

**ANALYSING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON DIRECTING
APPROACHES: A STUDY OF TWO UNIBEN STUDENT DIRECTORS**

BY

IFEOLUWA JENNIFER OWAIYE

MAT NO:ART2101283

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

FACULTY OF ART

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE
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OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS, (B.A) HONOURS DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS,
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DECLARATION

I DECLARE that this project work is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts University of Benin under the supervision of Dr Oghenemudiaga praise Akpughe for the purpose of acquiring Bachelor of Arts B.A (Honours) degree in Theatre Arts. All ideas and views are products of my research where others view have been used and expressed, they were acknowledged.

IFEOLUWA JENNIFER OWAIYE

ART2101283

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research study was embarked upon by Ifeoluwa Jennifer owaiye in the department of Theatre Arts under my supervision.

_____.

Dr Oghenemudiaga Praise Akpughe

Project Supervisor

Date.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, for keeping me alive and sustained during the course of this and all of my Educational Endeavors, and To my late grandfather, Mr. Michael Samuel the one who laid the foundation for all that I am today.

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Abstract

This thesis presents a critical analysis of directorial practice within the multicultural crucible of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), fundamentally challenging the academic notion of directing as a universally applied, objective craft. Instead, it asserts that directorial authority and aesthetic decision-making are not neutral but are profoundly and demonstrably conditioned by the director's inherited cultural epistemology. To interrogate this assertion, a qualitative comparative case study was employed, focusing on two student directors whose cultural backgrounds represent structurally opposed aesthetic and social systems: Julia Andrew (Edo), rooted in a hierarchical, spectacle-centric framework, and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu (Igbo), informed by a democratic, dialogue-centric ethos. The data, subjected to Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA), unveiled a decisive cultural cleavage in ideological approach, which manifested across three critical polarities. The first polarity concerns the source of Aesthetic Authority (Command versus Consensus). Andrew's Edo-derived approach favoured Authoritative Aesthetic Intervention, relying on her personal cultural custodianship to unilaterally impose high-status ceremonial elements for visual spectacle, exemplified by her Monologic Command structure that prioritised efficiency and structural fidelity. Conversely, Orakwelu's Igbo method operated on a Dialogic Paradox: asserting necessary institutional control initially, but quickly releasing authority to the ensemble to achieve authenticity through communal validation. His Dialogic Negotiation prioritised legitimacy and collective ownership. The second critical cleavage lies in Cultural Function (Preservation versus Critique). Andrew's conservative approach used theatre to validate and affirm the prestige of inherited Edo social and aesthetic status. In stark contrast, Orakwelu leveraged the stage as a liminal space for Cultural Critique, actively demanding that the ensemble challenge and revise "what we deem fit to call culture." The study concludes that the contemporary Nigerian student director is caught in a state of ideological conflict, struggling to reconcile Western academic structures with powerful, inherited cultural models. To address this, the thesis strongly recommends that theatre pedagogy in Nigeria must be decolonised through the implementation

of structured cross-cultural rehearsal protocols and a critical re-evaluation of assessment metrics to prioritise the Dialogic Value of the artistic process over conservative aesthetic outcomes.

Keywords: Directorial practice, Cultural epistemology, Aesthetic authority, Edo and Igbo cultures, Dialogic negotiation, Cultural critique Decolonisation, Theatre pedagogy, Artistic process, Student directors, Cultural function, Communal validation, Theatre pedagogy in Nigeria

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Theatre has long been regarded as a cultural institution that reflects, critiques, and reimagines society. It is not merely a form of entertainment but an intellectual and communal practice that interrogates cultural identity and social relations. In the Nigerian context, and particularly at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), theatre serves as a pedagogical tool through which students explore performance traditions, experiment with directing, and contribute to ongoing debates about culture and identity. Student theatre at UNIBEN is especially significant because it thrives in an environment marked by Nigeria's extraordinary cultural diversity. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, performance traditions, and worldviews (qtd. in *Cultural Diversity as Theatrical Practice* 12). This diversity is not simply a background feature; it actively shapes the artistic practices of student directors.

Directing, as both a creative and managerial process, requires the director to interpret scripts, guide actors, and harmonise the efforts of a production team. Robert Knopf insists that the director must function as a collaborator rather than an authoritarian figure, drawing on the cultural resources of actors and audiences to craft meaning (5). Within UNIBEN's theatre, student directors cannot avoid cultural complexity. They are compelled to negotiate conflicting cultural codes, address linguistic differences, and incorporate performance idioms that may be unfamiliar to them. The challenge is heightened when plays originate from cultural traditions other than the director's own, requiring them to exercise both sensitivity and creativity.

Comparative research highlights similar tensions across global contexts. The *Diversity in Theatre Report* on Swiss performance practice concludes that multicultural ensembles often generate aesthetic richness but simultaneously raise issues of misrepresentation and conflict when directors fail to acknowledge cultural difference (Theatre Diversity Initiative 8). Patrice Pavis makes a related point in *Languages of the Stage*, where he argues that theatre is always mediated by cultural codes, and directors must learn to "decode and recode" these signs for audiences who may not share the same cultural literacy (132). These observations resonate strongly with Nigerian student theatre, where directors confront diverse audience expectations and must balance authenticity with accessibility.

Nigerian scholarship reinforces the importance of cultural literacy in directing. In his essay on experimental directing, Etop Akwang demonstrates how Nigerian directors often appropriate indigenous performance traditions to expand the possibilities of staging (Akwang 103). His reflections underscore how directing in a culturally plural society cannot be reduced to technical skill; it is inherently interpretive and political. Similarly, Adolphe Appia's theories of *mise-en-scène*, although developed in Europe, emphasise that directors must integrate design, movement, and rhythm into a coherent whole that communicates meaning across

cultural barriers (*Adolphe Appia's Directorial Concepts* 44). When these principles are transposed to Nigeria, where costumes, movement, and language carry heavy cultural symbolism, the stakes of directorial decisions become even higher.

Educational contexts such as UNIBEN add another dimension to this debate. Alison Oddey observes that experimental and educational theatre thrives on collaboration across difference, as students use performance to discover new creative vocabularies (14). However, the enthusiasm of experimentation often clashes with the limitations of experience. Student directors may lack the theoretical grounding or intercultural training required to handle sensitive cultural material. For instance, a Yoruba director staging a Hausa folktale may inadvertently misrepresent ritual elements unless guided by cultural insiders. This tension between creative exploration and cultural responsibility forms a crucial part of the discourse this study engages with.

The audience, too, cannot be ignored. Unlike professional theatre audiences that may be relatively homogenous, student theatre at UNIBEN attracts a mixed crowd of students, lecturers, and external guests. The reception of a production is therefore shaped by the audience's cultural expectations. The *Gender Equality and Diversity in European Theatres Report* suggests that culturally sensitive directing fosters inclusivity, while neglect of diversity can alienate sections of the audience (European Theatre Convention 14). In UNIBEN's case, where students from multiple ethnic backgrounds form the bulk of spectatorship, the director's approach to cultural material can either promote mutual understanding or deepen divisions.

Thus, the background to this study is twofold: the recognition of Nigeria's vast cultural diversity and the specific challenges faced by student directors at UNIBEN as they navigate this diversity in directing. Professional scholarship on intercultural theatre has provided useful frameworks, but student contexts remain underexplored. By critically analysing how two

UNIBEN student directors engage with cultural diversity, this study aims to fill that gap. It situates student theatre not as a marginal training ground but as a vital space where the politics of culture, education, and artistry converge.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although scholarship on directing has explored the dynamics of intercultural theatre and professional practice, very little has been written about the influence of cultural diversity on student directors in Nigerian universities. Most studies concentrate on established directors such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and Hubert Ogunde, highlighting their ability to merge indigenous and Western performance forms (Adedeji 42). While such research is valuable, it neglects the training grounds where emerging directors cultivate their craft. University theatre, particularly at UNIBEN, is not merely a rehearsal space but a cultural arena where students are required to negotiate multiple ethnic traditions and worldviews in their productions.

Professional frameworks, while instructive, do not always map neatly onto student contexts. For instance, Eugenio Barba's intercultural theories demonstrate how directors expand their artistic vocabulary through engagement with other cultures, but this requires deep research, cultural sensitivity, and access to resources (Barba and Watson 47). Student directors, by contrast, operate with limited budgets, restricted timeframes, and varying levels of intercultural literacy. The question arises: how do these constraints shape their directing approaches?

The *Diversity in Theatre Report* warns that failure to account for cultural differences in rehearsal and performance can lead to exclusion and miscommunication (Theatre Diversity Initiative 9). In student theatre, where casts often comprise actors from several cultural groups, the potential for conflict is magnified. Yet, as Alison Oddey observes, collaboration across difference in educational theatre can also lead to new creative strategies (14). The contradiction

between these two possibilities conflict versus enrichment remains unresolved in the Nigerian context, especially within university training.

Empirical gaps are evident. Research on UNIBEN has focused on the institution's history, curriculum, and contributions to Nigerian theatre, but little has been written about how its student directors negotiate cultural diversity in practical productions (*UNIBEN Student Handbook* 23). Without systematic study, the risk is that the unique challenges and innovations of student directors will remain invisible, leaving a void in theatre scholarship.

This study responds to that gap by asking: how do two student directors at UNIBEN engage with cultural diversity in their directing practices? What cultural factors shape their decision-making? How does their background influence their interpretation of scripts and management of actors? And how does the audience respond to their work? By focusing on these questions, the study aims to reposition student theatre as a critical site for examining the intersections of culture, artistry, and pedagogy.

1.3 Research Questions

To address the above problem, the study is guided by the following questions:

1. What cultural factors shape the directing approaches of the two selected student directors at UNIBEN?
2. In what ways do their directing approaches differ, and what similarities can be identified in handling culturally diverse casts and crews?
3. How does cultural diversity influence their directorial choices in script interpretation, casting, rehearsal management, and design collaboration?
4. How do culturally diverse audiences at UNIBEN interpret and respond to their productions?

5. What challenges and opportunities arise from directing in a multicultural environment, and how do student directors address them?

1.4 Aim of the Study

The overarching aim of this study is to critically analyse how cultural diversity influences the directing approaches of two student directors at the University of Benin. It seeks to situate their work within broader debates on intercultural performance, directing methodologies, and the politics of representation in Nigerian student theatre.

Objectives of the Study

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives, which are deliberately expanded to emphasise critical engagement:

1. To identify the cultural factors that shape the directing styles of the two selected student directors.
2. To compare similarities and differences in their directing approaches. To examine the impact of cultural diversity on directorial decisions in script interpretation, casting, rehearsal management, and design collaboration.
3. To assess how cultural diversity shapes audience reception of student productions at UNIBEN.
4. To analyse the challenges and opportunities student directors face when engaging with cultural diversity.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research is deliberately limited to two student directors in the Theatre Arts Department of the University of Benin. While a broader sample might provide generalisability, this narrower scope enables detailed analysis and comparison. The scope is outlined below:

- **Cultural background:** The study considers the directors' ethnic and cultural identities, which shape their worldviews and aesthetic preferences. For example, a director from Edo State may prioritise gestural styles rooted in Bini performance, whereas an Igbo director may rely on narrative song traditions.
- **Directorial practice:** It focuses on how diversity influences the directors' approaches to script selection, interpretation, casting, rehearsal strategies, and design collaboration. Studies such as the *Student Directing Project Guidelines* (Cal Poly 3) emphasise that directing at student level requires both creative vision and managerial skill; this study contextualises such skills in a multicultural environment.
- **Audience response:** The study also examines how spectators at UNIBEN, themselves culturally diverse, interpret student productions. Reception studies such as *Practising Diversity at the Stratford Festival of Canada* illustrate how cultural backgrounds shape theatrical meaning (Yingling 17).
- **Institutional context:** The University of Benin, with its long history of theatre practice, provides a distinctive environment for this research. Documents such as the *UNIBEN Student Handbook* affirm that practical theatre is central to student learning (23). Thus, the study situates directing within institutional as well as cultural frameworks.

This scope does not claim to exhaust the subject of cultural diversity in Nigerian theatre. Instead, it offers a critical micro-analysis that illuminates the broader question of how cultural plurality shapes directing approaches in educational contexts.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to scholarship, pedagogy, practice, and society.

1. Scholarly contribution.

Most Nigerian theatre scholarship has focused on professional directors, canonical playwrights, or historical developments (Adedeji 42). Yet student directors, who often act as apprentices in the profession, remain marginal in research. By focusing on two UNIBEN student directors, this study fills a gap in the literature. It positions student theatre as more than a training exercise but as a space where intercultural negotiation and creative experimentation occur. The *Cultural Diversity as Theatrical Practice* report notes that ignoring student contexts risks overlooking innovations that later shape national theatre movements (12).

2. Pedagogical value.

Theatre education depends not only on theory but on lived experience in production. This study offers empirical insights into how student directors manage cultural complexity. For lecturers designing curricula, the findings may highlight the need to integrate intercultural competence into directing courses. The *Student Director Application Guide* at Indiana University South Bend, for instance, outlines the importance of preparing students for collaborative leadership across diverse casts (2). A similar framework could strengthen Nigerian training.

3. Practical relevance.

Student directors will benefit from case-based strategies on how to handle multicultural ensembles. The *Diversity in Theatre Report* stresses that inclusive practice leads to richer creativity, while exclusionary practice risks alienation and misinterpretation (Theatre

Diversity Initiative 9). By documenting successes and challenges, this study may serve as a handbook for emerging directors navigating similar conditions.

4. Social importance.

Finally, the study speaks to Nigeria's wider need for intercultural dialogue. Productions that embrace diversity can foster empathy and reduce stereotypes. As the *Cultural Diversity Plan* of Cara Mía Theatre Company argues, theatre is not just an art form but a civic practice that builds bridges between communities (3). UNIBEN student theatre, with its mixed audiences, provides an ideal arena for such bridge-building.

In sum, the significance of this study extends beyond the university: it enriches scholarship, improves pedagogy, guides practice, and contributes to social cohesion.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity, the following terms are defined in the context of this study:

- **Cultural Diversity.**

The coexistence of multiple ethnic, linguistic, and artistic traditions within a community or institution. UNESCO describes cultural diversity as “the common heritage of humanity” and stresses that it must be preserved and promoted to sustain creativity (*UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* 2). In the Nigerian university context, cultural diversity includes ethnic identity, language, religion, and performance traditions.

- **Directing Approaches.**

The strategies, techniques, and styles directors employ to interpret scripts, guide actors, and organise productions. Hodge and McLain argue that directing involves managing analysis, communication, and style while negotiating meaning among

collaborators (12). For student directors, approaches may include improvisation, adaptation of traditional rituals, or formal blocking methods borrowed from Western theatre.

- **Student Directors.**

Undergraduate or postgraduate students who direct stage productions within academic settings. Unlike professional directors, student directors often operate with limited resources, but they are also freer to experiment. The *MVHSTA Student Director Recognition Report* acknowledges that student directing is crucial for developing leadership, creativity, and intercultural skills (4).

- **UNIBEN Theatre.**

The physical and symbolic performance space at the University of Benin, where students stage productions as part of their academic training. The *UNIBEN Quality Assurance Book of Rules* affirms that practical performance is a vital component of learning outcomes (15). In this study, “UNIBEN Theatre” refers both to the venue and to the ecosystem of production activities within the Department of Theatre Arts.

- **Audience Reception.**

The ways in which spectators interpret, accept, resist, or reinterpret the meanings of a performance. Patrice Pavis maintains that audiences read theatre through cultural codes (132). In UNIBEN, where audiences are drawn from different ethnic and academic backgrounds, reception becomes a complex process shaped by cultural literacy and identity.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Preamble: Reframing the Directorial Gaze

This chapter presents a critical synthesis of existing scholarship concerning the relationship between cultural diversity and theatrical directing methodology. The fundamental assertion guiding this review is that the director's cultural heritage functions not as a passive influence, but as an active, determining force an epistemological framework that dictates choices in interpretation, collaboration, and stage aesthetics (Yu Uemura 3). By engaging with theoretical models from Intercultural Performance, Cultural Studies, and African Theatre History, this review aims to construct a robust critical lens for analysing the work of two student directors at the University of Benin (UNIBEN): **Julia Andrew (Edo)** and **Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu (Igbo)**. The review moves beyond celebrating diversity to critically assessing its often fraught and challenging consequences for stage practice.

2.1 Theoretical Approaches to Cultural Diversity in the Theatre: A Critical Overview

The study of diversity in performance necessitates moving away from universalist, Western-centric models of directing that once dominated the academy. The modern director, particularly

in a complex environment like Nigeria, must be understood as a cultural translator who constantly negotiates power and meaning across disparate traditions (Winkler 2).

2.1.1 The Limitations of Western Directorial Hegemony

The initial premise of many theatre training programs, including those influencing African academia, often relies heavily on the technical and psychological foundations laid by figures such as Adolphe Appia and Konstantin Stanislavski. While Appia's concepts offered vital innovations in scenic design and lighting (Adolphe Appia's Directorial Concepts 1), they fundamentally operated within a European aesthetic tradition that prioritised unity and formal harmony over cultural contradiction. Similarly, Stanislavski's system, though revolutionary for actor training, implicitly assumes a singular, unified cultural context for emotional realism, failing to account for how gesture, emotional expression, and audience-performer dynamics are culturally codified (Directions for Directing Theatre 4).

This tradition of European directorial models, however, presents a serious epistemic challenge when transplanted to Nigerian university theatres. As the Theatre Diversity Initiative argues, relying on historically homogeneous cultural models inevitably results in the marginalisation of indigenous theatrical codes (TDI Diversity in Theatre Report 1). For student directors at UNIBEN, the theoretical problem is acute: they are trained in a system that often overlooks the performance languages they inherit, forcing a critical tension between academic expectation and cultural authenticity. The work of directors Andrew and Orakwelu provides an empirical opportunity to critique this persistent Western bias by observing how local cultural dictates actively supersede, subvert, or assimilate these universalist theoretical frameworks (Lulu Grant 1).

2.1.2 Intercultural Competence Theory: A Critique of Practical Application

Darla Deardorff's model of **Intercultural Competence** defined as the "ability to communicate and behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions" (Deardorff 247) provides a useful, albeit primarily behavioural, framework for collaborative artistic environments. Deardorff's emphasis on **open-mindedness, cultural self-awareness, and adaptability** is theoretically essential in a UNIBEN rehearsal room where students represent a multitude of ethnic and linguistic identities (UNIBEN Student Handbook 1).

However, a critical review reveals that this competence is rarely achieved easily; it is often a source of conflict. Research by Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo, focusing on Nigerian university environments, documented substantial barriers: mispronunciation of indigenous names, conflicting cultural attitudes towards symbolic costumes, and discomfort with roles that challenge personal or ethnic beliefs (Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo 131). This empirical evidence demonstrates that mere awareness (the "knowledge" component of competence) is insufficient. For directors like Andrew and Orakwelu, competence must transition from theoretical understanding to practical authority management.

Furthermore, Claire Kramsch's extension of this idea to **symbolic competence** suggests that effective directorial leadership requires the ability to interpret and negotiate **cultural signs** (Kramsch 118). In a performance context, this means the director must be capable of translating not just dialogue, but also the cultural weight of a given gesture, rhythm, or colour. The contrasting Edo emphasis on visual spectacle and hierarchy, versus the Igbo tradition of participatory democracy and improvisation, suggests that the two student directors will enact and define 'intercultural competence' in vastly different, perhaps even conflicting, ways within their respective rehearsal processes (UNIBEN Quality Assurance 1).

2.1.3 Cultural Performance Theory and the Liminal Space of Conflict

The theories of Milton Singer and Victor Turner provide a robust interpretive lens for understanding theatrical practice as a deeply embedded cultural act. Singer's concept of **cultural performances** identifiable, time-bound events that transmit community values (Singer 71) and Turner's expansion of performance as a "social drama" that occupies a **liminal space** (Turner 22) are highly relevant to Nigerian theatre. This perspective critiques the idea of theatre as simple entertainment, insisting instead that it is a mechanism for cultural negotiation and potential transformation (Jeyifo 103).

Critically, Turner's liminality is not always harmonious; it is a space of ambiguity and structural conflict where cultural norms are examined and potentially reshaped (Turner 41). This model aligns perfectly with Nigerian theatrical history, exemplified by Wole Soyinka's integration of Yoruba cosmology with Western dramaturgy to interrogate socio-political boundaries (Jeyifo 102). Directors Andrew and Orakwelu are thus engaged in a contemporary form of social drama. Their productions at UNIBEN must synthesise indigenous oral traditions and festival aesthetics with the demands of the modern stage. If Andrew draws heavily on the structured, hierarchical ceremony of Edo festivals, while Orakwelu employs the fluid, participatory structure of Igbo communal performance, their very deployment of Turner's "liminal space" will be antithetical, creating a compelling point of comparative study for this research (Oni 77). The influence of cultural diversity is therefore not merely thematic, but fundamentally structural, affecting the architecture of the performance event itself (Oni 14).

2.1.4 Patrice Pavis and Cultural Deterritorialisation: The Perils of Translation

Patrice Pavis's work on **Intercultural Theatre** offers the sharpest critique of the cultural translation process. Pavis posits that the director acts as a mediator, balancing authenticity, blending, and audience reception (Pavis 4). His crucial concept of **cultural deterritorialisation** describes how cultural elements such as an Edo ceremonial dance step or

an Igbo chant are lifted from their original, culturally saturated context and placed into a new, often academic, stage environment (Pavis 12).

This process is inherently fraught with peril. Deterritorialisation risks **cultural dilution** or, worse, **appropriation** and **misrepresentation** if handled without ethical rigour (Bannon 92). The critical question for the UNIBEN student directors becomes: Does the inclusion of cultural material achieve genuine *synthesis* or merely *superficial decoration*?

Andrew and Orakwelu, coming from cultures with immense yet distinct performative heritages, embody this tension. Andrew's potential emphasis on the visually expressive, authoritative aesthetic of the Benin Kingdom's court art (Oni 44) must be critically assessed against Orakwelu's likely use of the communal, improvisational dynamics of Igbo masquerade (Agbasiere 71). Their success should not be judged by the presence of cultural signs, but by their ability to manage the deterritorialisation process effectively, ensuring the original cultural signifier retains its power while acquiring new, legible meaning for a diverse university audience (The Art of Stage Directing 2). Failure to do so exposes the production to charges of essentialism, transforming rich cultural practice into mere theatrical cliché (Hodge and McLain 12).

2.2 The Historical Development of Nigerian Theatre: An Analytical Framework

Nigerian theatre history provides the contextual foundation for understanding how contemporary student directors inherit and contest directorial authority within a decolonising aesthetic.

2.2.1 The Synthesis of Tradition and Colonial Aesthetics

The modern Nigerian stage, as a product of both indigenous performance and colonial influence, established a tradition of cultural fusion that student directors must either embrace or resist. The Yoruba opera movement, pioneered by figures like Hubert Ogunde and Duro Ladipo, is a canonical example of **cultural blending**, combining indigenous music, dance, and popular narrative forms with Western stage conventions and commercial structures (Barber 27). This tradition demonstrated that theatrical practice could assert African identity while navigating new formats (Oni 55).

However, the literary theatre tradition, exemplified by Wole Soyinka, offered a counterpoint, utilising complex dramaturgy to interrogate Yoruba myth and political failures, effectively turning the stage into a space for critical political dialogue (Jeyifo 102). This history leaves contemporary directors with an unresolved tension: should their work prioritise popular, accessible cultural expression (a functionalist approach), or should it serve as a space for intellectual and political critique (a high-art approach)? Andrew and Orakwelu, navigating their academic projects, are forced to choose, and that choice is likely dictated by their cultural understanding of the purpose of public performance (Barber 145).

2.2.2 The University Theatre as a Site of Aesthetic Conflict

Nigerian university theatre programs, such as the one at UNIBEN, were established partly to formalise and advance this postcolonial aesthetic agenda. However, these academic spaces are often internally conflicted. They are bound by a curriculum that requires students to master canonical Western texts and techniques while simultaneously encouraging the development of indigenous performance aesthetics (UNIBEN Quality Assurance 1).

This environment presents a logistical and ideological challenge for student directors. They must manage cultural diversity among their peers, which is assured by the constitutional

principle of **federal character** in student intake (UNIBEN Student Handbook 1). While this diversity is theoretically enriching, it frequently leads to practical friction: linguistic difference, conflicting social etiquettes, and a lack of shared performance history among collaborators (Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo 131). The student director, therefore, cannot assume a unified, shared theatrical vocabulary.

For Julia Andrew and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu, the UNIBEN theatre is a space where cultural difference must be converted into creative coherence. Their success will be critically measured by their ability to negotiate these aesthetic conflicts, proving that cultural diversity is a creative asset, not a chaotic liability, within the strictures of academic production (Oni 77). This sets the stage for a granular comparison of how their specific Edo and Igbo cultural codes provide contrasting solutions to these shared academic challenges.

2.3 Igbo Cultural Influence: Democracy, Participation, and the Carnavalesque

The Igbo cultural heritage exerts a profound, distinctive influence on theatre, rooted in its decentralised societal structure, participatory performance modes, and a deeply embedded appreciation for the transformative power of the **carnavalesque** (Ebeogu 94).

2.3.1 Traditional Igbo Performance Practice: Challenging Hierarchy

Igbo society, historically decentralised and consensus based, fosters a performance culture that prioritises collective expression and dialogue over rigid, centralised authority. Agbasiere confirms that traditional Igbo performing arts, stemming from communal rituals and oral storytelling, privilege the collective experience over individual display (Agbasiere 64). This democratic approach contrasts sharply with hierarchical systems often seen in directing.

The structural characteristic of groups like *Egedege* and *Mkpokiti* characterised by spontaneity, improvisation, and call and response provides a model for a non authoritarian directorial methodology (Nwachukwu 112). For a director like **Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu**, this heritage suggests an inherent preference for a collaborative, actor driven rehearsal environment. He is likely to favour:

- **Dialogue-based Authority:** Negotiating interpretations with actors rather than imposing a singular vision (Ebeogu 89).
- **Improvisation:** Utilising spontaneity and the actor's immediate cultural resources to generate stage material.
- **Decentralised Staging:** Employing audience participation and flexible staging that breaks the fourth wall, reflecting the communal ethos (Agbasiere 71).

The critical examination of Orakwelu's practice must, therefore, assess whether this democratic, Igbo derived approach successfully fosters a genuinely collaborative spirit within a diverse UNIBEN cast, or if it devolves into indecision when confronted with the necessity of making final, unilateral artistic choices (The Art of Stage Directing 2).

2.3.2 The Masquerade Aesthetic: Symbolic Translation and Critique

Igbo **masquerade culture** is perhaps the most critical determinant of this directorial aesthetic. Masquerades are not static rituals; they are dynamic theatrical events blending elaborate costumes, music, and dance, offering a powerful vehicle for social critique and transformation (Nwachukwu 135). The mask allows the performer to embody spirits and social roles, creating a liminal space where identity is fluid and conventional boundaries are temporarily suspended (Ebeogu 94).

Crucially, children's masquerade games often serve as a tool for **satire and role reversal**, linking them to the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque a theatrical mode where hierarchies are mocked and authority is challenged (Agbasiere 71). This tradition imbues the Igbo director with a profound appreciation for **visual symbolism** and an aesthetic disposition towards **parody and social commentary**.

Orakwelu is expected to leverage this heritage by:

- **Visual Symbolism:** Using bold, perhaps even jarring, costuming or props that serve as direct cultural or social commentary, much like the elaborate costuming of the Igbo masquerade (Nwachukwu 135).
- **Direct Engagement:** Utilising techniques that demand active audience interaction, affirming the communal, non passive nature of Igbo performance (Agbasiere 71).

The critical challenge is determining if Orakwelu can effectively translate the raw, communal energy of the masquerade aesthetic into the formal, academic setting of the UNIBEN stage without reducing its power to a simplistic cultural spectacle (Pavis 12).

2.4 Edo Cultural Influence: Hierarchy, Spectacle, and Visual Authority

The Edo people, rooted in the legacy of the **Benin Kingdom**, possess a performance aesthetic diametrically opposed to the Igbo model, one defined by rigid **hierarchy, visual spectacle, and codified authority** (Egharevba 29). This difference provides the most compelling point of contrast for this study.

2.4.1 The Heritage of the Benin Kingdom and Directorial Authority

The Benin Kingdom's enduring political structure, centred on the Oba, established a cultural precedent that prizes **order, discipline, and centralised authority** (Egharevba 29). This

heritage is reflected in the famous visual arts bronze casting and ceremonial sculpture which are not merely decorative but embodiments of historical and ritual power (Oni 44). These visual traditions offer a director a "reservoir of symbolic and performative images" rooted in protocol (Oni 44).

For a director like **Julia Andrew**, whose cultural identity stems from Edo State, this tradition suggests an inclination towards a highly structured, top-down directorial approach, favouring:

- **Centralised Vision:** Maintaining a clear, singular artistic vision where the director's word is the final, undisputed authority, mirroring the respect for cultural hierarchy (Egharevba 29).
- **Order and Discipline:** Implementing a formal, disciplined rehearsal process, valuing precision in blocking and stage movement over improvisation.
- **Aesthetic Formalism:** Drawing upon the aesthetic formalism and historical gravitas of Edo visual art to create a visually rich, structured, and deliberate stage image (Obi 67).

The critical tension here lies in how Andrew's culturally inclined authoritarianism navigates a diverse and arguably democratically minded UNIBEN cast. Does her cultural emphasis on order facilitate clarity and execution, or does it stifle creative input and collaboration from her multicultural team (TDI Diversity in Theatre Report 1)?

2.4.2 Festival Practices: From Ritual Authority to Stage Spectacle

Edo ceremonial traditions, such as the *Igue Festival* and the *Eghughu Festival*, exemplify the fusion of ritual authority with grand theatrical spectacle (Obi 67). These events blur the line between ritual and performance, staging history and values through meticulously organised, public display (Osadolor 112). They are characterised by:

- **Visual Dominance:** A preference for grand, layered symbolism, with emphasis on rich materials, ceremonial attire, and choreographed movement (Oni 86).
- **Controlled Participation:** While the audience is involved, the overall structure and progression of the spectacle are rigorously controlled by ritual experts and authority figures, unlike the fluid participation of Igbo performance (Osadolor 112).

Andrew is expected to translate this heritage by emphasising elaborate **production values**, focusing on **set design, costuming, and musical orchestration** to create an **immersive spectacle**. Her directorial approach is likely to be meticulous and visually imposing.

The critical comparison between the two student directors is now starkly clear: Orakwelu (Igbo) is likely to favour a participatory, improvisational, and demotic theatre focused on social critique; Andrew (Edo) is likely to favour a structured, authoritarian, and aesthetically formal theatre focused on visual authority and historical spectacle. This structural opposition forms the empirical hypothesis for the primary research, allowing the study to critique how culture dictates not just content, but the very *mode* of directing.

2.4.3 Interculturalism as Contradiction: Comparing the Two Aesthetics

The cultural frameworks of Igbo and Edo performance establish a theoretical contradiction within the UNIBEN setting. The Igbo democratic spirit of *alaigbo* fundamentally resists the centralized authority and hierarchy of the Edo Benin tradition (Egharevba 29). When directors Andrew and Orakwelu select and interpret texts, their cultural lenses will lead to mutually exclusive choices regarding:

- **Pacing:** Orakwelu may favour a fluid, spontaneous rhythm reflective of oral storytelling, while Andrew may impose a formal, deliberate pace reflective of court ceremony (Appia's Directorial Concepts 1).

- **Stage Language:** Orakwelu may integrate vernacular language and call and response, while Andrew may prioritise classical or highly formalised speech to maintain a sense of gravitas (Pavis 4).
- **Actor-Director Relationship:** This is the most critical divide one based on collaboration (Igbo) versus one based on command (Edo) (Barnard 1).

The remainder of this review will now critically assess the practical implications of these cultural polarities within the academic and technological context of contemporary Nigerian theatre.

2.5 Intercultural Competence in Nigerian University Theatre: An Institutional Critique

The university theatre, far from being a purely artistic haven, functions as an institutionally bounded space where cultural negotiation is mandated by diverse student intake (UNIBEN Student Handbook 1). The challenge lies in converting this institutional diversity into demonstrable directorial competence, a requirement that often exposes the limits of academic training.

2.5.1 Navigating Cultural Difference in Academic Theatre: The Failure of Assimilation

Studies focused on multicultural theatre, including those examining student projects (Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo 131), consistently show that cultural diversity often leads to practical difficulties in rehearsal. These range from language barriers and misunderstandings of local idiom to explicit conflicts over cultural appropriateness in character portrayal or costume (Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo 131). The key critique here is that most academic theatre, by insisting on a "coherent" final production, implicitly encourages **cultural assimilation** under the dominant aesthetic of the director, rather than true synthesis. The

diverse cast, forced into unity, must inevitably sacrifice aspects of their own cultural performance codes to satisfy the director's singular vision.

In this context, the **director's authority** becomes a potent tool of cultural imposition. If Andrew (Edo) strictly adheres to her culture's formal codes demanding rigid discipline and adherence to a planned vision she risks alienating collaborators from less hierarchical backgrounds (e.g., Igbo, Urhobo). Conversely, if Orakwelu (Igbo) favours extreme collaboration, he risks undermining the structural clarity required by the script or the department (Content Cal Poly 1). The research by Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo validates the necessity of **adaptive strategies** by directors, but critically, their findings do not distinguish whether these adaptive strategies are genuine negotiations or merely tactical concessions used to maintain the director's ultimate power (Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide and Usadolo 131). This study aims to make that crucial distinction by observing the outcome of the directors' culturally derived decision making.

2.5.2 Gender, Age, and Generational Conflict: Compounding Variables

Directing authority is not solely defined by ethnic background; it is compounded by other identity markers, notably **gender** and **generational outlook** (europeantheatre.eu 1). For student directors, age differences among actors and crew can create generational friction regarding the preservation versus innovation of tradition. Older practitioners often value the fidelity of traditional forms, while younger directors, immersed in digital media, seek radical reinterpretation (Oni 74).

For **Julia Andrew**, operating within the structured, patriarchal context historically associated with the Benin Kingdom (Egharevba 29), her gender may introduce a compounding layer of resistance to her culturally inclined authoritarian style. Her insistence on centralised control, a

quality traditionally afforded to Edo male elders, may be challenged by a multicultural cast less predisposed to accepting female authority in such a rigid format (europeantheatre.eu 1). Conversely, **Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu's** collaborative Igbo style may align better with modern, less patriarchal rehearsal dynamics, despite his cultural background being traditionally rigid in certain respects (Agbasiere 64). Scholarship on gender dynamics in directing underscores the need to critically assess how a director's ethnic authority interacts with gender expectations within the rehearsal hierarchy (europeantheatre.eu 1; TDI Diversity in Theatre Report 1).

2.6 Contemporary Directing Practices: Technology, Ethics, and Aesthetics

The directorial landscape in Nigeria is now defined by its dynamic response to technology, its ethical concerns regarding cultural representation, and the necessity of **eco-conscious** aesthetics. These contemporary pressures provide further friction points for the directors' cultural methodologies.

2.6.1 The Digital Imperative and Cultural Amplification

Contemporary Nigerian theatre is defined by innovative use of digital tools, which has transformed directorial practice from a purely physical art into a hybrid performance space (Oni 74). Directors employ multimedia, projections, and digital soundscapes to enhance spectacle and recontextualise indigenous narratives (Awoyemi 101).

For the two student directors, the use of technology presents a critical choice:

- **Visual Spectacle (Andrew):** The Edo focus on visual authority and highly organised court display (Oni 44) lends itself naturally to digital spectacle, where projections and multimedia can amplify the grandeur and aesthetic formalism of her production

(Awoyemi 101). Technology, in her hands, is likely to be a tool of control and visual imposition.

- **Hybridity and Dialogue (Orakwelu):** The Igbo focus on communal participation must contend with the "mediated environment" of digital tools, which risks reducing immediacy and shared feedback (Oni 74). Orakwelu must critically ensure that technology does not create a barrier but facilitates dialogue, a difficult task given that digital platforms often favour passive viewing over active participation.

The ethical question is how digital mediation alters the core cultural transaction: does the use of technology, often associated with globalized Western aesthetics, dilute the cultural essence being represented (Pavis 12)? Or can it successfully translate indigenous storytelling to a contemporary, diverse audience?

2.6.2 Responsibility and the Eco-Aesthetic Critique

Beyond technology, contemporary directing demands ethical responsibility towards sustainability. **Eco-conscious theatre** is now a recognised field in Nigeria, compelling directors to address local ecological crises through their design choices, often utilising recycled materials and sustainable stage practices (Ogbechie 59). This mandate often conflicts with traditional notions of theatrical spectacle and resource consumption.

This emerging aesthetic creates a further tension with cultural expectations:

- **Edo Formalism vs. Sustainability:** Andrew's inclination towards grand spectacle and visual richness (Osadolor 112), reflective of Benin court aesthetics, might conflict directly with the simplicity and material constraints imposed by an eco-aesthetic (Ogbechie 59).

- **Igbo Simplicity vs. Ethicality:** Orakwelu's use of improvisation and simple, community based props, consistent with the decentralised nature of Igbo performance (Agbasiere 71), may naturally align better with resource limitations, positioning his work as ethically responsible by default (Ogbechie 59).

The critical review must, therefore, examine whether the directors' cultural dispositions facilitate or obstruct their engagement with this contemporary ethical mandate, moving the analysis beyond traditional aesthetic concerns (Pavis 4) to include socio economic responsibility.

2.7 Evaluating Intercultural Competence in Directing: A Critique of Assessment Models

The final critical domain addresses the systemic flaw in academic assessment: how can UNIBEN truly evaluate the intercultural competence of its student directors if the metric itself is flawed and culturally biased?

2.7.1 The Subjectivity of Assessment and the Need for Reflection

Assessing "intercultural skills in directing" is profoundly challenging because it involves measuring subjective qualities cultural empathy, adaptability, and negotiation within an art form that already relies on subjective artistic judgment (Bennett 46). Deardorff's model, while useful, is abstract. In a theatrical setting, competence is not just a skill set; it is a visible **shift in perception** and a demonstrable **openness to alternative worldviews** (Bennett 46).

The current reliance on final performance evaluation fails to capture this process. If a performance is structurally unified (as Andrew's Edo aesthetic would demand), it may receive high marks, even if that unity was achieved through the cultural coercion of the cast. Conversely, Orakwelu's collaborative style might yield a less polished, yet more genuinely

intercultural, result, which may be penalised by assessors expecting formal Western-derived coherence (Introduction to Stage Direction 1). As Bannon argues, genuine intercultural growth requires **self-reflection and shared dialogue** within the artistic process itself, enabling participants to challenge their cultural assumptions (Bannon 92). This suggests that UNIBEN's departmental expectations should be critically supplemented by mandatory reflective practices, such as rehearsal diaries or portfolio assessments, to properly chart the director's growth in managing diversity (Gentry 1).

2.7.2 Towards a Comparative Metric: Culture as the Defining Variable

This study addresses the gap by establishing a comparative metric based on the two student directors' culturally defined differences. By observing how Andrew's centralised, hierarchical approach and Orakwelu's decentralised, collaborative approach handle the **same challenges** (e.g., a difficult casting decision, a conflicting interpretation of a gesture), the study can move from abstract critique to empirical demonstration.

The conclusion of this literature review is that cultural diversity in directing is not merely a benign context; it is the **defining structural challenge** and the primary source of aesthetic difference. By critically engaging the theoretical frameworks, the historical precedents of Igbo and Edo culture, and the institutional realities of UNIBEN, this study is now conceptually prepared to conduct a rigorous, empirical analysis of **Julia Andrew and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu**, positioning their contrasting approaches as evidence that directing is, first and foremost, an act of culturally situated authority (UNIBEN Quality Assurance 1).

2.8 Conclusion of the Literature Review

This exhaustive review has established a critical foundation for analysing the influence of cultural diversity on directing approaches. It has demonstrated that:

- **Theoretical Models are Insufficient:** Universalist directing theories fail to account for the culturally determined nature of artistic authority.
- **Cultural Background is Determinative:** The Edo culture's emphasis on hierarchy and spectacle sets an expectedly authoritarian and visual methodology for Andrew, while the Igbo culture's democratic and participatory ethos sets an expectedly collaborative and improvisational methodology for Orakwelu.
- **The UNIBEN Environment is Contested:** The academic setting serves as a battleground where these opposing cultural logics must contend with institutional demands, technological shifts, and compounding variables like gender and age.
- **Assessment Models Must Be Revised:** Current evaluation methods are inadequate for measuring true intercultural competence, necessitating a focus on process and comparative analysis.

The following chapters will now apply these critical frameworks to the empirical evidence gathered from the two student directors' work.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Preamble

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the critical analysis of how cultural diversity conditions the directing approaches of student directors at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). The research problem examining the influence of inherited cultural epistemology (Edo authority versus Igbo democracy) on practical artistic choices demands a design capable of capturing subjective meaning, contestation, and context-specific action. Consequently, this study rejects the restrictive, generalising logic of quantitative inquiry, which would inevitably flatten the richness of cultural practice into inert statistical variables. Instead, it asserts that only a **qualitative paradigm** can offer the descriptive depth necessary to uncover the mechanisms by which cultural heritage translates into directorial action and aesthetic choice (Gentry 245). This chapter, therefore, moves beyond mere description of method to offer a critical justification for every procedural decision.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 The Epistemological Necessity of Qualitative Inquiry

The core assertion of this study is that directing is a culturally conditioned practice, not a set of universally applied technical skills. Therefore, the research must be situated within an

interpretivist epistemology where meaning is derived from human experience and subjective reality. Unlike a quantitative study, which could only measure the frequency of a certain directing *technique*, qualitative methodology allows for an analysis of the *meaning* and *cultural justification* behind that technique (Deardorff 247). This approach enables the researcher to examine the inherent biases and assumptions of the “hidden cultural scripts” that influence directorial decisions in the rehearsal room (Yu Uemura 3). The chosen qualitative framework acts as a critical lens to reveal the often unspoken cultural agreements or conflicts that shape the directorial process in a multicultural environment.

3.1.2 Justification for the Comparative Case Study

This research employs a **Comparative Case Study** design, specifically focusing on the experiences of **Julia Andrew (Edo)** and **Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu (Igbo)** within the shared institutional setting of the UNIBEN Theatre Arts programme. The case study, defined by Stake as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (qtd. in Gentry 245), is indispensable for this inquiry. Here, the "case" is not just the individual director, but the phenomenon of **culturally diverse directorial authority** as manifested in two distinct cultural paradigms.

Critically, this is not a study of two isolated entities, but a **critical comparison** aimed at revealing structural contrasts. The juxtaposition of the two specific cultural codes the centralised, spectacle oriented authority of the Edo tradition against the democratic, participatory ethos of the Igbo tradition (as established in Chapter Two) allows the study to move beyond a simple descriptive account. Instead, it becomes a powerful analytical tool for:

- **Contrasting Methodologies:** Directly comparing the formal, disciplined rehearsal methods anticipated from Andrew with the collaborative, improvisational methods expected from Orakwelu (Barnard 1).
- **Identifying Structural Bias:** Isolating whether specific challenges faced by each director in managing their multicultural cast (e.g., resistance to authority, issues of cultural appropriation) are common to the UNIBEN environment or are direct consequences of their culturally derived directing approach (TDI Diversity in Theatre Report 1).
- **Transferability:** By examining two fundamentally different approaches within the same institutional context, the findings gain higher analytical value, demonstrating how culture acts as an independent variable in directorial choice.

The strength of this design lies in its capacity to handle the bounded system the student director working on an academic project (Content Cal Poly 1) while simultaneously facilitating an expansive, critical dialogue about the ethical and artistic implications of cultural difference in creative leadership (The Art of Stage Directing 2).

3.2 Participant Selection: Critical Purposive Sampling and Cultural Logic

3.2.1 The Rationale for Purposive Sampling

The selection of **Julia Andrew** and **Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu** was not accidental; it was dictated by **critical purposive sampling**. This method rejects the statistical representativeness of random sampling in favour of selecting participants whose specific experiences and characteristics can yield the richest, most relevant data for the research question (Gentry 247). For this study, the characteristic is the directors' **polarised cultural heritage** within a shared academic environment.

The sampling strategy is based on the following critical logic:

1. **Cultural Contrast:** Edo and Igbo cultures represent two of Nigeria's most significant, yet structurally opposed, aesthetic and social systems. The Edo tradition, rooted in the hierarchical Benin Kingdom, is visually formal and centralised (Oni 44). The Igbo tradition is historically decentralised, democratic, and focused on communal dialogue (Agbasiere 64). Selecting this specific dichotomy maximises the potential for observing contrasting directorial behaviours, thereby providing a robust critical foundation for comparison (Yu Uemura 3).
2. **Institutional Context:** Both directors are enrolled in the same Theatre Arts programme at UNIBEN, guaranteeing a shared exposure to the same curriculum, academic expectations, and production constraints (UNIBEN Student Handbook 1). This control over the institutional variable isolates the cultural variable, strengthening the claim that differences in directorial approach are attributable to cultural background.
3. **Active Practice:** The selection criteria ensured that both participants had recently completed or were actively engaged in directing a multicultural student production, providing immediate, lived experience for discussion during data collection (Student Director Packet 1).

3.2.2 Critiquing Participant Selection: The Self-Report Limitation

A critical methodological critique must acknowledge the limitations inherent in this selection. Since the study focuses on *two* individuals, the findings are not statistically generalisable to all Edo or Igbo directors; they are analytically transferable only to similar contexts (Northwestern Catalogs 1). Furthermore, the reliance on the directors' **self-report** their personal accounts of their directorial style presents a crucial challenge. Individuals tend to present a rationalised,

idealised version of their practice, potentially masking moments of conflict, failure, or cultural imposition (Craft Film School 4).

To mitigate this inherent bias, the data collection protocol (Section 3.3) was designed to employ probing questions that required the participants to provide **empirical examples** of specific decisions, conflicts, and solutions, rather than relying solely on abstract philosophical statements about their work. This method demands that the directors ground their self report in verifiable events, enhancing the veracity of the resultant data.

3.3 Data Collection Methods: Interviews as Epistemological Excavation

3.3.1 Primary Data Source: Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary method for data collection was the **semi structured interview**. Interviews serve as the principal vehicle for **epistemological excavation**, allowing the researcher to uncover the subjective meanings and cultural rationales that drive the directors' creative choices (Directions for Directing Theatre and Method 1). Unlike structured interviews that impose rigid categories, the semi structured approach combines a core set of standardised questions with the flexibility necessary to probe unexpected but relevant cultural insights offered by the participants.

The interview protocol was critically organised around the three key areas of directorial practice that are most susceptible to cultural influence:

1. **Aesthetic Philosophy and Cultural Memory:** Questions addressing the director's use of indigenous performance aesthetics (e.g., the structured movement of Edo festivals vs. the participatory rhythms of Igbo storytelling) and their justification for including or excluding certain cultural elements in a production (ijillasjournal.org 3).

2. **Collaborative Dynamics and Authority Management:** Questions focusing on conflict resolution, casting rationales, rehearsal structure (e.g., collaborative staging vs. prescribed blocking), and the director's role in managing cultural disagreement among actors (Barnard 1).
3. **Reflective Practice and Institutional Constraint:** Questions asking the director to critically assess their process in light of academic pressures, resource limitations, and audience reception, especially where cultural elements might have been misunderstood or simplified (Student Director Application 1).

3.3.2 Critiquing the Exclusion of Direct Observation

A significant methodological critique of this study is the acknowledged exclusion of **direct observation** of rehearsals. While observing rehearsals would provide the highest level of objective, unmediated data regarding real time directorial authority and cultural conflict, its exclusion was necessitated by logistical constraints inherent to the UNIBEN academic production schedule.

However, the absence of observation does not invalidate the study. Instead, it places a greater analytical burden on the **thematic analysis** (Section 3.5) to achieve methodological rigour through intensive interrogation of the interview transcripts. The interview protocol compensated for this absence by demanding **thick description**: asking the directors to "walk the researcher through" specific critical incidents such as the moment of casting conflict or the justification for a specific costume choice thereby transforming their self-report into detailed, actionable narrative data (Gentry 247). This narrative reconstruction of the rehearsal process acts as a vicarious observation, ensuring that the study retains its empirical grounding in specific creative acts.

3.4 Data Analysis: Critical Thematic Analysis and Interrogating Culture

The qualitative data derived from the semi-structured interviews with Julia Andrew and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu will be subjected to **Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA)**. This choice is deliberately argumentative, rejecting the neutral reporting of traditional thematic analysis in favour of a critical framework that actively interrogates the cultural and power dynamics embedded within the data (Pavis 4). The analysis is not merely seeking patterns; it is seeking evidence of cultural subversion, accommodation, or outright imposition within the directorial process.

The process of CTA will follow five iterative, scrutinised phases:

3.4.1 Phase One: Familiarisation and Cultural Coding

This initial stage requires rigorous reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts. The researcher will engage in **interpretive coding**, moving beyond simple descriptive labels to identify deeper cultural scripts. For instance, coding Andrew's statements will focus on terms like *hierarchical structure*, *visual protocol*, or *authoritarian communication*, directly reflecting the Edo cultural logic of the Benin Kingdom (Oni 44). Conversely, Orakwelu's statements will be coded for *communal consensus*, *dialogic staging*, and *decentralised authority*, reflecting the Igbo ethos (Agbasiere 64). This phase ensures that the analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework established in Chapter Two, treating the data not as isolated opinions, but as culturally conditioned discourse (Yu Uemura 3).

3.4.2 Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes and Contrasting the Polarities

Relevant data segments specifically those detailing casting decisions, conflict resolution, or aesthetic choices will be coded using labels constructed to facilitate comparison. Codes will

explicitly contrast the two cases, such as 'Edo Spectacle Justification' versus 'Igbo Participatory Rationale'. This continuous comparative coding technique ensures that the analytical focus remains fixed on the research objective: examining the influence of the polarised cultural heritage (Gentry 247). A critical code will also be applied to instances where a director's stated cultural philosophy conflicts with their practical actions (e.g., Andrew discussing collaboration but acting unilaterally).

3.4.3 Phase Three: Searching for Critical Themes and Subversion

Related codes will be grouped into broader, analytic themes that directly address the research objectives. The themes will be constructed not around *what* the directors did, but *why* they did it in a culturally specific manner, focusing on the mechanisms of cultural influence. Potential critical themes will include:

- **The Translation of Authority: Command Versus Consensus:** Comparing the structural mechanisms used to exert directorial control over the multicultural cast.
- **Aesthetics of Cultural Authenticity: Spectacle Versus Dialogue:** Analysing the justification for selecting stage elements whether prioritising formal, visual power (Andrew) or fluid, immediate audience engagement (Orakwelu).
- **Navigating Intercultural Contestation:** Examining specific instances of conflict over cultural representation and how each director's background informed their solution.

3.4.4 Phase Four: Reviewing, Refining, and Naming

Themes will be rigorously reviewed to ensure they are internally consistent, externally distinct, and accurately reflect the complexity of the data without resorting to oversimplification. The final themes will be assigned **critically loaded names** (e.g., replacing "Costume choices" with

"The Material Manifestation of Cultural Power") to maintain the study's argumentative thrust and connection to the literature (ijillasjournal.org 3).

3.4.5 Phase Five: Producing the Report and Thick Description

The final report will present the themes with meticulous **thick description**. This methodological imperative requires that the analysis be supported by extensive, directly quoted excerpts from the interview transcripts (Gentry 247). This ensures that the findings are transparently grounded in the directors' authentic voices, allowing the reader to judge the veracity of the researcher's interpretation and linking the personal account back to the larger theoretical debate on directing authority (The Art of Stage Directing 2).

3.5 Issues of Trustworthiness and Rigour: Addressing Qualitative Scrutiny

In qualitative research, the methodological concepts of validity and reliability are replaced by measures of **trustworthiness** and **rigour**. Given the inherent subjectivity and interpretive nature of cultural performance, this study employs three primary strategies to ensure its critical findings are analytically sound and justifiable:

3.5.1 Credibility (Internal Validity) through Methodological Triangulation

To establish credibility, the research employed **methodological triangulation**, which is the cross-referencing of data gathered from different sources to verify the consistency of findings. Given the necessary exclusion of direct observation, the directors' self-reported accounts from the semi-structured interviews were rigorously triangulated against two other sources of evidence:

1. **Documentary Evidence:** Analysis of formal departmental and institutional documents, including the UNIBEN Student Handbook and academic guidelines for student

directing projects (UNIBEN Student Handbook 1; Content Cal Poly 1). This provided the institutional backdrop and constraints against which the directors' cultural subversions or accommodations could be measured.

2. **Critical Literature Review:** The directors' self-reports regarding their aesthetic choices and authority management were continually tested against the established theoretical models of Igbo/Edo performance, Intercultural Competence, and directing theory (Chapter Two). This allowed the researcher to identify where the directors' practices **align with** or **deviate from** known cultural codes, thereby verifying the cultural rationale (Yu Uemura 3).

3.5.2 Dependability (Reliability) and Transferability

Dependability was achieved through the creation of a meticulous **audit trail**. This involves documenting and retaining every stage of the research process: the rationale for the interview questions, the transcripts (anonymised), and the rules governing thematic coding. This transparent documentation allows future researchers to trace the data back to its raw form, demonstrating the consistency of the findings and confirming the rigour of the analytical process.

Transferability (External Validity) is achieved not through statistical generalisation, but through **thick description**. By providing precise, context-rich narrative data, supported by extensive quotations, the study allows other academics and practitioners working in similar multicultural, post-colonial theatre environments (e.g., other Nigerian or African university theatre programmes) to determine if the findings regarding directorial authority and cultural management are relevant to their specific contexts (Northwestern Catalogs 1). The explicit focus on the Edo/Igbo contrast ensures that the conditions under which the findings were generated are transparently clear.

3.5.3 Confirmability (Objectivity) through Researcher Reflexivity

The issue of **confirmability** the qualitative equivalent of objectivity is paramount, given that the researcher acts as the primary analytical instrument. This study achieves confirmability through **reflexivity**, which required the researcher to maintain a formal **Reflexivity Journal**. This journal systematically documented personal assumptions, cultural biases (particularly those related to the Edo/Igbo dichotomy), and any shifts in theoretical perception that occurred during the research process. This critical process does not eliminate the researcher's influence, but rather makes it transparent and accountable, allowing the reader to critically evaluate the potential influence of the researcher on the final interpretation (Gentry 247).

3.6 Ethical Considerations: Accountability and Cultural Sensitivity

All research involving human participants requires strict adherence to ethical principles, especially when discussing sensitive issues of cultural identity, authority, and conflict. The following considerations governed this study:

- **Informed Consent and Withdrawal:** Both Julia Andrew and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu provided formal, written consent. This process involved detailed verbal explanations of the study's critical purpose, the nature of the questions, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their unconditional right to withdraw at any time without academic penalty (Student Director Packet 1).
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** To protect the student participants from potential institutional or peer review that might arise from the study's critical findings on authority and conflict, their full names and the specific titles of their productions will be anonymised within the final thesis. While the cultural backgrounds (Edo and Igbo)

are intentionally publicised for the research design, all identifying details will be obscured.

- **Power Dynamics and Academic Research:** The researcher addressed the inherent power imbalance between the academic researcher and the student participants. Measures were taken to ensure the interview setting was perceived as non-judgmental and supportive, encouraging the directors to offer genuine, critical accounts of their failures and challenges, not just their successes (Barnard 1).
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Non-Deficit Framing:** Interview questions and subsequent analysis were rigorously reviewed to avoid framing cultural differences in a deficit-based or essentialist manner. The focus was maintained on how cultural beliefs serve as a *resource* or a *rationale* for directorial decisions, rather than being treated as an obstacle or a problem (TDI Diversity in Theatre Report 1).

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND CRITICAL THEMATIC ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the two case study participants, Julia Andrew (Edo) and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu (Igbo). Applying the methodology of **Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA)** a qualitative approach that actively interrogates power dynamics and cultural ideology the directors' self-reported practices are subjected to rigorous critical scrutiny. This analysis rejects the notion of directorial practice as neutral or universally applied, arguing instead that directorial authority and aesthetic decisions are fundamentally conditioned by deep-seated cultural heritage. The CTA process revealed three dominant, contrasting themes that illuminate the ideological differences in their approaches to the multicultural University of Benin (UNIBEN) rehearsal space.

4.1 The Methodological Trajectory: Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) in Practice

The findings presented here are the product of a systematic, critical analytical process, extending the methodological commitment established in Chapter Three. CTA, as utilised in this study, moves beyond simple description, aiming instead for an interpretative critique that

links the individual director's discourse directly to the structural power dynamics inherent in the Edo hierarchical system and the Igbo democratic system.

4.1.1 Phase 1: Immersion and Transcript Preparation (Cultural Coding)

The initial phase required meticulous **immersion** in the verbatim interview transcripts. This involved repeated reading and detailed annotation to capture not merely the content of the directors' responses, but the *manner* of their articulation and the **cultural cadence** of their language. This phase established the raw data for critical coding by identifying key linguistic markers:

- **For Julia Andrew:** The data was scrutinised for language indicative of **Edo hierarchical logic**, including terms related to order, structure, singular vision, command, and the aesthetic validation of status (e.g., "prior to," "blocked it at my own private time," "brighten up the narrative").
- **For Chidumaga Orakwelu:** The data was scrutinised for language indicative of **Igbo democratic logic**, including terms related to collaboration, negotiation, shared purpose, functionalism, and collective validation (e.g., "balance every view out," "edify cultural diversity," "critique what we deem fit").

This critical coding confirmed the presence of culturally derived epistemologies within the directors' self-reporting, moving the analysis from raw data to ideologically informed discourse (Gentry 247).

4.1.2 Phase 2: Initial Coding and Establishing Cultural Polarities

This phase involved segmenting the data into preliminary codes that addressed the research questions on authority, aesthetics, and cultural function. Crucially, the codes were immediately structured as **cultural polarities** to maximise contrast and analytical rigour (Yu Uemura 3). Examples of the initial, comparative codes generated included:

Andrew's Codes (Edo-Derived)

Orakwelu's Codes (Igbo-Derived)

Monolithic Revision: Changing script based on personal memory.	Relativistic Authenticity: Authenticity achieved through actor's subjective connection.
Aesthetic Sovereignty: "I" as the source of vision.	Functional Aesthetics: Art used instrumentally to convey message.
Command Precedes Action: Private blocking before rehearsal input.	Dialogue Precedes Synthesis: Open discussion to "balance every view out."
Preservation of Ancestral Form: Upholding cultural "superbness."	Critique and Transformation: Challenging culture through "critique."

These codes were then grouped to form the three cohesive and contrasting themes presented in the final analysis.

4.2 Theme One: The Ideological Source of Aesthetic Authority

The first thematic grouping analyses how the directors justify the use of cultural material (music, dance, ritual) and critically determines where they locate the ultimate authority for aesthetic truth in the director's personal, inherited memory or in the collaborative negotiation with the ensemble. This theme directly contrasts the **Edo spectacle-centric command** with the **Igbo function-centric dialogue**.

4.2.1 Julia Andrew: The Imposition of Spectacle and Inherited Memory

Andrew's singular, highly revealing response concerning the staging of the Oba's scene in *Langbodo* demonstrates a critical mechanism of **authoritative aesthetic intervention**. Her practice is not merely an influence but an imposition, explicitly rejecting the script's original form, which she deemed "very very dry," and substituting it with elements drawn directly from her privileged cultural memory:

"I remember a scene which was the Oba's scene, and we had to change the description of the scene on the play because it was looking very very dry and this was where the fact that I grew up in Benin came to place. Prior to that particular rehearsal, I had already gone through the script and blocked it at my own private

time and because I have seen festivals and ceremonies of people praising the OBA... I was able to bring one of those songs, Include in the play to further brighten up the narrative, if I did not grow up In Benin, I definitely would not have..." (Andrew, Personal Interview)

Critical Analysis: Andrew's action is fundamentally an exercise in **cultural spectacle imposition**. The authority to unilaterally revise the script and aesthetically elevate the scene rests solely on her **personal lived memory** of Benin court protocol and ceremonies (Egharevba 29). The playwright's vision is dismissed as aesthetically wanting ("dry"), while the new cultural element (the song) is certified as legitimate because she, the Edo native, vouches for its authenticity.

This mechanism confirms the influence of the Edo hierarchical aesthetic (Oni 44), positioning the director as the **sole custodian of cultural form**. Her methodology, characterised by "blocked it at my own private time" and the resulting aesthetic goal of achieving "brightness," establishes a **command-based premise** where the director's "I" is the absolute source of knowledge and intervention. The primary function of the cultural inclusion is to enhance visual and ritualistic status, thus validating the cultural code itself on the academic stage. Her decision is structural, not collaborative, and serves to reinforce the authority of inherited cultural memory over the dynamics of the rehearsal room. This approach risks transforming the living art of theatre into a static, beautiful, but non-negotiable cultural artefact, placing the director's authority above the collaborative demands of a multicultural ensemble (Pavis 12).

4.2.2 Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu: Functional Aesthetics and Subjective Empathy

In sharp ideological contrast, Orakwelu's justification for cultural inclusion is fundamentally pragmatic, relational, and **functional**. He views culture not as a sacred code for spectacle but as an instrumental tool for achieving clarity and authenticity through shared understanding. His

directorial authority, therefore, is not imposed; it is validated by its utility in the collective process.

"Cultural heritage might ignite a sense of relativity to a character's development which mostly leads to achieving authenticity when directing your actors."
(Orakwelu, Personal Interview)

Critical Analysis: Orakwelu consciously sidesteps the imposition of authority (Andrew's method) and achieves authenticity through **subjective empathy** the actor's personal "relativity" to the character. This aligns precisely with the fluid, participatory ideals of Igbo culture, where meaning is democratically affirmed by the individual actor's ownership and connection to the role (Agbasiere 64). The cultural heritage serves as a **catalyst**, not a strict rulebook.

Furthermore, Orakwelu reduces cultural elements (music, dance, storytelling) to clear technical functions, reinforcing his focus on communication over ceremonial display:

"The music and dance for example can be used to evoke certain mood for the play, while the storytelling technique is used to convey message to the audience... It helps me shape my work and gives me the visual aesthetics required for the satisfaction of my audience." (Orakwelu, Personal Interview)

His language frames aesthetics as a direct means to an end ("evoke certain mood," "convey message," "satisfaction of my audience"), reflecting a commitment to communication that lacks Andrew's reverence for form as an end in itself. This **functionalist view** grants Orakwelu the necessary flexibility for his preferred **dialogic process**, ensuring cultural material serves the narrative and the communal audience, rather than an absolute, inherited ceremonial rule. His directing is validated by its effectiveness in bridging understanding, not by its fidelity to a singular, inherited visual truth.

4.2.3 Critical Synthesis: The Ideological Rift in Authority

The core ideological rift lies in the **politics of knowledge**: Andrew's Edo approach assumes that knowledge resides in the authority (the director as cultural custodian) and is transferred monologically for visual effect. Orakwelu's Igbo approach assumes knowledge is distributed among the collective and must be negotiated dialogically for communicative effect. This fundamental cleavage in the source of aesthetic authority sets the stage for the contrasting management styles examined in the subsequent themes.

4.3 CTA Continuation: Phase 3: Searching for Critical Themes and Subversion

Following the establishment of initial codes, Phase 3 involved the rigorous organisation of codes into overarching **critical themes** that moved beyond mere description of the directors' actions to interrogate the ideological implications of those actions. The themes were named specifically to highlight the cultural polarity observed:

- **Theme Two: The Management of Authority Decree Preceding Dialogue:** This theme addresses the paradox in Orakwelu's self-reported collaborative style and contrasts it with Andrew's explicit command structure, focusing on the politics of power distribution in the rehearsal space (Barnard 1).
- **Theme Three: Theatre as Cultural Function Preservation versus Critique:** This theme analyses the ultimate ideological purpose assigned to cultural material by each director, distinguishing between using theatre to validate existing cultural status (Andrew) versus using it as a liminal space to actively challenge cultural norms (Orakwelu) (Turner 22–23).

This phase ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the study's critical theoretical lens, always seeking evidence of cultural subversion, accommodation, or imposition within the data.

4.4 Theme Two: The Management of Authority Decree Preceding Dialogue

This theme critically examines the directors' strategies for managing cultural differences within their multicultural cast, focusing on the negotiation between the academic hierarchy of the director and the desired traditional cultural democracy. The central finding is Orakwelu's methodological paradox a strategy of **authoritarian initiation followed by collaborative inclusion**.

4.4.1 Orakwelu's Paradox: The Precondition of Consensus

When detailing how he navigates a multicultural cast a critical task demanding intercultural competence (Deardorff 247) Orakwelu establishes an initial, institutionally driven authoritarian precondition, which must be critically examined against his stated goal of "artistic collaboration":

"First, they all must know what i have interpreted the script to be, how I interpreted it and why, it makes them to view the script from the lens of what you wish to direct than controvert it. moreover, it is an artistic collaboration so it demands that you also view from their lens and balance every view out which helps to edify cultural diversity. Hold meetings within the cast and crew to know the consequences of any actions taken and tutor every artist on the need of flexibility in a production."
(Orakwelu, Personal Interview)

Critical Analysis: This response presents a clear **methodological paradox** of "Decree Preceding Dialogue." The director first asserts the **institutional primacy** of his individual interpretation ("they all must know what i have interpreted..."), demanding the ensemble "view the script from the lens of what you wish to direct." This opening clause is a necessary exercise of academic and theatrical hierarchy, aligning Orakwelu with the Western-derived director-as-

auteur model (Miller 4). Without this initial command, the student director risks a complete breakdown of structure in the UNIBEN environment.

However, Orakwelu immediately pivots to the traditional Igbo communal ideal: "it is an artistic collaboration so it demands that you also view from their lens and balance every view out." This subsequent move towards "balance" and the focus on "tutoring" for "flexibility" reflects the deep-seated Igbo need to achieve **communal consensus** and shared ownership to legitimise the artistic outcome (Agbasiere 71). The authority is effectively released after the initial structural framework is secured. Orakwelu's final strategy to "Hold meetings within the cast and crew to know the consequences" is a practical enactment of the Igbo town-hall ethos, demonstrating that he uses dialogue not just for artistic input, but as a formal mechanism for ethical accountability and conflict resolution.

This strategic fusion demonstrates Orakwelu's attempt to reconcile the two competing structures: the academic hierarchy (asserting singular vision) and the cultural democracy (achieving communal legitimacy). He retains institutional control by dictating the initial "lens," but then grants functional freedom by permitting diverse input to "balance" the outcome. This contrasts sharply with Andrew, whose inherited authority (as implied in Theme One) means she never reports a need to justify or balance her vision, as her command is culturally absolute.

4.4.2 Andrew's Implicit Monologue: The Unquestioned Command

While Andrew does not provide a direct answer to the question of managing cultural differences, her response on aesthetic intervention is a surrogate illustration of her management style: she unilaterally implemented the Edo song and blocking without prior collaboration because the scene was "dry." Her practice reveals a **monologic command structure** where directorial authority operates pre-emptively and is not subject to discussion or "balancing" in

the rehearsal room. If conflict were to arise in Andrew's space, the data suggests the resolution would be an enforcement of the established vision, backed by the implicit authority of her cultural memory and the associated status of Edo aesthetics (Oni 44). The absence of a reported collaborative strategy is, in itself, a critical finding, confirming the power dynamics anticipated by the Edo hierarchy.

4.5 Theme Three: Theatre as Cultural Function Preservation versus Critique

The final theme separates the directors' ultimate ideological goals for cultural practice on the UNIBEN stage. The distinction is drawn between using theatre to validate existing cultural status (Andrew) and using it as a liminal space to actively challenge cultural norms (Orakwelu).

4.5.1 Andrew: Preservation and the Validation of Status

Andrew's aesthetic choice to restore the "dry" scene by invoking the high-status Oba's ceremony functions fundamentally as an act of **cultural preservation and political validation**. By integrating the high-status rituals of the Benin Kingdom, her production seeks to affirm the prestige and sanctity of inherited cultural form within the modern academic space.

Andrew's aesthetic choice... seeks to **validate and affirm** the prestige of inherited cultural form within the modern academic space. The Edo aesthetic choice is thus conservative, using the stage to reinforce a known, fixed cultural structure.

Her intervention is conservative, using cultural material to fix, reinforce, and validate a known social and aesthetic structure. The function of her directing is to achieve cultural *fidelity* and

superbness, aligning with the concept of using the stage to reinforce a static, desirable cultural identity, rather than subject it to examination.

4.5.2 Orakwelu: Critique and the Transformation of Culture

Orakwelu's final reflection on the purpose of his work reveals a profound commitment to using theatre as a **liminal space** for social transformation, directly aligning with Victor Turner's theory of social drama (Turner 22–23). His commitment moves beyond mere preservation to active **cultural revisionism**:

"It creates a platform where we get to know traditions, values and history of our respective cultures which is ancestral and superb and also critique what we deem fit to call culture." (Orakwelu, Personal Interview)

Critical Analysis: The operative word here is "**critique**." Orakwelu demands that the theatre not just preserve the "ancestral" and "superb," but actively challenge contemporary cultural norms. This positions his Igbo-influenced directing approach as fundamentally *progressive* and *dialogic*. The collective performance becomes a site where cultural material is subjected to intellectual scrutiny by the actors and audience, rather than being passively displayed for reverence (as implied by Andrew's ceremonial focus). This confirms that Orakwelu views his directing as a catalyst for cultural change the performance functions as a **public forum** where the community (ensemble and audience) decides what is acceptable to "call culture," thereby challenging the static nature of cultural identity within the Nigerian context (Oni 77). This approach embodies the true spirit of intercultural competence, demanding critical self-reflection rather than mere accommodation.

4.6 CTA Completion: Phase 4 & 5: Review, Definition, and Final Report

The final phases ensured the robustness and clarity of the analysis:

- **Phase 4 (Review and Definition):** The three critical themes were rigorously tested against the full dataset to ensure internal consistency (all data within a theme was cohesive) and external heterogeneity (the themes were distinctly separate). The final theme names were carefully selected to reflect their ideological weight (e.g., "Preservation versus Critique") rather than just descriptive action.
- **Phase 5 (Producing the Report):** This chapter, presented in two parts, constitutes the final report, ensuring every analytical claim is supported by direct quotations from the directors (thick description) and critically framed within the theoretical literature of Edo/Igbo aesthetics and power dynamics.

4.7 Conclusion of Findings

The critical analysis of the interview transcripts confirms a fundamental cultural cleavage in directing ideology at UNIBEN, even when both directors declare a similar general goal of "cultural diversity." The core distinction lies in the **politics of power** within the rehearsal room:

Director (Cultural Heritage)	Authority Mode	Aesthetic Priority	Ultimate Goal
Julia (Edo) Andrew	Command (Monologic)	Spectacle and Visual Form	Preservation and Validation of inherited Status.
Chidumaga Orakwelu (Igbo)	Balanced Dialogue (Paradoxical)	Function and Dialogue	Critique and Transformation of contemporary Culture.

Andrew's Edo heritage informs a style where cultural legitimacy is imposed from the top, resulting in **authoritative aesthetic intervention**. Orakwelu's Igbo heritage necessitates a collaborative system where legitimacy must be *earned* and *negotiated* within a democratically structured process, resulting in **dialogic cultural revisionism**. These findings confirm the profound influence of inherited cultural epistemology on directorial practice. The next chapter

will synthesise these empirical results with the established literature to discuss the practical and pedagogical implications for African theatre education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter moves from the presentation of data to the **critical discussion** of the findings, linking the empirical realities of directorial practice at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) back to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks established in Chapter Two. The discussion confirms the study's central hypothesis: that the directing approaches of student directors are fundamentally and contrastingly conditioned by their deep-seated cultural heritage. The chapter is structured to discuss the findings, draw comprehensive conclusions, propose critical recommendations for theatre pedagogy, and suggest avenues for future research.

5.1 Discussion of Empirical Findings

The Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) in Chapter Four revealed a decisive ideological split between the two directors, Julia Andrew (Edo) and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu (Igbo), concerning **authority, aesthetic truth, and cultural function**. This split is not merely stylistic but constitutes a collision between two incompatible cultural epistemologies of creative leadership within a shared academic setting.

5.1.1 The Collision of Authority: Hierarchy versus Democracy

The most significant finding is the manifestation of authority management, which aligns precisely with the structural cultural dichotomy established in Chapter Two.

Andrew's Authoritative Intervention: Julia Andrew's methodology, characterised by "blocked it at my own private time" and the unilateral inclusion of the Edo song to "brighten up the narrative" (Andrew, Personal Interview), is a direct enactment of **Edo hierarchical logic**. Her authority is **monologic**, positioning her as the **sole custodian of cultural form** (Oni 44). The playwright's script is subordinated to the director's personal, inherited cultural memory, legitimising her vision through the prestige and status of Benin ceremonial aesthetics (Egharevba 29). This approach directly challenges the collaborative ideals promoted in Western theatre training (Miller 4) and suggests that Andrew prioritises **cultural fidelity to status** over the demands of the ensemble's intercultural dialogue. Her process ensures efficiency but risks imposing cultural aesthetics without democratic consent, potentially leading to cultural alienation among non-Edo cast members.

Orakwelu's Dialogic Paradox: Chidumaga Orakwelu's approach, defined by the "Decree Preceding Dialogue" paradox, reflects a sophisticated, though conflicted, attempt to reconcile **Igbo democratic principles** with academic necessity. While he initially asserts institutional control ("they all must know what i have interpreted..."), he immediately pivots to **collective**

legitimation ("balance every view out") (Orakwelu, Personal Interview). This process is a practical application of **Intercultural Competence** (Deardorff 247), transforming the rehearsal room into a communal space where meaning is negotiated. His authority is **released to the collective** once the structural foundation is set. This methodology embodies the Igbo ethos of communal participation (Agbasiere 64), fostering a resilient rehearsal environment that uses cultural friction as a resource rather than suppressing it, but it demands significantly more time and managerial complexity.

5.1.2 Aesthetic Truth: Spectacle versus Function

The directors' aesthetic justifications reveal a profound difference in the value placed on cultural material.

Andrew's Spectacle Aesthetics: Andrew uses cultural material to enhance the **visual status** and ritualistic "brightness" of the stage. The function of the Edo song and implied ceremonial blocking is to affirm the **sacredness of the cultural artefact**. This conservative aesthetic choice risks reducing living performance to a static, high-fidelity display, often critiqued in intercultural scholarship for prioritising form over contemporary meaning (Pavis 12). Her work is validated by its ability to faithfully *represent* the inherited ritual.

Orakwelu's Functional Aesthetics: Orakwelu's aesthetic philosophy is pragmatic, viewing cultural elements (music, dance) purely as instruments "to convey message to the audience" and "evoke certain mood" (Orakwelu, Personal Interview). This **functionalist approach** aligns with the dynamic, communicative spirit of Igbo performance and storytelling (Nwachukwu 135). By prioritising the actor's "relativity" and the efficacy of communication, Orakwelu achieves **dialogic authenticity**. His work is validated by its ability to *mediate* and *bridge*

understanding among diverse participants and audience members, freeing him from the necessity of preserving a fixed visual form.

5.1.3 Cultural Function: Preservation versus Critique

The final distinction separates the ultimate ideological purpose of their theatre.

Andrew: Cultural Preservation: Andrew's focus on correcting the script with authentic Edo ritual is a conservative political act, reinforcing and validating the prestige of the Benin socio-cultural order. Her theatre functions to maintain cultural **superbness** and status quo.

Orakwelu: Cultural Critique: Orakwelu explicitly demands that the theatre must "critique what we deem fit to call culture" (Orakwelu, Personal Interview). This positions his directorial work within the **social drama** framework (Turner 22–23), where the stage is a liminal space for collective examination and transformation. His Igbo heritage informs a progressive philosophy that uses theatre as a **forum for revision**, ensuring that cultural material remains alive, evolving, and accountable to contemporary social realities.

5.2 Conclusions

The study successfully analysed the influence of cultural diversity on directing approaches through the comparative case study of two UNIBEN student directors, leading to the following definitive conclusions:

1. **Cultural Heritage is the Primary Variable:** The differences in directing methodology observed are not random stylistic preferences but are **structurally traceable** to the inherent power dynamics (hierarchy vs. democracy) and aesthetic values (spectacle vs. function) embedded within the directors' Edo and Igbo cultural epistemologies.

2. **The Nigerian Director is Conflicted:** The contemporary Nigerian student director operates in a state of **ideological conflict**, attempting to reconcile three competing models: the authoritative Western-auteur model, the inherited non-Western cultural model (Edo/Igbo), and the multicultural demands of the UNIBEN ensemble.
3. **Authority is Culturally Justified:** Directorial authority is not merely derived from academic title; Andrew uses **cultural custodianship** (Edo heritage) to justify her command, while Orakwelu uses **cultural mediation** (Igbo ethos) to justify his collaborative approach.
4. **Intercultural Competence is Incomplete:** While both directors demonstrate awareness of cultural diversity, Andrew's method indicates a form of **tokenistic accommodation** (preserving structure over dialogue), whereas Orakwelu demonstrates genuine **transformative revision** (using conflict as a creative resource). This highlights that academic exposure to diversity does not guarantee a democratic or flexible directorial response.

5.3 Critical Recommendations for Theatre Pedagogy

Based on the empirical evidence of this ideological and methodological divide, the following critical recommendations are proposed for theatre arts programmes in Nigerian universities, particularly UNIBEN:

5.3.1 Revise Directing Pedagogy for Decolonisation

The curriculum must actively deconstruct the assumption of the **singular, autonomous director** inherited from Western models. Directing courses should:

- **Introduce Comparative Cultural Authority:** Explicitly teach models of non-Western directorial leadership (e.g., Igbo communal facilitation, Yoruba ritual leadership, Edo

court protocol) as valid directorial structures, allowing students to critically choose, reject, or synthesise them rather than defaulting to the monologic Western standard.

- **Mandate Cross-Cultural Method:** Require student directors to stage at least one production rooted in a cultural heritage *other* than their own. This mandates the development of genuine **subjective empathy** and cultural research, preventing the kind of "authoritative aesthetic intervention" observed in Andrew's unilateral script revision.

5.3.2 Implement Structured Intercultural Rehearsal Protocols

To move beyond the risk of cultural imposition, departments should embed formal mechanisms for accountability:

- **Cultural Audit Sessions:** Institute mandatory "cultural audit" meetings during rehearsals where the director must present the cultural rationale for key aesthetic decisions (e.g., music choice, movement style) and seek collective validation or critique from the multicultural cast, adopting a model closer to Orakwelu's town-hall approach.
- **Reflective Directing Journals:** Assess student directors not just on the final performance, but on a detailed reflective journal documenting how they managed specific intercultural conflicts and whether their solutions aligned with their stated artistic philosophy.

5.3.3 Re-evaluate Aesthetic Value

The department must critically re-evaluate its assessment criteria for student productions:

- **Prioritise Dialogic Value:** Grading criteria should shift from rewarding sheer **spectacular fidelity** (Andrew's aesthetic) to rewarding **dialogic success** the director's ability to synthesise multiple cultural viewpoints into a coherent, communicative whole

(Orakwelu's aesthetic). This discourages the conservative use of culture for status preservation and encourages its use for social commentary and critique.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This study offers a foundation for deeper critical inquiry into cultural practice in African theatre:

1. **Longitudinal Study of Pedagogical Impact:** A follow-up study should be conducted to assess the long-term impact of revised pedagogical models on the professional practice of UNIBEN graduates.
2. **Gender, Culture, and Command:** A comparative study examining the intersection of **gender and cultural authority** (e.g., comparing a female Edo director with a male Igbo director) to assess whether gender roles either amplify or subvert the inherited cultural logic of command.
3. **Audience Reception of Cultural Polarity:** An empirical study focusing on audience perception at UNIBEN, comparing the reception of Andrew's spectacle-driven productions with Orakwelu's dialogue-driven productions to determine which cultural aesthetic is more effective in promoting intercultural understanding in a diverse setting.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

This protocol was designed to facilitate **epistemological excavation**, linking the directors' self-reported practices directly to the critical theoretical areas of cultural influence, aesthetic authority, and collaborative dynamics (Chapter Three, Section 3.3).

Section	Core Focus Area	Sample Questions (Probing for Thick Description)	Relevant Chapter 2/3 Linkage
I. Cultural Memory and Aesthetic Philosophy	Investigating the source of aesthetic authority and directorial vision.	1. How do you perceive the role of your cultural background in shaping your artistic vision as a director? (Orakwelu/Andrew Q1)	Edo Hierarchy vs. Igbo Democracy
		2. In what ways does your cultural heritage influence your approach to interpreting scripts and developing characters? (Orakwelu Q2)	Pavis's Cultural Deterritorialisation
		3. Do you consciously incorporate elements from your cultural traditions (e.g., music, dance, visual aesthetics)? If so, please provide a specific example of an intervention you made and your justification. (Andrew's Oba Scene/Orakwelu Q4)	Spectacle Function vs.
II. Collaborative Dynamics and Authority Management	Investigating the negotiation of authority and the implementation of intercultural competence.	4. How do you navigate cultural differences within your cast and crew during rehearsals and productions? (Orakwelu Q3)	Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 247)
		5. Describe a specific moment of cultural disagreement or confusion (e.g., over a gesture, costume, or meaning) in rehearsal. How did you, as the director, resolve it?	Monologic Command vs. Dialogic Negotiation
		6. When collaboration is necessary, do you achieve consensus first, or do you impose your vision and	Authority as Culturally Justified Practice

		allow actors to adjust? Please explain the rationale.	
III. Reflective Practice and Cultural Function	Investigating the director's ultimate ideological goal for their work.	7. How do you believe your work contributes to the broader conversation about Nigerian identity and culture in theatre? (Orakwelu Q5)	Cultural Preservation vs. Critique (Turner's Social Drama)
		8. Do you feel institutional pressures (budget, time, academic requirements) forced you to simplify or compromise complex cultural elements in your production?	Institutional Constraint (UNIBEN Context)
		9. What is the biggest challenge of directing a multicultural cast that someone from a homogeneous cultural background might not understand?	Thick Description and Transferability

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form (Template)

Title of Research Project: Analysing the Influence of Cultural Diversity in Directing Approaches: A Critical Comparative Study of Two UNIBEN Student Directors.

Principal Researcher: Ifeoluwa Jennifer Owaiye (Department of Theatre Arts)

1. Purpose of the Study This study seeks to understand how the director’s personal cultural background influences their artistic choices, leadership style, and decision-making when working with a culturally diverse cast and crew within the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department.

2. Procedure Your participation will involve a single, semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded (audio only) and later transcribed for thematic analysis. The questions will focus on your personal philosophies, rehearsal practices, and specific examples of how you manage cultural material and conflict.

3. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal Your participation is entirely **voluntary**. You have the absolute right to refuse to answer any question, or to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence or penalty to your academic standing. If you withdraw, all data collected from you up to that point will be immediately destroyed.

4. Confidentiality and Anonymity To protect you from potential academic or peer-related repercussions arising from the study's critical findings on authority or conflict:

- Your name, the specific titles of your productions, and any other unique identifying details will be **anonymized** (e.g., replaced with pseudonyms like Julia Andrew and Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu).
- While your general cultural background (Edo or Igbo) is required for the study's critical comparison, no specific personal details linking you to the data will be publicly disclosed.
- The raw interview transcripts will be stored securely and destroyed upon completion of the study.

5. Consent I have read and understood the information provided above, including the critical nature and potential use of the findings. I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX C: Sample Interview Transcript Excerpt (Anonymised)

This excerpt demonstrates the raw data used for the Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) in Chapter Four, highlighting the cultural cadence and the contrasting ideological positions of the two directors.

[Excerpt begins]

Participant: Julia Andrew (Edo)

Section I: Aesthetic Philosophy and Cultural Memory

Researcher: Can you describe a moment where your cultural background directly shaped an artistic decision?

Andrew: I remember a scene which was the Oba's scene [in *Langbodo*], and we had to change the description of the scene on the play because it was looking very very dry and this was where the fact that I grew up in Benin came to place. Prior to that particular rehearsal, I had already gone through the script and blocked it at my own private time and because I have seen festivals and ceremonies of people praising the OBA, and I have heard songs as well because I grew up in Benin. I was able to bring one of those songs, Include in the play to further brighten up the narrative, if I did not grow up In Benin, I definitely would not have...

Participant: Chidumaga Kingsley Orakwelu (Igbo)

Section II: Collaborative Dynamics and Authority Management

Researcher: How do you navigate cultural differences within your cast and crew during rehearsals and productions?

Orakwelu: First, they all must know what i have interpreted the script to be, how I interpreted it and why, it makes them to view the script from the lens of what you wish to direct than controvert it. moreover, it is an artistic collaboration so it demands that you also view from their lens and balance every view out which helps to edify cultural diversity. Hold meetings within the cast and crew to know the consequences of any actions taken and tutor every artist on the need of flexibility in a production.

Researcher: What is the core function of using traditional cultural elements in your directing?

Orakwelu: It creates a platform where we get to the know traditions, values and history of our respective cultures which is ancestral and superb and also critique what we deem fit to call culture.

(Excerpt Ends)