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Students' workplace learning experiences: How do clothing Fashion Design Students apply knowledge and skills gained at university to the workplace?

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Abstract

This paper examines how the Clothing Fashion Design students applied knowledge and skills learnt from university to workplace. The major objective of this paper was to investigate the knowledge and skills that were applied by the clothing fashion design students during workplace learning periods. The qualitative paper utilised a descriptive case study design. Data was gathered from a purposive sample comprised of nine participants. Face-to-face individual interviews and document analysis were utilised in this paper as data collection instruments. Data were analysed thematically. Findings revealed that application of knowledge and skills by students during workplace learning was not uniform due to a pervasive lack of critical resources. The recommendations were that industry should acquire the critical resources to enhance student practice and the industry as such. There should also be a link between what students learn from the university and the activities in industry to perpetuate the thrust of the programme.

Keywords: Clothing, fashion design, skills, student experiences, workplace learning.

Introduction

The integration of theory into practice has been recognized as one of the key issues to consider if the development of professional experiences and vocational competence among students is to be achieved (Kaija, 2006). Researchers have indicated that the Clothing manufacturing industry where the Clothing Fashion Design students go for workplace learning is facing several challenges (Youmans & Chiwara, 2012) . This situation might have negative influence on the students' learning. Several researchers have indicated numerous benefits of workplace learning to students (Akplu & Amankra, 2008; Edziwa, et al., 2012; Matamande et al.,2013) but however, little is not yet known regarding the knowledge and skills that are applied during workplace learning by the Clothing Fashion Design students while on workplace learning. The issue therefore, poses a huge challenge to both the Clothing manufacturing industries and higher education institutions because the current pace of technological change and the high demand of skilled personnel in industry require that Clothing manufacturing industries have current machinery and manpower to enhance students' workplace learning (Kaija, 2006). The issue is confirmed by the fact that the whole

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essence of learning is to apply the learning theories into practice. Matamande et al., (2013). Literature further indicates that the whole essence of learning is to apply the learning theories into practice (Matamande et al., 2013). This is further mentioned by a number of researchers who holds the fact that workplace learning as allow students to update their skills and knowledge in their trades, exposing them to new methods and materials and giving them a holistic impression of their trades. (Akplu & Amankra, 2008; Edziwa et al., 2012; Tony 2008)

Applying knowledge and skills to current trends

What is currently occurring globally is one of the biggest trends in the fashion and retail world termed "athleisure" - athletic attire that people can wear in most non-athletic settings. For example, certain CEOs are now wearing sneakers to board meetings. It is thus apparent that athletic-casual wear is becoming progressively more acceptable “for use in a wide variety of social situations, and consumers are quickly jumping on the trend” (Petro, 2015). This does not seem to be a passing fad since it has links with the rise of fitness-conscious consumers. They now tend to view athletics not only as a hobby but also as an all-around lifestyle. More critical, students of clothing fashion design need to be aware that there is a huge desire for clothing to be comfortable, “…even when it's supposed to be functional, like formal wear in professional situations” (Petro, 2015).

Literature review

Workplace learning is a form of learning whereby students have a chance to apply knowledge, skills and feelings learnt from university in an immediate and relevant setting (Edziwa, et al., 2012; Tony, 2008). Fenwick (2008a) defines workplace learning as a form of learning that takes place through relations and dynamics among the individual participants and others. Workplace learning is also defined as the context in which acquisition of knowledge and skills takes place through formal or informal means (Cacciattolo, 2015). Avis (2010) indicated that the workplace learning is an important place where the creation of knowledge and development takes place. Workplace learning therefore, refers to a form of learning where by students outside their institution have any chance of applying, practising and acquiring the knowledge and skills required in their future trades under the assistance of others who can be peers or workplace staff.

The main objective of workplace learning in the Clothing Fashion Design degree is to provide students with exposure to the real world of work. Matamande et al. (2013) assert that the main aim of the workplace learning programme is for students to put into practice theories that would have been learnt during university learning. Akplu and Amankra 2008; Connor, 2008; Dennerlein et al., 2016) see workplace learning as allowing students to update their skills and knowledge in their trades, exposing them to new methods and materials and giving them a holistic impression of their trades. Akplu and Amankra (2008) observe that workplace learning brings elements of realism in students’ training. Institutions of higher learning are always seeking ways to ensure that students apply the acquired knowledge to practice (Clements, 2010). Learning in Clothing Fashion Design is about the application of theory to practice which is intensified in industrial settings during placement. In particular, workplace learning related to students’ degree programmes includes specific learning tasks, formal guidance or supervision, and assessment to assist students in their application of knowledge and skills. Kaija (2006) posits that workplace learning is intended to socialize the student into certain practices and expose them to already existing knowledge or specific skills. The other aim may be to change existing practices or to produce innovations or products not yet known (creativity). Placement students may also benefit from seeing the practical applications of their studies outside the academic world and hence relate their studies to the workplace. Brookshire (2008) asserts that workplace learning enhances

students' ability to apply and integrate what they have learnt in classroom. In the whole, Kaija (2006) points out that during workplace learning one learns to do things, copes with one's work tasks and takes care of things on time while at school one learns to be passive.

The constituents of expertise may be divided into components such as theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge self-regulative knowledge including metacognitive and reflective skills (Kaija, 2006). Recent accounts on the development of expertise have emphasized that the integration of these elements is of fundamental importance. For example, Kaija (2006) states that education should involve fusing theory and practice. However, in universities, this is not feasible since technologies are dynamic and difficult for institutions to acquire all the necessary machines and equipment for training students to apply theoretical knowledge into practice (Masimira, 2012). According to Kaija (2006), formal book knowledge should be transformed into useful knowledge used to solve problems. Hence, problem solving is a key to integration of these different elements of expertise.

Recent studies have also brought up a concept of work-process knowledge (Kaija, 2006) which is continuously being produced in the workplace through the work-process itself. This knowledge is characterized by its usefulness for work because it includes both practical knowledge and theoretical understanding. According to Kaija (2006), work process knowledge is generated when theoretical knowledge is integrated with experiential know how in the course of solving problems during workplace learning. Students studying Clothing and Fashion Design achieve this when they are given a chance to design garments to solve societal problems. The issue is how these students apply the knowledge and skills to solve problems while on placement Thus, there is need to see professional development as fusing theory and experience in both educational and work contexts.

The integration of theory and practice has been recognized as one of the key aspects in the development of vocational competence, but traditional practices in education and workplace have kept theory and practice separate from each other causing problems of inert knowledge; that is knowledge that can be used in educational settings but cannot be transferred to real life contexts. The recent trend of adopting workplace learning as an integral part of education has been one important effect to solve the problem of inert knowledge and the separation between theory and practice (Kaija, 2006). However, workplace learning has been applied in varied forms in which the relationship between theory and practice and formal learning has been varied considerably from high level integration to practically absent integration. The latter is an issue in the case the of Clothing Fashion Design students it is not known whether they have a chance to practice the concepts learnt at the university during workplace learning. Akplu and Amankra (2008) observe that workplace learning brings elements of realism in students' training. The relation between university-based learning and workplace learning and the Question of how theory and practice meet each other have become important questions related to the development of expertise.

Kaija (2006) reports that a group of employers noted theoretical knowledge education as an important source of competence for giving employees basic knowledge from the area in which they are working. In disagreement, Kaija (2006) posits that student's value educationally derived knowledge more than knowledge acquired through experience at the workplace. He further points out that in carrying out some of the tasks during workplace learning, it is possible to apply book knowledge. Kaija (2006) notes that some students considered that their university studies provided a general although limited, basis for workplace learning. There were also students who experienced that work involves direct application of school learning. Mhizha and Mandebvu (2012) point out that such students experience theory being applied and practiced during their workplace learning.

Linking the above statement to the current study the question is: How do the Clothing Fashion Design students apply knowledge and skills gained from college during workplace learning when the clothing manufacturing industry is facing a myriad of problems? When the Clothing Fashion Design students go for workplace learning, they are expected to apply the theory obtained from university to workplace. However, students face challenges in applying what they have learnt from college to workplace. Universities of technology are obliged to establish strategies for improving students' workplace learning. Although application takes place in industry, it is also important to establish how students apply what they have learnt from college to workplace learning in this study. It is in this regard that strategies to improve workplace learning need to be significant in order to assist students when they go for placement in these clothing manufacturing companies.

There is also the issue of theoretical knowledge and practical action during Workplace Learning. The relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical competence acquired on the workplace is seen as a continuum. Theoretical knowledge acquired in education was considered to be replaced by new practical knowledge required at workplace during placement. Theory and practice are seen as complementary and often integrated components of competence (Mhizha & Mandebvu, 2012). This assertion is evident during placement when students in clothing Fashion Design are expected to learn how to construct patterns for varied clothing items and finally do the designing, pattern construction, laying and cutting, production of the designed garment, finishing, quality control, labelling, packaging and dispatch (Kadolph, 2005). This process reflects the marrying of theory to practice during placement by students. This study sought to establish whether these students had a chance to go through all the above expected production processes (application) effectively when the industry was facing major challenges. What were their experiences regarding the application of what they had learnt at college to workplace?

Seeing theoretical knowledge and the practical competence acquired at work as a continuum means that theoretical knowledge such as (familiarisation with material and various tools) is perceived as a foundation for the things that one learns for workplace learning related activity. One is aware of the destination between knowledge accumulated at workplace learning but at the same time one recognises both as necessary pre-conditions for the successful performance of one's job whether one is already in employment or still in education running a project to meet the needs of the client. Furthermore, both the employees and students see it as a notable aspect of studying basic knowledge that one learns to know many of the tools for example during one's formal training but that it is only at work that one learns to use them practically and effectively (Kadolph, 2005). Thus, theoretical education knowledge and skills needed to perform one's specific task, as one employee describes: "I was thinking just now that if I had skipped school, I am quite sure I would be less quick to grasp the things that you must learn at workplace." This reflects that theoretical knowledge and practical know how work together.

Theory and Practice are seen as Integrated components, where theory and practice support and fuse into each other. According to Kaija (2006) many employees emphasised that from the perspective of competence, theoretical and practical knowledge should not be considered separate. Instead, together they make up competence as a comprehensive phenomenon. Kaija (2006) further notes that theory and practice support each other in a way that includes an understanding of the rationale according to which some particular tasks should be carried out and the background elements of the relevant solutions and that as a result includes also an understanding of the boundary conditions of the given job. He further emphasises that theory and practice support each other because sometimes one understands theories because one has analysed something through practice.

Kaija (2006) postulates that some students had experienced that it was only practice that made theory meaningful. Kaija (2006) also notes that courses done at university help students during placement and those theories influence everything done during placement. He further points out that basic knowledge that has accumulated influences how one unconsciously does things. Mhizha and Mandebvu (2012) point out that theoretical training received at the university blends very well with the practical work. This is true because, during placement, students will be practicing what they have acquired at the university in their first and second years of study in various courses. Moreover, some employees described theoretical knowledge acquired in school and action at workplace as an integrated relationship. It comes out, for example when employees who re-enter education after several years in working life see the relationship between practice and theoretical knowledge in new terms.

One is able to be more critical of both the details of theory or of workplace practice as he/she understands them. Kaija (2006) posits further postulates that the superiority of practical application in learning is that it creates a link with theoretical knowledge. However, for the students, the context for learning comprised a partnership between the university and the client enterprise. Thus, both the conservative and innovative features of learning are encountered during the placement period. Mhizha and Mandebvu (2012) assert that students receive relevant theoretical training at the university which is compatible with practical processes in industry. However, how the clothing Fashion Design students apply the knowledge and skills they learnt from university during work place learning is not known, hence the essence of this paper. Mhizha and Mandebvu (2012) further observe that all stakeholders' support the view that combing the two approaches to training is advantageous to all stakeholders.

Mhizha and Mandebvu (2012) highlight the importance of linking theoretical classroom training to the practical scenarios at the workplace. They emphasise that theoretical training without experience results in half-baked products that are not compatible with the needs of industry. Leslie et al (2009) observe that learning by doing is the most effective method of learning. Thus, application of knowledge and skills learnt at the university is the essence of workplace learning. However, the industry is facing some challenges which explains why the paper sought to establish whether the students were in a position to marry theory with practice during their placement period effectively.

Leslie et al (2009) assert that soldiers, pilots, lawyers, business people, nurses and teachers usually engage in real life role play while learning the contexts and conditions particular to their professions during their days in training. This process allows them to apply what they have learnt practically. As such Clothing Fashion Design students are expected to apply what they have learnt at the university during placement period in clothing manufacturing industries as they take part in various real manufacturing processes. The paper then sought to establish how the students in Clothing Fashion Design applied the knowledge and skills learnt from university to workplace.

Theoretical Framework

This paper utilised the experiential learning theory propounded by Kolb (1984). The researcher employed this theory to investigate how the Clothing Fashion Design students applied knowledge and skills gained from university to workplace learning. According to the experiential learning theory, there are four discrete sequential components that are crucial in accomplishing true learning and real understanding. These learning modes are concrete experience, reflective observation**,** abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kunz & Garner, 2007).

Concrete experience refers to a process whereby learners are involved in exploring or performing an activity of some kind (Edziwa & Chivheya, 2013). Concrete experience is a fundamental basis for new knowledge in experiential learning. Through concrete experience, students learn various processes and procedures (Brookshire 2008). Through concrete experiences, students encounter other experiences during workplace learning which need to be unveiled in this research.

Reflective observation is a process whereby learners transform experiences, through watching carefully those involved in the experience and then reflecting on what happens (Edziwa & Chivheya, 2013). Kolb and Kolb (2005) maintain that reflective observation takes place when the learner steps back, ponders questions and evaluates his or her own experiences. In reflective observation, learner's feelings, reactions and emotions are important for learning. Abstract conceptualization demands students to apply what they have observed or learnt (Brookshire 2008). This deepens and broadens the learner's understanding of a concept by cementing their experiences through generalizations and applications (Heather, Steve & Stephanie, 2009).

Finally, the fourth learning mode is active experimentation whereby an individual actually gets involved in a particular activity (Edziwa & Chivheya, 2013). Active experimentation happens when the learner is able to test, apply and act on what has been learned from the experience in new situations. Thus, active experimentation results in new experience leading to a new learning cycle (Leslie et al., 2009). Through this application experience, students start taking steps to change their lives in the longer term. The relevance of the experiential learning theory in this paper is that it provides an understanding of how students should learn to acquire knowledge and skills during placement, the theory also considers how students can obtain meaningful workplace learning. The theory also provides some insight into how companies that offer placements for students could improve on the experiences students encounter during workplace learning.

Objectives of the study

The paper sought to examine how Clothing Fashion Design students applied knowledge and skills learnt from college to work place learning.

Methodology

The research paradigm that was adopted in this paper was interpretivism and a qualitative approach. Using the paradigm enabled the researcher to explore Clothing Fashion Design students' personal thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding how they applied the knowledge and skills during placement (Dina, 2012; Krauss, 2005). This study adopted a descriptive case study design which facilitates deep investigation of a real life contemporary phenomenon in its natural context (Dina, 2012; Yin, 2012). The detailed descriptions allowed the researcher to gain insight into how Clothing Fashion Design students applied knowledge and skills learnt from university to workplace learning from the students themselves (Uma & Rodger, 2009; Yin, 2012).

Purposive sampling was utilised to select nine third year Clothing Fashion Design students on attachment to participate in the study. This paper utilised in-depth face-to-face individual interviews with the students to collect data. For identification purposes, students who participated in the study were allocated codes from Student 1 (S1) to Student 9 (S9). Students' workplace learning log books and journals were also examined.

The data was analysed inductively by identifying categories and themes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Dina, 2012). The interview guides were pilot tested using two clothing

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fashion design 3rd year students who were not part of the sample and two senior lecturers were asked to inject their ideas as expert researchers. Recommendations that emanated from the pilot test were effected into the interview guide before data collection process.

Results

The findings revealed that Clothing Fashion Design students on workplace learning engaged in a total of five major courses, namely pattern design, Fashion illustration garment cutting and making, fashion marketing and retailing, fashion quality management and communication skills but there were challenges in other areas as shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes on how Clothing Fashion Design students applied knowledge and skills gained at university to the workplace.

Theme	Sub-themes	Issues raised
Knowledge and skills applied During workplace learning	Pattern design	Applied pattern development, others used ready- made patterns use of CAD/CAM grading. Not taught to design new patterns in industry.
	Garment cutting and making	Students participated in garment cutting and laying and but some used manual methods, product development and garment construction.
	Fashion illustration/Creative design	Students were assisting mentors to illustrate their designs since mentors were underqualified.
	Fashion marketing and Retailing	Majority of students managed to be involved in the marketing of company fashion products
	Fashion Quality Management	Students participated in quality control in the various sections from designing to despatch
	Communication skills	This course assisted students on how to communicate with seniors other students and customers

Pattern design

Pattern design came up as a sub-theme under the major theme of knowledge and skills applied during workplace learning. The ability by students to apply what they have learnt at college to workplace learning was presented by one of the student who said:

*I applied graphic design. I applied that while we were doing embroidery. We made school logos for day cares, school logos for primary and secondary schools and business cards. (*S3*).*

In the same manner, another student supported the above statement saying that during workplace learning, students managed to apply pattern design as they managed to do pattern making. The student mentioned that:

In the first week, I was in the design department. I was asked to do some samples by the buyer so I made a few samples before I made my own patterns derived the pattern from a given picture. We also did pattern grading using computer aided design, CAD/CAM, yes, I applied (S8).

Still in support of the point of applying pattern design during workplace learning, another third-year student mentioned that:

*I applied pattern development here where I am. Pattern making was not something that I learnt or saw at industry or from industry only, but started it at the university. (*S5*).*

It should be noted that the issue of applying pattern design during workplace learning by students came out strongly evidenced by the students' reports during interviews, analysed students' documents such as the workplace learning log books and students' journals, it was revealed that students really managed to apply pattern design, grading and graphic design.

Garment Cutting and Making

Garment cutting and making emerged as one of the core courses that students had a chance to apply during workplace learning. Students during interviews noted that they participated in garment cutting and making while at the workplace**.** One of the students said:

*I also applied laying and cutting out. I used ordinary cutting out scissors, not the electric one. Electric was used in the cutting room only. I also applied sewing, that's garment construction. I made five outfits for the attachment project and also garments for the company. (*S7*).*

The above points were echoed by another student in the following words*:*

*I applied laying and cutting out when we were doing garment construction here at the workplace which I started from the university. (*S3*).*

The above reports by students and students' log books reveal that Clothing Fashion Design students managed to apply garment cutting and making during their workplace learning through active participation (learning by doing) and concrete experience.

Fashion illustration/Creative design

Apart from pattern design and garment cutting and making, students acknowledged that they managed to apply fashion illustration during their workplace learning period which they had also learnt at the university. During interviews, and in their log books, students mentioned that the background knowledge they had gathered from university in some areas assisted them to do their work since at the workplace they were now putting the theoretical knowledge and skills into practice. Students who applied it were not taught by the workplace mentors. They did it on their own using the knowledge they had acquired from university. On the application of fashion illustration, one student noted that:

Yes, I applied Fashion illustration, designers in the industry don't know how to illustrate. They don't know how to do the designing of patterns like what we do at university. So they use us mainly. We assist them more in designing especially the Fashion illustrating part. (S1*).*

This response was confirmed by another student who answered that*:*

*We did Fashion illustration at university and at the workplace. I applied figure drawing and anthropometry which is part of fashion illustration I illustrated ladies wear at the company during pattern design. (*S9*).*

The above reports show that most students managed to apply fashion illustration and other components of designing such as figure drawing and anthropometry while they were at the workplace, but fashion illustration was not taught at the workplace.

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Fashion Marketing and Retailing

Fashion marketing and retailing was mentioned during interviews as another area most students managed to apply during their workplace learning. One student replied that:

Ok, I applied Fashion marketing. Assisted them to market the products we were producing. I was also involved in the advertising of school uniforms including t/shirts, tracksuits, wedding gowns, some organisation t-shirts. I made fliers and company cards for customers to see what we the company offers. (S3).

The application of Fashion marketing and retailing was one area which was reported by students during interview discussions and students' workplace learning log books as an area where they managed to apply what they had learnt at university. One student confirmed that:

*At university, we learnt fashion marketing and retailing and I also applied it here. I applied how to market products and who to market to; the target group and consumer preferences. (*S5).

The same issue of fashion marketing and retailing was validated by some students who noted that they would go out to market company products. One student said:

*We did apply Fashion marketing and retailing since we would go out with some samples to some retail shops and they would send them to their headquarters to rate them if they liked them then they would always place their orders. (*S6).

According to the statements presented by the students above and the students' documents like the log books and students' journals that the researcher went through, it is evident that most students were able to apply fashion marketing during workplace learning which they had learnt at university prior to coming to workplace learning.

Fashion Quality Management

The area that students managed to apply knowledge was fashion quality management. This point was substantiated by one student who responded that:

Most of the things we learnt at university are also in industry like fashion quality management. We applied it in the dispatch, checking on how goods are packed, and even production stage we check quality of garments under construction stage by stage so that no mistakes will be found in the final stage. (S6).

Another student also supported the above claim by saying why they did fashion quality management at the workplace:

*I did quality control, yes because the slogan here at the industry at this company is "do it right first time". (*S8).

The points presented above make it clear that students applied what they had learnt in Fashion quality management from university to the workplace. The points explained above were also evident in the students' log books that the researcher analysed.

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Communication Skills

Clothing Fashion Design students also learnt and applied communication skills during workplace learning. One student during observed that:

Communication Skills is another course that I did at college and it is assisting me here in industry because I know how to talk to other people like my friends and seniors respectfully. (S4).

The point above was endorsed by another student who also said that:

*We also learnt communication skills at university and applied it now in industry. Now I know how to communicate with my colleagues and customers. (*S5).

From the points raised above and the students' workplace learning journals and the log books that the researcher analysed, it is evident that the skill in communication that the students learnt at the university had a positive influence on their communication at the workplace learning since they did not face any challenges regarding proper communication with their peers, customers and seniors at work.

Discussion

It was established that students managed to apply pattern design, grading and graphic design during workplace learning. However, students indicated that they were grading patterns using manual methods due to lack of machinery such as CAD/CAM in most of the industries. Shortage of machinery could be linked to lack of adequate resources like machinery since the clothing manufacturing industry is facing financial problems and resulting in others downsizing Youmans and Chiwara (2012). The use of manual methods in designing and grading patterns is quite slow and inaccurate. For students to effectively apply the knowledge and skills during work place learning the workplace learning should be relevant, meaning that it should have the necessary advanced machinery (Edziwa et al., 2012). When the placement place has the necessary equipment this will enhance concrete experience as stipulated in the experiential learning theory by (Kolb,1984).it was mentioned in the research that concrete experience enhances students' learning.

It was also established that students managed to apply fashion illustration and other components of designing such as figure drawing and anthropometry while they were at the workplace learning. Fashion illustration was however, not taught at the workplace. Students had learnt it from the university. Those students who applied it were not taught by the workplace mentors, they did it on their own using the knowledge they had gained from university since they said the mentors were not designing and lacked knowledge in fashion illustration. This is in line with Youmans and Chiwara (2012) who mentioned that the clothing industry is facing serious financial constraints leading to shortage of crucial resources such as human. Youmans and Chiwara (2012) indicate that some workers with scarce skills have migrated in search for greener pastures leaving the clothing manufacturing industry. This left students' with less qualified and experienced mentors to assist them during workplace learning.

The issue of underqualified mentors could be due to the fact that most of them were recruited and trained on the job, hence they have not learnt such critical courses anywhere. It could be also associated to the fact that the one university of technology in Zimbabwe' Clothing Fashion Design graduates are not yet found in all the clothing manufacturing factories hence the shortage of skilled manpower to assist students in Fashion illustration. As a solution to this problem the industry should recruit highly qualified staff and offer staff

development facilities in the critical areas to assist these students. This is confirmed by (Rudhumbu & Maphosa, 2015) who mentioned that careful recruitment and development of talent is a key aspect of motivated staff.

Students also indicated that they were not designing new patterns since the industry were making use of ready-made patterns. Use of ready-made patterns does not give students to practice fashion designing which is the thrust of the program However, students managed to design on their own for the university project using the knowledge they had acquired from the university since the workplace mentors were not knowledgeable in the area of Fashion Designing. Boyer et al (2014) explain that students who can work on their own to achieve the intended goal will be self- directed learners who are intrinsically motivated. What students did is in line with literature which says that the aim of student workplace learning is the development of professional expertise; hence knowledge acquired at college was put into practice during workplace learning period (Connor, 2008). In total agreement with the above statement, Kaija (2006) highlights that education should also involve fusing theory and practice. Kaija (2006) also noted that courses done at university help students during workplace learning.

He further points out that basic knowledge that has accumulated influences how one unconsciously does everything on that basis. Mhizha and Mandebvu (2012) mention that theoretical training gained at the university blends in very well with the practical work. This assertion concurs with some of the modes from the experiential learning theory by Kolb (1984). Through concrete experience students learn through practice and actually have a feel of the tangible object for better understanding through actively participating in the designing process. This means that students were supposed to participate in practical activities such as fashion designing. A concrete experience involves application of the theory and technical skills acquired from the university during the first and second years into practice (Sharrif, 2007). Students were supposed to apply all the aspects of designing during their workplace learning but this was not the case. Failure to practice Fashion Designing by students will result in these students not acquiring the skill and even fail to upgrade it. For students to practise fashion design effectively during workplace learning the industry should recruit quailed personnel in the area of Fashion Designing

Reports by students showed that Clothing Fashion Design students managed to apply garment cutting and making during their workplace learning through active participation that is learning by doing and concrete experience. The only problem they faced was that in some instances they were cutting out using manual methods due to lack of specialised machinery such as the electric cutting machine. This is in line with literature which observes that the quality of students' experiences while on workplace learning depends on the status of the industry (Youmans & Chiwara, 2012). Those who were in well established companies managed to cut using modern machinery as opposed to those in less established factories. This resulted in students not being able to acquire skills in the use of specialised machinery, production of low quality fashion garments. Therefore, garment cutting and making should be done where there is relevant machinery for students to practice properly. On the same issue, Molenaar and Jarvela (2014), Trede and McEwen (2016) as well as Sonnneberg and Bannet (2015) explained that it is necessary for universities and organisations to help students develop their capacity through promoting workplace learning. This means students on workplace learning should be supported for meaningful learning to take place. From students' responses, it was quite evident that students were able to apply fashion marketing which they had learnt at university during workplace learning. Students mentioned that they could market the fashion products using fliers, business cards and paying visits to their potential customers showing them the prepared samples of their products for them to view.

Such a finding is consistent with aspects of Kolb's experiential learning theory. In experiential theory, it is assumed that experience plays a crucial role in the learning process (Kolb and Davis, 2008). When students are involved in the marketing of fashion products, they will learn and understand better how fashion goods are supposed to be marketed.

The other area that students managed to apply was fashion quality management. Students noted that they were involved in quality checking from cutting room, production line and finishing. On this issue, there was a link between what students learnt at the university and what they learnt while at workplace learning. In experiential learning, the engagement of the body and mind through activity, reflection and application tends to provide depth and meaning to a learning training system (Kolb & Davis, 2008). Through actively participating in quality control, students were in a position to better understand the process. The age range of students also shows that they were still in the active years as the oldest among the females was 34 years and among the males was 43 years. It was possible for them to actively run around the various sections checking the quality of the garments being made.

From students' workplace learning documents' it was evident that the knowledge and skills in communication that the students learnt at the university actually helped them during their workplace learning. This reflects that communication skills as a course was taught at university effectively. The findings warrant the conclusion that communication skills assisted students during their workplace learning since they did not face any challenges regarding proper communication with their peers, customers and seniors at work. It was mentioned in the research that when students are at workplace learning, during the reflection phase, they share reactions and observations publicly and process their experiences through discussion and analysis with their peers and mentors (Edziwa & Chivheya, 2013). They do this through communication with others for learning to take place. Communication learnt at the university assisted them to share ideas through interaction with others at the workplace. McConnell (2008) suggests that communication skills with workmates and with a team of all ages and seniority and meeting people from other companies are valuable in developing one's professionalism. Without effective communication, learning would not take place since students should always be taking and following instructions from their mentors and sharing ideas with peers.

Conclusion

From the above findings, it can therefore be concluded that students applied what they learnt from the university to workplace learning but in some areas it was not very effective. However, students also faced challenges during the process of application, for example in pattern design, where they graded the patterns using manual methods due to lack of machinery such as CAD/ CAM. In garment cutting and making students were cutting using manual methods due to a lack of specialized machinery like the cutting machines and they had limited access to latest machines in some companies, and also underqualified mentors in fashion design. Consequently they were not taught to design new patterns because in industry they used ready-made patterns. Their mentors lacked knowledge in fashion illustration and fashion designing and the latest trends.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, a number of recommendations can be made towards enhancement of application of knowledge and skills the among the Clothing Fashion Design students. First of all, highly qualified personnel should be recruited and according them staff development facilities to assist in practical activities such as use of CAD/CAM, Fashion Designing and Fashion Illustration.

Secondly, workplace mentors should give students more practice time in the different departments, especially in the use of machinery, pattern making, designing, garment construction and CAD/CAM. Duration of workplace learning can be extended to provide enough time for students to practice in the various sections.
Thirdly, students need to be in tune with the latest trends in for example, leisure wear and the need for clothes that transition from one activity to the next. These clothes are popular as they give people greater function without compromising style.

Linking university theory with the knowledge and skills and practical activities in industry is one way of providing students with opportunities to apply what they have learnt. Thus, lecturers and mentors at workplaces should work together to make sure that students apply what they have learnt from the university. Universities establishing their own factories and phase out industrial attachment as a way of solving the problem of having students attached to poorly equipped companies with under qualified mentors.

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