**The Imperative of Design Thinking and Communication Relevance in Stage Productions: A Technical Consideration of *AKSU-FEST 2025***

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**Abstract**

*The theatre provides the atmosphere for creative imagination apparently determined or guided by the philosophical and ideological disposition, genre, culture and period that informs a performance. Recognizably, the challenges of in-depth user challenge pose a threat to ‘design thinking’. Design thinking is human-centred and the empathy in it is meant to give a designer thorough understanding of the audience members. It is an essential step for solution generation that applies specifically to the audience members so as to help theatre practitioners optimize user experience. This study adopts Augusto Boal’s design theory as it promotes collaborative and inclusive approach to theatre-making, which aligns with the principle of design thinking. It argues that the incorporation of Boal’s technique allows participants to engage in creative problem-solving, empathy-building, and innovative ideation within the context of theatre design. The study submits that the concept of design thinking requires the different areas in the theatre to come together for a realizable production. It further suggests that since ‘design thinking’ promotes experimentation and iteration, by embracing the iterative nature inherent, practitioners can continuously refine designs until they attain the desired objectives.*

**Keywords:** Communication, Consideration, Imperative, Relevance and Thinking.

**Introduction**

The concept of design is very important in stage productions. According to Jacob, “in Theatre practice, … , the concept of design is held as being very crucial to the profession. This is because any design process has to be seen as the defining steps towards finding or trying to find answers to identified problems in given contexts” (47). Design thinking therefore refers to a new paradigm for dealing with problems in many professions and fields specifically in Technical Theatre. Design thinking may be considered as a great tool in the Technical Theatre to develop twenty first century skills. It comprises collaboration in order to solve the problems by finding and processing information taking into consideration the real world, people’s experience, feedback and applying creativity, critical thinking and communication. Moreover, this approach is characterized by a powerful methodology for innovation which integrates human, business and technical factors in problem identification and solving (Brown 151). This creative thinking is put into practice through the compartmentalization of theatrical production into pre-production, production and post-production. The atmosphere is simulated in such a manner that these tripartite production processes avail designers the opportunity to conceive and or conceptualize ideas. Johnson adds that “conceptualisation is mainly a mental activity calling for mental alertness, ability to imagine and conjure images” (67).

Design thinking is a creative problem-solving approach that places human needs and experiences at the centre of the design process. Originally popularised in the world of product and industrial design, this methodology has found its way into various creative and entertainment industries including stage productions. Design thinking offers a fresh perspective and a systematic framework for developing and executing stage productions that are not only visually stunning but also deeply engaging, emotionally resonant, and relevant to the audience. At its core, design thinking is characterized by empathy, collaboration, and a reiterative process of ideation and refinement. In the context of stage productions, it involves understanding and addressing the complex challenges of storytelling, visual aesthetics, and audience connection.

Communication is exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, opinions, expressions, emotions, instructions between one to one or among one-to-many interaction. Jacob explains that “communication involves exchange as well as sharing of information, knowledge, data, experience, skills, ideas, feelings and emotions, opinions, attitude as well as world views” (93). The world revolves around communication, and it is almost impossible to lead a life without it. In Technical theatre, communication is referred to as an important tool to deliver important messages. The requirement for effective communication skills is excessive and crescent as today’s organizations are emerging and being competitive and the need to deliver correct messages in an appropriate way is of prime importance. Communication relevance is a critical aspect of ensuring that all technical elements, including lighting, sound, set design, and stage management, effectively contribute to the overall production. The term ‘communication relevance’ refers to the clear and efficient exchange of information and instructions among the technical team members, ensuring that everyone is on the same page and that their contributions align with the artistic vision of the production. The imperative of communication relevance in stage productions cannot be overstated. In line with the views held by Ekpe and Wekpe, clear and meaningful communication is essential for a play to effectively convey its message and engage the audience. This encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communications, as well as the overall relevance of the content being presented.

Furthermore, the relevance of the content being presented is vital for effective communication in stage productions. The themes explored in a play should resonate with contemporary audiences and address relevant social issues or universal human experiences. Bassey adds that “the art of the theatre has grown beyond the traditional performance spaces, because, like every other field, theatre has embraced the possibilities in technological innovations” (112). By tackling topics that are relatable or thought-provoking, stage productions have the power to spark conversations and inspire change. Clear and meaningful communication is imperative in stage productions for several reasons. Verbal communication ensures that dialogue is understood by the audience while non-verbal cues add depth to performances. Moreover, presenting relevant content allows plays to resonate with audiences on a personal level. By prioritising effective communication relevance in stage productions, theatre can continue to captivate audiences while providing valuable insights into our shared human experiences.

**‘Communication Relevance’ and the Imperatives of Technical Theatre**

In the world of technical theatre, effective communication is significantly relevant considering that “it is a vital factor in the … growth and creation of every society” (Bassey, Jacob and Ngonso 144). Whether it be between designers, technicians, or actors, clear and concise communication ensures that everyone involved understands their roles and responsibilities. However, one aspect that, arguably, lacks significant attention, is ‘communication relevance’. Technical theatre encompasses a wide range of areas such as lighting design, sound engineering, set construction, and costume design. Each focus requires deep understanding of the production's theme and message in order to create a cohesive experience for the audience. Through effective communicating relevance, technicians can ensure that their works align with the artistic vision of the production. For instance, if a lighting designer fails to understand the emotional arc of a scene or the overall tone of a play, they may inadvertently create lighting cues that distracts the intended mood. Similarly, if a set designer does not grasp the historical context or symbolism behind a particular play, they may create an environment that feels out of place or disconnected, particularly because “theatre, for its simplest description is the communication of ideas between two groups: Performers and Audience” (Wolf and Block 3). Consequently, it is safe to say that communication is the essence of all life and civilization and as a never-ending phenomenon, it is always instrumental behind the constant sustenance, survival and growth of the established order of the universe.

According to Garcia, “all living entities, beings and creatures communicate. All creatures communicate through movements, sounds, reactions, physical changes, gestures, languages and breath” (105). By emphasizing the importance of communication relevance in technical theatre education and practice, we can elevate productions to new heights. This can be achieved through workshops and training programme that encourage collaboration between designers and directors. Additionally, fostering open lines of communication throughout all stages of production will allow for feedback and adjustments to ensure every element contributes meaningfully to the overall experience. Communication relevance in technical theatre is crucial for creating impactful productions. By understanding and conveying the significance behind each creative decision made by technicians and designers alike, we can ensure that every aspect contributes harmoniously to tell a compelling story on stage.

**Importance of Design Thinking in Technical Theatre**

Design thinking is a crucial aspect of technical theatre that cannot be overlooked. It plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of any production, as it encompasses the creative problem-solving process that leads to innovative and effective solutions. Relatively, Jacob asserts that “every theatrical production has a concept” (137). Firstly, design thinking allows technical theatre professionals to approach their work from a holistic perspective. By considering all aspects of a production, such as lighting, sound, set design, and costumes, designers can create cohesive and immersive experiences for the audience. This comprehensive approach ensures that every element of the production aligns with the director's vision and enhances the overall storytelling (Eris and Fray 101).

Furthermore, design thinking “encourages collaboration and communication” (Cross 130; Ekpe). This exists among different members of the technical theatre team. By involving everyone in brainstorming sessions and encouraging open dialogue, designers can tap into diverse perspectives and ideas. This collaborative approach not only fosters creativity but also ensures that all technical aspects are seamlessly integrated. Moreover, design thinking enables technical theatre professionals to anticipate potential challenges or limitations early on in the process. By thoroughly analysing each element of a production's design, designers can identify potential issues before they arise during rehearsals or performances. This proactive approach saves time and resources while ensuring smooth execution on stage. “Technical Theatre has come to be reckoned with as the essential bedrock in the development of Theatre art profession without which the quality of theatre production, wherever the setting, would have still been at the rather crude stage of development” (Jacob 33).

Design thinking promotes innovation within technical theatre by pushing boundaries and exploring new possibilities. It encourages designers to think outside the box and experiment with unconventional ideas. This mindset fosters creativity and allows for groundbreaking designs that captivate audiences. It however proves how essential it is to technical theatre as it provides a framework for creative problem-solving, promotes collaboration among team members, anticipates challenges early in the process, and encourages innovation within the industry. Without this mindset driving their work, technical theatre professionals would struggle to deliver exceptional productions that engage audiences on multiple levels (Gunna and Goldschmadt 160).

**Application of Design Thinking in AKSU-FEST 2025.**

Design thinking, which enables the concept of design to be used in different technical fields, brings creative and innovative ideas to the technical theatre, noting that “every stage performance has its peculiar technical challenges” (Jacob 18; Ekpe and Okoronkwor 29). Design thinking is compatible and complementary to other areas and approaches, such as open and user-oriented innovation. Gillette insists that “the design process is a method for finding answers to questions…, the design process isn’t a simple, linear progression. As you move from step to step, you must check back on your previous steps to make sure that you are headed in the right direction with your proposed solution” (17). Although design thinking is thought to be a phenomenon related to design, it is an approach in which many disciplines can interact with each other. In AKSU-FEST, 2025, design thinking was very evident as many areas of the technical theatre came together to share their ideas as well as give the audience members something convincing and satisfying.

Laako proposes a framework to illustrate the dimensions and related elements underlying the application of design thinking in performances which include “practices, thinking styles, and mentality in which each section consists of elements of design thinking: approaches, methods, values and concepts that continuously surfaced from current literature of design thinking” (92). When artistic creativity is reflected in the design, it ensures that the design is new and original.

The set designer in AKSU-FEST 2025 used alternative materials to make flat rather than the usual plywood or thick linen. The set designer also used 4x4 woods to create the framings of the set and used the materials to make the main set, he went as far as making a storey building on stage to entice the audience members when they came into watch the production. The set designer also used wrappers to cover the openings in the flat created and they as well serve as the doors and windows in the portrayed buildings. Also, using different materials, the set designer distinguishes the rural area from the urban area which was also revealed during the story telling process.

Equally, the lighting designer had a comprehensive appraisal of the productions and saw it to be productions full of colours, using LED lights to achieve the different colours of light needed for the performances. Recognizing that “every theatrical performance takes place withing a given space otherwise known as acting area” (Jacob 143), the lighting designer used the lights to complement the actions happening on stage. Also, the lighting designer placing wires and bulbs across the flats indicated streetlights and poles as would be found in urban areas.

**Application of Communication Relevance in AKSU-FEST 2025**

Technical theatre is a complex and intricate art form that requires intentional coordination and effective communication among its practitioners. From set, lighting to sound engineers, every member of the technical theatre team played crucial roles in creating memorable productions. Therefore, the application of communication skills is paramount in this field. Effective communication ensures that everyone involved in the production is on the same page. Clear and concise instructions are essential for technicians to understand their roles and responsibilities. Without proper communication, chaos can ensue, leading to mistakes and delays.

Communication relevance was applied in AKSU-FEST 2025 in the following ways:

**1. Set Designs:** The set designs had their stories to tell, leaving a great impact on the audience members. The process of creating the set proved the communication relevance among members of the technical team. The set designer had to communicate with both the sound designer, lighting designer and also the costumier. This was to make sure that the sound, costumes and the lighting used were in tune with the set design so as to pass the intended message to the audience members.

**2. Lighting Design:** Communication relevance was applied in AKSU-FEST through lighting or illumination of the stage for different productions. The colours applied by the different lighting equipment gave their relevance. The lighting designer used the lighting equipment to tell the timeframe of the action that was taking place on stage. The designers also used lighting equipment to pass emotions and could let the audience members know when something horrific or nice was going to happen.

**3. Sound Design:** The sound designer played a vital role in communication relevance of technical theatre in stage productions as he controlled all the special effects and soundtracks of the different stage productions. He also held the tempo and indicated the cue to some actors, as when the sound goes off, the actor began acting. The sound designer held the tempo of the plays and as such communicated with both the actors and the audience members.

**Challenges of Design Thinking in AKSUFEST 2025**

Design thinking is a powerful approach that has revolutionised various industries, but its application to stage productions presented unique challenges. While design thinking encourages a user-centred approach and iterative problem-solving, the nature of live performances poses constraints that could hinder its effectiveness.

One of the recognizably challenges of applying design thinking in AKSU-FEST 2025 was the limited room for experimentation. Unlike other products or services, stage productions have a fixed timeline and limited opportunities for trial and error. This factor restricted designers from fully exploring different ideas and refining their concepts. Additionally, the collaborative nature of theatre often involves multiple stakeholders with differing opinions and visions, making it difficult to reach a consensus during the design process. Another challenge was in the aspect of effective communication among team members, especially when they came from diverse backgrounds, coherent communication is vital but can be difficult to achieve.

Limited resources also constituted further challenges for the technical department. Technical theatre often operates with constrained budgets and resources, which can make it challenging to fully explore and implement design thinking ideas and this constituted a challenge during the 2025 productions AKSU-FEST.

**Challenges of Communication Relevance in AKSU-FEST 2025**

One of the identifiable challenges of communication relevance during AKSU-FEST 2025 was related to Ododo’s assertion that “in this digital era, Nigerian theatre is entangled in the rapidly spinning wheel of knowledge generation, for as we are discussing here of the Nigerian theatre in a digital era, some scholars have already moved unto speaking about post-digitalism” (259). Technical Theatre requires a multidisciplinary approach, and functional equipment with different professionals from different backgrounds working together. However, this constitutes great challenge due to differences in functionality and understanding, because the host of AKSU-FEST still lacks in contemporary technology. Specifically, there are no digital communication systems such as intercom facility between the control room and the dressing rooms. Poor communication therefore became yet another challenge for the technical designers. Poor communication can lead to mistakes on stage or technical malfunctions that can disrupt the overall production. This highlights how crucial it is for all members of a production team to be on the same page and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

**Collaboration Across Disciplines:** Recognizably, technical theatre requires different forms of collaboration among professionals. This includes sound engineers, lighting designers, stage managers, as well as actors. And each operates within their discipline terminology and communication style.

**Multimodal Form of Communication:** Technical theatre relies on multimedial form of communication. This involves written cues, spoken language, visuals, and technical drawings, all of which can be complex to interpret and manage. These factors affected the actualisation of some of the production’s objectives designed for delivery through lighting.

Issues of Rapid Changes: Theatrical productions are sometimes characterised by last-minute adjustments and changes; making it a challenge to keep all parties informed on the same pace. This challenge was recorded during AKSU-FEST 2025.

Environmental Stress: Effective communication can be hinder during live performance by high pressure situations. It could equally encourage misunderstanding, accidents and mistakes. The identified factors posed as challenge during AKSU-FEST 2025.

Authority and Hierarchy: Communication flow can be influenced by structures of hierarchy within a theatrical production; where some persons may hesitate to offer suggestions or make known their concerns.

**Technical Related Challenges:** Technical issues can disrupt communication, such include malfunctioning microphones, power disruption, inaccurate triggering of lighting cues, problems with sound production which could result in confusion and/or delays. Notably, these challenges were recorded during AKSU-FEST 2025.

Notwithstanding, the challenges can be addressed through clear communication frameworks which encourage open dialogue. Additionally, training opportunities for team members could help in further understanding of technical language, the use technology to streamline processes of communication. It is also important that sufficient technical equipment be made available in subsequent editions of AKSU-FEST and any other productions.

**Impact of Design Thinking and Communication Relevance in AKSU-FEST 2025**

Design thinking could be described as a powerful approach which has revolutionised different industries; relatively, its impact on AKSU-FEST 2025 stand too significant to be understated. On a related note, technical theatre centres around creation of sets, sound, lighting as well as related elements which bring life to a production. Through the application of design thinking principles in this field, enhanced creativity and overall improvement can be achieved in production quality.

Notably, design thinking encourages empathy and collaboration. During the 2025 AKSU-FEST, it was imperative that different units work together in a seamless manner. Design thinking has the capacity to promote cross-functional teams which include lighting technicians, set designers, sound engineers, amongst others. By encouraging team members to understand each other’s challenges and perspectives, design thinking fosters empathy within members. It also supports an environment that fosters innovative solutions. Regarding the norms of technical theatre during AKSU-FEST 2025, effective communication stood paramount. From sound design to lighting, to stage management and set construction, the different aspects of a production can be seen to rely on concise and clear communication structure. This situates communication as a success determining factor.

Effective communication has the propensity to foster collaboration among members of a team, especially in the field of technical theatre, which is a collaborative art form, requiring individuals with diverse skills to work together. It is easier for a team to achieve a common goal when each person understands the others’ expectation and needs. A a situation that can be attained through open communication lines. The impact of communication relevance on technical theatre during AKSU-FEST 2025 cannot be underestimated. It ensured clarity among team members while facilitating efficient problem-solving and promoting collaboration. By recognising its importance and implementing effective strategies for communicating within the theatre industry, we can enhance the overall quality of theatrical productions and create memorable experiences for audience’s satisfaction.

**Understanding Design Thinking and Communication Relevance in Technical Theatre: A Futuristic Approach**

Design thinking, which enables the concept of design to be used in other fields, brings creativity and innovation to these areas. Therefore, it would not be hyperbolic to describe design thinking as a method that can transfer the design spirit to other fields. Brown and Wyatt assert that, “design thinking is a human-centred problem-solving method focused on original and innovative solutions in terms of feasibility, desirability and applicability of products and services” (55). Design Thinking is compatible and complementary to other approaches, such as open and user-oriented innovation.

Understanding design thinking in technical theatre provides numerous benefits such as enhanced empathy towards audiences, effective problem definition strategies, innovative ideation processes, leading to successful productions that resonate with viewers on a deeper level. Effective communication ensures that everyone involved in a production is on the same page towards effective coordinating cues during a performance, clear communication allows for a seamless collaboration between different departments. Without proper communication, misunderstandings can occur, leading to errors and delays that can negatively impact the overall quality of a production. Furthermore, understanding communication relevance helps foster a positive working environment. When team members feel, heard and understood, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their works. This leads to increased productivity and creativity within the technical theatre community.

**Conclusion**

In both design thinking and technical theatre, the process starts with empathy. Designers and technicians must understand the needs and desires of their audience or clients. They need to put themselves in their shoes to create a meaningful experience. This empathetic approach ensures that the final product meets the expectations of its intended users because “men have always been known to take the command in churning out rules and values that tend to justify oppressive and harmful practices” (Jacob 23). Another connecting factor between design thinking and technical theatre is the emphasis on collaboration. Both processes require teamwork and effective communication among different stakeholders. Designers work closely with directors, actors, and technicians to bring their vision to life. Similarly, technicians collaborate with designers to ensure that their technical requirements are met.

In technical theatre, communication begins with the exchange of ideas during the pre-production phase. This involves discussions between directors, designers, and technicians to establish a clear vision for the production. Having clear communication remains crucial at the planning and pre-production stages. Such involves concepts brainstorming, discussions on ideas, as well as team decision making. Where effective communication is lacking, misunderstandings can take over thus resulting in confusion, chaos and delays during rehearsals and possibly during performances. The need to have lighting cues coordinated with sound and sound effects need not be emphasized. Also, performers need to know their timing and blocking; crew members must also work together in a seamless manner. Conclusively, effective communication goes beyond technical aspects of the theatre. It involves the conveying of emotions and message delivery to an audience through acting and the arts of storytelling. Actors need to communicate the thoughts and feelings of the character they are portraying in an effective manner so that the audience can establish emotional connection with them. These can be achieved through regular team meetings, the establishment of clear chains of command, encouraging the art of active listening, as well as the utilization of visual aids.

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