Garment Designing Process – Kumasi Polytechnic Experience

Michael Obeng Nyarko
Lecturer, Fashion Design and Textiles Studies Department, Kumasi Polytechnic, Kumasi Ghana
Dr. Michael Ato Essuman
Lecturer, Fashion Design and Textiles Studies Department, Kumasi Polytechnic, Kumasi Ghana
Alhaji Prof. Y. S. Peligah
Dean, Fashion Design and Textiles Studies Department, Kumasi Polytechnic, Kumasi Ghana

Abstract:
This study is a record of the unique procedure developed by the creative design lecturers at Department of Fashion Design and Textiles Studies of Kumasi Polytechnic, as their contribution to academic training for the Fashion Industry. The study is purely qualitative and it describes how fashion students with a creative touch to produce garments have used traditional resources. The study is a collaboration between the local Fashion Industry in Kumasi and the Fashion Department of Kumasi Polytechnic. Activities of selected local industry players were observed and the management of those fashion houses were interviewed to identify challenges in the garment design and production process. Findings from the fieldwork identified the lack of research and creativity as a major gap in the garment designing process. Subsequently, interventions were designed and used to develop a model for the local fashion industry. The result is a demonstration of how garments can be developed through research by combining conventional and local resources. The unique experience is model for training Tailors and Dressmakers in the catchment area of Kumasi Polytechnic, and others in the Fashion field.

Keywords: Garment designing, theme board, branding, run-way

1. Introduction

There are varied standards for designing and producing garments worldwide. In the main, the standards involve analysing trends producing designs concepts, making sketches, designing patterns, and overseeing production. This elaborates procedure, for producing garments and its accessories for men is the work of the fashion designer.

Fashion design is the art of applying design and aesthetics or natural beauty to clothing and accessories. The process is influenced largely by cultural and social attitudes of both designers and patrons, and varies with time and place. It could be done individually or in a team. The designer however has the responsibility to ensure that the consumer desire for aesthetically designed clothing is not compromised. (Cruse 2012)

Burke (2001, p. 11) confirms that, "Fashion has always been a reflection of society". To some, it is an art form, which can transform an image, help express a person's identity, or even make a social statement. It is about promoting the new and is concerned with constantly changing aesthetics. Because of its connection with taste and time, a large number of people often describe fashion as the current style that is followed at any given time. It is therefore incumbent on the fashion designer to anticipate changing consumer tastes in order to develop the propensity to set fashion trends. This phenomenon of fashion is described by Burke (2001, p. 11) as portraying "the zeitgeist – the spirit of our times".

Globally, the fashion world is a multibillion-dollar industry offering a dazzling array of products in every price change range, from luxury items to the least expensive, mass produced low price goods. The fashion and creative industries supply chain, provides employment for many millions of people in the areas of fashion and textiles design, manufacturing and distribution, media, retail sales and marketing, fashion event management, and of course, education, which is responsible for training students to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to enter the fashion design and creative industries. (Burke 2001, p. 11)Garment production is a very important component of fashion design, and is linked to the history of man. "Recent scientific research estimates that humans have been wearing clothing for as long as 650,000 years. Others claim that clothing probably did not originate until the Neolithic Age (the "New Stone Age")" (Cruise, 2012). Cruise states further that, articles carried rather than worn (such as purses), those worn on a single part of the body and easily removed (scarves), those worn purely for adornment (jewellery), or those that serve a function other than protection (eyeglasses), are normally considered accessories rather than clothing.

Garment is used operationally in this study to refer to clothing. Kuper (1973 p. 349) as cited by Manlow (2008 p. 3) maintains that, the term "clothing" should be used in an inclusive sense and differentiated further into "dress," used on everyday occasions; "uniform," used for ceremonial occasions; and "costume," clothing with a mystical or sacred quality used for rituals/performances. In a sense, Fashion is the term that should be used to refer to the modern manifestation of clothing.

Despite the immense benefit available to the garment industry globally, collaboration between academia and the fashion industry is lacking at the local level. Theory and practice are not in harmony; hence, the two groups are operating in different paradigms. It is in the light of this that specific challenges in the local fashion industry were identified in order to design intervention to solve them. The unique experiences of students of the fashion department of Kumasi Polytechnic, which are the products of the interventions, have been recorded to serve as the creative base and an innovative model for tailors and dressmakers in the catchment area.

2. Materials and Methods

The action research approach was adopted for the study. The work is a collaboration between the local Fashion Industry in Kumasi Metropolis and the Fashion design Department of Kumasi Polytechnic. As a case study research, Ten (10) prominent local fashion houses were selected for the study. Below is the list of the fashion houses and their locations:

S/N	Name of Fashion House	Location in Kumasi
1	Unijay Fashion	AhinsanBonsuom
2	Kas Fashion	Asafo
3	Gasola Fashion	Kwadaso Estate
4	Jenisis Clothing	Ayeduase
5	NakabClodin	Bantama
6	Lydia Fashion	Oduom
7	Solomax Creation	Amakom
8	Trubaga Fashion	Adum
9	Style Talk	Ahinsan
10	Sony Fashion	Aswansi

Table 1

These industries were purposively selected because of their existing collaboration with the Fashion department by way of granting students the opportunity to do practical attachments with them. The 2014 Higher National Diploma final year students of Kumasi Polytechnic were the counterpart group for the study. The class was chosen because of the competency they have acquired after spending three years in school. The students numbered 46 and consisted of 14 Males and 32 females. Their ages ranged between 18 and 28 years.

The design processes of selected local industry players were observed over a period of three years and the management of the fashion houses were interviewed to ascertain the rational for their design concepts and procedures. The gaps identified were discussed with the local players as the basis to develop interventions to address the challenges. The 2013 HND final year batch was used as a test case and their products were evaluated. The challenges identified were consequently used to develop the design process, documented in this study.

The collections were produced over a period of two semesters under the supervision of experienced lecturers and presented for exhibition and fashion show. As a research class, creativity was emphasised and students were given the freedom to select their own themes, materials and methods of production. Students were encouraged to combine conventional materials with local resources so that their works could appeal to both the local and international markets. Emphasis was placed on good finish to give their collection the cutting edge needed to break into the fashion market.

The results demonstrate how garments can be developed through collaboration and research by combining conventional and indigenous resources. The unique experience is a model for training Tailors and Dressmakers in the catchment area of Kumasi Polytechnic, and others in the Fashion field at large.

3. Findings from Fieldwork

A major component of the HND Fashion Design Curricular is "Practical Industrial Attachment". The programme provides the opportunity for students to attach themselves to industry for a period to learn at first hand industry ethics and practices. It also provides the students and practitioners in the industry the opportunity to share ideas on current trends and innovations in the fashion industry. It is also an avenue for academia to identify specific needs of industry in order to design appropriate intervention required to solve those challenges.

In pursuance of these objectives, the researchers set themselves the task to assess the currents state of the garment designing process among the fashion houses in the Kumasi metropolis. A number of interactions with industry went on over a period of three years on the objectives of the study. Managers of the selected fashion houses were interviewed on their operations. Students who went on attachment between 2010 and 2013 were sensitised and trained to identify the gaps. The observations from the field together with imputes from the interviews granted by the management of the fashion houses were used as the basis to design interventions to address the challenges. Subsequently the 2013 HND three year group was used as a test case to address the challenges.

Challenges were identified within the various design processes and have been captured as follows: It was trendy for most of the designers to extract their designs from fashion magazines and catalogues. This is essentially a copy work approach with little creative input. It undermines critical thinking that is the basis of developing one's own concept and style in designing.

Most of the practitioners did not know how to sketch and they hardly sketched their designs. They did not keep sketchpads as records of their original designs. The practice of copying designs from magazines and catalogues limited their creativity to a great extent. It also made interpretation and execution of clients' taste and unique garment requests difficult. Another limitation is that they did not design their products as "collections" but as individual disjointed items. This practice limits the scope of clothing, which includes garments and their accessories.

Most of the industry players did not draft on paper first before transferring the designs onto fabrics. They drafted directly on the fabric. This practice is popularly called 'free hand cutting'. This procedure makes reproduction in large volumes difficult. Sewing was mainly by the use of the machine. They did not explore the use of hand stitches.

It was further observed that the local industry was not interested in branding. Investments were not made into the production of very attractive labels and packages as a way of promoting works and giving the fashion houses their unique identities. Quite a number of the designers did not have logos incorporated in their labels. Their labels were not elaborately designed. The best most of them produced in terms of packaging was the printing of the companies' names on polythene and paper carrier bags, to parcel the finished garments.

Another observation is that most of the fashion designers do not take advantage of Photo shoot, Exhibitions and fashion shows as effective ways to advertise their work. Majority of them marketed their work through personal contacts with clients. They took orders either in bulk or in small quantities and supplied the finished product to their client. This is a bad option in terms of fashion merchandizing because it has short-term benefits. A hand full of the designers such as Jenesis Clothing and NakabClodin however, occasionally, participated in Fashion Shows.

4. Result and Discussion

- Intervention: Garment Designing process

To address the challenges identified on the field, garment designing process models were designed. The models was categorised under the following headings: developing concept; producing design; making patterns; sewing garments; branding; photo-shoot, exhibition and fashion show.

4.1. Tools and Equipment (Facilities)

- Design & Branding: Pens and Pencils, Cameras, Computers and Accessories.
- Pattern Drafting and Sewing: Measuring tools, Cutting and Trimming tools, Tracing tools, Drafting tools and Sewing tools
- Photo-shoot, Exhibition and Fashion Show: Exhibition panels, Nails staplers, Thumb pins, Hammers, Computer and accessories, Cameras, Lighting, Public address systems, Projectors and Screens and Runway.

4.2. Model 1 - Design Concept

A concept is a general idea, thought or understanding. In a sense, it refers to the theme that drives one's activity. "It is part of the creative process that presents development in conceptual thinking". (Burke, p. 24) Students consulted both primary and secondary sources for ideas. They embarked on field trips to a number of fashion houses and textile companies within the Kumasi metropolis. Some other students explored the environment and made use of natural objects around them. These resources served as a source of inspiration to generate design ideas for their collection. These ideas were composed with pictures, in two-dimensional digital formats called **"Theme Board".** The theme boards reflected the general theme for the collection and also gave the designers ideas for their colour schemes and styles (See Fig 1& 2)

Figure 1: Theme board: "Fashion fusion"	Figure 2: Theme board: "Moonlight"

This model is designed to provide an alternative for the copy work approach where designers extract designs from catalogues and magazines. It serves as inspiration for fashion designers to produce original and thematic designs of their own. This will make the practice both competitive and dynamic.

4.3. Model 2 - Producing Sketches
After producing, the theme board, students selected the theme for their collection, and produced sketches for the garments designs. This was done through the process of idea development process. The process involved first picking an idea from the theme. The idea was drawn in details bearing in mind the following features; form, colour and texture. These features on the objects were altered, varied and manipulated through various stages to reflect the theme for the student's collection as in (Fig. 3).The final stage was then given the necessary, colour, texture and styling details. (Fig. 4)The garment was then presented in the front and back views to give the students an idea of how the finished garment would look like. Finally, the garments were drawn showing the various parts (technical details). The parts were well labelled to give the designer an idea of the components of the garment. (Fig. 5)
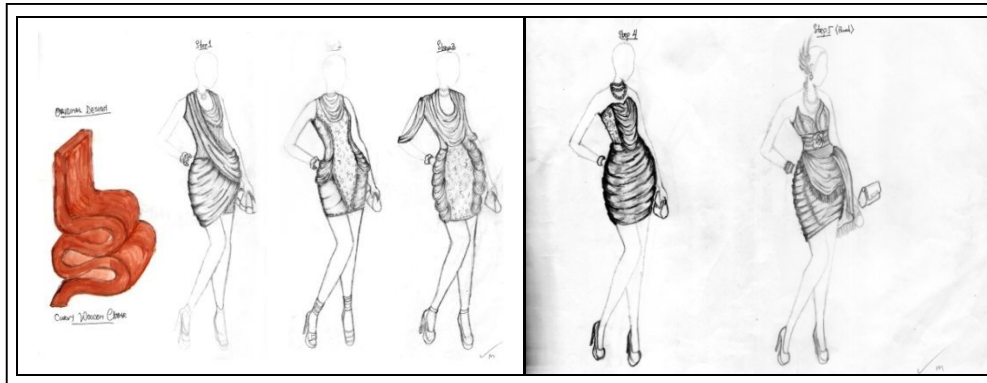

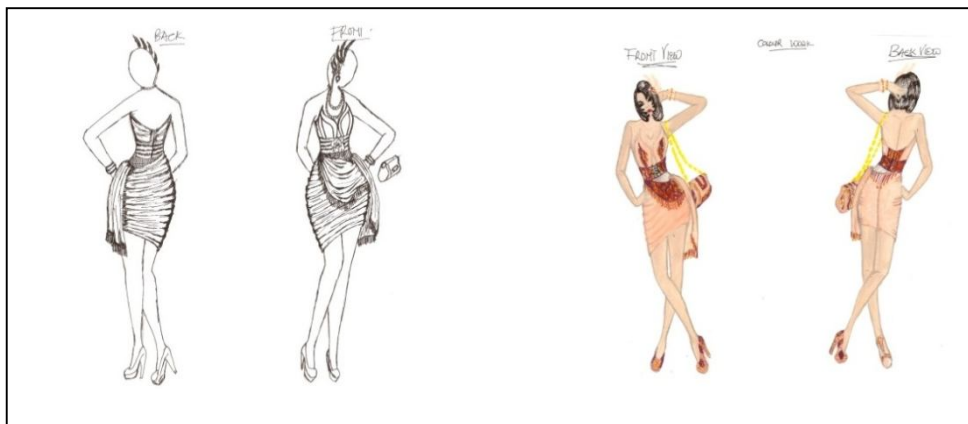*Figure 3: Idea development Process from the theme board*

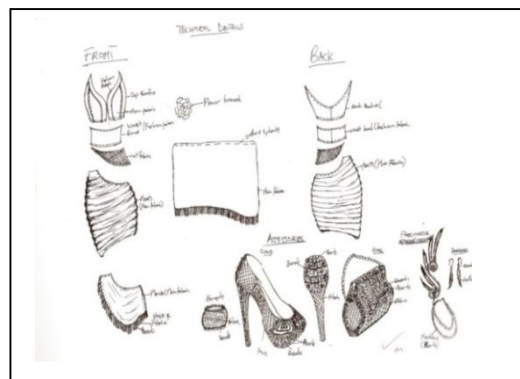*Figure 4: Front and back views of design*

Figure 5: Technical details of garment and accessories

This model seeks to challenge the local fashion designers to expand their scope of collection and harmonise them. The practice will help them overcome the "fear of drawing" which is the underlining factor that prevent fashion designers from sketching to generate ideas.

4.4. Model 3 - Pattern Drafting and Sewing
Pattern drafting is a system of pattern making that depends on measurement taken from a form or model to create foundation, or design patterns. (Joseph-Armstrong, 2010). Students started the process by first taking body measurement from their models and constructing foundation patterns for their collection. The patterns were then adapted to suit their various styles. For good results, toils were produced. Stringer P.C. (1996) describes toils as mock-up of your foundation, which will enable one to correct any imperfection and give confidence in using the pattern drafted. The patterns were transferred onto the selected fabrics and sewed into finished garments. See (Fig 6) for pattern drafting process. (Fig. 7) shows a student sewing a garment.

Figure 6: Drafting the pattern   Figure 7: The art of sewing the garment

A carefully planned drafting on paper assists designers to solve problems with measurement, thereby building confidence in them. It avoids any possible waste of fabric and makes reproduction of a particular design styles easier. The employment of hand stitches enhance creativity and makes room for the production of bulky garments that cannot be stitched with the straight stitching machines. An example of such a garment can be seen on page 17 (Figures 22 & 23).

4.5. Model 4 - Branding
The American Marketing Association characterises brand as 'a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of their competitors' (Bonevac, 2013). For the purpose of this project, the students selected elements of this definition to brand their collections
Students chose design names, which were derived from their real names, such as**"Xenna Couture"** and **"Monera Clothing".** These names were then used as key features for designing their Logos. See Figures 8 & 9 respectively, for example, name of symbol logos designed and produced by the students with the Adobe Photoshop CS software.

Figure 8: Logo A   Figure 9: Logo B

Labels were also produced with the logo as the major feature of the design for the various garment articles. The idea was to give student designers, professional identity. A label is a slip of material which is designed and decorated to affix on a fabric or garment to indicate its nature ownership and direction of use or care. The labels were fixed on the following parts of the garments; collar, pockets, helm lines, sleeves, and side seams to serve as attractive marketing tools for marketing the garments.

Figure 10: Label for Monera Clothing collection

Figure 11: Labels for Xenna Couture collection

To make the final garment presentable for delivery to clients, packages were designed to serve as containment of the finished products. Packaging is a specialized method of designing and constructing containers for products to preserve and identify them for consumers. It is a powerful marketing vehicle rather than a cost Centre, and the right packages can drive millions sales (Young, 2014)

Figure 12: Set of packages

Figure 13: 2 dimensional package to affix on container

The packages make finished works more presentable and easy to handle. These additions to the garment collections give them a global touch and comparative advantage over local competitors. It is an example of how local production can be stepped up to be accepted internationally.

4.6. Model 5 - Exhibition
The finished items were exhibited at the Great Hall of the Kumasi Polytechnic (as an exhibition venue) on the theme **"**New Age of High Fashion**".** Each student displayed four garments, which were fully accessorized. The collections were professionally displayed. Every stand had their either works labeled with names of the items displayed or price tags for individual articles. Comments books were provided to solicit views and opinions from the viewing public about the works. Some students either had their works sold or had orders to supply based on their exhibits. See pictures of exhibition stands in Figures 14-17.

Figure 14: Preparation of stands for exhibition

Figure 15: Overview of exhibition hall

Figure 16: Mounting exhibits on stands for display   *Figure 17: Mounted exhibits*

This model provides the opportunity for the designers to display the array of items they produce. It also helps them to solicit opinions from the public by way of comments in the comment book. The comments and discussion helps to set the agenda for developing trends.

4.7. Model 6 - Photo-Shoot
In the fashion or glamour industry, the process involves a model in a designed garment posing for a photographer at a studio for multiple photos to be taken so that the best one will be chosen for presentation. Sometimes the photographs are also taken in the natural setting to portray the mood of the collection. Shots of selected garments were taken to be used to produce magazines, billboards, etc. to advertise subsequent fashion shows.

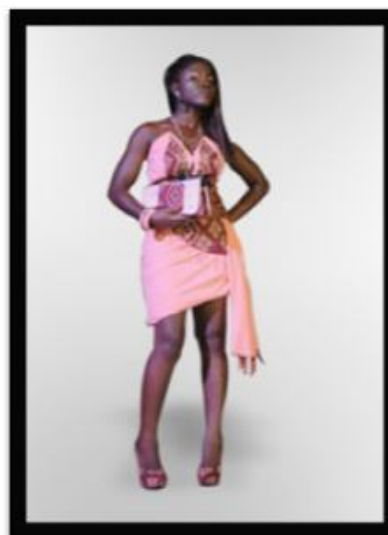

Figure 18: A photo-shoot of garment from "Xenna couture"   *Figure 19: A photo-shoot of garment from "Monera Clothing"*

The shots from the photo shoot would be used to produce catalogues and magazine to advertise the fashion houses and their collections. It could also be used as a medium for advertising various events by the designers as a marketing strategy.

4.8. Model 7 - Fashion Show
The next logical step after the exhibition and photo shoot was the fashion show.Fashion show is described as the lifeblood of the fashion industry. It is the denominator, which motivates designers to be more creative, innovative, and original. In essence, it is the most important and visible event in the fashion industry. (Aghekyan et al., 2012)
The 2014 fashion show provided the opportunity for the audience and prospective clients to see at first hand the array of designed collection produced by the students. The collections were displayed professionally on the runway by models appearing in the order of the students' index numbers. This was interspersed with choreography and music.

Figure 20: Overview of run-way for fashion show

Figure 21: Fashion Show in progress

Figure 22: A male Model displays Collectionon run-way

Figure 23: A female model poses for a photograph on run-way

Aghekyan et al. (2012) considers fashion show as the lifeblood of the fashion industry. In his opinion, it is what motivates designers to be more creative, innovative and original. It is what motivates editors to put in long hours and what motivates celebrities in selecting their next red carpet gown. It is hoped that the local designers will take advantage of this model to advertise their garments.

5. Conclusion
The study had revealed that given the required resources, time couching and tutorials, fashion students and fashion trainees can produce creative and unique garment collections and promote them effectively. The unique procedure and collections produced by students of the Fashion Design and Textiles Studies, Department of Kumasi Polytechnic is a testimony of this assertion. The experience is another manifestation of the importance of the synergy between theory and practice. The theoretical base encourages creativity and originality, while the practice gives the innovative skills and competencies required to perform at required levels.
The feedback from patrons of the Exhibition and Fashion Show through the comment book and responses from interviews granted by students and staff after the exhibition and Fashion Show is indicative of the acceptance of the intervention by local fashion industry players and the fashion patrons who were specially invited.
The findings express the need to sensitize the industry players on the models and possibly develop the results into a training manual, to be rolled out to the local fashion industry in the catchment area of Kumasi Polytechnic.

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