

## FEEDBACK ON WORK EXPERIENCES TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY FASHION STUDENTS ACQUIRE DURING THEIR SEMESTER-OUT INDUSTRIAL ATTACHMENT PROGRAMME

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### ABSTRACT

This paper sought to determine feedback Technical University Fashion Students on work experiences they acquired during the Semester-Out Industrial Attachment (S-O IA) programme to help document their concerns regarding their experiences. The paper adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design with a mixed method approach and used a semi-structured validated questionnaire for data collection. Purposive, simple random and convenient sampling techniques were used to sample 199 third year HND Fashion Students from five (5) public Technical Universities in Ghana. Data were analysed using SPSS software version 20 to generate frequencies and percentages. It was evident from the results that students acquired skills in all the specialised areas with quite a significant number of them acquiring work experiences in the Garment Manufacture option to the neglect of the other four equally beneficial areas. It was therefore recommended that the Technical Universities demonstrate their commitment to the S-O IA programme by collaborating with diverse companies regarding the various areas of specialisation for the benefit of the TUFSS during the S-O IA in particular.

**Keywords:** Technical University Fashion programme, Semester-Out Industrial Attachment Programme, work-related experiences

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Technical Universities (formerly Polytechnics) in Ghana have a mandate under the PNDC law 321 of 1992 to produce quality, career-focused and practical graduates to contribute to economic development and national prosperity (Government of Ghana [GOG], 1992; Damalie, 2009). Fashion Design is one of the several careers and practically oriented programmes studied under creative or applied arts in Ghanaian Technical Universities at the Higher National Diploma (HND) level. The courses studied include Creative Design and Working Drawing, Clothing and Textile Manufacture (design, development, production and styling), Management and Technology, Beauty Culture, Merchandising, Entrepreneurship, Communication Skills, French, Information Communication Technology (ICT), and African Studies among others (NABPTEx Fashion Design Syllabus [FDS], 2001; Competency Based Learning/Training [CBL/T] Curriculum, 2008-2009). The students trained are meant to be employed in various specialised areas (requiring technical skills) of manufacturing in the industry.

Hence, Technical Universities continuously emphasise on students embarking on internships to apply learnt theories. Both the traditional and the CBL/T curricula approach to students' industrial attachment (IA) also referred to as Semester-Out Industrial Attachment (S-O IA) is aimed at ensuring that the fashion students have more opportunities in industrial practice. It forms part of an important ingredient for learning in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) education at the tertiary and higher education institutions of which the Technical University is one. The Technical Universities have incorporated in their training schemes this element of the IA programme to fulfil the career-oriented practical training needs. This is to conform with the current thinking that Technical University education should be career-oriented with more emphasis on the practical content of the various courses and for the HND programmes to be made relevant and industry-friendly (Nyarko, 2011) as cited in Takoradi Polytechnic (2014).

Human capital development is at the heart of the S-OIA programme. It is meant for students to gain practical, managerial and or hands-on experience that pertain to the area or course of study for which they are undergoing. Like general IAs, the S-O IA are platforms for students to translate theory into practice, and acquire effective work habits which can be a tremendous aid in personal life, as well as in employment (Rice & Tucker, 1986); and this is the whole essence of learning; to apply the learned theories.

Essentially the S-O IA is meant for students to gain practical, managerial and or hands-on experience that pertains to the area or course of studies (Takoradi Polytechnic, 2014). In relation to practical experience, therefore, the students are expected to be given the opportunity to transfer knowledge gained in the lecture hall to real world-of-work and get introduced to the real-life experience in the world-of-work. They are also expected to have the chance to bridge the gap that exists between theory and practice and to be offered the opportunity to help solve real industrial problems. The interns similarly expect to gain practical skills that will help them adapt with real efficiency to their future employment besides identifying areas in an industry where research could be conducted (Takoradi Polytechnic, 2014).

Current study findings suggest that though students' field of study has link with their attachment activities or experience and these students have signalled that the programme should be continued, they are faced with many challenges (Donkor, Nsoh, & Mitchual, 2009). The quality of practical experience the students gain in the job market on their industrial attachment must equally be worthwhile in their area of specialisation in the third year (CBL/T, 2008-2009).

In all, TUFSS are expected to acquire new skills and sharpen the old skills they acquired in earlier semesters in relation to the areas they are studied. These competencies are necessary for their area of specialisation as well as required to operate in the industry upon employment. There was no specific documented evidence resulting from a wide all-inclusive empirical study on the challenges and benefits accruing to Technical University Fashion students on the S-O IA programme, and how to avoid situations where the objectives guiding the S-O IA will not be hindered. There was no specific wide all-inclusive empirical study to reveal whether the objectives of the S-O IA programme regarding work-related experiences were being achieved or not. These important issues encouraged the researchers to seek information from students' perspective on the S-O IA programme which is aimed at increasing the number of opportunities for Fashion Design students to acquire relevant competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes so as to justify the investment made by all stakeholders into their development.

The main goal of this study is to seek feedback from Technical University HND Fashion Students in identifying work experiences fashion students acquired during the S-O IA programme and to help confirm and document concerns of the fashion students about the S-O IA programme in relation to acquiring specialised skills. It might support the Technical University in Ghana to objectively administer the S-O IA programme more effectively to improve the work-learning programme in general. The specific objective of the study was to identify work experiences the Technical University Fashion students acquired during semester-out industrial attachment programme.

The study findings would directly benefit Technical University Fashion students and their academic institutions with regard to the improvement of the S-O IA for the Fashion Design programme in particular and the industrial attachment programme in general. It might support the Technical University in identifying challenging issues with the work-related experiences of the students and to objectively administer the S-O IA programme more effectively to improve the work-learning programme in general. The study findings might as well help confirm concerns of fashion students about the S-O IA programme in particular. The study findings might facilitate the inclusion of students' opinion on changes they would like to see in the S-O IA programme so as to address their concerns and improve the effectiveness of the programme.

Second, the findings would fill in the knowledge gap in understanding the concerns of Technical University Fashion students regarding S-O IA and add to existing knowledge on quality education delivery in public Technical Universities in Ghana. The study is limited to all public Technical Universities (then public Polytechnics) in Ghana which have run the Fashion Design programme for five years or more using either Traditional or Competency Based Learning/Training (CBL/T) curriculum; all third-year students who have been beneficiaries of the S-O IA segment were included in the study.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method approach in a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design to provide answers to the study's research question. The method was deemed appropriate because the study sought to evaluate an on-going programme (Donkor et al., 2009).

### 2.2 The population of the Study

The third-year HND Fashion Design students in all Technical Universities which had been running the Fashion Design programme for five years or more using either Traditional or Competency Based Learning/Training (CBL/T) curriculum were purposively targeted for the study. All third-year students in these institutions had gone through the programme therefore qualified to participate in the programme. Table 1 shows the population of the study.

**Table 1: Population of the Technical Universities Studied**

Name of Institution	Population of Third Years
Kumasi Technical University	109
Accra Technical University	105
Takoradi Technical University	63
Ho Technical University	44
Cape Coast T University	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>

### 2.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size decided then was 311 (87% at 5% margin of error) (Research Advisors, 2006). Simple Random sampling was to be used for sampling for representatives of the population within the sampling frame. The students present were to be made to pick the folded papers with written inscription to be part of the study or not. Students who picked 'yes' automatically fell into the sample. Those who picked 'no' fell outside the sample and were not included in the study.

## 2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Simple Random sampling was therefore used for sampling for representatives of Accra Technical University's Fashion students in third year to come up with the final list of 94 students for the Accra Technical University. The sample size of Accra Technical University was thereby consistent with the suggestion of the Research Advisor's (2006) at 5% margin of error. However, convenience sampling was adopted for the four other Technical Universities namely: Cape Coast, Ho, Kumasi and Takoradi. The sampling technique used as in the case of the first group was not replicated for the remaining third-year TUFS within each group due to low turnout. Consequently, under those circumstances, all third-year students who were in class and willing to be included in the study on the data collection days were sampled.

In all 221 (forming 61.9% of the population) questionnaires were administered to third-year Fashion students who formed part of the sample with the breakdown as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Actual Sample per Technical University (TU)**

Name of Institution	Fashion 3	
	Population	Sample
Kumasi Technical University	109	44
Accra Technical University	105	94
Takoradi Technical University	63	37
Ho Technical University	44	22
Cape Coast Technical University	36	24
Total	357	221

## 2.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance and permission were sought from the heads of departments whose departments were included in the study. The students were assured of anonymity and confidentiality as prescribed by Polit, Beck and Hungler (2010) and Brink (2006). Data collection was carried out over four months after the S-O IA period (i.e. in the sixth semester).

## 2.6 Instrumentation

A semi-structured questionnaire with both close-ended and open-ended items designed by the researchers was deemed most appropriate and therefore relevant for answering the research questions.

## 2.7 Data Analysis

Descriptive instruments such as tabled frequencies and percentages have been used to describe the established status of the work-related experiences the students acquired during the S-O IA programme.

# 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

## 3.1 Personal Information

The general characteristics of the respondents are described on institution, gender, age ranges, and their places of attachment under the personal information section. Table 3 shows the distributions of the students by institutions and gender.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Institutions and Gender**

Name of Institution	Gender					
	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%
Accra Technical University	14	7	77	38.7	91	45.7
Cape Coast Technical University	2	1	19	9.5	21	10.6
Ho Technical University	2	1	20	10.1	22	11.1
Kumasi Technical University	6	3	22	11.1	28	14.1
Takoradi Technical University	6	3	31	15.6	37	18.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100</b>

As illustrated in Table 3, about 46 % of the respondents were from Accra; 10.6 % from Cape Coast; 11% from Ho; 14 % from Kumasi and 18.6 % from Takoradi Technical Universities. Many students were from Accra. This is not surprising because there were more respondents from Accra Technical University. Majority of respondents (84.9 %) were females, and the males were 15.1 %. Biney-Aidoo, Antiaye and Oppong (2014) also found more females than males studying Fashion. If these findings are anything to go by, it could be described as an indication of the interest of females in the Fashion profession.

**Table 4: Age Ranges of Respondents**

Institution	Age in Years							
	15-19		20-24		25 and Above		Total	
	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%
Accra Technical University	1	0.5	69	34.7	21	10.6	91	45.7
Cape Coast Technical University	0	0.0	11	5.5	10	5.0	21	10.6
Ho Technical University	0	0.0	8	4.0	14	7.0	22	11.1
Kumasi Technical University	0	0.0	19	9.5	9	4.5	28	14.1
Takoradi Technical University	0	0.0	37	18.6	0	0.0	37	18.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents (72.4%) were within the age range of 20 – 24 years; followed by those within age 25 years and above (27 %), and only one was within the age range of 15-19 years (.5%).

The characteristics of the respondents play a significant role in the practical learning process. The result shows a significantly youthful (99.4% [20-24; 25 & above years]) group of young graduating class of professionals from all the participating Technical Universities about to make an entry into the fashion industry. The numbers of youthful students studying fashion; therefore, tell the patronage level of the youth in the fashion industry and what the future probably holds for the fashion profession in Ghana and Africa as a whole. Every country's most significant resource is said to be its human capital. It is no wonder therefore that Africa fashion continues to gain the attention of the West (Richards, 2015).

**Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Place of Attachment**

Institution	Place of Attachment					
	Private Organisation		Public Organisation		Total	
	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%	<i>Freq.</i>	%
Accra Technical University	87	43.7	4	2.0	91	45.7
Cape Coast Technical University	21	10.6	0	0.0	21	10.6
Ho Technical University	22	11.1	0	0.0	22	11.1
Kumasi Technical University	27	13.6	1	0.5	28	14.1
Takoradi Technical University	26	13.1	11	5.5	37	18.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>92.0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5 indicates that the majority (92%) of the respondents had their attachment with private host organisations. In that category, students from Accra Technical University formed 43.7 %, their counterparts from Cape Coast formed 10.6%, while those from Ho formed 11%. Students from Kumasi and Takoradi Technical Universities formed 13.6% and 13 % respectively.

The table indicates that very few (8%) had their attachment with public organisations. Respondents from Takoradi formed the highest (5.5 %) who got a placement with public host organisations, followed by their counterparts from Accra with 2 %. The result upholds the assertion of Biney-Aidoo et al. (2014) that most IA companies are privately owned.

Significantly, the private organisations have been very supportive of the IA particularly the S-O IA programme. In rather sharp contrast, it shows from the results that not many public organisations in the fashion industry are available as IA companies.

### 3.2 Experiences students acquire during the semester-out industrial attachment programme

Table 6: Work Experiences Respondents Acquired

Area	Skills	New Skill		Old Skill	
		<i>Freq.*</i>	<i>%*</i>	<i>Freq.*</i>	<i>%*</i>
<b>Garment Manufacture</b>	Designing	115	57.8	64	33.2
	Pattern Development	114	57.2	76	38.2
	Production	146	73.4	105	52.8
	Styling	44	22.1	51	25.6
<b>Leatherwork</b>	Designing	2	1.0	1	0.5
	Pattern Development	1	0.5	1	0.5
	Production	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Styling	1	0.5	0	0.0
<b>Beauty Culture</b>	Hair Dressing Cosmetology	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Make-up Application	0	0.0	1	0.5
	Styling	1	0.5	2	1.0
	Designing	1	0.5	1	0.5
<b>Textiles</b>	Production	6	3.0	5	2.5
	Packaging	6	3.0	5	2.5
	Sales/ Customer Service	1	0.5	3	1.5
	Packaging	4	2.0	1	0.5
<b>Merchandising</b>	Promo. & Sales Activities	9	4.5	3	1.5
	Visual Merchandising	6	3.0	1	0.5
	Customer Service	3	1.5	1	0.5
		4	2.0	3	1.5

\*Multiple Responses

Sources: Field Data, 2016

The results in Table 6 indicate that the students acquired skills in all the specialised areas identified which required special knowledge and skills namely; Garment Manufacture, Leatherwork, Beauty culture, Textiles and Merchandising.

#### 3.2.1 Garment Manufacture

The results show that quite a significant number of students (73.4%) acquired work experiences in garment manufacture. Although this may be partly based on the students' interest, it may also be because it is one if not the major course component in the Technical University HND Fashion Design programme (NAPBTEX FDS, 2001). It may further be attributed to the fact that the IA companies willing to accept students mostly need them in the production line to help meet deadlines as a result is consistent with the findings in Biney-Aidoo et al. (2014). In their study, 65% of the students were put into production in order to meet customer demands, while others (20%) were made to do only alterations or the same schedule until they mastered the skills of sewing. This result also supports the position of Adjei (2013) as reechoed in Adjei, Nyarko and Nunfam (2014) that the students are expected to have their learning reinforced, relatively changed and more experienced after the S-O IA programme.



### 3.2.2 Leatherwork

From the result in Table 6, a minimal number of students acquired new skills or sharpened old skills in the leatherwork programme. Two out of 199 respondents (1%) acquired new skills in designing leatherwork while one (.5%) sharpened old skills in same. In pattern development for leatherwork, only one respondent (.5%) acquired new skills and sharpened old skills in same. One out of 199 respondents (.5%) acquired new skills in styling leatherworks while one (.5%) sharpened old skills in same. The inclusion of this course, just as beauty culture and textiles is meant to provide students with knowledge and skills to enhance the marketability of goods produced in the fashion industry (CBL/T, 2008-2009).

### 3.2.3 Beauty Culture

From the result, a minimal number of students acquired new skills or sharpened old skills in the beauty culture programme. One out of 199 respondents (.5%) sharpened old skills in cosmetology. In make-up application, only one respondent (.5%) acquired new skills while two (1%) of them sharpened old skills in same. One out of 199 respondents (.5%) acquired new skills and sharpened old skills in styling a client. The inclusion of this course, just as leatherwork and textiles is meant to provide students with knowledge and skills to enhance the marketability of goods produced in the fashion industry (CBL/T, 2008-2009).

## 4. CONCLUSION

The study results established that the HND Fashion Design as run by the five public Technical Universities has a relatively high female youthful population, most of who were attached to privately owned companies for the S-O IA programme. It is also evident from the results that the students acquired skills in all the specialised areas with quite a significant number of them (97%) acquiring work experiences in the Garment Manufacture option. The results clearly showed that new skills the students acquired in all cases could be used in related areas of specialisation. The study finding is therefore consistent with current study findings which suggest that students' field of study has a link with their attachment activities or experience. However, the result indicates Fashion Students of Technical Universities prefer Garment Manufacture to the neglect of the other four equally beneficial areas of specialisation in their area of study which are meant to enhance their marketability. The Technical Universities would also have to demonstrate their commitment to the S-O IA programme by collaborating with diverse companies regarding areas of specialisation for the benefit of the TUFSS during the S-O IA in particular and in their successful participation in the world of work generally.



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