

Decolonising the Rhythm Curriculum: Integrating Global Groove Practices in Undergraduate Aural Skills

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Abstract

This article proposes and theorises a decolonising approach to undergraduate aural skills pedagogy by integrating non-Western ‘global groove’ practices into the rhythm curriculum. It explores how cyclic rhythmic frameworks and groove traditions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America can be meaningfully embedded to develop learners’ timing, listening acuity, and ensemble fluency. Drawing on reflective practitioner inquiry and curriculum design analysis, the article outlines a set of proposed semester-long modules introducing Indian *tāla* cycles, West African polyrhythms, Afro-Latin *clave*, and culturally responsive peer contributions into a first-year ear-training syllabus. These modules were designed to cultivate rhythmic independence, intercultural engagement, and embodied awareness through participatory ensemble work and scaffolded listening strategies. The design is intended to support increases in rhythmic precision, broader metrical perception, and enhanced cultural literacy. This pedagogical model contributes to current debates on decolonising music education by centring global rhythmic epistemologies alongside Western classical traditions and by positioning rhythm as a critical, inclusive foundation for twenty-first-century musicianship.

Keywords: decolonising music education; aural skills; rhythm pedagogy; world music; polyrhythm; groove; intercultural fluency

Word count: 4,358

Introduction

Western art music has long dominated formal music curricula, often to the exclusion or marginalisation of non-Western musical traditions. In many conservatoires and university programmes, classical repertoire and its associated notational systems still form the central axis of music training (Elliott & Silverman, 2014; Schippers 2010). This canon-centric model, though historically rich, limits the epistemological scope of music education by presenting one cultural lens as normative. As scholars have argued, the legacy of colonial education systems has produced what Ewell (2020) calls a ‘white racial frame’, an unexamined focus of Western knowledge systems in music theory and training.

In recent years, music educators have increasingly called for the ‘decolonisation’ of curricula, a rebalancing of music education to include diverse cultural perspectives and to challenge Eurocentric biases (Hess 2015; Smith 2012). Decolonising in this context does not imply discarding the Western canon, but rather expanding it. As Schippers (2010) argues, embracing a wider variety of musical traditions can make music education more inclusive and relevant in a globalised world. Hess (2015) similarly advocates moving beyond tokenistic additions of world music content, instead fundamentally broadening the curriculum’s focus on Western classical music. This phenomenon echoes calls by Paris (2012) and Ladson-Billings (1995) for a culturally sustaining pedagogy, one that supports the identities, traditions, and creative practices of all learners, not just those historically privileged.

In many postcolonial and multicultural contexts, ‘proper’ music training is still equated with European art music. The result is that learners may master Für Elise, yet

know little of their own folk or popular traditions. This disconnect can leave learners technically competent but culturally disengaged from the music they perform. hooks (1994) reminds us that education should be a practice of freedom, not a mechanism for reproducing dominant ideologies. In this light, music education should foster critical engagement, not cultural hierarchy.

In higher education, aural skills (ear-training) classes are a core component of music programmes, but they too often reflect a narrow Western scope (Karpinski 2000; Cleland and Dobrea-Grindahl 2010). Traditional undergraduate curricula typically focus on European tonal melody and harmony and common-practice rhythm (e.g., reading in 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 metre, using Western solfège and rhythmic syllables). While these skills are essential, the exclusive focus on Western metre and rhythm can inadvertently reinforce a hierarchy that positions Western musical concepts as the default ‘neutral’ foundation of musicianship (Belz 2006).

Meanwhile, learners often lack exposure to the rich rhythmic systems and listening practices of non-Western music cultures, from the complex cyclic metres of Indian classical music to the layered polyrhythms of African drumming traditions (Chernoff 1979; Nketia 1974). Incorporating these global perspectives into ear-training has the potential to not only diversify learners’ musical knowledge but also to enhance their overall rhythmic precision, listening depth, and creative flexibility (Montemayor, Coppola, and Mena 2018; van der Schyff 2015).

This article addresses that gap by exploring how global groove practices, defined here as rhythm and groove concepts from diverse musical cultures, can be integrated into an undergraduate aural skills curriculum. Specifically, we focus on rhythmic practices

from South Asia (Indian tāla cycles), sub-Saharan Africa (polyrhythmic ensemble drumming), and the Afro-Latin diaspora (e.g., Cuban clave-based rhythms) as case studies of ‘groove’ frameworks that differ from Western conventions.

By redesigning aural skills modules to include these practices, the goal is to decolonise the rhythm curriculum: decentering Western metre as the sole framework for time and feel, and validating non-Western ways of organising and internalising rhythm. In doing so, we align with Turino’s (2008) vision of music as social participation, not merely technical mastery, and with Campbell’s (2018) call to make music education a site of cultural connection, not division.

The following sections present the pedagogical rationale and design for integrating global groove practices into ear-training. We draw on relevant scholarship in music education, ethnomusicology, and critical pedagogy to frame the benefits of a more inclusive, participatory approach. We then describe example modules incorporating Indian, African, and diasporic rhythmic concepts into a first-year ear-training class, including teaching strategies and sample exercises. The paper presents the pedagogical rationale and projected outcomes of a conceptual curriculum design, highlighting how global rhythmic systems might reshape learners’ approaches to listening and learning. Finally, we consider the implications of this approach for curriculum innovation: how it contributes to ongoing decolonisation efforts, and what challenges and opportunities arise when expanding aural skills training beyond its traditional paradigm.

In higher education, reform calls have been particularly urgent. Sarath, Myers, and Campbell (2017) argue that music studies must be redefined systemically around creativity, diversity, and integration. Coppola, Hebert, and Campbell (2020) highlight the

importance of World Music Pedagogy in higher education, advocating ear-based and participatory approaches beyond static lecture models. Ewell (2023) critiques the “white-male frame” of music theory and emphasises the need for structural change in core musicianship training, including aural skills, to ensure inclusivity and equity.

Context and Rationale

Calls to diversify or decolonise music education have emphasised the importance of moving beyond Eurocentric content and acknowledging multiple musical epistemologies (Hess 2015; Kallio 2020; Smith 2012). Within postcolonial and critical pedagogical discourse, this shift is framed not simply as content expansion but as a structural reimagining of what constitutes valid musical knowledge (Bradley 2012). The calls include recognising oral transmission, improvisation, and embodied practices as equally legitimate forms of knowing (Jorgensen 2003; Green 2008).

In the specific context of aural skills education, this means re-examining what constitutes foundational listening and musicianship. Gary Karpinski's *Aural Skills Acquisition* (2000) codified the scope of typical collegiate ear-training around Western tonal repertoire and rhythms. Most published ear-training textbooks still centre on diatonic melodies, functional harmony, and conducting patterns or syllables for simple and compound Western metres (Cleland and Dobrea-Grindahl 2010; Rogers and Ottman 2019). While these methods build core skills, they leave a substantial gap when it comes to rhythmic systems, melodic structures, and pedagogical logics outside the Euro-American canon. As a result, learners may complete aural skills courses proficient in sight-singing Bach chorales or notating Beethoven rhythms, yet feel unprepared to engage with a West African drum ensemble or an Indian rāga performance that do not conform to those frameworks (Montemayor, Coppola, and Mena 2018; Nissen 2023).

Meanwhile, contemporary research in music education suggests that exposure to non-Western musical systems can deepen cognitive and perceptual skills. Schippers (2010) notes that learning music ‘from a global perspective’ fosters greater cultural understanding and flexibility in learning. Similarly, recent scholarship reflects on the challenges and possibilities that the inclusion of ‘world musics’ brings to education, arguing that learners trained in multiple musical systems may develop heightened listening skills, metrical fluency, and open-mindedness. These claims align with Freire’s (1970) concept of education as dialogic, a site for exchange, not indoctrination. As Campbell (2004) and Anderson and Campbell (2010) have shown, multicultural exposure can sharpen analytical acuity, creative awareness, and musical empathy when framed authentically.

In the specific domain of rhythm pedagogy, there have been some precedents for integrating non-Western concepts. For example, Hoffman, Peltó, and White’s takadimi system, introduced in the 1990s, adapts Indian rhythm syllables (bols) to teach Western rhythmic patterns. Takadimi has learners vocalise rhythms using syllables like *ta-ka-di-mi* for subdivisions, an approach inspired by South Asian pedagogical practice that proved intuitive for Western learners (Hoffman, Peltó, and White 1996). Other examples include Green’s (2008) use of informal learning strategies to foster rhythmic fluency in pop and groove-based contexts, and Belz’s (2006) proposals for direct immersion in diverse traditions. These efforts suggest that cross-cultural borrowing in rhythm pedagogy can be effective when thoughtfully applied. However, most such approaches stop short of teaching non-Western systems on their terms; takadimi, for instance, applies Indian-inspired syllables but within Western metres and notation.

A genuinely decolonising approach would go further by allowing non-Western rhythmic frameworks to stand independently, rather than be used as a bridge to reinforce Western concepts (Vaugeois 2007). Recent studies support this trajectory. Chilvers and Liu (2024), for instance, present a model for incorporating diverse musical content into core conservatory ear-training, demonstrating that learners can successfully engage with unfamiliar musical materials when given proper scaffolding. Mwanga (2025) similarly highlights the need for plural musical realities to be structurally embedded in higher music curricula, not simply as repertoire options, but as epistemic frameworks. These studies collectively reinforce the idea that now is the time to expand rhythm and ear-training pedagogy beyond its conventional confines.

Against this backdrop, the curriculum design proposes integrating global groove practices into aural skills training, both to broaden rhythmic understanding and to answer calls for a more inclusive curriculum. By immersing learners in cyclic, improvisational, and non-Western approaches to rhythm, we aim to cultivate what might be called rhythmic intercultural fluency, the ability to understand, internalise, and perform rhythms across cultural contexts. Small's (1998) notion of *musicking*, that music education is fundamentally about interaction, not just content delivery, and Turino's (2008) framing of groove as participatory, communal, and context-rich, informs this approach.

The intent is not to replace Western foundations, but to augment them. A proposed design would continue to include sight-reading and transcription of Western materials, while also introducing experiences such as clapping *tāla* cycles, singing African timeline patterns, and feeling the pull of *clave*. In this way, learners are encouraged to perceive connections across systems while also valuing each system's unique internal logic. Rather than offering 'world music' as seasoning, this model proposes rhythm as a shared yet culturally differentiated core, a shift in both method and mindset.

Methodology

This inquiry is framed as a reflective practitioner/practice-based curriculum design study (Burnard, 2006; Cain, 2008). As the sole author, I drew on practitioner reflection and relevant scholarship to develop a modular curriculum design for a first-year aural skills course. While the project is bounded like a case study (one course, one cohort), I avoid the formal "case study" label since it did not involve systematic participant interviews or extended narrative data. Instead, the reflective practitioner framing more accurately represents the standpoint, data sources, and design-based scope of the work. This approach resonates with recent work in rhythmic pedagogy, such as Duinker (2023), who argues for experiential and design-focused approaches to rhythm teaching in higher education.

As the sole author, I bring a background in jazz performance, world percussion, and rhythm pedagogy, with teaching and research based in Singapore. My experience in African, Asian, and jazz traditions has shaped the curriculum design analysed here. The proposed model is framed around a first-year compulsory aural skills class of

approximately 15 learners in a contemporary music programme in Southeast Asia, with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds (Southeast Asian, East Asian, European) and musical specialisations. This hypothetical context functions as a design frame, clarifying the standpoint and scope from which the curriculum framework was constructed.

In addition to instructor-designed modules, the proposed curriculum design includes opportunities for learners to contribute rhythmic practices from their own cultural communities (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). For instance, hypothetical examples could include Malay *kompang* or Chinese lion dance pulse patterns. Such peer-led activities are intended to embed culturally sustaining pedagogy by positioning learners as contributors, not only recipients, of diverse material (Paris, 2012).

This article presents a curriculum model that integrates non-Western rhythmic frameworks (Indian *tāla*, West African polyrhythms, Afro-Latin *clave*) into core ear-training. The design is presented conceptually, outlining proposed modules, teaching strategies, and anticipated learning outcomes. The intention is not to report an empirical trial, but to analyse a possible framework for curriculum innovation.

No empirical data were collected. The design analysis is informed by reflective practitioner insights and supported by existing literature on rhythm pedagogy, groove studies, and decolonising music education. For clarity, the curriculum design is organised conceptually around four themes—rhythmic independence, intercultural engagement, embodied groove, and cognitive load—synthesising practitioner rationale with prior scholarship rather than reporting coded qualitative data.

As this is a conceptual curriculum design study, no human-participant data were collected, and IRB approval was not applicable.

The following research question guided the inquiry:

How can global groove practices be meaningfully integrated into undergraduate aural skills curricula to broaden rhythmic understanding and support decolonising aims in music education?

This question is inherently pedagogical and political. It seeks not only to measure outcome (fluency) but also to explore curriculum transformation within a decolonial frame, aligning with Freirean principles of dialogic, student-centred learning (Freire 1970) and Smith's (2012) vision of research that resists imposed hierarchies of knowledge.

In this sense, the methodology reflects what Vaugeois (2007) calls a contested site of practice: a place where dominant frameworks are challenged not just in content, but in the very method by which learners construct meaning. The use of groove-based world music content, taught as core, not supplemental, represents a methodological stance as much as a curricular one. It suggests that decolonisation in music education begins with rhythm: with who defines it, who teaches it, and what forms of knowledge are allowed to count.

Integrating Global Groove Practices in Aural Skills

This section outlines the curriculum design and its projected outcomes; it does not report classroom data.

Indian Tāla Cycles and Western Metre

One cornerstone of the global groove integration is the introduction of Indian tāla (time cycles) in teaching metre and rhythm. In Indian classical music, tāla refers to cyclic rhythmic frameworks that organise beats into repeating patterns; tālas can range from very short cycles to extremely long ones, often with irregular internal divisions (Kippen 1999; Sorrell 2000). For example, the popular North Indian cycle Teentaal consists of 16 beats divided 4–4–4–4, while South Indian systems include structures like Misra Jhomp (10 beats in uneven groupings) or Misra Chapu (7 beats as 3+2+2). Unlike Western time signatures, which typically impose a fixed accent pattern (e.g., a strong downbeat every 3 or 4 beats), Indian tāla has no permanently strong or weak beats; accents are the result of phrasing and specific patterns called the *theka* played by percussion. This conception aligns with Nketia's (1974) argument that non-Western rhythmic thinking often emphasises cyclicity and phrasing logic over symmetrical metre.

In the proposed curriculum model, the concept of tāla would be introduced by mapping cycles onto familiar 4/4 groupings. Such design anticipates that learners might come to perceive cyclical structures differently — for instance, as circular rather than linear (cf. Turino, 2008). Exercises such as clapping and vocalising Teentaal are included to encourage subdivision over longer spans, in line with Green's (2008) emphasis on embodied practice.

This is the *theka* of Teentaal:

‘dha dhin dhin dha/dha dhin dhin dha/dha tin tin ta/ta dhin dhin dha’

In this design, clapping and vocalising the *theka* functions as projected rhythmic training and ear development, reinforcing long-span subdivision. This aligns with informal learning strategies described by Green (2008), where physicalisation aids retention and internalisation. Metaphorically, long cycles can be framed as “roundabouts rather than straight lines,” offering learners a way to reconceptualise phrasing.

To reinforce cross-system awareness, the design includes activities where Western melodies are superimposed on the 16-beat cycle (e.g., singing an 8-bar melody in 4/4 while clapping *Teentaal*). Such tasks are intended to cultivate rhythmic independence and what Stover (2022) calls frictional listening — the ability to perceive beat alignment within overlapping systems.

The curriculum presents *tāla* not as novelty but as a system equal in validity and rigour to Western metre. *Layakari* (rhythmic modulation) and *tihai* (a thrice-repeated cadential phrase resolving on the downbeat) are incorporated as examples of improvisatory rhythmic skill, often neglected in Western training (Schippers, 2010; Cain, 2008; Burnard, 2006). As Small (1998) argues, rhythm is not mere subdivision but musicking — a way of moving, anticipating, and engaging time culturally.

West African Polyrythms and Timeline Grooves

A second major component of the design is the integration of West African polyrhythm, particularly from Ewe and Asante traditions (Pantaleoni, 1972; Locke, 1987). These systems feature a layered approach where multiple independent parts align around a bell timeline, which acts as a structural anchor. This bell rhythm is not always metrically obvious, but it defines the internal groove architecture.

The model incorporates group clapping exercises with West African bell timelines, designed to cultivate internal pulse and awareness of cross-rhythm. These activities are expected to promote groove-based listening and ensemble entrainment, echoing Chernoff's (1979) and Keil & Feld's (1994) descriptions of participatory learning.

One proposed exercise has half the group clap the bell pattern (e.g., 'X.. . X.. . X.. . X.. .'), while the rest layer a cross-rhythm (e.g., 3-against-4). Such activities are anticipated to feel chaotic initially but are intended to develop into entrained groove as learners begin to "feel the interlock," consistent with Keil & Feld's (1994) theory of participatory discrepancies. These group entrainment moments also model Green's (2008) informal peer learning: finding stability through listening to each other rather than relying on a conductor or score.

Designed transfer outcomes include stronger internal pulse and reduced reliance on barline segmentation when learners later encounter Western compound metres (e.g., 12/8 jazz excerpts). As Prögler (1995) observes in jazz analysis, groove mastery often lies in the unwritten feel between quantised notes; African rhythmic logic provides a pathway into that sensibility.

Afro-Latin Clave and Diasporic Feel

To explore diasporic rhythm, the design includes Afro-Latin *clave* patterns, particularly the 3–2 and 2–3 structures that underlie Cuban *son*, *salsa*, and *timba* (Roberts, 1999; Belz, 2006). Learners would be asked to clap both versions and analyse recordings (e.g., Tito Puente, Celia Cruz) to observe how clave orientation drives phrase structure.

Pedagogically, clave connects syncopation to felt pulse. Culturally, it links back to West African content, showing how rhythmic principles travel and evolve under forced

migration. This part of the design reflects the broader curriculum goal: not simply exposing learners to global rhythms, but tracing their cultural flows and transformations (Bradley, 2012; Turino, 2008). Linking Afro-Latin *clave* to African bell patterns is intended to highlight diasporic continuity, while ensemble clapping and layering exercises are projected to strengthen rhythmic independence.

As with *tāla*, the model includes metric layering: for example, clapping *clave* while singing Western melodies or improvising syncopated riffs. These activities are designed to generate tension and projected to build rhythmic fluency across systems.

Student Contributions and Cultural Ownership

The curriculum design also incorporates peer-led sharing. Learners are invited to contribute rhythmic practices from their own cultural backgrounds (e.g., Malay *kompang*, Chinese lion dance), consistent with Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1995). Such peer-led activities are projected to reinforce cultural pride and validate student identities — consistent with Paris’s (2012) concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy. In this way, the classroom can become, as Allsup and Shieh (2012) suggest, a collaborative site of musical dialogue, not merely a space for delivery.

Considerations for Implementation

The integration of global groove practices is presented here as a proposed semester-long curriculum design for a first-year aural skills course in a contemporary music programme. The model assumes a class of approximately 15 learners representing diverse cultural backgrounds and musical specialisations. This conceptual framework is intended to illustrate the potential impact of a decolonised curriculum.

In terms of projected outcomes, the design anticipates heightened engagement during groove-based sessions. Several factors may contribute to this: the novelty of the material, the interactive nature of clapping and singing together, and the cultural resonance of working with Asian or African content. Prior research suggests that when learners see their own cultural practices represented, motivation and belonging are strengthened (Hess, 2015; Paris, 2012). Similarly, embodied, participatory work has been shown to increase attentiveness and retention (Green, 2008; Turino, 2008).

From a skills standpoint, the framework anticipates transfer effects into conventional ear-training tasks. For instance, rhythmic independence cultivated in African or Afro-Latin modules could inform strategies for notating syncopated passages, such as tapping a secondary pulse (Prögler, 1995). In this way, groove-based practice is expected to scaffold learners' rhythmic dictation and analysis in Western contexts, consistent with reports that embodied entrainment improves musical accuracy (Keil & Feld, 1994; Bremmer & Nijs, 2024).

Conceptually, exposure to diverse rhythmic systems is intended to broaden learners' perceptions of rhythm—shifting from a view of rhythm as counting units to understanding it as multidimensional and cyclical. This aligns with literature noting that learners who encounter non-Western systems often reconceptualise rhythmic organisation (Turino, 2008; Duinker, 2023). Such a reframing may enrich how they approach both global and Western musics.

Anticipated challenges include cognitive overload when encountering unfamiliar systems, especially for learners already less secure with pulse. To mitigate this, the design embeds scaffolds such as pairing stronger and developing learners, simplifying

patterns before layering, and revisiting each cultural groove multiple times. These strategies reflect critical pedagogy and differentiated instruction principles (Burnard, 2006; Cain, 2008).

Another potential challenge is avoiding superficial “tourism” or appropriation. To address this, the design incorporates cultural framing alongside technical practice, presenting each tradition in relation to its social and aesthetic context (Bradley, 2012; Hess, 2015). Literature further recommends involving culture-bearers where possible, whether through recordings, virtual visits, or practitioner testimony, to support respectful engagement (Mwanga, 2025). These measures aim to ensure that global groove content is integrated with integrity rather than tokenism.

Although this work is framed as curriculum design rather than classroom observation, the model anticipates the types of challenges instructors may face in practice and suggests possible scaffolds and framing strategies. A fuller reflexive account of teacher decision-making lies beyond the scope of this conceptual paper but represents a direction for future research—particularly to support instructors adapting these approaches in their own settings.

Assessment in this decolonised curriculum design also requires adaptation. Conventional ear-training exams (e.g., dictation, sight-singing) do not easily capture skills like groove or improvisation within cycles. The design therefore incorporates authentic assessments such as short group performances, where learners demonstrate maintaining a *tāla* cycle or improvising in an African-style call-and-response. Grading would emphasise effort and growth rather than perfection, recognising these as new domains of skill. Written exams could also include transcription of non-Western material,

signalling its legitimacy within the knowledge base. This approach aligns with Bernard & Abramo's (2019) argument that authentic, contextualised evidence of musical growth should complement conventional assessment, ensuring that innovative pedagogy can still be validated within accountability frameworks.

Implications and Conclusion

The integration of global groove practices into undergraduate aural skills design offers several key implications for curriculum design, pedagogy, and institutional change. Pedagogically, this conceptual model illustrates how learners may meaningfully engage with rhythmic systems outside the Western canon, even within the constraints of a single semester. Rather than diluting the curriculum, these additions are projected to enrich learners' skill sets, enhancing rhythmic independence, metric fluency, and listening sensitivity. Such anticipated outcomes echo benefits documented by Campbell (2004, 2018), Green (2008), and Montemayor, Coppola, and Mena (2018), all of whom advocate embodied, intercultural learning as a core component of musicianship training.

Significantly, the decolonising value of this work extends beyond technique. By repositioning non-Western grooves as central rather than supplemental, the design conceptually disrupts what Ewell (2020) terms the white racial frame in music education, the implicit notion that Western musical epistemologies are standard while others are exotic, additive, or peripheral. This reframes aural skills as a site of cultural negotiation, not just pitch and rhythm drills, aligning with Vaugeois's (2007) call to treat music education as a 'contested space' where ideological and cultural power must be made visible.

The projected benefits also challenge longstanding assumptions about what constitutes core curriculum in music. Too often, rhythm is presented as mechanical accuracy or notational decoding. However, as Keil and Feld (1994) emphasise, groove is relational, social, and felt. The proposed curriculum design suggests that when learners engage with groove as an interactive and culturally situated concept, they may not only perform more confidently but also listen more deeply. This perspective aligns with Small's (1998) and Turino's (2008) arguments that musical meaning arises through musicking, not just musical structure.

For music institutions considering curriculum change, this design offers a low-barrier entry point. It does not require structural overhaul, but rather a reallocation of time and a shift in pedagogical stance. That said, successful implementation depends on instructor readiness. As Bradley (2012) and Volk (1998) caution, world music integration often fails when handled superficially. Instructors need adequate training, cultural awareness, and ideally, collaboration with tradition-bearers. This highlights a broader need for faculty development: not only in rhythmic fluency, but also in critical pedagogy and intercultural facilitation (Allsup & Shieh, 2012; Jorgensen, 2003).

There are also implications for assessment. Conventional aural skills exams (sight-singing, melodic transcription, harmonic identification) may not adequately capture gains from groove-based learning. This invites rethinking what constitutes valid evidence of rhythmic fluency. As Anderson & Campbell (2010) suggest, evaluation might include performance-based assessments, reflection journals, improvisation tasks, and peer-teaching activities, each offering insight into learners' deeper understanding and adaptability.

More broadly, this curriculum model underscores the potential of student-led contributions. Inviting learners to contribute rhythms from their own traditions (e.g., Malay *kompong*, Filipino *kulintang*, Chinese lion drum patterns) is projected to position them as co-creators of the curriculum. This enacts Paris's (2012) vision of culturally sustaining pedagogy, where learners not only see their heritage in the curriculum but help shape it. Such contributions can cultivate not just rhythmic fluency but cultural confidence and empathy.

On a disciplinary level, rhythm pedagogy emerges here as a central site for decolonising music education (Hess, 2015; Mwanga, 2025; Kallio, 2020). While repertoire diversification has received greater attention, rhythm remains a powerful and under-leveraged portal for challenging normative assumptions, in part because educators often treat it as 'neutral.' Yet, as this design emphasises, rhythm encodes worldview, community values, and aesthetic logic. To teach groove is to teach politics — of time, of space, of identity (hooks, 1994; Stover, 2022).

Institutions looking to decolonise their aural skills training might begin modestly: introducing a *tāla* module, a clave exercise, or an African groove analysis. Even these small interventions can spark dialogue, deepen musicianship, and shift narratives. From there, programmes can scale incrementally: developing semester-length modules, partnering with tradition-bearers, and restructuring assessment frameworks to reflect a broader view of fluency.

In conclusion, the curriculum design indicates that integrating global groove practices can broaden rhythmic understanding, support cultural inclusivity, and enrich core aural skills outcomes. While conceptual in nature, this model offers a low-barrier

approach for institutions seeking to embed rhythm and groove as central components of decolonised aural skills pedagogy.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

No new data were created or analysed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

AI Assistance

The author used OpenAI's GPT-5 Pro for language editing and formatting assistance only.

All ideas, analysis, and conclusions are the author's own, and the author takes full responsibility for the content.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Summary of Integrated Aural Skills Module with Global Groove Practices

Module Topic	Key Activities & Concepts	Western Outcomes	Global Music Outcomes
Indian <i>Tāla</i>	Teentaal clapping, reciting bols, aligning melody with cycle	Subdivision across long metric spans	Internalising cyclic metre; layakari, tihai
West African Polyrhythm	Timeline claps, interlocking parts, call-and-response clapping	Polyphonic listening, rhythmic independence	Embodied groove, non-metric pulse
Afro-Latin Clave	3–2/2–3 clave claps, son track analysis, clave identification	Syncopation fluency, metre feel	Diasporic connection, Afrocentric rhythm culture
Student Mini-Presentations	Peer-teaching of cultural rhythms (e.g. <i>kompang</i> , <i>lion dance</i>)	Adaptive listening, cross-cultural awareness	Cultural validation, collaborative learning