutions perceiving the Global South as a source of exotic material.

Utilising insights from decolonial scholars such as Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, Mwanga reveals the imbalanced power structure that positions the Western classical canon as central, while relegating non-Western musics to the status of token inclusions. The thesis of the article posits that the dominant perspective on musical diversity represents a revival of Western hegemony, effectively reconstituting colonial dynamics. Mwanga advocates for the decanonization of the music curriculum, representing a decolonisation process that reorients the geography of knowledge away from Eurocentric dominance. He advocates for the dismissal of the idea that the Western canon serves as the default "centre" of music education, proposing instead the elevation of indigenous and local musical epistemologies. This source is pertinent as it directly applies decolonial theory to music education within a global framework. This presents a compelling case for countries such as Ghana to rigorously assess the valuation of knowledge within the music curriculum and to "delink" from colonial influences, thereby reclaiming musical education according to their own standards.

This recent empirical study focuses on practical strategies for decolonising music education curricula by incorporating Indigenous African Music (IAM) into a university setting (Ngoma & Fikelepi-Twani, 2024; also see Addaquay, 2024). Ngoma and Fikelepi-Twani examine the potential for the transmission of Nguni traditional music practices from rural villages to formal higher education within

the Xhosa and Zulu communities. This research is based on the praxial philosophy of music education and Ubuntu theory, highlighting the importance of collective, community-engaged learning. The authors present an ethnographic study conducted at Walter Sisulu University, wherein community music experts, specifically local master musicians, were engaged to instruct preservice music teachers in the use of indigenous instruments.

The research underscores the bias inherent in colonial and apartheid-era education. Despite curriculum reforms implemented post-1994 in South Africa, universities continue to prioritise Western art music, resulting in educators being inadequately equipped to teach African music traditions. The project demonstrated a decolonial approach by involving community custodians of culture in the classroom, thereby dismantling the hierarchy between academic knowledge and indigenous knowledge. The outcome was a collection of "appropriate and effective models" for teaching African music that respect indigenous learning methods, such as oral transmission and experiential learning. This source is pertinent for Ghana and analogous contexts as it offers a framework for the reclamation of indigenous music education. This work applies decolonial theory, demonstrating that prioritising local knowledge and community involvement in arts education can initiate the liberation of education from the prevailing influences of Western music.

Yeboah (2025) notes that Ghana's formal art curriculum has marginalised local Ghanaian art and knowledge due to the lasting effects of British colonialism. The thesis argues that colonial-era curricula enforced Eurocentric aesthetics while marginalising local artistic knowledge, thereby limiting the creativity and epistemic agency of Ghanaian learners. Yeboah proposes a "reparative art praxis" informed by decolonial education theory, engaging with thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Mignolo. This methodology consists of three steps: deconstruction, decentering, and healing, aimed at reforming art education in Ghana. This entails a critical examination of Eurocentric content in curricula, shifting the focus from Western knowledge to African perspectives, and employing art-making as a method for healing cultural identity and memory.

Yeboah's study incorporates practical art projects, such as those focused on African hair symbolism and the Door of No Return, as decolonial interventions aimed at reconnecting educators with indigenous heritage. This study is relevant to the reintegration of music education in Ghana, as it demonstrates that colonial biases influence the country's arts curriculum and presents a theoretical framework for promoting local Ghanaian art forms and knowledge. Adopting decolonial approaches in music education entails recognising traditional Ghanaian music practices within educational institutions, thus addressing the colonial disconnection and empowering students through their cultural art forms.

All of these sources substantiate the theoretical rationale for the reintegration and reevaluation of music and arts education in Ghana and analogous contexts. Collectively, they demonstrate that Amartya Sen's Capability Approach positions arts education as essential for enhancing human freedoms and agency, rather than as a luxury, while Decolonial Education Theory advocates for the re-centring of indigenous cultural knowledge and pedagogies in curricula to rectify the biases of colonial-era education. These academic publications provide both theoretical rationales and practical perspectives on transforming music and arts education to better benefit students in the Global South.

The capability approach literature demonstrates that music and arts education enhances human development outcomes, including well-being, empowerment, and equity. This supports the argument that reinstating music education can enhance students' capabilities and opportunities, which is particularly relevant for education policy in Ghana, where improving quality and equity is a key objective. The sources of decolonial theory illustrate the significance of culturally relevant curricula. The authors emphasise the importance of local musical forms, languages, and learning methods as essential components of practical arts education. In Ghana, this supports the argument that reintroducing music education must accompany curricular reforms that emphasise Ghanaian music traditions and knowledge systems, thus facilitating the decolonisation of the educational framework.

Figure 1: Matrix of Theoretical Frameworks for Music Education Reform

Theory	Key Concepts	Application to Music Education	Relevance to Ghana
Bourdieu's Cultural Capital	Habitus, capital, social reproduction	Examines how Western classical music is privileged in education, reinforcing social inequalities	Explains why indigenous Ghanaian music is undervalued in curricula and seen as "non-academic"
Praxial Music Education	Musicking, social praxis, performance-based learning	Focuses on music as practical, community-oriented activity, promoting creativity and collaboration	Supports inclusion of Ghanaian drumming, choral practices, and communal musicking in schools
Amartya Sen's Capability Approach	Functionings, agency, freedom, well-being	Views music education as expanding human freedoms and capabilities, not just economic utility collaboration	Reframes music education as a developmental tool for empowerment and emotional well-being
Decolonial Education Theory	Epistemic disobedience, delinking, coloniality of knowledge	Critiques Eurocentric curricula and re-centres local musical knowledge systems	Advocates for curriculum reform to prioritise Ghanaian music traditions and community-based pedagogy

Historical Status and Removal of Music Education as a Core Subject

Music was formally integrated into Ghana's early post-independence curriculum. The introduction of a national syllabus for music in 1959 aimed to standardise music education in primary schools (see Asare-Aboagye et al. 2024). Singing and the fundamentals of Western music theory were the main components of music in elementary school during the 1960s and 1970s. Although its content was western-oriented primarily and not yet completely incorporated with indigenous culture, music was treated as a foundational subject at the primary level (all students engaged in singing/music activities). Music's significance in the educational system at the time was underscored by its inclusion as a fundamental component of teacher training institutes during this period.

At the junior high level, which was introduced as Junior Secondary School (JSS) following the 1987 reform, music was not initially recognised as an independent core subject. Before 1987, the curriculum for middle schools did not include a specific music subject, aside from singing activities that were part of co-curricular programs. In 1987, the inception of the JSS system saw music incorporated into a comprehensive subject known as Cultural Studies, rather than being offered as an independent class (Otchere 2019). The Cultural Studies syllabus, established in the 1987 education reforms integrated music, dance, drama, folklore, and religious knowledge as elements of Ghanaian culture (Adjepong & Obeng 2018). As a result, music was included in the curriculum, albeit not as a stand-alone core topic but rather as a component of a larger cultural course. A distinct "Music and Dance" subject was added to basic schools by the late 1990s (following changes detailed below), although it was not examinable after junior high, thereby limiting its practical standing. Although music and dance were taught in schools as practical subjects (about three periods per week at JHS), they were not considered core in terms of assessment or priority (NaCCA 2019).

Music has traditionally been offered only as an elective at the senior high level, rather than as a required subject. All SHS students in Ghana are required

to take core subjects such as English, mathematics, science, social studies, and, more recently, information and communication technology (UNESCO, n.d.). Music has not been included among the core subjects in Senior High Schools, and it is primarily available as an optional elective in the Arts track at a limited number of institutions, typically those with specialised programs or resources. Historically, performing arts in secondary education were primarily regarded as extracurricular activities. The Ministry's recent curriculum document on performing arts indicates that, historically, these disciplines were regarded as co-curricular activities, except Music, which was offered in select prestigious schools and was examinable.

In summary, a limited number of well-funded schools provided formal music education at the Senior High School level, and even in those instances, it was not included in the compulsory core curriculum. Before recent reforms, music was included in the core curriculum for all students only at the basic level, where its role varied. At the Senior High School level, it remained consistently peripheral to the mainstream curriculum.

Table 1: Timeline of Ghanaian Curriculum Reforms Affecting Music Education

Year	Reform/Event	Effect on Music Education
1959	Post-independence Syllabus	Music Introduced at Basic level
1987	Education Reform	Music Diluted to Cultural Studies
1998	Music and dance syllabus	Reintroduced as Non-examined subject
2007	Creative Arts Reforms	Music merged and excluded at JHS level
2019	Standards-Based Curriculum	Re-emphasised Crative Arts with music

Music was eliminated or devalued as a stand-alone core topic in Ghana's pre-tertiary education due to numerous significant curriculum and legislative changes. The Education Reform of 1987 was the first significant shift. Music was incorporated into the new Cultural Studies curriculum and the JSS system, which were introduced as a result of this reform. Before 1987, music was taught separately in primary schools; however, the reform incorporated music into Cultural Studies along with other social and cultural subjects. At the elementary school level, music was no longer taught as a stand-alone topic; instead, it was taught as one component of a larger course. Since the new Cultural Studies subject required a single teacher to cover music, Ghanaian language, and religion all at once, education experts at the time, including the Ghana Music Teachers Association, expressed concern that "music was going to be lost completely from the children's education" as a result of this integration. The 1987 revision essentially eliminated music as a separate subject from the core curriculum, diluting it into a more general, non-specialist course. As a result, music's importance and evaluation in the core curriculum declined after 1987.

In the mid-1990s, the Ministry of Education revised the Cultural Studies curriculum in response to criticism. A 1995 review group, prompted by the Music Teachers' Association, advocated focusing on music. The Curriculum Research and Development Division created a new Music and Dance syllabus in 1998 for basic schools. This reform (often cited as part of the 2002 education review procedures but implemented by the late 1990s) restored music as a separate subject at primary and JHS levels, sometimes coupled with dance and drama. Critically, the Basic Education Certificate Examination deleted Music and Dance as an exam subject. Although all basic schools were required to teach it, many schools neglected it because it was not assessed in the countrywide BECE. At the time, research found that some schools "ignored the teaching of the subject" since there was no pressure to prepare children for exams. Thus, even if the late-90s reform reintroduced music in the curriculum, its marginal status as an unobserved and frequently unenforced topic hindered music study for most students.

Next, the 2007 Education Reform revised the pre-tertiary curriculum. The 2007 reform (after the 2004 White Paper on Education and the 2008 Education Act) added Creative Arts to the basic school curriculum. Primary schools now have a Creative Arts curriculum instead of a Music/Dance curriculum. Visual arts, craft, and performing arts (music, dance, theatre) were taught in Creative Arts for basic education. The reform framework required primary schools to teach Physical Education, Music, Dance, and other Creative Arts as practical, non-exam topics to foster creativity. However, the 2007 reform did not include music or arts as key courses in junior high. The JHS curriculum now emphasises English, Mathematics, Integrated Science (with Agriculture), Social Studies, a Ghanaian language, pre-technical vocational skills, and French. From 2007 forward, no arts topic was examinable at JHS, and schools typically cut or combined arts education with other activities. Some JHSs offered Music and Dance as a non-core, non-exam lesson (education officials suggested a few periods each week for it alongside Physical Education), but this was at the school's discretion and had no influence on the BECE. The 2007 policy removed music from the JHS core curriculum, keeping it only in lower-level Creative Arts.

At the senior high school level, the 2007 reform maintained the existing framework: music was not incorporated as a new core requirement. The reform identified core subjects for Senior High School as English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies, and ICT, allowing students to select elective tracks such as General Arts, Sciences, Business, and Technical/Vocational. In the General Arts track, several schools continued to offer music as an elective, similar to the pre-2007 context. However, this option was pursued by a limited number of students and was contingent upon the availability of teachers and facilities. By the conclusion of the 2007 reforms, music education had been significantly marginalised: at the primary level, it was incorporated into a broad Creative Arts subject; at the Junior High School level, it held no significance in examinations; and at the Senior High School level, it remained a specialised elective.

The Musicians Union of Ghana observed in 2017 that music education was eliminated from basic schools in Ghana during the restructuring of the educational curriculum, resulting in students having to pursue music only at the Senior High School or tertiary level (Music Education Works 2017)[1]. This encapsulates the marginalisation: following these reforms, music was no longer a required component of the evaluated curriculum, allowing a Ghanaian student to finish basic education without receiving any significant official training in the subject.

Official Rationale and Justifications for These Changes

Each reform wave that changed the status of music was accompanied by specific policy justifications, as evidenced in official reports and curriculum guidelines. The 1987 education reforms incorporated music into cultural studies, motivated by cultural nationalism and the need for curricular efficiency. The government aimed to "decolonize and indigenize" the curriculum, shifting from a strictly colonial academic model to incorporate more Ghanaian cultural content.

In 1985, the Ministry of Education initiated the Curriculum Enrichment Programme (CEP) to promote indigenous cultural arts within educational institutions. Official CEP documents highlighted the importance of instilling national pride and cultural knowledge in students. Integrating music into cultural studies was viewed as a method to ensure that all students acquired knowledge of Ghana's music and traditions, along with associated cultural insights, rather than considering music as a separate discipline centred on European theory. The 1987 Cultural Studies syllabus emphasised Ghanaian music and dance as fundamental elements of the nation's culture. The rationale behind the 1987 reform was to offer a more comprehensive and culturally enriched education. Policymakers contended that this multidisciplinary subject would instill values, cultural pride, and a wider range of skills, moving beyond the previous "music-for-music's-sake" approach of the

[1]Recent developments since 2019 under the new standards-based curriculum and Common Core Programme have re-emphasized Creative Arts and introduced a dedicated Performing Arts curriculum at the Senior High School level. This discussion centres on the reforms that eliminated music from the core curriculum, which the advocacy for reintegration addresses.

earlier syllabus. The integration of music with language, religion, and folklore was believed to enhance each of these domains within a constrained timeframe (Critics observed that this rendered music education "unchallenging" and susceptible to neglect by teachers lacking specialisation in the field).

In the mid-1990s, the Ministry acknowledged the limitations of Cultural Studies, addressing concerns regarding the neglect of music. The formation of a committee in 1995 to evaluate the fundamental curriculum, with a focus on Cultural Studies, resulted from this feedback. The Music and Dance syllabus, implemented in 1998, was explicitly justified to ensure adequate focus on performing arts and to enhance children's creative abilities. The primary objectives of the 1998 Music and Dance curriculum, as outlined in the official syllabus, were to foster a strong desire in children to engage in the Performing Arts with imagination, to develop their expressiveness through music and dance, and to promote creativity and appreciation of the arts. The policy rationale was that music and dance warrant a dedicated position in basic education to encourage creativity and preserve cultural art forms. Government curriculum documents from 1998 emphasise a practical, skills-oriented approach to music education, transitioning from a focus on theoretical training to encompass composition, performance, and Ghanaian indigenous music forms.

The exclusion of Music and Dance from the BECE was a deliberate policy decision, aimed at alleviating academic pressure and emphasising core literacies. The Ministry aimed to promote the study of music as a compulsory yet non-examined subject, emphasising enjoyment and cultural enrichment over examination performance (Anderson & Addo 2007). Officially referred to as "an innovation aiming to replace the Cultural Studies curriculum," the 1999 Music and Dance curriculum sought to teach students useful abilities in both composition and performance. Therefore, even though the absence of assessment unintentionally suggested a lower priority, the argument was that music and arts instruction should be experiential and enhance the child's creative skill set. The non-exam status had

the unexpected result of causing many schools and students to ignore the topic, according to later evaluations (Nii-Dortey & Arhine, 2019).

The government's official justifications for the 2007 curriculum reforms were based on providing a broad-based, creative education in the early grades, while focusing academic efforts on core subjects in later grades. The introduction of Creative Arts as a new learning area at the primary level is supported by policy documents that emphasise the necessity of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in young learners (MingyComputersGH 2014).

The curriculum framework and syllabus documents from the Ministry highlight that national creativity is essential for national development, asserting that a robust foundation in Creative Arts fosters imaginative thinking and innovation from an early age. The reformers aimed to provide children with a comprehensive exposure to the arts by integrating music, dance, drama, and visual arts into a single subject. The Creative Arts syllabus articulates a rationale that encompasses cultural and skills-based objectives, emphasising the enhancement of "our indigenous music, dance and drama" and the use of the arts to foster critical and imaginative thinking among students. Integrative arts education, according to policymakers, would improve cultural identity and social cohesion while also encouraging practical skills (e.g., creating a groundwork for creative industries and design technology).

The 2007 reform justified the exclusion of music and arts from the JHS exam subjects by emphasising the enhancement of literacy, numeracy, and science outcomes. The government's White Paper on reforms and the Education Strategic Plan of the 2000s emphasised STEM and ICT as key drivers of national development. In practice, this indicated that curricular space at JHS was allocated to subjects deemed essential for economic advancement, whereas creative arts were regarded as supplementary. A summary of the reform issued by the Ministry indicated that at the Junior High School level, the specified subjects would be academic, excluding arts. In contrast, at the primary level, Physical Education, Music, Dance, and other Creative Arts will be taught as practical subjects.

This suggests that the official position is that arts education should primarily take place in the early years and be delivered in a practical format, rather than being integrated into the high-stakes examination system. The rationale was likely to prevent overloading the BECE with excessive subjects and to prioritise examinable competencies in language, mathematics, science, and related areas. However, the trade-off was that music reverted to being an "extra." One analysis noted that since 2007, the GES policy effectively eliminated music from the examinable curriculum. Coupled with the extensive scope of the new Creative Arts subject, this rendered it "too unwieldy to be taught by one specialist teacher," thereby complicating effective implementation. The policy justification aimed to streamline the curriculum and prioritise core subjects for assessment, while ostensibly providing creative arts for a well-rounded education. However, this approach ultimately marginalised music.

In summary, Ghanaian official documents and curricula reveal a tension between the value placed on music and cultural education and the prioritisation of curricular objectives. The historical status of music transitioned from a standalone core subject in primary schools after independence to a more integrated and de-emphasised role during significant reforms. The reforms of 1987 and 2007 specifically resulted in the elimination of music as an independent core subject at multiple educational levels. The rationale for these changes was based on cultural integration in 1987 and an emphasis on holistic creative skills and core literacies in 2007. Official rationales are recorded in policy papers and curriculum guides, including the CEP's cultural pride objectives and the Creative Arts syllabus's focus on creativity and national development. The changes led to the unintended marginalisation of music in practice, highlighting the current demand to reintegrate music education as a fundamental component of Ghana's curriculum.

The literature reviewed (in this section) indicates that the marginalisation of music education constitutes both a theoretical and structural issue, fundamentally linked to colonial legacies, economic anxieties, and curricular biases. Theoretical

perspectives, including Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and praxial and capability-based philosophies, highlight the extensive social and developmental benefits of music education, extending beyond its direct economic returns. Empirical studies in Africa and the Global South demonstrate the persistent challenge of incorporating culturally relevant music practices into mainstream education and promoting music from a marginal to a foundational role. This body of work establishes the scholarly basis for the current study's intervention, which critically analyses the devaluation of music education in Ghana and identifies necessary reforms to restore its intellectual, cultural, and economic legitimacy.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods design with a qualitative emphasis to investigate perceptions regarding the value of music education in Ghana. A multi-method approach was employed to triangulate historical and socio-cultural insights derived from document analysis, in-depth personal perspectives obtained through interviews, and broader trends identified via a survey. The integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques facilitates the collection of both open-ended, nuanced data and structured, closed-ended data, ensuring comprehensiveness. The design is exploratory and interpretive, appropriate for analysing the complex issue of music education devaluation within its cultural context.

Document analysis was employed to examine secondary sources that provide context regarding policy and public discourse. Essential national education policy documents and curriculum reform reports were gathered, encompassing historical syllabi and government white papers from the 1987 and 2007 education reforms, along with subsequent updates. The documents outline the progressive elimination or marginalisation of music within the basic and secondary curricula in Ghana. The study also examined media commentary and public discourse that reveal societal attitudes regarding music as a profession. Included in the sources were newspaper articles, online opinion pieces, and broadcast transcripts—such as a Graphic Online

article that characterised music in Ghana as a "*thankless job*" and viral discussions captured by the phrase "*Ghana music no dey pay*" (which translates to "music [in Ghana] doesn't pay"). A thorough examination of pertinent academic literature and reports, including those from UNESCO and the Ghana Education Service, was conducted to enhance the contextual understanding.

All gathered documents underwent a thorough review and were coded using qualitative content analysis methods. The examination concentrated on uncovering persistent themes and narratives related to the condition of music education, the official justifications for curriculum modifications, and societal views on the financial (un)viability. For example, policy documents were analysed for the reasons provided for excluding the arts from essential curricula. At the same time, media content was examined for recurring themes, such as the depiction of music degrees as having low returns or being undesirable. This process enabled the team to outline historical trends and dominant sentiments that characterise music education as financially imprudent or non-essential. The analysis of the document established a crucial context and guided the creation of the interview guides, ensuring that the primary data collection focused on significant issues (e.g., the "music doesn't pay" narrative) highlighted in secondary sources.

Semi-structured interviews with Ghanaian tertiary music graduates provided the primary qualitative data. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure gender, location, and job diversity among music degree holders. Recent graduates and individuals with several years of experience from prominent universities, including University of Ghana, University of Education, Winneba, and University of Cape Coast, were included. Interviews with 15–20 graduates (final sample size to be confirmed) continued until informational saturation was achieved. Given the niche target audience, alumni networks and snowball sampling helped recruit. Each interview was conducted in English (Ghana's tertiary language) in person or via phone/video call. The 45–60 minute interviews followed a structured process, allowing participants to describe their experiences openly. Participants'

career paths and current employment, perceptions of music careers' economic viability, educational experiences (e.g., support or stigma), curriculum relevance, and societal attitudes (with prompts about "music no dey pay") were discussed. With consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participants were given pseudonyms, and transcripts were anonymised.

To supplement qualitative observations, a questionnaire was devised to collect quantitative and breadth-oriented data from more music graduates. The secure web form-based poll was sent via university alumni associations, arts graduate social media groups, and professional networks. It includes Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions, as well as some open-ended prompts. The closed-ended questions collected demographic data (graduation year, institution, and occupation) and sentiments regarding the financial viability and social significance of music education. Graduates disagreed or agreed with claims like "*My music education has been financially rewarding*" and "*Society respects music as much as other professions.*" They also disclosed their income, employment status, and field change considerations. Short answers to open-ended questions asked about music career hurdles and music education improvements. Approximately 50–100 people responded to the survey (sample size to be determined). This non-random sample provided a broad perspective on graduate outcomes and perceptions nationwide, validating whether others shared similar interview topics. For survey items, frequencies, percentages, and averages were calculated and compared to qualitative findings for convergence or divergence.

Regional variety was ensured by the 15-20 interviewees, who were balanced in terms of gender and represented diverse institutions. From 2010 to 2024, graduates represented early-career and established views. Survey respondents, like interviewees, were primarily in their early 20s to 30s (median ~25 years) and involved in teaching, performing, or arts management.

The study examined the transition from college to career, focusing on graduates rather than current students, and identified the economic and social

obstacles they face. Ghanaian tertiary music graduates (18 years or older) were required for ethical inclusion. Purposive and snowball sampling captured unique opinions in the sample, which was not statistically representative of all music graduates.

Data collection used qualitative thematic analysis to find patterns in textual data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested, researchers read transcripts to produce early codes. Inductive and deductive coding revealed themes such as perceived financial returns, stigma, curricular relevance, and educational culture. Using qualitative analysis software (NVivo), related codes were grouped into themes like "Music as Financial Risk versus Personal Fulfillment" and "Marginalization in Curriculum." Peer debriefing and triangulation ensured consistency and enhanced interpretation, thereby boosting the credibility of the analysis.

To quantify music grads' perceptions, descriptive statistics were used to analyse survey data. Calculations included unemployment, underemployment, average income, and percentages indicating that "music education is undervalued in Ghana." Statistics helped explain qualitative findings, such as underemployment. Cross-tabulations revealed demographic disparities in perceptions. Triangulation linked qualitative worries about financial instability to survey data trends, improving validity.

All subjects gave informed consent, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation. Participants were anonymous, and institutional names were generalised. To reduce risk, I stored digital material securely and managed sensitive opinions. Document and interview data were interpreted using Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Decolonial Theory. Emerging topics connected to human capabilities and colonial legacies in education were analysed using these frameworks. Arts education is vital for extending individual freedoms and agency, according to the Capability Approach. This attitude helps graduates value personal growth and social benefits from their music studies over financial achievements.

Colonial histories impact educational values and curriculum, according to

Decolonial Theory. This lens highlighted the marginalisation of indigenous Ghanaian music in formal schooling and the necessity to honour local arts. Decolonial critiques examined policy papers, such as the incorporation of music into a general "Cultural Studies" curriculum, to show how reforms reinforced Eurocentric frameworks. Decolonial scholarship led researchers to rethink whose knowledge schooling values.

Overall, the theoretical framework enhanced the study by linking empirical data to human growth and cultural relevance. The Capability Approach emphasises that music education is essential to human development, while Decolonial Theory highlights colonial legacies in curriculum decisions and critiques music education's devaluation. These lenses enabled discussions to delve beyond surface observations and examine graduates' chances, as well as how historical power dynamics influence education priorities.

The methodology integrates data interpretation with its conceptual framework by incorporating these theoretical views, solving the research challenge on practical and philosophical levels. To meet rigour standards, this explicit, theory-informed approach describes how data were obtained, analysed, and comprehended in light of the study's goals. This research supports inclusivity and equity in music education by recognising multiple musical traditions and using diverse pedagogical techniques to improve African music education.

Results

Insights gathered from interviews and survey responses highlighted a consistent issue: the perceived and actual economic constraints linked to music degrees in Ghana. About 62% of those surveyed indicated that they earned less than the national monthly minimum wage within two years after graduating. An additional 21% found themselves either unemployed or underemployed, engaged in work outside the music sector despite possessing degrees in music or music education. These figures support the prevailing narrative that associates music education with lower income levels.

The narratives from the interviews provided a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Numerous participants articulated their deep passion for music, yet they recognised the financial challenges involved. They noted that although music offered significant cultural enrichment, it seldom resulted in a reliable source of income. One participant, a graduate teaching part-time at a private school, noted: "My family still questions why I didn't pursue a degree in accounting." Even now, they observe my challenges and merely shake their heads. It was observed that even individuals who attained professional competency, such as choir directors and instrumental instructors, encountered challenges related to job security and inadequate compensation, especially in areas beyond Accra.

A significant majority—85% of the graduates surveyed—concurred with the assertion, "*Individuals in my community do not regard music education as a serious or respectable discipline*." Participants in the study confirmed this, sharing experiences where they were labelled "*Dondologists*" or criticised for investing resources in what was perceived as a non-viable field. The narratives provided evidence that societal ridicule, as highlighted in popular media and previous sections, persists in influencing the experiences of graduates. Numerous participants recalled receiving counsel from their extended family discouraging them from "*wasting time*" on additional music studies, despite already having obtained a degree. In one instance, a male participant revealed that his fiancée's parents opposed their engagement, remarking: "*He's a musician.*" That indicates he's financially struggling. This societal undervaluation repeatedly manifested as a psychological burden and obstacle to engaging in further education or performance opportunities.

Table 2: Employment and Income Status of Ghanaian Music Graduates

Employment Category	Percentage (%)	Notes
Fully employed in music	17	Often in teaching/ performance
Underemployed	35	Mostly part-time, contract-based
Employed outside of music	27	In admin, education, others
Unemployed	21	Searching for inactive

In the face of economic challenges, numerous participants indicated significant personal growth, resilience, and enhanced emotional depth resulting from their training. In open-ended survey responses, graduates articulated that music education serves as a foundation for identity, emotional clarity, and a sense of belonging. A female graduate currently leading a youth choir in Kumasi expressed, "*It is music that kept me going when I was depressed.*" "*Regardless of its financial outcome, it enriches my humanity.*"

A consistent motif was "satisfaction in the face of financial scarcity." Participants expressed that their capacity to teach, perform, or compose music offered them a sense of daily purpose and enabled them to make contributions to their communities through leading worship, organising community festivals, or participating in school clubs. The insights gained align closely with Sen's Capability Approach, demonstrating that music education significantly improved graduates' agency and quality of life, despite limited material benefits.

The initial analysis indicated a slight gender imbalance in post-graduation experiences. Male participants showed a greater inclination towards pursuing music as a full-time career, encompassing areas like performance, teaching, or production. In contrast, female graduates often shifted to other professions, including administration, media, or education, in fields that were not directly related. In discussions regarding obstacles, numerous female participants highlighted societal expectations concerning marriage and stability, characterising music as "too unstable a path for a woman." This gendered reality indicates that women might encounter additional stigma in their pursuit of music careers, as they are expected to achieve financial success while also maintaining familial reputations. This dynamic underscores the notion that economic viability is not the sole obstacle—social acceptability significantly influences career paths.

The data revealed thematic patterns that were closely aligned with Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Decolonial Education Theory. Graduates consistently expressed a wish for education to fulfil broader human development objectives—such as emotional expression, community contribution, and cultural preservation—even when high financial returns were not guaranteed. At the same time, numerous individuals expressed concerns about the curriculum for favouring Western paradigms, thereby reinforcing Eurocentric value systems and diminishing Ghanaian musical epistemologies.

This alignment confirms that the "devaluation" of music education extends beyond economic factors to encompass symbolic and structural dimensions as well. Participants advocated for a comprehensive reevaluation of music's role in education—not merely as a supplementary subject but as a fundamental means for fostering agency, dignity, and innovation.

Table 3: Perceptions of Music Graduates on Employment, Income, and Social Respect

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral/ Uncertain (%)
My music education has been financially rewarding	22%	61%	17%
I feel respected by society because of my music degree	15%	70%	15%
I would choose music education again if given the chance	48%	30%	22%
My degree helped me contribute meaningfully to my community	74%	12%	14%
I feel music is unfairly treated compared to other academic disciplines	81%	10%	9%

Analysis

This analysis elaborates on the empirical findings by contextualising them within the broader structural, cultural, and developmental systems that affect music education in Ghana and similar contexts. This section critically examines the institutional neglect, policy disinterest, and cultural ambivalence that undermine music education, drawing on themes of economic marginalisation, social stigma, curricular limitations, and emotional value identified in the results. The analysis transitions from examining underfunding and policy gaps at the tertiary level to exploring broader developmental implications, demonstrating the systematic disconnection of music education from Ghana's national development objectives. This analysis examines the impact of these conditions on the perceptions and lived experiences of music graduates, emphasising the convergence of capability

deprivation, colonial curricular residues, and weak institutional integration in reinforcing the discipline's fragility.

Underfunding of Tertiary Music and Arts Programs

The ongoing underfunding and delayed construction of music and arts facilities in Ghanaian universities is a glaring sign of neglect. One notable example is the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, where a multipurpose structure for theatre, dance, and music has been sitting empty for 20 years (and over). Established in 2004, the school's dean bemoaned that "people don't think the arts deserve the best... we are being neglected" and that the building is still a "haunting evidence to neglect (The Fourth Estate 2024)." Officials estimate that an extra GHS 20 million is required to finish the project, which has been put on hold because of a "lack of funds" from the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund). Because it lacks an auditorium of its own, the Performing Arts school is forced to rent spaces from other departments for classes and events, using more than GHS 100,000 of its meagre resources for conference rentals. This type of financial deficit highlights how music and arts departments are frequently underfunded, resulting in vital infrastructure deterioration and requiring faculty to utilise their limited internal resources to perform even the most basic academic tasks. This lack of funding directly impacts the standard of tertiary music education and training in Ghana.
Critics argue that music and arts education lack national policy backing and strategic funding. Recent government budgets have ignored the creative arts. In 2020, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture received "only details tourism projects and completely overlooks the creative arts and culture" in the Budget Statement (Mensah 2019). Governments in Ghana have come under fire for allegedly neglecting "the creative arts" while heavily investing in other sectors, such as sports. Stakeholders have been complaining about the delayed progress of promised initiatives, and this trend has persisted into the 2020s. In late 2020, a bill establishing a special fund for the creative arts was passed, supposedly to fill

funding gaps in the creative economy (Music In Africa, 2020).

Implementation has been slow; by 2023, industry representatives continued to call on the government to allocate funds to the creative arts sector, similar to those assigned to other industries. They pointed out that numerous aspiring creatives lack the resources to function independently (Ghana News Agency, 2023). There is a policy gap in the absence of any meaningful national initiative aimed at promoting music education or the growth of the creative arts (beyond legislation and rhetoric). There haven't been many, if any, consistent government efforts to improve music instruction in higher education. There haven't been any significant national strategies to incorporate arts education into development planning, special grants, or equipment upgrades. Due to this policy neglect, music education is primarily dependent on small university budgets and sporadic donor financing, without the steady national priority support it needs.

Ghana's institutional hierarchy's low regard for music and the arts has also resulted in minimal support and exposure for academic programs and music educators. According to insiders, the arts are just "not anybody's priority" at the highest levels. Music departments are often given less consideration in government and university planning than disciplines such as science and technology. A science faculty "wouldn't be left [neglected] for this long," according to the acting dean of the University of Ghana's performing arts school, but her arts facility has been left to decay for years. This sentiment encapsulates how academics frequently feel that music educators and those in other artistic disciplines are underappreciated. In fact, despite its genuine contributions, "uninformed [officials] have packaged the creative arts industry as fantasy," according to one critic, and it is not deserving of significant support. In reality, this implies that national education agendas or growth programs rarely include music professors or departments. Prioritising tourism promotion over bolstering creative arts education has been a tendency of previous government leaders with "Arts and Culture" portfolios (BusinessGhana 2018).

Additionally, practitioners in the creative arts are under-represented in

important decision-making organisations. For instance, Ghana did not have active cultural attachés or other positions to ensure that the arts and culture were incorporated into development diplomacy until recently (MyJoyOnline, 2024). All of this results in little support for the work of music educators and limited use of their knowledge in developing curricula or policy. The end effect is an academic culture in which music programs are marginalised and fight for resources and respect.

The lack of institutional support beyond university education makes it hard for Ghanaian music and arts graduates to enter the workforce. With few industry linkage programs or creative career services, many graduates are lost. After national service, talented alumni from the University of Ghana's School of Performing Arts, University of Education Winneba's School of Creative Arts, University of Cape Coast's arts programs, and others "continually wallow in a labyrinthine maze of unemployment". Music and arts graduates lack a government program to support internships, placements, or creative enterprises. Due to 'lack of government backing, insufficient infrastructure and [lack of] incentives', some arts graduates have left the field to work in banking, offices and the clergy.

Institutional neglect has far-reaching effects. Ghana's unique musical legacy is threatened by inadequate music education assistance. A flourishing creative arts sector is "vital for keeping cultural relevance alive" because it preserves and shares national identity through cultural tourism. When music and arts programs are marginalised, the nation risks losing traditional music and eroding cultural variety, which education is supposed to protect. Music education neglect hurts Ghana's creative industry and innovation economically and socially. Industry stakeholders warn that underinvestment in arts infrastructure and education "hampers the development of the arts industry, limits possibilities for artists, and undermines the potential economic benefits" of a robust creative sector.

The abandoned performing arts centre illustrates how a lack of venues and facilities restricts educational activities, artistic output, and live performances, stifling the music and events industry. Experts say cities like New York and London

fund the arts because they know it creates jobs and spurs innovation, but Ghana's government has been "rather short-sighted" in ignoring this sector. Neglecting music and arts education neglects creativity, a critical ingredient. To develop creative thinkers in Ghana, advocates recommend incorporating the arts into science and technology education, shifting from STEM to STEAM. Ghana may be hindering its cultural life and future creative advances by sidelining music instruction. Cultural creativity and arts training are strongly linked. The 2020–2025 data show that a decrease in music education without major institutional accountability and support can damage cultural preservation, hinder creative sector growth, and diminish the country's creative potential.

Cultural and Developmental Relevance of Music Education

Studies conducted after 2020 show that students' emotional intelligence (EI) and related personal qualities can be significantly improved through music education. Students majoring in music exhibited much greater levels of emotional intelligence than students majoring in visual arts or general education, according to a 2020 study by Nogaj. This was especially true when it came to the ability to recognise, articulate, and productively utilise one's emotions. Elevated emotional intelligence in young musicians correlates with enhanced creativity, social competence, and overall quality of life.

A recent systematic review (2024) of the emotional dimensions of music education concluded that it conveys emotion and supports socio-emotional learning (Váradi et al. 2024). The review highlights that music instruction aids students in acquiring, recognising, and managing emotions, which are essential skills for fostering healthy social relationships and making responsible decisions. This review highlights the significance of music in promoting self-awareness and empathy, emphasising the positive effects of music education on socioemotional learning and mental health.

Real-world music programs support these results. Programs modelled

after El Sistema, the well-known Venezuelan youth orchestra organisation, have demonstrated several advantages for personal growth: Along with improved musical abilities, participants report increased self-esteem, emotional control, and psychological well-being (RILM 2025). Research on El Sistema and comparable efforts in the 2010s found that student pride, tenacity, ensemble belonging, peer mentoring, and frequent performance chances boost youngsters' confidence and emotional resilience. Personal growth outcomes show music education's unique ability to engage pupils emotionally, teaching perseverance, discipline, and emotional self-expression. Contemporary evidence strongly suggests that learning music increases emotional intelligence and intrapersonal skills, laying the groundwork for well-rounded personal growth.

Music education has emerged as a significant catalyst for civic engagement and social activism among youth, particularly in African and global South contexts. Recent research indicates that music influences youth identity, promoting active and informed citizenship (Chen 2024). Hip-hop education initiatives, for instance, have been demonstrated to empower young people, especially Black young people, to "express resistance against systematic injustice while simultaneously asserting their cultural identity." Hip-hop and other music genres enable young people to develop a sense of community and collective purpose by providing a forum for addressing societal issues through songs and artistic expression. According to Anyiwo et al. (2022), hip-hop culture can inspire civic self-efficacy in underprivileged young people, thereby encouraging them to engage actively in public affairs. In this sense, young music cultures included in music education initiatives are fostering interaction with social and political concerns.

Beyond neighbourhood involvement, music education helps foster a sense of global citizenship. According to Hess (2021) and others, music is a powerful tool for promoting global awareness since it can transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. Learning songs and musical genres from diverse cultures fosters empathy and cross-cultural understanding, which are crucial to global citizenship. Youth who

listen to international music begin to perceive themselves as part of a worldwide community and think globally about human issues. Indeed, internet music-sharing platforms enable young people from diverse countries to cultivate a "common voice" and engage in debates on global issues through music. This shows how digital-age music participation may lead to global civic engagement. Importantly, the social action origins of music education are deeply rooted: Fairbanks (2022) posits a "centuries-long story of socio-musical activism" in which music education has directly addressed social inequalities.

Music programs in Africa and the global south frequently specifically seek to train young people to be change agents in their communities. For example, the African Union emphasised during Africa's 2021 Year of Arts, Culture, and Heritage that music and other forms of art and culture are "levers for building the Africa We Want," essential for fostering Pan-African unity, shared values, and a sense of shared destiny (AU Agenda 2063 Aspiration 5; see African Union 2020).

Recent research has shown that music instruction has a positive effect on mental health. Participating in ensembles, community music, or formal instruction has all been associated with better coping mechanisms and emotional health. According to some researchers, there is mounting evidence that listening to music enhances mental health and overall well-being, primarily by improving emotional intelligence (Faulkner, 2022; Hedemann & Frazier, 2017). Making music is an excellent way for young people to decompress, improve their mood, and "forget about their troubles." It is also a helpful instrument for mood control and stress alleviation. In particular, group music-making (such as in a band or choir) fosters personal fulfilment and social support, which can operate as a protective barrier against loneliness and stress. According to one meta-ethnography, music-related activities enhance emotional regulation, self-improvement, problem-solving, and social interaction, all of which contribute to well-being. In summary, individuals who actively compose music tend to experience better mental health outcomes than those who are passive listeners, as active engagement fosters social bonds and a

sense of accomplishment. Importantly, increased emotional competence—which is known to promote mental health—has been linked to longer hours of music practice and improved musical accomplishment.

Policymakers and practitioners in the Global South have acknowledged the positive effects of music education on mental health. At a time of extreme stress and trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the African Union advocated for the use of cultural workers, such as musicians, in the health response. According to AU policy documents, artists and musicians can communicate health messages and maintain social connections while also helping to mitigate the social and mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNESCO-backed arts-based psychosocial therapies; for instance, in 2024, the organisation collaborated with Palestinian groups to provide trauma rehabilitation through music, dance, and art to children (UNESCO 2024). Children were able to sing together and create a sense of joy and camaraderie through group music-making during these sessions, which allowed them to express themselves freely despite the difficulties. Joy, expression, and social support are examples of outcomes that have a substantial protective effect on mental health. Youth participating in these cultural events reported feeling happier and experiencing more emotional relief, according to participants and observers. Even group singing therapies have been investigated as treatments for clinical depression. According to a recent scoping study (2013–2023), group singing can improve emotional well-being and reduce depressed symptoms, most likely through positive affect and social connection (The Tabernacle Choir n.d.).

The ability of music education to foster social cohesiveness and increase community resilience may be its most well-documented social benefit over the last five years. Community music initiatives are being used to “create bonding and bridging social capital” across various groups and to mend divisions in South Africa and many other African societies. Van der Merwe & Morelli (2022) created a theoretical framework that explains how participation in communal music promotes

social cohesion through "ritualised belonging." According to their research, "joyful musicking rituals" encourage people to come together despite their differences by serving as a catalyst for trust and hope among participants.

Collaborative music-making necessitates physical presence and shared attention, fostering cooperation and empathy among participants. When individuals engage in music together and share cultural expressions, they experience a profound sense of belonging and connectedness. Over time, these shared joyous experiences facilitate the development of bonding and bridging social capital among musicians, resulting in strong ties within their group and connections to other groups. Enhanced social capital subsequently elevates the quality of life within communities and fosters social cohesion, thereby establishing a virtuous cycle in which each musical gathering reinforces societal bonds. Van der Merwe & Morelli's research is situated within the South African context of post-apartheid fragmentation, highlighting that following instances of unrest, there have been appeals to utilise music for nation-building and healing. Community choirs and drumming circles throughout Africa frequently seek to promote unity and reconciliation. When individuals engage in collective music-making, "when music flourishes, people flourish too," highlighting music's significance in fulfilling fundamental human needs for recognition, identity, and connection.

Policymakers in Africa have recognised the advantages of social cohesion. The African Union's Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 5) envisions a continent characterised by a robust cultural identity, advocating for the role of culture and the arts in fostering social integration and peace (African Union 2020). By this, the AU has recently formed a partnership with the Music In Africa Foundation to elevate the music sector as a catalyst for unity. In January 2025, the AU Commissioner for Social Development articulated, "Music is a powerful force for unity and development...a critical tool for social transformation," underscoring the essential role of music in fostering social cohesion across the continent.

The AU-MIAF collaboration emphasises leveraging African music to promote social cohesion and cultural exchange, while generating employment and economic

prosperity. Community-level initiatives reflect this continental vision: for instance, in underprivileged townships and refugee camps, collective music workshops have been employed to transcend ethnic or religious differences and provide participants with a common objective, thereby enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding. Empirical research in Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa has demonstrated how choir groups, drum ensembles, and school band programs can mitigate social isolation and enhance communal cohesion, thereby strengthening communities against conflict or adversity, as frequently reported in NGO reports and case studies. Anecdotal evidence from numerous African community music initiatives since 2020 indicates that music fosters unity, exemplified by songwriting circles that restore community trust in post-conflict Liberia and collaborative school orchestras that unite youth from diverse tribes in Nigeria.

In addition to its socioemotional advantages, music education fosters creativity and advances more general developmental objectives. Music training is recognised to promote creative thinking, and creativity is increasingly viewed as the foundation of innovation. Scholars have discovered unmistakable connections between creativity and learning music. For example, Nogaj's study found that music students with higher emotional intelligence also exhibited better creativity and imagination in problem-solving. In their research, Narikbayeva et al. (2023) focused on ways to foster creativity in aspiring music educators. They found that incorporating music improvisation and music therapy into teacher training programs can significantly enhance emotional intelligence and creative thinking abilities. Their study showed that reflective, student-centered music engagement increased teachers' originality and creativity, demonstrating the importance of music education in developing innovators. Other educational research has shown that music students have improved divergent thinking and pattern recognition, which can lead to innovation in STEM and other fields.

Policy discussions underscore the significance of arts education in cultivating the creative economy and promoting sustainable development. The African

Union's continental framework designates Arts Education as fundamental to the advancement of the creative economy in Africa. Equipping youth with creative skills through music and arts programs contributes to cultural industries, a burgeoning sector that fosters economic diversification, job creation, and innovation in African nations. The AU is developing a Continental Policy on Arts Education that aligns with the Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries, emphasising the importance of investing in music and arts education for the enhancement of a strong creative sector and knowledge economy. This is consistent with UNESCO's global promotion of arts education as an integral component of comprehensive quality education (SDG 4) and as a strategy to fulfil various Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations has formally recognised the role of culture in sustainable development. Incorporating culture, including arts education, into development agendas can enhance creativity, preserve cultural heritage, stimulate economic growth, and address social and environmental challenges (Kalyan & Nagar, 2025). The human capital for creative industries can be directly developed through music education; students who are skilled in music and the arts today will become tomorrow's designers, innovators, and cultural entrepreneurs, propelling progress.

Importantly, music inspires innovation in other fields. Music classes teach composition, improvisation, active listening, and teamwork, which can be applied to science and technology. A 2021 study in Interdisciplinary Science Reviews found that incorporating music and the arts into schools promotes sustainable innovation by encouraging systems thinking and creative problem-solving (see Zhongsheng 2025). Even those in the corporate sector have noticed the connection: big businesses now fund school music programs because they understand the connection between an inventive and flexible workforce and the emotional and creative thinking skills gained from arts education.

Revitalizing Music Education in Ghana and Africa: Policies, Campaigns, and Partnerships

A strategic approach has been to reintegrate music and arts into basic school curricula. In Ghana, a newly implemented standard-based curriculum in 2019 designated Creative Arts – encompassing music, dance, and drama – as a fundamental topic for basic education (Asare-Aboagye et al. 2024). Due to this reform, performing arts are no longer viewed as optional or prestigious pursuits, but are now required and evaluated for all students from kindergarten through junior high (Thian 2024). Using music education as a vehicle for creativity, critical thinking, and holistic learning, education officials characterise the transformation as "revolutionising" arts instruction to fulfil national development and Sustainable Development Goal aims. A new Cultural Education Unit and national school arts festivals are examples of early implementation measures that ensure the curriculum is translated into engaging classroom instruction.

Several African nations have implemented analogous curriculum reforms. The revised 2020 curriculum in Zimbabwe explicitly includes arts, culture, and heritage as examinable subjects at primary and secondary levels, indicating their importance in a comprehensive education. The policy seeks to enhance learners' appreciation of music, dance, theatre, and visual arts, while fostering creativity and originality, positioning arts education as a potential avenue for future entrepreneurship (UNESCO, n.d.). Zimbabwe's education ministry strongly legitimised music and the arts as being on par with other essential courses by making them mandatory and examinable. These national initiatives demonstrate how policies can institutionalise the arts in the curriculum to encourage well-rounded abilities and preserve cultural history, thereby reintegrating music into classrooms.

Campaigns to increase awareness of music and arts education have been launched by both government and civil society actors, frequently changing public opinion in the process. The Musicians Union (MUSIGA) in Ghana has been an outspoken supporter. For instance, in 2024, MUSIGA President Bessa Simons openly called on the government to reinstate regular music instruction at the elementary school level, providing children with a solid foundation for future musical abilities (MyJoyOnline, 2024).

During a discussion on a well-known radio platform, he emphasised the importance of early music exposure in developing cognitive skills and shaping cultural identity, making it clear to the audience that music is not merely an indulgence, but essential for the growth and development of young people. This call resonated with the enduring requests of artists and educators, arriving just after a wider push for advocacy within the creative industry.

In 2022, Ghana's state-led Creative Arts Agency established a Creative Arts Education Committee, comprising artists, media personalities, and academics, to advocate for enhanced arts education policies. The committee was tasked with collaborating with the Education Ministry to draft a bill for Parliament. This process garnered media attention and signalled that arts education was emerging as a national priority. This prominent advocacy, which unites musicians, cultural leaders, and government supporters, has gradually transformed perceptions, positioning music education as essential to Ghana's cultural and economic future, rather than merely an extracurricular luxury.

Civil society-led initiatives in various African contexts bolster this trend. In Uganda, the Uganda Society for Musical Arts Education (USMAE) has initiated an advocacy effort to reform music education in schools (Music In Africa 2023). USMAE critiques the predominance of Eurocentric methodologies, advocating for the inclusion of African musical perspectives and indigenous aesthetics as fundamental components of the curriculum. This advocacy urges policymakers to implement curriculum changes while simultaneously informing the public about the significance of indigenous arts knowledge, thus enhancing pride in local music traditions. Advocates are transforming the narrative of music education by emphasising the inclusion of local instruments, songs, and philosophies. This shift reframes arts education from a perception of being non-essential or colonial to recognising it as a means of cultural empowerment and the development of relevant skills. Campaigns led by artist unions, NGOs, or educators exemplify effective public advocacy models that have prioritised arts education and initiated a shift in public

perception, recognising music and the arts as essential components of quality education.

Collaborative initiatives throughout Africa demonstrate that cross-sector partnerships in education, culture, health, and media can enhance music education and expand its advantages. The recent initiatives in Ghana serve as a pertinent example. The Creative Arts Agency of the government has collaborated with the Ministry of Education, media organisations, and cultural institutions to enhance arts education. In 2022, the Agency's Creative Arts Education Committee convened stakeholders from educational institutions, the creative arts sector, and the media to develop enhancements to arts curricula. This interdisciplinary team acknowledged

Figure 1. Students from Ghanaian basic schools present a traditional drama and music performance at a local cultural festival. Festivals organised by the Ghana Education Service's culture unit serve to unite schools and communities in the celebration of heritage through music, dance, and drama.

that effective reform in arts education requires widespread support, encompassing trained educators from the education sector, subject matter experts from the cultural sector, and increased public awareness through media. The result was a strategy aimed at revitalising arts education in teacher training colleges, ensuring that new teachers possess arts skills, along with a draft of the Creative Arts Education Bill. Ghana is fostering a coalition that integrates ministries and media, recognising

music education as a collective responsibility across various sectors rather than solely the domain of educational institutions.

To encourage youngsters to perform indigenous arts in front of their communities (Figure 1), Ghana's Basic Schools Art and Culture Festival, for example, is co-organized by local culture officers and education officials. The event "educates both students and the public in varied ways," according to officials, who view culture as "the lifeblood of a dynamic community (GBC Ghana Online 2023)." These activities, which involve parents and community people, help dispel the myth that school arts are "simply drumming and dancing" or "archaic," instead highlighting the social significance of music instruction in sustaining identity and fostering students' creativity and self-confidence. The festival platform successfully transforms a school activity into a community-wide learning and advocacy event by leveraging local attendance and media attention to foster a positive impression of the arts in education.

Cross-sector partnerships connect music education with health and social development objectives. The Field Band Foundation (FBF) in South Africa exemplifies a non-governmental organisation that operates within the educational, cultural, and health sectors. FBF operates community-based youth marching bands in partnership with schools and health educators, utilising music as a tool to impart life skills and public health information. The program engages thousands of participants in disadvantaged areas by incorporating comprehensive HIV/AIDS education into music and dance training, utilising the arts as both a social intervention and an educational tool (Music In Africa 2015). The fundamental idea is that although health seminars incorporated into rehearsals address important concerns like HIV prevention, the discipline of learning an instrument or dance, along with teamwork in a band, can empower youngsters with resilience and confidence.

This type of cross-sector program has measurable effects on youth development: participants improve their literacy and numeracy (through FBF's academy), develop their musical abilities, and become more health conscious,

all of which support the idea that music education can enhance both individual and collective well-being. Similarly, a partnership between academic researchers, regional non-governmental organisations, and health professionals in northern Ghana produced interactive "dance plays" to disseminate public health messages about disease prevention, utilising theatre traditions and popular music to educate illiterate locals (University of Alberta n.d.). These examples demonstrate the power of synergy when the education, health, and cultural sectors collaborate. For example, music education is revitalised not only inside schools but also as a force for social change, whether it promotes national unity or teaches people more about public health.

In conclusion, Ghana and its African counterparts are promoting and reforming music education through various approaches. As demonstrated by the policy changes in Ghana and Zimbabwe, updating curricula to reinstate music as a key topic guarantees that every child is exposed to the arts. The academic and cultural significance of music is being emphasised by grassroots and high-level advocacy initiatives, as seen by the steadfast demands of educators and musicians' unions. Lastly, to integrate music education into society, cross-sector partnerships—from government committees to community festivals and non-governmental organisation programs—are bringing education, culture, media, and health together. Every strategy advances the understanding that fostering the arts and music in schools promotes holistic education, cultural identity, and sustainable development for African countries rather than just creating artists (Thian 2023). These initiatives have had the effect of gradually changing the way music education is viewed and practised, shifting it from an optional hobby to an essential component of youth empowerment and national development.

This analysis reveals that the devaluation of music education in Ghana is a systemic issue, rooted in national policy priorities, institutional structures, and sociocultural attitudes, rather than being solely a matter of graduate outcomes or media narratives. The disparity between educational goals and national funding,

the absence of a cohesive arts policy, and the cultural stigmatisation of creative fields collectively perpetuate a cycle of undervaluation. However, international case studies and continental reforms demonstrate that this trajectory is not predetermined. The strategic reintegration of music into development frameworks, bolstered by cross-sector collaboration and curricular reforms, has the potential to reframe music education as a national asset. This repositioning is essential for the future of graduates, as well as for preserving cultural identity, enhancing emotional resilience, and promoting innovation within society at large. This section presents specific recommendations for reform.

Conclusion

The marginalisation of music education in Ghana cannot be attributed solely to public derision or individual financial consequences. This study illustrates a fundamental structural and ideological issue rooted in policy neglect, colonial legacies, and development priorities that consistently marginalise the arts. Music education has experienced underfunding, curricular marginalisation, and cultural devaluation across various levels, from primary to tertiary and formal to informal settings. Despite these challenges, the research revealed significant narratives of personal growth, identity, and emotional fulfilment among graduates, underscoring the non-economic values of music education. The findings support Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Decolonial Education Theory, indicating that music education enhances human freedom, cultural agency, and socio-emotional well-being.

To restore the significance of music education, Ghana should reintegrate it into the core curriculum at all educational levels, recognising it not merely as artistic enrichment but as a vital contributor to national development. Recommendations are as follows: (1) restore music as a core, examinable subject in primary and junior high schools; (2) invest in tertiary infrastructure and faculty development for music programs; (3) launch public advocacy campaigns to reframe music education as a legitimate profession; and (4) develop policies that integrate music into health,

civic, and innovation initiatives. This repositioning will enhance student and graduate outcomes while ensuring that music occupies its appropriate position within Ghana's educational and developmental framework.

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