



Enriching The Competency Skills And Knowledge Of Semi-Skilled Garment Producers In Ghana (A Case Study Of Selected Semi-Skilled Garment Producers Within Cape Coasts Polytechnic Community And Its Environs)

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Abstract:

This paper examines the competency skills and challenges facing semi-skilled garment producers within Cape Coast Polytechnic community and its environs. Based upon the findings, an action oriented outreach programme was designed which serves as an engine to guide and propel them in improving upon their knowledge and skills in design and construction of garments that meet the required standards. The outreach programme highlights the effective use of design elements and principles in garment construction. The case study method of the qualitative research was employed with interview and observation as the main instrumentation for data collection. A sample size of thirty was randomly selected from the parent population which comprises five garment producers from C' Poly, Nanaba, Ayifua, Ebubonko, Abura and Kakomdo. The findings revealed that, garment producers within the study area have inadequate knowledge and competency skills for garment production to satisfy the clothing needs of consumers of the area who are predominantly students and are fashion conscious. The study therefore recommends a competency-base outreach programme as one of the surest ways to help improve their skills in garment production. A model of the developed outreach programme is attached to help respondents in this regard.

Keywords: *Semi-skilled; Competency; Garment; Challenges; Outreach programme*

1.Introduction

Ghana governments of the fourth republic are increasingly emphasizing skill development as an important factor towards enhancing productivity, stimulating economic competitiveness and taking people out of poverty. Amankwa (2007) states that, the Ghana government has initiated Vocational Technical Education as one of the systems of training that addresses the socio-economic challenges that threaten the country's industrial development. Amankwa however noted that, the fulfillment of these challenges is thrown on those who are trainers in the Vocational Technical Institutions. The Cape Coast Polytechnic, as part of its contribution towards improvement of socio-economic standards of the people in our societies, has made a provision in its mission statement to extend its high quality Vocational and Technical Education to the external communities through outreach programmes. This is to enable the people within the Polytechnic community and around acquire knowledge and marketable skills that will assist them to fend for themselves and enjoy meaningful living standards (Cape Coast Polytechnic Strategic Plan 2007- the 2011). Working towards the achievement of the above objective, the staff of the Department of Fashion has planned to establish a production unit. Among the planned activities is to give additional training to semi-skilled fashion producers in the Polytechnic community and its environment through outreach programmes. The programmes are meant to assist them to improve upon their knowledge and skills in designing and sewing of classic garments and other clothing articles that meet local and international standardizations and attractive to many fashion consumers.

2.Statement Of The Problem

The Ghanaian fashion industry is a developing one and most of our fashion producers, especially the semi-skilled ones, face challenges of getting more customers. One of the assumptions is that Ghanaian fashion consumers are mostly attracted by new and second-hand clothes imported from Europe, America and Asia, especially China. This is not only due to the fact that the prices for such clothes are lower, but mainly because their design and construction details are good and attractive. It is observed that the semi-skilled fashion designers in the Polytechnic community and its environment produce garments for consumers, but the quality of their designs and construction details are not good enough to attract more local fashion consumers as well as for export. The need for them to improve upon their competency skills to enable them produce quality garments

therefore becomes crucial as they found themselves in communities with predominantly educated people who have high sense of taste for fashion and will not compromise for excellence. To be able to identify and assist them to meet the clothing needs of such caliber of fashion consumers, the study assesses the educational and competency challenges of these dressmakers and finds feasible means to assist them improve their sewing knowledge and skills to equip them produce quality and becoming garments to attract wider fashion consumers.

3. Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges facing the semi-skilled garment producers in the Cape Coast Polytechnic community and its environment with special reference to their competencies in garment design and construction, and based on the findings plan a competency-based outreach programme to help improve their knowledge and skills in garment production.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What are the educational backgrounds of the semi-skilled fashion designers?
- What competency challenges confront the semi-skilled fashion designers faced with?
- What outreach programme can be developed to help the semi-skilled fashion designers to improve their knowledge and skills in garment production?

5. Review Of Related Literature

There is increasing concern expressed by many Ghanaians in the fashion industry about the challenges that our fashion producers face. The assumption is that, most of the fashion designers operating in small-scale fashion businesses face serious competition from importation of surplus and used clothing rejected by the thrift shops of Europe and America as well as cheap fashion products from Asia especially China. It is noted that globalization, is the key feature that has influenced production and marketing of Ghanaian fashion designers products (Turlings, 2002). Dickerson (1999) asserts that, today's fashion business is being shaped by globalization. The effect of this is interconnected global economy in the business. She continues that, technological advancements in communication and clothing production have facilitated the transfer

and transportation of information, goods and services, and that, the direct consequence of this is the expansion of production and distribution of fashion products in developed and Asian countries. Therefore, where and how fashion products are produced and sold has been globalized. Hines and Bruce (2001) add that, fashion designers, merchandisers, marketers, technologists, linguistics, managers and strategists are all involved in getting the best products to the market place in the fastest span of time and at the most competitive price. Mead (1995) expressed the concern that, globalization has adulterated the cultural implications attached to African dress and evidently, many African youths' dressings now end up resembling their European counterparts. Many Ghanaian females both old and young have taken to wearing of trousers, especially, those made of denim, 'the jeans' and tops made from knitted fabrics as they are found to be cheaper, easily obtainable and more interesting.

Deducing from the views expressed by these writers, it is evident that there is intense advancement in the technology of production and distribution of goods, merchandisers, marketers and others are now getting the best fashion products to markets in fastest span of time at competitive prices. It must be admitted that, the Ghanaian fashion industry has been globalized, and as a result Ghanaian fashion producers, especially the semi-skilled ones in Ghana operate in big challenging and competitive businesses. Ideally, any consumer wants to go in for good products offered for sale at best prices. A clear indication is seen in many Ghanaian fashion consumers who mostly go in for second-hand clothes. They find these clothes to be cheaper, interestingly designed and sewn. However, there can be a way out if teachers and trainers of fashion take keen interest and commitment to assist students and those already in the fashion business to learn to produce fashion products of high quality in design and construction.

Amankwa (2007) states that gone are the days when clothing production was for those who were not intelligent and had no formal education adding that, clothing production is a vocation which requires knowledge and skills which assist the producer to design and construct garments that are very becoming and appealing to consumers. Jones (2002) confirms that, talent in fashion production is not only the ability to sew but also the ability to create, design, draft and innovate styles of clothing that are new and interesting. In other words one should have the passion for fashion so as to inspire others. The outcome of learning, according to Gagne (1970) involves a change of behaviour and performance of the learner, therefore if the learner is equipped with knowledge, attitudes,

information, abilities, skills and competences that make him or her able to perform and do something, it signifies that learning has taken place.

It could be established therefore that, the use of appropriate educational techniques that foster creativity and competency skill acquisition is crucial in garment design and construction; hence adapting this in the planning and implementation of an outreach programme for Ghanaian semi-skilled fashion producers will help improve their designing capabilities as the choice of appropriate educational strategies and materials enhance and improve students' learning (Brown et al (1983)). The essential knowledge and skills about how to use elements and principles of design, textile fabrics, creative design and the flair to innovate styles add up to make what it takes to be a fashion designer.

6. Methodology

The case study method of the qualitative research was used as the research team needed to have direct contacts with the respondents and their settings. Both formal and informal interviews were conducted with participant observation for data collection.

6.1. Population and sampling

The population involved garment producers in the Cape Coast Polytechnic community and other communities comprising Nanaba, Ayifua, Ebubonko, Abura and Kakomdo. The sample size of thirty was purposefully selected which is made up of five semi-skilled dressmakers whose settings are in either single room shops or kiosks along the roadsides of Cape Coast Polytechnic and the five selected communities.

6.2. Instrumentation

The study employed participant observation and interview for data collection. The justification for choosing interview and observation as the main instrumentation for data collection was due to the fact that the respondents have little or no formal education and therefore preferred responding orally to questions than to answer questionnaire. The production processes of the respondents were critically observed at their shops while working to ascertain their competency skills and knowledge in garment design and construction. Interview guide and observational checklists were designed and given to two senior lecturers of Home Economics at the University of Cape Coast for validation. The instruments were trial tested on ten students to ensure reliability. Computation of

data using the Cronbach's Alfa yielded a coefficient of 0.8 indicating good reliability. Both the interview and observable findings were assembled, synthesized, and analyzed to draw conclusions and recommendations made towards the improvement of the work of the semi-skilled garment producers.

6.3. Data collection

The respondents were contacted by appointments for the interviews. Prior arrangements were made with respondents which made them to prepare in advance to give right information during the data collection process. The research team assured the respondents of anonymity and confidentiality. With their permission, the interviews were recorded. Four visitations were made to each respondent on different schedules to enable the research team collect enough data through interview and observation.

7. Presentation And Discussion Of Findings

The interviews were transcribed under themes and recorded. The responses of the individual persons were examined and analyzed through percentages. Table 1 shows educational backgrounds of respondents.

Educational background	Freq.	Percentage %
No formal education(apprenticeship only)	15	50
JSS Level and apprenticeship	13	43.3
JSS Level and Intermediate fashion	2	6.7
Total	30	100

Table 1: Educational Background of the Respondents

7.1. Discussion

The study revealed that fifteen (15) of the respondents that is, 50% did not go through any formal education. They learnt the sewing through apprenticeship with only thirteen (13) representing 43.3% who went through the Junior Secondary School and learnt the sewing. Two (2) of them representing 6.7% are Fashion Intermediate graduates. This signifies that their educational background is low. It was found that, almost those who went through apprenticeship cannot read. They can only recognize figures since they had been trained to use tape measures to take measurements.

Challenges facing respondents	Freq.	Percentage
Lack of formal knowledge and skills in Creative Design, Textile Fabrics and Pattern Drafting and Adaptation	25	83%
Lack of knowledge about the use of industrial machines and equipment	25	83%
Financial Problems due to low patronage	10	33%
Serious Competition with fashion production importation	28	93%

Table 2: The Challenges Facing Respondents

7.2. Discussion

It was found that, twenty-five (25) respondents representing eighty- three percent (83%) lacked formal knowledge and skills about Creative Design, Textile Fabrics and Pattern Drafting and Adaptation. Twenty-five (25) respondents representing eighty-three percent (83%) faced the challenge of lack of knowledge and skills of using industrial sewing machines and equipment. Ten (10) respondents representing thirty-three percent (33%) faced financial problems due to low patronage by customers. In addition, twenty-eight (28) respondents, representing ninety-eight percent (98%) faced serious competition with fashion products imported into the country. The above findings affirm the assertion made by Jones (2002) that, the talent in fashion production is not only the ability to sew but also the ability to create, design, draft and innovate styles of clothing that are new and interesting. It is apparent that, the semi-skilled garment producers cannot cope with the challenges unless they improve their knowledge and skills in the production of fashion goods. The analysis also confirms the effect of globalization on the fashion industry as expressed by the different writers that, globalization has facilitated the transportation of goods and services worldwide as well as causing the adulteration of the African fashion business and the cultural implications attached to African dress. Ghanaian fashion producers face competition from importation of surplus and used clothing rejected by the thrift shops of Europe and America as well as cheap fashion products from Asia especially China (Dickerson 1999), (Hines and Bruce 2001) (Mead 1995).

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Knowledge and skills in Creative Design and Styling	28	93
Knowledge and skills about Pattern Drafting and Textile Fabrics	24	80
Skill training about the use of industrial sewing machines	30	100
Financial support	25	83

Table 3: Suggestions for the improvement of their Businesses

7.3. Discussion

The findings presented in Table 3 indicates that twenty eight (28) respondents, representing ninety-three percent (93%) wanted to acquire adequate knowledge and skills that will improve their Creative Design and styling abilities. Twenty-four (24) respondents, representing eighty percent (80%) needed knowledge and skills in pattern drafting and adaptation and textiles fabrics. In addition, all the respondents required skill training with the use of industrial sewing machines, and twenty-five (25) respondents, that is eighty-three percent (83%) needed financial support to boast their business. The above suggestions made by the respondents confirm that training programmes are needed by the respondents. This is in line with assertion made by Amankwa(2007)that, gone are the days when clothing production was for those who were not intelligent and had no formal education, and that clothing production is a vocation which requires knowledge and skills that assist the producer to design and construct garments that are very interesting and appealing to consumers. Therefore the choice of adapting appropriate educational strategies and materials will enhance and improve their learning (Brown et al (1983). A conclusion can be drawn that, if the respondents are equipped with knowledge, information, abilities, skills and competences about the needs that they have suggested their performance in clothing production will be improved and quality products that will attract more consumers will be made.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the competency challenges facing the semi-skilled clothing producers in Cape Coast Polytechnic community and its environment, and to initiate a planned outreach programme that will help improve their skills and knowledge in producing quality and becoming garments to attract more fashion consumers. The study revealed among other things that majority of the respondents had no formal education with the rest having low educational background. Most of them lack knowledge and skills about Creative Design, Pattern Drafting and Adaptation of styles, Textile Fabrics. All the respondents lack the skills in the use of industrial sewing machines. Moreover, the study revealed that most of the respondents faced competition from fashion goods imported into the country.

9. Recommendations

The study recommends that a competency based training programmes be planned and developed to assist respondents improve on their expertise in garment design and construction. A model of such outreach programme developed based on the findings of the study and attached to the paper is recommended to be used on pilot basis to address the challenges facing the semi-skilled garment producers within the study area and beyond. This outreach programme primarily involves use of elements and principles of design in clothing design and construction which the research team believes should be the fundamental knowledge needed to provide respondents with the requisite creative abilities.

10. The Outreach Programme

10.1. Introduction

One of the most important reasons for putting on clothing is for adornment. This means that the clothes that we wear should enrich our physical appearance and attraction. Therefore, when designing and sewing clothes for people, it is very important to study the figure types of wearers and sew garments which give flattering effects. In other words, attention should be called to the good features while the poor ones of the wearer are camouflaged. These desirable qualities are achieved when elements and principles of design are used for the production of the designs. The elements are the ingredients which are used to create the designs, and principles show the ways through which the elements

should be used to get good and becoming designs. If you learn the uses and the effects that they give to designs you will be able to use them effectively. The elements of design include lines, texture, colour, shape, form and silhouette but the most popular ones that can be used to create illusions of different interesting dimensions are lines, texture, colour. (Motkya 1989) The principles of design are repetition, rhythm, graduation, radiation, contrast, harmony, balance and proportion. Because this is pilot programme positive response is required, therefore this programme will cover the use of elements such as lines, texture and silhouette and colour; and principles like repetition, rhythm and graduation, the other will be captured in the next outreach. Fabrics and papers will be supplied freely.

10.2. The use of elements and principles of design in fashion

This section deals with the outreach and it covers the lessons on the use of elements and principles of design in the development and creation of styles to elicit response from customers. It should be in the local dialect for easy understanding.

10.3. Vertical Lines

Vertical line is the one that stands like how the human form is in attention position. They carry the eyes from up and down so they make a person look slim and tall. So when your customer comes, look at her form, and if she is fat, short and plump, you may have to use these lines to create garment designs that will make her look slimmer and taller. To create and design garment to make the wearer look taller and slimmer, we use constructional details like vertical seamlines, knife pleats, darts, outline of yokes and collars. Explanation of these will be done during the demonstration. These designs give optical illusion of slimness, because when the person is in the dress, the onlooker's eyes travel up and down on him or her uninterrupted. Those with wide face and bulky chin use 'V' – necklines and lapels of collars straight and narrower. Demonstrate with paper, fabric and models with these facts for the learners to understand, for the choice of appropriate educational strategies and materials enhance and improve their learning (Brown et al, 1983).

10.4. Horizontal lines

They lie across the body. They are the opposite of vertical lines. They make the wearer appear shorter and fatter. So for customers, who are very tall and slim, create horizontal

lines designs garments for them. Designs like shorts skirt and blouse, are good if the person has good looking legs, the onlookers' eyes travel across the figures, there by making the wearer look wider, gorgeous and very beautiful. Use square-neck line designs with large collars; cape or bell sleeve styles for those with narrow face to give an illusion of width to their faces.

10.5. Diagonal Lines

Diagonal lines also carry the eyes across and around the body. Ideally, cut the garment on bias to make the seam lines travel diagonally giving a flowing and dynamic quality to the wearer. This quality is also achieved by arranging the structural design of the fabric, especially when using striped or checked fabrics. Yokes can also be cut and arranged to run diagonally from armhole to bust point on both sides of the garment. This is a very interesting design for medium sized figure.

10.6. The Use of Colour

It has been found that, the first attraction to a garment is the colour, therefore, check the structural design of fabrics your customers bring and advice them on colour that look good on them. Assist them to buy trimming that will match with the colour and texture of fabric. For instance, harmonize fine and lustrous fabric with metallic colours like gold and silver, for evening wears. They add glamour to the design and make a slim person look good in it.

10.7. Texture and Silhouette

Texture is the element usually refers to as the feel of the fabrics that we use for garments. Some are fine and soft, light, course and rough, heavy, stiff or bulky.

Silhouette is the overall outline and shape of the garment. It usually shows the fullness and bulk of the style. A combination idea of texture and silhouette gives good design to the different figure types. A fat and plump figure needs dull, light, and medium weight fabrics. They seem to minimize the apparent size of a figure. (Jones 2002) Lustrous fabrics reflect and increase size; fabrics like coarse linen, sateen and fine silk give pleasing and interesting effect on slim figures. Stiff fabrics also conceal the silhouette but they seem to increase the size of the figure. Ideally, depending on the variety of fabrics that are on our Ghanaian market, it is advisable to combine the texture of the fabrics with the knowledge and skills obtained from the use of lines to create interesting

and becoming garment. Demonstrate the use of lines to create these lines in the training. Create gored skirts, and 'A' line designs and styles with the use of flat pattern cutting method.

Principles of design are important part of the aesthetic means that help to adjust the focus and effect of designs.

10.8.Repetition, rhythm and gradation

Repetition, rhythm and gradation can be used in combined ways. They show the use of design elements details more than once in a garment. They carry the eyes on the way elements are placed. For example, if you use buttons to show direction of lines used in a design, and you place them vertically one after the other on the wrap of a dress, it is in a rhythmic order. The spacing and sizes of buttons and trimmings also give the effect of gradation, that is when they are evenly spaced and they form a sequence from big to bigger to biggest or small, smaller to smallest. Green trimmings on a neckline, and the same design found at the hem show repetition. Evenly distributed pleats either knife or box, gives becoming design and good effect on the wearer. Demonstrate all these for them to see and practice. Let them practice among themselves. Then give them assignment that will involve the respondents doing the following:

Sketch a design of a garment to show either the use of vertical or horizontal lines and explain why you are using it. Then show the principle of repetition in a graduated manner and harmonize your sketch with contrasting features. When you finish cut and sew. The assignment will be submitted after two weeks

10.9.Follow – up

The effectiveness of any outreach programme like this is achieved with a follow-up. Therefore visit them at their settings and workshops, giving suggestion and assistance. To conclude, the follow-up should elicit a feed back that demonstrates a change in the performance of the respondents. Brown et al (1985) states that, the task of a teacher is to create a desirable change in behaviour of individuals. Therefore check their performance through cognitive, psychomotor and affective domain assessment and evaluation.

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