

Improving the Standards of Fashion Education in Africa

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Report 002

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Introduction

The CIAFE operational team gained significant insights following our first report, 'The State of Fashion Education in Africa 2021'.

In June 2021, a Roundtable & Knowledge Exchange discussion was held with the CIAFE Advisory Board on 'How can we improve the standards of fashion education in Africa'.

This report was based on the findings obtained from the discussion and the insights from the 'State of Fashion Education 2021' report.

During the Roundtable & Knowledge Exchange discussion, we challenged the CIAFE Advisory Board members, which comprise fashion professionals from the continent and diaspora, to highlight issues and solutions to develop a tailored curriculum. Some of the Advisory Board's thoughts are quoted throughout the report.

Desk-based research and semi-structured interviews were also conducted to supplement whilst simultaneously addressing the objectives of this report. The rationale for this report is to highlight some of the core matters within African fashion education, which, when addressed, will improve the industry's outlook and encourage many prospective students to choose Africa when looking for a place to pursue a program in fashion education. This paper serves as a foundation for more studies and research conducted within the African fashion education industry.



Diagnose the Challenges

“We need to diagnose the actual challenge and prescribe working solutions and carry out research to carry the gaps”.

The African fashion education industry has great potential to overcome challenges and innovate to make the sector even more robust and competitive. Research can help us identify gaps and address weaknesses to give fashion students better opportunities, exposure, and meet industry needs.

Most African fashion institutions, for example, are design-focused, with little to no fashion business courses. An ineffective analysis would be identifying the fashion courses on the continent that are design-centric and then attempting to resolve the issue.

An effective analysis will conduct secondary research to understand why the continent focuses primarily on fashion design, as this will uncover hidden insights which will then inform the resolution process.



Patronise/Formalising Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a prevalent form of non-academic training in Africa. Many designers have either acquired or polished their fashion design skills through apprenticeships.

In Ghana, fashion education and training have been handed down from generation to generation even before the colonial invasion through apprenticeships, which can be described as an indigenous formal training system.

“The apprenticeship system is certainly a good thing that needs to be considered and needs to be encouraged more and even formalised.”

Incorporating apprenticeships into the fashion design curriculum is also a cost-effective way to train new staff while maintaining cultural traditions. Apprentices can make contributions to the workplace while they are learning and gaining skills on the job.



Strategic Partnerships are Key

“Some of the fashion schools in Africa have been standing for years and are not prone to change, especially in trying out a new curriculum”, “How do we integrate with the powers behind the education system?”, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”.

The purpose of CIAFE is to support development and innovation in the fashion education industry through fashion curriculum redesigning and restructuring. In line with CIAFE’s purpose, CIAFE intends to partner with individuals and bodies within the education sector such as Education Ministries, Accreditation Board, etc.

All of us have a relationship to change; either we have tried to change others or ourselves. Change can either succeed or fail, be good, or be a disaster, make us feel incompetent, or feel skilful. We may want to change or feel resistant to change.

No one is prone to change, but CIAFE is relentlessly committed to including educational authorities and their perspectives on change in the fashion education industry. This will enable them to understand why change is essential, reflect on the industry’s challenges and devise strategies to make change more effective.



Data Collection

“If we can find the right tools and right groups to gather data, it will be the key element to help solve the problems highlighted by the report.”

Institutions should work on collecting data to help inform and make better decisions. Using data to make decisions leads to higher and better outcomes. Gathering data is also important in developing content and integrating resources.

Data collection is simply the process of gathering information to analyse and make a decision. For example, in developing content and integrating resources, data is needed. Research should be conducted in surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc., to gather data to inform the decisions before developing new fashion institutions or evaluating existing fashion institutions on the continent. Data-driven decisions can positively impact the African fashion education industry.



Creating Resources to Identify Schools

“When I was looking for a fashion school to attend a couple of years ago, I struggled because there was no directory to help me find fashion schools on the continent.”

A handful of guides and directories provide a list of the fashion-related courses offered in various fashion institutions across Africa. Still, they are not extensive and comprehensive enough.

This makes it difficult for students to know the various fashion-related courses available on the continent to consider studying in Africa instead of going abroad.

Based on the research CIAFE conducted, it was discovered that irrespective of the numerous fashion schools in Africa, many schools do not have an online presence, limiting their visibility to students. More fashion school directories are needed to keep creating awareness about fashion courses and institutions on the continent.

