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**MANAGERIAL PERCEPTIONS ON APPAREL FIT MADE WITH PATTERN  
DRAFTING AND FREE HAND CUTTING**

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## MANAGERIAL PERCEPTIONS ON APPAREL FIT MADE WITH PATTERN DRAFTING AND FREE HAND CUTTING TECHNIQUES

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To assess the management perceptions on apparel fit made with pattern drafting and free-hand cutting techniques.

**Methodology:** The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey was considered adequate for this study as it has the advantage of soliciting respondent's views on the nature of the situation as it existed at the time of a study (Creswell, 2012; Mugenda, 2008). The design is an efficient way of collecting information of a large group of people within a short time using questionnaires. The survey design was deemed appropriate for this study as it has the advantage of seeking the views of informal dressmakers and tailors on the use of pattern drafting and free-hand cutting in apparel construction. It allowed for the use of both quantitative and qualitative techniques in the study. This paved way for better understanding of a phenomenon under study. The use of these methods offered the opportunity to have in-depth information and also the weakness in one method is compensated for by the strength in another method (Creswell, 2012).

**Results:** The results revealed that dressmakers and tailors' preference to free-hand cutting was influenced by the method they were trained with. Additionally, standardization of apparel production among the members can best be achieved by intensifying the use of pattern drafting as part of apprenticeship training to ensure accuracy in fit among informal dressmakers and tailors locally. The respondents were asked to state their views on whether educational level hinders the progress of their training.

**Unique Contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Reason why informal dressmakers and tailors were not using pattern drafting in apprenticeship training might be related to the fact that pattern skills seemed too difficult to understand and the period of training might be short to grasp the details of the method. Taking their educational level and period of training into consideration,

it would be very difficult for the apprentices to cope with the contents that come with patterns. This implies that, there is the need to inculcate the use of pattern drafting as part of training curriculum of apprentices and also increase the period of training to allow both masters and apprentices gain better grasp of the pattern drafting skills. When trainees are given adequate training skills on the use of pattern drafting, they would improve and this would in effect manifest in the high standard on fit of apparel among the dressmakers and tailors in the informal setting in the near future. The study recommended future studies to focus on the factors influencing training and acquisition of both skills of apparel constructions. This will help the policy makers rectify the structure of education accordingly to improve the way skills are disseminated and executed.

**Keywords:** *managerial perceptions, apparel fit, style and modification, pattern drafting, free-hand cutting.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

The creation of apparel comprises many processes. The appearance and fit of apparel are highly dependent on a particular process used in the construction (Kumar 2012). The use of free-hand cutting to make apparel is an initial step in apparel making. The use of patterns is another earlier step in apparel making. It is a craft that has evolved over centuries into a skilled technical process. Today, patterns have been designed to quickly perform repetitive time-consuming tasks, which have allowed apparel manufacturing companies to keep pace with the fast-moving world of fashions (Tamakloe, 2011).

Pattern drafting, prior to the industrial revolution was used only by the rich because tailors had to work hard to customize patterns using personal measurements of their clients. After the industrial revolution, standardized patterns were used essentially to produce ready-to-wear clothing (Aldrich, 2014). Initially, the use of standardized patterns resulted in poorly fitting apparel such as boxy men's suits, and ill-fitted skirts (Anikweze, 2013). However, after extensive experimentation and standardizing sizes, pattern drafting has triumphantly been transformed from customization to standardization (Anderson, 2011).

The communal and cultural practices of people change with time throughout the world and Ghana is no exception. However, the pace of fashion change could be less vibrant in countries like Ghana where different ethnic groupings, different cultural beliefs, and social norms may adversely affect the rate of fashion change. Other factors that could influence fashion change include media providing instant access to happenings all over the world, managerial perceptions and the availability of sophisticated communication technologies (Amankwah, Howard & Sarpong, 2012; Giddings, 2009).

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The level of dissatisfaction with fit and style modification of apparel by clients of informal dressmakers, tailors and apprentices has increased (dove, 2016; Wallace & Choi, 2011). Clients now demand better products as they have difficulties with fit of apparel made by their informal

dressmakers and tailors in Koforidua in the eastern region of Ghana). Research has shown that most clients are likely to resort to use ready-made new clothes when they are not satisfied with the services they receive from their designers. Further Studies have shown that though pattern drafting is mostly taught at the higher level of the Ghanaian education (Foster & Ampong, 2012), most of the informal dressmakers and tailors who may not have gone through secondary education may therefore lack the skills in pattern drafting. The problem may be acclimatized by the demographic attributes such as the age or level of education which influences their capacity to learn and acquire new skills. In spite of the contribution that the fashion design components of the skills training programs have in the informal economy, not much research has been done regarding the implication of pattern drafting and free-hand cutting on fit and style modification among informal dressmakers and tailors in the eastern region of Ghana.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

To investigate the managerial perceptions on apparel fit made with pattern drafting and free-hand cutting technique.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Informal Learning in the Fashion Industry**

Informal learning is the unofficial, unscheduled, impromptu way of most learning to jobs. It does not follow a specified curriculum and is not often professionally organized, but rather originates accidentally, sporadically, in association with certain occasions, from changing practical requirements. Informal education is a general term for education outside of a standard institution. It can refer to various forms of alternative education, such as home-schooling or self-teaching (Biney-Aidoo, Antiaye, & Oppong, 2013).

Foster and Ampong (2012) observed that, in Ghana, apparel construction is a widespread in small-scale occupation for both men and women and there has been a long and sustained condition of apprenticeship in apparel making. Larbi and Atta (2009) note that apprenticeship in sewing has been the practice by master-craftsmen who have the knowledge and skills in making clothes, and hand down what they have mastered from generation to generation to ensure continuity. These studies however did not indicate the minimum requirements or the factors influencing apprenticeships in apparel industry. These factors such as the level of education or knowledge are perceived by many as the determinants of apprenticeship training and the area of training.

With the foregoing reason these apprentices are not ready or prepared to learn any other method apart from what they already know. Larbi and Atta (2009) further argue that, it is imperative that in the absence of academic certificates and other paper qualifications, the youth be equipped with strong vocational or technical skills as a means of livelihood.

### **2.2 Free-hand Cutting Skill**

Free-hand cutting is a method of cutting a style of apparel directly on the fabric without the use of a pattern (Efajemue & Lily, 2011). Many types of apparel worn these days apart from ready-to-

wear apparel are usually made from free-hand cutting. Foster and Ampong (2012) noted that, little has been done on documentation on free-hand cutting. Shailong and Igbo (2009) described free-hand cutting as a method of cutting the fabric marked with chalk based on a measurement and cut directly without the use of a paper pattern. The measurement of the individual is utilized directly on the fabric in free-hand cutting. If a dressmaker or a tailor makes a mistake while using the free-hand cutting, the fabric is usually wasted.

According to Shailong and Igbo (2009), free-hand method of apparel construction may spoil the apparel entirely, thereby wasting the fabric. In addition, free-hand cutting is time consuming and slow, therefore cannot be conveniently used for mass construction. From the researcher's experience, free-hand cutting has in some instances resulted to poorly fitted apparel and quarrels among dressmakers and their clients.

Boakye (2010) has stated that, people may prefer ready-to-wear clothes due to the unsatisfactory jobs from some dressmakers and tailors that use free-hand cutting for apparel making. This has made the budget for clothing in some cases increase for individuals as a result of fabric wastage or increase in cost when patterns are used (Foster & Ampong, 2012). Thus, affecting the output of the dressmaking and tailoring institutes negatively. For the purpose of this study, an analysis was carried out on some of clothes made with drafted patterns and free-hand cutting, as a way to confirm these research findings.

### **2.3 Pattern Drafting Skills**

Pattern drafting is the art of designing the outline of the plan or arrangement for sewing apparel (Aldrich, 2014). Thomas (2009) posits that the first step in pattern drafting is taking of body measurements. She recommends that when taking measurements for pattern drafting, the person should just wear normal underclothes. Aldrich (2014) noted that pattern drafting by adopting shapes from pattern can play a central role in apparel making.

Anikweze (2013) stated that flat-pattern drafting, involves using a sheet of paper, pencil and all the pattern drafting tools, and coming out with a pattern based on a set of measurements. Flat pattern drafting is based on commercialized basic patterns with standard measurements but when employed in designing, one makes use of fitting darts to increase apparel fitting (Aldrich, 2014).

Anikweze (2013) added that flat-pattern has several advantages which include the ability to design patterns to fit into economical fabric layouts, the possibility of restyling old patterns and out-of-date clothing into new ones. It also ensures ease in determining causes of mistakes during the making of the pattern and how to correct them. By pattern drafting, one can plan properly and organize himself or herself efficiently during construction of apparel (Rosen, 2014).

According to Joseph-Armstrong (2010), patterns used in apparel making bring out the good style of the apparel and makes it fit better. The main categories of fashion designs are haute couture, ready-to-wear and mass construction. Haute couture collection is mainly custom-made to size and fit. This called for the need to find out the type of style modifications commonly made by informal dressmakers and tailors in the New Juaben Municipality.



## **2.4 Technological view of pattern drafting over Free-hand Cutting**

Lewis and Loker (2014) had emphasized that civilizations connote the satisfaction and conformity of the dress silhouette in the global competitive settings for confidence and comfort. It is very essential to identify the setbacks that impede the progress in the work environment. Hence, the fundamental implication of quality life boarded on the perfect apparel that cling well to the body contour (Wu & Ashdown, 2016). No matter where people live, clothing is an integral part of their lives, and civilized people are protected by clothing from the cradle to the grave. Without clothing, we would be living in a ridiculous world. Clothing enhances modesty in our everyday jobs (Aboagyewaa-Ntiri & Apreku, 2012).

In this technological era where time has become a commodity, we are to accomplish more to enhance progress and development. Time is the most valuable coin in one's life. Bray (2009) writes that the main drawback of free-hand cutting on haute couture approach to apparel creation is the time required for the many attempts to produce a perfect shape for just single apparel, and this renders the approach unsuitable for modern mass construction.

Bray (2009) further reiterated that the advantages of pattern drafting outweigh that of free-hand cutting in the sense that the outcome of pattern cutting results in conformance to international designs whereas the free-hand cutting operates within the traditional settings and therefore, conforms to traditional design cues. Pattern drafting has the ability of restyling old patterns as well as out of date clothing into fashionable ones to suit the demand of the time and also the ease of determining causes of mistakes on a particular design and flexible planning for correcting procedure (Tamakloe, 2011; Larbi & Atta, 2009). Tamakloe (2011) outlined that pattern drafting skills increase productivity and maximize profit and ensure business survival and growth.

In other words, pattern drafting helps to identify certain faults that might arise on the design and seek to adapt remedies to the problem before construction. In contrary, the free-hand cutting skills only identify the problem through fitting after sewing which waste much time and resources (Tamakloe, 2011; Larbi & Atta, 2009).

Creativity is the bedrock of any competitive market and this is best achieved in stages, process manipulation and systematic organization of processes. That is exactly what the pattern drafting skills portray which brings out creativity in styles. This platform is opposite in the free-hand cutting skill in that the styles remain static and still. Foster and Ampong (2012) write that pattern drafting offers free movement if more tailored to close fitting to the body contour.

## **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey was considered adequate for this study as it has the advantage of soliciting respondent's views on the nature of the situation as it existed at the time of a study (Creswell, 2012; Mugenda, 2008). The design is an efficient way of collecting information of a large group of people within a short time using questionnaires. The survey design was deemed appropriate for this study as it has the advantage of seeking the views of informal dressmakers and tailors on the use of pattern drafting and free-hand cutting in apparel construction.

It allowed for the use of both quantitative and qualitative techniques in the study. This paved way for better understanding of a phenomenon under study. The use of these methods offered the opportunity to have in-depth information and also the weakness in one method is compensated for by the strength in another method (Creswell, 2012). Five regional executives comprising President, Secretary, Coordinator, Financial Secretary and one co-opted old executive member were interviewed to find out the use of pattern drafting and free-hand cutting in making apparel and scope of training of apprentices.

## 4.0 RESULTS

### 4.1 Executive's Views on Apparel made using two Methods

The results revealed that dressmakers and tailors' preference to free-hand cutting was influenced by the method they were trained with. One of the executives said:

“...I want to use myself as an example. I was trained with free-hand cutting and other methods like pattern drafting but am very comfortable in using free-hand cutting in sewing. Though there are some types of styles I cannot do without the use of pattern.”

Another indicated that:

“...most of our members were trained with free-hand cutting and that is what they are used to in sewing of apparel. Even though these days due to the nature of style demands by clients, most especially the youth, dressmakers and tailors are now challenged. They now go for sloppers from friends who use pattern. The problem some of them face is that because they lack understanding of the symbols on the pattern, the outcome is most at time different from what the clients expect.”

In support of the above, another executive member indicated that:

“I once taught draping in a formal set-up but since I stopped teaching to have my own shop I have been sewing with free-hand cutting because I don't have the equipment for draping otherwise I would have preferred draping for sewing because I like it so much.”

The comments made by the executives suggested that the method dressmakers and tailors were trained with influenced their choice of method they used in making apparel. Most dressmakers and tailors felt free-hand cutting method was easier to use as compared with pattern drafting.

The next question sought to discover the scope of apprenticeship training among the informal dressmakers and tailors of the association. One of the executive members commented that, “the duration of the training is a minimum of three years and a maximum of four years. The method of training is mostly by free-hand cutting method.”

The researcher further asked them if there were any thoughts of reviewing the scope of apprenticeship training among their members. This was deemed important because most trainees found it easier to use the methods they were trained with than using methods that were new to

them. Interestingly, they all answered in the affirmative and added that the syllabus was undergoing review. One member stated that:

“There is an intention to review the current syllabus which to inculcate the skills of pattern drafting alongside the free-hand cutting for training of apprentices. It will also include other areas like simple arithmetic and practical instructions on construction of patterns.”

Further interrogation revealed that the standardization of apparel production among the members can best be achieved by intensifying the use of pattern drafting as part of apprenticeship training to ensure accuracy in fit among informal dressmakers and tailors locally. The respondents were asked to state their views on whether educational level hinders the progress of their training.

They all concurred and mentioned that they were taking that into consideration of apprentices' education level as part of the new syllabus which was under review. The researcher wanted more information on this and one of respondents commented:

“We have been having organizing short training on the use of pattern to help our members improve their skills. We realized the challenge some of our members face due to their low level of education. So, we are considering one's level of education as a requirement for apprenticeship training in the new syllabus. An apprentice must have at a certificate in basic education to qualify to train as a dressmaker or a tailor.”

The executives were asked about their opinions on differences in apparel sewn by members using free-hand cutting and those sewn using pattern drafting or ready-made new clothes. All the executives agreed that there is great variation in apparel made with the two methods most especially areas with curves.

One of them commented that,

“As an experienced designer I can easily notice the difference. Comparatively, the ready-made new apparel has a complete and perfect technical feature which the free-hand cutting apparel may lack.”

The last question sought to find out if the executives had any contribution to the interaction. The interviewees indicated that in most cases the informal dressmakers and tailors concentrated on traditional apparel such as shirts, trousers, “*kaba* and slit” (long skirt and top) and ‘*fugu*’ (smock) which can easily be made with free-hand cutting. They were of the view that more could be done to encourage members into the sewing of apparel like dinner wear, bridal and evening wears which may require patterns.

The executives were of the view that these styles needed to be included in the new syllabus of apprenticeship training which will improve sewing of curves. By so doing they can sew apparel with such styles in local fabrics and package for export to nearby countries.



## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Probing on reasons why they preferred free-hand cutting to pattern drafting brought to light that, the dressmakers and tailors' preference to free-hand cutting was influenced by the method they were trained with and the ease associated with the processes in free-hand cutting.

The study also concluded that one way of ensuring that the dressmakers and tailors use other methods of apparel construction was to review the IDTA training syllabus. This was deemed important because most trainers found it easier to use the methods they were trained in than using methods that were new to them.

The executives also agreed that there is need to intensify supervision of IDTA training to ensure compliance with the association's guidelines on apprenticeship training methods. The respondents indicated it would help to ensure some level of standardization in the apparel industry in the Koforidua area and lead to meeting clients' needs. This finding is not far from what other researchers had alluded to. For example, Carter (2010) reported that education was the key to improving fashion especially in apparel construction. Amender (2012) had further commented that the gap between apparel construction by pattern drafting and free-hand cutting such as apparel fit could only be achieved by education. Responses from the executives of the GNDTA indicated that comparatively the ready-made new apparel had complete and perfect technical features which were usually lacking in the apparel of free-hand cutting. To meet the global challenge, the training trend needed to be reviewed to conform to the high standard of apparel making they added.

Reason why informal dressmakers and tailors were not using pattern drafting in apprenticeship training might be related to the fact that pattern skills seemed too difficult to understand and the period of training might be short to grasp the details of the method. Taking their educational level and period of training into consideration, it would be very difficult for the apprentices to cope with the contents that come with patterns. This implies that, there is the need to inculcate the use of pattern drafting as part of training curriculum of apprentices and also increase the period of training to allow both masters and apprentices gain better grasp of the pattern drafting skills. When trainees are given adequate training skills on the use of pattern drafting, they would improve and this would in effect manifest in the high standard on fit of apparel among the dressmakers and tailors in the informal setting in the near future.

The study recommended future studies to focus on the factors influencing training and acquisition of both skills of apparel constructions. This will help the policy makers rectify the structure of education accordingly to improve the way skills are disseminated and executed.

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