



Tenure track, research and innovation in Zimbabwean academia: Unravelling the myths and misconceptions in music

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Abstract

In this study as researchers, we tackle the issues surrounding innovation in the academy of music. The discussions follow the ways through which people innovate in performance, music composition and music production. We explore how music innovation takes place in simple and complex forms. Our submission holds that novelty in the music domain is treated as frivolous in certain sections of society in Zimbabwe. Some of the music innovations although unique and very useful to the society, they continue to receive no recognition. It has been construed that notable innovations should produce tangible objects that should be patented, industrialised, and packaged as goods and services to generate revenue for the innovator(s) and their institutions. We argue that innovations in music particularly compositions, music productions, choreographies, and performances constitute novelties once they get copyrighted followed by industrialisation and revenue generation. Some music innovations go unpatented due to the society's view on the way they value the creative arts. The study advances the notion that innovation in music does not necessarily have to be patented, it should aid in how certain unique, creative musical undertakings in a given field take place.

Introduction

The issues around innovation have been a topical matter globally, regionally, and in Zimbabwe in recent years. As researchers, we opine that innovations can never be ignored regardless of where they occur. The former minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Prof Jonathan Moyo, in 2013, came up with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to promote innovation in science and technology. His efforts were also intended to inculcate a mindset that embraced innovation in science and technology more than the arts and humanities. The current minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development since 2018, Prof Amon Murwira, came up with the 5.0 trajectory to embrace heritage-based education to include innovation, industrialisation, research, teaching and community engagement. The above education path appears like a new focus even though research and innovation have been going on since the onset of academic endeavours in higher and tertiary education institutions. Several research undertakings have culminated in inventions and innovations that ended in massive industrialisation. From the current focus of the 5.0 thrust, the definition or model of innovations has become narrowly defined to mean that inventions and innovations should be patented, industrialised and subsequently monetised. Historically, innovations and inventions have always been notable, with no need for



scientific explorations to ascertain them. Real innovations cannot be defined in one way. They can come in their varieties and are not specific to a discipline.

Turner, Baker and Thurlow (2022) regard innovation as a cyclical process that involves using and reusing knowledge into new products. They further posit that innovation does not emerge from isolation. Rather, it comes from shared experiences and knowledge of the people involved. Turner et al. (2022) hold that innovators use our ideas in new settings, mixing them with their new creations. To corroborate the above notion, Fath et al. (2017) submit that innovation is a means to generating ideas and putting those ideas into practice or action. They further allege that reuse is a critical component of innovation, which should be regarded as a precursor to novelty. Such innovations can be adapted by others for use. As emerging scholars in music, we adopt the above view to advance our thoughts on musical innovations, in particular, intangible goods and services. There are chords of which no one can claim ownership; this also includes chord progressions and the keys used in music productions. Using these existing ideas, musicians can create vocal and instrumental melodies, which are innovations. They can make some add-ons to existing melodies as creativity and, thus, innovations. We argue that the art of choreography to existing dance styles constitutes an innovation, too. Much as it may look easy to define innovation, we know that this is a complex matter that can occur under difficult conditions. In certain contexts, innovation can be viewed as opportunistic because there are no formulae to arrive at cutting-edge innovations (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Musicians use the same musical resources as instruments and chords to create innovations that differ in musical genres and ideas conveyed to the listeners. In the music academy, people have different specialisations; hence, they innovate and generate ideas that contribute uniquely to the body of knowledge in various ways. In this study, we construe innovation in the intangible musical performances, compositions, and academic writing to be counted as worthy.

In this study, as researchers, we tackle the issues surrounding innovation in the academy of music. The discussions follow how people innovate in performance, music composition and production. We explore how music innovation takes place in simple and complex forms. Our submission holds that novelty in the music domain is treated as frivolous in certain sections of society. Although unique and very useful to society, some music innovations continue to receive no recognition. Notably, innovations should produce tangible objects patented, industrialised, and packaged as goods and services to generate revenue for the innovator(s) and their institutions. We argue that innovations in music, particularly compositions, music productions, choreographies, and performances, constitute novelties once they get copyrighted, followed by industrialisation and revenue generation. Some music innovations go unpatented due to society's view on how they value the creative arts. The study advances the notion that innovation in music does not necessarily have to be patented; it should aid in how certain unique, creative musical undertakings in a given field occur.

The first section of the paper provides a conceptual framework for innovation. The second section gives a historical perspective by tracing some landmark developments in musicology. The third section details the nature of innovation in song genres, dance choreography, chord arrangements, music composition, and technological inventions. The conclusion steers a discussion in which we argue that innovation subsists in the various fields of music even though some sections of society and academia elect to trivialise them.

A Historical Perspective of Innovation

Tschmuck (2006, p.179) argues that "[A]n invention is not automatically an innovation. An innovation has occurred only after the invention is successfully put on the market. Consequently, we must not equate the inventor with the innovator." The above thought sides with Schumpeter (1911; 1934) in that an inventor creates idea(s), but the innovator improves the idea(s), and that constitutes



innovation. Further, it is important to appreciate that inventions that do not stand the test of market forces cannot be construed as innovation. We argue that musicians' creative inventions revolutionise the music industry, and they constitute innovation. The first ever Jazz recording was done in 1917, while Funk music came in 1971, and in 1988, techno-driven music found a place on the market; these innovations impacted the world (Tschmuck, 2006). All music genres, musical instruments, recording technologies, laws governing the music industry, and ownership of music rights are innovations. We know that some innovations are collective, such as the breakthrough of The Beatles in 1962 and The Rolling Stones in 1963 (Tschmuck, 2006, p.180). Some innovations are individual-based, like Jordan Chataika pioneered Gospel music in Zimbabwe. At the same time, Alick Macheso is credited with being an outstanding pacesetter bass guitarist in the *sungura* fraternity in Zimbabwe (Muranda & Maguraushe, 2014).

The invention of recording technology in the 1870s changed the face of the planet when people discovered the ability to record sound in some form of medium (Hoagland, 2003; Lee, 2004). This revolution meant that people could capture music performances that could be listened to after the event of music-making had stopped. This was indeed an innovation in the history of humanity. Further research kept refining the modes of recording musical events to date. Morton (2004) states that the modes of recording technologies have been evolving since their inception. When penning this paper, evolution took place in the recording industry. Chimbudzi, Muranda and Maguraushe (2022) state that digital technology has enabled producers to engage in creative music productions. Some genres have been born of the advent of digital technology, including Amapiano, Hip-hop, Trap and Zimdancehall. Currently, some sections of society and academia do not consider involvement in the creative processes of music to be innovative (Maguraushe & Matiure, 2017). In recent years, music has not been recognised as an area that one can engage in as an academic study. However, Maguraushe and Magwati (2023) tell us that the institutional study of music dates back to 1947 when the Zimbabwe College of Music (ZCM) opened its doors to aspirant students. Although this was during the colonial era, the study of music is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Kwanongoma College and Factory for Music were opened in Bulawayo in 1960 (Jones, 2012). The first-ever study of music at the University of Zimbabwe only took off around 1994, with a cohort of less than 20 students (Maguraushe, 2018; Maguraushe & Magwati, 2023). The endeavour of the above institutions was and remains to train and equip students to become involved in music as performers, educators, researchers and composers. Given the above, the authors have noticed that what is conceived as innovation in music academia and the creative industry tends to go unrecognised. Innovations occur in dances, especially in choreography, performance of various musical instruments, and studio music productions; however, some are not regarded as innovations at times. In our thinking, musicians innovate as they write stories told through instrumental renditions and songs.

The meaning attached to innovation in the current times has led some people to construe innovation as something that should always lead to solving community problems that bedevil society. Indeed, we concur with such a view; however, more needs to be done to widen the scope of the meaning attached to the concept of innovation. One example of a global problem was/is the Covid-19 which rocked the world from 2019 to 2021. Finding a lasting solution to the alluded pandemic was an innovation. That innovation worked to avert the marauding impact of the disease. Similarly, providing online resources as alternative ways to communicate during pandemics is a timely innovation for the global society. Innovations that subsist in musical circles are usually considered ordinary undertakings, yet not all civilisation members can engage in musical innovation alike. We argue that the current meaning attached to innovation and industrialisation presents a halo effect and tends to distort the real meaning of the word. We have noted with concern that the academia, from primary to universities in the Zimbabwean context, do not readily recognise academic and non-



academic musical innovations. However, the music industry is a revenue earner to many economies despite the scourge of music piracy.

We noted that some recognised musical innovations include tangible instruments like Matiore's 2007 *Nyunganhare*, the 2011 *Mbiramutatu* and the 2018 *Marimbanhare*. Some intangible and useful innovations have gone unnoticed, including musical renditions by several musicians, academics, composers and performers worldwide. A Zimbabwean, Alick Macheso, has 12 albums with 72 songs to his name (Tshuma, 2022) that fit is a compilation of musical innovations. The late legend Oliver Mtukudzi's discography shows a list of 67 music albums produced before he passed on (Mpofu, 2023), and we hold that he was an innovator. We regard the throughput of the above musicians as innovations that contribute to dealing with social issues that affect society in different ways. The invention of digital technology has ushered in a new breed of music producers who utilise software to create songs and music for the entertainment needs of society (Chimbudzi et al. 2021). We recognise that software developers are indispensable innovators as they enable music producers to engage in their work. From this background, we notice that the value placed on intangible musical innovations defies the meaning of innovation and favours tangible innovations. We argue that innovation in the different areas of specialisation in music should be recognised as valid. The current conception of innovation needs to evolve and be all-embracing to cater for all forms of creativity and innovations that usually go unnoticed and are erstwhile overlooked as ordinary.

Forms of musical innovations

In the following subsections, it is important to tackle some forms of innovation in the areas that fall under the music industry: composition, dance choreography, music software development, music production, and the emergence of new genres. The discussion ends with a stint on how research contributes to the body of knowledge as innovation in the music fraternity.

Music compositions

Music composers innovate in many different, enormously complex and fascinating ways when they create novel styles and patterns. Novelty is the quality of being new, original, or unusual. It has to be noted that some musical novelties will just be a once-off creation, whereas others will be replicated in some compositional community. A composer may radically break the rules of an established style, devise a new strategy within existing stylistic constraints, or exploit a prevalent strategy in a novel way. Creativity depends on the personality of the composer (whether they are adventurous or conservative); the specific stylistic/compositional circumstance surrounding the innovation, and the external constraints, both specific (patronage, available performers, acoustical environment, and so forth) and general (cultural beliefs and attitudes, theories of music, and so forth) that may have influenced the composer's behaviour. All these play a crucial part in what is commonly considered the most important facet of creativity, namely, the invention of novelty. Meyer (1983, p.527) says,

Composers invent particular patterns of pitches, durations, and the like (musical relationships on various hierarchic levels), mostly realising existing stylistic constraints. Some of these patterns may be so idiosyncratic that they defy generalisation- that is, no class-like relationships can be discerned in them. 11 Other patterns, however, may be capable of generalisation. It is this second possibility that is of interest here: namely, that patterns invented as, and initially understood to be, no more than the individual realisation of existing constraints may subsequently be the basis for some new general strategy that is replicable.

Where a composer creates a motif, whether a once-off creation or some pattern that will be replicated, that amounts to an innovation. The criteria for determining innovation in the current scenario in tertiary institutions need to be cognizant of this fact and appreciate that musicians make music every time they are innovating. For example, in the Music Business, Musicology and Technology



department at Midlands State University, there are compositions by marimba, *mbira*, pop music band, folk choir, choir, and dance ensemble lecturers whenever they are given themes to address during occasions such as the annual graduation ceremony, open days, and research and innovation expos. Again, these creations of the mind do not contribute to staff tenure track promotions since they are not part of the criteria for scoring points. Behaviour is goal-oriented, and it is not easy for a music lecturer to compose for no apparent recognition. Ironically, these novelties are not respected as new creations of the mind.

Dance and choreography

Dance performances are innovations informed by choreographic experiments with rhythm, dance, gestures and memory to create symbolic ritualised movements for the stage. According to Monda (2017), performers take part in the music and dance experience that derives from the specificity of the tribe and simultaneously allows for individual expression, creativity and innovation. The dancers and choreographers combine their childhood memories of dance-style routines in Zimbabwe. These are based on their learned cultural knowledge, skills, and heritage combined with and influenced by dance practices adopted sometimes from multi-cultural encounters with artists, mentors, educators, and tourists. Dancers embrace their vibrant evolution by representing the aesthetics of cultural dances such as Chinyamvera, Bira, Dinhe, Mbakumba, Mhande and Muchongoyo. It is both a creative process and an empowerment strategy. The dancers' ability to succeed and survive centres around utilising various dance movement routines and traditional and innovative song lyrics from deep down in their imagination. Dance innovation is self-expression through a cultural arts praxis and performance, which leads the creators to become contenders in all areas of the contemporary art world. Contrary to the perception that traditional African performance, such as music and dance, is static and has not evolved since time immemorial, traditional music and dance, as with every other art form, is open to innovation and continuity (Monda, 2017). Morrison (2003, p.39) says the following about innovating within traditions: Different dramaturgical and scenographic layers show the dynamic aspects of tradition and innovation here. The dancer recognises the images as part of his/her cultural heritage. However, this is an image not just of the pictured past but of a dynamic past in a dynamic present. Local cultural heritage and contemporary creative expression are not separated but blended as digital cultural heritage in contemporary performance.

Bozic's (2014) study explored how principles and methods from contemporary dance and choreography could be applied to enable innovation in an organisational context and the effects and limitations of using knowledge from contemporary dance to enable organisational innovation. According to Nketia (1966, p.48), "Every musical (dance) played (danced) in community life has a tradition behind it, a tradition which governs its mode of performance, its repertoire ... as well as the tradition that governs the context in which it should be played (danced)." Spectators familiar with the dance expect to recognise it in practice and may be disturbed if there are serious departures, for there is enjoyment in the renewal of experience. Asante (1985, p.399) also says, "Creative additions or innovations are tolerated if they reinforce this pleasure".

Music software developers

The 21st century has seen innovations in software development for various musical executions and undertakings in the music industry. Reference to the music industry encompasses all stakeholders, creative industries, music education, music business and academia. Software algorithms which constitute artificial intelligence (AI) are used to mimic a wide variety of musical functions (Tigre & Maw, 2021). The developments, as mentioned earlier in our view, constitute innovation. The inception of software eased the efforts to produce and transcribe music instead of the rigorous and laborious manual execution inherent in analogue operations. Through research, some software engineers have developed AI-based programmes that simulate human capabilities such as vocal harmony,



modulating sound, dynamic sound processing, loops, rhythmic patterns and noise removal tools, among several digital tools. In music performance, one-person musician-performers can engage software that provides auto-accompaniment and perform their songs like big bands and orchestras. The texture of sound can be morphed to emulate any musical sound at the click of a button (Huber & Runstein, 2018).

Music educators can transcribe music from audio to staff notation, which emulates sound modules, and change it back to audio through software like Finale, Sibelius or MuseScore. The first version of Sibelius Notation for Windows and Mac computers was released in 1998 (Gilbert, 2000). Ben and Jonathan Finn, the innovators of the music notation, named their innovation in honour of the Finnish musician Jean Sibelius. Since the invention of the Sibelius software, several innovations have come as part of the package with improved service provision to composers and performers of various music genres. Even though some forms of music require special skills from the transcriber, notation software has necessitated more innovativeness among music composers and arrangers. According to Kar et al. (2023), software engineers who create tone banks with natural and artificial sound samples in software packages are innovators. The Zimbabwean *mbira* and other indigenous musical instruments need innovators to create samples that can be used in software packages. We envisage that creating samples for all the Zimbabwean indigenous musical instrumental sounds is a novelty that constitutes innovation. In Zimbabwe, for example, *sungura* and *mbira* are largely traditional popular genres that use real musical instruments such as guitars, *mbira* and drums. Even though virtual sound samples create an artificial impression of *sungura* and *mbira*, creative and innovative music producers strive to create samples from natural musical instruments as building blocks for music production. For example, since 2011, Clive Mukundu has used the real samples he created and continues to create to produce Afro-fusion, Chimurenga and *mbira* music. Such an approach makes him and several others innovative music producers in 21st-century Zimbabwe music production. There is room for further innovations in different Zimbabwean music genres. The apt to create real sound samples from the Zimbabwean Indigenous musical prototypes is a gap that some innovators close.

Music productions and new genres

At the onset of digital technology in the music recording industry, we noted an influx of musicians and producers who had delved into music production. Regardless of training and expertise, all music producers wield remarkable skills that set them apart (Chimbudzi et al., 2021). The music producers' unique identities only point to their capacities to innovate within their different areas of specialisation and professional expertise. Some music producers are successful, while others struggle to make their mark. Chord progressions in different genres are specific, and yet creative producers always manage to generate new captivating melodies and genres as their innovation. Based on experiential evidence, we note that creating new tunes with a given chord progression is not easy; rather, it takes one's freedom and independence of exploration. Chances are that one can get biased or skewed to the known songs, which constitutes plagiarism. We give credit to music artists who create new melodies and new genres. Amapiano, *sungura* and Zimdancehall are a typical example of genres in which the same chords are given to different melodies (Chimbudzi et al., 2022). The new melodies are the point of attraction to hopeful music fans. *Sungura* music genre is largely based on the I-V-IV chord progression, yet year in and year out, the creative and innovative musicians record new songs that keep them relevant to the entertainment market. The alluded point of discussion underscores the importance of the innovative and artistic minds of creative musicians (Mueller, 2023). Zimdancehall is a fairly recent music genre in which Zimbabwean music artists customised Jamaican Dancehall with Zimbabwean melodies and beats. Zimdancehall speaks to the Zimbabwean musical cultures in terms of lyrics, customised beats, and all that constitute innovation. Freeman, a Zimdancehall artist, collaborated with Macheso, a *sungura* musician, on a single titled *Ngaibake*, which is available on the



YouTube site <https://youtu.be/VMYtr8I69Rc>, and it became a hit that appealed to music fans regardless of age and location. To date, the video has garnered more than 5 million views since 2019. The convergence of the two music artists from the genres mentioned earlier drew fans from various genres beyond *sungura* and Zimdancehall. We view the flexibility of both Freeman and Macheso in this project as a result of their creativity and innovation.

Contribution to the body of knowledge

Contributing to the body of knowledge comes in many different ways. Some of these include crafting ideas and models useful in the music industry. Reference to the music industry includes music instruction, creative industries, production of musical instruments, and crafting theories that explain some key existential musical phenomena as in articles, books, and research at honours, master and doctoral levels of education. Some new knowledge has been looked down upon due to the narrowed view and meaning attached to innovation. The earned doctoral theses are awarded based on the contribution of new knowledge to the academia, creative arts and music industry. We know that some of the current doctoral theses are long essays presenting new knowledge and ideas. The fact that some of them unveil unexplored territories in the study of music to enable readers to see musical concepts in new but different ways signifies their state of innovation. We argue that instead of sticking to innovation that has patented goods and services as requisites for recognition, it is sensible also to acknowledge intangible knowledge in goods and services. An example of intangible knowledge is the crafting of methods for instruction. The Maraire (1991) number notation helped solve the problem of teaching *nyunganyunga mbira* to the Western community and the world. Muranda and Maguraushe (2014) proffer a theory explaining the etymology of pacesetters and emulators in developing the *sungura* music genre. The computer-assisted instruction of the *nyunganyunga* by Muranda's (2017) doctoral study brings the *mbira* into interaction with notation software for performance practice. Dzingayi's (2020) master's thesis proffered the Creative Heritage Expression Model to explicate popular musicians' creativity process. The above models and theories, combined with other academic contributions, enable practising musicians and academics to appreciate and understand the musical arts' performative terrain. The pulse notation method by Tracey (2021) is an innovation that helped conceive and understand the teaching of the African compound rhythms on the *nhare mbira*. We argue that these and other contributions to the new knowledge in the music academia are forms of innovation that cannot be ignored due to their efficacy in the music industry.

Conclusion

We conclude that musical innovation manifests itself in different ways in various domains and can be both academic and non-academic. Innovations evident in tangible and non-tangible forms should not be ignored. The paper shows that innovation has taken place throughout the history and development of the music industry from time immemorial to the analogue and current digital eras. Innovation has imposed a ripple impact and morphed the recording modus operandi from the analogue to the digital epoch. The development of recording technology was a major innovation, and it has continued to evolve to this day owing to innovation. The advent of digital technology has necessitated the production of music without real musical instruments, saving the use of loops of synthetic and real sound samples. The construction of musical instruments has also taken the innovative side of the creative industry, performative arts and music production. Traditional musical instruments such as the *mbira* have been brought to the performance stage using electronics to amplify their sound. The capacity to compose new melodies with common chord progressions has brought relevance to many musicians in the current music industry worldwide, which constitutes creativity and innovativeness. The popular musicians of yesteryear and the current times have thrived on dance and choreography to entertain their fans. Music production has also benefitted from digital technology's artificial intelligence to emulate the mixing tools that erstwhile needed a lot of resources to effectively bring



out a balanced music mix. Digital technology has created new genres, such as Amapiano, *sungura* and Zimdancehall. Music genres will continue to evolve as music producers and musicians innovate to create entertaining music for the people. Lastly, we conclude that the new methods of instruction, models, and theories that result from academic research, including outputs at honours, masters and doctoral as new knowledge, are innovations that bring change to the modus operandi in various music industry engagements.

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