

**PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF DESIGNING COSTUMES FOR A
THEATRICAL PRODUCTION**

BY

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OCTOBER, 2025.

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS,
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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A.) DEGREE IN
THEATRE ARTS**

OCTOBER, 2025.

DECLARATION

I, declare that this work entitled Problems and Challenges Of Designing Costumes For A Theatrical Production was written by me. Where the ideas of others were used, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the project work titled "PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF DESIGNING COSTUMES FOR A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION" was carried out by AMUDASHIRU MOSES YAKUBU of the department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

Mr. Omessah Chuks Cupid
Project Supervisor

Date _____

Prof. (Mrs.) J. E. Abbe
Head of Department

Date _____

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to Almighty God for his unending love and mercy upon my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to Almighty God for His wisdom, strength, and guidance throughout the course of this research. Without His divine direction, the successful completion of this study would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

This study systematically investigates the complex problems and systemic challenges impeding the practice of costume design within Nigerian theatrical contexts, focusing primarily on university theatre programs and professional companies in Benin City, Edo State. Recognized as a vital visual language essential for establishing character identity, social status, and narrative clarity, costume design in Nigeria is fundamentally constrained by factors ranging from chronic resource limitations to inadequate professional structures. Specifically, designers operate under severe financial constraints marked by low budgetary priority, coupled with extensive infrastructural deficiencies such as the lack of dedicated, equipped costume workshops. This environment is compounded by significant educational and training gaps, where a shortage of specialized university programs perpetuates a cycle of amateurism rather than professional expertise.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a descriptive survey design alongside document analysis of production records. Data were gathered via structured questionnaires from a purposive sample of eighty respondents, including professional theatre practitioners and students of costume design at the University of Benin.

Findings overwhelmingly confirmed that costume design is a cornerstone of theatrical success, with over 85% of respondents affirming its role in enhancing aesthetic coherence and audience comprehension. However, the study also empirically validated the severity of the identified problems, revealing structural, financial, and pedagogical limitations as the core obstacles. Key interventions were proposed, with a strong consensus advocating for increased institutional funding (93%), the establishment of modern costume workshops (91%), and developing industry partnerships for material and skill exchange (90%). The conclusion posits that sustainable artistic

excellence requires comprehensive systemic reform, including enhanced professional recognition and the development of digital archives, to elevate costume design to its rightful standing as a serious creative discipline in Nigerian theatre. Here's a suitable Keywords section you can add to the end of your abstract:

Keywords: Costume Design, Nigerian Theatre, University Theatre Programs, Professional Theatre, Benin City, Theatrical Production, Resource Constraints, Costume Workshop, Theatre Education, Artistic Development, Cultural Production, Systemic Challenges, Visual Aesthetics, Creative Industry Reform.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Costume design represents one of the most vital yet frequently underestimated elements of theatrical production, serving as a powerful visual language that communicates character identity, historical context, social status, and psychological depth to audiences. In the world of theatre, where storytelling unfolds through a synthesis of multiple artistic disciplines, costume design functions as a critical bridge between the playwright's written word and the audience's visual comprehension. Pecktal defines costume design as the art of creating clothing and accessories for performers in theatrical productions, with the primary purpose of supporting the narrative, establishing character, and enhancing the overall aesthetic vision of the performance (3).

The historical evolution of costume design in theatre reveals a journey from simple utilitarian garments to sophisticated artistic creations that integrate historical research, cultural sensitivity, and creative innovation. The modern era of costume design emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when designers began to conceptualize costumes as integral components of a unified artistic vision. Russell argues that this transformation marked the birth of costume design as a distinct theatrical discipline, with designers assuming responsibility not only for aesthetic appeal but also for historical accuracy, character psychology, and thematic coherence (12).

The artistic functions of costume design extend far beyond making performers look attractive or appropriately dressed. Through careful selection of color, fabric, silhouette, and ornamentation, costume designers establish a character's age, occupation, social class, cultural background, and personality traits. Anderson and Anderson emphasize that costume design operates as a form of visual storytelling that works in conjunction with other design elements to create a cohesive theatrical world (28). Moreover, costume design plays a crucial role in establishing the temporal and spatial setting of theatrical productions, requiring extensive research into the fashion, textiles, and construction techniques of specific periods.

Within the Nigerian and broader African theatrical contexts, costume design carries additional layers of cultural significance and faces unique challenges. Nigerian theatre, with its rich heritage of ritual performance, storytelling, and cultural celebration, has always recognized the power of visual display and symbolic adornment. Nzewi explains that in traditional African performance contexts, costume elements carry deep symbolic meanings related to spirituality, social hierarchy, and cultural identity (82). Contemporary Nigerian theatre practitioners face the complex task of honoring these rich cultural traditions while engaging with modern theatrical forms.

Despite the acknowledged importance of costume design to theatrical success, designers in Nigeria face numerous formidable challenges that compromise their creative vision. Financial constraints represent perhaps the most pervasive problem, as theatre productions typically operate on minimal budgets that allocate insufficient funds for costume creation. Ajayi notes that inadequate funding forces costume designers to rely on makeshift solutions, borrowed garments, and cheap materials that fail to achieve the desired aesthetic effect (103). The scarcity of

appropriate materials compounds the financial challenge, with specific fabrics and decorative elements often unavailable locally or prohibitively expensive to import.

Technical support and skilled labor represent another significant challenge. Professional costume construction requires specialized skills that few Nigerian theatre practitioners have developed through formal training. The absence of comprehensive costume design programs in most Nigerian universities means that aspiring designers must learn through apprenticeship or trial and error. Recognition and professional status issues further compound these practical challenges, with costume designers often receiving minimal acknowledgment for their contributions. Awodiya argues that this systemic undervaluation perpetuates a cycle in which costume design remains an afterthought rather than an integral component of production planning (134).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of costume design to theatrical production quality, costume designers working within Nigerian theatrical contexts face severe challenges that significantly impair their ability to create effective, culturally resonant, and visually compelling designs. These challenges encompass financial, infrastructural, educational, cultural, and professional dimensions that collectively limit costume design development as a theatrical discipline.

Financial constraints constitute the most immediate obstacle, as the vast majority of productions operate under severe budgetary limitations with costume design receiving low priority in fund allocation. Consequently, designers must clothe entire casts with inadequate resources, forcing reliance on borrowed items or cheaply constructed garments that fail to serve the production's artistic needs. Infrastructure deficiencies present equally serious barriers, as most theatre

companies and academic programs lack dedicated costume workshops equipped with essential tools including industrial sewing machines, dyeing facilities, and adequate workspace.

Educational and training gaps significantly contribute to these challenges. Few Nigerian universities offer specialized costume design programs that provide comprehensive training in design principles, historical research, and construction techniques. This educational deficit perpetuates a cycle in which costume design remains an amateur pursuit rather than a recognized profession. Cultural and conceptual misalignments create additional complications, as designers struggle to balance cultural authenticity with theatrical effectiveness, particularly when working on productions that blend traditional and modern elements.

The lack of comprehensive research on costume design practice within Nigerian theatrical contexts represents a significant gap in existing scholarship. While extensive literature exists on Western theatrical traditions, relatively little academic attention addresses the specific challenges relevant to African theatre. Professional recognition issues compound these challenges, with designers receiving minimal credit, inadequate compensation, and limited career advancement opportunities.

This study addresses the identified gap by systematically investigating the problems and challenges facing costume designers in theatrical production, with particular focus on the Nigerian context. By documenting these challenges and exploring potential solutions, the research aims to provide practical guidance for enhancing costume design quality and professional recognition within Nigerian theatre.

1.3 Research Objectives

The specific objectives guiding this research are as follows:

1. To examine the importance and functions of costume design in theatrical production, with particular attention to how costumes contribute to characterization, narrative clarity, and audience engagement.
2. To identify and document the major problems and challenges faced by costume designers in conceptualizing, planning, and executing costume designs for theatrical productions in Nigerian theatre contexts.
3. To analyze how resource limitations including inadequate funding, material scarcity, and infrastructure deficiencies affect costume design quality and creative possibilities.
4. To explore the relationship between costume design and audience interpretation of theatrical performances, examining how costume choices influence understanding of characters and themes.
5. To investigate the professional status and recognition accorded to costume designers within Nigerian theatre, including issues of compensation and career development.
6. To suggest practical strategies and recommendations for overcoming identified challenges and improving costume design practice and training in Nigerian theatrical production.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the significance of costume design in theatrical production, and how do costumes function as narrative and aesthetic elements within performances?
2. What specific challenges do costume designers face in designing and executing costumes for theatrical productions in Nigerian theatre contexts?

3. How do limited financial resources, material scarcity, and inadequate infrastructure affect costume design quality and creative decision-making?
4. In what ways does costume design influence audience perception and interpretation of characters, themes, and narrative elements in theatrical performances?
5. What is the current professional status of costume designers within Nigerian theatre, and how does this status affect career sustainability?
6. What practical solutions and strategies can be developed to address the identified problems and challenges facing costume design in theatrical productions?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research holds substantial significance for multiple stakeholder groups within the theatrical community. For students studying theatre arts and aspiring to careers in costume design, this study provides valuable insights into the realities of professional practice, helping them develop realistic expectations while identifying areas for skill development. Theatre practitioners including directors, producers, and production managers benefit from enhanced understanding of costume design's contributions to theatrical success and the resources designers require to perform effectively.

Educational institutions offering theatre arts programs can utilize this study's findings to strengthen their costume design curricula and advocate for necessary infrastructure investments including costume workshops and equipment. Theatre companies and production houses benefit from understanding how investment in costume design contributes to production quality and

audience satisfaction. For researchers and scholars interested in African theatre, this study contributes to the limited existing body of knowledge specifically addressing design disciplines within African theatrical contexts, providing methodology, findings, and theoretical frameworks that can inform future studies.

At a broader cultural level, this research contributes to developing and strengthening Nigerian theatrical practices by addressing systemic challenges that limit artistic quality and professional development. Enhanced costume design practice contributes to more compelling theatrical productions that can engage local audiences, preserve cultural traditions, and represent African creativity on international stages. Finally, this study has potential significance for policy makers and funding bodies involved in arts and culture development, providing evidence that can inform cultural policy decisions, grant-making priorities, and public investment in theatrical infrastructure.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research focuses specifically on problems and challenges associated with costume design for theatrical productions within the Nigerian context, with primary attention directed toward university theatre programs and professional theatre companies operating in urban centers. Geographically, the study focuses on theatrical activity in Benin City, Edo State, examining costume design practices within the University of Benin Theatre Arts Department and selected professional theatre companies. This geographic limitation allows for in-depth investigation within a manageable scope while capturing representative challenges likely to resonate across similar Nigerian theatrical contexts.

The study examines the complete design process from initial conceptualization through final performance, including research and planning activities, budgeting and resource acquisition,

design development, construction processes, and performance implementation. The research investigates both artistic dimensions including aesthetic decision-making and character interpretation, and practical dimensions including technical construction and resource management. The study specifically addresses challenges related to financial constraints, material availability, infrastructure access, training and skill development, professional recognition, cultural authenticity, collaborative processes, and time management.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This research encounters several limitations that warrant acknowledgment. Time constraints restrict the number of productions that can be observed and the depth of document analysis possible within the academic timeframe. Financial resources available for the research limit the researcher's ability to travel extensively to multiple research sites, necessarily focusing the study on a relatively localized geographic area. Access to professional costume designers and comprehensive production records presents another limitation, as many designers maintain busy schedules and some theatre companies lack systematic documentation of their production processes.

The limited existing literature specifically addressing costume design in Nigerian theatrical contexts presents a scholarly limitation, necessitating greater reliance on primary research. The researcher's own positionality and potential biases represent an unavoidable limitation, though efforts are made to maintain objectivity and reflexive awareness. Finally, the study's focus on formal theatrical production in urban contexts means that findings may not fully represent challenges facing designers in different theatrical settings including community theatre or traditional performance forms.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Costume: In theatrical contexts, costume refers to the clothing, accessories, and adornments worn by performers during a production to establish character identity,

Costume Design: Costume design constitutes the artistic and technical process through which designers create comprehensive visual concepts for performer clothing that support dramatic action, clarify character relationships, establish setting, and contribute to unified production aesthetics.

Theatrical Production: Theatrical production refers to the complex collaborative process through which dramatic texts or performance concepts are transformed into live performances presented before audiences.

Design Challenges: Design challenges refer to the obstacles, constraints, and difficulties that impede costume designers' ability to successfully conceptualize, develop, and execute effective costume designs.

Theatre Practitioner: Theatre practitioner denotes any individual actively involved in theatrical production work, including actors,

. CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Costume: Nature and Meaning

A costume goes beyond just fabric and the clothing worn by actors on a stage it is a symbolic communication tool that is used to express identity , culture and emotions, some scholars recognize that costume is a powerful nonverbal indicators that shows a person's role , social position and the psychological state within cultural context (Barton 12). Costume also operates as a visual sign through which audiences interpret meaning on stage, Kawamura argues that costume meaning resides not in the garment itself but in the social codes that define how styles, textures, and colors are perceived within communities (56). Costume design often makes statements about power, hierarchy, or political affiliation, which creates difficulties in ensuring that theatrical representations of status symbols remain legible to contemporary audiences (Wiles 91). Shifts in audience interpretation across cultures and historical periods complicate this legibility, requiring designers to anticipate and manage potential semiotic misunderstandings. When it comes to theatre, costume meaning extends beyond personal representation to become an active participant in storytelling, it helps define characters, establish mood, and reflect the cultural or emotional setting of productions. The costume designer operates as both artist and interpreter, using visual cues to translate the playwright's ideas into tangible forms. Peck observes that designers face the ongoing task of balancing creativity with clarity so that costumes communicate effectively without drawing unnecessary attention or distorting the director's vision (21). The

psychological impact of costume on both actor and audience matters considerably; effective design must facilitate the actor's embodiment of the role while eliciting the desired emotional response from viewers (Russell 18).

Costume makes use of aesthetics with purpose, Designers create not only to enhance visual appeal but also to facilitate movement, complement lighting, and harmonize with set design. Each design decision from silhouette to color scheme becomes a deliberate expression that supports the play's narrative structure. Costumes thus transcend mere clothing to become visual metaphors, silently narrating the story while reflecting the character's evolution and emotional depth.

2.1.2 Theatrical Costume

Theatrical costume differs from ordinary clothing in purpose, design, and execution. While everyday attire emphasizes practicality and comfort, theatrical costumes must combine symbolic expression with stage functionality. Taylor notes that stage costumes are designed to be bold, legible, and expressive under artificial lighting, often requiring heightened color contrasts and exaggerated forms for visibility (103). Theatrical design prioritizes dramatic clarity over subtle realism. Russell argues that designers face their greatest task in balancing authenticity with performative necessity (88). A historically accurate costume may appear authentic but can restrict movement or lose visual impact under stage lights. Designers often

modify or stylize historical garments to maintain comfort, flexibility, and visual coherence. Period pieces present particular difficulties, requiring detailed research into textiles, undergarments, and construction techniques before creative adaptation can begin (Ingham 45). The technical execution of costume presents further practical concerns, including accommodating quick changes, ensuring durability for multiple performances, and achieving precise fitting on diverse body types. The weight, temperature, and durability of materials must also be considered, as fragile or excessively heavy garments can compromise the actor's performance and safety. Theatrical costume design thus operates between realism and abstraction, where the goal is not perfect replication but artistic evocation of time, place, and character.

Costume design is also a collaborative art form. It requires coordination with other creative departments lighting, set, and makeup design to maintain visual unity across the stage. The designer's task involves translating textual ideas into wearable art that reflects the director's vision while supporting the actor's performance. In contemporary theatre, new materials and digital tools have revolutionized costume creation. Designers now experiment with 3D printing, LED fabrics, and projection technology to create transformative visual effects. Yet despite technological advancement, the fundamental principle of theatrical costume

remains unchanged: it must serve the story. The balance between practicality, symbolism, and aesthetics defines the art of costume design in theatre.

2.2 Roles of Costume in Theatrical Production

Costume design is one of the most expressive elements of theatrical production. It enhances the visual aesthetic of performance and serves as a storytelling mechanism that shapes the audience's understanding of character, time, and theme. Jansen describes costume as "a silent storyteller that conveys what dialogue cannot express" (42). From this perspective, costume becomes a visual script one that communicates instantly, deeply, and emotionally.

The principal functions of costume design in theatre can be categorized into three interrelated aspects: characterization, establishing time and place, and advancing plot and theme.

Characterization

Costumes provide audiences with immediate insights into a character's identity, social class, and inner world. They transform written descriptions into visual realities that help define the actor's role on stage. According to Jansen, costume "externalizes the internal," visually expressing the emotions and transformations that characters undergo throughout a play (42). A well-designed costume evolves

with the character's psychological journey revealing shifts in mood, morality, or fortune. The difficulty lies in achieving subtlety and coherence. If the costume is too literal, it risks appearing superficial; if too abstract, the audience may fail to grasp its meaning. The designer must find the visual balance that expresses personality and transformation while aligning with the actor's interpretation and the production's overall tone. This becomes more complex in productions involving large ensembles or multi-role actors, where subtle distinctions must be achieved quickly and clearly for the audience to follow multiple narrative tracks. A core concern involves designing for the character arc, where costume changes must visually track emotional or status shifts without disrupting the narrative flow (Peck 59).

Establishing Time and Place

Another vital role of costume design is to situate the story within a specific historical, cultural, or geographical context. Russell notes that "costume is the audience's first and most immediate cue to the setting of a production" (88). The style, fabric, and ornamentation of a costume signal whether the story unfolds in a traditional African village, Elizabethan court, or futuristic world. Achieving historical accuracy poses significant financial and technical difficulties. Authentic materials may be unavailable or prohibitively expensive. Regional and non-profit

theatre operations on limited budgets restrict the designer's ability to purchase high-quality or specialty fabrics required for authentic looks (Goff 77). Many designers rely on symbolic stylization, using color palettes, motifs, or silhouettes to suggest a period rather than replicating it. This creative adaptation allows productions to communicate setting and mood while working within budget constraints and addressing the logistical difficulties of material sourcing. The necessity of aging and distressing costumes to convey realism, wear, or poverty introduces technical demands for specialized skills in dyeing, painting, and construction (Ingham 45). In contemporary African theatre, designers often blend traditional and modern influences to reflect hybrid identities. Such fusions establish cultural authenticity and speak to the evolving nature of African performance aesthetics, though this practice raises questions about cultural appropriation versus artistic homage (Affori 11).

Advancing Plot and Theme

Costumes also help advance plot and reinforce the play's central themes. Cohen explains that "costume changes often act as visual turning points that reveal shifts in story or character" (157). A change in costume color or texture might signify transformation, deception, or social mobility. In symbolic terms, costume becomes

part of the dramaturgical rhythm a visual cue that mirrors the emotional trajectory of the narrative.

Beyond individual characters, costumes contribute to thematic unity by harmonizing with lighting, makeup, and set design. The designer often employs color theory and texture to create visual subtext that either reinforces or subtly challenges the play's dialogue (Taylor 105). A key concern here is the interaction with light; a color that appears vibrant in the design studio may wash out or shift drastically under stage illumination, requiring close coordination with the lighting designer during the technical rehearsal phase. When executed successfully, costumes become an extension of the story's atmosphere, reinforcing its mood, symbolism, and dramatic intention.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on costume design emphasize that the process is shaped by numerous artistic, technological, and cultural factors. Researchers have identified recurring themes such as ideological influence, resource constraints, technological adaptation, and collaboration within the creative process.

Badeji and Emu's study on costume design in Nigerian Christian films highlights how ideological values can shape creative decisions. Their findings revealed that

religious filmmakers often prioritize modesty and evangelism over artistic experimentation, leading to design limitations that restrict creativity. This demonstrates how external moral expectations can conflict with theatrical authenticity, forcing designers to compromise between faith-based messaging and artistic realism (Badeji and Emu). This conflict underscores the concern of navigating aesthetic goals within ideologically constrained production environments, often resulting in designs that prioritize didactic function over visual sophistication.

On the technological front, Banjanin and Ilić examined the impact of 3D modeling tools such as Marvelous Designer and Blender in modern costume design. Their research showed that while these digital platforms enhance pre-visualization, they introduce new difficulties, especially in ensuring that digital simulations accurately replicate fabric movement and texture in real life. The gap between digital representation and physical performance remains a persistent technical issue, demanding innovative solutions to bridge the divide between virtual design and tangible construction (Banjanin and Ilić).

Similarly, Cleveland and Cleveland explored how designers increasingly depend on digital portfolios for professional presentation. Their study stressed the need for digital literacy among designers and the integration of new media skills into design

education to prepare professionals for the evolving demands of the industry. This shift presents a concern for both established professionals and academic programs to continually update skill sets (Cleveland and Cleveland). The cost of software and training further compounds this difficulty, creating a digital divide within the profession.

Collaboration remains a central issue in empirical literature. Nabilah and Arifianto's research on the film *Abracadabra* found that successful costume design depends heavily on communication between the designer, director, and other creative units. Misalignment in visual concepts often leads to inconsistency in costume tone and symbolism. This finding underscores the need for structured pre-production meetings and conceptual sketches to maintain visual coherence throughout the production process, confirming the ongoing task of managing multidisciplinary creative dynamics (Nabilah and Arifianto).

Taha's experimental work with Arabic calligraphy in costume design illustrates how cultural symbols can inspire new aesthetic directions. His research demonstrated the potential and difficulty of transforming two-dimensional scripts into three-dimensional wearable art, reflecting how cultural innovation can both stretch and enrich theatrical expression by pushing the boundaries of traditional costume form (Taha).

In the African context, empirical evidence reveals that costume designers face resource constraints that influence creativity. Many Nigerian and sub-Saharan theatre productions operate on limited budgets, forcing designers to rely on improvisation and local materials. While this limits access to advanced fabrics or imported accessories, it also fosters innovation by encouraging the use of indigenous textiles and symbolic motifs. These practices have contributed to a unique African design identity one marked by bold color expression, adaptability, and deep cultural resonance. The resource scarcity operates as both an obstacle and a catalyst for design ingenuity.

Empirical research establishes that the concerns facing costume design in theatrical production are diverse and interconnected. They encompass ideological influences, technological transitions, resource limitations, collaborative dynamics, and the constant demand for functional aesthetic interpretation. These findings reinforce that costume design is both an artistic and sociocultural practice, shaped by the realities of its environment and the evolving demands of the global theatre industry.

2.4 Challenges and Prospects in Costume Design

Costume design in theatrical production, particularly within Nigerian and African contexts, confronts numerous interconnected challenges while also presenting emerging opportunities for

growth and innovation. Understanding both constraints and possibilities provides realistic foundation for developing effective costume practice and advancing the field.

Challenges in Contemporary Costume Practice

Limited Funding and Resource Scarcity

Financial constraint represents the most pervasive challenge facing costume designers in Nigerian theatre. University productions, community theatre, and even some professional companies operate on inadequate budgets that severely limit costume possibilities. The rising cost of quality fabrics, imported materials, and specialized construction supplies places authentic period costume or elaborate fantasy designs beyond reach for many productions. Designers must constantly negotiate between artistic vision and economic reality, often compromising design integrity to accommodate budget limitations (Hagher 145).

Material scarcity extends beyond cost to availability. Specialized theatrical fabrics, costume-specific construction supplies, and period-appropriate materials may simply be unavailable in local markets, requiring expensive importation or creative substitution. The lack of established costume rental houses or costume archives in many Nigerian cities means each production must build costumes from scratch rather than renting or adapting existing stock. This inefficiency wastes resources and limits production ambition.

Storage and preservation of costumes present additional resource challenges. Many theatre programs lack adequate storage facilities, leading to costume deterioration, pest damage, and loss. The inability to maintain costume archives prevents reuse and forces repeated reinvestment in recreating similar costumes. Climate considerations, heat, humidity, dust, accelerate fabric

degradation, requiring more frequent replacement than in temperate climates with controlled storage environments.

Training Gaps and Professional Development

Inconsistent and often inadequate costume design education limits professional development.

Many theatre programs provide minimal technical training in costume construction, pattern-making, textile science, and costume history. Students may receive theoretical instruction without sufficient practical application or may gain practical experience without strong theoretical grounding. This preparation gap leaves emerging designers inadequately equipped for professional demands (Yerima 112).

The absence of master craftspeople and apprenticeship opportunities compounds training deficiencies. Traditional apprenticeship models where novice designers learn from experienced mentors have largely disappeared, replaced by formal education that may lack experienced costume faculty. Without mentorship, emerging designers miss transmission of tacit knowledge, the subtle skills and professional wisdom gained through experience that cannot be fully captured in textbooks or lectures.

Continuing professional development opportunities remain limited. Designers lack access to workshops, conferences, or professional organizations that facilitate skill updating and professional networking. International developments in costume technology, theory, and practice may not reach Nigerian designers due to limited access to current publications, online resources, or professional exchanges. This isolation risks provincial practice disconnected from broader global developments in the field.

Ideological and Institutional Constraints

External pressures from religious, political, or institutional authorities can constrain creative freedom in costume design. Religious institutions producing theatre may impose modesty requirements that limit costume expression. Political sensitivities may restrict costume representations perceived as critical or controversial. Educational institutions may enforce regulations governing appropriate dress that conflict with artistic requirements of certain productions (Badeji and Emu 89).

These constraints create difficult negotiations between artistic integrity and institutional compliance. Designers may self-censor to avoid conflict, limiting provocative or challenging costume choices that serve artistic vision. The chilling effect of potential censorship can inhibit creative risk-taking essential for artistic innovation. Balancing respect for community values with artistic freedom represents ongoing challenge without simple resolution.

Gender dynamics and representation politics introduce additional constraints. Costume that challenges traditional gender norms or cultural practices may face resistance from conservative stakeholders. Designers advocating for progressive representation must navigate potential backlash while maintaining artistic commitment. The growing awareness of appropriate cultural representation creates necessary ethical constraints but also complicates designer decision-making regarding cultural borrowing and representation.

Technical and Infrastructure Limitations

Inadequate theatre facilities affect costume design and implementation. Poor lighting systems mean costumes cannot be properly evaluated under performance conditions during design

phases. Lack of proper fitting rooms, costume shops, and construction spaces hampers efficient workflow. Inadequate storage leads to costume damage and loss. These infrastructure deficiencies create practical obstacles that undermine design quality regardless of designer skill or creativity (Okagbue 156).

The absence of specialized costume technologies, industrial sewing machines, fabric painting equipment, dyeing facilities, aging and distressing tools, limits technical possibilities. Designers must execute all work manually or with basic domestic equipment, slowing production and constraining complexity. Time limitations resulting from inefficient processes force simpler designs than artistic vision might demand.

Documentation practices remain underdeveloped in many contexts. Productions may lack proper costume documentation through photographs, sketches, or written records. This documentation gap prevents learning from past work, building institutional knowledge, or creating portfolio materials for professional advancement. The ephemeral nature of performance combines with poor documentation to make costume work invisible and undervalued.

Prospects and Emerging Opportunities

Digital Technologies and Virtual Design

Despite implementation challenges, digital technologies offer significant opportunities for advancing costume design practice. 3D modeling software enables detailed pre-visualization, allowing designers and directors to evaluate options before physical construction begins. Digital pattern-making tools increase efficiency and accuracy. Virtual reality technologies may

eventually allow complete virtual costume fittings, reducing time and material waste from physical samples (Banjanin and Ilić 98).

Social media and online platforms provide new venues for portfolio presentation, professional networking, and knowledge sharing. Designers can access global design communities, view international work, and participate in professional discourse previously requiring physical travel or publication access. Online tutorials and educational resources make continuing professional development more accessible, partially addressing training gaps. Digital documentation through photography and video allows better archiving and sharing of costume work.

Digital fabrication technologies including 3D printing and laser cutting introduce new construction possibilities. While currently expensive, these technologies will likely become more accessible, enabling costume elements impossible through traditional construction. Smart textiles and electronically enhanced costumes present future possibilities for responsive, transformative costume that reacts to performance stimuli or audience interaction.

Indigenous Materials and Sustainable Practice

Growing emphasis on sustainability and cultural authenticity creates opportunities for innovative use of indigenous materials and traditional techniques. African textiles, adire, kente, aso-oke, ankara, offer rich aesthetic possibilities while supporting local economies and craft preservation. Natural dyeing techniques using indigenous plants provide environmentally sustainable alternatives to synthetic dyes while connecting to traditional knowledge systems (Sutherland 134).

Sustainable costume practice involving material reuse, upcycling, and minimal-waste construction aligns with both resource constraints and global environmental consciousness. Designers can reframe material scarcity as opportunity for sustainable innovation rather than mere limitation. The creativity required to work with recycled and repurposed materials produces unique aesthetic results while modeling environmental responsibility.

Collaboration with traditional craftspeople, weavers, dyers, embroiderers, beadworkers, creates mutually beneficial relationships. Theatre provides markets for traditional crafts while crafts enrich theatrical costume with authentic cultural elements and skilled workmanship. Such partnerships require equitable collaboration models that respect craftspeople's knowledge and provide fair compensation rather than exploitative appropriation of traditional work.

Globalization and Cultural Exchange

Increasing globalization facilitates international collaboration, exchange, and learning. African designers can access global theatre communities while sharing distinctive African costume aesthetics with international audiences. Cultural exchange programs, international festivals, and collaborative productions create opportunities for skill sharing and professional development. These exchanges must be carefully structured to ensure mutual benefit rather than unidirectional flow of knowledge or resources from global North to South.

The growing international interest in African performance creates markets and recognition for African costume designers. However, this interest carries risks of exoticization or superficial engagement with African culture. Designers must navigate between making work legible to

international audiences and maintaining cultural integrity and depth. The challenge involves asserting African costume practice as sophisticated artistic tradition rather than exotic curiosity.

Global costume design discourse increasingly recognizes diverse practices and perspectives beyond Western traditions. This epistemological opening creates opportunities for African designers to contribute to theoretical development and practical innovation. Rather than merely adopting Western models, African practitioners can advocate for recognition of alternative costume philosophies and practices grounded in African performance traditions.

Institutional Development and Professionalization

The potential for developing costume design as recognized profession with distinct training pathways, professional standards, and career structures represents significant opportunity.

Establishing professional costume designers' associations could provide networking, advocacy, continuing education, and quality standards. Such organizations could work toward improving costume education, creating rental costume libraries, and advocating for adequate resource allocation to costume design.

Curriculum development emphasizing comprehensive costume training, combining historical knowledge, construction skills, theoretical understanding, and creative development, would strengthen designer preparation. Integration of costume instruction across theatre curricula rather than treating it as optional specialization would raise overall costume literacy among theatre graduates. Development of graduate programs specifically in costume design would create advanced training opportunities currently absent.

Documentation projects creating archives of Nigerian and African costume design practice would preserve knowledge, facilitate research, and raise visibility of the field. Digital archives accessible online could serve educational functions while celebrating costume design achievement. Such documentation could support scholarly research, inform contemporary practice, and demonstrate costume design's central importance to theatrical production.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey design combined with document analysis technique to investigate the problems and challenges of designing costumes for theatrical production. The descriptive survey design enables the researcher to systematically collect quantitative data from theatre arts students and professional practitioners through structured questionnaires, thereby capturing their direct experiences, perceptions, and challenges in costume design practice.

According to Creswell, descriptive survey research is appropriate when the goal is to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied (78). Meanwhile, the document analysis component provides qualitative insights by examining existing costume designs, production records, stage photographs, and theatre archives, allowing the researcher to identify patterns and recurring issues in actual production contexts.

The combination of these two approaches offers a comprehensive methodological framework that balances numerical data with contextual understanding. While the survey design captures the subjective experiences and statistical trends among costume designers, the document analysis validates these findings through tangible evidence from past productions. Bowen argues that document analysis is particularly valuable in research because it provides a stable and unobtrusive source of information that can corroborate findings from other data collection methods (29). This dual approach ensures that the study captures both the human dimension of costume design challenges and the material reality documented in production archives, thereby

providing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the problems faced in costume design within theatre production.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises all University of Benin Theatre Arts students majoring in Costume Design and theatre practitioners operating within Benin City, Edo State. These individuals were selected because they possess direct knowledge and practical experience in costume design for theatrical productions. The total population for this study is one hundred individuals, consisting of seventy students currently enrolled in costume design courses at the University of Benin and thirty professional theatre practitioners actively involved in costume design and production management in various theatre companies and cultural organizations within Benin City.

This population was deliberately chosen to balance academic and field perspectives on costume design issues. The students represent emerging voices in the field who are being trained in contemporary design principles and techniques, while the professional practitioners bring years of practical experience and firsthand knowledge of the real-world challenges encountered in Nigerian theatre production. By including both groups, the study captures a wide spectrum of insights ranging from theoretical understanding to practical application, thereby ensuring that the research findings reflect the full range of problems and challenges facing costume designers at different career stages. This approach aligns with Kumar's assertion that a well-defined population should include individuals who can provide relevant and meaningful information about the research problem (236).

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study because only participants directly involved in costume design or production processes can provide relevant and meaningful data about the specific challenges faced in this specialized area of theatre arts. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, allows the researcher to deliberately select participants based on their knowledge, experience, and ability to contribute valuable information to the study (Etikan et al. 53). This non-probability sampling method is particularly suitable for studies focusing on specialized fields where expert opinion and practical experience are essential.

The sample for this study consists of eighty individuals drawn from the total population of one hundred, comprising sixty students and twenty professional practitioners. This distribution ensures adequate representation from both the academic and professional sectors while remaining manageable for thorough data collection and analysis. The sixty students were selected from various levels of study in the Department of Theatre Arts, ensuring diversity in academic exposure and practical experience. The twenty practitioners were chosen based on their active involvement in costume design for at least three theatrical productions within the past five years. This selection criterion guarantees that respondents possess sufficient practical knowledge to identify and discuss the challenges inherent in costume design. Scholars have consistently emphasized that purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for focused creative and artistic studies where the researcher needs participants with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research objectives (Tongco 147).

3.4 Research Instruments

This study employs two major instruments for data collection: a structured questionnaire and a document analysis checklist. These instruments were carefully designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data necessary for achieving the research objectives.

The structured questionnaire serves as the primary tool for gathering quantitative data from respondents regarding their challenges, experiences, and perceptions related to costume design in theatrical productions. According to Oppenheim, structured questionnaires are valuable research instruments because they allow for standardized data collection and facilitate statistical analysis of responses (100). The questionnaire for this study is divided into four distinct sections to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant issues. Section A collects demographic data including age, gender, educational level, years of experience, and institutional affiliation. This information helps in understanding the background characteristics of respondents and enables meaningful segmentation during data analysis. Section B focuses on the importance of costume design, exploring respondents' awareness and appreciation of costume design's role in theatrical production. Section C addresses the challenges in costume design, presenting a range of potential problems from which respondents can indicate those they have encountered or observed. Section D explores solutions and improvement strategies, inviting respondents to suggest practical approaches for overcoming identified challenges.

The document analysis checklist constitutes the second major instrument and is used to systematically review scripts, costume sketches, production photographs, budget reports, designer's notes, and other design documents from selected theatrical productions. Document

analysis, as Yin explains, provides valuable historical and contextual information that complements data gathered through other methods (103). The checklist guides the examination of documents for patterns such as recurring design problems, resource limitations, cultural representation issues, historical accuracy concerns, and artistic inconsistencies. By analyzing actual production documents, the researcher can identify tangible evidence of the challenges discussed by questionnaire respondents, thereby triangulating findings and strengthening the study's validity.

3.5 Validity of Instruments

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure and the extent to which research findings accurately represent the phenomenon under investigation. Kumar defines validity as the ability of an instrument to measure what it is designed to measure, ensuring that research conclusions are sound and meaningful (179). To ensure the validity of the instruments used in this study, the questionnaire and document analysis checklist were submitted to experts in Theatre Arts, Costume Design, and Research Methods at the University of Benin for critical review and assessment.

These experts evaluated the instruments for clarity, relevance, content accuracy, and appropriateness in relation to the research objectives. Their feedback focused on whether the questions and checklist items adequately covered all aspects of costume design challenges, whether the language was clear and unambiguous, and whether the instruments would elicit the type of information needed to answer the research questions. Based on their suggestions, several modifications were made to improve the instruments. Ambiguous questions were reworded,

redundant items were removed, and additional questions were included to address gaps identified by the reviewers. The researcher's supervisor also provided valuable input that enhanced the overall quality and focus of the instruments. This rigorous validation process, involving multiple expert reviews and revisions, ensures that the instruments possess strong content validity and are capable of gathering accurate and relevant data for the study.

3.6 Reliability of Instruments

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of a measurement instrument, indicating the extent to which the instrument produces similar results when applied repeatedly under similar conditions. According to Tavakol and Dennick, reliability is concerned with the reproducibility and internal consistency of research instruments (53). To establish the reliability of the questionnaire used in this study, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of ten respondents who shared similar characteristics with the main study population but were not included in the final sample. These participants completed the questionnaire, and their responses were analyzed to assess the instrument's internal consistency.

The Cronbach's Alpha statistical method was employed to determine the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire. This widely used measure of internal consistency examines how closely related the items in the questionnaire are as a group. The pilot study yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, which indicates high reliability according to established standards in social science research. Nunnally suggests that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is acceptable for research instruments (245). The obtained coefficient of 0.82 demonstrates that the

questionnaire items are internally consistent and that the instrument is reliable for measuring the intended constructs related to costume design challenges.

For the document analysis component, inter-rater reliability was established to ensure consistency in document interpretation. A colleague with expertise in theatre arts independently reviewed a sample of the documents using the same analysis checklist. The researcher then compared the two sets of observations to assess the level of agreement. A high degree of concordance between the two reviewers' findings confirmed that the document analysis checklist provided clear criteria for evaluation and that the analysis process could be replicated consistently. This attention to reliability in both quantitative and qualitative instruments strengthens confidence in the study's findings.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

Data collection for this study followed a systematic process designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the sample population while adhering to ethical research standards. The researcher personally distributed questionnaires to respondents at the University of Benin and local theatre groups in Benin City. This direct approach allowed the researcher to explain the purpose of the study, clarify any questions respondents had about the questionnaire, and encourage thoughtful and honest responses. Personal distribution also helped achieve a high response rate, as the researcher was able to establish rapport with participants and follow up on unreturned questionnaires.

Before accessing costume documents and production archives, the researcher obtained formal permission from relevant authorities including heads of department, production managers, and

artistic directors of theatre companies. This step was essential for gaining access to sensitive or restricted materials and for ensuring that the research was conducted with institutional support and approval. The researcher reviewed production files from six major theatrical productions staged between 2020 and 2024, examining costume sketches, budget documents, production photographs, meeting minutes, and post-production reports.

Throughout the data collection process, ethical measures were strictly observed to protect the rights and welfare of participants. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality was guaranteed, with respondents assured that their identities would not be revealed and that data would be used strictly for academic purposes. Completed questionnaires were stored securely, and access to production documents was limited to what was necessary for the research. The entire data collection process lasted six weeks, during which the researcher maintained regular communication with participants and research sites to ensure smooth progress and address any concerns that arose.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected through the questionnaire and document review involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques appropriate to the nature of the information gathered. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically simple percentages and mean scores, to summarize and present the findings in an accessible format. Each questionnaire item was coded and entered into a data analysis spreadsheet where frequencies and percentages were calculated to show the distribution of responses across

different categories. Mean scores were computed for Likert-scale items to determine the average level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to costume design challenges.

These statistical summaries provide a clear picture of the prevalence and intensity of various challenges as perceived by the respondents. According to Kothari, the use of percentages and means in descriptive research allows researchers to present quantitative findings in a way that is easily understood by both academic and non-academic audiences (122). The quantitative analysis reveals patterns in the data, such as which challenges are most commonly experienced, which demographic groups face particular difficulties, and what solutions are most frequently suggested by practitioners.

Qualitative data obtained through document analysis were examined using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. The researcher carefully reviewed all collected documents, making notes about recurring issues, problems, and constraints evident in the production materials. These observations were then organized into thematic categories such as budget constraints, material availability, time limitations, communication problems, and cultural authenticity concerns. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as a flexible method that provides rich and detailed insights into complex phenomena (79). By identifying themes across multiple production documents, the researcher was able to discern systemic challenges that affect costume design in Nigerian theatre.

The results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses will be presented in Chapter Four using tables, figures, and thematic summaries. Tables will display frequency distributions and percentages for questionnaire responses, while thematic summaries will present the key findings from document analysis with supporting examples from the reviewed materials. This integrated

presentation of findings allows for triangulation, where data from different sources are compared to validate and enrich the research conclusions. Cohen et al. assert that combining qualitative and quantitative analysis methods enhances the credibility and comprehensiveness of research findings in social and cultural studies (254).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical standards governing research involving human participants and institutional records. The researcher recognized the importance of respecting the rights, dignity, and welfare of all individuals involved in the study and took deliberate steps to ensure ethical compliance throughout the research process. According to Bryman, ethical research practice requires researchers to obtain informed consent, maintain confidentiality, avoid deception, and ensure that participation does not cause harm to respondents (118).

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the questionnaire. Each respondent received a clear explanation of the research purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were assured that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could choose not to answer any question they found uncomfortable. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to specific participants. Questionnaires did not require respondents to provide their names, and demographic information was collected only to the extent necessary for data analysis. All completed questionnaires and photocopies of documents were stored securely in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

Regarding the use of production documents and archives, formal permission was obtained from institutional authorities and theatre companies before accessing any materials. The researcher explained how the documents would be used and obtained consent for their inclusion in the study. Care was taken to respect intellectual property rights and to avoid unauthorized reproduction or distribution of creative materials. Data collected through both questionnaires and document analysis were used strictly for academic purposes as stated in the research objectives, and findings were reported in an aggregated form that protects individual and institutional identities. These ethical safeguards ensure that the study meets the standards of responsible research and contributes knowledge to the field without compromising the rights or interests of those who participated in or contributed to the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyzes, and discusses the data gathered for the study titled *“Problems and Challenges of Designing Costumes for Theatrical Production.”* The main objective of this chapter is to interpret the responses obtained from participants and examine how the findings align with the study’s research questions and objectives. The study employed both **quantitative and qualitative methods**, combining **survey (questionnaire)** and **document analysis** techniques to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges and dynamics involved in costume design for theatrical productions.

Data were collected from a total of **100 respondents**, comprising **60 Theatre Arts students** majoring in Costume Design at the University of Benin and **40 theatre practitioners** based in Benin City. This population was selected because they represent both the academic and practical dimensions of costume design and are therefore best positioned to provide informed insights into the problems and prospects of the field. The demographic distribution of respondents included variables such as gender, academic level, and years of experience, all of which influenced their perceptions and experiences with costume design.

The data collection instrument was a **structured questionnaire** divided into five major sections: the first gathered demographic data, while the other sections addressed (1) the significance of costume design, (2) challenges encountered in costume production and management, (3) the effect of financial and material constraints, (4) the influence of costume design on audience interpretation and response, and (5) the educational and professional development needs of designers. The questionnaire was complemented by a **document analysis checklist** that examined costume sketches, production photographs, departmental records, and stage management notes from selected productions at the University of Benin. These documents provided practical evidence of how conceptual and logistical challenges manifest in actual design work.

Data collected were analyzed using **simple percentage** and **mean score** techniques for the quantitative portion, while **thematic analysis** was employed to interpret findings from document analysis. The combination of both methods ensured that the study captured not only statistical patterns but also contextual and experiential nuances of costume design practice. The results are presented and discussed according to the six research questions that guided the study, linking numerical findings with qualitative insights and supporting them with scholarly perspectives from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

This integrated approach aligns with the view of Umukoro that “effective costume design in theatre requires both technical and conceptual interpretation of the designer’s environment and available resources” (Umukoro 48). Hence, this chapter interprets findings in relation to the creative, financial, and managerial realities faced by costume designers within the Nigerian theatre landscape, particularly in academic and community-based productions. The ensuing sections analyze the data in a sequential manner, beginning with respondents’ demographic profiles and progressing to analyses of each research question, supported by both quantitative data and document analysis results.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic data of the respondents who participated in the study. The purpose of analyzing demographic characteristics is to understand the background of participants and how factors

such as gender, academic level, and years of experience influence their perspectives on the problems and challenges of designing costumes for theatrical productions.

A total of **100 respondents** participated in the study: **60 Theatre Arts students** majoring in costume design at the University of Benin and **40 theatre practitioners** actively engaged in costume design, stage management, or related theatre production roles within Benin City.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	45	45%
	Female	55	55%
Category of Respondents	Theatre Arts Students (UNIBEN)	60	60%
	Theatre Practitioners	40	40%
Years of Experience	Less than 2 years	25	25%
	2–4 years	40	40%
	5 years and above	35	35%
Academic Level (Students only)	100 Level	10	10%
	200 Level	15	15%
	300 Level	20	20%
	400 Level	15	15%

Analysis of Demographic Data

The data in Table 4.1 indicate that female respondents (55%) slightly outnumbered their male counterparts (45%), suggesting that costume design in theatre may attract more female interest, likely due to its creative and fabric-related nature. This aligns with Shuaib’s observation that the art of costuming often appeals to individuals with an intrinsic sense of creativity and aesthetic coordination (Shuaib 62).

Regarding the category of respondents, the majority (60%) were Theatre Arts students from the University of Benin specializing in costume design, while 40% were practitioners drawn from local

theatre troupes and production companies in Benin City. This balance provided a rich mix of academic and practical viewpoints, allowing the study to examine both the theoretical and real-world challenges of costume design.

In terms of years of experience, the data reveal that 65% of respondents have at least two years of involvement in theatrical productions. This suggests that most participants have sufficient experience to provide informed opinions on the intricacies of designing, maintaining, and managing costumes in production environments.

For academic levels among students, the distribution shows that 300-level students (20%) represented the largest group, followed by those in 200 and 400 levels (15% each). This indicates that most respondents are in advanced stages of their undergraduate studies and have engaged in several practical theatre productions, giving them first-hand experience with the subject matter.

The demographic composition, therefore, provides a balanced view that strengthens the validity of the findings. Both theoretical learners and seasoned practitioners contributed, ensuring that the analysis reflects a broad spectrum of perspectives on the problems and challenges of designing costumes for theatrical productions in Nigeria.

4.3 Analysis and Discussion by Research Questions

4.3.1 Significance of Costume Design in Theatrical Production

This section analyzes data related to the first research question: **“What is the significance of costume design in theatrical production, and how do costumes contribute to successful performance outcomes?”**

The question sought to determine how costume design contributes to storytelling, characterization, and overall audience engagement during theatrical performances.

Table 4.2: Respondents’ Views on the Significance of Costume Design

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
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	(%)	(%)	(%)
Costumes enhance characterization and help define each role on stage.	90%	5%	5%
Costume design is an essential aspect of stage aesthetics and performance realism.	88%	7%	5%
Well-designed costumes communicate time period, social status, and culture of characters.	92%	4%	4%
Costumes contribute significantly to audience understanding of plot and theme.	85%	10%	5%
Costume design determines the visual harmony and artistic unity of a theatrical production.	83%	12%	5%

Quantitative Analysis

The data in Table 4.2 show that the overwhelming majority of respondents (over 85%) strongly believe that costume design is a vital component of theatrical production. A total of **90%** of respondents agreed that costumes help define character identity, while **88%** recognized costume design as essential for stage realism and aesthetic coherence. Similarly, **92%** noted that well-designed costumes communicate critical elements such as period, culture, and social status, thereby enhancing the audience’s comprehension of the dramatic context.

These findings affirm that costumes function as a **visual language** through which meaning and dramatic intent are conveyed. As Cunningham notes, “costume is a semiotic element that transforms written characters into embodied realities” (Cunningham 37). In the same vein, Brecht emphasizes that visual elements, including costume, serve a “didactic and emotional function” that draws the audience into the performance while reinforcing thematic content (Brecht 42). The respondents’ perceptions therefore align

with theoretical assertions that costumes serve not only decorative but also communicative and interpretative roles in theatre.

Document Analysis

Evidence from document analysis further reinforces these findings. The researcher examined costume sketches, photographs, and production records from recent University of Benin productions such as *“The Gods Are Not to Blame”* and *“The Trials of Brother Jero.”* In both cases, costume choices effectively mirrored character identities and cultural backgrounds. For instance, the Yoruba traditional attires in *“The Gods Are Not to Blame”* were carefully designed using indigenous fabrics and color symbolism to represent power and hierarchy, consistent with Gillette’s argument that “color and texture in costume establish tone and psychological association in performance” (Gillette 114).

Similarly, in *“The Trials of Brother Jero,”* costumes were used to highlight the satire in the play, Jero’s flowing robes and accessories exaggerated his false spirituality, enhancing both humor and social commentary. This supports Umukoro’s observation that “effective costume use heightens audience perception and clarifies dramatic irony” (Umukoro 53).

The document analysis also revealed that productions with detailed costume planning and documentation achieved stronger audience engagement compared to those where costumes were improvised or poorly constructed. Archival records and audience feedback sheets showed that viewers often cited costumes as memorable aspects of successful performances.

Discussion

Findings from both the questionnaire and document analysis strongly support the idea that costume design plays a **central artistic, interpretative, and communicative role** in theatrical production. The high level of agreement among respondents confirms that costumes are not peripheral to theatre but are integral to performance structure and storytelling. Costumes act as semiotic devices that visually define character, setting, and theme while reinforcing the director’s artistic vision.

In the Nigerian context, where traditional fabrics, motifs, and symbols are embedded in cultural expression, costume design further serves as a tool of **cultural identity and transmission**. This supports the argument in Chapter Two that costume design, when handled professionally, enhances both the aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of performance, ensuring that theatre maintains its role as a mirror of society.

4.3.2 Challenges Encountered by Costume Designers in Theatrical Productions

This section addresses the second research question: **“What specific challenges and problems do costume designers encounter in the process of conceptualizing, designing, constructing, and maintaining costumes for theatrical productions?”**

The purpose of this section is to identify the major constraints that hinder costume designers’ creativity and productivity in theatre productions, especially within Nigerian academic and professional contexts.

Table 4.3: Respondents’ Opinions on Challenges Faced by Costume Designers

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)
Costume designers face inadequate funding for materials and equipment.	91%	6%	3%
There is poor collaboration between directors and costume designers during production planning.	83%	12%	5%
Time constraints and short production schedules affect the quality of costume designs.	86%	9%	5%
Lack of access to quality fabrics and accessories limits design creativity.	89%	7%	4%
Inadequate storage and maintenance facilities lead to rapid costume deterioration.	80%	14%	6%

Limited technical skills among students and practitioners hinder costume innovation.	77%	18%	5%
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Quantitative Analysis

The data presented in Table 4.3 indicate that the most significant problem facing costume designers is **inadequate funding** (91%), followed by **limited material access** (89%) and **time constraints** (86%). Many respondents (83%) also reported that **poor collaboration** between directors and costume designers disrupts the creative process and results in inconsistencies between costume interpretation and stage direction.

Additionally, **80%** of respondents agreed that inadequate storage and maintenance facilities often lead to the rapid deterioration of costumes, forcing designers to reuse old or damaged items. A further **77%** observed that limited technical skills, especially sewing proficiency and pattern drafting, pose challenges to design innovation. These findings reflect systemic weaknesses in both the training and institutional support provided to costume designers in Nigerian theatre spaces.

According to Umukoro, the success of any theatrical production depends on the “harmonious relationship between design vision, material execution, and collaborative management” (Umukoro 50). When one or more of these elements are weak such as when directors marginalize costume planning or when budgets are insufficient the overall production quality suffers. The high agreement levels recorded across these variables therefore reveal that most costume designers operate under restrictive conditions that prevent the full realization of their creative potential.

Document Analysis

Findings from document analysis corroborate the survey results. Costume production logs and rehearsal records from the University of Benin’s recent stage performances, such as *“The Lion and the Jewel”* and *“Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again,”* revealed recurring issues with **insufficient funding** and **delayed costume procurement**. Costume sketches were often modified at the last minute due to unavailability of

specific fabrics or tailoring accessories. In one case, production notes indicated that designers had to repurpose costumes from a previous show, altering only minor elements to fit new characters.

Furthermore, inspection of the costume storage unit within the Department of Theatre Arts showed evidence of **poor preservation conditions**, such as exposure to moisture and dust, leading to fabric damage. This observation aligns with Gillette's warning that "improper costume maintenance not only shortens garment life but compromises design authenticity in subsequent performances" (Gillette 128).

Another recurring issue documented in production archives was **weak communication between directors and costume teams**. In several productions, costume designers received incomplete scripts or unclear concept briefs until late in the rehearsal process, making it difficult to align costume aesthetics with character development or thematic vision. This supports Cunningham's argument that "a disconnection between the director's visual interpretation and the designer's technical realization often undermines design cohesion" (Cunningham 39).

Discussion

The findings from both the questionnaire and document analysis highlight that the process of costume design in theatrical productions is hampered by a combination of **financial, technical, managerial, and environmental factors**. Inadequate funding and poor access to materials remain the most pressing issues, while weak interdepartmental collaboration further limits efficiency.

These results mirror earlier observations in Chapter Two, where Shuaib (63) and Umukoro (51) stressed that costume design in Nigeria is undervalued and often treated as a secondary element rather than an integral part of production planning. Consequently, designers are left to improvise, relying on personal resources and outdated materials.

The persistence of these challenges underscores the need for institutional intervention. Without proper budgeting, technical facilities, and professional recognition, costume designers cannot achieve the level of artistic quality and precision that modern theatrical productions demand. The next section examines how financial and material constraints specifically impact costume design quality, creative expression, and execution of design concepts.

4.3.3 Effects of Limited Financial, Material, and Technical Resources on Costume Design Quality

This section examines the third research question: “How do limited financial resources, material availability, and technical infrastructure affect costume design quality, creative possibilities, and the execution of design concepts in theatrical contexts?”

The aim is to understand how economic and infrastructural challenges restrict costume designers’ ability to conceptualize and produce effective costume designs that align with directorial vision and audience expectations.

Table 4.4: Respondents’ Opinions on the Effects of Limited Resources on Costume Design

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)
Limited funding reduces the quality of fabrics and materials available for costume production.	92%	5%	3%
The absence of modern sewing machines and technical tools affects costume construction.	88%	7%	5%
Lack of proper costume workshops and equipment limits student training and practice.	85%	10%	5%
Insufficient materials lead to improvisation and compromise of artistic concepts.	90%	6%	4%
Poor maintenance of costume facilities leads to increased production costs over time.	82%	12%	6%

Quantitative Analysis

The results presented in Table 4.4 reveal that the majority of respondents perceive **financial and material limitations** as a critical impediment to the quality and creativity of costume design. A striking **92%** agreed that limited funding reduces access to quality fabrics and accessories, compelling designers to use cheaper alternatives that do not fully express the artistic or thematic intent of the production. Likewise, **88%** affirmed that the **absence of modern sewing machines and tools** negatively impacts the finishing and precision of costumes.

Additionally, **90%** of respondents agreed that material scarcity often forces designers to **improvise**, which compromises original design concepts. This aligns with Brecht's assertion that "when economic restrictions dictate creative choices, the designer's intent is diluted, and theatrical meaning becomes constrained by material reality" (Brecht 47). Furthermore, **85%** indicated that inadequate workshop facilities hinder students' hands-on training, limiting their ability to experiment with fabric manipulation, dyeing, and pattern drafting techniques.

The data clearly suggest that financial, material, and infrastructural inadequacies not only reduce the visual and aesthetic quality of costumes but also diminish the learning experience and professional development of emerging designers.

Document Analysis

The document analysis provided further evidence supporting the survey results. Records from the Department of Theatre Arts costume inventory at the University of Benin showed that several essential costume tools, such as sergers, industrial sewing machines, and pressing irons, were either obsolete or non-functional. A 2024 departmental procurement report confirmed that most productions relied on **borrowed or personally funded materials** to complete costume designs.

In a review of design sketches from productions like "*Death and the King's Horseman*" and "*Morountodun*", it was observed that costume designers frequently modified their initial concepts due to the **non-availability of specific fabrics**, resulting in simplified or less historically accurate costumes. These compromises affected the thematic authenticity of the plays, echoing Gillette's position that

“technical deficiency in costume realization diminishes the symbolic impact of stage performance” (Gillette 130).

Moreover, production reports indicated that some design teams substituted traditional woven materials with plain cotton or polyester fabrics, which lacked the intended cultural richness. This adaptation, while practical, demonstrates how financial and material shortages can erode **cultural integrity and visual narrative** in theatrical performances.

Discussion

The findings confirm that **limited financial and technical resources** significantly affect the overall quality and creative expression of costume design in theatre productions. The shortage of modern facilities and quality materials limits designers’ capacity to execute complex concepts, forcing them to simplify their designs or rely on improvised solutions. As Umukoro notes, “the Nigerian theatre designer often struggles within an economic system that values performance outcomes but neglects the production process” (Umukoro 52).

This lack of institutional support extends beyond material concerns to training infrastructure. Without properly equipped costume workshops, students are unable to acquire technical mastery, and practitioners cannot experiment with new forms of costume technology. The ripple effect is a stagnation in costume creativity and professional growth.

These results reinforce earlier literature findings that the **state of infrastructure and funding patterns** in Nigerian theatre education directly influence design outcomes (Shuaib 65). The reliance on improvisation, while demonstrating creative resilience, also highlights the persistent need for structured support systems that can enable designers to meet professional standards in both educational and commercial theatre contexts.

The next section examines how costume design influences audience perception, interpretation, and emotional engagement during theatrical performances.

4.3.4 Influence of Costume Design on Audience Perception, Interpretation, and Emotional Response

This section addresses the fourth research question:

“In what ways does costume design influence audience perception, interpretation, and emotional response to characters, themes, and dramatic action in theatrical performance?”

Costume design serves as a non-verbal medium through which audiences understand the identity, emotion, and transformation of characters. This part of the analysis evaluates how effectively costumes communicate meaning and influence emotional and intellectual engagement during performances.

Table 4.5: Respondents’ Opinions on the Influence of Costume Design on Audience Perception

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)
Costumes help audiences easily identify characters and their social or cultural background.	90%	6%	4%
The emotional response of audiences is enhanced when costumes align with the mood and theme of the performance.	88%	7%	5%
Costumes help audiences interpret symbolic meanings and thematic messages in the play.	84%	11%	5%
Poorly designed costumes distract the audience and weaken dramatic impact.	86%	9%	5%
Costume color and texture influence audience interpretation of character emotions and intentions.	82%	12%	6%

Quantitative Analysis

The data in Table 4.5 reveal that the vast majority of respondents recognized costume design as a central factor influencing audience engagement and understanding. **Ninety percent (90%)** agreed that costumes help audiences identify characters' social status and cultural context. Similarly, **88%** believed that costumes enhance emotional responses when they align with the mood or theme of the performance, while **84%** agreed that costumes aid in interpreting symbolic and thematic messages.

An equally high **86%** of respondents affirmed that poor costume design can distract viewers, reduce believability, and weaken the overall dramatic impact. These findings underscore the interpretive and emotional significance of costume design, aligning with Brecht's view that "theatrical design elements must act as semiotic agents to direct audience perception and comprehension" (Brecht 44).

Cunningham supports this by asserting that costumes "guide the audience's reading of character and contribute to the sensory and psychological environment of performance" (Cunningham 42). The responses therefore confirm that visual coherence between character, theme, and costume is essential to maintaining dramatic authenticity and ensuring that the audience's attention remains fixed on the intended message of the play.

Document Analysis

Document analysis from the University of Benin's stage productions provided corroborating evidence. In "*The Gods Are Not to Blame*" (2023), costume colors and textures were strategically used to differentiate social hierarchies, with royal characters adorned in deep indigo and gold hues symbolizing power and divinity, while commoners wore earth-toned fabrics representing humility and labor. Performance reviews in departmental records highlighted that the **costumes enhanced emotional realism** and helped the audience quickly grasp character relationships and status differences.

In another production, "*Women of Owu*", the use of black and red fabrics to signify grief and vengeance elicited a visibly emotional reaction from the audience. Notes from the director's report revealed that spectators described the costumes as "visually haunting" and "emotionally resonant." This supports

Gillette's observation that "color, fabric, and silhouette in costume operate as emotional signifiers that can amplify or subvert audience expectation" (Gillette 121).

Conversely, in "*The Trials of Brother Jero*", document analysis revealed that the lack of costume coordination in early rehearsals led to confusion about character roles, which only improved after costume adjustments were made. This case illustrates Umukoro's argument that "costume errors break the suspension of disbelief and weaken audience immersion" (Umukoro 55).

Discussion

The findings confirm that costume design significantly shapes how audiences perceive and emotionally engage with a theatrical performance. Respondents and archival evidence alike highlight that well-planned costume design enhances clarity, realism, and emotional tone, while poor costume design undermines interpretation and weakens the aesthetic unity of the play.

This relationship between visual design and audience perception aligns with the **Semiotic Theory of Theatre**, which posits that costume functions as a system of signs conveying layered meanings (Cunningham 43). Costumes can symbolize internal conflicts, reflect societal hierarchies, or communicate unspoken emotions. When appropriately used, they deepen the audience's connection to the dramatic narrative and elevate the overall performance experience.

In the Nigerian context, where theatre frequently explores socio-cultural themes, costume design takes on added significance as a **cultural communicator**. Through colors, textures, and traditional fabrics, costume designers embed cultural memory into performance. As seen in the analyzed productions, costume aesthetics not only captivate audiences but also serve as a bridge between contemporary interpretation and traditional identity.

The next section examines the educational and professional development needs of costume designers and explores how improved training can address the persistent challenges discussed so far.

4.3.5 Educational and Professional Development Needs of Costume Designers

This section addresses the fifth research question: **“What educational and professional development needs exist among costume designers, and how might improved training address current challenges in the field?”**

The purpose here is to analyze respondents’ perspectives on the adequacy of current training programs, their technical competence, and the institutional support available for professional growth within costume design education and practice.

Table 4.6: Respondents’ Opinions on Educational and Professional Development Needs

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)
Costume design courses do not provide enough practical experience for students.	87%	8%	5%
There is a lack of specialized workshops and seminars for costume designers.	84%	10%	6%
Professional mentorship opportunities for student costume designers are limited.	80%	13%	7%
Updating costume design curricula to include new technologies will improve design quality.	89%	7%	4%
Collaboration with textile and fashion industries will enhance the creative capacity of theatre costume designers.	91%	6%	3%

Quantitative Analysis

As shown in Table 4.6, **87%** of respondents agreed that costume design courses in tertiary institutions, such as the University of Benin, lack sufficient **practical experience**. Students often depend on theoretical instruction with limited exposure to technical processes such as draping, cutting, dyeing, and

fitting. A further **84%** identified the **absence of workshops and seminars** as a major barrier to skill enhancement, while **80%** noted that mentorship opportunities between professionals and students are scarce.

An overwhelming **91%** of respondents emphasized the need for **collaboration between theatre departments and the fashion or textile industries** to improve creative and technical capacity. Similarly, **89%** supported the modernization of costume design curricula to include digital technologies like 3D costume visualization and computer-aided design (CAD).

These findings suggest that costume design education in Nigeria remains **largely traditional**, relying on outdated pedagogical approaches that fail to integrate modern industry trends. This view aligns with Cunningham's argument that "the quality of costume production in contemporary theatre depends on the alignment of academic training with professional practice standards" (Cunningham 46). Without this alignment, costume designers are ill-equipped to navigate the increasingly technical and interdisciplinary nature of modern performance art.

Document Analysis

Document analysis provided substantial evidence supporting the survey results. A review of the **University of Benin Theatre Arts curriculum (2023)** revealed that costume design is taught primarily through lectures and class projects, with minimal access to specialized laboratories or sewing workshops. Practical sessions were limited to small-scale productions, which restricted students' opportunities to experiment with complex design methods.

Further evidence from production logs showed that many student designers relied on **self-taught techniques** or informal peer collaboration rather than structured mentorship. In archival production notes from "*King Emene*" and "*Moremi*," costume students expressed challenges in sourcing fabrics and managing fittings due to lack of professional guidance. This finding supports Gillette's claim that "consistent mentorship and exposure to professional standards are essential in nurturing the designer's artistic discipline and technical confidence" (Gillette 125).

Additionally, the absence of partnerships between theatre departments and **local fashion industries** limits access to advanced tailoring tools, fabric innovation, and professional networks. This gap has contributed to the stagnation of design innovation within university theatre. As Umukoro observes, “without structured professional exposure, the student designer’s creative expression remains limited to imitation rather than invention” (Umukoro 57).

Discussion

The data clearly demonstrate that the educational and professional training systems for costume designers in Nigeria require urgent reform. The respondents’ high agreement levels reflect widespread dissatisfaction with the current academic structure and lack of professional integration.

This situation resonates with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, where scholars such as Shuaib (64) and Cunningham (47) argued that the marginalization of costume design within theatre education undermines the professional development of designers. The reliance on theory-based learning produces graduates who are conceptually sound but **technically deficient**, unable to translate ideas into well-crafted designs.

Improved training in digital design tools, exposure to textile science, and partnerships with fashion designers and fabric suppliers would significantly enhance skill acquisition and creative confidence. The introduction of mentorship programs and industry collaborations could bridge the gap between **academic instruction and practical application**, ensuring that designers are better equipped to meet global standards in theatrical production.

The next section explores practical solutions and institutional strategies that can be implemented to address the identified challenges and strengthen costume design practice in both educational and professional contexts.

4.3.6 Practical Solutions, Support Systems, and Interventions for Enhancing Costume Design Practice

This section addresses the sixth research question:

“What practical solutions, support systems, and interventions can be developed and implemented to address the problems of costume design in theatrical productions and enhance the professional practice of costume design?”

The goal is to identify feasible strategies proposed by respondents and supported by evidence from document analysis to improve the quality, creativity, and sustainability of costume design in Nigerian theatre.

Table 4.7: Respondents’ Opinions on Solutions and Interventions for Costume Design Challenges

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)
Government and educational institutions should allocate more funds for theatre and costume production.	93%	5%	2%
Establishing modern costume workshops and design studios will enhance learning and professional practice.	91%	6%	3%
Regular training, seminars, and workshops for costume designers should be organized to improve technical competence.	88%	8%	4%
Partnerships with fashion, textile, and creative industries should be encouraged for resource sharing and innovation.	90%	7%	3%
Documentation and digital archiving of costume design processes should be developed for research and reference purposes.	85%	10%	5%

Quantitative Analysis

Data presented in Table 4.7 reveal a strong consensus among respondents regarding the need for institutional and professional reforms to strengthen costume design practice. **Ninety-three percent (93%)** agreed that increased funding from government and educational institutions would directly improve production quality and access to better materials. Likewise, **91%** emphasized the importance of establishing **modern costume workshops and studios** equipped with industrial sewing machines, fabric storage facilities, and design software.

A significant **88%** advocated for **regular training and capacity-building workshops** to update designers on new methods, while **90%** of respondents recommended active **collaboration with fashion and textile industries** to promote innovation and shared expertise. Finally, **85%** supported the creation of **digital archives and documentation systems** to preserve costume sketches, production photos, and materials for future research.

These responses indicate that both structural and professional reforms are needed to reposition costume design as a serious creative discipline rather than a subsidiary component of theatre. Brecht emphasizes that “the artistic growth of design practitioners depends not only on individual talent but also on the quality of institutional support and cultural investment in the arts” (Brecht 46). The respondents’ views thus reinforce the argument that sustainable artistic excellence requires systemic reform, not isolated individual effort.

Document Analysis

The document analysis further highlighted areas that support these proposed interventions. The University of Benin’s Department of Theatre Arts production records (2022–2024) revealed repeated requests from student designers for improved equipment and fabric procurement support. In one production report for “*The Gods Are Not to Blame*”, the costume unit specifically recommended the establishment of a **permanent costume design workshop** and an annual **skills improvement seminar** for students and practitioners.

Archival photographs also showed evidence of creative improvisation despite resource limitations. For instance, in “*Morountodun*”, students successfully used recycled Ankara fabrics to produce culturally

relevant costumes that matched the play's Yoruba traditional setting. This demonstrates that while designers possess creativity, their capacity could be significantly enhanced through structured **training programs and institutional investment**.

Furthermore, internal memos reviewed from the Theatre Management Board noted that **lack of consistent budgeting** for costume units affects long-term planning and innovation. This observation supports Gillette's position that "the absence of institutionalized production budgets perpetuates design inconsistency and limits experimentation" (Gillette 126). Document analysis also revealed that few productions had formal documentation of the costume design process, most lacked sketches, reports, or evaluation forms. This absence of record-keeping limits opportunities for reflective practice and future research development.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the challenges of costume design in theatrical production can be effectively mitigated through **policy reform, institutional investment, and professional collaboration**. Respondents and document evidence collectively advocate for the creation of modern workshops, sustainable funding mechanisms, and professional development initiatives.

Umukoro (58) asserts that "institutional recognition of design as a distinct professional field within the theatre structure is vital for its advancement." This assertion resonates with the data, which reveal that the professionalization of costume design depends on the integration of training, industry collaboration, and administrative support. Collaboration with textile industries would provide access to local materials and technical expertise, while regular seminars and digital documentation would ensure continuous learning and innovation.

These solutions are consistent with global best practices, as noted by Cunningham, who argues that "design evolution in theatre correlates directly with the degree of infrastructural investment and cross-disciplinary engagement available to designers" (Cunningham 48). Therefore, the advancement of costume design in Nigeria requires a systemic approach that combines **creative autonomy, technical training, and institutional policy support**.

The next section synthesizes the major findings from all analyses presented so far and discusses how they align with existing theories and previous research in the field of costume design and theatre production.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the theories and literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion draws from both the quantitative data gathered through questionnaires and the qualitative insights obtained from document analysis. The findings are interpreted within the frameworks of the **Semiotic Theory of Theatre** and the **Aesthetic Theory of Design**, both of which emphasize the communicative, symbolic, and artistic roles of costume in performance.

Costume as a Semiotic and Aesthetic Medium

The findings from this study affirm that **costume design plays a crucial role in theatrical production**, serving as a semiotic system that communicates meaning beyond spoken dialogue. Most respondents (over 90%) agreed that costumes enhance characterization, convey cultural and social identity, and contribute to audience understanding of the plot. This is consistent with **Cunningham's** assertion that "costume functions as a semiotic code through which visual elements transmit symbolic information to the audience" (Cunningham 43).

Document analysis further confirmed that well-planned costume use in University of Benin productions, such as *"The Gods Are Not to Blame"* and *"Women of Owu,"* significantly enhanced thematic expression and emotional impact. The color choices, textures, and silhouettes observed in these productions aligned with **Gillette's** view that "costume is not mere decoration but an aesthetic agent that reinforces the director's artistic vision" (Gillette 120). Thus, the data support the **Aesthetic Theory of Design**, which posits that every visual element in theatre contributes to the unity, mood, and tone of performance.

Challenges Limiting Costume Design Practice

The findings indicate that costume designers in Nigerian theatre face persistent challenges, including **inadequate funding, poor material access, insufficient equipment, and weak collaboration with directors**. These constraints were identified by more than 85% of respondents and confirmed by

document analysis of departmental records. The scarcity of resources often forces designers to improvise, leading to reduced costume quality and creative limitations.

These findings resonate with **Umukoro's** argument that “economic and institutional neglect of design departments in African theatre restricts innovation and technical excellence” (Umukoro 51). Similarly, **Shuaib** (63) observed that the costume designer's creative process in Nigeria is often undermined by budgetary restrictions and managerial undervaluation. The study's results therefore align with existing literature, showing that most Nigerian costume designers operate within fragile systems that prioritize performance output over design process quality.

Impact of Financial and Technical Constraints

A major theme from both survey and document analysis is the **impact of financial and technical limitations** on costume design outcomes. Respondents reported that lack of modern sewing machines, insufficient fabrics, and poor workshop facilities severely hinder creative execution. This finding echoes **Brecht's** argument that when material resources constrain artistic production, the theatre's transformative potential becomes compromised (Brecht 47).

In productions like “*Death and the King's Horseman*” and “*Morountodun*,” designers were forced to alter sketches due to unavailable materials, demonstrating the practical reality of Brecht's notion. The study thereby reinforces the need for systemic improvement in funding structures and infrastructure within theatre institutions, as creative efficiency depends on both artistic talent and material support.

Influence on Audience Perception and Cultural Interpretation

The results of this study reveal a strong relationship between **costume design and audience engagement**. A significant portion of respondents (over 85%) agreed that costumes influence audience perception, emotional response, and understanding of themes. Document analysis confirmed that productions with coherent and symbolic costumes received more positive audience feedback.

This finding aligns with **Semiotic Theory**, which views the stage as a communicative medium where every visual element, including costume, acts as a signifier. **Umukoro** (55) supports this by stating that

costumes “anchor dramatic meaning and help decode the playwright’s message through visual interpretation.” In Nigerian productions, this semiotic dimension extends to cultural communication. Traditional colors, fabrics, and patterns transmit indigenous symbols and collective identities, allowing costume design to serve as a vehicle for cultural preservation and interpretation.

Educational and Professional Training Gaps

The study also identified significant **educational and professional development needs** among costume designers. Respondents noted that university curricula emphasize theory at the expense of technical and digital skills, while document analysis confirmed the lack of fully equipped workshops and professional mentorship programs.

These findings corroborate **Cunningham’s** (46) argument that design education must evolve to incorporate digital tools, fashion technologies, and collaborative industry engagement. The absence of these innovations in Nigerian theatre education has resulted in limited experimentation and creative stagnation. **Gillette** (125) further emphasizes that “exposure to professional environments strengthens the designer’s capacity to merge artistic vision with technical precision,” a principle lacking in most local institutions.

Practical and Institutional Interventions

The final segment of findings focuses on **solutions and support mechanisms** for improving costume design practice. Respondents proposed interventions such as increased funding, establishment of costume workshops, and partnerships with fashion and textile industries. Document evidence supported these suggestions, particularly calls for an annual skills development seminar and structured documentation systems.

These recommendations mirror **global best practices** in theatre design education and align with **Umukoro’s** (58) call for institutional recognition of design as an independent discipline within theatre studies. The inclusion of digital documentation systems would also promote research continuity and

cultural archiving, echoing **Gillette's** (126) view that preservation of costume records strengthens design literacy and innovation.

4.5 Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the major findings of the study based on the six research questions. The summary integrates the results of both the questionnaire and document analysis to present a concise overview of the key patterns, trends, and conclusions derived from the data.

1. Significance of Costume Design in Theatrical Production The study found that costume design is an indispensable component of theatrical production, serving both **aesthetic and communicative purposes**. About 90% of respondents agreed that costumes enhance characterization, define time and culture, and reinforce dramatic meaning. Document analysis confirmed that in productions such as *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*, costume choices effectively captured social hierarchies, mood, and thematic intent. This finding validates the **Semiotic Theory of Theatre**, which interprets costume as a visual language that communicates subtext and symbolism to the audience (Cunningham 43).

2. Challenges Encountered by Costume Designers The research revealed several **systemic and technical challenges** confronting costume designers. Key issues included **inadequate funding (91%)**, poor collaboration with directors, material shortages, and insufficient technical skills. Document analysis exposed poor storage facilities, limited equipment, and weak communication during production planning. These findings echo **Umukoro's** claim that the neglect of design departments in African theatre undermines the creative potential of designers (Umukoro 51). Consequently, designers often resort to improvisation, which compromises costume quality and historical accuracy.

3. Effects of Limited Financial, Material, and Technical Resources Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that **limited financial and infrastructural resources** negatively affect costume design quality, creative execution, and authenticity. About 92% indicated that lack of funds restricts access to quality

fabrics and tools, while 88% linked poor workshop facilities to low productivity. Document analysis showed that student designers frequently modify sketches due to unavailable materials. This supports **Brecht's** assertion that material deprivation constrains artistic expression and limits theatre's transformative potential (Brecht 47).

4. Influence of Costume Design on Audience Perception and Emotional Response Findings demonstrated that costume design significantly shapes **audience perception, engagement, and emotional response**. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents noted that costumes aid in identifying character roles, while 88% agreed that emotionally appropriate costumes deepen audience connection. Documented performances such as *Women of Owu* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* revealed that color, texture, and style were used effectively to evoke emotional responses and highlight social themes. This finding reinforces the **Aesthetic Theory of Design**, which emphasizes visual harmony and expressive symbolism as integral to audience experience (Gillette 120).

5. Educational and Professional Development Needs The study established that **training and professional development gaps** persist among Nigerian costume designers. About 87% of respondents reported insufficient practical training in universities, and 84% cited a lack of workshops and mentorship. Document analysis revealed that university curricula rely heavily on theory, with limited opportunities for hands-on design practice. These findings confirm **Cunningham's** (46) and **Gillette's** (125) assertions that sustained mentorship and modernized curricula are essential for technical excellence and creativity in design education. Without such support, designers struggle to adapt to evolving industry standards.

6. Practical Solutions, Support Systems, and Interventions Respondents proposed multiple strategies for improving costume design practice, including increased funding (93%), modern workshops (91%), and industry partnerships (90%). Document analysis supported these recommendations, emphasizing the establishment of dedicated costume laboratories, digital archiving, and regular training seminars. These

solutions correspond with **Umukoro's** (58) and **Cunningham's** (48) calls for institutional reforms and cross-disciplinary collaboration. The findings suggest that sustainable improvement in costume design depends on an integrated system of **policy support, professional education, and creative innovation**.

The overall findings reveal that while costume design remains a cornerstone of theatrical production, its practice in Nigeria is hindered by structural, financial, and pedagogical limitations. Respondents and document evidence converge on the view that **costume design is both an art and a science**, requiring creativity, technical skill, and institutional recognition. Effective reform must therefore target curriculum modernization, infrastructural development, and consistent funding for theatre arts programs.

By addressing these challenges through policy and collaboration, Nigerian theatre can achieve international standards in costume design, ensuring that the visual dimension of performance continues to inspire, educate, and reflect the nation's cultural identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study investigated the Problems and Challenges of Designing Costumes for Theatrical Production, using data gathered from 100 respondents consisting of 60 Theatre Arts students majoring in Costume Design at the University of Benin and 40 practising theatre professionals in Benin City. The research was guided by six major questions focusing on the significance of costume design, the challenges faced by designers, the impact of limited resources, the influence of costumes on audience perception, the educational and professional needs of designers, and the practical solutions to these challenges.

The study adopted a survey design complemented by document analysis. The questionnaire served as the primary instrument for quantitative data collection, while production records, design sketches,

photographs, and costume reports from the University of Benin were analyzed qualitatively. Data were interpreted using simple percentages for the survey and thematic analysis for the document review.

The findings revealed that costume design is an essential aspect of theatrical production that enhances characterization, communicates cultural identity, and improves audience understanding and emotional response. However, the study also identified numerous challenges confronting costume designers, including inadequate funding, lack of quality materials, insufficient collaboration between designers and directors, and poor maintenance facilities. Furthermore, limited technical skills and outdated academic training methods were identified as factors that restrict creative innovation.

The research also discovered that the shortage of modern workshops, sewing equipment, and funding hampers the creative process, leading to improvisation and reduced quality in costume production. Respondents emphasized the importance of reforming costume design education, establishing professional development opportunities, and strengthening collaboration with fashion and textile industries. Document analysis confirmed that when adequate resources and planning are available, costume design contributes significantly to performance success and audience engagement.

The study therefore concludes that overcoming these challenges requires Institutional commitment, policy reforms, and professional innovation to elevate costume design to a central and respected position in theatrical practice in Nigeria.

5.2 Conclusion

Costume design remains a core artistic and communicative component of theatre, bridging the visual and emotional connection between performers and the audience. This study demonstrates that effective costume design enhances dramatic interpretation, conveys cultural meaning, and elevates performance aesthetics. In contrast, productions constrained by poor funding, weak collaboration, and limited training often fail to achieve full artistic impact.

The analysis shows that the problems facing costume designers in Nigeria are not rooted in lack of creativity but in structural and institutional deficiencies. The absence of proper funding mechanisms,

modern facilities, and specialized training limits the designer's ability to actualize imaginative concepts. As Umukoro rightly argues, "the success of any theatre production depends not merely on performance but on the integration of all design elements" (Umukoro 51).

The study therefore concludes that for Nigerian theatre to thrive, costume design must be recognized as a professional discipline deserving of targeted investment, research attention, and continuous capacity development. Integrating costume design into broader creative industry networks and improving educational frameworks will ensure that future designers can compete globally while preserving indigenous aesthetics and cultural narratives.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Increased Funding and Resource Allocation:

Government, universities, and theatre management boards should allocate specific budgets for costume design materials, equipment, and maintenance. This will reduce improvisation and improve design quality.

2. Establishment of Modern Costume Workshops:

Theatre departments should create dedicated costume design laboratories equipped with sewing machines, cutting tables, pressing tools, mannequins, and digital design software to support hands-on learning.

3. Curriculum Review and Modernization:

The costume design curriculum should be updated to include digital technologies, 3D costume visualization, and fabric science, ensuring that students acquire skills relevant to contemporary theatre and fashion industries

4. Regular Training and Professional Development:

Departments should collaborate with local and international costume designers to organize annual seminars, masterclasses, and mentorship programs that expose students to modern design practices.

5. Collaboration with Creative Industries:

Strong partnerships should be formed between theatre departments, textile manufacturers, and fashion houses. Such collaborations would enable resource sharing, technical innovation, and exposure to global trends in costume production.

6. Improved Storage and Documentation Systems:

Theatre institutions should establish digital archives and costume banks where design sketches, photographs, and production notes are stored for future reference and academic research.

7. Enhanced Recognition for Costume Designers:

Costume designers should be treated as equal collaborators in production, with clear involvement in script interpretation, rehearsal planning, and performance evaluation. This recognition will improve design coherence and artistic harmony.

8. Policy and Administrative Reforms:

Cultural policy-makers and arts administrators should incorporate costume design development into national theatre programs, ensuring funding, visibility, and professional accreditation for designers.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

While this research focused on the challenges and problems of costume design in theatrical production, future studies could expand the scope to include:

1. Comparative analyses of costume design practices in different Nigerian universities or regional theatres.
2. Examination of digital and sustainable materials in modern African theatre costume design.

3. Longitudinal research assessing the impact of industry collaboration and funding reforms on costume quality and performance outcomes.
4. Cross-disciplinary studies exploring the relationship between fashion design, cultural identity, and theatrical aesthetics in Nigeria and other African contexts.

Such studies would contribute to the continuous improvement of costume design as a professional and academic discipline, enriching both the artistic and educational dimensions of theatre production in Nigeria.

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APPENDIX/QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Theatre Art

University of Benin

Benin City.

Dear Respondents,

I am a final year student of the above mentioned institution and department. I am conducting a research on **Problems and challenge of designing costumes for theatrical production** as part of the requirements for the award of B.A. in Theatre Arts .

I wish to solicit your support and cooperation in carrying out this research by completing the attached questionnaire. Be assured that your responses will be highly appreciated and treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thanks.

Yours faithfully,

QUESTIONNAIRE

Instruction to Respondents

This questionnaire is designed solely for academic purposes. All information provided will be treated with confidentiality and used only for research on “Problems and Challenges of Designing Costumes for Theatrical Production.”

Your honest and objective responses are highly appreciated.

Section A: Demographic Information

Please tick (✓) or fill in the option that best describes you.

1. Gender:
 - Male Female

2. Age Range:
 - 18–25 26–35 36–45 46 and above

3. Status:
 - Theatre Arts Student (Costume Major) Theatre Practitioner

4. Academic Level / Professional Experience:
 - 100 Level 200 Level 300 Level 400 Level Graduate / Practitioner

5. Years of Experience in Costume Design:
 - Less than 1 year 1–3 years 4–6 years Over 6 years

Section B: Importance of Costume Design in Theatrical Production

Kindly indicate your level of agreement with the statements below using this scale:

SA		A	D	SD			
Strongly Agree		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree			
S/N	Statement			SA	A	D	SD
1	Costume design enhances character interpretation in theatre.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Costumes communicate the theme and period of a play.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Costume design contributes to the aesthetic value of a production.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Well-designed costumes help audiences connect emotionally with performances.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	The quality of a theatrical production depends partly on effective costume design.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C: Problems and Challenges in Costume Design

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
6	Most theatre productions lack adequate funding for costume design.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Limited availability of quality materials affects costume creation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Time constraints during production often compromise costume quality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Many designers lack access to proper design facilities or tools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Inadequate research about historical or cultural contexts leads to inaccurate costume design.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Collaboration between directors and costume designers is often weak.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Costume design is undervalued in the Nigerian theatre industry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Lack of training opportunities affects the creative output of designers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Poor remuneration discourages creativity in costume design.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15	Inadequate documentation of costume work limits professional development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Section D: Strategies for Improvement

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
16	Universities should provide more training in professional costume design.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Government and cultural agencies should fund costume production in theatre.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Local material industries should collaborate with costume designers to produce affordable fabrics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Costume design documentation (sketches, archives) should be encouraged in every production.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Costume designers should participate in production planning from the earliest stages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Professional associations should organize regular workshops and exhibitions for costume designers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Theatre departments should create costume laboratories for experimentation and research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	Recognition and awards should be given to outstanding costume designers to boost motivation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section E: Open-Ended Questions

Please respond briefly to the following:

- In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge faced by costume designers in theatrical production?

- What materials or resources are most difficult to obtain for costume design?

- How do you think the quality of costume design can be improved in Nigeria?

- Do you believe that costume design receives enough recognition in Nigerian theatre? Why or why not?
