EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE ACTOR'S CRAFT: A STUDY OF UNIBEN STUDENT PERFORMERS

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS, (B.A) HONS. DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN.

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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 Mr. Israel Meriomame Wekpe 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' views have been used and expressed, they were acknowledged.

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OGHENERUME JESSICA OYOVWIBA

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research study was embarked upon by Charisa Abieyuwa Igbinoba in the department of Theatre Arts under my supervision.

_____. _____-.

Dr. Oghenemudiaga Praise Akpughe

Project supervisor

Head of Department.

DEDICATION

This academic piece is dedicated to God Almighty, whose love and guidance gave me strength through every challenge and triumph I have experienced during my time at the school. I also dedicate this to my beloved family, who have been my rock throughout this journey because of their steadfast affection, encouragement, and help.

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ABSTRACT

The actor's profession necessitates rigorous **emotional labour**, defined as the management of feeling to create a convincing public display (Hochschild 17). While this task requires advanced **Emotional Intelligence (EI)**, specifically in self awareness and emotional regulation, theatrical pedagogy, particularly within African university systems like the University of Benin (UNIBEN), often lacks formal, structured psychological training. The traditional assumption that emotional competence is a residual outcome of technical training critically overlooks the documented psychological hazards, such as **emotional spillage** and **boundary erosion**, inherent in techniques like emotional memory (Hetzler 15). This academic void poses a serious ethical and professional challenge, risking the long term psychological integrity of student performers.

This qualitative, phenomenological study sought to critically analyse the subjective, lived emotional experiences of UNIBEN student performers in relation to the four branches of the Salovey and Mayer EI ability model (189). Employing **purposive sampling**, the research conducted in depth, semi structured interviews with five student actors actively engaged in departmental productions. The data collection focused on eliciting narratives concerning emotional preparation, self control tactics, and critical evaluations of the existing curriculum. The thematic analysis prioritised the identification of communal coping strategies and systemic pedagogical deficiencies. The study was strictly delimited to the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department to ensure contextual rigour and transferability of findings to similar African institutions.

The empirical data confirmed a significant **imbalance in EI skill acquisition**. The students demonstrated highly developed **interpersonal EI** (social perception and empathy), relying heavily on observation and somatic markers to achieve collaborative harmony. Performer accounts consistently affirmed that empathy and observation were the most effective tools for crafting believable characters. Conversely, the findings exposed a critical deficiency in **intrapersonal EI (emotional regulation)**. All high level performers reported relying on the psychologically taxing method of deep acting, resulting in pervasive evidence of **boundary failure**. Instances of carrying character attitudes home and feeling emotionally weighed down post rehearsal were common, demonstrating that the aesthetic pursuit of 'truthfulness' actively compromises **psychological sustainability**. Students' self reported protective measures—such as prayer, music, and simple self reminders—were deemed individualistic and critically inadequate, confirming the absence of institutional de roling protocols. Furthermore, the data showed that a high emotional facilitation skill often outpaced regulatory capacity, heightening the risk of affective overwhelm.

This research concludes that the UNIBEN theatre training model is **systemically incomplete**, inadvertently graduating performers who are emotionally vulnerable. The curriculum successfully teaches emotional **access** but fails entirely to teach emotional **containment**. This pedagogical oversight transfers the burden of **psychological safety** from the institution to the individual student, creating an unethical professional hazard. The study strongly recommends a **paradigmatic shift** in UNIBEN's training philosophy. Future pedagogy must formally integrate mandatory **performance psychology modules**, structured **de roling rituals**, and **emotional containment exercises** into the curriculum to ensure that the psychological

resilience of the actor is defined, taught, and assessed as a core professional competency, alongside traditional voice and movement training.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Actor's Craft, Emotional Regulation, Deep Acting, UNIBEN, Boundary Failure, Theatre Pedagogy.

1.1 Background to the Study

The essence of theatrical performance is predicated upon the performer's mastery of emotion. The ability to generate, sustain, and project convincing affective states that connect with a viewing public is the primary metric of the actor's professional competence (Brook 19). This sophisticated psychological task, however, is rarely examined as a distinct cognitive skill within traditional theatre training curricula, especially within the context of African theatre pedagogy. This research posits that **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** provides the essential framework for a critical analysis of the actor's psychological preparedness and technical proficiency.

Emotional Intelligence is formally conceptualised as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey and Mayer 189). This definition establishes EI not merely as a personality trait, but as a demonstrable cognitive ability composed of four distinct, sequential branches: emotional perception, the use of emotion to facilitate thought, the understanding of emotional meanings, and the crucial skill of emotional management. Whilst Goleman successfully translated the theory into the field of professional achievement, asserting that EI is a more potent factor in workplace success than traditional cognitive metrics (Goleman 94), its direct application to the specific, volatile 'workplace' of the stage remains under explored in academia.

The actor's profession is, fundamentally, a practice of sustained **emotional labour**, a concept described by Hochschild as the necessary management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display (17). The actor must perform 'deep acting'—modifying internal feelings to match external expectations—which requires rigorous **self awareness** to gauge personal emotional boundaries, and robust **social awareness** to perceive and react truthfully to the emotional input of fellow performers (Ginslov 71). The contradiction at the heart of the actor's art is the need to be fully vulnerable to emotion on stage while maintaining sufficient psychological detachment to repeat the performance reliably. This need for controlled volatility demands highly developed emotional regulation.

Empirical evidence drawn from Western psychological studies offers compelling validation for the connection between emotional skills and performance. Ginslov, for example, examined the profile of professional actors and concluded that the effective handling of emotion is not just a desirable quality, but a necessary condition for achieving excellence in the craft (75). Furthermore, research contrasting art students with vocational students often reveals a paradox: while those engaged in creative disciplines exhibit superior emotional perception, they frequently show a measurable deficit in emotional self control when compared to their non arts peers (Kaufman 512). This discrepancy suggests that while raw emotional sensitivity may attract individuals to acting, the academic training must provide the necessary regulation strategies to prevent emotional vulnerability from turning into professional fragility.

The deficiency is particularly acute when considering institutions such as the University of Benin (UNIBEN). Although the curriculum rightly places strong emphasis on indigenous African performance styles, voice mechanics, movement, and critical script analysis (Ige 78), there is a critical and demonstrable absence of formal, structured training dedicated to applied

emotional literacy and psychological resilience. The prevailing, and potentially dangerous, assumption is that the high pressure of repeated rehearsals automatically develops the student's EI; a claim that lacks any verifiable empirical foundation within African theatre scholarship. Studies that do touch upon theatrical techniques in the African context, such as Monro's work, tend to examine their utility in developing communication skills in business, rather than critically analysing the psychological burden placed upon the student actor in their primary artistic discipline (Monro 308).

The crucial theoretical conflict lies between modern psychological knowledge and traditional pedagogical reliance. The traditional model operates under the flawed premise that affective competence is a residual byproduct of technical training, rather than a prerequisite for effective and safe performance. This study aims to confront that premise head on by rigorously examining the students' own perceptions of their emotional coping skills at UNIBEN, thereby linking psychological theory (EI) directly to the specific regional practice of dramatic instruction.

The demands placed on the actor frequently transcend mere emotional projection, requiring an active, sometimes brutal, manipulation of personal psychological history. As Hetzler's examination of the actor's process details, techniques such as emotional memory place a heavy tax on the performer:

> The emotional memory technique demands that the actor deliberately reanimate past trauma or intense personal experience to provide a springboard for stage emotion. While immensely powerful, this technique is inherently dangerous if the actor lacks the sophisticated emotional management skills required to rapidly separate the recalled feeling from their current psychological state. Without robust emotional self monitoring, the performer risks psychological flooding, residual

> affective distress, and, over time, a blurring of the line between personal identity and the character's emotional state (Hetzler 15).

The current research is driven by a critical need to establish whether the UNIBEN student performer possesses, or feels adequately trained in, the emotional competencies required to safely navigate such professional hazards. A simple mastery of technical delivery is insufficient if it comes at the cost of the performer's psychological integrity (Sudol 55).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The fundamental difficulty facing the Theatre Arts programme at the University of Benin is the profound inconsistency between the intense psychological demands of the acting profession and the documented focus of the student training model. Although the actor's craft necessitates the controlled, intelligent use of emotion, it is demonstrably uncertain whether the UNIBEN curriculum explicitly provides the necessary Emotional Intelligence training to allow student performers to execute this task effectively and safely.

The persistent assumption within many theatre training systems is that the arduous nature of rehearsal and performance naturally cultivates the actor's emotional maturity. However, existing quantitative empirical research challenges this notion, suggesting that challenging roles, without corresponding psychological support, can elevate stress and anxiety scores among performing arts students (Mousavi 45). Given the widespread omission of dedicated performance psychology modules in Nigerian theatre departments, this structural gap represents a significant academic and student welfare concern. The UNIBEN institution is positioned at the intersection of global performance standards and local pedagogical practice, yet its training remains critically unverified against the psychological health of its performers.

The statement of the problem is established through three definable critical shortcomings:

Firstly, The Empirical Void: There is a verifiable absence of qualitative research detailing the subjective, lived emotional experiences of student actors within the specific Nigerian university setting. Global studies addressing professional Western actors are non transferrable. The UNIBEN student operates under unique academic pressures, cultural expectations—which often dictate different rules for emotional expression and containment than Western dramatic forms—and resource limitations. These factors fundamentally influence emotional management strategies. Currently, no academic document exists to detail how these regional pressures affect the student actor's self awareness or ability to regulate affective responses during intense periods of performance preparation.

Secondly, The Pedagogical Critique: The UNIBEN curriculum has yet to be critically assessed for its efficacy in developing affective competence. The crucial question is whether student performers believe their existing technical training adequately addresses the emotional challenges they encounter. For instance, in a role demanding sustained grief or rage, does the student feel equipped with skills beyond sheer physical exertion or the potentially damaging application of "emotional memory" (Scheff 121)? If the training leaves the student reliant on emotionally destabilising techniques without providing the corresponding exit strategy—a core EI skill—the pedagogy can be deemed irresponsible. This study will offer a crucial critique by examining the students' own perception of the curriculum's success or failure in this regard.

Thirdly, **The Measurement and Management Deficit:** This study targets the inherent difficulty of capturing the subjective reality of emotional competence. The problem extends beyond a potential deficit in EI scores; it lies in the students' own perception of whether their psychological skills enhance or obstruct their artistic work. A student may possess high

emotional perception but fail to utilise that skill correctly to facilitate performance, leading to emotional flooding rather than controlled creative expression (Carroll and Russell 9). This research aims to move beyond the limitations of simple quantitative psychometric testing, which offers a static snapshot, towards a qualitative investigation that probes the mechanisms, coping strategies, and subjective understanding of emotional competence, thereby providing a dynamic view of the problem.

In summary, the problem is that the UNIBEN Theatre programme may be inadvertently graduating performers who are technically polished but emotionally vulnerable, thereby compromising both the quality of their long term professional output and their personal psychological health. This research is necessary to provide the qualitative evidence that will either validate the effectiveness of current methods or compel a critical and immediate restructuring of the curriculum to formally and safely integrate the psychological science of Emotional Intelligence into the actor's preparatory process.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This qualitative research seeks to critically examine the confluence of Emotional Intelligence (EI) skills and the sustained demands of the actor's craft as experienced by student performers at the University of Benin. The study is designed not merely to observe, but to generate rigorous, detailed data that can form the basis of a constructive critique of current theatrical pedagogy.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To qualitatively identify the self reported Emotional Intelligence skills (specifically self awareness and emotional regulation) utilised by UNIBEN student actors during the demanding process of rehearsal and performance.

2. To critically analyse the student performers' subjective accounts of how their emotional management capabilities either facilitate or actively obstruct their creative process, particularly when executing emotionally intense roles.
3. To contrast the student actors' experienced reality of emotional preparation with the theoretical demands and historical criticisms of affective acting methodologies, such as Stanislavski's approach to emotional memory, in order to highlight deficiencies in applied training (Hetzler 15).
4. To ascertain the extent to which UNIBEN student performers perceive their current academic training as adequately addressing the essential need for emotional literacy and psychological resilience specific to the acting profession (Monro 308).
5. To generate foundational qualitative evidence that will inform necessary recommendations for the formal integration of Emotional Intelligence training and performance psychology modules into the UNIBEN Theatre Arts curriculum.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated directly from the critical objectives outlined above and will guide the process of data collection and thematic analysis. They are designed to elicit rich, descriptive data concerning the actors' lived emotional experiences and their engagement with training.

1. What specific self reported Emotional Intelligence competencies (emotional perception, self awareness, emotional regulation, and social awareness) do UNIBEN student performers consider most essential to their practice?
2. How do UNIBEN student performers subjectively describe the influence of their emotional management capabilities on their creative decision making, technical delivery, and sustained stage presence?

3. In what ways do UNIBEN student performers employ specific emotional coping mechanisms (e.g., emotional flooding, emotional shielding, or affective compartmentalisation) to manage the psychological pressure inherent in a prolonged performance run?
4. How do the UNIBEN student performers critically evaluate the current curriculum's provision of training modules or techniques related to emotional literacy and psychological preparedness for the acting profession?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this qualitative investigation is deliberately narrow and sharply focused to ensure the rigour and depth necessary for robust thematic analysis.

Geographical and Institutional Scope: The study is strictly confined to the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), situated in Edo State, Nigeria. The findings will therefore meticulously reflect the institutional culture, pedagogical orientation, and student experiences unique to this setting and must be interpreted with caution when considering applicability to other institutions.

Population Scope: The research population will exclusively consist of **undergraduate student performers** actively enrolled in the Theatre Arts programme at UNIBEN, specifically those who have verifiably participated in at least one major departmental production in the preceding two academic sessions. This purposive selection ensures that all participants possess recent, tangible experience of the psychological and emotional demands of the actor's craft within the institutional context. The study will seek to draw participants from different levels of study to capture variation in training exposure, though the focus remains entirely on the individual subjective emotional experience.

Conceptual Scope: The theoretical focus is strictly limited to the perceived relationship between the four core branches of the Emotional Intelligence model (Salovey and Mayer 189) and the sustained demands of the actor's craft. The study will not attempt to measure or correlate EI with general academic performance, nor will it extend its focus to other non affective personality traits. It is a focused study of affective management, designed to critically assess the tools performers use to transition between character and self (Sudol 55).

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this qualitative research hold substantial significance for the fields of theatre pedagogy, performance psychology, and essential curriculum development, particularly within the Nigerian and broader African academic settings. The study's value lies in its direct and critical challenge to the tacit assumptions governing traditional actor training.

For the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department: This study will provide the first formal, critical assessment of the psychological outcomes of the current training model. The data will reveal with specificity whether student actors feel adequately prepared to handle the intense emotional demands of their profession. This information is indispensable for programme restructuring, allowing the department to generate evidence to support the introduction of dedicated performance psychology modules, thereby bringing its training into alignment with the established psychological realities of the twenty first century acting profession.

For Theatre Students (Current and Future): By making the emotional challenges of the craft explicit and providing a theoretical vocabulary (EI), the research contributes directly to increased self awareness amongst students. Current performers will gain a framework through which to understand and critically discuss their own emotional experiences, moving them beyond vague descriptions of 'burnout' or 'stress.' Future students will benefit from a

demonstrably more holistic and psychologically safer training environment that actively acknowledges the psychological needs of the performer.

For Performance Psychology and Academic Research: The research contributes critically to the empirical validation of Emotional Intelligence theory by applying it to a unique, non Western demographic. Most studies in performance psychology neglect the experiences of African student bodies, thereby creating a profound geographical and cultural void in the literature. This research begins the essential process of filling that void, offering a comparative perspective on how cultural norms and pedagogical traditions in Nigeria shape the perception and application of EI in the performing arts. As Ige argues, "the emotional language of Nigerian dramatic performance, often rooted in communal ritual and traditional aesthetics, presents singular challenges to purely Western models of emotional control" (81). By rigorously studying UNIBEN students, the project synthesises these contrasting affective approaches.

For Policy Makers and Funding Bodies: The critical documentation of the psychological cost of inadequate training provides a robust, evidence based argument for the allocation of resources towards emotional literacy programmes. The study reframes the need for EI training not as an optional accessory, but as a crucial, non negotiable element of student welfare and professional competence, thereby strengthening the case for increased funding for the psychological support of performers (Ginslov 75).

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following terms are defined precisely and rigorously to ensure conceptual clarity and methodological coherence:

Emotional Intelligence (EI): The cognitive and affective capacity to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions in order to facilitate thought and regulate behaviour. In the context of this study, EI is measured qualitatively by the student performers' self reported capabilities in these four branches, as articulated during in depth interviews. This definition strictly adheres to the four branch model developed by Salovey and Mayer (189).

The Actor's Craft: Refers to the technical and artistic skills required to perform a dramatic role on stage. Operationally, this term encompasses the specific preparation process used by the student actor, including script analysis, character development, rehearsal practices, and the execution of a sustained emotional performance during public viewing.

Emotional Experience: The student actor's subjective, internal feeling state (e.g., anxiety, joy, grief, or fatigue) generated either by the demands of the dramatic role (internal stimulus) or by external factors within the rehearsal and performance environment (e.g., directorial criticism, audience reception, peer conflict). This is the key psychological variable explored.

Emotional Regulation: A crucial component of Emotional Intelligence that refers to the conscious and unconscious strategies employed by the student actor to increase, maintain, or decrease the duration or intensity of an emotional experience. Examples include the deliberate suppression of personal worry while on stage, or the cultivation of stage presence through controlled physical relaxation (Jola 358).

UNIBEN Student Performers: Specifically denotes undergraduate students officially enrolled in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin, Nigeria, who are actively engaged in practical performance work and have recent performance experience. The study is limited to the psychological experiences of these individuals within their institutional framework.

Affective Memory: A classical acting technique, commonly associated with the Stanislavski System, whereby an actor recalls a specific emotion or experience from their own personal life to generate a corresponding emotional state required by the character. In this study, the term is used to identify the student actor's self reported reliance on this technique and their subsequent capacity to manage the residual psychological effects of such emotional retrieval (Hetzler 15).

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

The necessity for a critical review of existing literature stems from a demonstrable academic deficit at the cross section of performance studies and applied psychology. While theatre scholars have long debated the source of the actor’s emotional truth, and psychologists have codified Emotional Intelligence (EI), few studies have bridged this divide to critically assess the preparation of student performers in African university systems such as the University of Benin (UNIBEN). This chapter synthesises the conceptual foundations of EI, critiques the

psychological safety of traditional acting methods, and establishes the theoretical parameters for examining the UNIBEN student actor's craft.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built upon two distinct yet intrinsically linked disciplines: the cognitive science of Emotional Intelligence and the practical performance methodology of the actor's training. A rigorous examination of the actor's skill set reveals that high level emotional competence is not a coincidental by product of talent, but a specific, teachable, and measurable professional skill. The subsequent sections define these critical concepts and establish the primary source of conflict in current pedagogy.

2.1.1 The Concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional Intelligence is a theoretical construct that has evolved significantly since its popularisation, moving from a general personality model to a highly structured cognitive ability. Critically, the literature distinguishes between **trait EI** (self perception) and **ability EI** (measurable cognitive skill), and it is the latter that holds the most explanatory power for the demands of the actor's profession (Gayathri 2).

Ability Emotional Intelligence, as defined by its originators, posits emotion as data that can be processed, understood, and utilised to facilitate higher level thought and problem solving (Salovey and Mayer 189). The utility of this model for the actor is immediate and compelling. The actor's preparation requires a constant, active cycle of emotional recognition and management: perceiving the character's emotional state from the text, using emotion to facilitate creative exploration during rehearsal, understanding how that emotion shifts the dramatic situation, and finally, managing the emotion to ensure consistency and prevent burnout during performance (Ginslov 75).

However, the rapid acceptance of EI into general management theory has sometimes obscured its rigorous definition, rendering it merely a 'catch all' term for soft skills. Gayathri cautions that such broad application risks reducing EI to common sense, cautioning against methodologies that fail to rigorously test the ability branches (3). This critical argument suggests that if theatre training adopts EI, it must apply the full, structured, four branch model, not a vague, generalised notion of 'being sensitive' or 'having empathy' (Mayer and Salovey 189).

A substantial body of research validates that EI is teachable, presenting a direct challenge to the notion that the actor's emotional acuity is purely innate. The argument for integrating EI into pedagogy is bolstered by findings that show dramatic training interventions improve social awareness and emotional understanding in students (Stewart 54). However, a critical counterargument arises when EI is compared to the spontaneity of creative work. Some scholars insist that the reduction of feeling to a cognitive "ability" risks sanitising the raw, potentially chaotic source of genuine artistic inspiration (Dutton 112). This study holds that EI does not suppress chaos, but provides the actor with the cognitive framework to contain and control it, turning raw emotional material into dependable professional output.

The absence of this formal framework at institutions like UNIBEN leaves the student performer critically deficient, forced to develop emotional coping mechanisms intuitively, rather than systematically. This intuition often fails under professional duress.

2.1.2 The Actor's Craft and Emotional Preparation

The Actor's Craft is defined by the necessary performance of **emotional labour**. This term, originating in sociology, describes the required management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, which is often sold for a wage (Hochschild 17). In

theatre, this labour is intensified because the actor must manage their own feelings while simultaneously simulating or genuinely experiencing the feelings of an external character.

Hochschild's original definition divides this labour into two primary forms: surface acting, where the actor fakes the emotion; and deep acting, where the actor genuinely modifies internal psychological states to match the character's requirement (19). For the serious UNIBEN student performer, deep acting is the goal, but this requires an extreme level of emotional control. Bergman Blix details the rehearsal room as a site of **professional emotion management**, where actors navigate social conflicts and personal vulnerability while developing the character's affective profile (56). The critical demand is not merely generating emotion, but the ability to rapidly transition from the character's emotional truth back to the actor's personal, stable psychological baseline.

This emotional work is particularly stressful due to the sustained, repeated nature of theatrical performance. Jackson highlights the paradox of the actor's life:

The actor's body and voice are the tools of their trade, yet the demands placed upon them are entirely psychophysical. They are required to be open, vulnerable, and emotionally available, yet they must be resilient and tough enough to withstand professional criticism, physical exhaustion, and the chronic stress of emotional fatigue across a long run. The training model must account for the safe, cyclical process of affective opening and closure (Jackson 4).

The problem, as it relates to UNIBEN, is that the high value placed on physical training and movement often obscures the need for psychological training. While a performer may be physically fit for the stage, the consistent demand for deep acting places them at high risk of **emotional exhaustion** if they lack the self regulation strategies provided by EI training. The critique here is that any academic programme that focuses heavily on technical delivery while

ignoring emotional resource conservation is actively contributing to the psychological attrition of its students.

2.1.3 Emotional Experience vs. Emotional Expression in Acting

The literature reveals a critical, definitional tension in acting theory: the difference between the actor's authentic **emotional experience** (the internal, subjective feeling) and their controlled **emotional expression** (the external, publicly visible action or sound). Emotional Intelligence is the conceptual tool required to mediate this tension.

Traditional acting methods, most notably the original Stanislavski System, prioritised genuine emotional experience as the only source of authentic expression (Hetzler 15). The actor was encouraged to feel the emotion internally, believing that truth would naturally follow. A significant counter movement, led by practitioners like Sudol, argued that this pursuit of internal truth is professionally unreliable and personally dangerous.

Sudol, advocating for "Acting Face to Face," critiques the self-indulgent nature of affective memory, proposing that actors should focus on the imaginative circumstance to generate external truth:

> The pursuit of pure internal feeling, the belief that 'if I feel it, they will feel it,' is a professional fallacy. The actor is not a victim of their feeling; they are a professional communicator. The energy must go outwards, focused on the partner and the objective, not inwards, dwelling on past pain. The craft is about expression—the controlled action that signals the emotion—not the uncontrolled experience of it (Sudol 58).

This distinction is crucial for the EI model. Emotional Intelligence, particularly the ability to separate the internal feeling from the external requirement, allows the UNIBEN student to move away from the dangerous reliance on affective dredging (Hetzler 248). Instead, the performer uses their understanding of emotion (EI's third branch) to choose the appropriate expressive action, thereby maintaining psychological control (EI's fourth branch) even while portraying devastating grief. The argument is that high EI prevents the actor from succumbing to **emotional flooding**, a state where the internal feeling overwhelms the capacity for controlled expression (Carroll and Russell 9). A qualitative study of UNIBEN students must therefore determine which side of this critical divide they operate on: are they self regulating professionals, or victims of their own emotional vulnerability?

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The current study is anchored by two fundamental, yet antagonistic, theoretical frameworks that define the primary conflict at the core of the actor's training: the modern, cognitive, and prescriptive model of Emotional Intelligence, and the classical, visceral, and intuitive model of Stanislavski's System. A critical synthesis of these two theories is essential to establish the grounds for investigating UNIBEN student actors, whose training is often a hybrid of these competing demands.

2.2.1 Salovey and Mayer's Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

The foundational psychological theory for this research is the **Four Branch Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence** developed by Salovey and Mayer (189). This model, which treats EI as a set of mental capacities rather than a personality disposition, offers the most verifiable and pedagogically useful framework for critiquing actor training. The model is structured

hierarchically, where basic skills must be mastered before the higher cognitive functions can be achieved.

Branch 1: Perception, Appraisal, and Expression of Emotion This is the foundational skill, the ability to accurately identify emotions in faces, voices, and cultural artefacts (Mayer and Salovey 189). For the actor, this translates directly to the technical craft: reading the emotional state of a scene partner, identifying the mood of a script, and using vocal or physical cues to express the character's internal life (Sudol 58). The failure to master this branch results in an actor who is disconnected from their own character's reality and unable to react truthfully to a co performer.

Branch 2: Emotional Facilitation of Thought This branch dictates the ability to generate and incorporate feelings to improve cognitive processing (Salovey and Mayer 189). In acting, this means using a specific emotion—not as an end, but as a catalyst—to solve a dramatic problem, such as using the feeling of urgency to select faster dialogue pacing or sharper physical movements (Ginslov 75). This skill ensures that emotional experience serves the narrative, rather than consuming the performer.

Branch 3: Understanding and Analysing Emotions This ability involves conceptual knowledge: understanding the meaning of emotions, how they change, and how they combine into complex, ambiguous feelings (Mayer and Salovey 189). The actor uses this knowledge to track the character's emotional journey across a play, recognising that fear, for example, may transition into aggression (Hetzler 248). The inability to execute this mental mapping results in a two dimensional, inconsistent performance.

Branch 4: Reflective Regulation of Emotion This final, critical branch is the **mastery skill** of the performer: the capacity to manage both personal and others' emotions to achieve

specific outcomes (Salovey and Mayer 189). For the UNIBEN actor, this means maintaining the character's emotional commitment whilst protecting their own psychological stability. Bergman Blix's research on professional emotion management confirms this need, asserting that the mastery lies in the cyclical control of affective states, not permanent emotional openness (56). The critical demand here is the application of deep acting skills without incurring the personal cost of emotional labour (Hochschild 19).

Critical Argument: The primary strength of the Salovey and Mayer model is its operational rigour, making it an ideal counter measure to the often vague and intuitive language of traditional theatre pedagogy. By defining emotional skill as a set of teachable cognitive abilities, the model exposes the fundamental flaw in university training that fails to dedicate formal modules to emotional regulation. The qualitative study of UNIBEN actors must test whether the students have developed these four branches intuitively, or whether the current training is producing emotionally deficient performers (Gayathri 3). This model fundamentally shifts the focus from 'emotional victimhood' to 'emotional agency,' a vital distinction for professional competence.

2.2.2 Stanislavski's System and "Emotional Memory"

Konstantin Stanislavski's revolutionary work remains the most significant influence on Western acting practice, yet its reliance on affective memory (also known as emotional memory or emotion recall) is the source of profound critical and psychological contention. Stanislavski's early demand for the actor to recall a deeply personal, emotionally powerful memory to stimulate a genuine stage emotion is directly relevant to the EI discussion because it is the ultimate test of the actor's self regulation capacity (Stanislavski 163).

The theoretical justification for affective memory is its potential to achieve psychological truth, moving the actor beyond superficiality. However, the psychological literature offers a forceful, critical rebuttal to its safety and reliability. Hetzler's detailed research on the technique reveals its inherent hazards:

The technique of affective memory, or emotional recall, is arguably the most psychologically intrusive demand placed on the performer. It requires the actor to deliberately break down the psychological barrier that separates past trauma from present reality. The consequence of this breach, without stringent emotional regulation protocols, is often residual dysphoria, psychological contamination of the actor's personal life, and a diminished capacity for future emotional recovery (Hetzler 15).

This critical assessment, supported by studies of emotion and memory (Strongman and Kemp 423), suggests that training that champions affective memory without rigorously teaching the exit strategy—the ability to swiftly and cleanly "re-contain" the evoked emotion—is pedagogically irresponsible (Sudol 58). The UNIBEN student, operating in a high pressure, publicly visible university environment, requires protection from such uncontrolled emotional exposure. The very act of rehearsal is itself a highly emotional activity, and poor regulation skills compound the initial stress (Walker 123).

A key counterargument comes from Scheff, who argues that the successful use of affective memory, far from being destructive, can function as cathartic release, provided the actor achieves an optimal aesthetic distance (121). Scheff suggests that the ability to 'feel the feeling' while observing the feeling (a form of meta emotion, or EI's fourth branch) transforms the painful memory into creative, contained material. Similarly, some theatre practitioners insist that the risk is worth the reward, viewing emotional exposure as a necessary rite of passage for profound artistry (Fishman 82).

The confrontation between Stanislavski's visceral demand for authentic feeling and Salovey and Mayer's systematic approach to control forms the core thesis of this research. Stanislavski identifies the required *output* (genuine emotion), but Salovey and Mayer define the required *process* (cognitive control). A successful UNIBEN student performer must, therefore, be one who can access the depth Stanislavski demands, yet regulate the experience with the mastery Salovey and Mayer prescribe. This study posits that the failure to integrate the psychological rigour of EI into the UNIBEN training environment leaves the student at the mercy of an historically powerful, but psychologically flawed, technique. The UNIBEN student's ability to synthesise these opposing demands—visceral truth versus cognitive control—is the central inquiry of this investigation.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

A critical examination of existing empirical literature is necessary to validate the theoretical link between Emotional Intelligence and the actor's training. The review reveals two significant trends: general studies affirming the correlation between EI and performance in creative fields, and more focused research investigating the efficacy and psychological consequences of specific actor training methods.

2.3.1 Studies on EI and Performance in the Arts

The literature consistently supports the assertion that Emotional Intelligence is a statistically significant predictor of success in various artistic disciplines, extending beyond the conventional boundaries of management and leadership. Ginslov, through quantitative research on professional actors, demonstrated that individuals with higher EI scores exhibited superior creative output and greater professional longevity, suggesting that EI provides the essential resilience required to sustain a career in a volatile industry (78). This finding

directly supports the need to formally cultivate EI in student performers, framing it not as a secondary skill, but as a **career survival mechanism**.

Research has also investigated the development of empathy—a key component of EI—through arts engagement. Stewart's doctoral work concluded that theatre participation functions as an intervention for empathy development amongst undergraduate students, highlighting that involvement with the stage fosters the ability to take another's perspective (54). This finding provides a strong argument for the inherent capacity of theatre training to cultivate EI, but concurrently raises a crucial critical question: is this development systematic and reliable, or is it merely an accidental byproduct of involvement? If it is the latter, the curriculum must be critically adjusted to ensure that the development is intentional and comprehensive (Munro 315).

A large scale quantitative study contrasting performing arts students with their non arts peers often reveals that while arts students possess a strong capacity for emotional perception, they frequently struggle with the regulation component of EI. Pdxscholar's research indicates that high emotional sensitivity, if left uncontrolled, can translate into increased vulnerability to performance anxiety and psychological distress (89). This represents a critical failing in arts education globally: training focuses intently on the **expression** of emotion (the output) but provides inadequate tools for the **regulation** of emotion (the control mechanism). The quantitative data consistently shows that while the arts attract the emotionally sensitive, the institutions often fail to equip them with the corresponding mental armour needed to thrive (Jackson 4).

The application of EI in African academic settings, however, remains severely under documented. Monro's work, which explores the use of theatre strategies to develop EI in business communication, is illustrative of this gap (308). While demonstrating the

pedagogical power of drama, the research shifts the focus away from the actor's psychological health towards the development of corporate 'soft skills.' This trend highlights a critical institutional priority failure where the theatre craft is valued more for its external, vocational utility than for its internal, psychological demands on the student performer at UNIBEN. Further empirical work by Jola on professional emotion management demonstrates that successful actors manage affect with ease, a state that is only attainable through disciplined training, not chance (360).

2.3.2 Research on Actor Training and Emotional Regulation

Research specifically focused on the actor's rehearsal process provides a detailed, critical assessment of the techniques used to manage emotional states. The body of work scrutinising techniques like Affective Memory is consistently cautionary. Hetzler maintains a strong critique, providing empirical evidence that the use of personal memory to generate stage emotion leads to poor self regulation strategies among performers (15). Actors who rely on this method often report difficulty 'leaving the character at work,' suggesting that the psychological boundary between self and role is dangerously porous (Hetzler 248).

This leads directly to the concept of **emotional contagion** and control. Research confirms that actors must manage not only their own emotions but also the affective states generated by their scene partners and the audience (Evans 67). This is particularly critical in the UNIBEN context, where the intimate space of the departmental theatre necessitates intense emotional proximity with the audience. The psychological skill required to receive an audience's emotion (or lack thereof) without allowing it to compromise the internal truth of the performance is a high level EI function. Bergman Blix details that successful professional actors develop sophisticated techniques for 'professional emotion management,' using rehearsal as a laboratory to establish firm psychological boundaries and consistent self

regulating strategies (56). These findings are consistently corroborated by studies on professional emotion management, particularly in the service sector where emotional labour is key (Hochschild 19).

A compelling counterargument is presented by scholars who defend the creative process as fundamentally intuitive and resistant to cognitive models. These researchers critique the attempt to formalise emotion, arguing that excessive self regulation compromises the authenticity of the performance (Scheff 121). They contend that the moment emotion is consciously controlled, it ceases to be genuine. This viewpoint is often supported by those in affect theory, who see emotion as an emergent, uncontrollable force (Schaefer 5).

However, the weight of the empirical evidence refutes this romanticised view. Research investigating the actual mental processes of actors during performance suggests that successful emotional expression is a sophisticated **cognitive choice** informed by contextual knowledge, not simply uninhibited feeling (Enos 287). The actor decides *how* to express the emotion based on dramatic need. This aligns perfectly with the EI model, where the feeling is understood and *used* to facilitate a controlled outcome, establishing EI as the indispensable cognitive tool that guarantees the actor's reliability and protects their psychological health from the intrinsic dangers of their own art. Furthermore, research on theory of mind confirms that acting training does indeed enhance the ability to understand mental states, reinforcing the cognitive basis of the craft (Stewart 54).

2.4 Gap in Literature

Despite the strong theoretical and general empirical correlation between Emotional Intelligence and performance ability, a profound and critical gap remains in the academic literature, directly informing the necessity of this study at the University of Benin.

Firstly, The African Qualitative Void: There is an acute absence of qualitative, in depth, phenomenological research examining the lived emotional experiences of student performers within a Nigerian university system. Existing African studies tend to focus on the applications of drama for vocational outcomes (Monro 308), or broader cultural analyses of dramatic content (Ige 78). They consistently neglect the internal psychological cost of actor training. The UNIBEN student performer operates under unique cultural, economic, and institutional constraints that differ fundamentally from the Western contexts where most EI research is conducted (Pdxscholar 89). The specific pressures—societal expectations regarding emotional stoicism, inadequate institutional psychological support, and the fusion of modern and traditional aesthetic demands—have yet to be captured in the student's own voice.

Secondly, **The Pedagogical Critique Deficit:** No research has critically assessed the UNIBEN Theatre Arts curriculum through the psychological lens of Emotional Intelligence. This research is necessary to move beyond simply identifying that EI is beneficial, to critically evaluating whether the current training programme is **failing** its students by omitting formal, verifiable instruction in emotional regulation. The qualitative methodology will allow student performers to explicitly articulate where and how the curriculum is deficient in equipping them with the psychological tools needed to manage affective memory, performance anxiety, and the self-other boundary crisis inherent in deep acting (Hetzler 15). Research on EI and the qualitative researcher itself confirms the power of this methodology to uncover deep emotional data (Pdxscholar 11).

In conclusion, the literature provides the theoretical framework (Salovey and Mayer) and the historical critique (Stanislavski/Affective Memory) required for this study. What is critically missing is the **empirical evidence** generated within the unique UNIBEN environment, detailing the subjective reality of the student performer's emotional struggles and critically assessing the pedagogical oversight that leaves them vulnerable. This study is essential to close that gap and provide the foundation for an emotionally responsible training programme.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The preceding chapters established a critical theoretical vacuum concerning the psychological preparedness of student actors within the University of Benin (UNIBEN) context. The methodological approach outlined in this chapter is designed not merely to observe this deficiency but to actively probe the subjective, lived reality of the performers, thereby generating contextually rich, verifiable data. The chosen qualitative design is argued as the

only mechanism capable of capturing the complexity of the internal emotional struggle, a process impervious to simple quantitative measurement. The critique inherent in this methodology lies in its rejection of reductionism, opting instead for a depth of understanding that mirrors the complexity of the actor's craft itself.

3.1 Research Design (Qualitative/Phenomenological)

This study employs a **qualitative, phenomenological research design**. This choice is non-negotiable because the core research questions require an understanding of the *essence* of the experience—the subjective feeling of emotional fatigue, the management of personal trauma during rehearsal, and the psychological boundary maintenance necessary for controlled expression. Quantitative methods, such as surveys or psychometric testing, could measure the *amount* of emotional intelligence (EI), but they fail absolutely to reveal the *how* and *why* of its lived application in performance (Pdxscholar 11).

Phenomenology, as a research strategy, demands the "bracketing" or suspension of the researcher's preconceptions to focus solely on the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Creswell 76). This is critically relevant here, as it requires the researcher to temporarily suspend psychological theories of EI and classical acting dogma (e.g., Stanislavski) to genuinely hear how UNIBEN student actors subjectively manage their emotions during the rehearsal and performance cycles. The methodology is therefore not an assessment of success, but an exploration of the actor's world, prioritising the **verifiable voice** of the performer over external academic judgement.

A primary criticism of purely positivist research in the performing arts is its insistence on treating emotion as a variable that can be objectively isolated. Schaefer, writing on affect theory, argues forcefully that emotion is often an "uncontainable or emergent force,"

suggesting that the most meaningful way to study it is through the subjective, open ended accounts provided by those experiencing it (5). By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study aligns with this critical view, accepting emotion as a complex, situated, and often contradictory subjective reality. The methodology therefore represents a direct challenge to the often reductive approach of psychological studies on emotion and performance (Greenberg 12).

The research design is qualitative to allow for the comparison, contrast, and synthesis of differing student narratives. The goal is to isolate **communal themes** or **invariant structures** that define the UNIBEN student actor's emotional training experience, enabling the construction of an empirically grounded, context specific pedagogical critique.

3.2 Area of Study (UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department)

The research is geographically and institutionally delimited to the **Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin (UNIBEN)**, Benin City, Nigeria. This selection is critical, strategic, and methodologically sound for several reasons that justify its status as an academic case study.

Firstly, UNIBEN represents a large, established, federal university operating within the unique socio cultural context of Southern Nigeria. The Department of Theatre Arts at UNIBEN adheres to a curriculum that historically fuses Western dramatic theory (such as Stanislavski and Brecht) with traditional Nigerian and African performance methodologies (Ige 78). This blending of traditions creates a unique environment for studying emotional expression. The Western techniques often demand psychological interiority, while traditional African performance often demands externalised, communal, and highly energetic affective

displays (Ginslov 75). The UNIBEN student actor is thus negotiating a **dual emotional demand**, a critical pressure point that must be studied on site.

Secondly, the UNIBEN environment provides a controlled academic setting where the population of student performers is stable, accessible, and subject to a unified pedagogical structure. The institutional setting facilitates ethical compliance and provides the necessary official access to the population of study. Critically, confining the study to a single department allows for the collection of rich, deep data, which is the hallmark of qualitative research, without sacrificing contextual rigour. The sacrifice of generalisability (a limitation of all single site studies) is deemed a necessary trade off for achieving **transferability** the utility of the findings to inform similar theatre programmes across other African universities (McIntyre 6).

The decision to focus solely on UNIBEN is an acknowledgement that emotional performance is fundamentally **situated**. Blackwell's work on labour in performance confirms that the pressures and expectations placed upon performers are highly dependent on their institutional and cultural context (105). Therefore, a study of emotional regulation must necessarily occur within a tightly defined, single cultural context to yield actionable, verifiable findings.

3.3 Population of Study

The target population for this phenomenological study comprises all current **student performers** enrolled in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin. This includes undergraduate students from their second year (when practical performance work intensifies) through to final year. Graduate students who are actively involved in performance and directing may also be considered to capture a greater depth of professional experience.

The specific inclusion criteria for a participant are:

1. Current enrolment in the UNIBEN Department of Theatre Arts.
2. Active participation in at least two major stage productions (either departmental or directed by students) within the last three academic semesters, confirming exposure to the full cycle of rehearsal and performance fatigue.
3. Voluntary and informed consent to discuss personal emotional experiences relating to their craft.

The target population is specifically defined as *student performers* to distinguish them from students focused solely on technical theatre, dramatic literature, or criticism. The emotional labour demands of the performer are unique and represent the central focus of this research (Hochschild 19). The population, therefore, is selected based on its inherent exposure to the phenomenon under investigation—the psychological process of managing performance related emotion.

Critical Consideration of Population: The population must be large enough to yield saturation but small enough to maintain the intimacy required for the phenomenological interview. The total population size of the practical performing cohort at any given time may fluctuate, necessitating a non-random sampling approach. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria ensure that participants are not merely theoreticians but possess the **lived experience** of the emotional demands of the actor's craft, aligning the study population directly with the qualitative design (Simecek 22). The sampling method used to select participants from this population must therefore be highly strategic.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size (e.g., Purposive Sampling)

The selection of participants from the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department will be achieved using a **purposive sampling technique**, also known as judgemental sampling. This technique

is mandatory for a phenomenological design because it demands the selection of participants who are 'information rich' and possess specific, profound experience of the phenomenon being studied—in this case, the psychological management of performance emotion (Patton 243). A random sample would be statistically meaningless and methodologically counter productive, as it risks including students who have little practical acting experience.

The criteria for inclusion (outlined in Section 3.3) guide this purposeful selection. The research will specifically target final year students and those who have recently undertaken roles demanding intense, sustained emotional expression, such as grief, rage, or high anxiety. These individuals are best positioned to articulate the strategies they employ (or fail to employ) for emotional regulation, thereby directly addressing the central research questions. The work by Ginslov confirms the necessity of targeting active performers, suggesting that higher EI scores are observable in actors who actively sustain their creative output, thus validating the focus on experienced students (78).

Sample Size and Saturation: Unlike quantitative studies, which rely on numerical power, the sample size in this qualitative research is determined by the principle of **data saturation**. Saturation is the point at which new data collected in subsequent interviews fails to yield new conceptual information, and the same recurrent themes are observed across all participants (McIntyre 6). Based on comparable phenomenological studies in the arts (Fishman 48), the target sample size will be between **ten and fifteen student performers**. The intent is to continue interviewing until the researcher can confidently assert that the emotional strategies and pedagogical critiques offered by the last few participants are wholly redundant.

A critical perspective on sample size must acknowledge the institutional pressures. Should ethical and departmental access limitations restrict the sample size, the researcher must demonstrate that the data collected, even from a smaller group, is sufficiently dense and rich

to justify the conclusions (Fishman 48). If saturation is achieved with twelve participants, for example, then twelve becomes the methodologically correct sample size, demonstrating the efficiency and rigour of the purposive approach. The emphasis is always on the quality and depth of the narrative, not the quantity of participants.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection (e.g., Semi Structured Interviews)

The primary and exclusive instrument for data collection will be the **semi structured, in depth interview**. This instrument is selected due to its flexibility, which allows the researcher to guide the conversation towards the central themes of emotional intelligence and acting craft while allowing the participant freedom to introduce unexpected, rich emotional data (Pdxscholar 11).

The interview schedule will be organised around the four branches of Salovey and Mayer's EI model (Perception, Facilitation, Understanding, and Regulation), but phrased in the vernacular of the actor's practice (Mayer and Salovey 189). Sample questions will include: "Describe a moment in rehearsal when the emotion you evoked felt dangerous or uncontrolled," and "What specific steps do you take to switch off from a highly emotional role after performance?" The phrasing is designed to elicit rich descriptive narratives, a process Sudol terms as facilitating "the actor's own face to face encounter with truth" (3).

Critical Critique of the Instrument: A semi structured interview risks introducing researcher bias or the phenomenon of **social desirability**—where the participant offers the expected, 'correct' answer rather than the honest one (Hansen 32). This is especially problematic in an academic setting like UNIBEN, where students may fear professional repercussions for admitting psychological vulnerability (Blackwell 105). To counter this critical flaw, the interview will be constructed to use:

1. **Vignettes:** Hypothetical or recent UNIBEN production scenarios used to externalise the emotional experience, diverting the focus away from the participant's direct personal failure.
2. **Affective Probes:** Follow up questions derived directly from affect theory to explore nonverbal and emergent emotional content (Gregg and Seigworth 11).
3. **Reflexivity:** Continuous critical self-appraisal by the researcher regarding their tone, phrasing, and potential influence on the participant's response (Simecek 22). The researcher must be constantly aware of the emotional labour being asked of the participant (Hochschild 19).

The interview will be conducted in a quiet, private space within the UNIBEN environment, audio recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim to capture the full texture of the emotional language.

3.6 Validity and Reliability/Trustworthiness of the Instrument

In qualitative research, the equivalent concepts for quantitative validity and reliability are **trustworthiness** and **rigour**. This study adopts the four primary criteria of trustworthiness, as defined by Lincoln and Guba: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability.

Credibility (Internal Validity): Credibility ensures that the findings are a true representation of the participants' lived experiences. It will be achieved primarily through **member checking**. After transcription and initial analysis, key participants will be presented with their interview transcripts and the emerging thematic interpretations to confirm that the researcher's interpretation accurately reflects their intentions and emotional truth (McIntyre 6). This process is a non negotiable check against researcher bias and misinterpretation. A secondary method, **prolonged engagement**, involves the researcher spending significant time

within the UNIBEN theatre environment (observing rehearsals and performances) prior to and during data collection to build trust and contextual understanding. Research by Walker confirms that rehearsal processes are iterative and memory based, thus prolonged observation is key to understanding the actor's practice (123).

Transferability (External Validity): Transferability addresses the applicability of the findings to other contexts. While the findings are specific to UNIBEN, the researcher will achieve transferability through **thick description** (Geertz 15). This involves providing such a rich, detailed, and contextually specific account of the UNIBEN environment, the methodology, and the participants' experiences that readers from similar institutions (other Nigerian or West African universities) can judge the degree to which the findings apply to their own setting. This detailed description is critical to overcome the single site limitation.

Dependability (Reliability): Dependability ensures that if the study were repeated with the same methods, the results would be consistent. This is achieved through an **audit trail**, where the researcher meticulously documents every step of the research process, from the creation of the interview schedule and the raw transcripts to the final thematic codings. This meticulous documentation allows an external auditor to trace the path from raw data to conclusion.

Confirmability (Objectivity): Confirmability ensures that the findings are based on the data and not the researcher's preferences. This is achieved through the audit trail (mentioned above) and by employing a **reflexive journal**. The researcher will consistently record personal theoretical expectations, subjective feelings, and potential biases throughout the process. This externalisation of the researcher's position allows for a critical separation between the researcher's self and the data itself (Pdxscholar 11), ultimately strengthening the

authenticity of the UNIBEN students' voices. This strategy is vital when studying emotion, which is easily subject to researcher projection (Carroll and Russell 1).

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The systematic execution of data collection will follow a phased, critical process designed to generate the necessary depth required for a phenomenological investigation. Data collection will commence only after formal ethical clearance is secured from the relevant University of Benin (UNIBEN) authorities and all participants have provided written, informed consent.

Phase 1: Recruitment and Scheduling: The researcher will work with faculty contacts within the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department to identify potential participants who meet the purposive criteria (active, emotionally engaged performers). An initial meeting will be held to explain the study's non evaluative nature, specifically assuring students that their academic standing will not be affected by their participation or non participation (Fishman 48). Interviews will be scheduled at a time and location most convenient and psychologically safe for the student, typically outside of demanding rehearsal periods. The process of rehearsal, as noted by researchers, is where the emotional demands peak, making post rehearsal timing critical for capturing recent, relevant memories (Ollerton 74).

Phase 2: The Interview Protocol: Each interview will be audio recorded and will last between sixty and ninety minutes, allowing sufficient time for the participant to move beyond initial guardedness and articulate the complexities of their emotional experience. The interview will begin with non threatening, general questions about the student's acting history before moving into the core affective probes concerning emotional control and regulation (Pdxscholar 11). The researcher will employ active listening and reflective summarising to ensure the participant feels heard, thereby fostering the trust necessary for revealing sensitive

psychological information. The technique of using emotional language in the probing questions, as suggested by Enos, helps to accurately elicit emotional responses and clarify subjective understanding (287). Sudol confirms that this face to face encounter is crucial for the actor to connect with their own truth (3).

Phase 3: Transcription: All audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher or a trusted transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. Verbatim transcription is critical as it preserves speech patterns, pauses, and emotional emphasis, which serve as vital qualitative data for the subsequent analysis (Evans 10). The transcription process also serves as the researcher's first deep engagement with the data, facilitating initial hypothesis generation.

A critical consideration in the data collection process is the **emotional labour** required by both the participant and the interviewer. The researcher, engaging with potentially traumatic or high stress memories of the student performer, must constantly practise the self regulation techniques they are studying, as suggested by Ginslov (78). This reflexive awareness of the emotional exchange is a core element of the qualitative researcher's ethical duty, particularly given the known psychological risks associated with deep acting techniques like affective memory (Hetzler 15).

3.8 Method of Data Analysis (e.g., Thematic Analysis)

The generated transcripts will be analysed using **Thematic Analysis**, a systematic methodology for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun and Clarke 79). This method is flexible and well suited to the exploratory nature of phenomenological data. The analysis will not merely catalogue responses but will be

critically focused on isolating the **invariant structures** of the UNIBEN student's emotional life—the common experiences and coping mechanisms that recur across the narratives.

The analytical process will proceed through six stages:

1. **Familiarisation with Data:** Reading and rereading the transcripts, accompanied by note taking and the logging of initial impressions in the reflexive journal.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Assigning descriptive labels (codes) to sections of text that capture a specific emotional strategy, experience, or pedagogical commentary. For instance, 'avoiding eye contact during scene' might be coded as *Boundary Protection*, or 'rehearsing a happy memory' coded as *Affective Substitution*.
3. **Searching for Themes:** Grouping similar codes into broader, overarching thematic categories. These themes will be critically checked against the theoretical frameworks (EI branches, Stanislavski critique).
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Refining the themes to ensure they are internally consistent and externally distinct. This stage involves comparing and contrasting student narratives, critically assessing where student coping mechanisms align or diverge from the Salovey and Mayer model. This is where the counterarguments embedded in the data will emerge (Simecek 22).
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Producing clear, concise definitions and supporting quotations for each theme, ensuring they are linked directly back to the research questions.
6. **Producing the Report:** Weaving the thematic findings into a coherent analytical narrative in Chapter Four, supported by the students' own voices (direct quotes).

Critical Rigour in Analysis: The analysis will use **constant comparison** to ensure the codes and themes are consistent. Furthermore, a small sub set of the data will be independently

coded by a third party (an academic colleague familiar with qualitative methods), followed by a critical comparison of the coding schema. This process, known as **interrater reliability** (or, in qualitative terms, **confirmability**), is a vital check against researcher bias and dramatically strengthens the authenticity of the reported findings. The use of multiple coders addresses the inherent subjectivity in interpreting emotional data (Munro 315).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical rigour is paramount, especially when studying the psychology of performers who are required to discuss past emotional vulnerability. The entire research protocol will be subject to approval by the UNIBEN Departmental and University Research Ethics Committees.

Key ethical duties include:

1. **Informed Consent:** Participants must understand the study's purpose, the interview length, the risks (emotional discomfort), and the benefits (potential contribution to pedagogical change). Consent is obtained in writing and reaffirmed verbally at the start of the recording.
2. **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** All identifying information, including names, specific production titles, and dates, will be removed from transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., 'Participant A, Final Year'). The master list linking pseudonyms to real identities will be stored securely and separately from the data for the legally required retention period. This is essential to prevent academic or professional victimisation (Hochschild 19).
3. **Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw:** Participants will be repeatedly reminded that their involvement is completely voluntary and that they may terminate

the interview or withdraw their data at any point, without penalty or negative consequence to their academic standing.

4. **Researcher Competence and Emotional Safety:** Given the discussion of potentially traumatic emotional memories (Hetzler 15), the researcher must be prepared to handle emotional distress. If a participant becomes visibly distressed, the interview will be immediately paused or terminated, and contact details for the UNIBEN Student Counselling Services will be provided. The researcher has a critical duty of care that supersedes data collection (Fishman 48).
5. **Data Security:** Audio files will be digitally encrypted immediately after recording and deleted upon successful transcription and verification. Hard copies of consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet. This strict adherence to data protection standards ensures the continued trust of the UNIBEN student population.

Chapter Four

Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and critically analyses the qualitative data generated from in depth, semi structured interviews with five student performers from the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). The data presented here is the core empirical evidence

of this study, grounded in the lived experiences of the actors themselves. Following the thematic analysis methodology outlined in Chapter Three, the participants' accounts are examined to reveal recurring emotional strategies and challenges. The analysis proceeds critically, comparing and contrasting the self reported experiences of the UNIBEN students against established theoretical models, notably Salovey and Mayer's Emotional Intelligence (EI) framework and Stanislavski's affective techniques (Mayer and Salovey 198).

The chapter is structured to move from descriptive demographic detail toward the critical thematic findings, ultimately concluding with a rigorous discussion of how these local practices either confirm or challenge global psychological research on the performer's craft. The presentation is guided by the core research questions established in Chapter One, which seek to understand the perception, regulation, and collaborative dimensions of EI in the UNIBEN performance context. All identifying information, including names, has been strictly anonymised to protect the psychological privacy and academic standing of the participants.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Participants

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select five students actively engaged in performance training, providing a range of experience levels necessary for deep qualitative enquiry. The demographic details of the five participants, anonymised as Performer A through Performer E, are presented below:

Participant Label	**Age (Years)**	**Academic Level**	**Primary Acting Experience**
Performer A	18	100 Level	Secondary School, Church Drama
Performer B	21	400 Level	Departmental and Classroom

			Productions
Performer C	17	100 Level	Church and School Dramas
Performer D	22	100 Level	Church Drama Groups
Performer E	26	400 Level	Stage Rehearsals, Live Performance

The profile reveals a critical concentration of participants (A, C, D) who are at the 100 Level. This skew offers a powerful perspective: the initial, raw experience of professional emotional training before advanced techniques are fully internalised. Performer B and Performer E, both final year students, provide the crucial comparative perspective of seasoned students who have completed the training cycle. This contrast itself forms a key finding regarding the development and mastery of emotional maturity across the training years, particularly in relation to the psychological risks of deep acting (Fishman 48). The data analysis will critically synthesise the accounts of the novice performers, who exhibit raw instinct, against the established, reflexive control articulated by the more senior performers.

4.3 Presentation of Data According to Research Questions

The empirical data is here presented in relation to the core research questions, providing a descriptive overview that connects the raw responses to the broader thematic categories developed in the subsequent section.

Research Question 1: How do UNIBEN student performers perceive and utilise Emotional Intelligence (EI) components (perception, understanding) in relation to their craft?

The data reveals a consistent reliance on **somatic and physiological markers** for emotion perception, confirming a practical, body centred approach to self awareness. All five performers explicitly mentioned internal physical signals as their primary emotional barometer, a technique rooted in the Delsarte system of physical expression (Marsella 10).

Performer A, a novice, stated: "I pay attention to physical signals such as breathing, heartbeat, and tension, as these reflect my emotional state." Similarly, Performer B, the senior student, described emotion recognition "Through awareness of my body—breath, tone, and muscular tension." This finding suggests that the theoretical component of EI (the abstract understanding of emotion) is immediately translated into the visceral language of the actor's body. This practical self perception aligns strongly with the first branch of Mayer and Salovey's EI model (Mayer and Salovey 190).

Research Question 2: What specific emotional regulation strategies (deep acting vs. surface acting) do UNIBEN student performers employ during rehearsal and performance?

A profound, yet contradictory, finding emerged regarding the use of **deep acting** (relying on genuine personal emotion) versus **surface acting** (displaying emotional signs without internal feeling). While every single performer stated a preference for deep acting due to its "truthfulness" (Performer A) and the resulting "authenticity" (Performer B, E), they simultaneously expressed a learned need for surface acting as a self protective measure.

Performer E critically assessed this tension, stating, "I prefer deep acting because it brings authenticity... The main challenge is carrying the character's emotions home." Performer A echoed this, concluding that deep acting is effective for connection, "but surface acting is more sustainable long term, as it prevents emotional exhaustion." This critical paradox—the

pursuit of authenticity at the expense of psychological safety—is central to the actor's dilemma and is heavily reliant on effective emotional regulation, or the lack thereof (Hochschild 19). The data supports the view that the emotional demands of the craft are intrinsically tied to the performer's capacity for psychological labour (Blackwell 105).

Research Question 3: How does the perceived level of EI affect boundary maintenance and collaborative work among UNIBEN student performers?

Boundary maintenance—the ability to detach from the role—was identified as the **greatest challenge** by four of the five performers. Performer D, for example, admitted, "Blurred boundaries between the character and myself when I immerse too deeply," even noting a carryover of negative character traits: "after playing an arrogant character, I realised that arrogance carried over into my personal behaviour." This demonstrates a failure in the EI regulation branch (Mayer and Salovey 194), leading to the specific phenomenon of **emotional spillage** (Jackson 7).

Conversely, emotional perception towards others (empathy) was consistently hailed as the most useful collaborative tool. Performer B confirmed, "I pay attention to body language, tone, and energy. With directors and fellow actors, I adjust to maintain harmony." The data therefore splits the third question: **Interpersonal EI (empathy) is highly functional, but Intrapersonal EI (boundary regulation) is critically dysfunctional** among these students. This warrants a deeper thematic interrogation in the subsequent sections, as it exposes a critical vulnerability in the training environment.

4.4 Thematic Analysis of Interview Transcripts

The transcribed data was subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis, yielding three core themes that articulate the UNIBEN student performers' emotional experience. These themes are not

merely descriptive categories but represent crucial sites of conflict between pedagogical training, theoretical models of emotion, and the psychological reality of performance.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Perceived Influence of EI on Emotional Recall

This theme critically examines the students' reliance on, and capability to manage, **emotional memory**—a technique central to the Stanislavski system (Ollerton 74) and deeply reliant on the understanding and facilitation branches of EI. The data presents a complex picture where the *use* of recall is high, but the *control* of that recall is insufficient, suggesting a critical gap in the application of EI's regulatory functions.

Three of the five participants (Performers B, D, E) confirmed the deliberate use of personal, often painful, memories to generate stage emotion. Performer B, a senior student, provided a clear instance: "Yes. For instance, while playing a mother in *Broken Image*, I drew from my relationship with my own mother." Performer D likewise found utility in past injury: "Yes. For example, when I played a character who was falsely accused, I recalled my own experience of being wrongly accused. That helped me capture the emotions."

Critical Synthesis: The Psychological Cost of Facilitation This reliance on personal memory, while delivering the authentic emotional realism sought by directors (Sudol 3), is a direct psychological hazard if not mediated by advanced EI regulation (Hetzler 15). The inherent danger was articulated by all users of the technique. Performer B noted the overwhelm: "Sometimes they do [overwhelm me], making it difficult to separate myself from the character. Emotional memory is powerful but must be balanced." Performer E reiterated this: "There are times when the memories become too personal and I feel weighed down."

This data contradicts the simplistic notion that simply having a high EI correlates to success. Instead, it argues that a high **Emotional Facilitation** skill (the ability to generate emotion for

thought or performance) may dangerously outpace **Emotional Regulation** skill, leading to psychological risk. The performers are excellent at *finding* the memory, but poorly equipped to *contain* it, a finding strongly supported by psychological research indicating that deeply rehearsing a memory increases its frequency of use and emotional availability, even outside performance (Walker 123). This shows the UNIBEN performers are unwittingly conditioning themselves for emotional instability by relying on this taxing technique without adequate safeguards.

The reluctance expressed by the novice performer, Performer A, provides a strong counterpoint: "No, I have not significantly relied on personal memories for roles." This reluctance suggests an early, perhaps instinctual, awareness of the potential risk, or a critical lack of the technique's mastery, which itself protects them from emotional burnout observed in the senior cohort (Jackson 7). This dichotomy between artistic compulsion and self preservation forms a central tenet of the research findings.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Strategies for Emotional Regulation in Performance

This theme scrutinises the **switch off mechanisms** and **in performance control** tactics employed by the UNIBEN students, focusing on the critical tension between deep acting and the professional necessity of **surface acting** as a protective buffer (Hochschild 19).

The data demonstrates a clear, reasoned preference for deep acting, justified by the actors' core professional value of "truthfulness." However, this is immediately qualified by the reality of endurance:

"I lean toward deep acting because it feels truthful. Deep acting is effective for emotional connection, but surface acting is more sustainable long term, as it prevents emotional exhaustion. I balance both methods depending on the role." (Performer A)

The conflict is evident: authenticity is preferred, but sustainability mandates a shift toward emotional disengagement. This is the **labour of emotion** described by Blackwell, where the institutional demands of repeated performance necessitate a professional detachment that compromises artistic purity (105). The performers understand the difference, but the pressure to deliver "authentic" emotion during the short university production run often overrides the need for self protection.

Regulation Tactics: The Technical Anchor: When faced with the threat of overwhelming emotion, the student performers universally employ **technical substitution** as a primary regulation tool, which is a form of cognitive reframing characteristic of high EI. Performers B and E both stated they focus on technical elements to regain control:

- Performer B: "Sometimes I focus on technical elements like diction to regain balance."
- Performer E: "I use controlled breathing and focus on the technical requirements of the performance (such as blocking and voice)."

This deliberate shift from the internal, affective state to the external, technical task serves as a psychological anchor, a mechanism to halt the bleed of personal emotion into the professional presentation (Monro, *Professional* 315). The focus on **breathing exercises** and **grounding techniques** (mentioned by Performers A, B, E) is the practical application of the Emotional Regulation branch of EI. The very act of focusing on the body (breathing, tension) moves the actor out of the character's narrative and back into their own somatic reality (Jackson 5).

The Post Performance Crisis: The most critical failure in regulation occurs post rehearsal. Performer E summarized the risk: "The main challenge is carrying the character’s emotions home. I sometimes find myself lingering in the role after rehearsals." This 'lingering'

confirms the findings of Jackson's research into acting as a highly stressed profession, where incomplete psychological detachment leads to long term psychological risk (7). The mental health protection mechanisms reported—journaling, prayer, music (Performer B), and conscious separation (Performer D)—are individualistic and highly varied, suggesting the UNIBEN curriculum lacks a unified, institutionalised **de-roling or debriefing protocol**, a necessary professional standard for managing deep emotional labour (Monro, *Theatre* 45). The current system delegates this critical protective task entirely to the individual student's nascent EI.

4.4.3 Theme 3: EI in Collaboration and Ensemble Work

This theme examines the relational component of Emotional Intelligence (EI), focusing on the students' capacity for **empathy** and **social skills**—the ability to read and adjust to co actors, directors, and the audience (Mayer and Salovey 192).

The data is overwhelmingly positive regarding the strength of **Interpersonal EI**. Every performer identified **empathy and observation** as their most effective tools for character creation and ensemble work. Performer A stated: "Empathy connects me to characters, while observation provides realistic details." Performer B affirmed this functional utility in the rehearsal space: "With directors and fellow actors, I adjust to maintain harmony."

Empathy as a Learning Tool: The student narratives reveal that empathy is developed not just for the character, but for the immediate learning environment. Performer C highlighted the necessity of reading the stage energy: "For instance, when another actor projects anger, I adjust my response to sustain the reality of the scene." This is EI in practice—the social management of emotion to facilitate a collective goal (the scene's reality), confirming that collaborative work is a powerful, organic source of emotional learning (Monro, *Theatre* 315).

The student's ability to "adjust" to co actors demonstrates a high level of the EI branch of *Managing Emotions in Others*, crucial for sustaining the psychological contract of performance (LSU 67).

The use of **observation** further grounds this empathy in the physical reality of the Nigerian context. Performer B, for instance, specifically noted observing "real life maternal figures" while Performer A observed "women in my community, studying their gestures, speech, and energy." This direct, localised observation confirms that UNIBEN student performers are using EI to create a culturally truthful representation, merging internal emotional skill with external social reality.

The Critical Conflict of Institutional Demands: A critical tension arose concerning the integrity of emotional expression versus institutional pressure. Performer C noted: "Sometimes, directors demand exaggerated facial expressions that don't feel natural to me." This is a significant finding: the student's personal EI leads them toward truthful emotional expression, but the external authority (the director's vision) mandates a retreat to superficial, possibly artificial, emotional signs (surface acting). The student's functional EI allows them to perceive the conflict, but the social hierarchy prevents them from challenging it, resulting in emotional labour that prioritises the external product over the actor's internal psychological process (Blackwell 105).

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The thematic analysis provides crucial empirical insight into the UNIBEN student performer's craft, critically engaging with the theoretical concepts established in Chapter Two. The findings both validate the relevance of EI to acting training and expose specific pedagogical deficiencies within the local context.

Validation and Imbalance of EI Theory: The data strongly validates the relevance of Salovey and Mayer's four EI branches, but demonstrates a clear **imbalance in acquisition and application** within the UNIBEN context:

1. **Perception and Facilitation** are highly developed (somatic awareness and effective use of personal memory/empathy).
2. **Regulation and Management** are critically underdeveloped (boundary failure and post performance spillage).

This imbalance confirms the core hypothesis that the training environment, while successfully cultivating emotional access, fails to provide the necessary tools for emotional self preservation. The students are highly skilled at the *outgoing* flow of emotion but critically vulnerable to the *incoming* consequence. This failure aligns with observations of acting as a profession where emotional access is prioritised over psychological safety (Jackson 7).

The Authenticity Paradox and Boundary Failure: The single most critical contradiction is the pursuit of "truthfulness" (deep acting) which directly leads to the greatest risk: **boundary failure**. Performer D carrying "arrogance" into their personal life and Performer E "lingering" in the role are explicit forms of emotional spillage (Aura Antioch 21). This is not a failure of the performer's intent, but a failure of the system to teach effective **de-roling** (Monro, *Professional* 45). The current UNIBEN system delegates this critical protective task entirely

to the individual student's innate or untrained EI, a system that, as Fishman argues, places student actors at risk of experiencing secondary trauma (48).

"The challenge is that the actor's craft requires a deliberate blurring of the self and the character, yet professional survival demands an equally deliberate re establishment of that boundary. The data shows that the UNIBEN performers are excellent at the blurring, but critically weak at the re establishment."

The Influence of Training Pedagogy: The data suggests that the UNIBEN pedagogy, consciously or unconsciously, endorses techniques that rely on the actor's vulnerability (emotional memory). The empirical evidence confirms Hetzler's warning that emotional memory is a dangerous tool when regulation is lacking (15). While the students attempt self regulation using technical substitution (focusing on diction, breathing), these methods serve as crisis management during the scene, not as a preventative psychological hygiene protocol. The institutional expectation, as voiced by Performer C, which sometimes demands *exaggerated* (untruthful) emotion, further complicates the actor's ethical and emotional task (Blackwell 105).

Conclusion of Findings: The UNIBEN student performers exhibit robust interpersonal EI, translating easily into strong collaborative and empathic work. However, this is undermined by a critical vulnerability in intrapersonal EI, specifically in the regulatory branch. The findings demonstrate a clear need for pedagogical intervention that integrates formal psychological training—including emotional containment and de-roling exercises—directly into the acting curriculum. The current reliance on personal coping mechanisms and the inherent risk of emotional spillage suggest that the students are succeeding artistically in spite of, rather than because of, the existing emotional safety protocols. This finding is the crucial justification for the recommendations in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

This final chapter synthesises the findings of the qualitative study, **Emotional Intelligence and the Actor's Craft: A Study of UNIBEN Student Performers**, which investigated how student actors perceive and employ emotional intelligence (EI) within their artistic process. The empirical analysis in Chapter Four, derived from the experiences of five performers, critically confirmed the essential link between high EI and effective performance, yet exposed profound deficiencies in the protective aspects of training.

The summary of findings is presented in three core thematic areas, reflecting the central arguments established throughout the research.

5.1.1 The Dominance of External Emotional Perception and Empathy

The study confirmed that the UNIBEN student performers possess highly developed skills in the **interpersonal branches of EI**, specifically the perception and social management of emotions (Mayer and Salovey 204). This strength is functionally vital for their craft:

- **Empathy as Core Technique:** All participants cited empathy and observation as their most valuable tools for character creation. Performer E stated that "Empathy allows me to imagine what the character feels, even if I have not personally experienced their circumstances," demonstrating the successful use of EI for cognitive emotional projection. This aligns with Stewart's argument that participation in theatre intrinsically promotes the capacity for external emotional understanding (45).

- **Collaborative Correction:** The students are adept at emotional calibration within an ensemble. The process involves swiftly reading co-actors' cues—body language, tone, and energy—and adjusting their own performance to maintain the truth of the dramatic situation. Performer C's statement, "I observe their behaviour and body language on stage. For instance, when another actor projects anger, I adjust my response to sustain the reality of the scene," illustrates a sophisticated application of social EI as a mechanism of dramatic management (Monro, *Theatre* 315).

This finding establishes that the UNIBEN theatre environment effectively trains actors to use EI as a **social and aesthetic tool**, necessary for professional theatrical collaboration.

5.1.2 Critical Failure in Intrapersonal Regulation and Boundary Management

The most significant and critically negative finding is the widespread deficiency in the **intrapersonal (self-regulatory) components of EI**. While the students successfully access and express powerful emotions, the pedagogical model fails to equip them with the tools for **conscious emotional disengagement** and psychological preservation.

- **Emotional Leakage and Spillage:** A majority of the student performers reported instances of emotional leakage, where the character's feelings or attitudes carried over into their personal lives. Performer D's experience of carrying over "arrogance" and Performer E's difficulty "carrying the character's emotions home" are specific empirical examples of **boundary erosion**. As Jackson argues, this is evidence of unregulated emotional labour, which constitutes a real occupational hazard for the actor (12).
- **Insufficient Coping Mechanisms:** Although all participants acknowledged the importance of 'switching off,' their methods—such as prayer, music, or simple self-

reminders—were personal, informal, and often insufficient, forcing them to navigate significant psychological strain without structured institutional support. This lack of formal **de-roling** protocols is a critical gap in the training, contrasting sharply with the emphasis on achieving emotional depth.

This regulatory deficit confirms the central argument of the thesis: UNIBEN actors are trained for emotional *availability* but not for emotional *sustainability*.

5.1.3 The Deep Acting Paradox and Psychological Cost

The research highlighted a deep paradox concerning the choice of acting methodology. All high-level performers preferred **deep acting** because of its authenticity, stating it allowed them to "live the character's life truthfully" (Performer E). Yet, the very students who favoured deep acting were the ones who reported the most severe emotional drainage and boundary struggles.

- **Risk vs. Authenticity:** This paradox illustrates that the technique deemed most aesthetically rewarding is also the most psychologically demanding. Performer A's calculated assessment—that surface acting "is more sustainable long term, as it prevents emotional exhaustion"—reflects a rational awareness of the high price demanded by unregulated deep acting.
- **Shifting Techniques:** The reliance on **observation** over potentially damaging emotional memory by most younger performers suggests a self-protective evolution in technique. This practical drift supports Ginslov's theory that experience leads actors to favour non-autobiographical methods to mitigate psychological risk, substituting imagination for personal pain (35). The UNIBEN context thus reveals a tension between traditional affective training and the pragmatic need for self preservation.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that **Emotional Intelligence serves as the central, yet critically undeveloped, skill set** within the UNIBEN student performer's craft. The research has successfully demonstrated that while the institution produces actors who are exceptionally competent in the **social and external application of emotion**—vital for collaboration and effective scene construction—it neglects the final, most crucial stage of **intrapersonal emotional regulation**. This oversight represents a systemic failure in pedagogical responsibility.

The empirical data decisively proves that the student actor is placed in a high risk professional position. They are mandated by the aesthetics of the craft to engage in profound emotional labour (Hochschild 15), yet they are abandoned without institutionalised protective protocols. The absence of formal de-roling training means that the psychological burden of the character's suffering is transferred directly to the individual, resulting in the reported boundary failures and emotional exhaustion (Jackson 14). This critical conclusion is reinforced by the performer admissions that they rely on ineffective personal coping mechanisms—such as simple self reminders or prayer—to manage intense affective residue, confirming the lack of a structured, professional framework (ICCPP 89).

The traditional focus, often rooted in an outdated, literal interpretation of the Stanislavski system, implicitly assumes that the actor's psyche is self repairing (Hetzler, *Emotion* 15). This assumption is empirically false within the UNIBEN context, where deep emotional access leads directly to measurable psychological cost. The current training is therefore only half

complete, creating a dichotomy where artistic excellence is achieved at the demonstrable expense of psychological wellness.

The study's ultimate conclusion is that the future of theatre training must incorporate EI not as an assumed outcome, but as a **taught, measurable, and protective core competency**. The goal must shift from simply generating expressive actors to cultivating **resilient emotional managers** who can consciously control the inflow and outflow of affective material, ensuring the sustainability and ethical practice of the actor's demanding profession.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the evidence of high emotional risk and the failure of existing pedagogical structures to provide psychological containment, the following recommendations are proposed for the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department and for similar tertiary training institutions.

5.3.1 Curricular Re-Engineering for Psychological Protection

The department must formally introduce a mandatory, non examinable course component focused entirely on **psychological hygiene and emotional containment**. This module should run concurrently with core acting courses and should not be optional.

- **Structured De-roling:** Implement mandatory post rehearsal and post performance **de-roling** rituals. These rituals should include structured physical warm downs, breathing exercises focused on emotional discharge, and verbal separation exercises, formally marking the transition from character back to self (Monro, *Professional* 48). This directly addresses the boundary failure reported by Performers D and E.

- **EI Workshop Integration:** Integrate practical EI training workshops, focusing specifically on the **self regulation** dimension as defined by the ability model. Use exercises to teach students how to identify the subtle physiological signs of emotional leakage (Mayer and Salovey 204) and employ controlled distraction techniques to prevent spillage, mitigating the risk of carrying negative emotional residue (Jackson 12).
- **Substitute Affect Training:** Shift pedagogical emphasis away from the potentially damaging use of traumatic **emotional memory** towards safer substitute affect techniques, such as emotional transfer and affective imagination, as championed by critics of the Stanislavski system (Hetzler, *Emotion* 16). This provides an ethical framework for achieving the emotional depth preferred by the students without requiring autobiographical pain.

5.3.2 Institutional and Collaborative Support Structures

The department should establish a formal support mechanism in collaboration with the University's student counselling unit.

- **Theatrical Counsellor Liaison:** Designate a counsellor or psychology graduate student to be the official liaison to the Theatre Arts Department. This individual would provide free, confidential debriefing sessions for students engaged in emotionally demanding roles, specifically addressing issues of boundary failure and emotional fatigue.
- **Director Accountability:** Implement a policy requiring all student and faculty directors to attend a workshop on the **Ethics of Emotional Labour**. This ensures directors understand the psychological risks involved in demanding deep acting and

mandates the inclusion of structured de-roling procedures in all rehearsal schedules, thereby distributing the burden of care (Blackwell 109).

5.3.3 Re-evaluation of Observation Pedagogy

The department should build upon the empirically proven strength of the students' observation skills by formalising it as a primary, safe technique. The training must incorporate advanced applied improvisation and theatre techniques that focus on rapid, accurate reading of non verbal communication. This strengthens the existing high level of **social EI**, providing a robust, low risk alternative to internal emotional diving and supporting the self protective choice already being made by the younger performers (Stewart 55).

5.4 Implications for Theatre Training and Practice

The critical findings of this study, derived from the experiences of the UNIBEN student performers, bear significant and necessary implications for the practice of tertiary theatre education in Nigeria and globally.

5.4.1 Redefining Professional Competence: The Holistic Actor The primary implication is the urgent necessity for a **paradigmatic shift** in how theatre institutions define and assess professional competence. Historically, training has often prioritised aesthetic and technical mastery—voice projection, physical control, and emotional expression—often treating the actor's psychological state as a secondary, personal concern (Ige 18). The evidence from UNIBEN demonstrates this approach is inadequate and unethical. The prevalence of

boundary failure among students means that institutions are, in effect, training actors for artistic efficacy while simultaneously generating **psychological fragility**.

Professional competence must be redefined to integrate **psychological resilience** as a core, measurable skill. The successful actor must be a resilient emotional manager, capable of consciously controlling the inflow and outflow of affective material (Jackson 17). By adopting the proposed EI curriculum, the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department can set a new standard, affirming that the ethical duty of care is inseparable from artistic excellence.

5.4.2 Professionalisation of Emotional Labour The findings necessitate the professionalisation of emotional labour within the academic setting. When actors are taught structured de-roling techniques, the process of separating from a character is transformed from an expected, potentially damaging personal sacrifice into a **manageable, shared, and ethically governed workplace risk** (Hochschild 17). This formal validation elevates the actor's status, recognising their work as psychologically specialised. Training institutions must ensure graduates enter the industry not expecting to suffer for their art, but equipped to manage its unique stresses.

5.4.3 Advancing Affect Theory in African Contexts The study contributes critical empirical data to affect theory by grounding its principles within a specific West African student demographic. The distinct challenges observed in emotional regulation—where deep emotional access leads directly to leakage—suggest that cultural norms regarding emotional suppression or reserved public expression may exacerbate the psychological pressure when students are suddenly required to demonstrate profound public vulnerability (Blackwell 109). This study provides a necessary anchor for the integration of EI into the local discourse on performance psychology, moving beyond generalised Western models to address context specific needs.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

The critical limitations inherent in this small-scale qualitative study, particularly its focus on a single institution, necessitate several critical follow up investigations to solidify and generalise these findings.

5.5.1 Longitudinal Efficacy Study of EI Interventions The most critical research gap to fill is the lack of empirical evidence regarding the long-term effectiveness of EI interventions in theatre training. A **longitudinal study** should be conducted within the UNIBEN Theatre Arts Department after the proposed EI and de-roling curriculum is implemented. This research would employ a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative psychometric tools to assess changes in student self-regulation scores over two academic years, complemented by qualitative interviews to evaluate the perceived efficacy and cultural acceptance of the new de-roling rituals (Stewart 90). The goal is to provide measurable proof that psychological hygiene is a teachable skill.

5.5.2 Comparative Institutional Study on Pedagogical Gaps A comprehensive **comparative study** is required across at least three diverse Nigerian tertiary institutions. This research would investigate whether the regulatory deficiency identified at UNIBEN is a universal weakness across national theatre pedagogy or a site specific issue. By interviewing students and faculty at varied institutions, the study could establish local differences in emotional demands and identify best practices in emotional management, providing nuanced recommendations for curriculum developers nationwide.

5.5.3 The Actor-Audience Affective Loop Future research should explore the actor's EI in relation to the audience, investigating the complex communication loop. A study could adapt the methodologies of Evans, who measured audience physiological response, to focus on the

actor's perception and interpretation of affective feedback (16). This would involve interviewing actors about how they perceive and respond to non-verbal audience cues during performance, thereby linking the actor's high **social EI** directly to the moment-to-moment dynamics of performance and completing the critical synthesis between internal psychology and external theatrical outcome (Sudol 4).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form

Emotional Intelligence and the Actor's Craft: A Study of UNIBEN Student Performers

Researcher: Oghenerume Jessica Oyovwiba

Department: Theatre Arts

Supervisor: Dr. Oghenemudiaga Praise Akpughe

Purpose of the Research: This study aims to understand and critically analyse how student performers at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) perceive and employ Emotional Intelligence (EI) skills—specifically self-awareness and emotional regulation—to manage the psychological demands of acting and rehearsal. The findings will be used to inform recommendations for improving theatre training pedagogy.

Procedure: Your participation involves a single, one-on-one interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes, conducted in a private, confidential space within the university environment. The interview will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of your responses. Questions will focus on your personal experiences, coping mechanisms, and critique of the training curriculum regarding emotional preparedness.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to decline to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence to your academic standing.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

1. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential.
2. Your identity will be protected at all times. Your name and other identifying details (specific roles, dates) will be replaced with an anonymised label (e.g., Performer A) in all transcripts and final publications.
3. The audio recordings will be destroyed upon the successful verification of the final thesis.
4. No quotes used in the research will be traceable back to you.

Risks and Benefits: Discussing emotional experiences may cause temporary discomfort. If you experience distress, the interview will be paused or stopped immediately, and contact information for the UNIBEN Student Counselling Centre will be provided. The primary benefit is the contribution of your experience to improving the psychological safety and efficacy of future theatre training curricula at UNIBEN.

I have read and understood the information provided above, and I willingly consent to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that my responses will be kept confidential.

Agreement	**Yes/No Initial**
I consent to be interviewed for this study.	
I consent to the audio recording of the interview.	
I consent to the use of anonymised quotes in the final thesis.	

Participant Signature: Date:

Researcher Signature: Date:

APPENDIX B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

(Adapted to align with the four branches of the Salovey and Mayer EI Model and the critical issues raised in Chapter Two.)

Section A: Background and Training Context (Perception & Foundation)

1. Can you tell me briefly about your background in acting (before and at UNIBEN) and the current focus of your training?
2. How do you typically begin the preparation process for a new, emotionally intense role?
3. In your experience, what are the biggest emotional challenges the UNIBEN programme asks you to face?

Section B: Emotional Perception and Self-Awareness (Branch 1)

4. How do you recognise the specific emotions you are experiencing *while* you are performing or rehearsing? Do you rely on physical, mental, or internal signals?
5. What physical signs (e.g., breathing, tension, heart rate) do you use to gauge if the emotion you are feeling is "right" for the character, or if it is becoming uncontrollable?
6. Do you have specific times when you reflect on how you felt emotionally during a scene or performance?

Section C: Emotional Facilitation and Understanding (Branches 2 & 3)

7. Do you draw on personal memories or past experiences (emotional memory/recall) when you need to generate a character's emotion? Please describe the process.
8. Do personal memories ever feel overwhelming, distracting, or dangerous when used on stage? How do you manage that feeling when it happens?
9. How does your understanding of a character's *emotional journey* change the way you deliver your lines or move on stage?

Section D: Emotional Regulation and Management (Branch 4 & Critical Analysis)

10. What specific techniques or rituals do you use to regulate overwhelming emotion *during* a performance (e.g., controlled breathing, technical focus, internal monologue)?
11. Which method do you rely on more: **Deep Acting** (genuinely modifying internal feelings) or **Surface Acting** (faking the expression for the audience)? Which is more psychologically sustainable for you?
12. What steps or rituals do you take to **switch off** or detach from a highly emotional character after a final rehearsal or performance run? (Critical: Boundary Maintenance)
13. Have you ever noticed a character's attitude or emotional state carrying over into your personal life? How do you deal with that "emotional spillage"?

Section E: Social Awareness and Collaboration (Interpersonal EI)

14. How do you read and adjust to the emotions of your co-actors during an ensemble scene to ensure harmony and truth?
15. Do you actively observe people in real life (outside the theatre) to study their gestures, speech, and emotional responses for use in your roles?

Section F: Pedagogical Critique

16. How effective do you believe the current UNIBEN curriculum is in explicitly preparing you for the **emotional and psychological stress** of the acting profession?
17. If you could add one required training module to the curriculum to protect the mental health of actors, what would it be?

APPENDIX C: Sample Interview Transcript (Anonymised)

(Excerpt from Performer E, Level 400)

Researcher: Can you tell me about your acting journey and training?

Performer E: I began acting during my time at the University of Benin. My experiences include stage rehearsals, classroom projects, and live performances. Over time, I have acquired both theoretical training (script analysis, character breakdown) and practical exposure (voice, movement, improvisation).

Researcher: Do you use personal memories when acting?

Performer E: Yes, I sometimes rely on emotional recall. When I need to portray grief or anger, I draw on experiences from my own life.

Researcher: Have those memories ever overwhelmed you?

Performer E: Yes. There are times when the memories become too personal and I feel weighed down. I have to consciously remind myself that the performance space is separate from my private life. **(Coded: Affective Overwhelm; Unstructured Regulation)**

Researcher: How do you regulate emotions during acting?

Performer E: I use controlled breathing and focus on the technical requirements of the performance (such as blocking and voice). I also shift my focus back to the character's objectives rather than my own feelings. **(Coded: Technical Substitution; Functional Regulation)**

Researcher: What challenges have you faced with deep acting?

Performer E: The main challenge is carrying the character's emotions home. I sometimes find myself lingering in the role after rehearsals. **(Coded: Boundary Erosion; Emotional Spillage)**

Researcher: Which techniques are most effective for you?

Performer E: Empathy and emotional memory are my strongest tools. They allow me to connect deeply with characters while keeping performances relatable to the audience. **(Coded: Preferred Technique)**

APPENDIX D: THEMATIC CODING TABLE

(Mapping Qualitative Data, Thematic Categories, and Theoretical Constructs)

This table details the process of qualitative data analysis, demonstrating how initial codes derived from the interview transcripts were grouped into the three main thematic categories presented in Chapter Four (Sections 4.4.1–4.4.3). The final column provides the necessary link to the theoretical constructs of Emotional Intelligence (EI) that informed the critical discussion.

Thematic Category (Chapter Four Section)	Sub-Theme/Focus Area	Sample Initial Codes (Data Driven)	Key Illustrative Quotes (Example)	Theoretical Link (Salovey & Mayer EI Branch)
Theme 1: Emotional Recall & Facilitation **(4.4.1)**	**Reliance on Affective Memory**	Emotional Memory Use, Drawing from Own Mother, Recalling Past Injury, Deep Acting Preference, Authenticity Pursuit	"I draw on personal memories... [it] helped me capture the emotions."	Emotional Facilitation of Thought (Branch 2)
	Affective Overwhelm Risk	Overwhelming Memories, Feel Weighed Down, Distracting Recall, Struggle to Detach	"There are times when the memories become too personal and I feel weighed down."	Understanding Emotion (Branch 3) - *Failure to manage intensity.*
Theme 2: Regulation & Self-Preservation **(4.4.2)**	**Boundary Maintenance Failure**	Carrying Emotions Home, Lingering in Role, Blurred Boundaries, Arrogance Carried Over	"Managing the boundary between my personal life and my roles. Deep acting can blur these lines."	Regulation of Emotion (Branch 4) - *Systemic regulatory failure.*
	In-Performance Control	Controlled Breathing, Focus on Technical Elements, Grounding Techniques, Focus on Objectives	"I use controlled breathing and focus on the technical requirements of the performanc	Regulation of Emotion (Branch 4) - *Conscious management strategy.*

			e (such as blocking and voice)."	
	Sustainability Paradox	Surface Acting Sustainable, Deep Acting Draining, Conscious Separation, Technical Anchor	"Surface acting is more sustainable long term, as it prevents emotional exhaustion. "	Regulation of Emotion (Branch 4) - *Risk assessment and self-protection.*
Theme 3: Collaboration & Social Awareness **(4.4.3)**	**Interpersonal Competence**	Empathy as Tool, Observing Real Life Figures, Adjust to Maintain Harmony, Reading Co-actor Energy	"I pay attention to body language, tone, and energy. With directors and fellow actors, I adjust to maintain harmony."	Perception of Emotion (Branch 1), Managing Others' Emotions (Branch 4)
	Pedagogical/External Conflict	Exaggeration Demanded, Director's Vision, Emotional Spillage in Rehearsal	"Sometimes, directors demand exaggerated facial expressions that don't feel natural to me."	Curriculum Critique (External Pressure)
Cross-Cutting Theme: Training Deficit	**Unstructured Coping**	Lack of De-roling Protocol, Prayer/Music/Journaling, Remind Myself of Personal Identity	"I have not developed any deliberate strategies yet, but I try to focus on the distinction between myself and my character."	Regulation of Emotion (Branch 4) - *Absence of formal technique.*