ASSESSMENT OF TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES' CURRICULUM CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION PRACTICES IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability of the fashion industry has become increasingly crucial amidst growing concerns about its use of resources and impact on the environment. Currently, fashion and textile waste dominate landfills, waterways, market centres, and gutters, making it difficult for most Ghanaians to enjoy environmental sanity. This study, therefore, assessed the technical universities' curriculum contributions to sustainable fashion practices in Ghana. This study used a descriptive research design. Interviews were conducted to elicit primary data, while secondary data was acquired from technical universities' fashion design and textile curriculums in Ghana. Fashion lecturers constituted the population. According to the findings, the curriculum comprises only a few academic courses that address sustainability issues; the majority of courses are not sustainability-centred or connected. This highlights the reality that Technical University fashion courses in Ghana contribute relatively little to sustainability issues, reaffirming the view that higher education curricula have not historically been developed to build a sustainable world. It is proposed that higher education stakeholders offer sustainable courses to raise students understanding of sustainability issues. In addition to academic lectures, the curriculum should be revised to incorporate outreach programs that cultivate students' interest in and capacity for addressing sustainability challenges. Each of these activities has the potential to dramatically educate and mobilize students around the concept of sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainability Concept; Fashion; University Curriculum; Sustainability Fashion Practices

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Fashion is a common aesthetic appearance at a particular place and period and in a specific context, mainly in clothing, makeup, footwear, lifestyle, hairstyle, accessories, and body proportions. Custom-made clothing was the order of the day way before the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a significant rise in the latest technologies, such as sewing machines, the development of factory systems for production, and the growth of retail outlets. All the new technologies initiated the start of mass production in standard sizes and were to be sold for fixed prices. Delhaye & Woets (2015) explained that this brought about the birth of the global fashion industry, an outcome of the modern age.

The fashion industry over the last decade has evolved significantly. Although America and Europe saw the development of the fashion industry first, it became an international and highly globalized industry as of the year 2017. Today, Ghanaian fashion has undergone a complete overhaul because of globalization (Amankwah & Howard, 2012). Globalization played a significant role in the growth of the Ghanaian fashion industry. For this reason, a company like Vlisco and Ghanaian fashion designers operate in a globalizing fashion world (Delhaye & Woets, 2015). Due to globalization, commercialization and access to the international world of fashion have become possible.

Unfortunately, like many other developing countries, Ghana is suffering economically due to the inadequate development of its local fashion industry (Tsyewu, 2013). Development that will suit the current fashion era is missing in the industry. Inadequate development in terms of infrastructure, limited policy directions, insufficient human resource development, and many others are gradually collapsing the industry. Inadequate higher education in quality techniques or standards and sustainability may cause non-conformance to standards in the garment industry which have become rampant (Tsyewu, 2013). Delhaye & Woets (2015) Ghana cannot pride itself on a vibrant and robust fashion industry (Amankwah & Howard, 2012). There is more room for massive improvement to recognize a vibrant industry on the globe.

According to Rattan (2011), sustainability includes three (3) traditional dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. Ghana is one African country with a well developed trade in waste fashion products, such as apparel, accessories, lingerie from overseas being brought and worn by local people (James & Kent, 2019), and the leftovers are disposed of later. This has brought a decline in the local textile and fashion industry, raising troubling questions on the industry's sustainability and the environment. However, the second-hand clothing market is purported to provide employment and opportunity for renovation and repairs of used clothing both from overseas and locally made; unfortunately, there is less or limited evidence of higher value-adding activities taking place in the industry regarding this subject. Therefore, sustainability in the Ghanaian industry, especially for small garment producers, requires creativity, skills, and techniques in well-tailored clothes (Dzramedo &

Amissah, 2014). Designers need to be skilful and apply relevant techniques to promote sustainability measures in the industry.

With education as a change agent, a fashion designer can positively acquire knowledge and influence the mainstream business model. Innovative skills must be taught frequently where designers may act as sustainable mediators that might combine economic and environmental interests. Fashion education has not only adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) courses but has delved into opening strategic classes which allow the student to explore through the use of recycling and upcycling materials developing collections from unusual things (Obregón, 2012), education in the broadest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. In its most technical definition, education is the deliberate transmission of society's acquired knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to the next. According to (Jellenz et al., 2020), education enables creative innovations and helps meet the growing needs of nations. Education is the basis for progress and empowerment for every nation. It plays a vital role in understanding and participating in daily activities environmentally in a sustainable way.

Essential characteristics for a fashion curriculum are Designing, textiles, millinery & accessories, fashion merchandising, fashion marketing, production management, fashion illustration and computer skills, pattern technology and Garment technology. However, fashion industry professional higher education has a rich tradition of techniques, philosophies, methodologies, and history, which informs current attitudes towards the value and supply chains, from the initial sourcing and design stage to the retail and marketing (Palomo & Hahn, 2014).

To create a sustainable fashion curriculum, interlocking strategies must be formed in the curriculum, including intentional and local reading books on fashion sustainability, deliberate conversations, thus lecturers engaging in conscious conversations and endeavours that support sustainable action and thought and finally creating opportunities for purposeful projects (Taylor & Pasricha, 2011). Projects include refashioning projects, sustainable product development projects, adaptive clothing design projects and zero waste design projects. The study seeks to assess the Technical Universities' fashion curriculum contributions to sustainable fashion practices in Ghana by presenting strategies that can develop a more sustainable path. The key research objective is to examine Technical Universities' curriculum contribution to sustainable fashion practices in Ghana.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Research designs are beneficial because they guide researchers' methodological choices throughout their investigations and establish the logic by which they draw interpretations after their studies. The descriptive research design was used for the

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study. This research study employed purposive sampling to collect data from fifteen fashion lecturers. Nonetheless, a convenient sampling technique was used to gather the curriculum from five Technical Universities, namely Accra, Kumasi, Sunyani, Takoradi and Tamale Technical Universities. The qualitative data acquired during the interview was examined using content analysis, a research technique that identifies the existence of specific terms or concepts within texts (Elo and Kyngas, 2008).

Additionally, an assessment tool called STAUNCH $^{(RTM),}$ created by Lozano and Peattie (2011), was used to examine the course content of the curricula at the five Technical Universities. STAUNCH stands for Sustainability Tools for Assessing University's Curricula Holistically. One of the STAUNCH $^{(RTM)}$ criteria was adopted. This includes; Assessment of the university's contribution to Sustainable Development (SD) by assessing its course content.

The five Technical Universities fashion curricula were assessed using the course content. For each of the programme's courses, the topics that facilitated the achievement of the aforementioned objectives were identified, enumerated, and expressed as a proportion of the total number of topics covered in the course. This was the method used to determine each course's percentage of sustainability. Additionally, an inventory of courses was conducted to assess whether a course was centred on sustainability or was connected to sustainability. Sustainability-centred courses impart an in-depth understanding of the concepts and principles behind sustainability and connect theory and practice with the various facets of sustainability. Also, the courses are designed to provide students with the necessary skills for handling sustainability-related issues in all of their manifestations and complexity. On the other hand, sustainability-connected courses impart information about a component of sustainability, cover themes connected to sustainability, or provide a general and broad grasp of sustainability challenges (AASHE, 2010).

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section encompasses discussing results and findings on the fashion curriculum contributions to sustainable fashion.

3.1 Result from Fashion Curriculum on Contribution to Sustainable Fashion

Table 1: Curriculum Contribution to Sustainable Fashion (Level 100)

Course	Level	Sustainability centred or connected	Sustainability topics in courses	Total no. of topics to be treated	Sustainability topics to be treated	% Presence of sustainability
Fashion Design I &II	100	Connected	- Recreate or reconstruct old clothes into new clothing items.	13	1	7.69
Textiles Design I & II	100	Connected	-Recreate and compose shapes and symbols for new motifs.	15	1	6.66
Fashion History	100	None	None	3	0	0
Pattern Technology I & II	100	None	None	17	0	0
Garment Technology I & II	100	None	None	14	0	0
Textiles Technology I &II	100	None	None	12	0	0
African Studies	100	Connected	- Historical development of the African continent with emphasis on Ghana. -Role of Africa in the global economy. -Decision making at various levels of leadership in their societies. -Identify how the continent contributes to the global economy.	7	4	57.14
Fashion Illustration I &II	100	None	None	16	0	0
Computer skills I &II	100	None	None	20	0	0
Communication skills	100	None	None	7	0	0

Millinery / Accessories I	100	None	None	4	0	0
Production Management I	100	Connected	-Discuss the principles of Management. -discuss the organization of the Marketing Department. - Discuss the organization of the Finance Department.	10	3	30

Table 2: Curriculum Contribution to Sustainable Fashion (Level 200)

Course	Level	Sustainability centred or connected	Sustainability topics in courses	Total no. of topics to be treated	Sustainability topics to be treated	% Presence of sustainability
Fashion Design III	200	None	None	9	0	0
Textiles Design III	200	None	None	6	0	0
Research	200	None	None	6	0	0
Pattern Technology III	200	None	None	4	0	0
Business Law	200	Connected	- Constitution, Statutes, Common Law, Customary Law. - topics under negligence and the duty of care towards neighbours	3	2	66.66
Garment Technology III	200	None	None	5	0	0
Textiles Technology III	200	None	None	9	0	0
Millinery & Accessories II	200	None	None	2	0	0
Fashion Merchandising &Entrepreneurship	200	Connected	-The concept of fashion merchandising. -Pricing of goods. - Concept of marketing. -Advertising. -Market/customer behaviour.	7	5	71.42
Production Management II		Connected	- Garment costing in the Clothing Industry.	6	1	

Fashion Illustration & Presentation III (Computer Skills)	200	None	None	4	0	
Review study: Preparing specialization and industrial attachment	200	None	None	5	0	
Fashion Merchandising &Entrepreneurship	200	Connected	-The concept of fashion merchandising. -Pricing of goods. -Concept of marketing. -Advertising. -Market/customer behaviour.	7	5	71.42
Production Management II	200	Connected	-Garment costing in the Clothing Industry	6	1	16.66
Fashion Illustration & Presentation III (Computer Skills)	200	None	None	4	0	0
Review study: Preparing specialization and industrial attachment	200	None	None	5	0	0

Table 3: Curriculum Contribution to Sustainable Fashion (Level 300)

Course	**Level**	**Sustainability centred or connected**	**Sustainability topics in courses**	**Total no. of topics to be treated**	**Sustainability topics to be treated**	**% Presence of sustainability**
Pattern Technology IV	300	None	None	3	0	0
Garment Technology IV	300	None	None	3	0	0
Accessories	300	None	None	3	0	0
Collection book & Fashion show	300	None	None	3	0	0
Entrepreneurship I & II	300	Connected	-Generation of business, project planning and preparation. -Significance of market surveys	7	2	28.57
29		**8Co, 0C**		**223**	**19**	**8.52**

Source: Curriculum for HND Fashion Design and Textiles for Polytechnics in Ghana (2010)

Summary of Curriculum Contribution to Sustainable Fashion as Represented in Table 1 above:

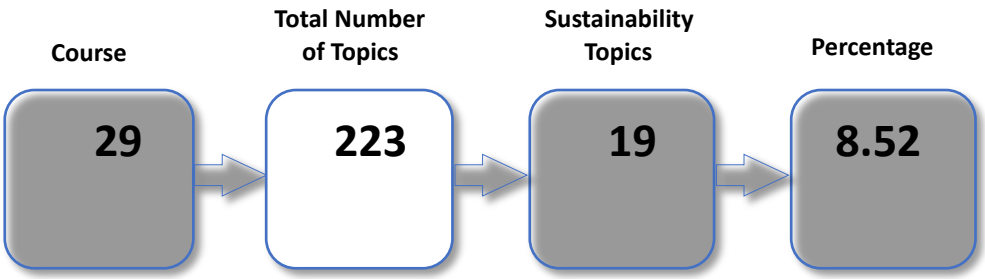


Figure 1. Summary of Curriculum Contribution to Sustainable Fashion **Source:** Curriculum for HND Fashion Design and Textiles for Polytechnics in Ghana (2010).

The tables above show that for the three years of study, students are exposed to 29 courses under which 223 topics are studied within the period, out of which only 19 reflect sustainability issues representing 8.5%. It is revealed that only 8 courses are sustainability connected, and none of the courses is sustainability centred, representing 27.6%.

The absence of sustainability-centred courses in the programme indicates a general lack of awareness of sustainability issues among the curriculum developers and those responsible for the program's oversight. Concerning sustainability-connected courses, 8 of the 29 courses include some topics connected to sustainability. Considering the very low presence of sustainability topics in some of the courses, it would be misleading to use the eight (8) courses that contain issues about sustainability as a proportional representation of sustainability in the curriculum.

For instance, of 13 topics treated in the course "Fashion Design I & II", as shown in Table I, only 1 course was connected to sustainability. The study used the number of topics in which sustainability featured relative to the total number of topics covered by the courses in the curriculum and multiplied by 100 to determine the percentage presence of sustainability in the curriculum. The total number of topics treated by the 29 courses is 223; only 19 of these topics are connected to sustainability. In percentage terms, 8.5 per cent of the topics of the HND Fashion Design and Textile courses contain issues connected to sustainability.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Without a doubt, the fashion industry's inventiveness and dynamism cannot be overstated in the twenty-first century, which is characterized by global challenges in every sphere of life. However, it can be concluded that there is too little awareness of

sustainable fashion practices created in the Technical University fashion curriculum in Ghana. This is obvious in the 29 courses studied over the three years of the HND program, out of which 8 courses are connected, and none is centred on sustainability issues. Again, out of the 29 courses studied, 223 topics are treated, and only 19 of these topics representing 8.52%, are sustainability connected. This is too little representation on this subject in the Technical University Fashion Curriculum, knowing the Sustainable Development GOAL 4, Target 4.7 preach about acquiring knowledge and skill in sustainable education to all learners by 2030. The discussion must start now on this subject.

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, the National Professional and Technical Examination Board must raise awareness and provide training on sustainable issues for HND's fashion curriculum developers and other relevant stakeholders. Also, developers should build sustainability-oriented courses to highlight the importance of sustainability. Additionally, the study recommends that the fashion curriculum give students other learning experiences other than the courses. These may include outreach activities, sustainable projects, cross-campus partnerships and campus-community partnerships focused on environmental responsibility, social equity and economic empowerment.

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