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Exploration of the Factors That Affect the Increasing Number of Students in Fashion Design Programme, Takoradi Technical University (TTU), Ghana

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Abstract:

Choosing a discipline to study in the tertiary institution is a crucial and complex decision-making process for students since it prepares and determines the kind of profession that students intend to pursue later in life. As students try to make the choice of programme of study at the tertiary level, they face the challenge of matching their study area to future career choices and with their abilities in school performance.

Every academic year sees students from pre-tertiary schools seeking to be admitted at the Takoradi Technical University. Prospective applicants make programme choices in accordance with the course they studied at the Senior Secondary, Technical or Vocational schools. This sees a smooth transition of the programme they wish to study at the University. However, in the past three years, it has been observed that many students are pursuing Fashion Design and Technology Programme at Takoradi Technical University.

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing programme choice at the Faculty of Applied Art and Technology, with a special focus on Department of Fashion Design and Technology of the Takoradi Technical University. The study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A population of one hundred and fifty (150) students was randomly selected from the department of Fashion Design and Technology. The data for this study was collected using questionnaire and interview schedules.

The findings of this study indicate that learning experiences and carrier advancement opportunities are factors that influence a student to pursue education at the Takoradi Technical University and for that matter the department of fashion design and technology. It was also observed that most students choose programmes that are totally different from the ones they studied while in secondary. This translates to personal interest as the most influential factor of students' decision to pursue the Fashion Design Programme. Most of these students claim to have had this interest since childhood but they were denied by their parents and guardians.

Keywords: Fashion design, programme choice, factors, carrier choice, student interest, tertiary education

1. Introduction

The fashion industry has evolved over the past years. The dynamics of the industry has shaped the changing needs and trends of the consumer. As a result, fashion education has not just ended with apprenticeship, but has thrive to gaining certification in the intermediate level, advance, diploma, degree, masters and PHD programmes.

Tertiary education programmes in general prepares a student to gain a career as well as meeting the changing needs of various industries in one's country and in the world at large. A student's decision to pursue a particular programme may be influenced by many underlining factors.

According to Kerka (2000) career choice is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, parental grooming, social support and available resources such as information and financial strengths. Once the students join the chosen course, the school is mainly responsible to understand the aforesaid factors and accommodate required learning for students to meet their aspirations. According to Salami (1999) many students made wrong choices in their career because of ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or tags attached with certain job types without adequate knowledge. Kerka added also that factor such as the prestige attached to the University and the programme and of course the practicality of the course, are among other factors that is key to a choice of programme in a school. Other factors may be

job placement and remuneration after one's education. These factors may play a major role in a student's decision to effectively pursue a particular programme.

Over the past three years, student's enrollment in fashion programmes at Takoradi Technical University has increased steadily. Students who have no basic education in fashion or any Art course have also shown keen interest in pursuing a programme in fashion design. There is a motivational factor behind this current drive of interest in fashion design programme that needs to be explored, as stated by Kerka. The main objective of this study therefore is to explore the factors which have led to the phenomenal increase in enrollment of students to the programme over these past few years. It is also to assess student's level of understanding of the programme they are pursuing and motivation in terms of career opportunities at the end of the programme.

2. Background

The decision to choose a particular programme of study in the tertiary institution is very crucial in the life of an individual. Higher education programme prepares a student for a future carrier and therefore a student is mostly not solely responsible for such decision making. Parents and other stakeholders take keen interest in one's decision to study a particular programme keeping in mind the job prospects after one's education.

Taking a critical look at enrollment into the fashion programme at TTU over the past five years, one can say that the study of fashion has grown into a serious pursuit for many students looking for creativity and career.

Academic Year	Number of Students Enrolled					
	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
2013/2014	7	9.59%	66	90.41%	73	100%
2014/2015	18	26.47%	50	73.53%	68	100%
2015/2016	5	7.4%	63	92.6%	68	100%
2016/2017	6	6%	93	94%	99	100%
2017/2018	9	5.1%	166	94.9%	175	100%
2018/2019	17	8.5%	181	91.5%	198	100%

Table 1: Summary of Student Enrollment over the Past Five Years

Source: (Admissions Office. TTU)

It can be deduced from the above data that the phenomenal increase in enrollment started from the past three academic years. The researchers have become more curious about what the department of Fashion has done or are doing to see an incremental jump in numbers; so that for the past three years, the Fashion Design and Technology Department have steadily had increase in enrollment of students than most of the other departments at the Faculty of Applied Arts. The Department is now the second largest Department, after the Graphic Design Department. Such hypothetical questions like: (is it just a student's choice of the programme or are there other factors that have influenced applicant's decision to study Fashion Design at the TTU?) needs to be explored.

It is therefore important to explore the motivational factors that have led to the increase in enrollment as well as the criteria for selecting student into the fashion programme.

2.1. Factors Influencing the Selection of Fashion Programme

Choosing a programme of study in a tertiary institution is greatly influenced by one's carrier choice which is an extremely important decision that impacts an individual's entire future. Career choice is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, parental grooming, social support and available resources such as information and financial strengths. (Kerka, 2000). Educational level of parents, their profession and income are also identified as very important factors (Hearn, 1988). Friesen (1981) argue that the range of occupations that an individual will consider in choosing a career is determined largely by the status expectations of the social class to which he belong. Similarly, parents strongly influence their children in the choice of a career. Other factors such as aptitude, life circumstances, and academic achievement have also proven to be determinants of career choice (Ferry, 2006).

Navin (2009) asserts that exploring career options before committing to a career increases future career success and satisfaction. Oh (2007), has also documented that many students are attracted by the outlook of a certain career offers such as job opportunities, salary and career advancement. Career selection whether based on an individual's own choice or by an external influence, impact positively or negatively on one's life.

Many students made wrong choices in their career because of ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, advice from friends, parents and teachers, or tags attached with certain job types without adequate knowledge. Salami (1999). The courses offered in the fashion programme are predominantly related to garment manufacture, pattern drafting, fashion illustration, millenary and accessories and beauty culture.

Many students who choose the fashion programme have the tendency of becoming fashion designers, beauty therapist, models, fashion educationist, fashion merchants, entrepreneurs, among others.

Once the students join the chosen programme, the department and faculty as a whole is mainly responsible for understanding the aforementioned factors and are expected to accommodate required learning for students to meet their aspirations.

2.2. Criteria for Admitting Student in the Takoradi Technical University

An admission officer of Takoradi Technical University (Ms. Olivia Agyemang) was interviewed about the criteria for the selection of student to pursue Fashion Design. This became necessary because the researchers realized that students who did not have any background in the Fashion Design or even the Visual Arts but have been admitted to study Fashion Design. Ms. Agyemang admitted that more students are showing keen interest in the programme since fashion is the new niche. Anyone who has the interest in learning fashion related courses can begin studying online or enrolling in training as an apprentice. Secondly, there is a huge employment opportunity in the Fashion Industry, which makes it the preferred choice of most applicants. One does not need to wait to be employed but he or she can establish himself as an entrepreneur and employ others.

The admission requirement to pursue Fashion Design and Technology at Takoradi Technical University is between grade A1 to D7 in the core subjects (Mathematics, English and Science and Social Studies) plus three pass (A1 to C6) in '*relevant*' electives. (per comm. with Ms. Olivia Agyemang, admissions officer, TTU.). With the Fashion programme, an attention is given to students who show interest in the programme but with little knowledge in art or fashion related courses. When asked if there are no sanctions for admitting students with no background in a subject area, Ms. Agyemang said they hedge on the statement '*relevant elective*' and use their discretion to decide on which elective course is relevant to a programme.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the research was to explore and examine the factors that have led to the increase in enrollment at the fashion design programme at Takoradi Technical University. This study employed mix method research, which combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A sample of one hundred and fifty students was randomly selected from the Department of Fashion Design and Technology. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire. The head of department and some lecturers of the Fashion Design Department and an official of admissions unit, TTU were interviewed for in-depth information.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from some randomly selected students from the Department of Fashion Design. After a thorough review of related literature, a questionnaire was developed to collect relevant information from participants regarding their background such as gender, programme studied at senior high school, motivational factors, interests, expectations, influence and challenges. The questionnaires were structured in a way that gave students the opportunity to express themselves whilst in some cases, students could choose among existing options. Most of the findings are therefore limited to the interpretation of student's responses to choices that have been presented by the question rather than described in their own words. The researchers also conducted interviews with the head and some lecturers of the department of fashion design and an official of admissions unit for in-depth result. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and qualitative data were themes derived and analyzed.

The answered questionnaires were each coded for easy computation and analysis, using the SPSS Data Software. The open - ended answers were summarized under themes which were derived from the responses from participants. Discussions were then built around these themes. This process gave the exposition of themes evolving from the responses from participants which defined students' motivation, expectation and perception related to the choice of programme at the University.

The researchers also interviewed some lecturers and Head of Department (HOD) of the Department of Fashion to get a fair understanding of some of the major changes that had occurred in the Department. These interviews were audio-taped with approval of the interviewees.

5. Results and Discussions

The quantitative data were analyzed by means of tabulating and frequencies for simple descriptive statistics. In an effort to explore the factors certain questions were set for students to answer. A summary of the outcome is shown in the tables below; each table describes the responses to the individual questions in the questionnaire.

5.1. Q 1. 'Sex'

Gender	NO.	%
Male	12	13.2
Female	79	86.8

Table 2

Table one shows percentage regarding gender. The results presented show there are more female students in the fashion programme than there are males.

5.2. Q 2. 'What Informed Your Choice of Programme in the Senior High School?'

Factors	NO.	%
parental influence	16	12.8
personal interest	97	77.6
peer influence	4	3.2
job prospect	6	4.8
Prestige attached to the school/ programme	4	3.2
Total	127	100

Table 3

Table two explores how students have progressively decided and pursued a career of their choice by studying its foundation at the Senior High Level of Education. Hewitt (2010) thinks career choice can either be intrinsic or extrinsic or both. Hewitt further states that most people are influenced by parents favourite, and others follow the careers that their educational choices have opened to them.

From the table, it can be inferred that 97 students (participants), which represents 77.6% said they followed their own personal interest in the choice of the course they studied at the Senior High School. Kochung & Migunde (2011) asserts that most students in the Secondary schools do not have accurate information about occupational opportunities to help them make appropriate career choice. The table shows that parental influence is not strong when it comes to the choice of course at the senior high level. Other factors such as peer pressure, job prospect and prestige attached to school/programme had less than 5%. This shows that students even at the Senior High school have a budding passion or interest which had guided their choice of the fashion programme at TTU.

5.3. Q 3. 'Name of programme studied at the Senior High School.'

Course	NO.	%
Visual Arts	13	14.4
Business	5	5.6
Home Economics	44	48.9
General Arts	25	27.8
General Science	1	1.1
Agric Science	1	1.1
Engineering	1	1.1
Total	91	100

Table 4

The course a student pursued at the Senior High School, most often than not, influences what programme he/she is likely to study in the tertiary. This gives an appreciable learning experience and a firm foundation which makes future career choice less difficult. The response presented in the table 3 attests to the fact that much consideration is given to students who have background to the Programme they want to pursue at the University.

5.4. Q 4. 'Have You Always Wanted to Enroll in a Fashion Programme?'

	NO.	%
Yes	107	85.6
No	18	14.4
Total	127	100

Table 5

From the table, majority of the participants answered in the affirmative that they have always wanted to enroll in a Fashion Design programme. This is not surprising since personal interest seems to be the most influential factor when it comes to choice of programme.

Factors	NO.	%
parental influence	5	5.6
personal interest	79	87.8
peer influence	1	1.1
job prospect	4	4.4
the school's new status (polytechnic to university)	1	1.1
Total		100.0

Table 6

5.5. Q 5: 'Who or What Informed Your Choice of the Programme "Fashion Design and Technology" in T.T.U'

The researchers were also interested in what/ who influenced their choice of programme at the University. The response has been represented in table Q5. Personal interest emerged the most influential factor with as high as 87.8%. Other factors did not have much influence on participants' programme choice.

Participants were asked to give any other reason if any, for choosing a fashion design programme. Some of the themes that emerged are as follows;

5.5.1. Passion/Interest

In this study personal interest of students was considered imperative. Koshong and Migunde (2011) assert that matching personal interest with career choice often leads to job satisfaction. For some student this passion surfaced long before the actual decision to enroll in a University was made. Some put it expressively:

'My ambition is to be a fashion designer since childhood'.

'I have always loved fashion and before I even completed my junior high school, I could sew anything that I lay my hands on and that was when I realized I wanted to study it as a course at the tertiary level.'

'Because I did clothing and textiles in the Senior High and have had passion of being a fashion designer since I completed'.

Nevertheless, not all students stated passion as a motivator for enrolling in a fashion programme at the University. They felt they had an interest in "working with the hand" some student did not mince words on this:

'I've always wanted to be a fashionist, this is because I have the potential of choosing styles for others or fixing someone up, but I'm really not good in cutting and sewing; but I'm a good stylist.....'.

'I've always loved working with my hands; I did some beadmaking after Senior High School and decided to do Fashion Design afterwards'.

Words such as *love*, and *passion* were used by most participants to express their strong interest in the programme.

One participant stated:

"I enrolled in a fashion programme because, I have always loved fashion, but I don't know how to sew, so I applied for the programme so I could learn how to sew."

Another expresses:

'Because I have always loved to be a fashion designer.'

5.5.2. To Fulfill a Dream

Other students talked about fulfilling a childhood dream as a motivational factor for enrolling in the fashion programme.

"It has always been my dream to become a fashion designer since I was a child"

"It has been an obsession to become a fashion designer since childhood."

5.5.3. To Impact Knowledge

The interest and ability to impact knowledge in fashion design and other related activities in fashion also came up as one of the factors linking participants' reasons for considering a fashion program at the TTU.

One participant expressed:

"I enrolled in the fashion programme to be able to impact the knowledge in accurate and effective sewing of garment into others and bring out new designs."

5.5.4. To Polish a Talent

Some students have already been involved in fashion and other related fashion activities and were in the programme to improve on their talents and to become professionals.

'I am talented in the field that is I can design very well so I came to school to improve on my talent.'

5.5.5. Job Search and Job Security

The study also explored participants' view on the ability to secure a job and have career advancement with a degree in Fashion Design. This was explored through themes relating to job search.

5.5.6. To Become an Entrepreneur

Some participants were of the view that, enrolling in a fashion programme could help them to establish a business and employ others.

'At first I wanted to enroll in a journalism programme but looking at the number of unemployed graduates in the country, I decided to offer fashion in order to get some skill and set up my own business after school'.

5.5.7. Family Influence

Some of the participants expressed family influence as a factor.

"I was influenced by an elderly person in my family"

"Because my grandfather inspired me to be in love with art and I chose fashion".

For participants in this study, the choice to pursue a fashion programme in the university was very personal. Most of them expressed passion and interest in fashion and fashion related courses that stemmed from as far back as early childhood. Participants who did not have any art background from the senior high school had strong belief that their passion for fashion would carry them through to be ultimately successful.

5.6. Q6. 'Did You Have Any Knowledge in Garment Designing and Sewing Before Enrolling in the Fashion Design Programme?'

	NO.	%
Yes	58	46.4
No	67	53.6
Total	125	100

Table 7

The Fashion Design programme is seen as a direct work of the hand. People with the passion and interest decide on some sort of training by whatever means before deciding on a University Degree in Fashion Design. Researchers decided to delve into how many of the participants have had such training before enrolling in the University. The table Q6 records that 53% of the participants have not had any knowledge in garment designing and sewing before enrolling in the Fashion Design programme. Whilst 46% affirms that they already have knowledge in the subject area.

5.7. Q7. 'If 'Yes' How Was This Knowledge Acquired?'

Factors	NO.	%
Formal training	30	41.1
apprenticeship	20	27.4
Family orientation/ influence	10	13.7
Personal research	13	17.8
Total	127	100.0

Table 8

This question saw participants giving varied responses as to their knowledge acquisition on the programme even before they got admitted at the TTU. 41% said they have had a formal training before coming to pursue a degree in Fashion. 27.4%, have had a training through apprenticeship. And 13% picked up the knowledge from a family member who is or was in the business. Only 17.8% acquired the fashion designing knowledge by personal research i.e. through the internet and related literature and logistics.

5.8. Q8. 'Has This Knowledge Been Beneficial to Your Study of Fashion Design Programme in the University?'

Factors	NO.	%
Yes	74	80.4
No	17	18.5
Total	127	100

Table 9

The researchers then inquired how the knowledge these students had acquired elsewhere influenced their formal tertiary education and 80.4% admits that the knowledge they had before coming to pursue a degree in Fashion Design has indeed given them an edge in the programme. 18.5% responded in the negative.

5.9. Q9. "Which of the Fashion Program Course Interests You the Most?"

Course	NO.	%
Garment Manufacture	71	86.8
Fashion Merchandising	16	17.8
Millinery and Accessory	22	20.6
Beauty Culture	14	13.9
Fashion Illustration	13	13.0
Textiles	8	8.8
Pattern Technology	6	4.7
Creative Design and Working Drawing	17	13.4
Total	127	100

Table 10

To help shape future plans of the department of Fashion Design and Technology by giving recommendations from the outcome of the research, the researchers decided to find out which of the courses students are most interested in. 86% have more interest in the 'Garment Manufacture' course. 17.8% find interest in 'Fashion Merchandising', 20.6% have interest in 'millinery and Accessory' course. 13.9% loves 'Beauty Culture', whilst 13.0% showed great interest in 'Fashion Illustration'. 8.8% also have interest in 'Textiles' and 4.7% have interest in the 'Pattern Technology' course. 'Creative Design and Working Drawing' course has 13.4% of students having interest in it. Most participants showed great interest in garment manufacture than other courses because that is where they learn how to cut and sew garments. Surprisingly, only few of the participants showed interest in pattern technology, which happens to work hand in hand with garment manufacture.

5.10. Q10. "Has Your Expectation Been Met?"

Factors	NO.	%
Yes	56	44.4
No	68	54
Total	127	100

Table 11

The researchers were also interested in the level of satisfaction students have in the programme. It is necessary to know if the departments and the school have been able to meet the expectation of the students. 44.4% agree that their expectations have been met, but 54% thinks the department has not met their expectation.

5.11. Q11. Q10. 'Are the Resources Enough for Your Training'?

Factors	NO.	%
Yes	45	36.0
No	80	64.0
Total	125	100

Table 12

It is important to have adequate resources and logistics for the training of an individual. 36.0% asserts that the resources provided for their training is enough. But 64.0% disagree to this fact. Participants expressed certain concerns about lack of resources that makes learning difficult in the fashion department. Themes that emerged from concerns raised are as follows;

6. Space

Participants expressed lack of enough space for executing their practical works. Below are some of their narratives;

"I suggest there should be spacious rooms for practicals."

"A much bigger room for practicals should be provided."

"There should be renovation of the pattern room; the tables are too small and not enough."

7. Equipment

Tools and equipment are very vital in the training of students in a technical education. However most of the participants were not pleased with the number of industrial machines available for their training. Below are some of their expressions;

"I believe if more sewing machines are available for students, then learning will be easy and student too will learn how to use the machine as well."

"All necessary equipment should be provided for our training as a fashion department"

"Machines are not many to help students when it comes to practicals and most the machines have faults that need to be fixed."

8. Findings

This study has shown that students' choice of the fashion programme in Takoradi Technical University is basically based on an applicant's interest and passion for the Fashion Design and Technology Programme. This is because about 87.8% of the participants assert that personal interest in the Fashion Design programme led to their choice of the programme.

Also, the admission process in the University is open enough to admit students from varied educational backgrounds who express interest in the programme, regardless of the programme studied at the second cycle institution. This is possible because the admission requirement does not spell out the phrase 'relevant elective' an applicant needs to pursue the Fashion Design and Technology Programme. Students who do not have any background in the subject area tend to struggle at the beginning of the programme and have suggested that an orientation be made for such students to give them a smooth transition into the programme. They also think lecturers must increase contact hours so that students who are 'new' to the subject area will be able to pick up easily.

Nonetheless, the research found out that most students have a subject they like. And have wished that they major in one or two of the courses at the end of the programme. Most participants showed great interest in garment manufacture than other courses because that is where they learn how to cut and sew garments. Surprisingly, only few of the participants showed interest in pattern technology, which happens to work hand in hand with garment manufacture. Students also want the department to give them special training on how to use the industrial machine.

The researchers also found out that the department admitted 'physically challenged' (deaf and dumb) student, who compete with abled students for the same course of which understanding poses a challenge to the academic needs of these students. The school is not well resourced to cater for these students as there are more physically challenged students than there are for interpreters.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Students' programme choices are influenced by a number of factors including personal interests, parental and family influences, teachers, learning experiences, individual variants such as gender and environmental factors. Personal interests and parental influence were the most influential factors in student's choice of fashion design programme in Takoradi Technical University. However gender also plays an important role since about 86.8% of students are females. There are variations in the level of influence each factor has on students' programme choice. Apart from personal interest, family members are more influential in students' programme choice as compared to other variants.

Based on the conclusion that programme choices are mostly influenced by the students' personal interest, this study recommends that student at the secondary school level should be provided with career counselors who will provide students with experiences and outcome expectations of their choice of programme at the tertiary level. This will ensure that they are well informed so as to provide accurate information on what to expect as they choose a programme of study at the tertiary level. Technical courses including fashion design gives an opportunity for graduates to start their own business with optimal resources and investment; that means rather looking for an employment opportunity these graduates can in turn offer employment to others. The study therefore recommends that student who are enrolled into the programme especially those without any background in fashion or art related courses be given proper orientation on the programme as well as empowering them with entrepreneurial and managerial capabilities to enable them fulfill their dreams. Also, special attention should be given to physically challenged students to enable them go through the programme successfully. The institution should orient and train lecturers who handle such students keeping in mind the students' aspirations and background to ensure curriculum delivery in appropriate context to help the students achieve their aim.

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