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Deconstructing Kenyan Theatrical Adjudication: Video Assistant Adjudicators in the Kenya National Music Festival

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges of adjudication in theatrical performances at the Kenya National Drama Festival and the potential role of Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAA) in strengthening fairness, accountability, and professionalism. Adjudication in the festival has historically relied on the immediate perception, memory, and interpretive judgment of adjudicators. While this reliance foregrounds human expertise, it is prone to fatigue, bias, and inconsistency, leading to contested judgments and eroding participant confidence. The purpose of this study was therefore to deconstruct existing adjudicative practices and to explore the viability of integrating technological support in the form of VAA. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the limitations of relying solely on human faculties, to examine how VAA could minimize bias and contested judgments, and to assess the pedagogical and archival value of video evidence in theatrical performances. The study was informed by Fuller's theory of adjudication, which emphasizes procedural fairness while acknowledging the limits of human judgment,

and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explains how innovations are adopted through their perceived usefulness and ease of integration. Together, these frameworks provided a lens for analyzing both the structural shortcomings of the current adjudication process and the potential acceptance of VAA by stakeholders. The study employed a qualitative methodology, drawing on purposive and snowball sampling to identify adjudicators and regular theatre attendees as oral sources. Data was collected through interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings demonstrate that the use of VAA enhances fairness, transparency, and accuracy in adjudication, while simultaneously creating an authoritative archive for critique, training, and research. Situating the discussion within the Kenyan theatre and Music Festivals contributes to broader debates on the intersection of performance, technology, and justice, and underscores the transformative potential of video technology in the professionalization of theatre adjudication in Kenya.

Keywords: Adjudication, Video Assistant Adjudication, Festivals

Introduction

Theatre, as a live and dynamic art form, has traditionally relied on the immediacy of human judgment in performance evaluation, adjudication, and competition settings. However, the absence of technological support in the adjudication process often exposes performances to subjectivity, bias, and inconsistencies in assessment. Council (2000) ^[11] demonstrated how Alabama secondary school choral directors' beliefs about choral methods influenced festival scores, underscoring the subjectivity embedded in adjudication. Similarly, Stutheit (1994) ^[18] examined hierarchies of musical elements prioritized by adjudicators, directors, and students in high school choral contests, revealing divergent emphases that shaped contest outcomes. These findings highlight a persistent challenge in arts adjudication: outcomes are often contingent not only on the quality of performance but also on the perspectives and predispositions of the adjudicators.

Hansen (2017) ^[14] investigated the influences guiding choral adjudicators' rating decisions, showing that evaluations are shaped by personal experience, training, and cognitive biases. Yarbrough, Orman, and Neill (2007) ^[19] focused on time usage by choral directors in preparation for sight-singing adjudication, highlighting the pressures of time management that can affect performance outcomes and subsequent judgments. These studies demonstrate that adjudication is not purely objective but rather is influenced by situational factors and human limitations. Yet, none of them engage with mechanisms that allow

adjudicators to revisit or verify contested judgments. Beyond the performing arts, scholarship in law and jurisprudence provides critical perspectives on the forms and limits of adjudication. Fuller (1978) ^[13] argued that adjudication has inherent limitations when tasked with resolving complex disputes, while Richards (1979) emphasized the responsibility of adjudicators to balance subjectivity with fairness in decision-making. Barnett and Wheeler (2018) ^[10] extended this discussion to administrative adjudicators, questioning oversight, accountability, and procedural transparency. More recently, Del Mar (2022) ^[12] explored the ethics and politics of adjudication, stressing that adjudicative practices are never neutral but reflect broader institutional and social values. While these works are situated in legal contexts, they offer a theoretical foundation for analyzing adjudication in theatre, where judgments similarly balance subjective interpretation and the demand for fairness.

Within theatre studies, Salter (1990) ^[17] analyzed adjudication in the Dominion Drama Festival, emphasizing how judgments were bound up with questions of independence, authority, and cultural identity. Milner Davis (2018) ^[15] similarly examined the role of judges in European theatre, showing how adjudicators can themselves become part of the performance, carrying symbolic authority that influences audience perceptions. These works highlight that adjudication in theatre is not merely about technical evaluation but also about legitimizing cultural and artistic values. Yet, both accounts stop short of addressing how contemporary technology could reshape adjudicative practices in performance festivals.

The Kenya National Drama Festival, as a competitive and educational platform, presents an opportunity to examine how integrating VAA could safeguard integrity while acknowledging the cultural weight of adjudication. Although international literature provides useful insights on adjudicative subjectivity, the Kenyan context presents distinct challenges that require localized solutions. The KNDF relies on rubrics assessing elements such as vocal projection, staging accuracy, and costume fidelity, yet adjudicators make these decisions under strict time constraints and without a formal appeals process. As regional scholarship shows (Arko-Mensah, 2020; Bullindah, 2017 ^[24]; Nzomo, 2016), the absence of verifiable documentation frequently leads to contestable judgments, particularly where factual staging or rule-based errors are involved.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that adjudication, whether in music, theatre, or law, is shaped by human perception, cultural context, and institutional pressures. The consistent gap lies in the absence of technology as a corrective or supportive tool in live adjudication processes. This study fills that gap by proposing Video Assistant Adjudicators as a practical and theoretical innovation in Kenyan theatrical adjudication, with the potential to enhance fairness, accountability, and reflective practice in the Kenyan music and theatre festivals.

Statement of the Problem

The Kenya National Music Festival plays a central role in nurturing artistic talent, promoting cultural expression, and advancing educational growth. However, the credibility of its adjudication process has increasingly come under scrutiny. Adjudicators rely heavily on immediate perception,

memory, and interpretive judgment, which, despite reflecting professional expertise, are prone to fatigue, selective attention, and subjective bias. As Zembower (2000) ^[9] observed, human adjudication often overlooks critical performance elements that recordings can later reveal, while Rawlings (2019) ^[8] highlighted that inconsistencies in large-ensemble adjudication erode participant trust. Similarly, in the Kenyan context, contested outcomes and limited transparency have raised questions about fairness, accountability, and professionalism in theatrical adjudication. Without verifiable evidence or lasting resources for critique, disputes are often settled through subjective explanations, weakening confidence among performers, trainers, and audiences. This study, therefore, addresses the pressing need to explore how Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs) can be integrated into the Kenya National Drama Festival to enhance accuracy, fairness, and pedagogical value in theatrical adjudication.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Fuller's Theory of Adjudication and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Applied together, these frameworks establish both the philosophical justification for reforming adjudication in the Kenya National Drama Festival (KNDF) and the practical pathway through which stakeholders may adopt Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs) as part of that reform. Their integration resolves earlier inconsistencies in the manuscript while ensuring conceptual alignment between the study's purpose, method, and context.

Fuller's jurisprudential view of adjudication underpins the understanding of human judgment limits in live performance assessments. Fuller (1978) ^[13] argues that adjudication is limited by reliance on subjective perception, fallible memory, and interpretive bias, factors that inevitably lead to variation and debate in decisions. Richards (1979) builds on this by stressing the moral duty of adjudicators to justify their decisions in ways that uphold institutional legitimacy. Yang (2020) ^[23] describes adjudication as a philosophically structured activity that demands clear evidence and procedural reasonableness. Additionally, McAdams (2005) ^[21] asserts that adjudicative decisions have expressive power, influencing public trust based on whether outcomes seem coherent or arbitrary. Allen (2007) ^[20] cautions that adjudication can become "magical" when decisions lack solid, verifiable basis, making judgments opaque to those affected. In the context of the KNMF, where adjudicators evaluate complex theatrical performances in real time, these theoretical constraints appear in disputes, inconsistent scoring, and the lack of reviewable evidence. Therefore, Fuller's tradition helps explain why reforming adjudication, such as with VAA is both ethically and structurally necessary.

Where Fuller explains the need for reform, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains *how* that reform may be operationalized through stakeholder acceptance. As a framework for predicting user adoption of new technologies, TAM focuses on two principal constructs: Perceived Usefulness, the degree to which stakeholders believe the technology will enhance performance; and Perceived Ease of Use, the extent to which they believe the system will be free of effort or disruption. This aligns directly with the qualitative design of this study, which draws on interview

data from adjudicators, directors, and festival officials. Statements that VAAs improve fairness, accuracy, and evidence-based judgment correspond to Perceived Usefulness, while reflections on required training, workflow integration, and operational simplicity relate to Perceived Ease of Use. By using TAM, the study develops a systematic way to analyze stakeholder perceptions, grounding the adoption of VAA in measurable cognitive and experiential factors rather than abstract technological optimism.

Together, Fuller's Theory of Adjudication and TAM create a coherent analytical frame for the study. Fuller and subsequent scholars expose the universal and contextual vulnerabilities of human adjudication, demonstrating why the KNDF is prone to inconsistency, bias, and unverifiable judgments. TAM complements this by providing a structured approach for examining whether VAA can be realistically adopted within the festival environment based on stakeholder perceptions of its usefulness and ease of implementation. Through this dual framework, the introduction of Video Assistant Adjudicators is presented as both an ethically grounded reform and a practically viable innovation capable of strengthening transparency, accountability, and pedagogical integrity in Kenyan theatrical adjudication.

Literature Review

Arko-Mensah (n.d.)^[2] examined adjudication of music performances in selected Ghanaian municipalities and revealed how adjudicators rely on rubrics, personal discretion, and contextual norms when evaluating performances. While the study highlights the role of experience in shaping adjudicative outcomes, it also exposes subjectivity and inconsistency in decision-making. However, the study does not explore technological interventions that could minimize such discrepancies. This is relevant to the current research, which proposes Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs) as a way of reducing bias and ensuring consistency in Kenyan theatrical adjudication. Similarly, Pier (2009)^[6] analyzed Uganda's Senator National Cultural Extravaganza and underscored how cultural competitions are influenced by branding, sponsorship, and national identity politics. The study shows how adjudication outcomes carry reputational weight, linking performances to broader sociopolitical dynamics. Yet, it fails to consider how transparent adjudication systems could safeguard credibility in such contexts. This makes the Kenyan case particularly relevant, as VAA could provide objective evidence to protect the legitimacy of the Kenya National Drama Festival from disputes that may undermine its cultural mission.

Rasmussen (2010)^[7], while reviewing Uganda's national cinema, offers insight into the politics of cultural evaluation and the infrastructures within which performances are judged. This work emphasizes that adjudicative practices are embedded in institutional and media ecologies. However, it does not directly engage with live festival adjudication, where fleeting actions can easily be overlooked. This gap reinforces the value of investigating VAA in Kenya, where theatre performances demand accurate tools for capturing and revisiting momentary details.

Achieng'Akuno (2019)^[1] focused on music education in Africa and emphasized process-oriented pedagogy and culturally responsive assessment practices. She highlights

the need for evaluation to be both formative and summative, nurturing learners while benchmarking their skills. Yet, her work does not address the practical challenges of applying such assessments in competitive festival settings where judgments are immediate and time-limited. The current study is therefore relevant, as VAA can bridge this gap by creating replayable evidence that enhances both fairness in summative scoring and depth in formative feedback.

Hensley (2016)^[4] studied choral festival adjudicators and revealed wide differences in what adjudicators attend to, such as vocal blend, diction, or stage presence. This variability explains why performances often receive inconsistent evaluations across judges. However, Hensley does not propose mechanisms to reduce such inconsistency. The present study becomes relevant by suggesting VAAs as a means of standardizing judgments, enabling adjudicators to revisit contested performance moments and align their evaluations.

Rawlings (2019)^[8] explored large-ensemble adjudicated events and found that while they motivate and benchmark learners, they also present challenges such as stress, logistical strain, and perceived bias. Although the study provides insights into participant experiences, it does not explore how technology could mitigate these challenges. This gap aligns with the Kenyan case, where VAAs could minimize perceived bias and provide performers with transparent, verifiable assessments that enhance confidence in the adjudication process.

Zembower (2000)^[9] investigated the use of video and audio recordings in adjudication and found that video significantly alters evaluators' perceptions, as visual elements influence scoring differently from audio alone. While this demonstrates the power of video, the study does not apply such findings to festival adjudication contexts. This gap is addressed in the present research by examining how controlled use of VAAs could provide balanced, evidence-based reviews without distorting evaluative priorities in Kenyan theatre.

Dickelman (2023)^[3] discussed learning and performance technologies, emphasizing how digital tools enhance reflective practice and professional growth when integrated into structured workflows. While the study underscores the pedagogical potential of technology, it does not specify how such tools can be embedded into competitive adjudication frameworks. This omission is where the current study contributes by proposing structured VAA protocols for the Kenya National Drama Festival, demonstrating how technology can support both adjudication integrity and educational outcomes.

Onziru (2021)^[27] examines adjudication reforms within the Kenyan judiciary, arguing that corruption, opacity, and weak accountability mechanisms undermine public trust in legal decision-making. His analysis demonstrates that adjudication systems require transparency tools and procedural safeguards to ensure legitimacy. Although Onziru's work focuses on the judiciary rather than the arts, it highlights structural vulnerabilities that also affect adjudication in the Kenya National Drama Festival (KNMF), such as unreviewable decisions, lack of evidentiary support, and discretionary power concentrated in single adjudicators. However, the study does not address adjudication in cultural or performance contexts, nor does it consider technological interventions such as video replay. This leaves a gap that this study addresses by proposing

Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs) as a mechanism for enhancing integrity, transparency, and accountability in theatrical adjudication.

Nyawa (2023) ^[26] investigates the standard of proof used in election petition adjudication and advances a rights-centric model designed to protect fairness and procedural justice. His argument demonstrates that adjudication's legitimacy depends on clear, evidence-based reasoning that can withstand contestation. This insight is highly relevant to performance adjudication, where decisions similarly affect rights, such as the right of competitors to fair evaluation and just outcomes. Yet Nyawa's study is limited to constitutional and electoral processes, offering no guidance on how non-legal adjudication environments can operationalize such evidentiary safeguards. This study extends these concerns to cultural adjudication by arguing that VAA can provide visual evidence enabling fairer, rights-sensitive decisions in the KNDF.

Bullindah (2017) ^[24] focuses on creative processes in generating theatrical music, showing that performance outcomes depend on meticulous, multi-stage artistic labour. While his emphasis is on composition and production rather than adjudication, his work underscores the complexity of Kenyan theatrical performances and the extensive investment performers make in crafting stage items. This reinforces the need for adjudication systems that can accurately assess such labour without relying solely on real-time, fallible human observation. However, the study does not address the evaluative structures that determine how these creative works are judged. This study fills this gap by proposing VAA as a tool to ensure that the richness of theatrical production documented by Bullindah is judged with precision, consistency, and fairness.

Muyuku and Odutsa (2025) ^[25] explore the relationship between cultural creative dances and environmental consciousness, illustrating how performance genres serve pedagogical and social functions. Their work emphasizes that Kenyan performing arts are vehicles for cultural communication and behavioural influence, implying that adjudication in festivals must be rigorous, credible, and pedagogically aligned. Although insightful, their study does not interrogate the mechanisms through which cultural dances are assessed within competitive festivals, nor does it question whether current adjudication structures adequately support the pedagogical intentions they identify. This study responds to this omission by examining how VAA could enhance accuracy and reflective learning in the adjudication of creative dance and other theatrical genres within the KNDF.

Plastow (2021) ^[28] provides a comprehensive historical account of post-independence theatre in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, revealing how theatrical forms have developed within shifting political, cultural, and institutional landscapes. Her analysis demonstrates that East African theatre has long been shaped by tensions around authority, legitimacy, and the institutional regulation of performance. While this offers essential context for understanding the institutional role of festivals such as the KNDF, the study stops short of examining the adjudication frameworks that mediate artistic competition and recognition. By focusing primarily on historical and structural evolution, Plastow leaves unexplored the adjudicative mechanisms that regulate contemporary performance practice. This study builds on

her historical insights by interrogating one such mechanism, adjudication, and proposing VAA as a contemporary institutional innovation within Kenyan theatre.

Zien (2020) ^[29] analyses theatre and drama produced in politically charged "hot zones" during the Cold War, demonstrating how performance becomes entangled with power, surveillance, and ideological contestation. Although her work is situated in geopolitical rather than festival contexts, the underlying argument, that theatre is shaped by systems of observation, evaluation, and control, resonates strongly with adjudication in Kenyan festivals. The relevance lies in the insight that evaluators, whether political authorities or festival adjudicators, exercise power that can shape artistic expression and outcomes. Yet Zien does not address the procedural or technological structures that regulate evaluation in less politically fraught settings. This gap positions the present study to examine how VAA can democratize and equalize evaluative power within the KNMF, ensuring that decisions are grounded in observable evidence rather than opaque authority.

Collectively, these studies highlight progress in understanding adjudication, pedagogy, and technology in performance contexts. Yet, they leave unaddressed the challenge of ensuring fairness and consistency in live, school-based theatre competitions in Africa. This study fills that gap by examining how VAA could transform Kenyan theatrical adjudication, offering both accountability and pedagogical value.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design in order to generate rich, descriptive insights into the adjudication practices of the Kenya National Drama Festival and the potential role of Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs). A case study approach was employed, focusing on the Kenya National Drama Festival as a central site where issues of fairness, credibility, and technological integration in theatrical adjudication could be explored.

Research Area

The research was conducted during the Kenya National Drama Festival, which annually brings together theatre groups, schools, and adjudicators from across the country. This setting was considered appropriate because it provided direct access to performances, adjudicators, and audiences whose perspectives were critical to the subject under study.

Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to identify 25 respondents with direct experience and expertise in theatrical adjudication and festival participation. Specifically, 10 adjudicators were targeted because of their role in decision-making, while 15 regular theatre attendees were selected for their perspectives as consumers of adjudication outcomes. In addition, snowball sampling was used to expand the pool of respondents by 10 more. Adjudicators and attendees who were initially approached recommended other suitable participants with relevant experience and insights. This dual sampling strategy ensured that the study captured a range of informed voices while maintaining focus on individuals directly engaged with theatrical adjudication processes.

Data Analysis

The primary data sources were oral testimonies from adjudicators and regular theatre attendees. Adjudicators provided professional perspectives on the challenges of human-based adjudication, while attendees offered audience-centered views on fairness, transparency, and trust in the process. Together, these sources offered a balanced understanding of both the institutional and experiential dimensions of adjudication in Kenyan theatre.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents to allow for flexibility while still focusing on core themes such as the reliability of human adjudication, the potential application of VAA, and the implications for fairness and pedagogy. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and supplemented by field notes taken during festival observations. This method enabled the researcher to capture both stated experiences and contextual details of adjudication practices.

Data Analysis

Data were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Codes were generated to identify recurring themes, including perceived weaknesses of human adjudication, participant experiences of bias or inconsistency, and attitudes toward technological interventions such as VAA. Thematic analysis allowed for the comparison of perspectives across adjudicators and attendees, highlighting points of convergence and divergence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Kisii university research and ethics committee and NARCOSTI, before the commencement of data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and their voluntary involvement. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research. Pseudonyms were used in reporting findings to protect participant identity.

Results and Discussions

Human memory limitations

Adjudication in theatrical performances, such as those in the Kenya Universities Performing Arts Association (KUPAA) and the Kenya National Drama Festival, has traditionally depended on adjudicators' perception, memory, and interpretive judgment. While this reliance foregrounds human expertise, it inevitably introduces challenges that compromise fairness and accuracy. Nyandoro, a national adjudicator, acknowledged that fatigue often reduces attentiveness and precision, thereby limiting the ability to capture performance details and to allocate points consistently (G. Nyandoro, 5th May 2025, personal communication). Similar concerns are reflected in Zemboer's (2000) [9] study, which showed that the use of video and audio recordings significantly influenced evaluators' perceptions, with visual elements shaping scoring outcomes in ways that audio alone could not. These insights highlight the limitations of depending solely on human faculties in performance evaluation.

Ouma, a theatre arts director, emphasized that, at the Kenya National Drama Festival, adjudicators are tasked with assessing numerous performances within a compressed

timeframe (Ouma T personal communication). This shows that, given that human memory is selective and short-lived, subtle elements such as vocal modulation, timing, or intricate stage movements often fade quickly, leading adjudicators to rely on broad impressions rather than precise recall. This tendency increases the risk of omissions, inconsistencies, and contested judgments. The integration of Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs) offers a viable solution, as replay capabilities would enable adjudicators to revisit performances and verify details, thereby minimizing memory lapses and enhancing the reliability and objectivity of theatrical adjudication.

Visual Constraints of Human Perception

In live theatrical performances, multiple elements such as dialogue, gestures, blocking, and stage dynamics unfold simultaneously. This simultaneity requires adjudicators to process large amounts of information in real time, which creates a high cognitive load and increases the likelihood of perceptual oversights. When relying solely on sight, adjudicators are likely to miss overlapping or fleeting details, particularly in ensemble scenes where different actions occur across the stage. Once overlooked, such aspects cannot be retrieved for verification, which compromises the comprehensiveness and fairness of the evaluation. The figure below demonstrates how VAR works in football, which is by reviewing scenes that might have been missed and capturing data that might be important in the contest. Likewise, this can be adopted in theatre festivals to capture every detail, to help in decision making.



Nyamwaka, a national adjudicator, confirmed this limitation in an oral interview, noting that even slight misses can result in lost marks or unpenalized offences (E. Nyamwaka, personal communication, August 15, 2025). This personal account echoes a broader concern documented in research. Hensley (2016) [4], for instance, found that choral festival adjudicators varied widely in what they attended to during performances, with some focusing heavily on vocal blend and diction, while others prioritized stage presence or interpretive style. Such differences reveal that even trained adjudicators cannot perceive and process all dimensions of a performance equally, and that judgments are often shaped by subjective emphasis rather than comprehensive observation.

The limitations of human perception underscore the value of technological assistance in adjudication. Video technology captures performances holistically, preserving both the visual and auditory dimensions for subsequent review. Unlike the fleeting nature of live observation, video allows adjudicators to replay scenes, zoom into specific actions, and slow down sequences to capture otherwise imperceptible details. This capability is particularly important in ensemble performances, where simultaneous

actions may compete for the adjudicator's attention. In reducing the risk of oversight, video technology enhances both accuracy and fairness in adjudication.

Okemwa explained that replay technology introduces a form of accountability. When performances are preserved, adjudicators can justify their decisions with reference to specific replayed evidence, reducing the likelihood of disputes and building confidence among participants (C. Okemwa, personal communication, May 20, 2025). In this way, small but essential details such as a missed line, improper blocking, or an exceptional moment of stage presence are not lost but become part of a verifiable record. As such, video-assisted adjudication not only mitigates perceptual constraints but also aligns the adjudicative process with principles of fairness, transparency, and consistency that are critical to the credibility of the Kenyan theatre and music Festivals.

Dispute resolution and credibility

Adjudication without supporting evidence often leads to disputes from performers, directors, and schools, who may question the fairness and legitimacy of decisions. In the absence of a verifiable record, such disputes are typically settled through subjective explanations, which risk eroding trust in the adjudication process and, by extension, compromising the integrity of the festival. Performers and institutions who feel that their work has been undervalued or unfairly penalized are left without concrete grounds to understand or challenge the decision, fostering perceptions of bias or inconsistency.

Baraka, an actor and director, reflected on this challenge, recounting instances at county-level festivals where the outcomes seemed misaligned with what both audiences and participants perceived as deserving (Baraka, personal communication, August 12, 2025). He emphasized that a video review system would have provided an objective basis for revisiting such contested decisions, enabling adjudicators to clarify whether the disputed performance elements were penalized appropriately. His perspective highlights the disparity between subjective human judgment and the increasing demand for transparency in evaluative processes. The figure below demonstrates a VAR in action to solve a disputed action that the referee might have missed in real time because of the speed of the live action, similar technology will be vital in theatrical adjudication.



This concern is not unique to Kenya. Rasmussen's (2010) [7] analysis of Uganda's national cinema highlights the politics of cultural evaluation and the infrastructures within which performances are judged. His findings suggest that

evaluative practices, when left unchecked or undocumented, often reflect not only individual subjectivity but also broader socio-cultural biases, thereby intensifying disputes and undermining credibility.

The introduction of video evidence provides a practical remedy to these challenges. In enabling adjudicators to replay contested performances, festivals can resolve disputes with reference to verifiable material rather than memory-based explanations. This transparency not only fosters accountability but also reassures participants that judgments are grounded in observable facts rather than personal bias or fatigue-induced oversight. Moreover, the existence of an archival record of performances strengthens institutional credibility, as decisions can be defended and contextualized long after the festival ends. Therefore, integrating video-assisted adjudication promotes fairness, reduces the likelihood of protracted disputes, and reinforces confidence in the adjudicative process. In doing so, it safeguards the reputation of cultural festivals such as the Kenya National Drama Festival, ensuring that outcomes are seen not only as authoritative but also as just and trustworthy.



Pedagogical and archival value

At present, the adjudication process in festivals such as the Kenya National Drama Festival and KUPAA provides performers and trainers with little beyond adjudicators' brief verbal feedback. While such comments are valuable, they are often too general or fleeting to serve as effective tools for sustained learning or improvement. Once performances conclude, participants have no concrete evidence to revisit specific errors or to reflect on areas that were penalized. This is particularly limiting in complex genres such as folk dance, where performers may unintentionally execute incorrect patterns without realizing how or where the error occurred. Without recorded evidence, such mistakes remain unnoticed or misunderstood, thereby hindering meaningful correction before advancing to the next competitive level.

Onchiri affirmed this pedagogical limitation, noting that performers often desire to review precise moments of error, whether in blocking, rhythm, or choreography, to make targeted improvements (personal communication, August 12, 2025). Video recordings would provide such an opportunity by allowing trainers and performers to carefully track errors, identify their origins, and implement informed corrections in subsequent performances.

These concerns align with Wheeler's (2018) broader discussion of adjudication in administrative contexts, where he raised critical questions about oversight, accountability, and procedural transparency. Although Wheeler's study focused on administrative adjudicators, the principle extends naturally to artistic adjudication: without durable records, adjudication lacks both pedagogical and procedural depth.

The introduction of video evidence thus transforms the adjudication process from a one-off evaluative act into an enduring pedagogical and archival resource. Recorded performances create a permanent repository for critique, training, and scholarly analysis. For teachers and learners, these recordings function as practical teaching aids, enabling reflective practice and systematic skill development. For theatre scholars, they serve as research material that documents evolving trends in performance, style, and adjudication practices. In this way, the integration of video-assisted adjudication not only enhances fairness and accuracy but also strengthens the educational and archival value of festivals, ensuring their impact extends beyond the immediate competition.

Conclusion

The adjudication of theatrical performances in the Kenya National Drama Festival remains an indispensable process for evaluating talent, fostering cultural expression, and guiding artistic growth. However, reliance on human perception alone exposes the process to limitations of subjectivity, memory lapses, and perceptual oversights that compromise fairness and consistency. This study has argued for the integration of Video Assistant Adjudicators (VAAs) as a pragmatic and innovative solution to these challenges. Zembower (2000) ^[9] demonstrated that video and audio recordings reshape evaluators' perceptions by providing a more holistic reference point than auditory judgment alone, underscoring the potential of technology in enhancing adjudicative accuracy. Rawlings (2019) ^[8], in exploring large-ensemble adjudicated events, highlighted the benefits of structured and transparent adjudication processes for participant confidence, which resonates with the Kenyan context, where contested judgments often erode trust in festival outcomes. Similarly, Achieng' Akuno (2019) ^[1] emphasized the centrality of music education as both process and practice, pointing to the value of systematic feedback and learning resources in nurturing performers' growth.

Taken together, these insights affirm that adopting VAA in the Kenya National Drama Festival would not only safeguard fairness and accountability but also expand pedagogical and archival opportunities for learners, trainers, and scholars. In bridging gaps in perception, memory, and feedback, video-assisted adjudication would professionalize the evaluation process and align Kenyan theatre adjudication with global best practices.

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