

**REDEFINING HEURISTIC PARADIGMS:  
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE IMPETUS OF PROBLEMATIZATION IN  
AFRICAN MUSIC THEORY AND COMPOSITION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Critically investigating the role of problem statements in academic inquiry, this paper investigates the complex equilibrium between originality and contribution in African music theory and composition. In culturally rich environments like Africa, the significance of comprehensive analysis and the preservation of established knowledge can be undermined by an excessive emphasis on novelty, despite the fact that originality is the driving force behind innovation. This study advocates for a more inclusive approach that incorporates both creative exploration and respect for traditional scholarship by utilising interdisciplinary and global perspectives. The paper underscores the significance of fostering intellectual independence and critical thinking while simultaneously acknowledging historical contributions by situating African music within global academic discourse. The paper promotes a balanced framework that promotes innovation while also acknowledging the cumulative nature of academic knowledge, thereby cultivating a dynamic and evolving scholarly environment.

**KEY WORDS**

african music; originality; problem statements; music theory; scholarly contribution.



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**REDEFININDO PARADIGMAS HEURÍSTICOS:  
UM DISCURSO CRÍTICO SOBRE O ÍMPETO DE PROBLEMATIZAÇÃO NA  
TEORIA E COMPOSIÇÃO DA MÚSICA AFRICANA**

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**RESUMO**

Investigando criticamente o papel da formulação de problemas na investigação académica, este artigo analisa o complexo equilíbrio entre originalidade e contribuição na teoria e composição musical africana. Em ambientes culturalmente ricos, como é o caso de África, a importância de uma análise abrangente e de preservação do conhecimento estabelecido podem ser prejudicadas por uma ênfase excessiva na novidade, apesar do facto de a originalidade ser a força motriz da inovação. Este estudo defende uma abordagem mais inclusiva que incorpore tanto a exploração criativa como o respeito pelos estudos mais convencionais, utilizando perspetivas interdisciplinares e globais. O artigo sublinha a importância de promover a independência intelectual e o pensamento crítico, ao mesmo tempo que se reconheçam as contribuições históricas do campo, ao situar a música africana no discurso académico global. Este texto procura uma abordagem equilibrada que promova a inovação, ao mesmo tempo que reconheça a natureza cumulativa do conhecimento académico, cultivando-se assim um ambiente académico dinâmico e sempre em evolução.

**PALAVRAS - CHAVE**

música africana; originalidade; formulação de problemas; teoria musical; contribuição académica.



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**RESUMEN**

Al investigar críticamente el papel de los planteamientos de problemas en la investigación académica, este artículo analiza el complejo equilibrio entre originalidad y contribución en la teoría y composición en la música africana. En entornos culturalmente ricos como África, la importancia del análisis integral y la preservación del conocimiento establecido puede verse socavada por un énfasis excesivo en la novedad, a pesar de que la originalidad es la fuerza impulsora de la innovación. Este estudio aboga por un enfoque más inclusivo que incorpore tanto la exploración creativa como el respeto por la erudición tradicional mediante la utilización de perspectivas interdisciplinarias y globales. El artículo subraya la importancia de fomentar la independencia intelectual y el pensamiento crítico y al mismo tiempo reconocer las contribuciones históricas al situar la música africana dentro del discurso académico global. Este artículo entabla un marco equilibrado que promueva la innovación y al mismo tiempo reconozca la naturaleza acumulativa del conocimiento académico, cultivando así un entorno académico dinámico y en evolución.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**

música africana; originalidad; planteamiento de problemas; teoría musical; contribución académica.



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# Redefining Heuristic Paradigms: A Critical Discourse on the Impetus of Problematization in African Music Theory and Composition

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## EMPHASIS ON PROBLEM STATEMENT

Academic research is fundamentally guided by established norms, with the emphasis on a well-defined problem statement being one of the most critical (Annamalai et al., 2013; Crowhurst & Emslie, 2020; Huang, 2011; McGaghie et al., 2001; Newman & Covrig, 2013; Peters & Marshall, 1993; Tigor, 2020; Trinchet Varela & Trinchet Soler, 2007; Velázquez, 2019). This element is the foundation of scholarly inquiry, establishing explicit objectives and defining the scope of the investigation, thereby directing the researcher's methodology and approach. The cornerstone of any successful research endeavour is the identification of knowledge deficits through a problem statement, as per Creswell and Creswell (2017). It establishes its position within academic discourse by defining the objectives and relevance of a study. This conventional research model, which is primarily based on the resolution of knowledge gaps and the resolution of practical concerns, is in accordance with the established academic paradigm (Obeso, 2019).

Nevertheless, the appropriateness of conventional problem statements is a topic of increasing debate in creative disciplines, including music theory and composition. In most academic disciplines, the problem statement remains an indispensable guide; however, its application in domains that emphasise theoretical analysis and creative production presents distinctive obstacles. For example, the traditional convention can be reassessed through the lens of music theory and composition. A more adaptable approach is necessitated by the nature of musical scholarship, which is characterized by innovation, reinterpretation, and exploration of musical concepts (O'Hara, 2017; Tanzi, 1999; Viig, 2015). Composition in music is less about investigation and more about presentation and revelation, as Croft (2015) argues. It represents the act of creation rather than the resolution of predetermined issues, resulting in a departure from the traditional research model.

The field's exploratory potential may be restricted by the insistence on rigorous problem statements, particularly in the context of African music, where indigenous and contemporary practices intersect. This sentiment is reiterated by Maniglier (2021), who contends that the notion of "problem" can stifle more innovative and expressive scholarly pursuits in transdisciplinary studies such as music theory and composition. In artistic research, such as music composition, Almeida (2015) further argues that the potential for creative and intellectual exploration is restricted by an overemphasis on problem statements. In the African context, where music functions as both an art form and a cultural and historical expression, these limitations are even more apparent.

The expectation that research must address predetermined academic "problems" often overshadows the unique intellectual contributions of African music scholarship, whether through theoretical analysis or composition. However, the aesthetic and critical

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analysis of music makes a substantial contribution to the body of knowledge, even when it does not explicitly address a specific issue, as noted by Chiantore (2020) and Neuwirth et al. (2018). The problem statement framework in music research requires a reevaluation, according to scholars such as Hiller (2016), Çelik and Köksal (2019), and Edwards (2012). This reevaluation should be in accordance with the diverse epistemological foundations that are inherent in creative disciplines like music theory and composition.

By validating knowledge creation through artistic expression, innovation, and cultural reinterpretation, a broader, more inclusive understanding of what constitutes a “problem” can enrich African music scholarship. This redefinition is especially crucial for Africa, where music education has been significantly influenced by colonial and postcolonial narratives, which frequently prioritise Western paradigms over indigenous methodologies. So, scholars like Werle (2014) suggest that “problems” in disciplines such as literary history and music composition should not be restricted to gaps in knowledge, but should also include innovations and novel artistic contributions. We can gain a better comprehension of the ways in which music theory and composition contribute to both regional and global academic discourse by broadening the definition of a problem within the African musicological context. For instance, a comprehensive examination of the creative processes of African composers or contemporary African compositions can be regarded as contributions to a perpetual scholarly dialogue. These works advance the discipline by embracing the intricate, culturally-infused processes of creation, interpretation, and innovation, rather than by resolving academic puzzles (Mc Adams, 2004).

## METHODOLOGY

The role and redefinition of problem statements in African music theory and composition are the subject of this research, which employs a critical-analytical and interdisciplinary approach. The methodology is intended to accommodate the unique requirements of interdisciplinary academic inquiry while also reflecting the intricacy of creative scholarship. It establishes a durable framework for redefining problem statements that recognises both academic rigour and artistic creativity by incorporating theoretical analysis, contextual evaluation, and qualitative synthesis.

The research design of the study is multi-phase, integrative, incorporating interdisciplinary theoretical exploration, comparative studies, and critical discourse analysis. This design enables a thorough assessment of the potential and constraints of conventional problem statements, notably in the fields of African music theory and composition.

The research is founded on a constructivist epistemology, which underscores the subjective construction of knowledge in creative disciplines. The study implements the subsequent frameworks, which are derived from critical theory, musicology, and cultural studies.

The purpose of this implementation is to investigate the academic paradigms that influence conventional problem statements in music scholarship, to challenge the hegemony of Western paradigms and promote an African-centered perspective, and lastly, to investigate the intersection of academic inquiry, innovation, and creativity in music theory and composition.

The research integrates data from three primary sources, including comprehensive examination of academic journals, books, and critical works regarding African music

theory, global music scholarship, and problem statements. It also includes a comprehensive examination of certain African compositions, theoretical writings, and pedagogical practices to demonstrate the functionality of problem statements in a variety of contexts. Contextual depth and substantiation are also provided by insights from African musicologists, composers, and educators that have been discovered through secondary literature.

The study utilises a layered analytical approach to examine the conventional constructs of problem statements and suggest a redefinition that is specifically designed for African music scholarship; which includes the process of identifying methodological and epistemological divergences by examining the application of problem statements across disciplines (sciences, humanities, creative arts), the evaluation of the extent to which traditional problem statements impede on innovation in African music theory and composition, as illustrated by examples from published African music scholarship, and lastly, developing an adaptable framework for problem statements in creative disciplines by incorporating insights from music composition, ethnomusicology, and global academic discourses.

Some of the Procedures in phase 1, which is the literature review, recognises and organises the conventional functions of problem statements in academic disciplines. Again, it emphasises the deficiencies in current methodologies that impede their implementation in music theory and composition, with a particular emphasis on African contexts. In phase 2, which discusses critical case analysis, chooses case studies of African composers and compositions that demonstrate innovative practices that transcend conventional problem frameworks, and examines the extent to which these examples either support or contradict conventional academic paradigms. Ultimately, phase 3, which is the framework development, integrates the results into a proposed redefinition of problem statements that prioritises scholarly contribution, innovation, and cultural inclusivity. This guarantees that the framework is flexible enough to accommodate both traditional and contemporary African music scholarship.

As far as reliability and validation is concerned, the study guarantees methodological rigour by triangulation: That is cross-referencing findings from literature, case studies, and expert perspectives to increase credibility and profundity. In terms of peer-review of analysis, the study collects feedback from African musicologists and scholars to verify the cultural and contextual accuracy of interpretations. In iterative refinement, the study continuously evaluates the proposed framework against scholastic and creative benchmarks to refine it.

This methodology is uniquely positioned to reconcile the discrepancy between the exploratory requirements of creative disciplines and the traditional academic rigour. It establishes a new standard for academic inquiry in African music theory and composition by emphasising interdisciplinary dialogue, contextual relevance, and methodological innovation. Not only does it contribute to the global discourse on problem statements, but it also emphasises the significance of African scholarship in the global reshaping of musicology and composition paradigms. This method guarantees that the investigation not only adheres to the most stringent academic standards but also makes an innovative contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship, music theory, and composition.



## COUNTERARGUMENT TO PROBLEMATIZATION IN MUSIC THEORY AND COMPOSITION

The conventional focus on problem statements in scholarly research, according to scholars such as Abdehgah et al. (2022), Fomin (2021), Heffernan and Teufel (2018), and Tarvirdizdeh and Nimehchisalem (2021), is not merely an entry point for inquiry; it is a cornerstone that guarantees precision, focus, and scholarly rigour. In disciplines such as music theory and composition, the clarity of a research problem is essential for achieving a degree of objectivity and specificity (Grassly & Fraser, 2006; Oyediran, 2019; Remenyi, 2022). Proponents of this framework contend that problem statements establish the parameters within which creativity can be productively directed, particularly in creative disciplines such as music, by providing a structured pathway for innovation to emerge.

Many scholars contend that a well-defined problem does not stifle artistic innovation, but rather functions as a guiding principle that enhances the creative process, in contrast to concerns about limitations on creativity (Gale, 2015; Heffernan & Teufel, 2018; Reiter-Palmon & Murugavel, 2018; Shahfee & Yasmeeenn, 2022). Researchers and composers are capable of making unique contributions to their respective disciplines by establishing a clear framework (Chiantore, 2020; Londoño, 2009). This structured approach is especially significant in the field of African music scholarship, where traditional and contemporary practices frequently intersect with creativity, thereby establishing a dynamic environment for academic inquiry. Scheuregger and Efthymiou (2020) propose that problem statements in collaborative composition projects function as a roadmap, directing composers and academics towards distinctive contributions to the field by resolving specific research questions. In the same vein, Jullander (2013) underscores that the identification of problem areas enables academicians and composers to make unique contributions to artistic research in music. Additionally, Berkley (2004) highlights that the conceptualisation of composition as creative problem-solving not only fosters originality but also improves pedagogical initiatives within the field.

In addition, the traditional method's advocates, including Shannon and Truman (2020), Duguid and Grumbach (2017), and Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), underscore the importance of problematization in the development of music scholarship in diverse contexts. A structured research framework can offer clarification and focus, particularly in African music education, where the balancing of indigenous and Western methodologies presents unique challenges. If research lacks a distinct problem statement, there is a substantial risk of disconnection from broader intellectual discourse (Annamalai et al., 2013; Obeso, 2019; Pecher et al., 2020). These scholars contend that academicians can more effectively engage with and contribute to ongoing dialogues on a regional and global scale by precisely defining research issues.

Additionally, research that emphasises the potential for rigorous problem statements to foster originality mitigates concerns that they may promote derivative research. Well-crafted problem statements have been employed by scholars to investigate uncharted territories, promote interdisciplinary approaches, and generate innovative research enquiries (Ellis & Levy, 2008; Okimoto, 2014). In Africa, where music research is influenced by both traditional and global trends, a clear problem statement can serve as a catalyst for cross-disciplinary integration, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse. Consequently, a significant number of scholars maintain that problematization is an essential element of music theory and composition, as it provides a framework for the evaluation of scholarly contributions and the promotion of academic discourse. The structure that problem statements provide not only improves problem-solving skills but

also attracts funding and institutional support by explicitly demonstrating the purpose and potential impact of research.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY FIT AND CONTRAST WITH MUSIC THEORY

The utilisation of problem statements in academic research is a well-established practice that reflects a diverse array of approaches across various disciplines, each of which is influenced by distinct epistemologies, methodologies, and objectives. This investigation commences with a comprehension of the manner in which problem statements operate in distinct academic domains, ranging from the empirically driven rigour of the sciences to the interpretive nuances of the humanities. The nuances of these approaches are subsequently analysed in the context of music, with a particular emphasis on the distinction between music theory and composition.

Problem statements are essential in the sciences and engineering for the identification of knowledge deficits or practical challenges that necessitate resolution (Lin et al., 2021; Üreten et al., 2020; Velázquez, 2019; Yana et al., 2014). These disciplines are frequently governed by the scientific method, which emphasises hypothesis testing and verifiable solutions, and rely on empirical inquiry. This rigorous methodological framework guarantees that research is firmly rooted in the rationalist tradition, with a focus on quantifiable results.

In contrast, the social sciences utilise a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to situate their investigations within the broader context of societal dynamics and cultural phenomena (Dhobi, 2022; Friesen, 2023; Kuhn, 1997; Mehrad & Zangeneh, 2019; Perez, 2021). Problem statements that incorporate multiple perspectives are frequently necessary in these interdisciplinary disciplines, which include psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among others. In this context, the emphasis is on articulating the research's significance within its cultural or societal context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach is in line with African musicology, where the music's cultural significance frequently intersects with itself.

In contrast to empirical disciplines, the humanities frequently emphasise exploratory and interpretive forms of inquiry. Berning (2022) notes that these disciplines employ problem statements not to resolve specific issues, but rather to provide innovative perspectives on historical and cultural narratives. For instance, comprehension and interpretation are prioritised over problem-solving in literature, philosophy, and history (Colavizza et al., 2023; Feldt & Petersen, 2021; Hubard, 2011; Kidman & Casinader, 2017). This transition from empirical problem resolution to the exploration of meaning provides a valuable analogy to African music theory, in which the cultural and historical foundations of musical traditions can be as valuable as technical analysis.

The use of problem statements in music is further differentiated by the diverse methodologies and objectives of its disciplines. For example, in disciplines such as ethnomusicology, problem statements frequently pertain to the cultural, social, and anthropological components of music. Common research topics include the function of music in the formation of community identity and the effects of globalisation on indigenous music traditions (Campbell, 2003; Nattiez, 2012; Sardo, 2014; Williams, 1998). This method, which is especially pertinent in Africa, where music is a fundamental component of both societal and cultural identity, emphasises descriptive and interpretive elements over strictly structural analysis (Nettl, 2005). Problem statements regarding cultural survival are particularly significant in the context of African





ethnomusicology, which frequently endeavours to preserve and interpret traditional musical forms.

In contrast, the problem statements of music education are centred on the enhancement of pedagogical practices and outcomes. Research in this field frequently seeks to establish practical, quantifiable objectives, regardless of whether it is examining the efficacy of curricula or the integration of technology into music classrooms (Marasco, 2011; Matos, 2011; Rogerson, 2013). These problem statements may also incorporate concerns regarding curriculum integration and pedagogical innovation in Africa, where music education frequently straddles the line between traditional teaching methods and contemporary approaches. Music education, particularly in African contexts, also confronts the challenge of decolonising the curriculum by integrating Western and indigenous music education to enhance the learning experience.

In the field of music therapy, problem statements are constructed in accordance with therapeutic objectives, such as the utilisation of music to alleviate anxiety, dementia, or other clinical conditions (Abbott, 2020; Sun & Chen, 2015; Villarreal, 2019). The clinical and problem-solving focus in this study is a significant departure from the aesthetic and structural concerns that are present in music theory and composition (Baroni Caramel et al., 2024; Drewitt et al., 2022; Reschke-Hernández et al., 2023; Sari & Maulana, 2022). Although music therapy is still in the process of developing in numerous African contexts, it is a significant area where music intersects with healthcare, addressing mental health and well-being. This is an area that is becoming increasingly significant on the continent.

Music theory, in contrast to these disciplines, frequently endeavours to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and development of music, with an emphasis on components such as cadence, form, and harmony. The objective of music theory is frequently to enhance our comprehension of the technical operations of music, in contrast to empirical disciplines, where problem statements are intended to address specific challenges. This investigation in African music entails the integration of contemporary compositional techniques with traditional rhythmic structures, emphasising the extensive diversity of African musicological scholarship. Therefore, problem statements in music theory frequently explore the technical foundations of musical compositions, challenging the limits of both conventional African and Western theoretical frameworks.

It is evident that the role of problem statements varies substantially across disciplines, reflecting the broader objectives and methodologies of each field, by emphasising these distinctions. These distinctions are especially evident in African music, as problem statements must negotiate the intricate landscape of academic rigour, innovation, and cultural preservation. The comprehension of these interdisciplinary contrasts is instrumental in the structuring of African music scholarship within a global academic discourse, thereby ensuring that local and regional concerns can contribute to broader, international conversations on music theory and composition.

## PROBLEMATIZATION IN MUSIC THEORY AND COMPOSITION

Music theory, in contrast to the methodical and empirical approaches found in the sciences, aims to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the complex nature of music and its continuous development (Snarrenberg, 1997). McCreless (2016) asserts that music theory aims to elucidate the fundamental principles



that govern musical compositions by conducting a meticulous analysis of formal designs, melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic progressions.

This perspective is further developed by scholars like Hanninen (2012) and Christensen (2018), who underscore the significance of historical analysis, theoretical frameworks, and structural inquiries in order to develop a thorough comprehension of the evolution of music. These multi-layered investigations, which are essential to music theory, entail the exploration of the logics that influence compositional choices and the impact of these logics on a variety of musical traditions, including those found throughout Africa.

For example, African music theory frequently integrates rhythmic structures and harmonic progressions that differ from Western frameworks. The analysis of these distinctive components offers music theorists the chance to participate in an interdisciplinary dialogue, utilising cultural, historical, and structural elements to improve the global comprehension of music (Addaquay, 2022; Amuah & Acquah, 2014; Becker, 2012; Hipp, 2015). Therefore, music theory is essential in elucidating the aesthetic principles that underpin both indigenous African music and its interactions with global musical traditions.

The development and refinement of conceptual frameworks utilised in music analysis are also part of the theoretical investigation of music. Problem statements in this domain concentrate on topics such as rhythm, form, tonality, and modality, all of which broaden the resources available to theorists (Benoit, 2005; Gao et al., 2018; Matyushkina et al., 2022). These frameworks are not only beneficial for comprehending Western musical structures, but they also offer indispensable instruments for the analysis of African music, which necessitates innovative theoretical approaches due to its diverse tonal systems, modal traditions, and rhythmic intricacies.

Furthermore, the historical context of music theory enables the examination of the ways in which musical genres and compositions reflect the sociocultural and historical circumstances of their era. This entails an examination of the ways in which colonialism, globalisation, and postcolonial identity have impacted both traditional and contemporary African musical expressions in the African context (Vasilii, 2022). Problem statements in music theory offer valuable insights into the ways in which historical events have influenced the creation and reception of music, both in Africa and around the world, by investigating the interconnectedness of music with broader cultural practices.

Music theory scrutinises the fundamental elements of music, including harmony, melody, form, and structure, while also contemplating their evolution across various genres and eras, through this interdisciplinary and global lens. In Africa, problem statements may encompass enquiries regarding the integration of Western and traditional compositional methods, the role of rhythmic patterns in the generation of musical tension and release, or the evolution of tonality across various historical periods. Additionally, comparative methodologies—such as the intersection of African rhythmic structures with linguistic patterns—can significantly enhance our comprehension of the cultural significance that is inherent in musical compositions.

The utilisation of problem statements in music theory indicates a dedication to the investigation of the intricacies of musical composition and aesthetics. Music theory not only promotes a more profound understanding of music but also facilitates ongoing scholarly discourse by emphasising analytical, theoretical, and historical dimensions. This method is especially crucial for Africa, as it enables the thorough examination of traditional music and contributes to global discussions regarding music theory and composition. African academicians, composers, and performers can make significant contributions to both regional and global musical discourses by engaging in methodical inquiry, thereby further advancing the development of musical genres.



The conventional concept of a problem statement is modified to facilitate the creative process in the field of music composition. Composers frequently explore novel techniques or confront social issues in their compositions, generating music that is centred on conceptual or artistic challenges rather than concrete problem-solving. The focus is on artistic expression and innovation, as composers contemplate social contexts or investigate novel methodologies through their compositions.

African composers are required to navigate the intricate socio-political environments that influence their creative output in addition to embracing the traditional elements of African music. African composers encounter the intricate task of balancing their cultural heritage with the socio-political dynamics shaped by colonial legacies and postcolonial frameworks, as noted by Agawu (2011). Agawu emphasises that the identity of the African composer is intricately formed by a confluence of diverse heritages, encompassing both indigenous traditions and European influences, thereby complicating the creative process. For instance, although African composers engage with indigenous modalities and rhythmic frameworks, their formal education frequently prioritises European tonal systems and compositional methodologies. The concept of “dual heritage” situates African composers within a distinctive socio-political and artistic framework, wherein their creations embody both a challenge to colonial legacies and a revival of cultural identity.

Furthermore, Agawu emphasises the influence of socio-political circumstances, including inadequate institutional backing and restricted resources for art music, which shape the reception and distribution of African compositions. In contrast to mainstream or conventional music, art music has faced significant obstacles in achieving comparable visibility and recognition, owing to these entrenched challenges. This corresponds with the overarching claim that African composers need to meticulously navigate the interplay between tradition and modernity, all while considering the socio-political dynamics that influence their artistic expressions.

Agawu’s concept of “creative ethnomusicology” highlights the significance of composers interacting with traditional music, viewing it not just as archival content but as a wellspring for compositional innovation. This methodology empowers African composers to assert control over their cultural legacy, converting socio-political limitations into avenues for artistic expression. For example, the compositions of Kwabena Nketia illustrate the manner in which composers weave together aspects of Akan funeral dirges and rhythmic idioms within contemporary art music, creating works that resonate with both local and international listeners.

Also, this dual challenge is effectively illustrated by Ekpo (2023), who argues that African art music composers like Christian Onyeji utilise indigenous languages and idioms not just as tools for creative expression but as deliberate acts of decolonisation. Ekpo posits that Onyeji’s composition *Abigbo* for Modern Orchestra exemplifies the deliberate engagement of composers with cultural heritage, aiming to maintain identity amidst the intricate socio-political dynamics shaped by colonial legacies. The intricate interplay between cultural preservation and socio-political engagement is further clarified by Ofosu (2010), who depicts African composers as social critics. Ofosu posits that these composers often craft their works as tools for rectification, skilfully interlacing subtle yet significant messages aimed at addressing societal challenges and fostering moral and cultural reflection. In this context, music acts as a medium for the exploration of power dynamics and the restoration of societal balance.

Mukuna (1997) enriches this perspective by emphasising the cultural backdrop of African musical traditions, arguing that the creative process in African music is deeply connected to the socio-linguistic dynamics of its communities. He illustrates the manner in which African composers draw inspiration from their environments, where musical

innovation acts as a reflection of cultural identity and a response to the social and political dynamics that shape their lived experiences. This renders the music not only a manifestation of tradition but also a reflection on modern-day circumstances.

The perspectives presented collectively demonstrate that African composers traverse a complex terrain of cultural authenticity and socio-political involvement. Their works are profoundly anchored in the traditional elements of African music, all the while interacting with the socio-political landscapes that influence their reality. This dual focus enriches their compositions, elevating them to powerful tools for cultural and social advocacy, transcending the realm of mere artistic expressions.

According to scholars such as Sunarto (2020), the emphasis in composition transitions from problem-solving to artistic expression, with composers emphasising the exploration of novel techniques and creativity. Mielke and Andrews (2023) also contend that educational music prioritises the development of skills, collaboration, and communication over the sheer resolution of technical difficulties. This perspective is bolstered by Croft (2015), who emphasises that composition frequently emphasises innovation and conceptual challenges, particularly when it comes to addressing social issues through music.

However, certain academics argue that problem-solving is essential for the development of creativity in the field of music education. Burnard (Burnard & Younker, 2004) posits that the creative process is improved by recognising various compositional routes, such as problem-solving. This perspective is especially pertinent to African music education, as the cultivation of creativity necessitates both a comprehension of traditional musical forms and the capacity to innovate within them.

Problem statements provide a structured approach to inquiry in both music theory and composition, while also enabling flexibility for creativity and exploration. This flexibility is essential in the African context, as it enables scholars and composers to engage with the intricate complexities of traditional and contemporary music, while also contributing to broader global discussions about music theory and composition.

## SIGNIFICANCE, REPERCUSSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The application and formulation of problem statements in music theory and composition are essential for the advancement of musical knowledge, innovation, and education (Barbar et al., 1996; Bu, 2022; Freer, 2017; McAdams, 2004). Problem statements are essential for music theorists and composers, as they provide distinct research objectives and facilitate the analysis of musical phenomena. This leads to the development of innovative theoretical frameworks, which improve comprehension of music in a variety of contexts. Furthermore, problem statements encourage innovation by promoting the development of novel theoretical structures and compositional methods. In the African context, these frameworks can be instrumental in the integration of indigenous and Western musical traditions, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive discussion of global music theory.

The importance of problem statements is significant in the development of curricula and pedagogical practices, as it enables educators to develop targeted interventions and more effectively disseminate research findings. The dissemination of musical knowledge is made more accessible and comprehensible to a broader audience through structured problem statements, thereby fostering cross-cultural understanding. This is especially pertinent in the field of African music education, where educators utilise problem



statements to maintain a balance between traditional music practices and contemporary techniques, thereby guaranteeing that students receive a comprehensive education in both local and global music systems (Andreatta et al., 2006; Blum & Preiss, 2005; Brody & Janik, 1989; de Aguiar, 2010; Newcomb, 2017; Norgaard, 2005; Rodriguez, 2020).

The primary objective of problem statements in music theory is to unravel the aesthetic principles and logics that regulate musical composition by focussing on analytical, theoretical, or historical dimensions. This entails the methodical examination of pitch organisation, harmonic progressions, melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, and formal designs, all of which contribute to the comprehension of the compositional process and the narrative power of music (Hoover & Stanley, 2009; Lisboa et al., 2011, respectively). The integration of modern techniques with traditional rhythmic and harmonic structures in African music, for example, offers a fertile environment for exploration. This type of research distinguishes original contributions from derivative works and contributes to the ongoing development of music theory as a discipline.

It is imperative to be able to distinguish between originality and derivation in music in order to address the legal and ethical implications of plagiarism and copyright, as well as for academic discourse. African music scholars, in particular, are required to carefully navigate the intricate landscape of preserving traditional music while simultaneously innovating within contemporary frameworks. When scrutinising unresolved matters in composition, composers frequently employ problem statements to investigate themes or technical challenges that have not been adequately addressed within the existing canon. This emphasises the significance of music as a medium for contemplating human experiences and broadens the thematic diversity of compositions.

The adoption of new technological and instrumental advancements is also influenced by the implementation of problem statements in composition, particularly in resource-constrained environments. For instance, the integration of keyboard synthesisers into choral music in West Africa has broadened the expressive capabilities of musicians and composers, illustrating how problem statements can provide practical solutions in situations where conventional resources are scarce.

Problem statements fulfil a variety of critical functions that extend beyond the distinction between original and derivative works:

1. **Research Guidance:** They offer musicologists, theorists, and composers a clear path to concentrate their enquiries on specific areas of concern. This enables targeted contributions to be made without being inundated by the field's breadth.
2. **Encouraging Cross-Disciplinary Integration:** Music theory frequently integrates concepts from a variety of disciplines, including physics, mathematics, cultural studies, and psychology. This interdisciplinary approach is essential for comprehending the cultural and social aspects of music in African music theory. Problem statements contribute to the comprehension of music as a complex, interdisciplinary phenomenon by incorporating insights from these disciplines.
3. **Pedagogical Innovation:** In Africa, particularly in music education, problem statements identify areas that necessitate new methodologies or resources, thereby enhancing teaching practices. Identifying deficiencies in student comprehension can result in the development of more sophisticated instructional strategies that cater to the requirements of both traditional and contemporary music education.

4. **Encouraging Technological Progress:** Problem statements frequently serve as catalysts for technological advancements in music technology and audio engineering, resulting in novel approaches to performance, recording, and composition.
5. **Cultural and Historical Contextualisation:** Scholars are encouraged to investigate the ways in which music reflects and influences social and historical contexts through the use of problem statements. This is especially important in the field of African musicology, where the relationship between music and culture is intricately intertwined.
6. **Performance Interpretation:** The quality of interpretation and execution is improved by the clarity of problem statements, which aids performers in comprehending the theoretical and historical contexts of a performance.

Problem statements in music theory and composition guarantee that each new study or composition contributes coherently to the broader scholarly discourse, thereby continuously broadening the boundaries of what is understood and what can be created. The development of collective knowledge within the field of music is facilitated by this dialogue.

Although problem statements are essential for organising research, they can also impose restrictions, particularly in creative disciplines such as music composition. According to certain scholars, the exploratory spirit that is inherent in music theory and composition may be restricted by the prescriptive nature of problem statements (Campos, 2007; Jatmika, 2020; Werle, 2014). The objective of music theory is frequently to improve comprehension and appreciation, rather than to address specific problems. This interpretive and exploratory approach may not always be consistent with the formal problem-solution framework that is typically associated with problem statements.

The unique characteristics and methodological complexities of music theory are reflected in the debate surrounding the role and limitations of problem statements. Music theory frequently entails the examination of stylistic nuances, compositional techniques, and aesthetic qualities without the explicit objective of resolving a problem. This is in stark contrast to more structured disciplines, in which problem statements are indispensable for the purpose of directing research.

Technical experimentation and artistic inspiration are the driving forces behind creative and innovative processes in composition (Biró, 2020; Sato et al., 2021). The expressive potential of music is frequently expanded by composers as they address previously unexplored challenges or themes. Nevertheless, phrasing these endeavours exclusively as problem statements can restrict their scope, thereby diminishing the originality and creative freedom that are essential to composition.

Although music theory and composition research frequently defies the conventional problem-solving paradigm, it is essential to make contributions that propose novel theoretical frameworks or analytical methods in order to advance the field. A more inclusive and dynamic approach to musical inquiry is fostered by acknowledging that significant research is not always problem-oriented.

Undoubtedly, problem statements establish a foundation for academic research in music theory and composition; however, their relevance fluctuates. Problem statements must accommodate both exploratory and innovative enquiries in African music, where traditional forms intersect with modern techniques. Scholars ensure that music theory remains fertile ground for the development of new ideas and perspectives by recognising



contributions that extend beyond conventional problem-solving. This allows the field to evolve and expand in response to changing cultural and academic contexts.

## RETHINKING ORIGINALITY: BALANCING INNOVATION WITH CONTRIBUTION IN MUSIC SCHOLARSHIP

The construction of problem statements in music theory, composition, and analysis frequently emphasises the novelty of scholastic work, with a focus on “*something that has not been done before*” or “*something uncommon*.” Although this method fosters creativity, it also poses substantial obstacles, particularly in the culturally diverse and wealthy environments of Africa, where extensive yet undocumented musical contributions may be disregarded. The value of more established but essential contributions from African music traditions can occasionally be obscured by the strong emphasis on novelty within academia.

The erroneous belief that the value of research is contingent upon its novelty is a significant concern. This viewpoint implies that originality is prioritised over exhaustive inquiry, methodological rigour, and intrinsic quality, which could potentially distort the trajectory of academic work. The significance of contextually rich investigations is diminished when unexplored areas are prioritised over in-depth contributions to established topics. This imbalance can lead to the neglect of critical scholarship that preserves, analyses, and interprets historical practices and contemporary expressions in African music, where traditions are profoundly embedded in cultural narratives across various regions and communities.

Simultaneously, there are compelling considerations in favour of the emphasis on originality in music scholarship. The pursuit of innovation motivates researchers and composers to question established norms and investigate novel avenues, thereby guaranteeing that music theory and composition are dynamic and ever-changing fields. The pursuit of novelty has facilitated the development of novel artistic discoveries, methodologies, and genres. African music genres, including Highlife, Afrobeats, and the fusion of traditional African rhythms with modern electronic music, show how novelty can be created through cultural fusion. Scholars contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of the diversity of African music by investigating previously unexplored aspects of these genres.

In addition, the promotion of originality can foster an academic environment that prioritises diverse perspectives and methodological approaches, resulting in a more inclusive body of work. This is particularly significant in the field of African music scholarship, as it promotes the examination of musical traditions that have been historically marginalised or under-researched, thereby offering a more comprehensive perspective on musical expression throughout the continent. In addition to preventing stagnation in both scholastic and creative endeavours, the promotion of innovation also encourages researchers and composers to surmount conventional frameworks and introduce their unique perspectives to the academic discourse.

Intellectual independence and critical thinking are promoted by the pursuit of originality for students and early-career scholars. This ability is indispensable in both academia and the arts, as it allows individuals to challenge conventional wisdom and make unique contributions. In Africa, the discipline's vitality is maintained by the pursuit of innovation, as the intersections of traditional and contemporary music are still being



mapped. However, it is imperative to maintain a balance between innovation and contribution, ensuring that research both acknowledges and builds upon existing knowledge.

The pressure to consistently generate original work can also have significant drawbacks, particularly for early-career scholars. Critical research that confirms or expands upon previous studies is frequently undervalued when academic success is solely determined by novelty, despite the fact that such work is indispensable for a resilient and robust field. In African music, where oral traditions and undocumented practices are the foundation of numerous musical traditions, the reproduction and analysis of these traditions should be regarded as essential scholarly contributions rather than being disregarded due to their lack of novelty.

This emphasis on originality may also result in a competitive and restricted academic environment, in which researchers prioritise the pursuit of unexplored areas over the production of meaningful contributions to ongoing discussions. Overemphasising novelty may result in the devaluation of foundational scholarship, suggesting that previous work is somehow inadequate. This fosters competition rather than a spirit of shared discovery, thereby undermining the collaborative nature of academic inquiry. The continuity of scholarship may be compromised by the erosion of collaborative inquiry in favour of individual achievement, which is common in Africa, where knowledge is frequently transmitted communally.

Research in academia is inherently cumulative, as it is constructed upon the groundwork of prior scholarship. Nevertheless, this critical attribute may be disregarded when originality is prioritised over all else. New studies may fail to incorporate established findings, resulting in a disjointed academic landscape, which may lead to the emergence of redundant research efforts. In the field of African musicology, where a significant amount of knowledge has been historically transmitted orally, neglecting to acknowledge prior research may result in the further fragmentation of the scholarly record and the undermining of collective efforts to preserve and study these traditions.

Additionally, the collaborative nature of academic inquiry is based on the conviction that knowledge is collectively produced through shared effort. This collaboration may be impeded by an excessive emphasis on originality, as researchers may feel impelled to emphasize the distinctiveness of their work at the expense of acknowledging the broader scholarly foundation it is built upon. This could potentially restrict the interdisciplinary collaboration of ethnomusicologists, theorists, and composers in African music studies, who all contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the continent's rich musical landscape.

A balance must be achieved between contribution and originality. The introduction of new ideas is equally important as the critical evaluation, integration, and expansion of established research. The deep engagement with existing scholarship and the introduction of novel perspectives are both essential components of a vibrant academic community. This balance in African music studies guarantees that both traditional and contemporary expressions are examined with equal depth and respect, thereby resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the continent's diverse musical heritage.

Academic research will continue to be both cutting-edge and connected to the broader scholarly conversation by prioritising critical dialogue and meaningful engagement with existing knowledge in a balanced approach to innovation in music theory and composition. Scholars can guarantee that music theory and composition continue to develop in innovative and grounded ways by cultivating a research culture that prioritises both originality and contribution. This approach expands the field while building upon the invaluable work of previous generations.





## CONCLUSION

This study rigorously scrutinises the traditional function of problem statements within academic research, particularly emphasising their relevance in the context of African music theory and composition. The examination revealed that conventional problem statements, frequently grounded in empirically based research frameworks, limit the exploratory and innovative capacities of creative fields such as music composition. The frameworks, although proficient in organised fields, fail to entirely embrace the fluid and interpretative essence of music theory and composition. This constraint is especially pronounced in African contexts, where the interaction between traditional practices and modern innovations necessitates a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach.

The research proposes a re-examination of problem statements within the realm of African music scholarship, highlighting the necessity of incorporating creativity, cultural contextualisation, and interdisciplinary viewpoints. In this manner, it aims to harmonise the additive character of scholarly understanding with the creative potential embedded in artistic exploration. This redefinition underscores the significance of recognising the distinct contributions of African music theory and composition, situating it as an essential element of global academic dialogue.

The ramifications of this endeavour are profound. The proposal advocates for a transformative approach that integrates artistic expression with scholarly discipline, affirming the status of African music scholarship as a vital component of global musicology. The study highlights the necessity for educators to refine their teaching strategies, integrating a comprehensive understanding of problem statements while harmonising traditional and modern methodologies. Moreover, it establishes a foundation for subsequent investigations to empirically evaluate this framework by examining the methodologies employed by African composers and theorists in addressing and modifying problem statements within their creations.

This study reinterprets the function of problem statements within African music theory and composition, thereby addressing a significant gap and cultivating a more nuanced and inclusive academic environment. It advocates for a vibrant academic atmosphere where innovation and independent thought flourish, guaranteeing that African music scholarship plays a significant role in the worldwide conversation surrounding music theory and composition. This method highlights the capacity of African music to surpass cultural and cognitive limits, providing fresh insights into the changing landscape of global music studies.

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