Arts and Design Studies
ISSN 2224-6061 (Paper) ISSN 2225-059X (Online)
Vol.53, 2017

Some Underlying Reasons Acconnting for Fashion Graduates of the Polytechnics not Operating iu the Fashion Industry

Mawutor Wovenu
Dept of Fashion Design & Textiles, Ho Polytechnic.

Abstract
Growing intricacy in all aspects of work, and community life tied with continual calls for educational reform over the past few decades present various challenges to professionals in occupational and technical education. The call for review of outmoded curricula and to develop innovative programmes to meet the challenges of work trends is apparently becoming a global occurrence. The global context in which young people reside plays an ever more important part in the economic growth of a nation, keeping in mind that the education system should cater for the manpower requirement for the economic development of the country. The paper looks at the underlying reasons why young graduates from the Ghanaian polytechnics were drifting away from the very industry for which they were trained. Graduates of 5 polytechnics were snowballed for the study. It was discovered that a large number of them were operating outside their core industry for which they were trained. Low competencies were cited as accounting for the drift. Reforms to enhance the quality of technical education at the polytechnics to enable them become dynamic, demand-driven, quality-conscious, and competitive at both national and global levels were recommended.

Introduction
Mounting intricacy in all aspects of work, and community life tied with continual calls for educational reform over the past few decades present various challenges to professionals in occupational and technical education. The call for review of outmoded curriculum and to develop innovative programmes to meet the challenges of work trends is apparently a never-ending occurrence. But, what drives the changes and modification made to occupational and technical programmes? What then is the vital reason of occupational and technical programmes in an emerging global economy looking for highly trained or highly educated worker? Is occupational and technical education, equipping the youth for particular types of work? Where is occupational and technical education heading in the predictable future?

The world is rapidly getting globalized and a change effected in one part of the world has a noticeable impact elsewhere, regardless of language, religious, cultural, ethnic, or geographical differences. Local knowledge and the integration of young people into local contexts are still of critical significance in a globalizing world. The global context in which young people reside plays an ever more important part in the economic growth of a nation. We need to push forward innovative educational paradigms at the global level because the fortunes of the youth are tied to the processes of the change. Global economic, political, technological and cultural development are presently making old educational paradigms inadequate. Building on these arguments and analyses, globalization places specific responsibilities on educational systems. The way out is to teach young people problem-solving and communication skills outside the individual's cultural context (Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007).

According to Berryman et al in Wovenu (2007), the skill requirements of a globalized economy call for a policy to educate students to develop the competencies needed for industrial jobs. Their report advocated a suitable model of instruction where work-based problems determine learning situations that integrate academic concepts with practical vocational learning activities. Workplaces in a globalized economy according to Filipezak in Wovenu (2007) need broader and more creative skills than ever before. Industrial organizations have come to recognize that they must get better trained workers if they are to survive globalization. Based on this, skill providers are stepping up their training and requesting higher entry level skills for all jobs (Hamilton, Kolberg, Smith, Bottoms, all in Wovenu, 2007).

In Ghana as well as many other African countries, generally, garments are made for individual customers. The measurements of the customer are taken and the design chosen by the customer is tailored to fit. Fashion in Ghana unlike the developed world according to Adamtey (2004) is premised on the traditional "Kaba and Slit" designs. *Kaba* and *Slit* garments are usually made with locally manufactured African prints. Depending upon what is in vogue, some of the styles are intricate and very elaborate. Adamtey explained that the procedural approach to designing these garments appear simple on the surface but detailed and complex in practice. Few paper works are employed in rare situations. Generally, complex geometric replications and folding techniques are used. The archetype of the model design blinks from the memory of the designer to guide precision of cut during patterning (Adamtey, 2004). Normally, the delicate part of this exercise is the pattern-making, and the method used is termed "free-hand" cutting. It is usually done by the experienced person (the designer). The cutter cuts safe, that is, he/she cuts away from the pattern lines, and uses the subtractive method

to arrive at the fitting shape (Adamtey, 2004). This is the case because, unlike the paper pattern approach where you can keep the patterns and use afterwards, here, there is nothing to keep. What to keep is the model design and its rudimentary construction. That means that every design and its rudimentary process must be memorized in order to muster confidence to take up contracts and be sewing for customers (Adamtey, 2004).

Simple equipment such as hand sewing machines, the treadle, and in some cases electric sewing machines are used. In most cases, the hand sewing machine is used. Buttons, buttonholes, and hemming are entirely meticulously finished by hand. The buttonhole must be synonymous with that of the automatic sewing machine to conform to quality. And this requires diligence and consistency (Adamtey, 2004).

The basic skills are acquired after 2 to 3 years through apprenticeship, and the state of *origination* attained years later in practice (Adamtey, 2004). There is nothing like standard body measurements in this case. African figure proportion defies western anthropometry. One figure could run through three different size categories—the bust of the figure could be size 14; the waist, size 12; and the hip, size 20 respectively. And this is typical African figure proportion. It requires skill to be able to design and sew for such figure types (Adamtey, 2004).

The fashion industry has found itself on the threshold of globalization within the last ten years. Global businesses have studied the patterns of global consumption, and have expanded accordingly. Luxury global retailers such as Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Michael Kors have expanded reaching Asian consumers. The target market for these luxury brands is now Asia because of their quick economic development. For our global businesses to chalk up success across the globe, cultural branding strategy must be adopted for their target markets (Temporal, 2000). As the West is struggling to revitalize fragile economies, Milan, Paris, and New York are no more the leading fashion centers of global lavish spending since these brands have taken a cue on economic situations of several countries. As the economic situation of the west has gone down, luxury fashion business dealers have moved eastwards to Asia where the economy is pacing speedily (Jones & Hayes, 2002). While the US is struggling with very high unemployment situations, the luxury industry which flourished there previously is now going through some revolutions (Mathew, 2003).

According to Berryman et al in Wovenu (2007), the skill requirements of a globalized economy call for a policy to educate students to develop the competencies needed for industrial jobs. Their report advocated a suitable model of instruction where work-based problems determine learning situations that integrate academic concepts with practical vocational learning activities. Workplaces in a globalized economy according to Filipezak in Wovenu (2007) need broader and more creative skills than ever before. Industrial organizations have come to recognize that they must get better trained workers if they are to survive globalization. Based on this, skill providers are stepping up their training and requesting higher entry level skills for all jobs (Hamilton, Kolberg, Smith, Bottoms, all in Wovenu, 2007).

In a study funded by The American Vocational Association (1995) to identify significant trends and issues of national importance for workforce preparation and determine their implications for vocational teacher preparation, a recommendation was made which underscored the fact that the development of a well-prepared workforce is an issue of critical concern for the nation today. Krieg et al in Wovenu (2007) emphasized the need for students to acquire a new set of skills to survive economically, politically, and socially. Nonetheless, the outcomes of these studies are accepted as direct reflections of the skills progressive employers seek in their employees. Carnevale et al in Wovenu (2007) maintain that high school graduates should enter the workplace with the academic and vocational skills that support employment and sustain their longevity as productive members in today's complex work environment. Cheek in Wovenu (2007) asserts that vocational and technical education is having difficulty keeping abreast with technological advancement. Consequently, he contends, employers are having rough time transferring new technologies into the work place, since their workforce lacks the skills and knowledge on which to anchor new learning experiences.

Reforms, in most European countries such as Spain, the UK, Germany, and France, had been made to adapt vocational training to the increasing needs of the job market and the employment system. Changes concerning the structure of the labour market, technological innovations and improved methods of organizing work have required new knowledge and the development of competencies to meet the challenges of globalization. Not only these but also, contingent upon the demand for new professional positions and the higher qualifications, vocational education and training systems obviously have had to be reviewed in order to completely provide answers to current requirements in the wake of up-and-coming global developments (Tippelt, 2003).

Bruening and Scanlon (2001) found, in a survey verifying the most frequently utilized methods for teaching students that constructing meaningful tasks for instruction based on real-world problems emerged as having the best effect size. They advocated for the need to introduce more practical and innovative competency-based teaching methods for vocational and technical subjects.

According to Goel (2008), skills and knowledge are the engines of economic growth and social development of any country. Countries with higher and better levels of skills and knowledge react more

promptly and effectively to challenges and opportunities of globalization. Goel indicates that India is in transition to a knowledge based economy and its competitive advantage will be determined by the abilities of its people to generate, share and use information more effectively. The transition expects India to train for the information trade people who will be more analytical, flexible, adaptable and practical in the multi-skills. In the current knowledge economy the set of skills will include managerial, operational, professional, behavioural, inter-functional and inter-personal skills. Goel (2008), discussed the main problems of Polytechnic education in India as follows:

Over the years, the diploma programmes have deteriorated losing the skill components, which has resulted in their being just a diluted version of degree education. The organizations employing them have to train them all over again in basic skills. Major problems being faced by the polytechnic education system are: -

1. Non - availability of courses in new and emerging areas.
2. Inadequate infrastructure facilities and obsolete equipment.
3. System unable to attract quality teachers
4. Inadequate financial resources
5. Inadequate or non-existence of state policies for training and retraining of faculty and staff
6. Lack of flexibility and autonomy to the institutions
7. Inadequate industry institute participation
8. Lack of Research and Development in technician education
9. Antiquated Curricula.

To mitigate these challenges, India created flexible educational and training systems to provide the foundation necessary for learning competencies as means of accomplishing lifelong learning (Short, 2008). In addition, Government of India implemented a Technical Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) with the assistance from the World Bank to improve the quality of education and enhance the capabilities of the technical institutions to become dynamic, demand-driven, quality conscious and competitive at the national and global levels. The proposed reforms include faculty development, examination reforms, regular curriculum revision, focus on research and giving autonomy with accountability.

Findings:

Table 1: Categories of Respondents

Institution	Frequency	Percent
Accra Polytechnic	20	20.0
Cape Coast Polytechnic	20	20.0
Ho Polytechnic	20	20.0
Kumasi Polytechnic	20	20.0
Takoradi Polytechnic	20	20.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 1 indicates the sex distribution of the respondents involved in the study. There were 100 graduate respondents of which majority (75%) were females. There were 5 heads of department, one from each polytechnic.

Table 2: Job activities of the Graduates

Operations	Frequency	Percent
Designing/Production industry	37	37.0
Lecturing (fashion)	3	3.0
Sales (unrelated to fashion)	26	26.0
Teaching (basic level)	29	29.0
Supervisor (clothing firm)	5	5.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 2 indicates the job activities in which the graduate respondents were involved in. Majority (37%) of the graduate respondents surveyed were into apparel production. Twenty seven (27%) percent claimed they were teaching vocational subjects at the basic and vocational schools, whereas 3% were lecturing fashion at the polytechnic level.

Table 3: Major Skills Training Areas in the Polytechnics

Skill Areas	Gx	SD
Pattern, Cutting, Millinery & Garment	2.94	0.472
Fashion Marketing	1.62	0.420
Equipment & Machining	1.45	0.388
Design Application Software	1.16	0.475
Beauty Culture	1.40	0.659
Mean of means	1.71	

A mean score from 4 to 5 indicates a mastery level necessary for success in the globalized fashion industries. Since the overall skill level of the graduates from the various polytechnics, that is, mean of means (1.71) is less than 4 or 5, it can be seen that the competency level of polytechnic graduates is abysmal and, therefore, falls below expectations in the globalized industries.

Table 4: Reasons for graduates' 'offshore' operations

Reasons	Freq.	%
Start-up phobia	15	15.0
Lack of start-up capital	14	14.0
To generate venture start-up capital	14	14.0
Vocational skill inadequacies	13	13.0
Needed extra training to launch venture	13	13.0
More flexibility abounds offshore	10	10.0
Quick-fixes abounds offshore	7	7.0
Lucrativity of offshore operations	6	6.0
More social exposure offshore	6	6.0
Lacking the vocation for the fashion job	1	1.0
Have no difference to create in the field	1	1.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 4 presents the reasons for functioning 'offshore'. Majority claimed (15% and 14%) claimed that startup phobia, and venture startup capital were the reasons for their offshore operations. Others (13%) claimed skill deficiencies pushed them offshore and that they needed extra training before opening their industry.

Discussion

In a study conducted by Ukaegbu in Wovenu (2007) a number of engineers employed in various sectors of the Nigerian economy appeared under-utilized, and graduates from the polytechnics were not seen working in the apparel industries. Findings from this survey have also revealed that 46% of the graduates were seen working outside the training received at the polytechnics. Reasons offered by the graduates include startup phobia (15%) due to vocational skills inadequacies (13%), and that they needed extra training before starting up (refer table 4.10). Polytechnic education is meant for training students to improve their work potential and to be self-reliant (Barlow in Wovenu, 2007).

The grand mean of design application skills mastery level of the graduate respondents is 1.16, a score far less than 4 to 5 needed to function successfully in the globalized fashion industry. These findings confirms Longe's in Wovenu (2007) observation that the objective of higher school training to produce graduates manpower to maintain industries is being compromised.

The effect of this is reflected in a good number of graduates (46%) engaged in operations outside their core training they received at the polytechnics out of this number, 13% claimed they were forced offshore due to vocational skills inadequacies, whereas another 13% claimed they needed extra training to build the confidence for the startup. This is confirmed in Kotrlik et al (2000) who also reported similar vocational inadequacies in general and software specific knowledge and skill.

The global beauty industry would look for nothing but skilled labour. The skill level of the graduates is rather rated at 1.40 (grand mean), indicating that the graduates are not ready for the challenge at the global level yet. In the apparel industry, modern equipment feature prominently and anyone seeking for engagement there must well conversant with the equipment being used. But findings have revealed the competency level of the graduates at 1.45 grand mean score, far below the desired range of 4 to 5. A large number of the graduates (95%) have never used the hemming machine before. Seventy-four percent have never used the industrial buttonholing machine before, and 96% of the graduates have never operated the industrial embroidery machine before, and have never used the industrial fusing machine before. All of them (100%) claimed that they have never used any industrial cutting machine or industrial vacuum irons before. The general average performance of the graduates in the five broad skills areas in the curriculum of the polytechnics is 1.71 (mean of means) which is *weak* and not

strong enough for the global fashion industry.

The survey has revealed that the overall performance of the graduates in pattern, cutting, millinery and garment is just about average (i.e., grand mean score of 2.94). Occupational preparation is becoming increasingly necessary as a driving force for learners as they go through the training programmes in schools. As a result of this, practical skill proficiency as "license" for job entry should be the prime principle guiding instruction in the polytechnics (Allen in Wovenu, 2007). The reasons being offered by the graduates to justify their offshore operations go to illustrate their low competency levels at the end of their programmes of study in the polytechnics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Very large number of graduates (83%) advanced unacceptable reasons for not working in the clothing industry for which they were trained. They were simply not skillful enough to function there. Inadequate materials and equipment for training also contributed to the low competencies of the graduates.

It was therefore recommended that:

1. Students should be trained with the state-of-the-art production equipment to render them competitive in the globalized market.
2. Globalization trends should inform inputs in the training curricula of the polytechnics.
3. Competency-based approach to training must be emphasized in the curricula of the polytechnics.
4. And there should be a strong relationship between the polytechnics and industry to close the situational gaps between them.
5. There should be reforms to enhance the capabilities of the polytechnics to become dynamic, demand-driven, quality conscious and competitive at the national and global levels.

References

Adamtey, S. (2004). *Evaluation of vocational training in clothing with special reference to Ghana.* Unpublished master's thesis submitted to the School of Art and Design. Nottingham Trent University.

American Vocational Association, (1995). Retrieved from http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JVTE

Bruening, T.H., & Scanlon, D.C. (2001). *The status of career and technical education teacher preparation programmes*. National Research Centre for CTE, St Paul, MN.

Goel, V.P. (2008). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system in India for sustainable development. Retrieve from http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/up/India_Country_Paper.pdf.

Jones, R.M., & Hayes, S. (2002). The economic demands of clothing consumption in the UK 1987 - 2000. *Journal of fashion marketing and management 6(4)*: 326 – 339.

Kotrlik, J. W., Redmann, D. H., Harrison, B. C., and Handley, C. S. (2000). Information technology related professional development needs of Louisiana Agricscience teachers, *Journal of Agricultural Education, 41*(1), 18-29.

Mathew, M.D. (2003). The relationship between crime and unemployment. *The pack place Economist 1(11)*.USA. Illinois Wesleyan University

Short, P. (2008). Technical and Vocational Education and Training in India. South Asia**.**

Suárez-Orozco M., and Sattin, C. (2007). Introduction: Learning in the Global Era: In Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, (Ed), International Perspectives on Globalization and Education. Pp. 1-43. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Temporal, P. (2000). *Branding in Asia*. Singapore. John Wiley & Sons.

Tippelt, R. (2003). *Competency-based training: Training the trainers*. Retrieved from http://www3.giz.de/imperia/md/content/bereich4-intranet/abteilung4-01/1_competency_based_training.pdf

Wovenu, M. (2007). *Fashion education at Ho Polytechnic as a factor for employment inthe fashion industry*. Unpublished master's dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.