



# Integrating Critical Thinking into Advanced Musical Analysis in Ghanaian Music Education

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## Article History

Received: 2024.05.27

Revised: 2024.08.22

Accepted: 2024.09.11

Published: 2024.09.15

## Keywords

Education

Ghana

Innovation

Music

Tradition

## How to cite:

Addaquay, A. P. (2024). From Analysis to Argument: Integrating Critical Thinking into Advanced Musical Analysis in Ghanaian Music Education. *PAN African Journal of Musical Arts Education*, 2(2), 1-9.

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## Abstract

This study examines the incorporation of critical thinking into the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course in the context of music education in Ghana. The research used a qualitative method, especially a case study design, to investigate the effective integration of interdisciplinary frameworks and critical thinking abilities into advanced musical analysis. The data were gathered using a combination of document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. This allowed for obtaining perspectives from instructors, students, and external examiners who were participating in the course. The findings demonstrate the potential advantages and difficulties of combining standard academic rigour with inventive, context-specific techniques that incorporate aspects such as phenomenology, semiotics, and cultural theory. Also, the study emphasises the possibility of a curriculum that is flexible and inclusive, incorporating African musical traditions. This would improve students' ability to analyse music and promote a more active and lively involvement with it. The findings underscore the importance for music instructors in Ghana to give high priority to fostering critical thinking skills and incorporating cultural relevance. This would ultimately enhance the academic and cultural aspects of music education in the country.

## Introduction

Course design in specialised subjects such as music theory is crucial in shaping students' understanding and interaction with music. Incorporating critical thinking into music theory (Lively, 2015) and advanced musical analysis is essential. It goes beyond mere technical proficiency and empowers students to scrutinise, interpret, and formulate their viewpoints on many aspects of music. Attinà (2023) defines critical thinking as "a mode of thinking characterised by specific and unique features in contrast to casuistry that imposes general rules on individual cases." Also, I concur with the authors who highlight the significance of perceiving critical thinking as a pragmatic skill and advancing humanistic education that prioritises personal growth and social advancement (Paunović & Živković, 2023).

The "Advanced Musical Analysis" course encounters a significant dilemma in Ghana, especially at the graduate level. Academics increasingly acknowledge the importance of critical thinking and research abilities in musical analysis. However, traditional perspectives, often evident in curriculum evaluation



and exam moderation, restrict the course to a narrow focus on score analysis or discussion of Western music. The mismatch between the course and broader perspectives frustrates teachers. It hinders students from actively addressing more significant philosophical concerns related to music composition, performance, and analysis within the Ghanaian context. Meanwhile, Vlahopol (2019) asserts that studying music analysis enhances critical thinking, enabling performers to understand compositions, develop original concepts, and interpret works authentically.

Also, I agree with Rudent's (2022) paper highlighting the importance of incorporating intellectual inquiry and contextual comprehension in musical analysis, particularly when examining popular phonographic songs, rather than solely focusing on scores. As far as the teaching of music is concerned, Latifah et al. (2019) declare that critical thinking can improve the creative teaching abilities of music teachers. Twenty music teachers took part in their research study, where they received training to enhance their creative music teaching skills by utilising critical thinking talents.

Hence, this study examines the equilibrium between upholding traditional academic rigour and embracing multidisciplinary and new approaches in designing the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course in the Ghanaian environment. In this light, the course can enhance students' ability to analyse and appreciate music from multiple perspectives by including critical thinking, research skills, and contextual understanding. The training can enhance the musical environment in Ghana by promoting critical and inventive thinking. Nevertheless, graduate students who desire to analyse music in their thesis are not solely restricted to examining the musical aspects but also the comprehensive framework of their thesis. Essentially, this investigation is crucial for connecting the divide between conventional methods and the changing requirements of music research, thereby benefiting both students and the wider music community.

### **Method**

This study utilises a qualitative research methodology to investigate the incorporation of critical thinking into the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course in Ghana's unique cultural and educational setting. A qualitative methodology is well-suited for this research because it can thoroughly investigate intricate social phenomena, such as teaching practices and the perception of critical thinking among students and instructors. This methodology is optimal for comprehending participants' significance, encounters, and explanations, which are essential for scrutinising the integration of critical thinking into music education in Ghana. The qualitative technique allows for the adaptability of gathering detailed and context-specific observations necessary for comprehending the dynamics occurring in the course.

### **Research Design**

The research was guided by a chosen case study design. The case study design facilitates a thorough examination of a particular "case" – in this instance, the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course provided at some institutions in Ghana. This design efficiently analyses the distinct problems, possibilities, and dynamics associated with incorporating critical thinking within the course. The case study approach enables a comprehensive examination of the course's progression, gathering data from many viewpoints (instructors, students, external examiners) and diverse data sources (documents, interviews, and observations). This thorough design is suitable for capturing the subtle details and intricate aspects of incorporating critical thinking into music education in the Ghanaian environment.



### ***Data Collection Methods***

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the integration of critical thinking into the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course, the study employed three primary data collection methods:

#### ***1. Document Analysis***

The content was studied on necessary course-related materials covering five years, such as syllabi, exam papers, and marking rubrics. This analysis aimed to determine the primary themes, assessment techniques, and the importance placed on critical thinking and research skills in the course. The study aimed to reveal explicit and implicit expectations for developing critical thinking abilities and incorporating interdisciplinary views in the curriculum by conducting a comprehensive review of these papers. This data collection stage yielded fundamental insights into the formal and informal frameworks influencing the course's methodology in fostering critical thinking.

**Sample Size:** Five key documents (syllabi, exam papers, marking rubrics) were analysed.

#### ***2. Semi-structured Interviews***

Three groups of participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to gather their experiences, thoughts, and observations on the incorporation of critical thinking into the course:

**Instructors (N=4):** The interviews with four instructors centred on their pedagogical approaches, the constraints they identified in the existing curriculum, and their willingness to incorporate critical thinking and interdisciplinarity into their teaching methodologies.

**Students (N = 6):** Six students were interviewed to investigate their experiences in the course, the difficulties they had in applying critical thinking, and their recommendations for improving the course's emphasis on critical thinking abilities.

**External Examiners/Moderators (N = 3):** Three external examiners were questioned to gather their perspectives on the expectations for the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course and its effectiveness in promoting critical thinking and research abilities.

The interviews were recorded in audio format, transcribed word for word, and subjected to thematic analysis to uncover repeating patterns, themes, and differing viewpoints. This approach enabled me to comprehensively grasp the profound and intricate nature of the participants' experiences and gain insight into how many stakeholders see the incorporation of critical thinking in the course.

**Sample Size:** 13 individuals were interviewed, including four instructors, six students, and three external examiners.

#### ***3. Classroom Observations***

Direct observations were conducted during five classroom sessions of the "Advanced Musical Analysis" course to acquire insights into the interactions and teaching strategies employed in the classroom. The observations centred on using various teaching approaches to enhance critical thinking and facilitate debates. Additionally, the focus was on examining the dynamics of interactions between educators and learners and among the learners themselves. Significant emphasis was placed on assimilating various musical samples and integrating musical traditions from Ghana.

Field notes were recorded during the observations and subsequently examined with interview transcripts and document data. The observations yielded immediate evidence of teaching techniques and facilitated the identification of successful strategies and areas for enhancement.



**Sample Size:** Five classroom sessions were observed.

**Data Analysis:** Data obtained from document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations were analysed using content and thematic analysis.

1. **Content Analysis:** This method, utilised for document analysis, entailed systematically categorising the information found in syllabi, test papers, and marking rubrics. Its purpose was to discover repeating themes and patterns associated with critical thinking and interdisciplinary approaches. The content analysis facilitated the establishment of a fundamental comprehension of the course's formal expectations and needs.
2. **Thematic Analysis:** This kind of analysis was undertaken in multiple stages, examining interview transcripts and observation field notes.

**Familiarisation:** The transcripts were reviewed numerous times to understand the facts comprehensively.

**Coding:** Segments of the data were coded according to emerging themes and patterns related to teaching practices, student engagement, and perceptions of critical thinking.

**Theme Development:** The codes were reviewed and grouped into broader themes that reflected the research questions and objectives.

**Interpretation:** The study's objectives guided the interpretation of themes, establishing links between various data sources to develop a cohesive comprehension of how critical thinking was included in the course.

### **Triangulation and Ethical Considerations**

Triangulation was utilised to enhance the results' trustworthiness and dependability by incorporating many data sources, such as documents, interviews, and observational data. This approach facilitated the cross-validation of data, augmenting the credibility of the findings and yielding a more thorough comprehension of incorporating critical thinking into the curriculum.

Throughout the research procedure, ethical considerations were given priority. After providing all participants with relevant information, consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy and identity were protected. The study followed the ethical norms of the institutions involved, guaranteeing the protection of participants' rights and the exclusive use of their contributions for research purposes.

### **Results**

The examination of the literature on music education reveals a striking contrast between conventional approaches and emerging new tactics, particularly noticeable in higher courses such as "Advanced Musical Analysis." Conventional approaches to music, heavily rooted in Western traditions, prioritise formalism and structural analysis. This emphasis was underscored by Clarke in 2011. These courses emphasise a thorough comprehension of musical structures, forms, and harmonic language, often achieved through detailed examination and analysis of musical scores. The primary objective is cultivating impartiality and technical expertise, directing pupils towards "correct" interpretations based on well-established theoretical ideas. This approach often focuses on the Western (art) music canon, emphasising historical context and the evolution of styles.



Although these conventional methods are highly valued for their role in developing analytical skills, they have received criticism, particularly from student interviews. They are frequently seen as exclusive, disregarding non-Western musical traditions (Leung, 2018) and restricting involvement with African popular and traditional music or modern genres. The inflexibility in prioritising "accurate" explanations might hinder innovation and autonomous thinking (McGinity, 2015). Moreover, students frequently encounter difficulties connecting theoretical concepts to broader cultural and social settings, resulting in a learning experience relatively detached from practical real-life application (Stearn, 2015; Rose et al., 2018).

In response to these constraints, novel methodologies in music education have surfaced. Advocates support interdisciplinarity, which involves incorporating perspectives from other fields, such as philosophy, cultural studies, and ethnomusicology. As discussed in works by Baroni (2021) and Doğantan-Dack (2022), this approach aims to enhance analysis and promote critical thinking. It embraces student-centred learning and enables learners to generate enquiries, explore their research passions, and develop distinctive analytical perspectives. Furthermore, it establishes a connection between abstract principles and practical implementations, whether in performance, composition, music technology, or criticism and guarantees academic studies' applicability beyond the educational setting's boundaries. These tactics strive to cultivate versatile musicians and researchers who can think critically and independently, actively engage with various musical genres, and establish connections between music and more significant cultural and societal matters.

Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of course materials and discussions with examiners and evaluators uncovers a consistent commitment to conventional standards. There are often concerns about "scope creep," which refers to the possibility of including philosophical discussions or research approaches that go beyond the limits of "Advanced musical analysis," thereby weakening the course's focus. The tension between subjectivity and objectivity arises when there is a desire to embrace multiple interpretations and student-driven research while ensuring objectivity and adhering to established analytical standards (see Kemp, 2024). Adopting these new methods is further complicated by practical restrictions such as limited resources, time constraints, and unfamiliarity with innovative pedagogical approaches.

Although these concerns are legitimate, they risk impeding student development and restricting the significance of music instruction in environments such as Ghana. Promoting a more comprehensive and relevant music education involves expanding the "Advanced Musical Analysis" range for multiple justifications. Enabling Ghanaian students to participate in critical discussions about music actively empowers them to cultivate their analytical perspectives, thus enriching the dynamic musical environment beyond conventional musical notation. Incorporating Ghanaian musical traditions and viewpoints into the curriculum improves cultural comprehension and cultivates a feeling of possession over musical expertise. Providing students with the ability to analyse and interpret music from many cultures prepares them for a wide range of jobs, both within and outside the field of music, in a world that is becoming more interconnected.

Implementing novel methods in "Advanced Musical Analysis" can significantly enhance the educational experience for music students in Ghana. Enhanced student engagement and motivation are probable when students can investigate subjects that align with their interests and cultural backgrounds. This approach promotes a more comprehensive and interconnected understanding of the power and importance of music by linking analysis to broader contexts. Moreover, refining critical



thinking, research, and communication abilities improves students' preparedness for various professional trajectories (Ibragimova et al., 2024; Hakobyan et al., 2023). However, acknowledging this significant change requires thoughtful deliberation, especially in the context of enhancing teacher development. For instructors to effectively incorporate new teaching methods in music education, they need proper training and access to sufficient resources. This will enable them to adapt to the changing academic standards and cultural trends confidently.

### **Discussion**

The examination of conventional and groundbreaking methods in music education, specifically in the setting of an "Advanced Musical Analysis" class in Ghana, uncovers a significant conflict at the core of the field. The findings emphasise a worldwide discourse over the fundamental essence of music education: Does it primarily include safeguarding established knowledge and analytical methods, or does it primarily involve enabling students to participate actively and thoughtfully in a dynamic and always-growing art form?

The case study highlights a prevalent concern regarding innovation - the apprehension of compromising academic rigour or deviating excessively from the perceived essence of the profession. Nevertheless, adhering to inflexible interpretations of tradition poses the danger of overlooking the abundance and significance that broader viewpoints can provide. In the Ghanaian setting, it is crucial to prioritise incorporating local musical traditions and encourage thoughtful exploration of music's social and cultural aspects to provide a valuable educational experience.

The difficulty does not lie in selecting between tradition and innovation but in creating a balanced combination that utilises both advantages. "Advanced Musical Analysis" should embrace its primary purpose: providing students with the necessary skills to deconstruct musical compositions, comprehend harmonic syntax, and cultivate an appreciation for formal arrangements. These skills are essential for engaging in knowledgeable discussions about music. Nevertheless, these conventional instruments are more effective when utilised within a broader intellectual context. By incorporating philosophical and conceptual frameworks such as phenomenology, semiotics, cultural theory, cognitive psychology, and ethnomusicology, score analysis is enhanced in significance. Let us examine the reasons why these apparently "external" fields are essential to sophisticated musical analysis:

Phenomenology promotes a shift from structural study to examining the subjective encounter with music, investigating how musical sounds elicit emotions, memories, and physical reactions. Semiotics offers a theoretical structure for comprehending music as a complex arrangement of signs and symbols. This framework enables students to scrutinise the process of generating, conveying, and interpreting musical significance in distinct cultural settings. Cultural Theory explores the dynamic relationship between music and social power structures, encouraging students to analyse how music reinforces or questions existing conventions, ideas, and identities. Cognitive psychology provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes behind music perception, memory, and creativity. It helps us understand and analyse how we comprehend and react to musical structures and patterns.

Ethnomusicology expands the range of analysis beyond the Western classical music tradition, urging students to interact with many musical cultures and question Eurocentric prejudices in the study of music. Considering these discussions, de Amorim Chagas's research paper in the year 2019 demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of music theory and composition by incorporating philosophical, cultural, social, and political perspectives from influential thinkers such as



Wittgenstein, Husserl, Kuhn, Agamben, Flusser, and Heidegger. It emphasises the significance of diverse viewpoints in advancing the study of sound phenomenology and musical composition.

Students cultivate a more sophisticated and discerning comprehension of music's intricate and diverse characteristics through active involvement with these frameworks. They acquire the ability to pose more profound enquiries, question underlying beliefs, and establish links between musical analysis and broader intellectual and cultural dialogues. Moreover, incorporating research methodology within "Advanced Musical Analysis" does not aim to transform every student into an ethnomusicologist. The goal is to provide them with the necessary abilities to approach musical analysis from a researcher's perspective. Assisting students in creating research questions, conducting initial research, refining their focus, and constructing hypotheses equips them with the challenges of autonomous scholarly work, regardless of their decision to pursue additional academic studies.

In the Ghanaian context, more is needed to recognise the presence of many musical traditions. The course "Advanced Musical Analysis" aims to actively include students in Ghanaian music's intricate and diverse realm, equipping them with the necessary tools and knowledge to thoroughly examine and value their musical legacy. The following items are included: Examining the intricate rhythmic structures in West African music, including polyrhythms and cross-rhythms, defy conventional Western concepts of metre and rhythmic arrangement. Analysing Ghanaian traditional music involves studying its distinct forms, genres, and performance techniques based on the research conducted by prominent researchers in this field. Exploring the development and distinguishing features of several African music genres, including Highlife, Afrobeats, Palm-wine music, and others, while examining their societal and cultural importance. Examining traditional African instruments' scales, tunings, and playing skills to understand and value their distinct sound characteristics and cultural roles. Incorporating Ghanaian musical identity into the curriculum, "Advanced Musical Analysis" transcends mere theoretical exploration and enriches cultural exploration and self-validation.

### **Cultivating a Vibrant Learning Atmosphere**

To attain a harmonious equilibrium between tradition and innovation, course designers and educators may consider the subsequent suggestions:

**Promote adaptability:** Foster various methods for examining music, motivating students to investigate subjects and techniques that align with their personal interests and professional goals. Integrate interdisciplinary perspectives by including readings, conversations, and assignments utilising philosophy, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, and other pertinent subjects.

### **Focus on Ghanaian Musical Traditions:**

**Create a comprehensive collection of Ghanaian music:** Construct a curriculum that showcases various Ghanaian musical illustrations, encompassing traditional percussion and dance styles and modern popular genres. This canon should encompass Ghanaian musical expression's range and complexity, featuring renowned personalities and lesser-known musicians.

**Extend invitations to guest artists and scholars:** Enhance the educational experience by inviting Ghanaian musicians, composers, and ethnomusicologists to impart their skills and viewpoints to students. These guest sessions offer excellent insights into Ghanaian music's practical and theoretical aspects.

**Promote Active Participation:** Enhance the learning experience by allowing students to engage in practical activities and actively practise Ghanaian music. Possible activities may include hosting



seminars on traditional instruments, fostering partnerships with local music ensembles, or creating unique compositions influenced by Ghanaian musical influences.

Facilitate a connection to contemporary issues by prompting students to critically examine how Ghanaian music mirrors and actively addresses present-day social, political, and cultural matters. One such approach is to examine concepts like identity, globalisation, technology, or societal change by analysing their representation in music.

### **Nurturing the development of analytical thinking and creative problem-solving**

**Promote critical thinking:** Motivate students to challenge existing narratives and analytical frameworks, cultivating a discerning and analytical approach to the study of music.

**Encourage Autonomy in Research:** Offer direction and assistance to students to foster the creation of their research endeavours, enabling them to make original contributions to the area by generating fresh knowledge and viewpoints.

**Embrace Technology:** Use digital tools and resources, such as software for music notation, online databases, and virtual platforms for performances, to improve the learning experience.

**Promote Collaboration:** Implement group projects, peer feedback sessions, and presentations to foster collaborative learning and create a friendly and intellectually challenging atmosphere. By including both traditional and innovative elements, "Advanced Musical Analysis" has the potential to be a dynamic and revolutionary educational experience for Ghanaian music students. It can give them the analytical tools, critical thinking abilities, and cultural awareness to become knowledgeable musicians, researchers, and cultural ambassadors. Music education in Ghana may equip a new generation of musicians and scholars to significantly impact the global stage by cultivating a profound understanding of Ghanaian musical legacy and incorporating diverse perspectives and inventive methods.

This method surpasses the constraints of merely conserving the past or pursuing temporary trends. It acknowledges that genuine innovation arises from a profound comprehension and reverence for heritage. Still, a dynamic musical culture flourishes by being able to adjust, develop, and interact with the ever-changing environment. By embracing the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, music education in Ghana has the potential to empower students to not only inherit a rich musical past but also shape its future.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation of the fusion of traditional and innovative elements in "Advanced Musical Analysis" in Ghana highlights the urgent requirement for a sophisticated approach to music education. Although concerns about the potential weakening of academic rigour by including broader theoretical frameworks are legitimate, the evidence indicates that such integration, especially when considered in the context of the Ghanaian experience, can significantly enhance musical analysis.

The analysis shows that including philosophical and conceptual frameworks such as phenomenology, semiotics, and cultural theory, coupled with a concentrated examination of Ghanaian musical traditions, does not lessen the significance of traditional analytical abilities. Instead, it fosters a more discerning and comprehensive comprehension of music, enabling students to interact with music as a vibrant cultural influence actively. Hence, the suggested suggestions, which prioritise adaptability in analytical methodologies, incorporating multidisciplinary viewpoints, and the focalisation of Ghanaian musical identity in the curriculum, are not simply hypothetical. The course "Advanced Musical Analysis" is based on the belief that students must have a comprehensive understanding of





conventional musicology and the ability to critically engage with a broad and ever-changing musical landscape to be effective.

By embracing the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, music education in Ghana can go beyond a pure preservationist approach and empower a new generation of musicians and scholars to inherit a rich musical legacy and shape its future.

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