



## An assessment of the evaluation of Kenyan university fashion and apparel design Programs

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### Abstract

The link between quality education and effective production at workplaces lies in the efficacy of evaluation. This paper, premised on the findings of a study that sought information on how the university undergraduate fashion and apparel design programs are evaluated in Kenya, outlines the various assessment approaches adopted by Kenyan universities offering fashion and apparel design programs. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study was carried out in 5 Kenyan universities and apparel design firms that have employed Kenyan university fashion and apparel design graduates across Kenya. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and field observation was analysed using SPSS. The findings established that evaluation of fashion and apparel design programs was done by all the university FAD departments while performance standards were evaluated through International Organization for Standardization tools, students' evaluations and external evaluations. In addition, course evaluation of practical courses was done either by the lectures or technician as the students did their practicals. Evaluation for theory lessons was mostly done by written Continuous Assessment Tests, term papers and final written exams. At the end of the semester, before beginning exams, the end products were marked and kept to be marked again by external examiners. The paper concludes evaluation of UFAD courses varies for theory and practical courses, and varies from one university to another. In addition, external examiners from other institutions evaluate the examination scripts once in an academic year. As such, mark allocation should be reviewed for both practicals and theory and other evaluation strategies can be designed other than through the usual evaluation of exams and course outlines by external examiners. This is because practical courses may not be adequately evaluated by external examiners who evaluate exams once or twice a year. The FA industry and relevant standards should, too, be included in the evaluation of the UFAD programs. Further on evaluation, external examiners for FAD courses should have specialised in FAD.

**Keywords:** assessment, evaluation, fashion and apparel design, Kenyan universities

### Introduction

Program evaluation or assessment is defined as the process of using quantitative measurements to determine if students are accomplishing the desired learning objectives: it is about students learning in order to describe what they know, are able to do and also working toward (Hounsell, 1994; Guijt *et al.*, 2011) <sup>[6, 4]</sup>. Assessment describes a variety of ideas and methods for gathering evidence of student performance. Results from assessments should also be used in the development and revision of the curriculum and provide information about teaching and learning. This information is used to provide students and staff with ongoing feedback, plan further instructional and intervention.

Studies points out lack of adequate training for the Kenyan apparel firm workers. A report by the United Nations and the DIT further indicates that Kenyan universities' training lack a link to the industries - most employers spend up to two years retraining their recruits to equip them with skills (Siringi, 2005; Imo, Mugenda & Mburugu, 2010) <sup>[14, 7]</sup>. Studies have attributed this inadequate training to unclear human resource development for Fashion and Apparel (FA) industry in the Kenyan universities (Republic of Kenya, 1996) <sup>[11]</sup>. Kenya's Vision 2030 identifies human resource development as a key foundation for national socio-economic transformation. To

strengthen the linkages between training and research institutions and industry, hence promote demand-driven training that is responsive to industry requirements, the human resource sub-sector has recognized the need to review industrial training curricula and syllabi in education and training institutions so as to align them to the requirements of industry and keep them in tandem with technological and other changes in the world (Government of Kenya, 2010) <sup>[3]</sup>. Riechi (2010) <sup>[12]</sup> recommends that the Kenyan government and other stakeholders should be involved in the process of reviewing and re-aligning the curriculum for each degree course offered at the public universities. Further, Mbae (1995) <sup>[8]</sup> and Nguku (2012) <sup>[9]</sup> recommend constant review of university educational programs and one way to ensure this is through such feedback from the stakeholders as well as the industry. This paper, therefore, discusses the findings of a study that sought information on how the university undergraduate fashion and apparel design programs (UUFADPS) are evaluated in Kenya.

### Conceptual Framework

The discussions in this paper revolve around the ideas of the systems theory (Heylighen & Josylin, 1992) - a trans-disciplinary study of the abstract organization of phenomena

as proposed in 1940 by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Pidwimy (2008) <sup>[10]</sup> and Carter (2008) <sup>[11]</sup> define a system as elements in interaction and system thinking as a theoretical approach to understanding a phenomenon. A system has a structure that is defined by its parts and processes which tend to function in some way while interacting with each other (Pidwimy, 2008) <sup>[10]</sup>. All systems, therefore, have inputs, processes and output(s) and they tend to be goal-seeking; the elements move together in a direction of goal achievement. For a system to work properly, it must have a central mechanism that accepts information about the system's output, evaluates the information based on certain criteria related to the goals of the system and feeds back the evaluated information to be used as additional input (Schoech, 2004) <sup>[13]</sup>. Pidwimy (2008) <sup>[10]</sup> notes that, in order for a system to maintain a steady state, the system must possess the capacity of self-regulation which is controlled by a feedback. Feedback occurs when the system receives the results of its previous processes. The feedback is then fed to the entire system as an input to ensure a self-sustained change, hence better efficiency. This study referred to the skill training for the apparel industry through the university fashion and apparel undergraduate programs as a system. The concept of inputs, processes, output and feedback were explained as follows: the system's input included students' and staff interest in the success of the program, availability of adequate teaching and learning materials and equipment, support from the administration, sufficient labs and a library; the system's processes involved teaching, learning (through, field, discussions, practicals and self study) and research; the output of the system would be trained manpower (who are skilled and competent workers for the fashion and apparel industry), goals are achieved, careers are advanced and the community and the nation at large will benefit; and feedback is derived from the entire system and from the central mechanism that the system works towards. The sources of feedback include course evaluation, students' grades and appraisals from employers in the fashion and apparel industry about the performance of university fashion/apparel graduates in the industry. This feedback can therefore be used as an input in reconstructing the university programs. Godlaski (2010) <sup>[12]</sup> points out that the systems theory is important as it shows that each component of a system has a role to play. He also indicated that change in one element of the system must also occur in the other elements simultaneously for a system to function successfully. Communication and interaction among systems parts/elements is therefore important as the systems' elements are interdependent and are goal oriented. Thus change in one part must be communicated as it may affect the whole system.

### Methodological Approach

The study used a descriptive survey research design and was carried out at Kenyatta University, Maseno University, Egerton University, University of Eldoret (UoE) as well as University of Eastern Africa – Baraton (UEAB) where the fashion and apparel design programs were offered and had their degree graduates working in the FA industry. The study was also conducted at apparel design firms that have employed Kenyan university fashion and apparel design

graduates across Kenya. These firms included business establishments that take care of all aspects of apparel: from designing garments and selling finished products to the retail trade. These graduates, therefore, were those who were employed in fashion designing, pattern making, garment assembly, quality control, fashion merchandising and retailing in Kenya. The graduates who responded to this study were from FAD firms/industries that were located in Kisumu, Nakuru, Mombasa, Eldoret, Athi River and Nairobi, Kenya.

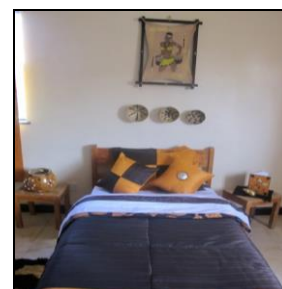
The study population was made up of all the departments in Kenyan universities offering UUGFADPs. Thirty two (32) university fashion and apparel design staff (UFADS) (lecturers and technicians, and 99 third and fourth year university undergraduate fashion and apparel design students (UUFADS) were selected purposively, and 54 university fashion and apparel design graduates (UFADGs) were selected through snowball sampling. Both structured and unstructured questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and field observation were employed in data collection. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyse data.

## Results and Discussion

### Modes of Evaluation

Interviews with UFAD HODs found that evaluation of FAD programs was done by all the university FAD departments ranging from internal moderation, external moderation (examiners) and Directorate of Quality Assurance. Performance standards were evaluated through ISO (International Organization for Standardization) tools, students' evaluations and external evaluations.

During field observation, it was noted that course evaluation of practical courses was done either by the lectures or technician as the students did their practicals. Final products for practical lessons included folders with samples of seams, pockets, collars, drafted patterns and dresses made from muslin, skirts, blouses, shirts, trousers, jewellery, sketches, one piece dress and African cultural dresses. At the end of the semester, before beginning exams, the end products were marked and kept to be marked again by the external examiners then returned back to students later. During the period of observation at UEAB, UoE and Egerton University, displays of the students' projects were done or students wore and did a fashion show of their designs as the lecturer marked. During the show, other members of the department were invited. Fig 1 illustrates an exhibition of students' projects for Multimedia class at Egerton University while Fig 2 shows a lecturer looking at a students' work during an exhibition at UoE.



**Fig 1:** An Exhibition of Multimedia Projects at Egerton University



**Fig 2:** A Lecturer Looking at Students' Fashion Illustration Project at UoE; Inset: Students Looking On

Figs 3 and 4 show students from Kenyatta University wearing their designed costumes during an evaluation while Figs 5 and 6 illustrate UoE students modelling their projects in a fashion show organized at the end of the semester. Figs 7 and 8 give more illustrations of students' projects exhibitions at the universities.



**Fig 5:** A Student Showing her Designed Maasai Attire



**Fig 3:** Student at Kenyatta University Showing an Evening Dress



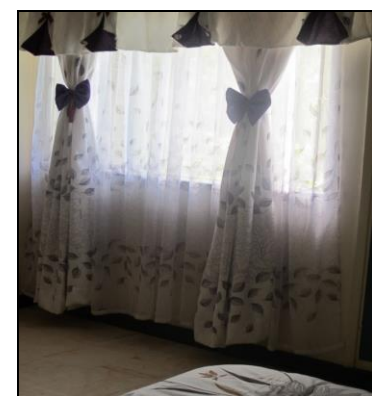
**Fig 6:** Students of UoE in a Cat Walk of Cultural Dress



**Fig 4:** A Show of Performance Costume by a Student at Kenyatta University



**Fig 7:** Lectures and Technician from UoE Assess Students' Projects at the End of a Semester



**Fig 8:** A Display of a Student's Soft Furnishing Project at Egerton University

At UEAB FAD department, students' practical projects were never checked by an external examiner; they were given back to the students once they had been marked. This implies that the evaluation of the standards for the practical area, which is crucial to acquisition of FAD skills, was not sufficient in this department.

### Mark Allocation

The results from document review of course outlines noted that evaluation for theory lessons was mostly done by written Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs), term papers and final written exams. Table 1 presents mark allocation for FAD theory courses as per the UFAD departments.

**Table 1:** Mark Allocation for FAD Theory Courses as per the UFAD Departments

UFAD Department	CATs	Written Exam
KU	30	70
UoE	30	70
Maseno	30	70
Egerton	30	70
UEAB	50	50

*Source:* Field Data

CATs, in all the UFAD departments except UEAB's, carried 30 marks and the end of semester written exams carried 70 marks. UEAB CATs and written exam each contributed 50 percent to the course mark. Table 2 presents mark allocation for FAD practical courses as per the UFAD departments.

**Table 2:** Mark Allocation for FAD Practical Courses as per the UFAD Departments

UFAD Department	Practicals	Written Exam
KU	30	70
UoE	40	60
Maseno	50	50
Egerton	40	60
UEAB	Determined by lecturer	Determined by lecturer

*Source:* Field Data

As illustrated in Table 2, Maseno University had 50 marks for written exam and 50 marks for practicals, UoE and Egerton University had 40 marks for practicals and 60 marks for written exam while Kenyatta University had 30 marks for practicals and 70 marks for written exam. Some courses at UoE, Maseno and Egerton universities were 100% practical work. Other modes of evaluation included term papers, class presentations, group work for theory courses and field reports and students' projects for practical courses.

The study noted that some UUFADSs had complaints concerning UFAD course mark allocation; that sometimes courses that were too demanding practically were allocated lower marks while the theory part of the lesson was allocated higher marks which demoralized learners. The UUFADSs further recommended that during evaluation, the practical part of a course should be allocated more marks than the theory part. The evaluation of students' performance during industrial attachment was done by supervisors at the places of attachment and university assessors; the lecturers would

occasionally visit the industrial attachment stations and assess the FAD students' progress.

This paper avers that ascertaining teaching/learning through moderation of examination scripts by an external examiner is not an adequate way of evaluating practical courses such as FAD. Written exams only ascertain the knowledge and not practical skills of a learner. This observation concurs with those of Mbae (1995) <sup>[8]</sup> and Nguku (2012) <sup>[9]</sup> who question the justification for appointing external examiners to moderate examination as a way of maintaining high standards, yet some issues such as lack of qualified personnel and inadequate supply of teaching materials are left unchecked at Kenyan universities. The evaluation of FAD courses would be more effective when done practically and continuously throughout the learning process.

### Conclusion

This paper concludes that, in Kenyan universities, evaluation of UFAD courses varies for theory and practical courses, and varies from one university to another. In addition, external examiners from other institutions evaluate the examination scripts once in an academic year. From the findings, it has been established that the evaluation of FAD teaching should be revised. Mark allocation should be reviewed for both practicals and theory and other evaluation strategies can be designed other than through the usual evaluation of exams and course outlines by external examiners. This is because practical courses may not be adequately evaluated by external examiners who evaluate exams once or twice a year. The FA industry and relevant standards should, too, be included in the evaluation of the UFAD programs. Further on evaluation, external examiners for FAD courses should have specialised in FAD.

### Areas of Concern in UFAD Evaluation and Way Forward

It was also noted by the UFADS that during external moderation of examination scripts, most of the times, the external examiners did hurriedly as they had too many scripts to examine within a very short time. In some cases, the external examiners who were not specialized in the area of study did external evaluation of UFAD courses; for instance a specialist in Home Economics being appointed as an external examiner for UFAD department. The implication of this observation is that the feedback from the evaluation process may not be relevant enough to the UUGFAD skill training for the FA industry. This challenge could be attributed to the few senior staff that have specialized in FAD in Kenyan universities.

This paper asserts that the external examiners should handle manageable workload within a specified time for thorough evaluation to be done and that they should have qualifications on areas of specialization that are relevant to FAD. When the specialists in FAD are few, sourcing them from other countries is a better option so that the feedback from the evaluation of FAD courses becomes more relevant to the UUGFADPs.

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