Communication elements in cultural troupes' performance in Benin City, Nigeria

[1]Daniel Eromosere Omoruan & [2]Sam Erevbenagie Usadolo

Abstract

Cultural troupes (CT) are community-based performing groups that deploy traditional resources and heritages in their performances to communicate community issues to the people. Communication is a fundamental aspect of cultural troupes' performance (CTP) across various cultures and CTs in Benin City, Nigeria adopt similar communication approaches to educate their audiences and propagate the culture of the people. The study aims to stimulate broader academic interest in CTP towards addressing language and cultural degradation in the community. It uses the artistic communication (AC) framework to analyse the communication elements and conveyed messages in cultural troupes' performances (CTP) in Benin City. A qualitative methodology is employed, incorporating data collection through focus groups (FGs), key informant interviews (URs), purposive sampling of respondents (Rs), and observation. Data analysis follows an interpretive thematic approach. Findings reveal that communication elements in CTP in Benin City align with established communication patterns in other cultural communities, and there is a constant transformation of traditional forms and intercultural penetration, alongside a low level of language and cultural knowledge among the young generations in Benin City. Additionally, the scarcity of research on communication within CTP in other communities limits the data available for this study.

Keywords: *communication, context, cultural troupes, performance*

About the authors:

[1]Corresponding author. Department of Visual and Performing Arts, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa. Email: 22176420@dut4life.ac.za

[2]Department of Media, Language and Communication, Faculty of Arts and Design, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa. Email: samu@dut.ac.za

1. Introduction

Communication is essential for human existence; it facilitates interaction, knowledge creation and exchange. Human communication employs diverse methods, broadly classified as verbal and nonverbal (Wahyuni, 2018). These two categories can be combined, as in cultural troupes' performance (CTP), to achieve specific communicative goals or to provide emphasis. Globally, CTP is shaped by cultural and ethnic dynamics, and scholars have in the past studied CTP from the perspective of anti-colonial struggle (Hess, 2021), change management (Abbe, 2017), national identity (Diouf, 2019), and cultural preservation (Espinosa-Dulanto & Olivares-Palma, 2020). However, communication in CTP remains significantly under-researched in the context of Benin City, and several communities in Nigeria. This study therefore aims to fill this gap.

Benin City has several CTs drawing from its rich cultural heritage. While privately owned troupes are plentiful, there is only one government-owned cultural troupe in the city. In recent decades, these CTs have become a prominent means of entertaining and informing the people by showcasing the peoples' cultural heritage through performances that integrate song, dance, costume, and other artistic forms. This study focuses on the elements of communication present in Benin City's cultural CTP in relation to the messages they convey. It underscores the elements of communication in CTP in Benin City as tools to promote community knowledge across all sections of contemporary Benin City population, thereby fostering knowledge and understanding among its members. The communicative function of CTP lies in transmitting information and messages rooted in the community's historical experiences and cultural traditions through the composite communication elements. This study is motivated by the need to understand the effectiveness of communication through contemporary CTP in the increasingly polarised Benin City society, where English, Pidgin, and foreign religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, are prevalent.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cultural Troupes' Performance (CTP)

CTP is an artistic communication (AC) medium (Usoro & Odoette, 2014) that involves the use of songs, dances and embodiment to communicate values and messages (Koozin, 2024), which are culturally and contextually specific rather than universal (Schechner & Appel, 1990). CTP is shaped by ethnic, regional, and individual factors and it emphasises the interplay of art and communication. It emerged out of cultural performances (CP) in Africa which can be traced back in time, but contemporary CTP emerged as a response to colonialism and the desire for political and cultural autonomy (Kringelbach, 2014). Rouse and Gupta

(2017) note that the formation of CTs in most British colonies during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a means of asserting cultural identity. CTs often served as cultural ambassadors, performing for European audiences during the colonial era to demonstrate the cultural richness of their respective communities. These performances fostered a sense of cultural pride among colonised peoples, acting as counters to the dominant colonial culture (Banda & Mwanza, 2017).

In Nigeria, CTP can be traced to the Egungun ritual performances (Adeyemi, 2017) attached to the palaces of the Yoruba monarchs. Herbert Ogunde, who established the first professional dance troupe in Nigeria in the 1940's is acclaimed to have been a member of the Egungun cult (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013). He toured several cities in the country and the West African sub-region between the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporaries of Herbert Ogunde like Doro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and Moses Olaiya Adejumo alias Baba Sala also undertook performance tours in Nigeria and the West African sub-region. These performances centred on African total theatre (Anigala, 2006). CTP in Nigeria was boosted with the hosting of the 2nd World Black and African festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977 (Yerima, 2007).

In Benin City, CTP evolved through the performance of the community's female and male traditional dances known as *Ugho* and Esakpaide. Ugho was created by the wives of an early ruler of the kingdom known as Ogiso Ẹrẹ. According to Ero and Owie (2016), Ogiso Ẹrẹ ruled the kingdom between 925-60 A.D. Esakpaide, on the other hand was created in the sixteenth century during the reign of King (Oba) Esigie (Nwabuoku, 2007). Both dances are instrumental to the creation of CTP in Benin City having been initially adopted by the royalty for palace performances only for many centuries (Nwabuoku, 2007; Osawe, 2007). These dances were liberalised during the colonial rule in the kingdom. Edebiri (2005) observes that Ugho is one of the "most glamorous and graceful non-ritualistic dances of the Benins" (p.113), and it is presented at marriages, burials, remembrances and important festivals. CTs in Benin City communicate various social and historical themes through songs, dance, costume and chants (Osawe, 2007) which is referred to as artistic communication (AC).

2.2. Artistic Communication (AC)

AC involves the reception of that which the artist(s) has expressed through a particular medium or media. Ghosh (1987) views AC from a broad perspective including song, dance,

painting, leaf, and sculpture and views that "works of art are not vehicles of communication but are embodiment of the message". As vehicles of communication, works of art are either mute or audible, physical or ephemeral. For instance, a stage play contains features such as makeup, painting, designs, masks, costumes, and dialogue (speech) just as a dance or musical performance on stage will contain some or all these embodied and animated features. In other words, humans imbibe ideas from society and express them through art. These forms of art could be song, drama, song, painting, drawing, carving or dance. Whatever the form that art takes; the overall purpose is to communicate (Luhmann, 2000).

Bellini (2017) views AC through the lens of language, suggesting that art is a language with characteristics, conditions, and potentialities as conventional languages. Wolfengarger and Sipe (2007) view that art forms possess unique and captivating languages. Feshchenko (2023) notes that AC methods such as song, praise-chants, poetry, drama have independent language characteristics. Sønning (2024) notes that song is a unique form of AC used to disseminate historical experiences and transmit cultural conditions. On his part, Akinwande (2024) uses the "Oríkì Òndó," or a sub-ethnic chant of the Yoruba people of Nigeria to illustrate the linguistic and cultural intricacies in praise-chants as methods of AC. These views underscore the use of AC as a vehicle for communication in CTP. CTs in Benin City embody the properties of AC, communicating with audiences through diverse language systems or elements of communication such as song, costume, drum, and dance among others.

Valentinovna (2019) and Bannerman (2014) view dance as a form of AC. Gordeeva (2019) uses solo dance performance to explore the dynamic relationship between the body, time, and space. The dance showcases the human body's virtuosity and its ability to integrate with music. Both solo and group dances involve the body's response to musical signals to create meaningful movements (Franklin, 2014). Dance and music are aspects of dramatic performance. Xiao (2024) view that drama is a composite work of arts, and an AC medium.

Contextually, works of art can be vehicles of communication, or embodiment of messages. The phrase "works of art" when used only for material artwork limits its space of reference. It has a broad meaning and includes all the activities of the artistic genre, such as the material and performing arts forms. In a situation where embodiment occurs in works of art, encoded messages are usually mute or passive, which the researcher refers to as "voice of silence", associated with physical art forms such as sculptor, painting, dance among others (Mitchell & Mehan, 2022). Thakur (2023) considers works of art from the perspective of

material art and notes that art elements are the forms used by artists to create their works, but they make use of them selectively depending on harmony and style of the art piece.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

AC is the encoding and decoding of messages by the performers and the audience through a negotiated interchange between the performer, the message and the audience conveyed through a particular source (Juslin & Laukka, 2003). As a source, it represents cultural values, traditions passed down from generations to generations (Bengtson et al., 2013) and other social issues being portrayed. As an act it involves the performance or embodiment of values and messages (Hanna, 1979), which relies on vision, aural and perception to decode. These diverse approaches apply to communication in CTP as it involves the transmission of messages, the negotiation of meaning and the deliberate use of the human body and material elements to communicate.

The difference in the mode of transmitting information and messages through art is contingent on the media deployed. Artistic expression (AE) is commonly associated with the material art that mainly relies on inanimate medium to construct and transmit messages. The human factor (artistic input) in the creation of material art ceases to exist as soon as the artwork is completed, giving way to the expression of messages to the viewers through visual and emotive responses to the artwork. Uduak and Akpan (2020) support this view noting that art is a form of language that humans deploy to express and communicate various issues, and it comprises of visual, aural, tactile and kinetic forms that are part of everyday language in a community. Uduak and Akpan (2020) use of the terms express and communicate denoting the separateness of the modalities of transmission of messages between the material and performing arts.

Makkreel (2006) emphasises the functionality of art as means of expression and communication within the realms of aesthetics and hermeneutics which also agrees with the views canvassed by Uduak and Akpan (2020). AE and AC are interrelated, but they share distinct properties. AE focuses on the journey of the artwork from the artist internal experiences and relationship with the muse through the process of the creation of the art piece and application of his skill to the exhibition of the artefact before viewers. On the other hand, AC involves the transmission and reception of a message which the artist has infused in his art. In AC, the artist creates songs, poetry or chants through inspiration or intellectual process

and stored within. The process of its outward release of his creation is known as expression while its contact with the audience is communication. This implies that CTs in Benin City initially express messages before it is communicated to the audience. The process of expression is usually silent such as in visual, aesthetic, or emotional appeal while communication is mostly oral in nature. However, AC and AE intersect in CTP in Benin City through song as a medium of communication and costume and dance as medium of expression. Both forms involve the transmission of messages to the viewers through performing/oral elements (AC) and material elements of (AE).

Ghosh (1987) explores the relationship between expression and communication as artistic processes of message transmission. Using the theory "rasa" in India aesthetic approach, Ghosh (1987) differentiates between these terms by emphasising the distinction between the content of communication (what) and the means of communication (media). He argues that a single message can be transmitted through various media, with the message adapting to the specific characteristics of each medium to express similar meaning. While expression is often linked to material art, scholars have acknowledged its applicability to performing arts as well (Álvarez et al., 2010). AE refers to the creative process where the artists reproduce their thoughts and ideas through medium such as poetry, music, or dance and so on. It involves the translation of the visions and the feelings of the artist into concrete or perceived forms; however, it also connects with the viewers or audience. On the other hand, AC involves the process of transmitting and receiving the artists' creations or messages by the audience. The main distinction between AE and AC is that while AE involves the creative processes of the artists and the viewers, AC focuses on the act of transmitting the creations of the artists to the audience who are indispensable element in this transaction.

Feschenko (2023) sees AC as a form of human communication peculiar to the art discipline including prose, poetry, drama, song and digital expressions, while Valentinovna (2019), and Bannerman (2014) view that dance is a form of AC. The view highlighted by Valentinovna and Bannerman underscores the use of AC for nonverbal forms against the views of some scholars that AC are for verbally communicated art forms like music, drama and poetry (Feshchenko, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design. This is an expression of all the strategies that researchers deploy to achieve nuanced findings and answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It serves as a blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data and provides a structured approach to researchers in their quest for knowledge, or discovery (Leavy, 2017). The research design incorporates methods such as literature reviews, interviews, and observation. The suitability of the qualitative research design approach for this study is based on Dementjeva (2024) view that qualitative research design entails verbal, aural, observational, taste, smell, and touch sensations derived from audio, film, documents and photographs and live presentation to give meaning to the study.

Qualitative research helps researchers to study, analyse and interpret social phenomena. When the purpose of a study is to learn more about something, describe, shed light, or provide an explanation for a phenomenon, qualitative research is preferable (Mohajan, 2018). Munn et al. (2014) note that qualitative research design focuses on unquantifiable elements and issues that are descriptive. Qualitative methodology is appropriate for addressing issues that deal with the organisation of society, or the way the organs of the society function.

3.2. Population of the Study

The study community is Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria and the population of the study are the specific individuals in the study community or environment having specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to gather for the study. The population of a study is determined by several factors such as gender, age, profession, knowledge among others depending on the focus of the study. The population for this study is three selected CTs, nineteen respondents drawn from CTP events and two university lecturers.

The exclusion and inclusion criteria for this study follows McElroy and Ladner's (2014) principle that the inclusion and exclusion criteria should be sufficiently narrow to ensure study validity and broad enough to allow for generalisation of findings to the wider population. Three FGs were selected from various CTs based on their recognition in the community and their demonstrable capacity to represent cultural heritage and transmit messages relevant to the study's objectives, while others who did not meet these criteria were excluded. For university lecturers, inclusion criteria included specialisation in traditional dance studies and relevant

publications. Only two lecturers satisfied these criteria and those who did not meet the criteria were excluded. For audience members at performance venues, eligibility was determined through regular attendances at CT events, familiarity with the performances and cultural context of the study community.

3.3. Sample Size and Recruitment

The sampling technique involved purposive sampling, key participants and semi-structured interviews. It allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific subset of the population based on individuals possessing the necessary characteristics or expertise, whose opinions are representative of the larger group (Taherdoost, 2016; Etikan et al., 2016). This aligns with Rai and Thapa (2015) view of purposive sampling as researcher dependent. This method is justified by the complexity of the society, which comprised diverse groups of individuals biologically, socially, academically or vocationally separated and having specialised knowledge in various fields.

The sample size for this study consists of 3 FGs comprising 12, 10 and 7 members respectively, 2 key participants from the local university (URs) and 19 individual respondents (R) selected from seven CTP events attended by the researcher. By targeting informed participants, the sampling technique ensured a focused examination of specific community issues by eliciting data from those who have knowledge about these issues. Audience feedback was crucial for evaluating communication effectiveness, as they represented the final stage of the communication context in CTP.

3.4. Data Collection

This research made use of both primary and secondary data (Hox & Boeije, 2005). Primary data was collected via interviews with research participants using a set of predetermined questions and observation from the selected CTs' members or FGs, the audience, and writers, while secondary data was gathered from literature. The members of each performing group made up the FGs (Dilshad & Latif, 2013) and interviews took place at the venues where the groups are officially based. A semi-structured interview was used with questions taken directly from a prepared guide (Billé, 2012), focusing on the objectives of the study. The FGs and key participant interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes while the

interview with audience members took place at CTP events venues and lasted between ten to fifteen minutes.

3.5. Ethical Consideration

According to Leavy (2017), ethical considerations underpinned all the research protocols; research ethics are rational because they ensured the well-being of study participants. In conducting this study, the researcher sought the approval of Durban University of Technology, Durban (DUT's) institutional research and ethics committee (IREC) approval and approval was granted and documented with an assigned ethical clearance number. In carrying out this research, the respondents' anonymity was safeguarded by using identity markers in the form of letters and numbers to identify the FGs and participants. Letters of consent of participants and related documents are locked up in a safe place and personal identifiers erased from the documents while soft copies have been encrypted adhering to ethical conducts of research. According to Wiles (2012), every component of a research is governed by a code of ethics.

3.6. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was deployed in this study to analyse data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Data were collected from 3 FGs labelled as FG1, FG2 and FG3, 19 Rs, and 2 URs or key participants. The data were analysed inductively from an interpretivist perspective, and subsequently coded into themes and sub-themes (Chandra & Shang, 2019).

The appropriateness of using the inductive method is to ensure that the findings align with the objectives of the study, the research questions and represented the views of the research participants (Babbie, 2011). The data collected were carefully studied to identify patterns of meaning from the data set by using the coding strategy (Saldana, 2022).

Sub-themes were contextualised and supported by incorporating pertinent references. The codes were scrutinised to ensure that they conformed with the research questions and objectives of the study. To maintain consistency with the study's objectives, the data were analysed in the light of the theoretical framework of AC. The aim of the study is to examine the elements of communication in CTP in Benin City categorised as verbal and nonverbal communication elements.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Verbal Elements of Communications

Song. Respondents note that the song is one of the elements of communication in CTP, which is used to transmit various messages including royalty, colonialism, historical events, justice, identity and social relations, ethics and values among others. Nwabuoku (2007, p. 69) notes that "the themes of songs are usually proverbial and instructive, and they are also used in praising or condemning." According to Folabalogun (2017), artistic expression in Benin City often glorifies and reflects the influence of the royalty or King (*Ọba*). Songs are used to venerate royalty personages such as *Ọba Ọvonramwẹn* and Queen *Idia*. Osadolor and Otoide (2008) view that songs are used to express the travails of the deposed Ọba Ọvonramwẹn by the British imperialist and portray the bravery of Queen Idia as a war leader. The song below expresses the British confrontation with Ọba Ọvonramwẹn:

<div align="center">

Ọgbaisi mwẹn n'ogie, n'igho

</div>

Ọgbaisi my king of great wealth

ọgbaisi mwẹn n''ogie, Ọgbaisi mwẹn n'ogie

My notable king, my notable king

Ọvonramwẹn n''ọgbaisi mwẹn n''ogie, ọgbaisi o

Ọvonramwẹn my notable king

Songs are versatile medium to reflect every facet of human experiences; from the natural world to complex themes like education, religion, human relationships, personal and public experiences depending on the level of the inspiration, or creativity of the artist (s). Below is an excerpt from the song on Queen Idia.

Idia o Idia o Idia mwẹn n'iyẹsigie- chorus (2 times).

Idia o, Idia o, Idia the king's mother

Okhuo ma yo kuo ẹdẹ so kpin Idia mwẹn n'iyesigie nọba (chorus)

A woman never goes to war except Idia the mother of *Esigie*

Iyẹsigie nọ okpokhuo nẹ ku nọbiọ ba- (chorus).

Idia o Idi o idia the mother of *Esigie*

Ẹkan vbi vie nọ erọkpa ma viẹn yọ aro- (chorus).

Cowries and beads could not distract her

Ugha sẹrimwin laho o we nikaro do- (chorus).

At the great beyond salute our ancestors

Iyẹsigie nọ ama mie gbore vbẹ do dẹ- (chorus).

There is none like the mother of *Esigie*

The songs uniquely explore both royal, colonial, and historical themes. For example, Ọba Ọvonramwẹn reigned over the Benin Kingdom from 1888 to 1914 before he was dethroned by the British. The other song celebrates Queen Idia, a prominent Benin City queen in the 15th and 16th centuries, wife of Ọba Ọzọlua (1483-1504), and mother of Ọba Ẹsigie (1504-1550).

Praise Chants. Respondents further identified praise chants as an element of communication in the performance. Praise chants are used to venerate and project the image of the kings of Benin City and other notable citizens, and they have melodic quality like singing. Nwizu (2017) views that praise chants express heartfelt admiration for something or someone and make use of vivid language and imagery to convey the feelings inside. Praise chants and songs serve dual purposes. They are used to boosts the ego of the recipient and expresses well-wishes. Below is an example of a common praise song for dignitaries in the kingdom.

Ya ghọe, ọmọ nọ gi ma ya hio

There he goes, the man of whom we are proud.

Common praise terms used to describe the qualities of the Ọba are *Ugboriri, Ọsiame ọsioni, ekẹnẹkẹnẹ, ologbo ghi'ran vbotọ* and so on. Praise chants are sometimes difficult to comprehend due to the overwhelming presence idiomatic expressions. Feshchenko (2023, p. 569), quoting Voloshinov (1926, p. 247) view that "a word taken wider, as a phenomenon of cultural communication, ceases to be a self-sufficient thing and can no longer be understood regardless of the social situation that has generated it." This correlates with Kant's notion of AC flaw (Kemal, 1986) whereby artistic messages get lost in artistic exuberance. Personal observation during live performances revealed that CTs often concluded their performances with a closing chant or remark: "*Ọba 'ghatọ kpẹre*", which means "long live the king."

Proverbs. Respondents also identified proverbs as a means of communication in CTP in Benin City. Proverbs are used to cleverly, and subtly deliver messages especialy when the user wants to address, or caution people against wrong doing. Proverbs are expressed as interjections in songs in CTP, however, there are some songs like *Itendo* by Fabọmọ used by CTs in Benin City constructed entirely of proverbs.

Bashir and Idris-Amali (2012) view proverbs as "wise sayings, deep expressions with carefully chosen words that give weight and meaning to the ideas they convey." Achebe (1958) captures the essence of proverbs in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, stating that: "Proverbs are the palm oil with which yams are eaten." Similarly, Opata and Apeh (2012) view proverbs as "knowledge bearers," while Asika and Ameodi (2012) see them as the "palm oil with which good stories are told." Njwe (2015), focusing on Cameroon's endangered languages, metaphorically considers proverbs as palm oil that ease the consumption of words. Proverbs serve as tools to negotiate ideas and impart knowledge in children to foster intellectual growth. Ehondor (2017) recognises African proverbs as a form of everlasting communication, while Al-Mutalabi describes it as a complex expression of communication. This agrees with Feshchenko (2023, p. 565) view that AC "is where language works differently from ordinary speech, or from other types of discourses."

5.2. Nonverbal Elements of Communication

Dance. According to participant FG1M2, a major dance performed by CTPs originated from the wives of Ogiso Ẹrẹ, while FG2M4's view that Ugho and Esakpaide are dances with historical roots. Dance is the most expressive form of nonverbal communication in CTP. The evolution of CTP in Benin City is contingent on the presence of the community's traditional dances known as Ugho (Abbe, 2022), and Esakpaide (Nwabuoku, 2007). The dances are gender sensitive. Ugho is female dance, while Esakpaide is male dance. Esakpaide is performed by the chiefs at important ceremonies in the kingdom to honour and express their loyalty to the king. It is usually a solo dance, but it can be performed by a group of people. Esakpaide reflects masculine prowess associated with the nobility, or the Ọba. Ogene (2007, p. 200) submits that "another outstanding factor about Nigeria dances is its linkage with religion and royalty."

Participants reveal that CTs prioritise contemporary dance forms over traditional ones. Contemporary dances are modern creations incorporating elements of traditional dance.

Akinsipe (2007) highlights this phenomenon, noting that older individuals sometimes find contemporary versions of traditional dances, like the *Obitun*, unrecognisable. Lo-Bamijoko (2007) echoes this sentiment and states that, "In Nigeria today, and likely in all urban African cities, contemporary dances are hybrids that blend cultural elements with modern styles, coexisting alongside more traditional forms" (p. 173).

Garfias (2004) observes that the imprint of the past is difficult to erase from the way things are done or created, and that efforts to avoid the past inevitably result in its reflection in actions. According to Yerima (2006, p.125), "the power of the signification of dance, also gives dance the repressive and oppressive values upon which the morality and ideology of any given society above all are invested." The transformation of traditional cultural practices to new forms is what Emielu (2013) considers as progressive traditionalism. This is a process that involves the reinvention and modernising of traditional African cultural milieu. Contemporary performances rooted in these traditions often incorporate innovative elements while still maintaining a strong connection with their cultural origins.

A method of communication associated with dance is facial expression. This is achieved through smile. Smile, or glee is a primary quality in CTP in Benin City. It is a basic quality in Ugho and Esakpaide. The cheerful faces of the dancers highlight joy and amity conveyed through dance in Edo culture. Dance is not merely entertainment, but serves as therapy, fostering emotional and psychological well-being on the viewers (Faigin & Stein, 2010), and smile is a factor for achieving therapy or emotional relief (Hoffman et al., 2011). The message conveyed through smile is real, functional and engenders relief thereby reducing stress in individuals. The cheerfulness embodied in traditional Edo dances like Ugho, and how the kings' wives use it to successfully attract their attention is evidence on how cheerfulness or smile is used to win peoples' heart. Dances have historically been used to convey affection and uplift peoples' spirits from despair (Rounds, 2016). Other nonverbal methods by which messages are transmitted in CTP in Benin City are costume, sceptre, drum and the gong.

Costume. A participant, FG1M7 views that "the costume promotes Ẹdo identity", while R4 view that "Ẹdo costume is not complete without the beads", and dancers wear beads on their wrist and neck. The Edo traditional costume is very lavish and expressive, the colour is often red, however, other colours are also used. The costume consists of wrappers tied around the chest of the females, while the males tie them around their waist. Kwakye-Opong and

Adinku (2013) submit that because Nigerian costumes are ethnically configured, it is easy to identify Edo people by their own costume. Notably, Queen Idia who is represented in an iconic mask carving carted away by the British in their conquest of the kingdom in 1897 (Omoruan & Uzzi, 2022), the sword and sceptre (ada and ẹbẹn) form the basic design in the costume of CTs in the area. Ẹdo costume portrays nobility, and it is one of Africa's richest dress cultures (Okpokunu & Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2005). Costumes in Benin City's CTPs have undergone significant evolution and innovation.

Dancers wear distinctive hair gear known as *okuku* but they are counterfeits of the original ones worn by the wives of the Ọbas. The okukus signify royalty. The use of okuku by CTs performers aims to uphold the tradition of women covering their hair in the public. According to Shukla (2015), costume reflects social and environmental aesthetics and identities. Ẹdo ritual dances such as Orogho and Ugba have their typical costumes. These dances are seldom performed by CTs except on religious, or chieftaincy ceremonies, thereby highlighting the ritualistic practices of the Ẹdo people.

Participants (R10 and R12) describe the sceptre as an emblem of authority of the kings of Benin City, which is now used by several monarchs in the surrounding community for similar purpose. The sceptre is another form of nonverbal expression in CTP in Benin City. Traditionally, the kings of Benin City present it to his representatives who rule in the surrounding communities. It also serves as symbols of identity (O'Leary et al., (2016). It is very light, aesthetically attractive, and adaptable for dance. However, its use in dances in the kingdom has been curtailed due to its aberrant deployment in CTP.

Drum and Gong. The drum and the gong are less visible communication tools in the ensemble, and observation reveals that there are three types of drums. They are the *iyema* (mother drum), *ovbiema* (baby drum) and *emugho* (Celebration drum). The *emele* is a new introduction into the drum ensemble and it is borrowed from the neighbouring *Yoruba* community where it is called *sakara*. The emele is used to add rhythm or flavour to the beat and it has a fast and fluctuating light and deep resonance. The mother drum is used to send messages to the dancers such as change from one dance to the other during performance. A high and fast rhythm indicates progression of dance, while a slow or drab rhythm indicates conclusion of the dance. A new dimension to the use of the emele in CTs in Benin City is the use of the "talking drum", a higher version of the emele.

The drum and gong belong to the category of percussive instruments. The gong is a melodic and religious instrument (Bakare, 2006) and used to call members attention. Noting the language equivalence of nonverbal elements in AC, Bokor (2014, p. 165-194) views that "drums are a primal symbol- a speech surrogate form qualified as drum language used for rhetorical purposes to influence social behaviour, to generate awareness, and to prompt responses for the realisation of personhood and the formation of group identity".

5. Conclusion

CTP in Benin City stands as a pivot for the city's deep-rooted history and traditions. Originating during the colonial era, these performances showcase the region's unique methods of transmitting cultural, historical, and social knowledge using congenial elements of communication such as song, proverbs, dance and costume. While messages in songs and proverbs are easy to comprehend, chants pose communication challenges. The nonverbal elements like costume and sceptre are used to convey tradition, artistic splendor and authority. Data analysis reveals that a strong understanding of Benin City's cultural context and language is crucial for the audience to fully comprehend the transmitted messages.

This study contributes to a greater understanding of CTP by providing nuanced insights into its communicative approaches, but this is however limited by methodological constraints which makes it impossible to consider numerical data hence a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods would have provided statistical evidence and trends which qualitative methodology cannot provide. Furthermore, the restriction of respondents to a section of the population makes generalisation improbable because had there been equal representation, the result obtained could have been different. Finally, findings reveal a dearth in literature on the study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was not supported by any funding but the APC was paid by the Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by Durban University of Technology. The conduct of this study has been approved by the Institutional Research and Examination Committee (IREC) with reference number IREC 175/23.

References

Abbe, J.E. (2017). Dance and change management in modern Benin cultural troupes' performance. *Nigerian Theatre Journal*: *A Journal of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists*, 17(1), 165-178).

Abbe, J. E. (2022). Ugho dance performance of the Benin people: An endearing but endangered form. *Umẹwaẹn: Journal of Benin and Edo Studies*, 7, 1-23.

Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Heinemann

Adeyemi, S. (2017). Many colours of an African performative ritual. *Alarinjo: Oye Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, *1*(2), 16-30.

Akinsipe, F. (2007). Obitun dance of the Ondo people: From rite to dance. In: C. Ugolo (ed.) *Perspetives in Nigerian dance studies* (pp. 50-75). Caltop Publications.

Akinwande, B. I. (2024). Rhetorical figures in Òndó Praise Chants. *Yoruba Studies Review*, *9*(1&2), 79-106. https://doi.org/10.32473/ysr.9.1and2.137825

AL-Mutalabi, M. M. (2019). Exploring the significance of proverbs in English language. *Alsuna: Journal of Arabic and English Language*, *2*(1), 30-38. https://doi.org/10.31538/alsuna.v2i1.298

Álvarez, I., Perez, H. J., & Perez-Carreno, F. (2010). *Expression in the performing arts*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Anigala, A.E. (2006). *Traditional African festival drama in performance*. Kraft Books.

Asika, I. E., & Emeodi, L. I. (2012). The Palm-oil with which good stories are told: Proverb as plot generator in Flora Nwapa"s Efuru and Idu. *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*, *1*(2), 111-126. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4065936

Bakare, O. (2006). The contemporary choreography in Nigeria: A realistic culture preserver or a harmful distortionist? In A. Yerima, B. Rasaki, & A. Udoka (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Dance in Nigeria* (pp. 64-75). Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.

Banda, F., & Mwanza, D.S. (2017). Language-in-education policy and linguistic diversity in Zambia: An alternative explanation to low reading levels among primary school pupils. In: M.K. Banja (ed.). *Selected readings in education* (109-132). Lusaka: University of Zambia Press.

Bannerman, H. (2014). Is dance a language? Movement, meaning and communication. *Dance Research*, 32(1), 65-80. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43281347.

Bashir, A.A., & Idris-Amali, H.O. (2012). Positive portrayal of women in Idoma proverbs. *Foreword to the Offering on the Gazelle*, 485.

Bellini, P.P. (2017). Intercultural potential of artistic communication. *International Conference* RCIC'17.

Bengtson, V.L., Putney, N.M. & Harris, S. (2013). *Families and faith: How religion is passed down across generations*. Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199948659.001.0001

Billé, F. (2012). The spectacular state: culture and national identity in Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey*, 31(2), 229–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2012.688503

Bokor, M. J. (2014). When the drum speaks: The rhetoric of motion, emotion, and action in African societies. *Rhetorica*, *32*(2), 165-194. https://doi.org/10.1525/RH.2014.32.2.165

Braun, V., & Clarke, C. (2022). *Thematic analysis*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2024.2391666

Chandra, Y., & Shang, L. (2019). Inductive Coding. In*: Qualitative Research Using R: A Systematic Approach.* Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3170-1_8

Dementjeva, J. (2024). Educational management aspects of the somatic intelligence. *Journal of Management*, 40(2), 75-86. https://doi.org.10.38104/vadyba.2024.2.07

Dilshad, R.M. & Latif, M.I., (2013). Focus group interview as a tool for qualitative research: An analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* (PJSS), 33(1).

Edebiri, D. U. (2005). *Benin historical essays*. Allen Publishers.

Ehondor, B. (2017). The concept of proverbs as a theoretical category in communication in Africa. *Pan-Atlantic University*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321698840

Emielu, A. (2013). Nigerian highlife music. *Journal of International Library of African Music*, 158-161. https://journal.ru.ac.za/index.php/africanmusic/article/view/1895/971

Ero, O.O. & Owie, S.P. (2016). *The Benin and Ogiamien connection*. Mindex

Espinosa-Dulanto, M., & Olivares-Palma, M. A. (2020). Contemporary tendencies of folkloric dance in Latin America. *Journal of Dance Education*, 20(3), 114-121.

Etikan, I., Musa, S.A. & Alkassim, R.S., (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

Faigin, D. A., & Stein, C. H. (2010). The power of theater to promote individual recovery and social change. *Psychiatric Services*, *61*(3), 306-308. https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.2010.61.3.306.

Feshchenko, V. (2023). Artistic communication as an object of semiotics and linguistic aesthetics. *Sign Systems Studies*, *51*(3-4), 565-603. https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2023.51.3-4.04.

Franklin, E.N. (2014). *Dance imagery for technique and performance*. Human Kinetics. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781718212831

Folabalogun, M. (2017). Art, symbol and royalty: A case study of the Yoruba speakers in Nigeria. *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *6*(1), 162-175. https://doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v6i1.14

Garfias, R. (2004). *Music: The cultural context*. *Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology*, 47, 1-38.

Ghosh, R.K. (1987). Artistic communication and symbol: Some philosophical reflections. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 27(4), 319-325. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/27.4.319

Gordeeva T.V. (2019). Artistic communication in dance performance: The transformation of spectators' comprehension in the works of Andrey Andrianov and Taras Burnashev.

Philharmonica International Music Journal, 2, 55-62. https://doi.org/10.7256/2453-613X.2019.2.40288

Hanna, J. L. (1979). *To dance is human: A theory of nonverbal communication*. University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/851611

Hess, J. (2021). Music education and the colonial project. In: *The Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education (23-39).* Routledge.

Hoffman, B.M., Bayak, M.M., Craighead, W.E., Sherwood, A., Doraiswami, P.M., Coons, M.J., & Blumenthal, J.A. (2011). Exercise and pharmacotherapy in patients with major depression: One-year follow up of the smile study. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 73,(2), 127-133. https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0b013e31820433a5

Hox, J.J. & Boeije, H.R., (2005). Data collection, primary versus secondary. In: *Encyclopodia of Social Measurement* (pp. 593-599). Amsterdam: Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-12-369398-5/00041-4

Juslin, P. N., & Laukka, P. (2003). Communication of emotions in vocal expression and music performance: Different channels, same code?. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(5), 770. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.770

Kemal, S. (1986) *Kant and Fine Art: An essay on Kant and the philosophy of fine art and culture.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/2219719

Koozin, T. (2024). *Embodied expression in popular music: A theory of musical gesture and agency*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197692981.003.0001

Kringelbach, H.N. (2014). Choreographic performance, generations and the art of life in post-colonial Dakar. *Africa*, 84(1), 36-54. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000197201300065X

Kwakye-Opong, R., & Adinku, G. U. (2013). Costume as medium for cultural expression in stage performance. *Arts and Design Studies*, *8*, 9-19.

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design*. New York: Gilford. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcsr.12276

Lo-Bamijoko, J. N. (2007). Music and dance in Igbo culture: A marriage of convinience. In: C. Ugolo (ed) *Perspetives in Nigerian dance studies (*pp. 173-183). Caltop Publications.

Luhmann, N. (2000). *Art as a social system*. Stanford University Press.

McElroy, L. M., & Ladner, D. P. (2014). Defining the study cohort: Inclusion and exclusion criteria. *Success inAacademic Surgery: Clinical trials,* 131-139. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-4679-7_11

Makkreel, R. A. (2006). The aesthetic and hermeneutic significance of expression. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 27(2), 187-204. https://doi.org/10.5840/gfpj20062729

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713616671930

Mitchell, J. & Meehan, T. (2022). How art-as-therapy supports participants with a diagnosis of schizophrenia: A phenomenological lifeworld investigation. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 80, 101917. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2022.101917

Mohajan, H.K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, *7*(1), 23-48. https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571

Munn, Z., Porritt, K., Lockwood, C., Aromataris, E. & Pearson, A., (2014). Establishing confidence in the output of qualitative research synthesis: The ConQual approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 14(1), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-14-108

Njwe, E. (2015). The palm oil with which words are eaten": Proverbs from Cameroon"s endangered indigenous languages. *Languages in Africa: Multilingualism, language policy, and education*, 118-126.

Nwabuoku, E. (2007). Dance in royal context: The Esakpaide dance of the Edo. In: C.E. Ugolo (ed) *Perspectives in Nigerian Dance Studies (pp. 50-73).* Caltop.

Nwizu, C. A. (2017). The motif of praise in the African oral poetic tradition. *Ethnosensitive Dimensions of African Oral Literature: Igbo Perspectives*, 51.

Ogene, J. (2007). Nigerian dance as visual resource. In: C.E. Ugolo (Ed.). *Perspective in Nigerian Dance Studies (*pp. 194-209). Caltop..

Okpokunu, E., Agbontaen-Eghafona, K. A., & Ojo, P. O. (2005). Benin dressing in contemporary Nigeria: Social change and the crisis of cultural identity. *African Identities*, *3*(2), 155-170. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840500235506

O'Leary, C., Sánchez, D. S., & Thompson, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Global insights on theatre censorship*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315714417.

Oloruntoba-Oju, O. (2013). From Alarinjo to Arugba: Continuities in indigenous Nigerian drama. *African Identities*, 11(4), 395-406. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2013.863143

Omoruan, D. & Uzzi, F. O. (2022). God's chisel in the hands of the carver: An esoteric view of Joseph Alufa Igbinovia. *SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts and humanities*. 4(1). https://doi.org/10.3126/sjah.v4il.43054

Opata, C. C., & Apeh, A. A. (2012). Proverbs as knowledge bearers: Towards a reconstruction of the knowledge of traditional medicine among preliterate Igbo society of Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Natural & Applied Sciences*, *1*(2), 59-63.

Osadolor, O.B. & Otoide, L.E. (2008). The Benin kingdom in British imperial historiography. *History in Africa*, *35*, 401-418. https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.0.0014

Rai, N. & Thapa, B., (2015). A study on purposive sampling method in research. *Kathmandu: Kathmandu School of Law*, 5.

Rounds, S. (2016). *Dance as communication: How humans communicate through dance and perceive dance as communication* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon).

Rouse, L., & Gupta, A. (2017). Performing culture: The politics of CT in postcolonial India. *Cultural Dynamics,* 29(3), 163-179.

Saldana, J. (2022). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 232-237. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/12085

Shukla, P. (2015). *Costume: Performing identities through dress*. Indiana University Press.

Sønning, A. (2024). Communication across artistic expressions and codes. In: *Creative Concert Production and Entrepreneurship (*pp. 55-104). Routledge.

Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology: How to choose a sampling technique for research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 5. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3205035

Thakur, M. (2023). An analysis of the art elements utilized in a works of art. *Shodhkosh*: *Journal of Visual and performing Arts*, 4(1). https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.338

Thompson, J. B. (2020). Mediated interaction in the digital age. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *37*(1), 3-28. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418808592

Uduak, P. & Akpan, R. W., (2020). An overview of the arts as a language of communication, expression and experience: A discourse. *Serbian Research Journal of Education, Humanities and Developmental Studies*, 10(1).

Usoro, R. O., & Udoette, M. S. (2014). Authenticating performance with oral forms: The Case of Uko Akpan cultural troupe. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, *11*(2), 60-74.

Valentinovna, G.T. (2019). Artistic communication in dance: The transformation of spectators comprehension in the works of Andrey Andrianov and Tara Burnashev. *PHILHARMONICA. International Music Journal*, (2), 55-62.

Wahyuni, A. (2018). The power of verbal and nonverbal communication in learning. *1st International Conference on Intellectuals' Global Responsibility* (pp. 80-83). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/icigr-17.2018.19

Wolfenbarger, C. D., & Sipe, L. R. (2007). Research directions: A unique visual and literary art form: Recent research on picturebooks. *Language arts*, *84*(3), 273-280. https://doi.org/10.58680/la20075636

Xiao, W. (2024). The language of the body: The role and significance of body shaping in drama art education. *Arts Educa*, *38*..

Yerima, A. (2006). Symbols and images in Nigerian dances. In: A. Yerima, O.R. Bakare & U. Arnold (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Dance in Nigeria (*pp. 124-134*).* Caltop.

Yerima, A. (2007). Symbols and images in Nigerian dances. In: A. Yerima, O.R. Bakare & U. Arnold (Eds), *Critical Perspectives on Dance in Nigeria*. Caltop.