



Reexamining Africanism and Eclecticism in Nigerian Popular Music

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This study examines the nexus between Africanism and eclecticism in contemporary Nigerian popular music, offering critical insight into how globalisation continues to reshape local cultural expressions. While globalisation and commercialisation have accelerated cultural eclecticism, prompting the blending of traditional Nigerian forms with Western genres like American Hip-Hop, R&B, and electronic music, this paper demonstrates the enduring resilience of Africanism as a foundational cultural core. Grounded in historical and conceptual frameworks, the paper analyses the structural role of indigenous rhythms, tonal languages, traditional instruments (such as the dundun, bata, udu, and kakaki), and communal socio-cultural functions in shaping genres ranging from Highlife, Jùjú, and Fuji to Fela Kuti's Afrobeat and modern Afrobeats. The findings reveal that cultural eclecticism does not inherently erase indigenous identity; rather, it creates a dynamic, glocalised musical ecosystem—however, unchecked market-driven hybridisation risks diluting moral substance, linguistic authenticity, and native artistic control. To ensure the continued prominence of African identity in global music economies, this paper emphasises strategic interventions, including intellectual and educational decolonisation, curriculum reform, local institutionalisation of indigenous languages, and greater economic ownership of distribution channels by African creators. Ultimately, the study concludes that prioritising an authentic African cultural orientation allows the Nigerian music industry not merely to adapt to global market trends, but to project its distinct identity onto the world stage.

Keywords: Africanism, Eclecticism, Nigerian Popular Music, Afrobeats, Globalisation, Glocalisation, Cultural Identity.

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Introduction

Music reflects the events, happenings, lifestyles, history, politics, technology, and religious rites of a people in a given society (Xu, 2019). As a cultural entity, it embodies several cultural elements, reflecting the passage of time, advancements, and development. Music is dynamic and can integrate other forms, styles, and languages, as it is a creative tool. The idea

that music magnetises other cultural elements and is dynamic is referred to as eclecticism. The study of eclecticism is value-laden and an attempt to unravel global influences on music across diverse identities (Adedeji et al., 2015). It shows how certain music types, especially traditional forms, borrow elements and styles from other cultures, and what genre emerges from such fusion. Eclecticism is closely linked to



globalisation, which seeks to harmonise global culture from the perspective of Western or more developed cultures. Both concepts play crucial roles in the Nigerian music industry, which forms the crux of this study.

From a proactive perspective, Africanism paints a picture of a revolt against unwholesome acculturation or hybridisation of African cultures, strongly advocating for the preservation of African culture and its contents, far from commoditisation and modernisation (Njaka, 1971; Demand Africa, 2018; Obot, 2026). In music, Africanism seeks to protect cultural elements, styles, language, etc., from the corrosive effects of modernisation to preserve African culture. If this concept is not enforced, the loss of African music is imminent. No culture can fully resist modernisation, but at least an attempt should be made to ensure cultural fusion does not completely obliterate what seems African.

Understanding globalisation's influence on African music is imperative. This is because globalisation has continued to exert a significant effect on global culture, of which music is a part (Adediji et al., 2015; Mueller & Bender, 2013; Obot & Omolara, 2025). Scholars have examined Nigerian and African music in terms of their African structures, rather than global or external influences. This issue has no end because globalisation constantly reshapes narratives around certain cultural practices, especially on the African continent and in Nigeria in particular (Serang, 2026; Obot, 2025). Failing to continue this debate may allow crucial matters to pass unnoticed. Many artists, both local and international, combine indigenous African music and rhythms, utilising multiple languages and themes to connect across cultures and highlight music as a universal language. Although scholars have studied these styles and efforts, understanding of how artists truly carry out this fusion process remains limited (InterScholar Studies, 2026). This gap may lead many to overlook the complexities of musical composition and eclecticism. As a result, audiences might not fully recognise the exchange of ideas and values that underpins this musical diversity. Thus, this paper examines the

nexus between Africanism and Eclecticism in Nigerian popular music to understand globalisation's intricate influence.

Africanism and Eclecticism: Conceptual Exploration

This paper discusses concepts such as Africanism and Eclecticism. While scholars widely recognise Africanism, it may not be a common term among musicians and artists (Njaka, 1971). They might not realise their work reflects these concepts directly, but they incorporate them indirectly into their daily musical practices. In a pedestrian sense, Africanism refers to efforts to preserve, express, and revitalise traditional African musical aesthetics, such as call-and-response, polyrhythms, indigenous language use (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, Pidgin), and socially functional lyrics (Adjei, 2015; Demand Africa, 2018). Furthermore, Eclecticism refers to blending multiple genres (such as Highlife, Afrobeats, R&B, and Hip-Hop) or musical eras to forge a hybrid, cross-cultural sound (Osiebe, 2024; Play Mag, 2025).

It is absolutely difficult to discuss Eclecticism in the Nigerian music space without recourse to globalisation. In fact, it cannot be overemphasised. It has two facets: advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, globalisation has boosted the nation's economic wealth by enabling Nigerians to earn foreign currency from their music (Arewa, 2026). This means Nigerian music brings forex to the country and has become commoditised. This is done in many ways, such as digital streaming and international collaborations (Play Mag, 2025; Osiebe, 2024). As it stands, digital streaming has given many artists avenues to reach international audiences through digital distribution.

Although many have expressed satisfaction with this opportunity, others have pointed out revenue imbalances between digital platform owners and users (Arewa, 2026). Regardless, streaming brings in foreign revenue for Nigerians and opens up Nigerian artists to international engagements through live shows and performances, which can be seen as international

collaborations. For example, prominent Nigerian artists such as Wizkid, Burna Boy, Tiwa Savage, Teni, and Tems have collaborated with top global stars in Europe, America, and beyond. Through these collaborations, many have expressed that Afrobeats cross-pollination into international festivals has gained momentum (Serang, 2026). Overall, globalisation creates opportunities to export Nigerian dance, language, costumes, fashion, and settings.

While globalisation has positive dimensions, it also has disadvantages. For instance, cultural hybridisation occurs because the global market cannot accommodate a single culture in its entirety, since it involves other cultures. To stay in business and enjoy the wealth that comes with it, companies must compromise on context, language, and other areas. Creating this appeal can feel like diluting culture, since music is a cultural element (Oyebade et al., 2020). Traditional elements, such as drum patterns, may change; artists may also incorporate foreign-language borrowing to enhance appeal. Some argue that this has caused Nigerian artists to lose focus on indigenous content. Music genres such as Jùjú, Fuji, and traditional folk have been observed to appropriate Westernised styles or elements (Waterman, 1990; Omojola, 2006). The idea is to appeal to other cultures, especially Western audiences. This study may not explore several disadvantages.

Africanism: Historical Foundations

Africanism draws on the musical elements it uses (Njaka, 1971; Britannica, n.d.). For instance, Juju, Fuji, and Apala, fundamentally Yoruba music, use indigenous African elements such as talking drums, percussion, the Yoruba language, praise singing, and proverbs (Waterman, 1990; Omojola, 2006). The talking drum makes Yoruba music tonal, just as the language itself is. Drums mimic the pitch and inflexion of words spoken in Yoruba. This allows a musician to communicate with the audience without singing words. There is also the use of sekere (beaded gourd), agogo (metal gong), and agidigbo (thumb piano). These elements appear in Jùjú and Fuji, creating a unique fantasy that makes

them peculiar to the Yoruba tradition.

Many African musical forms of Nigerian descent also employ chants, proverbs, and local dialects (Akinwumi & Abodunrin, 2018; Xu, 2019). Metaphor and folklore are distinctive, allowing music to communicate historical, familial, and ethical content to listeners (Wilderness Destinations, 2022). In addition, much traditional music includes dialogue and call-and-response to deepen its messages. Praise singing is deployed for royalty and big men in society. It flourishes in parties and events. To this day, most events among the Yoruba people feature an ensemble of musicians with talking drums and praise singing to obtain money, favour, etc. (Omojola, 2006). It is also used in courts and by wealthy patrons.

Furthermore, traditional African music in the Yoruba area is notable for its use of satire. Fela Anikulapo exemplifies this, as many of his songs satirised junta regimes and corrupt officials (Olaniyan, 2004). This type of music effectively critiques, demonises, and challenges authorities, aiming to inspire social change. It closely resembles praise-singing in its function. Traditional African music historically served as a rite of passage at events such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals (Wilderness Destinations, 2022). For example, the Rites of Passage genre was tailored for communal events and was often performed at naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and Owambé weekend parties, forming the main soundtrack of Yoruba social gatherings (Waterman, 1990). These genres also fulfil religious functions (Adeniyi, 2020).

Nigerian Popular Music

Nigerian popular music has become a major phenomenon in recent years, growing by leaps and bounds, with different artists making strong impacts not just nationally but across continents (Arewa, 2026). Also known as Afrobeats or Afropop, it blends traditional rhythms such as highlife and Fuji with Western hip-hop, R&B, and reggae (Onyeji, 2002; Osiebe, 2024). Globally, a few artists have shaped this scene and left their mark. Wizkid, Burna Boy, and Davido

are among them. Other artists who have helped make Nigerian popular music soar include, but are not limited to, Ayra Starr, Omah Lay, Asake, Ckay, Fireboy DML, Mr Eazi, BNXXN, Kiss Daniel, Olamide, Seyi Vibe, etc. (Play Mag, 2025; Nigerian Tribune Cultural Index, 2024).

The Evolution of Nigerian Popular Music

The history of Nigerian popular music is robust and rich. Understanding its evolution is crucial to appreciating the nexus between its rich cultural heritage and global culture. In other words, what we hear today has passed through several stages, including highlife, juju, Fuji, Afrobeat, modern Afrobeat, and Afropop (Collins, 2012; Yusif, 2024). Highlife dominated the Nigerian music scene early on, cut across many ethnic groups, and was widely accepted by Nigerians, especially on the airwaves (radio). In fact, the highlife that dominated early on fused African rhythms with Western brass and jazz instruments (Collins, 2012). Musicians who returned from Europe and America brought back the idea of combining Western instruments with African drum rhythms, giving rise to the early genre. At the time, highlife was spreading across Nigeria's towns and villages, and other genres also had a fair share of audiences. For instance, in the Yoruba land, Juju and Fuji became dominant. Both genres relied heavily on the talking drum, traditional percussion, praise-singing, and heavy footwork, with a striking display of Yoruba fashion (Waterman, 1990).

In the 1970s, a new music genre emerged in Nigeria, transforming the country's music scene. Afrobeat, pioneered by the legendary Fela Kuti, singer, composer, and versatile musician on piano and saxophone, was heavily influenced by his Western experiences in jazz, funk, and highlife, which contributed to the development of what is now called Afrobeats (Olaniyan, 2004; Omojola, 2009). The genre's signature sound featured a strong horn section, traditional talking drums, and powerful rhythms. Afrobeat quickly became a potent force for political activism, often criticising government and military regimes (Olaniyan, 2004). Fela's politically charged lyrics created deep divides between

politicians and the military. He was imprisoned multiple times due to conflicts with government authorities. Ultimately, Afrobeat served as a tool for emancipation, exposing government misconduct and mocking oppressive regimes.

Recently, Afrobeats and Afropop have expanded, giving rise to what can be called Modern Afrobeats and Afropop (Yusif, 2024). Modern in the sense that they have adopted new patterns from diverse cultures. Interestingly, the digital age and media have brought sound effects and technologies that have given these genres a wider range of newness (Serang, 2026). Specifically, the late 1990s and 2000s introduced American hip-hop culture into Afrobeats, different from what Fela left behind: Afrobeat (Osiebe, 2024; Interscholar Studies, 2026). Now, conscious blends of American hip-hop and R&B have made it more danceable and modern. Its flavour no longer carries Fela's agitated nuances or presence. It is more about pure fun and entertainment, and critics tend to see this development as a lack of purpose, which Afrobeat has had in the past (Nigerian Tribune Cultural Index, 2024). In all of these, there is a clear presence of foreign elements, which many observers do not subscribe to, let alone embrace. However, many music enthusiasts want to know the future of popular music in Nigeria, as if it were not already pointing to an unending blend of global culture (Arewa, 2026).

African Culture in Nigerian Popular Music

The portrayal of African culture and values in pop music is no longer a new debate. Scholars have often highlighted how it showcases rich artistic expressions, lively African rhythms, percussion, dance, fashion, and performances to a global audience (Akinwumi et al., 2017; Afolayan et al., 2018). Genres like Afrobeat and Afro-pop embody these African lifestyles while integrating Western influences (Ekunwale, 2018). Many lyrics incorporate Nigerian languages and accents, offering a glimpse into the music's roots (InterScholar Studies, 2026). Music videos in these genres further depict African cultural themes, featuring Nigerian and African settings, cuisines, community life,

resilience, struggles for emancipation, side hustles, fashion, group dance routines, and other elements tied to the Nigerian cultural landscape.

Transformation of Nigerian Popular Music

Nigerian popular music has transformed significantly, becoming a cultural commodity. More succinctly, commercialisation drives the Nigerian music industry (Arewa, 2026). As a result, the focus has shifted from showcasing rich cultural heritage to a money-generating venture. Young Nigerian artists seem not to care about preserving rich Nigerian cultural elements or artefacts. The wave celebrates collaboration with foreign artists and endorsements, which in turn bring in dollars and fame.

Scholars have argued that commercialisation often dilutes or alters African values, such as lyrics and moral teachings (Oyebade et al., 2020; Asante & Abarry, 2015). It has frequently been reported that current popular Nigerian music lyrics lack moral substance and are morally bankrupt, a stark contrast to the 70s to 90s. Many also argue that these changes are not entirely the artists' fault; rather, the global music industry, shaped by groups with specific objectives, influences outcomes. Nigerian artists aiming to succeed often feel compelled to follow international trends and collaborations; those who do not risk missing opportunities. In essence, the decline in moral content within Afrobeat and similar genres is seen as orchestrated and driven by Western interests.

Additionally, commercialisation and cultural identity require careful consideration. Today, the global music industry primarily focuses on entertainment to satisfy audiences. This differs from Nigeria's traditional music practices, which aimed to highlight the country's rich cultural heritage (Demand Africa, 2018). While globalisation might not prioritise preserving existing cultural values, it often seeks to reshape them to appeal to a worldwide audience. Nigerian artists have had to negotiate their content to meet a global audience. This depends on record labels and managers, who play major roles in internal collaborations if they see an opportunity to rework content to meet

collaborators (Osiebe, 2024).

Africanism and Eclecticism: The Nexus

Scholars have argued that eclecticism and Africanism must thrive together, meaning that they have come to stay and cannot be removed from the schemes of global affairs (Adedeji et al., 2015). Africanism struggles to uphold African values and cultures; eclecticism continues to allow the fusion of musical forms and content. The strength of eclecticism lies in the fact that the world inches towards a unified culture with every passing second, and music is a major aspect affected by this. The argument is that, in the near future, all cultures will have experienced some fusion or adoption of elements from other dominant cultures, especially from the world powers that control socio-political spaces.

Factors that Influence Africanism in Nigerian Music

Since time immemorial, various cultures have been shaped by the interconnectedness of history, language, and culture (Xu, 2019). This suggests that identity develops through these elements, particularly in African contexts, a process often referred to as Africanism (Njaka, 1971). Key contributors to Africanism include indigenous rhythms, traditional instruments, and cultural revival efforts. It can be supported by leveraging the rich diversity of sound traditions from different ethnic groups. For example, the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria use instruments like the dundun, bata, and sekere, which feature polyrhythms (Waterman, 1990; Omojola, 2006). These rhythms form the basis of genres such as Afrobeat, Juju, and Fuji. Modern Highlife music drew heavily on traditional Igbo percussion instruments, such as the udu (clay pot drum), ogene (metal gong), and various slit wooden drums (African Music Library, n.d.; Melodigging, n.d.). In contrast, the Hausa people of northern Nigeria feature the kakaki, a uniquely elongated metal trumpet reserved primarily for royal and elite ceremonial practices (Britannica, 2026). Given this, if Africanism is to be preserved, Nigerian music should continue

emphasising existing music traditions that have become defining features of Nigerian culture. Even when these traditions are incorporated into contemporary Nigerian music, they must be preserved and upheld.

Afrobeat emerged intentionally as political protest and cultural renewal (Olaniyan, 2004). In the mid-20th century, educated African intellectuals influenced by Western ideas increasingly challenged colonial systems, sparking a significant cultural resurgence (Adi, 2018). This development took place across two main musical and political periods: in the 1950s, Highlife pioneers used the genre to celebrate and envision independent African nations about to gain self-rule (Collins, 2012). Then, in the 1970s, multi-instrumentalist Fela Kuti developed Afrobeat to promote Pan-Africanism, blending politically charged lyrics with complex West African rhythms to oppose systemic oppression and neo-colonial domination (Olaniyan, 2004; Omojola, 2009).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, music serves a practical purpose and is closely woven into everyday life, rather than merely being a commercial product (Demand Africa, 2018; Wilderness Destinations, 2022). Nigerian music preserves its African roots by staying connected to communal rituals and festivities. People intentionally create it to commemorate weddings, funerals, births, religious festivals, and collective work, strengthening community bonds and social ties. Africanism in Nigerian music is dynamic; it evolves by integrating foreign influences while preserving its African roots (Njaka, 1971; Yusuf, 2024). This glocalisation process combines global trends with local styles. Initially, genres fused West African melodies with European brass bands, calypso, and church hymnals (Collins, 2012). Today, modern artists uphold Africanism by combining the vibrant energy of American hip-hop, R&B, and electronic music with traditional African rhythms and dance moves (Interscholar Studies, 2026; Play Mag, 2025).

To promote Africanism (African culture, identity, and values) amid global cultural eclecticism, Africa must leverage the same mechanisms that drive globalisation: technology,

media, economics, and education. Instead of resisting global integration, the strategy should focus on aggressively exporting African culture while institutionalising it at home. The following are effective ways to foster the dominance of Africanism:

Africans must integrate African history, philosophies (such as Ubuntu), literature, and indigenous knowledge systems into primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In addition, standardise and institutionalise indigenous African languages in administration, business, and tech development to ensure they remain functional, modern modes of communication (Interscholar Studies, 2026). Furthermore, we can invest heavily in local think tanks and universities to document, preserve, and innovate using native African practices rather than relying solely on Western or Eastern frameworks.

African creators must own their distribution channels (such as local streaming platforms or publishing houses), control the narrative, and enforce strict intellectual property laws to prevent exploitation and unauthorised appropriation of music genres (Arewa, 2026; Osiebe, 2024).

Conclusion

This paper reexamined the critical intersection of Africanism and eclecticism within the contemporary Nigerian music industry, offering a timely intervention into ongoing debates about the future of African music. While globalisation has accelerated the infiltration of foreign styles, methods, and cultures, leading to an increasingly eclectic musical landscape, this study demonstrates the enduring tenacity of the African world (Adedeji et al., 2015). By looking beyond superficial patterns of African descent, this research successfully identified the deeply rooted African forms, sonic textures, belief systems, customs, and unique linguistic features that continue to anchor Nigerian music (Waterman, 1990; Onwuengbuna, 2012).

The findings reveal that while cultural eclecticism is an undeniable byproduct of a globalised media ecosystem, Africanism remains

a resilient core rather than a fading relic. The factors shaping Africanism in Nigerian music are complex and deeply contextual, rooted in historical realities and local agency. By theorising the structural relationship between Africanism and eclecticism, this paper argues that blending foreign genres does not inherently dilute local authenticity; instead, it challenges stakeholders to preserve and project indigenous cultural frameworks intentionally.

To counter the overwhelming pressures of globalisation and sustain Africanism's dominance, a deliberate restructuring is required. Musicians, producers, and cultural policymakers must consciously rethink and reintegrate traditional African heritage into contemporary compositions. Ultimately, fostering an environment that prioritises African cultural orientation will ensure the Nigerian music industry does not merely adapt to global trends, but continues to project its authentic African essence to the world.

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