

## EMPOWERING NIGERIAN THEATRE EDUCATORS: TEACHER TRAINING AND DIGITAL LITERACY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

**Bunu Humatwude Awintu**

College of Education, Gindiri, Department of Theatre Arts

### **Abstract**

*Theatre arts education in Nigeria stands at a critical crossroads where tradition must meet innovation. As artificial intelligence and digital technologies rapidly reshape the creative industries, Nigerian theatre educators face the urgent task of adapting their teaching practices to meet contemporary demands. Yet, a significant gap remains in digital literacy and technological readiness among many instructors, particularly in public institutions where outdated curricula, limited access to resources, and inadequate training persist. This paper examines how the lack of digital competence among theatre arts educators threatens to widen the divide between Nigerian theatre education and global standards. Rather than viewing technology as a threat to creative authenticity, this study argues for a paradigm shift—one that embraces AI, virtual platforms, and interactive tools as extensions of artistic imagination and pedagogy. The paper explores how focused teacher training programmes, tailored to the Nigerian context, can empower educators to integrate digital tools meaningfully into their classrooms and rehearsal spaces. Strategies such as blended learning, peer-led workshops, and practical exposure to AI-driven applications are proposed as viable solutions. Furthermore, the role of institutions and policymakers in supporting this transition is highlighted, emphasising the need for systemic investment in infrastructure and continuous professional development. By re-imagining the role of the theatre educator as both artist and innovator, this paper calls for an urgent, collective commitment to future-proofing Nigeria's theatre education through digital empowerment and creative resilience.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Theatre educators, Teacher training, Digital literacy and Artificial intelligence

### **Introduction**

Theatre education has long served as a vital medium for fostering creativity, critical thinking and communication skills, and cultural understanding (Oladipo, 2019). Traditionally, theatre educators have relied on experiential, face-to-face methods such as role-play, improvisation and collaborative performance to transmit knowledge and nurture students' artistic expression (Heathcote & Bolton, 2002). However, the 21st century has witnessed a rapid transformation in education, driven by technological innovation and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The emergence of AI and digital tools is not only reshaping modes of learning across disciplines but challenging theatre educators to rethink their pedagogical practices in ways that align with a digitally interconnected world.

As education systems globally integrate digital technologies into curricula, theatre teachers are faced with the dual responsibility of preserving the humanistic essence of arts while adapting the new literacies demanded by the digital age. Digital literacy is no longer an optional skill but a necessity for effective teaching, enabling educators to critically evaluate, creatively apply, and ethically engage with technology

in their classrooms. In the context of AI, this include understanding its potential in areas such as automated feedback, digital scenography, virtual performance environments and scriptwriting support, while remaining vigilant about challenges such as ethical use, authenticity and unequal access to resources.

Teacher training thus becomes a crucial site for intervention. Empowering theatre educators with the skills and confidence to harness digital technologies that can enhance their ability to deliver relevant, engaging and inclusive instruction. In countries like Nigeria and other parts of Africa, where theatre has traditionally served as both a cultural resource and an educational tool, the urgency of teacher training in digital literacy is even more pronounced (Adeyemi, 2021). Many educators struggle with limited access to resources, inadequate training opportunities, and systematic neglect of arts education, creating a digital divide that could widen if proactive steps are not taken.

This paper therefore examines the current landscape of theatre education in Nigeria and how theatre educators can be empowered through teacher training and digital literacy in the age of AI. It interrogates the opportunities presented by AI technologies, considers the role of training and equipping teachers with the necessary competencies and highlights strategies for integrating digital literacies into theatre pedagogy without undermining its creative and human-centered values.

This conceptual review is guided by the following questions: 1. **How can AI and digital literacy transform theatre education in Nigeria?** 2. **What models of teacher training are most suitable for Nigerian theatre educators?** 3. **What institutional and policy interventions are required to support this transformation?**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this paper is anchored on the intersection of theatre pedagogy, teacher professional development and digital literacy in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). It combines educational theories with technology integration models to explain how theatre educators can be empowered through teacher training and digital competence.

This conceptual framework provides the foundation for analyzing how teacher training programmes can enhance digital literacy and AI competencies while preserving the creative and humanistic core of theatre education. Bringing together these frameworks suggests that empowering theatre educators requires a multidimensional approach. For this paper, three frameworks are particularly useful:

The Constructivist and Experiential Learning Theories (Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Theatre education is rooted in experiential and constructivist traditions, where learners actively construct meaning through participation, collaboration and reflection. Theatre educators act as facilitators of creative experiences, guiding students in role-play, improvisation, and performance. Integrating AI and digital tools into theatre education requires maintaining these learner-centred approaches while enhancing them with innovative technologies. Thus, constructivism provides a foundation for understanding how educators can adopt digital tools in ways that enrich rather than replace the human-centred nature of theatre pedagogy.

Another framework is the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). The TPACK model (Mishra & Koehler 2006) explains the complex interplay between

technology, pedagogy and content knowledge in effective teaching. For theatre educators, this means not only mastering theatre content and pedagogical strategies but also acquiring digital literacy to meaningfully integrate AI and technology into instruction. For example, teachers may need to know how to use AI-driven tools for script analysis, digital stage design or online collaborative platforms while still grounding these activities in theatrical principles. The TPACK framework therefore emphasises teacher training that addresses all three domains in a balanced and interconnected way.

Furthermore, the Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 2000) and Ethical Engagement with AI highlights the importance of empowering teachers and learners to question systems of power, inequality and control. In the context of AI, theatre educators must be trained not only to use technology but also to interrogate its implications for creativity, originality and equity in education. This perspective ensures that digital literacy training goes beyond technical competence to include ethical and critical awareness, particularly in contexts like Nigeria where access to technology is uneven.

### **The Current Landscape Of Theatre Education In Nigeria**

Theatre education today exists at a crossroads where tradition and innovation intersect. On one hand, it continues to rely on long-established practices that emphasises live interaction, embodied performance and collective creativity. On the other hand, it faces pressures to adapt to changing educational environments shaped by technology, globalization and shifting cultural priorities.

Theatre has historically thrived on experiential and participatory learning methods such as improvisation, role-play, devised theatre and collaborative performance projects. These approaches promote creativity, empathy, communication and problem-solving skills that remain central to holistic education (Heathcote & Bolton, 2002; Ackroyd & Saxton, 2016). In many contexts, theatre education also serves as a cultural resource transmitting heritage, storytelling traditions and collective memory (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). Nigerian and African theatre education, for example, often integrates indigenous performance forms, festivals and oral traditions thereby affirming identity while fostering critical awareness. These strengths continue to validate the relevance of theatre education even in the digital age. Nigerian theatre educators must therefore reconcile the preservation of traditional performance practices with the integration of new digital methodologies if they are to remain globally relevant.

As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986) once argued, "culture is a means of creative survival." In the Nigerian context, the survival of theatre education depends not only on its cultural authenticity but also on its ability to adapt to global digital trends.

### **The Emerging Opportunities of AI And Digital Tools in Theatre Education**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital tools are increasingly transforming theatre education by reshaping pedagogical practices, content delivery and performance training. AI refers to computer systems that stimulate human intelligence, including learning, reasoning and problem-solving (Russell & Norvig, 2021). On the other hand, Digital tools refer to technological applications, platforms and devices that facilitate teaching, learning and creative expression through digital means (Selwyn, 2016).

When combine with artificial intelligence, digital tools further enable adaptive learning, automated feedback and creative experimentation, thereby reshaping how theatre educators train students in performance, production and theory.

There are significant opportunities for Nigerian theatre education if AI and digital adoption is embraced. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) emphasises that AI and digital technologies can “**amplify creativity rather than diminish it**” (p. 19). This means that tools like AI-assisted design, online rehearsal platforms, and blended learning can coexist with indigenous storytelling, dance, and oral traditions.

Artificial intelligence (AI) offers transformative opportunities for theatre educators, particularly in contexts where resources are limited. Globally, AI has been applied in theatre for tasks such as **script analysis**, **audience behavior prediction**, and **automated subtitling** (UNESCO, 2021). For example, natural language processing tools can help students analyze scripts by identifying character patterns, themes, and emotional shifts. Such tools could save Nigerian educators time in teaching dramaturgy while deepening students’ analytical engagement.

AI is also being used in **virtual scenography**. Software can generate multiple stage designs or lighting plans based on a script, giving students exposure to design possibilities without costly physical materials. In countries like the United States, this practice has already become part of digital scenography courses (McKinney & Butterworth, 2021). If adapted, Nigerian theatre educators could use AI-driven design tools to overcome resource limitations such as lack of stage equipment or technical infrastructure.

As Miller (2018) observes, “AI does not replace human creativity; rather, it serves as a provocateur, inviting new aesthetic responses” (p. 16). This perspective is crucial for Nigerian educators who may see AI as a threat to authenticity. Properly framed, AI can be presented as a **partner in creativity** rather than a substitute.

Another key opportunity lies in **blended learning models**, which combine face-to-face instruction with digital platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many global theatre institutions successfully transitioned to online rehearsals and performances using platforms such as Zoom, YouTube Live, and Microsoft Teams (Baldwin, 2020). These experiences demonstrated that digital platforms can extend theatre education beyond the physical classroom.

For Nigerian institutions, blended learning could be a cost-effective way to bridge infrastructure gaps. For instance, students in rural areas could participate in rehearsals virtually, Guest lecturers from other parts of the world, could teach online without the expense of travel and Performances could be live-streamed, expanding the audience reach beyond the campus. Such practices would democratize access to theatre education and make Nigerian students globally visible. As Adeleke and Afolabi (2022) argue, “digital platforms create opportunities for Nigerian students to engage in cross-border learning and performance collaborations” (p. 52).

Furthermore, AI tools can even assist in translating Nigerian plays into multiple languages, making indigenous works accessible to international audiences. Such innovations reinforce Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s (1986) call for African artists to

“decolonise the mind” by affirming local creativity while also engaging the global stage. Thus, the integration of AI and digital platforms should not be framed as a rejection of tradition but as an **expansion of imagination**. The educator’s role is to guide students in navigating this dual heritage, ensuring that cultural voices remain central even as they embrace global tools.

Again, the opportunities of AI and digital tools can only be meaningful if adapted to Nigeria’s realities. For instance, theatre educators can use compressed video formats, offline rehearsal software, and mobile applications that function without constant internet access. Peer-led online workshops and WhatsApp-based rehearsal groups could serve as low-cost entry points for digital adoption. Colleges can partner with cultural institutes, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or tech companies to establish digital theatre labs where students and lecturers experiment with AI-driven creativity.

As UNESCO (2021) stresses, “the value of AI in education is not in replacing teachers but in augmenting their capacity to teach more effectively” (p. 22). This perspective should guide Nigerian theatre educators as they explore digital opportunities.

### **Teacher Training And Capacity Building**

The success of integrating AI and digital tools into Nigerian theatre education depends largely on the **empowerment of educators through structured training**. Without adequate training, even the most advanced technologies will remain underutilized. Some viable strategies that can be adapted are discussed below:

**I. Peer-Led Workshops:** Training does not always need to be imported or outsourced. Peer-led workshops allow digitally skilled educators to train their colleagues within the same institution. This approach reduces costs and builds a culture of collaboration. According to Rogers’ (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations* theory, early adopters play a crucial role in influencing the majority; thus, peer-led initiatives can accelerate adoption in environments where skepticism is high.

**II. Continuous Professional Development (CPD):** Training should not be a one-off event but part of an ongoing process. UNESCO (2021) emphasises that “professional development must be continuous, contextual, and competency-based” (p. 27). For Nigerian theatre educators, CPD could include regular training modules on digital pedagogy, AI applications, and blended learning models. Online CPD platforms could help address the challenge of geographical spread by connecting educators across the country.

**III. Practical Exposure to AI-Driven Applications:** Beyond theory, educators need hands-on exposure. Training programmes should give lecturers opportunities to experiment with AI-powered tools such as **script analysis software, virtual stage design programmes, and online collaboration platforms**. Practical experience builds confidence and reduces the fear of technological complexity (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

**IV. Integration into Teacher Education Programmes:** Future theatre educators—currently studying Theatre Arts, should be exposed to digital pedagogy during their training. As Akinwale and Okoye (2020) notes, the digital divide in Nigeria is partly

sustained because teacher training programmes often ignore digital literacy, assuming it is “supplementary rather than fundamental” (p. 107). Integrating digital literacy into curricula for theatre education programmes will ensure long-term sustainability.

### **Institutional Role**

While individual training is important, institutions must create enabling environments for sustained adoption. Colleges of Education can contribute by: **Updating Curricula** (incorporating courses such as *Digital Theatre Practice* or *AI in Creative Performance*), **Investing in Infrastructure** (providing stable internet access, digital labs, and relevant software for performance simulation) and **Creating Incentives** (recognizing and rewarding educators who successfully integrate digital tools into teaching).

As Adeleke and Afolabi (2022) argue, “digital transformation is not sustainable without institutional will and structural investment” (p. 50).

### **Policy-Level Interventions**

At the macro level, government agencies and regulatory bodies such as the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), **National Universities Commission (NUC)** and the **Nigerian National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC)** play a pivotal role. Policy interventions could include; **National Digital Literacy Standards for Educators** (similar to global models, these standards would provide benchmarks for theatre and other disciplines), **Funding Schemes** (grants for departments of theatre arts to establish digital labs or access AI applications) and **Public-Private Partnerships** (collaborations with tech companies, NGOs, and cultural organizations to provide training, infrastructure, and digital content).

As Yekini and Adigun (2021) notes, “digital literacy must be recognized at the policy level as a driver of educational relevance and national development” (p. 65). Without systemic policy commitment, teacher training will remain fragmented and underfunded.

### **The Cultural Dimension of Training**

Training must also be **context-sensitive**. Nigerian educators often worry that adopting digital tools may erode traditional performance practices. Training should therefore emphasise how technology can preserve and amplify cultural heritage rather than replace it. For example, educators can be trained to use digital archiving to document indigenous plays or to live-stream performances that showcase Nigerian storytelling traditions to global audiences. Okoh (2019) reminds us that African theatre has always been adaptive: “tradition in African performance is not static but a living, evolving practice” (p. 34). Training programmes should therefore frame digital adoption as the next step in that evolution, not as a rupture.

### **Implications for the Future of Nigerian Theatre Education**

The integration of digital literacy and AI in Nigerian theatre education will inevitably **reshape the identity of theatre educators**. No longer confined to the role of a lecturer transmitting knowledge, the theatre educator of the future must function as:

- i. **An artist-scholar** who preserves cultural traditions while engaging with global innovations.

- ii. **A digital mentor** who equips students with the competencies required in creative industries increasingly shaped by AI and digital platforms.
- iii. **A collaborator** who bridges the gap between performance spaces and digital networks, ensuring Nigerian theatre remains globally relevant.

As Burnett (2020) observes, “the twenty-first-century educator must be agile, technologically literate, and culturally grounded to prepare students for a rapidly shifting creative economy” (p. 89).

Furthermore, Digital empowerment of educators has a **direct impact on students**. Students trained under digitally literate lecturers will gain exposure to; **Virtual performance spaces** (enabling them to stage productions online and reach wider audiences), **AI-driven creative tools** (such as digital dramaturgy software and virtual scenography, that enhance imagination) and **Collaborative learning platforms** (which develop teamwork, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication).

These skills not only improve academic outcomes but also **boost employability** in Nigeria’s growing creative and digital economies. As UNESCO (2021) emphasises, digital competence is now a “core employability skill” across industries (p. 14). For Nigerian graduates, this means being competitive not just locally but also globally.

Again, by investing in digital literacy and teacher training, Nigeria can **narrow the global divide**. This will allow Nigerian theatre to; Participate in **international collaborations**, such as virtual festivals and cross-border research projects. Contribute uniquely African perspectives to global conversations on AI and creativity and showcase indigenous storytelling traditions using modern platforms, thereby **globalizing Nigerian cultural heritage**. Consequently, digital adoption becomes both a **protective mechanism** against marginalization and a **transformative force** for positioning Nigeria as a leader in African digital theatre.

### **Risks and Ethical Considerations**

While the future holds great promise, several risks must be addressed:

- i. **Over-reliance on AI** may undermine originality if students begin to substitute machine-generated content for human creativity.
- ii. **Digital inequality** may persist if only elite institutions gain access to AI tools, further marginalizing public institutions.
- iii. **Cultural dilution** may occur if technology is adopted uncritically without grounding in local traditions.

Therefore, the implication for the future is not just about embracing technology but about doing so **critically, ethically, and inclusively**. As Omoera (2020) cautions, “technology in African theatre must serve as a complement, not a substitute, for the communal essence of performance” (p. 57).

### **Recommendations**

**Firstly, educators should actively pursue digital literacy** through peer-led workshops, online courses, and collaborative practice. Experiment with AI tools for teaching and creative production while critically reflecting on their cultural implications and serve as role models for students by embracing technology as a creative partner rather than a threat.

Secondly, institutions should revise theatre arts curricula to include modules such as *Digital Theatre Practice* and *AI in Creative Performance*, establish digital

performance labs equipped with AI software, virtual stage design tools, and reliable internet infrastructure and reward innovation by recognizing educators who successfully integrate digital tools into pedagogy.

**Thirdly, policymakers such as the** National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should set **minimum digital literacy standards** for theatre educators, Provide funding and grants for digital capacity building in public Colleges of Education, which often lack resources and encourage **public-private partnerships** with technology firms to provide affordable access to digital tools.

Lastly, collaborations should be fostered between professional theatre companies and Colleges of Education to expose students and educators to real-world applications of digital performance and Platforms should be developed for showcasing Nigerian theatre globally through live-streams, digital festivals, and online archives.

### Final Reflection

The future of Nigerian theatre education will be determined by how courageously educators, institutions, and policymakers respond to the challenges of the digital age. As Omoera (2020) reminds us, African theatre has always thrived on adaptability. By **empowering educators with digital skills**, Nigeria can ensure that its theatre education not only preserves cultural identity but also contributes meaningfully to global conversations on creativity and technology.

Consequently, Nigerian theatre educators can become **torchbearers of a hybrid future**-where tradition meets innovation, and where the stage extends from the village square to the virtual screen.

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