

Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Fashion Design Programme of Accra Polytechnic from 1995 to 2010

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Abstract

The competence of an employee in any dynamic workforce is the ability to efficiently perform industry-related tasks, function professionally in a range of roles and situations and to have the capacity for continuous learning, development and change. The researchers attempted to assess the competence/skills acquired by students in fashion designing in relation to the performance expectations of the fashion industry. It was established that, the industry needs students who are practically inclined and as such students needed more practical lessons that is, theory and practice should go hand in hand to contribute to the effectiveness of the Fashion Design programme. Again, freehand cutting should be incorporated in the curriculum to equip students for specific skills on the job. It was also revealed that competences/skills do not come by easily unless it is taught or experienced personally. In the light of this, the study recommended that:

- Lecturers should link practice with theory and provide sufficient Industrial Attachment.
- Students must learn freehand cutting in addition to Flat Patternmaking.
- Teaching assistants with practical skills should assist students with their practical work.

Keywords: Competence, Freehand cutting, Flat pattern making.

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1. Introduction

Technological and scientific development in the field of Fashion has gathered momentum in Africa. In line with government policy to drive innovation and technology for accelerated development in Ghana, Accra Polytechnic aims to train both young people and older workers returning to school for continuous professional development in the areas of Applied Sciences and Arts. It has therefore taken this challenge in providing a conducive learning, teaching and research environment in the field of Fashion Design.

Countries all over the world are redefining the policies that govern tertiary education to ensure that all citizens get equal access to tertiary education. Right from independence Ghana has identified and prioritized technical vocational education and training (TVET) as the sector for providing its middle level manpower base for accelerated development (MOESS, 2007).

The purpose of most polytechnic reforms is to provide people with a high-level education by creating a more practically and professionally oriented higher education system to exist side by side the university degrees. Since 1992, when Government directed Polytechnics in Ghana to run tertiary programmes, significant gains have been made in the output of the Polytechnic graduates. The Polytechnics provide the bulk of people with technical education that is relevant, up-to-date in technology, and forward looking in approach. As such polytechnic graduates play a significant role in the development of the nation. The Polytechnics in Ghana were first established as technical institutes that offered craft courses. In 1960, following the industrial development policy and rapid technological progress in a broad range of areas, technical education became a necessity for the country. Since the technical institutions (polytechnics) were offering second-cycle craft courses while the universities were offering higher tertiary courses, there was a gap in the manpower supply needs of the country (Nsiah-Gyabaah, 2005).

In 1987, the Government of Ghana constituted a University Rationalisation Committee (URC) to develop proposals for reforming the management, academic structure and funding of tertiary education in Ghana. Following the submission of the URC's report, the government issued a white paper in 1991 which gave prominence to polytechnic education and in 1993, following the promulgation of the Polytechnic Law, 1992

(PNDCL 321), the Polytechnics were upgraded to tertiary status. In 1994 the polytechnics commenced the running of Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes (GOG, 2004). The White Paper specifically stated that the Polytechnics have a distinct and important role to play in middle-level manpower development and that programmes and courses were to be offered without departing from syllabi dedicated to practical training. Such programmes will complete the cycle of technical education and provide a capacity for higher-level technician training and practical research (Ministry of Education, 1993).

The Polytechnic Law assigned aims and objectives which the Polytechnics are to achieve as follows:

1. Provide tertiary education through full time courses in the fields of manufacturing, commerce, science, technology, applied social science, applied arts and such other areas as may be determined by the authority.
2. Encourage study in technical subjects at the tertiary level.
3. Provide opportunity for development, research and publication of research findings.

The Polytechnic Law also gave legal backing to desirable changes in polytechnic administration, course structure, grading, certification and staffing. The Polytechnics in Ghana now have their own governing boards or councils and the right to design their own curricula, plan their management and development activities. Accra Polytechnic thus attained a tertiary status according to the Polytechnic Law, 1992 (PNDCL321) with the mandate to award degrees by the 2007 Polytechnic Law Review.

The vision of Accra Polytechnic is to become a universally acknowledged centre of excellence for Teaching and Research of Applied Science, Arts and Technology and to become a distinguished partner in the provision of Technical, Vocational and Professional Skills towards the development of manpower.

The mission of Accra Polytechnic is to produce skilled career focused tertiary and middle-level manpower in the areas of manufacturing, commerce, science, technology, applied science and arts.

1.1 The Department of Fashion Design and Textiles

The principal goal of the Fashion programme is to prepare students for meaningful employment in the fashion industry and to facilitate the realisation of the country's goal of self-reliance. The programme is also to provide an integrated academic and liberal study, develop appreciable in-depth knowledge in fashion design and technology, adequate practical and entrepreneurial skills for the local and international markets.

In recent years, significant reforms have been made in the field of vocational and training systems globally with the view of adapting vocational training to the needs of the labour market and employment system and the Department of Fashion Design and Textiles is not an exception. Changes affecting the structure of the market, technological innovations and new ways of organizing work have required new knowledge and the introduction of employment competencies that hitherto rarely formed part of the vocational training system. The increased effort in the development and application of skill standards based on Competency-Based Curricula is one method being proposed as having a strong potential.

1.2 The Concept of Competency-Based Training (CBT)

Across the literature of countries that have introduced CBT into their Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the growing concern and dissatisfaction over the relevance of the content of formal educational programmes to the workplace environment. There is a commonly expressed belief that institution-based courses too often emphasize theoretical, 'chalk and talk' or 'book' knowledge at the expense of the ability to apply knowledge to perform practical tasks and fulfill workplace roles.

Since the development of Competency-Based Training (CBT) in 1960, a number of definitions of CBT have been debated in a move to establish stronger link between the needs of the industry and their education and training. The term 'competency' has no widely accepted single definition (Debling & Hallmark, 1990). The meaning of competency shifts according to the context of its use and the requirement of the user. It is not clear whether; a competence is a personal attribute, an act, or an outcome of behavior. For some authors, CBT is a system, while for others; it can alternatively be an approach to training, a form of assessment, a model of curriculum, or even the use and delivery of training using specially designed training packages (State Training Board, 1991).

One popular definition of CBT by the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI) is that, it is a form of training that places primary emphasis on what an individual can actually do in a workplace as a result of training (outcome), and as such, represents a shift away from an emphasis on the process involved in the training (input). It is concerned with training to industry specific standards rather than with an individual's achievement relative to others in a group (Australian Vocational Education & Training System, July, 1991). Mulcahy and James (2000) also perceive CBT as a training model in that, it gives priority to outcomes and define outcomes as standards and specifications. They argue that training commonly involves bringing someone to a desired state or standard. This is confirmed by Field (2000) when he indicated that training is generally expected to relate to specific needs. The assumption is that as workplace requirements change, a gap will show up between enterprise needs and available skills. Training is the mechanism by which employees receive the skills they need to catch up.

Evidently, most authors, practitioners and government agencies do not appear to be working from the same frame of reference in relation to the term 'competencies' and the derivatives such as competent, competence and competency (Gonczi, 1996 & Bowden & Masters, 1993). Interestingly, however, the plurality of definitional approaches and the use of competency approaches in educational and the labour organization underscore the importance of the concept and its implications for workplace learning. Despite the variety of definitions and the confusion over the nature of the concept and its application, there is one factor that unites the literature, and that is the essence of defining competent performance or competencies. Across the literature, the purpose is to increase the level of skills and flexibility and indeed, to improve human performance at the workplace.

Moreover, even though the definition of CBT is contested, and its practice varies from provider to provider, and from teacher to teacher, (Lowrie, 1999), there are enough common elements to enable CBT to be studied as a curriculum innovation in the teaching/learning process. The key elements common to all definitions of CBT are:

- (a) Focus of training is on the outcome of the teaching.
- (b) Outcome is measured against specific standards, not against other students.
- (c) The standards relate to industry.

In summary, it can be deduced from the foregoing discussions that competencies are the job behaviours and attributes individuals need to demonstrate in order to perform a specific task in a job or a given context. These job behaviours ought to be observable, measurable, and relevant to the specific job context as proof of the existence of skills and knowledge. It also means that, the attributes of a competent workforce goes beyond that of being trained and skilled in a specific job-task. The competent employee must also possess job-related traits such as the capacity to adapt, innovate, create, be proactive, collaborate, communicate, be a team-player and resourceful in a business or commercial environment. The indicators of competence of an employee in any dynamic workforce, therefore, is the ability to efficiently perform industry-related tasks, function professionally in a range of roles and situations and possess the capacity for continuous learning, development and change.

1.3 Statement of the problem

It is expected that, graduates will become skilled or/and knowledgeable and sell their knowledge and skills for income in the area of training and/or education. For some time now, it has been observed that many of the Fashion graduates are unable to start businesses, gain jobs or work effectively in the Fashion Industry. Again for some reasons, some of the students after acquiring the Higher National Diploma in Fashion Design and Textiles unfortunately change their career to something entirely different from what they studied. These and other complaints have necessitated an investigation into the nature of the programme, and recommend ways of making the programme more effective.

1.4 Objectives

Specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Assess the competences/skills acquired by students in fashion designing vis-a-vis the performance expectations of the fashion industry.
2. Examine the mode of training for the HND Fashion Design programme.
3. Discuss the factors that negatively impact the HND Fashion Design programme and recommend strategies that will help to minimize the problems or alleviate them altogether for increased effectiveness.

1.5 Research Question

Will insufficient acquisition of skills/knowledge in Fashion Design lead to a change in career path after graduation or a rejection of the graduates?

1.6 Significance of the study

It is hoped that this study when published will be beneficial to many people, notably among them are:

- Academia: Lecturers and students could use it as reference material during teaching and learning and again the information could be used in the revision of the Fashion Design programme.
- Policy makers: The study will unearth important information that will be beneficial in Policy formulation and implementation in the area of Fashion Education.
- Other stakeholders: Improvement in the quality of the graduates will position the Fashion industry well to meet both local and international needs towards national development.

2. Methodology

The population was five hundred and thirty four and comprised all students of the Department of fashion design of Accra Polytechnic from 1995 to 2010. The sample size was made up of 140 respondents comprised 33 males, 107 females and 10 garment producers from the Fashion industry. The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling specifically, snowball sampling where the probability of inclusion in the sample was unknown. Ten people were used to pre-test the questionnaire for clarity and non-ambiguity. The data were collected using questionnaire, observations and telephone interviews. In all 47 questions were administered to

eachrespondent andin all three months was spent in collecting data for this study.

3. Results and Discussions

The results were presented using frequency/percentage distributions and histograms and were discussed in line with the skills acquired by students as well as performance expectations of the fashion industry.

Table 1: Entry Qualification

Entry Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Advanced Fashion	32	22.86
Senior Secondary	87	62.14
'A'Level	7	5.00
Teacher	14	10.00
Matured	0	0.00
Total	140	100

Table 1 indicates that, 22.86% of the respondents were Advanced Fashion students, 62.14% of the respondents were from Senior High School, 5% were 'A' Level students, and 10% were Teachers. This shows that with the exception of those with background in Advance Fashion, and a few in the other categories, most of the respondents had little or no fashion background but had interest in fashion and expected to acquire relevant skills for the world of work.

Table2: Current Employment

Current employment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Operating a small scale sewing shop	15	10.71
Seeking employment	9	6.43
Teaching clothing/fashion in SSS/JHS/Vocational school	30	21.43
Teaching courses/subjects other than fashion	42	30.00
Clothing production in teams/clusters	5	3.57
Working with a clothing firm	18	12.86
Engaged in a job not related to fashion	21	15.00
Total	140	100.00

Table 2 indicates that, 30% of the respondents teach courses or subjects other than fashion, 21.43% teach clothing/fashion related subjects, 15% engaged in jobs not related to fashion, whereas, 12.86% work with clothing firms. Again, 10.71% operate a small scale sewing shop, 6% are still looking for employment, whilst 3.57% operate clothing production in teams/clusters. Apart from the respondents who have not yet found jobs, the table shows that 45% of the respondents are doing jobs that are not related to Fashion possibly because they lacked the relevant practical skills and therefore failed to get fashion related jobs. This finding supports Field (2000) when he indicated that training is generally expected to relate to specific needs so that the graduate gets the right job or becomes effective on the job.

Table 3: Performance of skill

Performance	Very high	High	Quite high	Low	Very low	Total
Threading industrial over lock machines	23(17%)	14(10%)	19(13%)	70(50%)	14(10%)	140
Operating industrial sewing machines	42(30%)	23(17%)	23(17%)	42(30%)	9(7%)	140
Freehand cutting	14(10%)	9(7%)	24(10%)	51(37%)	42(30%)	140
Making buttonholes manually	28(20%)	65(47%)	14(10%)	28(20%)	5(3%)	140
Making buttonholes neatly with machine	19(13%)	33(23%)	28(20%)	51(37%)	9(7%)	140
Sewing classic garments without supervision	33(23%)	42(30%)	23(17%)	37(27%)	5(3%)	140

Table 3 indicates that, 17% of the respondents rated themselves very high, 10% as high, 13% as quite high, 50% as low, and 10% as very low in threading industrial over lock machines, whilst, 30% of the respondents rated themselves as low in operating that same machine. With the use of the manual buttonhole machine, 20% rated themselves very high and an equal number as low in performing the same task indicating that those who were

competent might have acquired the skill from either Advanced Fashion or during industrial attachment. Nineteen (19) of the respondents representing 13% said they could use the buttonhole machine confidently but 51 of the respondents representing 37% said they were not taught how to use the buttonhole machine when they were students. Thirty-three (33) of the respondents representing 23% said they could confidently make classic garments without supervision, whilst 37 of the respondents representing 27% needed guidance to complete a garment. Fourteen (14) of the respondents representing 10% could cut using the freehand method.

Concerning the performance of certain industry-related skills, in Table 3, the percentage of respondents that indicated 'very high' averaged 20.6%, an average of 25.4% indicated 'high', 15.4% indicated 'quite high' while for 'low' and 'very low' the average for the two categories was 19.4%. This shows that, about 19.4% of the respondents could not perform to industry expectations and a modification of teaching methods will help improve the situation to make the graduates more effective in the industry. Thirty-seven (37) of the respondents representing 27% on the other hand could not cut using freehand method which was needed most in the Ghanaian garment industry. A lot of the graduates with Advanced Fashion background students had opportunities to do industrial attachment with garment producers and also some of them were introduced to freehand cutting in the vocational schools, therefore, a lot of them did not have problems with freehand cutting.

Table 4: Challenges facing fashion education

Challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Materials needed for practical lessons not provided on time	12(8.6%)	18(12.9%)	64(45.7%)	47(33.6%)	140
Complaints about high cost of practical work	64(45.7%)	70(50.0%)	6(4.3%)	0	140
Outdated /outmoded equipment in the Labs.	18(12.9%)	41(29.3%)	82(58.6%)	0	140
Class sizes too large	18(12.9%)	70(50.0%)	53(37.9%)	0	140
Industrial attachment periods too short	41(29.3%)	99(70.7%)	0	0	140
Training is not directed to industrial practice	6(4.3%)	88(62.9%)	47(33.6%)	0	140
Insufficient sewing machines/tools	58(41.4%)	64(45.7%)	6(4.3%)	12(8.6%)	140
Insufficient reference materials/textbooks	35(25.0%)	99(70.7%)	6(4.3%)	0	140

Table 4 shows that, sixty-four (64) of the respondents representing 45.7% disagree that materials needed for practical lessons were provided on time. Seventy (70) of the respondents representing 50% complained about high cost of practical work. Eighty-two (82) of the respondents representing 58.6% disagree that equipment are outdated in the department whilst 50% agreed that, the class sizes were too large, with 70.7% agreeing that, industrial attachment periods were too short for any meaningful impact. Also, 62.9% agreed that, classroom work was mainly theory and not directed towards industry practice, 45.7% agreed that, there were insufficient sewing machines/tools for students to work with, while 70.7% agreed that, there are insufficient reference materials and textbooks at the library. It is clear that, most of the challenges that were listed militate against the acquisition of practical skills and therefore these should be seriously addressed in order to make the programme very responsive to the needs of industry as well as help the fashion graduates to acquire enough practical skills that would make them start their own businesses and free them from depending on government for employment.

Table 5: Should freehand cutting form part of the training?

	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	135	96.67
No	5	3.33
Total	140	100

Table 5 shows that 96.67% of the respondents indicated that, freehand cutting should form part of their training whilst only 5 of the respondents representing 3.33% said they were alright with pattern drafting. The Ghanaian Garment industry has a large number of people who were not skilled in flat pattern making and therefore used mainly freehand cutting and therefore industry expected the fashion graduates to master the skill of freehand cutting. However, there are many garment producers who wished they possessed skills in flat pattern designing because of its numerous benefits.

Table 6: Rating on the practical courses available in the programme

Rating of courses	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Total
Pattern Technology	79	42	14	5	140
Garment Technology	19	19	9	93	140
Textiles Technology	12	17	42	69	140
Fashion Accessories	23	19	70	28	140
Design and Illustration	37	34	69	0	140

Table 6 indicates that 79 respondents were very good in pattern technology whilst 93 out of the 140 were poor in garment technology. Sixty-nine (69) respondents rated themselves as poor in textile technology, 70 rated themselves as average in fashion accessories and 69 also as average in illustrating styles. The skills needed for being competent in the industry are represented by the courses listed above and therefore graduates who are unable to master the practical aspects of these courses whilst in school became frustrated with industry-related tasks and therefore this sends a clear message to the department to ensure that, more attention is given to these courses. Again, this explains why most of the students changed their career paths to jobs that did not have technical skills as found in fashion.

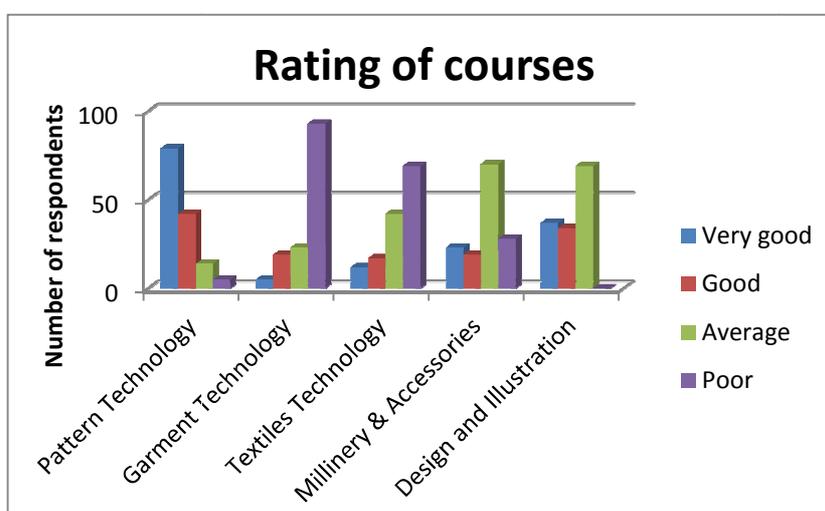


Figure 1 Rating of courses

Table 7: Performance expectation of the Fashion Industry

Performance expectation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Operating industrial overlock machine	0	0	7	3	10
Operating industrial sewing machine	0	1	8	1	10
Using the cutting machine	0	0	10	0	10
Making buttonholes neatly with machine	0	0	9	1	10
Sewing classic garments without supervision	0	1	8	1	10
Using the freehand cutting method	0	0	8	2	10
Sketching ideas clearly	1	7	2	0	10
Creating new styles	0	2	8	0	10

Table 7 indicates that most of the students who went on internship lacked the ability to perform creditably. Seven of the fashion designers representing 70% disagree that the students could operate the over-lock machine while all the 10 said the students could not use the industrial cutting machine. Eight (8) representing 80% of the fashion designers disagree that students could sew classic garments without supervision and also indicated that, students are more conversant with patterns. The designers indicated that they do a lot of custom sewing and therefore they prefer using freehand cutting and added that in the industry freehand cutting is mostly used in making clothes for customers but patterns are used when they had to do mass production for big contracts. Seven (7) representing 70% of the designers agree that some of the students can sketch ideas clearly but majority of the graduates lack the ability to create new styles. These are clear indications that students are failing to meet industry expectations and so industry may either reject them, or the lack of technical skills will prevent them from starting fashion businesses and these may consequently affect employability of the graduates. Strategies need to be put in place to make the programme responsive to the needs of stakeholders for increased effectiveness of Fashion education for accelerated development (MOESS, 2007).

Table 8: Level of satisfaction for the programme

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	9	6.67
Satisfied	14	10.00
Quite satisfied	33	23.33
Not Satisfied	84	60.00
Total	140	100.00

Table 8 shows that 6.67% of the respondents were very satisfied with the programme, 10% were satisfied, 23.33% were quite satisfied and 60% were not satisfied with the fashion design programme. When respondents were asked to indicate whether they had sufficient skills to work in the industry, only 33.57% could work efficiently at the industry, and 66.43% did not have adequate skills for employment at the industry partly because they were not given sufficient practical skills as students. A great deal of the graduates expected more than the programme provided so far as the fashion industry expectations was concerned. Students did not have sufficient skills and so were either unable to meet industry standards to secure jobs, neither could such graduates start businesses also because they lacked certain vital competencies in fashion design. It is believed that a revision in the curriculum will help to bridge the gap between the department and the industry in line with government's aspiration as posited by Nsiah-Gyabaah, (2005).

4. Conclusion

Lack of technical skills by students in Fashion Design is the cause for their change in career path after graduation. Therefore, practice and theory should go hand in hand to contribute to the learner's immediate success in the industry and also equip the graduates with practical skills for self-reliance. The syllabi/curriculum when reviewed will go a long way to make the Fashion Design Programme in Accra Polytechnic effective.

5. Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the under-listed are recommended:

1. Evaluate students' pre-entry competencies/interests before commencement of the training programme to ensure that, the right applicants are admitted and also identify the roles and critical situations students are likely to find themselves after completing their education to enhance policy decisions.
2. Revise the curriculum/syllabi to reflect the changing needs of the industry by linking practice with theory, supervise students' practical work and also fulfill their roles as coaches. Provision of a modern well equipped Production Room will enhance acquisition of practical skills.
3. Freehand cutting should be incorporated in the curriculum to meet the expectations of industry.
4. In view of the large class sizes, teaching assistants/technicians possessing practical skills should be attached to lectures to assist students with their practical work.
5. Period spent in industry for attachment should be extended for optimum realisation of goals and again, students must be sensitized to take their industrial attachment seriously for increased effectiveness. Lecturers also need to spend some time in industry to help bridge the gap between the department and industry.

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