

Promoting Sustainability In Selected African Fashion Design Institutions

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Abstract

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The period 2005-2014 has been identified as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). The Decade highlights education and learning as vehicles through which sustainable agenda could be driven in the universal search for sustainable development. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) gives a clear direction on the multifaceted interdependence between human needs and the ecosystem. Higher Education Institutions educate people who develop and manage future society. Therefore, the concepts of sustainability need to be taken seriously by fashion and textile higher educators, since major environmental and ethical concerns are particularly relevant to the fashion industry. Since, universities provide students with interdisciplinary knowledge, it is important that these institutions become proactively responsive to socio-environmental issues for the sake of the environment and social concerns of workers in factories. Education is essentially supportive to humanity, mostly when making the right and responsible choices. Regrettably, most African higher education institutions with reference to those offering Fashion Design Programmes do not contain sustainable development awareness, which emphasises positive education strategies and action plans. This study used qualitative approach to evaluate fashion design curricula in selected Universities in Africa. The findings show that there are traces of sustainable development concepts integrated into support subjects and not in the core subjects of Fashion Design Programmes. With inclusion of sustainability issues, students can experience the powerful contribution fashion and textile education can make towards creating an eco-fashion world. They can fully engage with the relevant sustainability agenda and begin to find clear paths to new forms of practice.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Sustainability emphasises on the activities that should be ecologically sound, socially just, economically feasible and civilised, and the need to sustain them even by future generations (Newman, 2005:27-31). Sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Declaration from the 1977 United Nations (UN) Conference on Environmental Education stressed the importance of ESD as imparting knowledge and practical skills that could promote positive attitude towards environment. Further, many governments have prioritised the challenge of sustainable development since the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio, Brazil. Since 2004, the United Nations General Assembly has acknowledged that quality education is the key for sustainable future. Besides, a new ten-year international program on sustainable consumption (2002-2011) warrants that new and innovative strategies to address the unsustainable consumption will continue to be a priority to many governments. Additionally, there are many published guidelines by the United Nations to steer decisions (Lozano & Peattie, 2011). The period 2005-2014 was identified as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), while UNESCO continues to provide leadership on international management and support. The Decade highlighted education and learning as vehicles through which sustainable agenda could be voiced in the common pursuit of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2006). World’s higher education institutions (HEIs) could take advantage of the decade to cultivate sustainable behaviour that upholds healthy living (Haigh, 2007). As earlier stated, ESD reconciles the complex interdependence between human needs and the natural environment as it addresses the pillars of sustainable development (Society, Environment, Economy and Culture). According to UNESCO (2004) cited by Venkataraman, (2009:2), ESD “encompasses environmental education but sets it in the broader context of socio-political issues of equity, poverty, democracy and quality of life”. Education is a powerful instrument that helps humanity in making appropriate and more responsible choices (Newman, 2005; UNEP, 2010). Through education, people are informed about the dangers of irresponsible lifestyles and how they can exercise freedom to act accountably. It is through education that people learn how to make informed choices (Su, 2006:453; Venkataraman, 2009).

There are enormous societal challenges in adapting sustainable lifestyles and practices, but education is reported as the best means to make transition happen (Fashion Futures, 2010). The textile and apparel manufacturing industry contributes to environmental degradation and also raises issues of social concerns among the workers in the apparel factory. According to Fashion Futures 2025 (2010:12), the fashion industry is “locked into a cycle of unsustainability using more and more of the earth’s resources and in some cases exploiting cheap labour supplies in return for ever decreasing profit margin”. This, therefore, demands that Fashion Design Programmes should be designed in such a way that it fosters sustainable development awareness and responsibility for the purposes of promoting significance and furthering the welfare of society. It is possible to address the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development, when every fashion designer is armed with ‘environmental literacy’ and when sustainable concepts are embedded in all the core subjects of the programmes. It may be argued that educating undergraduate fashion students, who will be the future fashion designers and managers in the fashion industry, will

accelerate positive changes relevant to industry practices to towards the improvement of environmental performance. Likewise, fashion educators should be role models for sustainable development and also focus on creating learning modules which inculcates understanding, positive attitudes, morals and principles in fashion design students. Students graduating from Fashion Design Programmes will eventually make decisions in the industry where they are employed. It is therefore important that these students are well informed of the socio-environmental implications of the clothing and textile manufacturing. Lozano, R., Lukman, Lozano, F., Huisingh & Lambrechts, 2011:3) stress that Universities have ethical obligation to work in favour of healthy environment.

Most higher education declarations, charters and partnerships until Lüneburg (2001) declaration for sustainable development include the following:

- Focus on environmental degradation, threats to society, and unsustainable consumption;
- Ethical or moral obligation of university leaders and faculties to work towards sustainable societies, including the intergenerational perspective;
- Inclusion of SD throughout the curricula in all disciplines;
- Encouragement of SD research;
- Movement towards more sustainability orientated university operations;
- Collaborations with other universities;
- Collaboration and engagement with stakeholders, such as the public, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) businesses and outreach (Calder & Clugston, 2003 and Wright, 2004 in Lozano, R. *et al.*, 2011:3).

With the various declarations, a growing number of higher education institutions (HEIs) have began engaging in curricula transformation and integrating sustainable development (SD) into their curricula, research, actions, assessment and reporting among others (Fien, 2002; Cortese, 2003; Thomas, 2004; Boks & Diehl, 2006). Furthermore, many universities worldwide have signed agreements to include sustainable topics in curricula of all disciplines (Thomas, 2004). For example, the Talloires Declaration was signed in October 1990 by twenty university rectors, presidents, and vice chancellors from different parts of the world with aim of advocating for sustainable practises in their institutions. Between 1990 and 2007, the number of signatures increased to 356 (ULSF, 2007 in Lozano, R., et al, 2011).

The declaration emphasised that:

- There should be an increase in awareness of environmentally sustainable development in institutions;
- Institutions should create an institutional culture of sustainability;
- Institutions should educate environmentally responsible citizens, and promote environmental literacy for all;
- Institutions should practice institutional ecology and an involvement of all stakeholders; and
- All the above directives should be maintained (ULSF, 1990).

Regardless of the declarations and a number of efforts by some HEIs, incorporating ESD remains a challenge to most universities (Wemmenhove & de Groot, 2001; Boks & Diehl, 2006). Lozano, R., *et al.* (2011:8) asserts that most universities lag behind in implementing ESD. They report that “only 15 out of 14,000 world universities have published sustainable reports” (Ibid, page 2). Despite agreements made in Abuja during the 12th General Conference on Sustainable Development in Africa (AAU, 2009), most African Universities have not yet bought into the concept of ESD being included in all disciplines or curricula (Matten & Moon, 2004; Lozano, R, 2006). Although African governments are proactively encouraging sustainable concepts in education through a number of reports and proposed strategies, regrettably, implementation of such strategies are quite slow and lack enforcement directives. The structures and funding of higher education system in African universities are also limited (Wemmenhove & de Groot, 2001). Most governments in Africa do not reward the adoption of sound environmental practices in institutions unlike in developed countries, where there is at least some commitment from the governments. For example, such dedication is emphasised in the UK’s official sustainable development strategy, which stresses that “sustainability literacy be made a core competency for all professional graduates” (Her Majesty, Government, 2005:39). The London college of Fashion inspires students continually to deliver innovative solutions for the changing world (Fashion Futures 2025, 2010:7). In Canada, the Manitoba province has initiated many activities that prepare students to practise sustainable lifestyles. Some of the activities include, “funding support of education for sustainability, establishing policies that integrate sustainable development concepts into provisional curricula, establishing sustainability indicators and reporting on indicators, developing regulations and policies that work towards greening operations of educational institutions and supporting educators in the field” (McDonald, 2006:1011).

Fashion/Clothing design curricula currently being used in Kenyatta University (Kenya), Auchi Polytechnic (Nigeria) and Tshwane University of Technology (South Africa), have been in existence for many years with minimal annual, yet the changes do not incorporate issues of sustainable development relevant to the profession. Further, sustainable development awareness, which emphasizes constructive education strategies and action plans particularly within the core subjects of the programme are missing. Aspects of education for sustainable development are already taught in developed countries, although as earlier mentioned, there is still a general lack of agreement on what constitutes ESD in most institutions (Su, 2006:453, Lozano, Lukman, Lozano, Huisingh & Lambrechts, 2011). Most Universities do not quite understand the vision of ESD on the conceptual level (UNEP, 2010) and more so within the context of Fashion Design Programmes. On the level of course content, some of the subjects taught in the classrooms are fragmented and are occasionally dependent on fashion design competitions organised by private companies such as South African Cleaner Production Organisation (“No Kak”¹ competitions) and some other companies sponsoring eco-fashion competitions. In Nigeria and Kenya, a subject dedicated to issues of climate change is taught across all the fields offered in the university. Such subject offers general knowledge about climate change, but does not address how the fashion and textile industry contributes to climate change and the social welfare of the workers in the industry. Issues of

¹ No Kak simply means no rubbish in Sesotho language

environment are meagrely and randomly introduced by lecturers during practical subjects, although, most often, those lecturers struggle to impart adequate knowledge required to combine theory, with research and practice. Developing knowledge of sustainable development is important to the Fashion Design Programmes because many students graduating will gain employment in the fashion and clothing industry which is known for socio-environmental concerns. The aim of ESD in the context of Fashion Design Programmes is to ultimately improve the industry performance with regards to environment and social welfare of the workers. For this to occur, it is necessary to incorporate certain “eco-ethical” aspects specific to the profession within the core subjects (textile science, garment, pattern design and creative design) of the Fashion Design Programmes. Furthermore, Nicolaides (2006:422) stresses that since universities are integral parts of ‘global village’, they need to give attention to research interests in the area of sustainability and also contribute to knowledge that can “add value to long term goal of fully sustainable environment”. It is therefore an ethical imperative that this research was undertaken to explore how higher Education institutions especially Fashion institutions, can contribute to the goal of fully sustainable environment as noted by Nicolaide.

The aim of this research was therefore to review the Fashion Design undergraduate programmes in Tshwane Univeristy of Technology (South Africa), Kenyatta University (Kenya) and Auchi Polytechnic (Nigeria), so as to understand the situation of the present curricular in line with the socio-environmental issues in the three countries.

METHODOLOGY

This was a pilot study for a broader research yet to be undertaken regarding situation of ESD in Fashion institutions in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria. The broad research to be undertaken will not only examine the curricula, but will also interview consumers, lecturers, students and role players in government and fashion industry. A thorough literature review was undertaken to understand and identify which aspects of sustainability need to be included in the Fashion Design Programmes, the socio-environmental impact of the fashion industry and how the industry can improve on its performance. This will help determine what level of eco and ethical literacy is required of fashion design consumers, educators and students. Approaches to curriculum design and development for the purposes of determining what is considered good practices with regard to developing eco/ethical will be established. Being a pilot study for an ongoing broader research, this research used qualitative method to obtain adequate data that could inform strategies to be used for a research with a wider scope of socio-environmental issues covering most of the themes of the higher education declarations, charters and partnerships for the attainment of sustainable development.

Fashion design curricula from Tshwane University of Technology, Kenyatta University and Auchi Polytechnic were screened to gain an insight into the present situation regarding socio-environmental issues. Only core subjects (pattern design, garment cutting and making, textile/material science and creative design) of the programme and their study guides/course outlines were screened. Fashion marketing subject offered at Kenyatta University has social aspects of workers in the Fashion industry and therefore was included in the study even though it may not be seen as a

core subject of Fashion Design Programmes. Consents to undertake this study were obtained from Fashion Design Departments of the three institutions mentioned above.

RESULTS

Since the aim of this research was to review the Fashion Design Programmes in the selected institutions, the results in Tables 1, 2 and 3 are presented according to the institutions that were studied.

Table 1: Curriculum situation of the Fashion Design Programmes in Tshwane University of technology, South Africa

SUBJECTS/ MODULES	ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	ETHICAL ISSUES	Remarks
	Screened documents (curriculum and study guides)	Screened documents (curricula and study guides)	
Pattern Design	<p><u>Curriculum</u></p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u></p> <p>Some themes/briefs about work to be done include issues of environment on paper usage, patterns to be prepared for ethical designs</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u></p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u></p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p>	Minimal ESD is identified in the curriculum. Although the study guides contain more issues of ESD, these issues are bound to be withdrawn, if subject lecturers were changed. Since ESD is not embedded within the curriculum, it can easily be ignored and seen as not an important subject.
Garment Cutting and Making	<p><u>Curriculum</u></p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u></p> <p>Some themes/briefs about work to be done include issues of environment, particularly, selection of materials to be used, utilisation of fabric waste, re-furbishing of old clothes among others</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u></p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u></p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p>	Nothing reflecting ESD
Textile/Material Science	<p><u>Curriculum</u></p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u></p> <p>Some of the theoretical topics have some negligible</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u></p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u></p> <p>No written description on ethical issues. Some themes</p>	Minimal issues observed only with the study guides

	environmental issues	on projects reflect some elements of ESD	
Creative Design/Fashion Illustration	<p>Curriculum</p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p> <p>Study guides</p> <p>Some themes/briefs about fashion illustrations to be drawn, include issues of environment, particularly, selection of materials to be used, utilisation of fabric waste, re-furbishing of old clothes. Story boards are guided by pictures of real life situations of climate change</p>	<p>Curriculum</p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p> <p>Study guides</p> <p>Some themes/briefs about fashion illustrations to be drawn include issues on the abuse of labour. Sources of inspiration are true reflection of social issues in the factories where the wages are below minimum requirements, use of child labour, working conditions of the sweat shops among others. Story boards are guided by pictures of real life situations</p>	Nothing reflecting ESD in the curriculum. The study guides contain more issues of ESD; these issues are bound to be withdrawn, if subject lecturers are changed. Since ESD is not embedded within the curriculum, it can easily be ignored and seen as not a major subject.
<p>Observation: Although study guides show inclusion of some socio-environmental aspects, these issue could be taken more seriously if they were embedded in the curriculum. Students may not take issues outside curriculum seriously and hence learning may not take place. There is no subject/module or subjects/modules that address(es) how the fashion industry impacts negatively on the lives of the factory workers and how the textiles industry affects the environment right from the farm until when the fabric is completed. Textile products from the petro-chemicals as well as regenerated fabrics have vast environmental and health implications on workers, but are not reflected in the curriculum at Tshwane University of Technology.</p>			

Table 2: Curriculum situation of the Fashion Design and Marketing Programmes in Kenyatta University, Kenya

SUBJECTS/MODULES	ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	ETHICAL ISSUES	Remarks
	Screened documents (curriculum and study guides)	Screened documents (curricula and study guides)	
Pattern Design	<p>Curriculum</p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p> <p>Study guides</p> <p>No written description on environmental issues</p>	<p>Curriculum</p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p> <p>Study guides</p> <p>No written description on ethical issues</p>	No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides

<p>Garment Cutting and Making</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on environmental issues</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on ethical issues</p>	<p>No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides/course outlines</p>
<p>Textile/Material Science</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> Some of the theoretical topics have some negligible environmental issues</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on ethical issues</p>	<p>No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides, but only negligible issues of environment are written.</p>
<p>Creative Design/Fashion Illustration</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides/Course outline</u> No written description on environmental issues</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study Guides/Course Outlines</u> No written description on ethical issues</p>	<p>No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides</p>
<p>Fashion Marketing</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No environmental issues written.</p> <p><u>Study guides/ Course outline</u> No environmental issues written</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> Minimal issues on social aspects of the workers. Sweat shops, child and women labour in the apparel and textile industry are highlighted.</p> <p><u>Study guides/ Course outline</u> Some topics address the social aspects of the workers in the apparel and textile industry</p>	<p>Some elements of Social aspects of the factory workers are included. However, there is need to also address the rise of eco-conscious consumers and the reasons behind the growth of sustainable consumption and disposal practices of the apparel consumers</p>
<p>Observation: There are negligible socio-environmental issues highlighted in only two subjects/modules and study guide. This point out the need to look at the textile and apparel production processes and how it could impact negatively on the environment. It is also important to understand elements of sustainable behaviours of the apparel and textile product consumers. For example, it is imperative that the consumers understand how the entire life cycle of a textile product can affect the environment negatively.</p>			

Table 3: Curriculum situation of the Fashion Design and Textile Design Programmes in Auchi Polytechnic, Nigeria

SUBJECT S/MODULES	ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	ETHICAL ISSUES	Remarks
	Screened documents (curriculum and study guides)	Screened documents (curriculum and study guides)	
Pattern Design	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on environmental issues</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on ethical issues</p>	No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides
Garment cutting and making	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> Some traces about environment, particularly on selection of materials and utilisation of fabric waste fabrics to come up with a garment</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on ethical issues</p>	No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides
Textile/Material science	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> Some of the theoretical topics have some negligible environmental issues</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on ethical issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on ethical issues</p>	Some negligible elements of ESD are embedded in the study guide. If ESD is not embedded within the curriculum, it can easily be seen as not a major subject and therefore not taken seriously.
Creative Design	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on</p>	<p><u>Curriculum</u> No written description on environmental issues</p> <p><u>Study guides</u> No written description on</p>	No ESD embedded in either curriculum or study guides.

	environmental issues	environmental issues	
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Observation: There are negligible environmental issues highlighted in only one subject/module and study guide. This point out the need to look at the textile and apparel production processes and how the processes could impact negatively on the environment. It is also important to understand sociological aspects of the workers in the textile and apparel industry and elements of sustainable behaviours of the apparel and textile product consumers. For example, it is imperative that the consumers understand how the entire life cycle of a textile product can affect the environment negatively.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident in this study that the prescribed Fashion Design curricula of the studied institutions do not adequately promote ESD, even when study guides particularly at Tshwane University of Technology had included both social and environmental aspects. Also, the adoptions of policies of Agenda 21 by majority of African governments notwithstanding, institutions of higher learning have not employed the recommendations to any great extent within the Fashion Design Programmes.

It must also be noted that the elements of ESD found in the study guides are purely initiatives of creative lecturers who attempt to put into practice what society advocates and not necessarily what the curricula stipulates. Yet, institutions of higher learning will continue to be key players in bringing about positive change through research and by the equipment of their students with skills and knowledge to handle socio-environmental challenges. The findings of this study also point out the need for more environmentally literate fashion graduates who can design eco-products and be able to influence future production of Eco-fashion in the apparel industry as well as influence consumers to make sustainable consumption and disposal of textile and apparel products. This indicates the need for the HE sector to address these issues. Level of environmental literacy can only bring about change towards ESD if the Fashion Design curriculum is carefully developed with negotiations and input from all the stakeholders involved by coming up with a multi-stakeholders perspective of curriculum negotiated with the industry, the government and the consumers of the textile products as highlighted in the Talloires Declaration of 1990.

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