The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Nigerian Theatre: An Exploration of Stage Directors' Experiences in Creative Production

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Abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to shape various facets of creative industries globally, its integration into theatre production raises important questions about authorship, aesthetics, and the future of performance. This study explores the experiences of Nigerian stage directors in incorporating AI tools into the creative process of theatre production. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected directors actively engaged in contemporary stage practice across Nigeria. The study investigates the nature of AI tools utilized, ranging from script generation and lighting design software to digital stage management systems, and examines directors' perceptions of their impact on storytelling, rehearsal efficiency, and cultural expression. Findings reveal a mix of curiosity, cautious optimism, and ethical concern among directors. While many acknowledge AI's potential to enhance production value and streamline creative tasks, others express reservations about the loss of human nuance and the erosion of indigenous performance traditions. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on AI in the humanities by offering culturally grounded insights into how theatre professionals in a postcolonial African context negotiate innovation and tradition. This research underscores the need for a contextualized framework for AI adoption in Nigerian theatre that preserves artistic integrity while embracing technological advancement.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Nigerian Theatre, Stage Directors, Creative Production, Performance Technology

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Introduction

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in creative industries is reshaping how artistic content is conceptualized, produced, and distributed. From music and film to digital art, AI-driven tools have begun to alter traditional creative processes, prompting redefinitions of authorship, aesthetics, and audience engagement (Ma & Yu, 2025; Hemraj, 2025). Theatre, a historically human-centered art form, is not exempt from these technological shifts. In the global North, AI applications in theatre include automated lighting systems, scriptwriting algorithms, and real-time interactive performances (Horváth, 2025). However, in postcolonial contexts such as Nigeria, the relationship between theatre and technology is complicated by issues of cultural authenticity, infrastructural limitations, and the legacy of oral and indigenous performance traditions (Amonyeze, Agbo, & Adeola, 2023).

As Nigerian theatre navigates a landscape increasingly influenced by digital technologies, the adoption of AI tools by stage directors raises pertinent questions: Can AI preserve the performative soul of indigenous storytelling? Does the introduction of algorithmic creativity support or undermine human interpretation in live theatre? Understanding the experiences and perspectives of Nigerian stage directors in this technological transition is essential to inform both policy and practice within Africa's evolving creative ecosystem.

While global literature on AI and performance is expanding, there remains a significant research gap concerning its application in African theatrical contexts. Specifically, few empirical studies address how Nigerian theatre practitioners, particularly stage directors, engage with AI in the creative process. This lack of context-sensitive scholarship limits our understanding of the implications of AI for performance culture, artistic identity, and the future of theatre practice in Nigeria. Without such insight, efforts to adopt or regulate AI within the Nigerian creative sector risk being disconnected from the lived realities of practitioners.

This study seeks to explore the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools within Nigerian theatre, focusing specifically on the perspectives of stage directors. At its core, the research aims to uncover how these technologies are influencing theatrical practice in Nigeria, beginning with an identification of the types of AI currently employed in stage productions. From there, the inquiry extends to how such tools are shaping both the creative and managerial dimensions of a director's work, including their decision-making, collaboration, and overall artistic direction.

Flowing naturally from this is an examination of how directors perceive AI's influence on cultural expression and performance authenticity. This aspect is particularly significant in the Nigerian context, where theatre often serves as a vessel for preserving and communicating indigenous values and narratives. The study also probes the ethical and practical challenges that arise as directors attempt to adopt and adapt AI within a performance tradition deeply rooted in communal storytelling and cultural specificity.

In doing so, the research contributes to the sparse academic discourse on AI in African performing arts. It offers not only a scholarly foundation for future exploration but also practical insights for theatre practitioners and policymakers. These insights are aimed at helping stakeholders integrate AI into theatrical practice in ways that support innovation without undermining local artistic values or cultural identities. More broadly, the study engages with larger theoretical questions surrounding the coexistence of tradition and technology in postcolonial performance environments, especially within nations where cultural heritage remains a vital part of everyday life.

The scope of the study is deliberately focused on stage directors currently involved in contemporary Nigerian theatre. It centres on their engagement with AI tools used in areas such as scripting, design, and stage management. While these insights are rich and context-specific, the research does not extend to AI applications in other art forms such as film or music, nor does it attempt to generalise findings to contexts beyond Nigeria. This delimitation ensures a concentrated exploration of AI's evolving role in Nigerian theatre.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has increasingly permeated the creative industries, transforming how art, music, film, and literature are conceptualized and produced. The capacity of AI to perform tasks previously reserved for human creativity has redefined authorship and artistic agency (Ma & Yu, 2025, 2025). For instance, tools such as Creative Adversarial Networks (CANs) and GPT-based models have been used to generate poetry, visual art, and musical compositions with levels of sophistication that challenge traditional definitions of creativity (Yenduri et al., 2024; Horváth, 2025). As Gervás (2021) argues, creativity can be computationally modeled, albeit within the framework of defined stylistic or rule-based systems. This evolution raises philosophical and practical questions about the role of the human creator in an increasingly automated world.

Moreover, scholars such as Wu et al. (2021) suggest that AI expands, rather than replaces, human creativity, functioning as a collaborator that supports artists in generating novel ideas and streamlining labor-intensive processes. However, critics warn of a potential homogenization of aesthetics and a diminished role for intuition and emotional nuance, particularly in contexts where cultural specificity and historical continuity are central to artistic expression (Baradaran, 2024).

The adoption of AI in performance arts remains relatively nascent compared to its use in static or digital media, yet it is a rapidly growing area of exploration. In Western contexts, AI has been employed to develop intelligent lighting systems, responsive soundscapes, generative scripts, and even robotic performers (Hsieh & Kao, 2025). Interactive theatre projects have incorporated AI to personalize audience experiences through real-time data processing, allowing for non-linear narratives and immersive dramaturgy (Horváth, 2025).

The intersection of technology and African performance traditions introduces a unique set of challenges and opportunities. African theatre, particularly in Nigeria has long been rooted in oral traditions, communal participation, and ritualistic expression (Abe, 2024; Ene, 2021). Historically, technology was viewed with skepticism, often associated with Westernization and cultural erosion. However, recent studies demonstrate that African artists and scholars are increasingly embracing digital tools in ways that reflect indigenous epistemologies and aesthetics (Asiedu et al., 2024; Schoon et al., 2020).Digital theatre practices expanded in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic, where online platforms were used to sustain performance amid restrictions on live gatherings (Ojoniyi, 2023). These developments have accelerated conversations about the relevance and applicability of performance technology within Nigerian theatre practice. Yet, scholarly work on AI-specific applications remains limited, particularly with respect to directing practices and ethical considerations surrounding automation, representation, and authenticity.

As Ndasauka (2024) argues, there is a pressing need to develop "Afrocentric technocultures" that embed African values, languages, and performance codes into the use of digital tools. Without such a framework, the integration of AI risks perpetuating technological colonialism by imposing Eurocentric standards of artistic production onto African creative landscapes.Directors in Nigerian theatre serve as both artistic visionaries and production managers, mediating between actors, designers, and audiences. Their role is especially critical in aligning dramatic content with cultural context and community expectations. While there is a growing body of work on digital scenography, sound engineering, and multimedia performance in Nigeria (Nwadigwe, 2024; Olatunji & Oki, 2024), little is known about how directors are engaging AI tools in these processes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some directors use AI-assisted lighting software, automated stage cues, or even AI-generated dialogue as preliminary drafts (Hsieh & Kao, 2025), but no systematic study has captured their lived experiences, motivations, or reservations.

While existing literature has explored the use of AI in various creative fields and touched on its emerging role in global performance arts, including some developments within Nigerian digital theatre, a significant gap remains in understanding the specific experiences of stage directors in Nigeria. Despite the recognition of directors as central figures in shaping the aesthetic, cultural, and logistical dimensions of theatre, little empirical research has examined how they navigate the integration of AI tools in their creative and managerial processes. This study addresses that gap by providing a focused exploration of Nigerian stage directors' interactions with AI, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on Afrocentric approaches to technology in performance and offering grounded insights into the ethical, cultural, and practical implications of AI in Nigerian theatre production.

Methodology

This study adopted a **qualitative research design**, which is most appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena that involve human experiences, perceptions, and interactions (Leavy,

2020). Given that the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Nigerian theatre is both emergent and context-sensitive, a qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of stage directors as they engage with new technological tools in their creative practice.

A **phenomenological approach** underpinned this study, focusing on capturing and interpreting the lived experiences of Nigerian stage directors who have integrated or interacted with AI in the course of their theatre productions. Phenomenology allows researchers to identify patterns of meaning across individual accounts, particularly useful for understanding how AI is shaping the artistic, managerial, and cultural dimensions of theatre direction (Van Manen, 2023).

The target population consisted of professional stage directors actively involved in contemporary Nigerian theatre. A **purposive sampling technique** was used to select participants based on their relevance to the research objectives, specifically, directors who have had direct or indirect interaction with AI tools in their production processes. A total of **twelve (12)** stage directors were selected across different regions of Nigeria, representing a diversity of theatre traditions, production scales, and professional backgrounds. The selection also considered gender, experience level, and affiliation with either independent or institutional theatre bodies.

Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews**, allowing for flexibility in probing specific experiences while maintaining consistency across participants.

The interview guide covered thematic areas such as:

- Types of AI tools used in their creative process;
- Perceived advantages and challenges of using AI;
- The effect of AI on cultural and artistic expression;
- Ethical concerns and decision-making processes related to AI use.

The data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved familiarization with the data, coding of significant statements, identification of patterns, and clustering these into overarching themes. This inductive method allowed themes to emerge organically from the participants' narratives rather than being imposed a priori.

Although the study offers valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of AI in Nigerian theatre, it is limited by its relatively small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. The findings may not be generalizable to all Nigerian theatre directors, especially those not yet exposed to AI. Additionally, some directors may have under- or over-reported their engagement with AI due to unfamiliarity with specific terminologies or tools.

Findings And Discussion

The analysis is organized into **five major themes** that emerged from the interviews: (1) AI Tool Utilization and Accessibility; (2) Perceived Benefits of AI in Theatre Production; (3) Concerns over Artistic Authenticity and Cultural Displacement; (4) Ethical and Professional Ambiguities; and (5) Readiness and Capacity for AI Integration. These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and the socio-cultural context of Nigerian theatre.

1. AI Tool Utilization and Accessibility

All twelve participants in this study acknowledged using, testing, or being exposed to some form of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool within their theatre production process. However, the nature and intensity of this usage revealed significant variation based on access, awareness, and the type of production contexts in which each director operated. Generally, most participants interacted with **entry-level or commercially accessible AI applications**, while only a minority reported knowledge of or experimentation with advanced AI-driven performance systems.

Among the tools most frequently cited were **AI-assisted lighting control systems**, which automate the sequencing and programming of lighting cues based on script data and predefined settings. Several directors also referenced the use of **automated cue schedulers** and **digital rehearsal planning tools**, which helped in coordinating complex rehearsal timetables, managing actor availability, and organizing production calendars. Additionally, a growing number of directors admitted to employing **AI-powered text generators,** notably ChatGPT and similar platforms for tasks such as rewriting scenes, suggesting dialogue alternatives, or creating promotional content like synopses, actor bios, or poster taglines.

> Most of us are only scratching the surface. I use AI mostly to format scripts, plan my lighting cues, and sometimes generate promotional material. I haven't seen anyone here use AI for real-time stage design or actor interaction – *Participant 4*

This quote captures a prevailing sentiment among directors: that while AI tools are beginning to infiltrate certain production layers, their use is largely confined to **logistical, administrative, and text-based tasks**, rather than artistic or interpretive ones. In essence, AI functions as a **backstage assistant**, rather than a dramaturgical partner.

Importantly, **more advanced AI applications**, such as **generative scenography**, **real-time actor-AI interaction systems**, **motion tracking**, and **algorithmic stage choreography**, were notably absent in participants' reports. Not a single director indicated experience with such systems, though a few were aware of their existence in international contexts. When asked why these tools had not been adopted, participants consistently cited three major barriers: **infrastructural limitations**, **cost of software and hardware**, and **lack of specialized training**.

> I once saw a YouTube video where a director used motion sensors and AI to manipulate light and sound dynamically as actors moved. That was inspiring, but I don't know where to even start learning that here, or how to afford the setup – *Participant 7*

These responses echo the observations of Iyorza and Ashaver (2025), who documented that much of Nigerian theatre's digital engagement is **surface-level and experimental**, with full-scale technological integration hampered by under-resourced institutions, low digital literacy among practitioners, and poor funding for the arts. This disparity reinforces what Renard and Zanella (2024) terms a **"creative digital divide"**—a gap not just in access to technology but in the ability to **meaningfully innovate within local cultural contexts** using those technologies.

A broader implication here is the **asymmetry between the creative potential of AI and its practical realization** in Nigeria. Whereas in technologically advanced theatre ecosystems, directors are already experimenting with AI-generated scripts, holographic actors, and machine learning-driven audience feedback systems (Ma & Yu, 2025; Ene, 2021), their Nigerian counterparts remain largely constrained to using AI as an **organizational or utility tool**.

Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the study revealed a **strong undercurrent of curiosity and ambition** among participants. Several directors expressed a desire to learn more, experiment with AI in more meaningful ways, and push the boundaries of what Nigerian theatre can achieve with digital tools especially if given proper training, institutional support, and affordable access.

> What I'm doing now with AI is minor. But I see the potential. If we get workshops, access to better tools, and funding, we could do things that are globally competitive while still preserving our style – *Participant 10*

This emergent optimism resonates with Lee (2022), who emphasize that AI's future in the creative industries lies not in **replacing human artistry**, but in **empowering human creators** to explore new domains of meaning-making through **co-creation**. In the Nigerian context, this means that with the right infrastructural and educational interventions, directors can evolve from peripheral users to **active shapers of AI-driven performance practice**.

2. Perceived Benefits of AI in Theatre Production

A major theme that emerged from the interviews was the recognition of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a valuable asset in improving **efficiency, organization, and operational fluidity** within theatre production. Many stage directors described their experiences with AI as "liberating" in the sense that it helped automate or streamline routine and time-consuming aspects of production particularly in scheduling, technical coordination, and administrative planning.

Directors commonly reported using AI tools for **rehearsal planning**, where the software could process complex calendars, actor availabilities, and scene breakdowns to generate optimal rehearsal schedules. In productions with large casts and limited rehearsal time, typical of many Nigerian ensemble theatres, such functionality was seen as transformative. In some instances, directors were able to reassign blocking or actor pairings in real-time, thanks to AI suggestions that incorporated changes in availability, delays, or even weather forecasts (for outdoor performances).

> Using AI to schedule rehearsals saved me time. It even suggested alternative actor pairings when one person dropped out, which helped me stay on track – *Participant 9*

Additionally, several participants cited **script formatting and version control** as areas where AI provided significant support. These tools helped generate clearly marked scenes, highlighted edits, and allowed multiple collaborators to work on a script simultaneously. AI-supported platforms were also used to generate automatic summaries or scene overviews, which directors found helpful when preparing cues for lighting or sound.

These uses align with the notion of AI as a **creative enabler**, not a replacement for human intuition and vision (Lee, 2022). By delegating mundane and repetitive tasks to AI, directors were able to focus more on the artistic and interpretive elements of their productions. In this sense, AI functioned as what one participant called a "silent assistant," a non-intrusive presence that supported rather than disrupted the creative workflow.

The benefits extended into **technical execution** as well. AI-supported lighting design software was used to automate and simulate light plots before stage setup, helping directors visualize the mood and spatial texture of a scene. In smaller productions, some directors relied on AI to pre-program sound cues, reducing the need for additional technical staff. For directors often burdened by limited crew sizes, these features offered practical relief.

> I programmed all the sound transitions using AI software. It even analyzed the rhythm of the scenes and suggested fade-ins and dramatic accents. I still made the final choices, but it gave me a great starting point – *Participant 11*

Interestingly, a few participants extended AI usage into **early-stage dramaturgical exploration**, particularly during script development. Some used AI to generate **alternate dialogue versions**, scene transitions, or character monologues. Although they rarely used these outputs directly in performance, directors described them as **creative prompts** that triggered new lines of thought or dramatic experimentation.

This application reflects what Meng et al. (2025) describe as AI's role as a **collaborative interlocutor which is** a system that engages with the human creator in a dialogic manner, offering suggestions rather than dictating outcomes. Such interactions, according to participants, helped **overcome creative blocks**, offered unexpected interpretations, and sometimes revealed narrative possibilities not previously considered.

However, it is important to note that the **use of AI in core creative functions** such as final scriptwriting, character development, or dramaturgical structuring, remained **tentative and cautious**. Only three directors reported using AI-generated text in actual performance scripts, and even then, the material was extensively revised and localized to suit Nigerian linguistic and cultural idioms.

> The AI gave me a version of a dialogue that was okay structurally but tone-deaf culturally. I had to rework the language completely. It's a helpful draft partner, not a final writer – *Participant 2*

This reflects a broader skepticism among directors toward the **cultural limitations of AI-generated content**, which is often trained on non-African, Western-centric datasets. While the structural logic of a scene may be algorithmically sound, the **emotional cadence, metaphorical richness, and cultural resonance** of the dialogue still requires human input rooted in context-specific knowledge. This cautious engagement demonstrates a healthy balance between innovation and tradition, where AI is integrated as a tool rather than a surrogate for artistic discernment.

In a Nigerian context where productions often face **tight budgets, limited rehearsal windows, and skeletal technical crews,** the practical efficiencies introduced by AI were generally welcomed. Many directors suggested that even a basic level of AI support could **dramatically improve production quality**, reduce stress, and allow for more time to be allocated to blocking, interpretation, and actor coaching.

Nevertheless, this reliance on AI for logistical tasks also raised subtle questions about **dependency and skill erosion**. A few directors expressed concern that over-reliance on AI for scheduling or lighting might lead younger practitioners to lose foundational skills in manual stagecraft and production management. This tension echoes debates in broader creative fields where the line between **augmentation and automation** is constantly negotiated (Ashaver, 2025).

3. Concerns over Artistic Authenticity and Cultural Displacement

While many directors acknowledged the utility of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in simplifying certain aspects of theatre production, a significant number expressed **deep concern about the potential erosion of cultural integrity** through its uncritical adoption. This concern centered not merely on

the technical limitations of AI but on its **inability to grasp, reproduce, or respect the cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic depth** that underpins African, especially Nigerian performance traditions.

> "There is a soul in Yoruba performance that I can't imagine an algorithm recreating. The cadence, the pauses, the spirit of the gods... it's not something AI can feel or reflect." *Participant 2*

This perspective underscores the **intangible and embodied knowledge systems** that form the core of indigenous theatre practice in Nigeria. Unlike many Western dramatic forms that prioritize text and representation, African theatre often operates through **ritual, orality, communal improvisation, symbolic gesture, and spiritual invocation** (Abe, 2024; Ene, 2021). The sacred and performative dimensions are intertwined in a way that resists reduction into algorithmic rules or syntactic prediction.

Many directors noted that AI-generated content particularly script suggestions or narrative structures, tended to default Western dramaturgical logic, linear plots, and dialogic patterns that felt alien or inadequate for conveying the **polyphonic, layered, and performative nature of African storytelling**. This concern reflects what Norton (2017) refers to as **technological colonialism,** a phenomenon where imported digital tools, developed and trained in Euro-American contexts, impose foreign logics onto indigenous cultures under the guise of innovation.

> I tried using AI to generate a folk-style play, but it kept giving me things that sounded like Shakespeare or American television. There's no rhythm of our own people in it – *Participant 5*

The worry here is not just aesthetic but existential. For many directors, the heart of Nigerian theatre lies in its ability to **channel collective memory, spiritual lineage, and cultural resilience**. These elements are encoded not merely in words but in tone, movement, costume, silence, and rhythm, all of which are culturally specific and deeply affective. The directors questioned whether AI, which currently lacks **cultural contextualization or emotional intuition** can genuinely engage such elements without flattening or distorting them.

This anxiety was particularly acute in discussions about **younger, digital-native theatre practitioners**, who may be more inclined to rely on AI-generated content without the requisite grounding in traditional performance aesthetics. As one participant warned:

> If we keep feeding students with AI scripts that don't reflect their roots, we'll raise a generation that thinks theatre is about speed and structure, not about spirit and story – *Participant 6*

This apprehension reflects Langmia's (2016) argument for **Afrocentric technocultures,** the urgent need to build digital systems and creative algorithms trained on African data, languages,

aesthetics, and ethics. Without this localized grounding, AI could reinforce a form of **creative dependency**, where African artists continue to consume tools and ideas shaped by others, rather than contribute to or control their own digital futures.

Furthermore, participants emphasized that **performance in African traditions is often an act of communion**, not mere communication. It involves metaphysical elements like invocations, ancestral presence, spiritual possession, that cannot be "learned" or simulated by AI. This limitation was seen as a fundamental boundary between the **embodied, experiential reality of African theatre and the cognitive, pattern-based outputs of machine learning systems**.

Yet, this critique does not suggest a wholesale rejection of AI. Rather, the participants called for a **conscious, culturally anchored approach** to its integration. They advocated for AI tools to be re-imagined and trained with African performance data, local languages, symbolic codes, and traditional dramaturgical patterns. Only then could AI be seen not as an intruder, but as a collaborator capable of **participating in African creative ecosystems** without undermining them.

> If the tools are developed here, by people who understand our ways of seeing and telling, maybe then we'll have AI that dances to our rhythm, not against it – *Participant 10*

The implications of these concerns are significant. If not addressed, the growing popularity of AI could contribute to a **progressive marginalization of indigenous performance idioms**, especially in urban and commercial settings where speed, efficiency, and spectacle are increasingly prioritized. This could result in a homogenized theatre landscape, where local voices are muted under the dominance of globally trained digital systems.

4. Ethical and Professional Ambiguities

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into theatre production, while offering practical and creative benefits, has also ushered in a host of **ethical and professional uncertainties** that are not yet resolved within the Nigerian theatre landscape. A recurrent concern among participants was the question of **authorship and intellectual ownership** when AI contributes to the development of dramatic content or production design. In several interviews, directors expressed confusion over the extent to which AI-generated outputs such as monologues, scene directions, or promotional texts, could be rightfully claimed as their own intellectual property.

> If I use AI to write a monologue and it turns out brilliant, who owns it? Me? The machine? The developers? This is a grey area – *Participant 6*

This dilemma mirrors global debates around the **legal status of AI-generated works**, particularly within creative industries. As Mahala and Chauhan (2025) notes, current copyright regimes both

in the Global North and South, largely rest on human authorship and intentionality, leaving AI-assisted or fully AI-generated works in a **juridical limbo**. In Nigeria, where intellectual property (IP) laws are inconsistently enforced and rarely updated to reflect digital realities (Olubiyi et al., 2022), these questions become even more fraught. For theatre directors, this ambiguity is more than theoretical; it affects practical matters such as **credit attribution, contract negotiations, festival submissions, and revenue sharing**.

Moreover, participants voiced concern about **plagiarism and data privacy**. Since AI systems often generate outputs based on patterns learned from massive online datasets including copyrighted or proprietary materials, some directors worried that unknowingly incorporating AI-generated content into a script or design might expose them to **legal risks**. The opacity of how AI models are trained and what sources they draw from compounds this anxiety.

Another key ethical issue raised by directors was the potential for **labor displacement**. While none of the participants reported actual layoffs or role eliminations due to AI, several expressed concern that AI could **gradually erode professional roles**, particularly in areas such as **lighting design, sound programming, dramaturgy, and script editing**. Directors working in commercial or fast-paced environments feared that producers might opt for AI-generated services to cut costs and time, thereby **marginalizing human collaborators** who bring not only technical skill but artistic sensibility.

> If AI can do basic design, producers might stop hiring real designers especially when they're trying to save money. That's a threat we need to watch closely - *Participant 8*

These concerns resonate with similar warnings in the wider arts and media sectors, where AI adoption is seen as both **technological progress and potential economic disruption** (Manimalathi et al., 2024). In the Nigerian context where job security in the creative industries is already precarious, such a shift could deepen existing vulnerabilities, especially among early-career practitioners and freelance creative.

However, it is important to note that the directors' perspectives on AI were not entirely oppositional. Several participants recognized the **empowering potential** of AI to democratize access to production tools, especially for underfunded or grassroots theatre initiatives. AI tools that automate lighting plans, generate promo materials, or provide script suggestions were seen as **equalizers**, giving lesser-resourced companies a means to produce at a more competitive level without needing large teams or expensive consultants.

> Before now, I had to beg a graphic designer for every poster or programme. Now I can use AI tools to do basic designs myself. That's freedom for small directors like me – *Participant 12*

This duality of AI as both **threat and opportunity,** highlights the **ambivalence that typically accompanies technological transition** in the arts. On one hand, AI challenges traditional hierarchies and workflows; on the other, it opens new creative pathways and reduces production bottlenecks. The tension lies in **who controls these tools**, **how ethically they are deployed**, and **what value systems guide their use** in a culturally rich and economically unequal context like Nigeria.

Another subtle ambiguity that emerged was around **professional identity and artistic legitimacy**. Directors who used AI in their creative process occasionally reported feelings of **insecurity or imposter syndrome**, questioning whether they were still "real" artists if parts of their work had been machine-assisted. This reflects a deeper philosophical concern: whether **artistic authorship** is tied to the **act of creation itself** or to the **curatorial and interpretive process** that often follows.

> Sometimes I feel like I'm cheating when I let AI help me generate ideas. But then I remember that I'm still the one choosing, shaping, rejecting, directing. Maybe that's what art is – *Participant 3*

Such reflections suggest that the ethical questions raised by AI are not only legal or economic but **existential**, challenging artists to reconsider long-held notions of originality, intuition, and authorship. These debates are especially relevant in performance arts, where **collaboration and fluidity** are already core to the creative process. Unlike novelists or painters, stage directors often co-create with actors, and designers, so introducing AI as another "collaborator" may not be entirely alien. What matters, then, is the **transparency of that collaboration** and the **cultural sensitivity of the technology involved**.

5. Readiness and Capacity for AI Integration

Despite the growing awareness and tentative experimentation with Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools among Nigerian stage directors, the study revealed a **substantial readiness gap** in terms of infrastructural capacity, institutional support, and formal training for AI integration within the country's theatre ecosystem. While individual directors demonstrated curiosity and adaptability, the absence of **systemic frameworks and strategic investment** has left most practitioners to navigate this emerging technological landscape **without guidance, structure, or support**.

Participants consistently reported that their engagement with AI was largely **self-initiated**, driven by necessity and informal learning rather than through institutional scaffolding. Directors described their knowledge acquisition as haphazard by relying on **trial and error, peer collaboration, YouTube tutorials, and free online tools** to experiment with AI in limited ways.

> Everything I know, I learned through YouTube and trial and error. There is no training or workshop that teaches directors how to use these tools in Nigerian theatre – *Participant 1*

This reality underscores a critical **capacity deficit,** not of interest or willingness, but of access, mentorship, and policy-level attention. The findings align with the broader concerns raised by Ogbonna (2023) and Adeyemi (2022), who have documented the systemic underfunding of technological infrastructure in the Nigerian creative sector, especially within non-commercial arts like live theatre. These constraints have resulted in **digital exclusion** for many artists who lack the technical fluency or economic capital to engage with cutting-edge tools, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities within the arts community.

Of particular concern is the complete **absence of AI-focused curricula, workshops, or institutional programming** within the theatre departments of major Nigerian universities or training centers. Not a single director in this study reported receiving formal instruction on AI applications in performance, nor were they aware of any ongoing initiatives to integrate AI training into professional development offerings for theatre practitioners.

This institutional void has cascading effects. It creates a situation where AI integration is uneven and fragmented, driven by the resourcefulness of individuals rather than a **coherent strategy for digital transformation**. Also, it leaves artists vulnerable to **legal and ethical missteps**, as many lack a grounded understanding of intellectual property rights, data ethics, and cultural adaptation principles relevant to AI. Then, it stifles innovation by limiting cross-disciplinary collaboration between theatre professionals and technologists.

The implications of this capacity gap are profound. Without intentional interventions, the benefits of AI integration in theatre may accrue only to a **small, urban, tech-savvy elite**, while the majority of practitioners remain excluded from the digital turn. This would exacerbate existing disparities in opportunity, exposure, and artistic development, leading to a **two-tiered theatre ecosystem**: one technologically empowered and internationally competitive, the other digitally disenfranchised and locally constrained.

Nonetheless, despite these systemic challenges, the study uncovered a strong **current of optimism and determination** among directors. Several participants expressed hope that with proper investment, policy reform, and culturally relevant programming, AI could be integrated in a way that **enhances rather than threatens** the ethos of Nigerian theatre. The call was not merely for funding but for **intentional, localized, and ethically grounded initiatives** that prioritize indigenous values and practices.

> AI can help us, not hurt us, but only if it's developed with our stories and our people in mind. It must reflect us, not erase us – *Participant 10*

This view is echoed in scholarship advocating for **African-centered approaches to digital arts development**, where technologies are not simply imported but **co-developed with local artists, communities, and traditions** (Akiwa et al., 2021; Byard, 2012). Such frameworks would require collaborative engagement between **government agencies, universities, NGOs, digital developers, and creative professionals** to build the infrastructure for inclusive AI literacy and application.

Moreover, the readiness question must also be viewed in light of **policy silence**. Unlike sectors such as fintech or health tech, where national policy documents now include digital innovation strategies, the Nigerian cultural and creative industries continue to lack **a coordinated digital development roadmap**. Until such policies are developed and enforced, complete with budget allocations, incentives, and institutional partnerships, the integration of AI in theatre will likely remain **ad hoc, inequitable, and unsustainable**.

Conclusion And Recommendations

This study examined how stage directors in Nigeria are engaging with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their creative and production processes, offering insight into the evolving relationship between tradition and technology in the country's theatre landscape. Through directors' lived experiences, the research revealed that while AI is beginning to make its mark by simplifying logistical and technical aspects of theatre-making, its presence is met with both cautious optimism and deeply rooted apprehension.

Directors reported practical uses of AI in areas such as rehearsal coordination, lighting control, and promotional design, which have contributed to greater efficiency and reduced workload. In many cases, AI acted as a silent partner, supporting routine tasks and allowing directors to concentrate more fully on artistic vision. Yet, this pragmatic engagement with AI is often accompanied by critical concerns. Many directors expressed unease over the technology's lack of sensitivity to the emotional and symbolic depth of African performance traditions. Fears of cultural erosion, aesthetic standardisation, and the dilution of communal storytelling traditions were prominent, pointing to a need for more careful and culturally anchored integration of these tools.

Equally concerning is the institutional vacuum within which this integration is occurring. Most directors adopt AI on their own initiative, relying on informal learning due to the absence of structured training, professional development opportunities, or policy direction. This lack of support not only limits the reach and sustainability of innovation but also deepens existing disparities within the theatre community, particularly between well-resourced urban practitioners and those in underserved regions.

In light of these findings, it is evident that a more intentional and inclusive approach to AI integration is required. Efforts should begin with a reform of theatre education to include AI-

responsive curricula that address both technical skill and critical literacy. This would empower emerging artists to engage with digital tools creatively and reflectively. Simultaneously, cultural policymakers, legal experts, and theatre professionals must collaborate to establish ethical frameworks that safeguard intellectual property, cultural sensitivity, and equitable access.

Funding structures must also evolve to support experimentation and innovation, particularly through grants or fellowships aimed at tech-integrated theatre projects. These initiatives should prioritise accessibility across geographical and economic divides. Beyond funding, platforms for cross-disciplinary collaboration between artists, technologists, and researchers are crucial in developing AI tools that are not only functional but also culturally adaptive and aligned with Nigerian storytelling traditions.

Promoting Afrocentric AI development is essential to ensure that the technology reflects local languages, aesthetics, and dramaturgical logic. This requires deliberate investment in culturally specific datasets and algorithmic training models that can engage with Nigerian theatre on its own terms. Equally important is the need for continuous, inclusive dialogue across academic, artistic, and public spheres. These conversations must critically examine the ethical implications of AI and ensure that technological change does not displace the reflective and communal spirit of African performance.

Finally, capacity-building initiatives such as workshops, master classes, and mentorship schemes should be rolled out by national and regional arts bodies. These programmes can bridge the gap between interest and application, allowing theatre practitioners at all levels to explore AI with confidence and cultural clarity. Together, these measures offer a roadmap for integrating AI into Nigerian theatre in ways that preserve its integrity, amplify its reach, and celebrate its rich cultural heritage.

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