

The Importance Of Policy Implementation In Decolonising The Fashion Curriculum Effectively

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Table of Contents

01

Overview

02

The Relationship Between Fashion Education And Policy

03

Constraints In Implementing Fashion Education Policies

04

Effective Strategies That Aid Policy Implementation

05

Policy Recommendations To Decolonise The Fashion Curriculum

06

Conclusion

Overview

Education is crucial to the development of a nation and its various industries. With a focus on fashion education, over the past decade, the Eurocentric nature of the global fashion curricula has become a subject of great concern to stakeholders within fashion academia and industry. However, although more fashion institutions now identify the importance of holistic educational offerings and are formulating frameworks in this regard, calls for decolonising academic fashion curricula have only intensified. This is due to the significant gap between the formation of educational policies and their practical implementation.

Decolonising the fashion curriculum is expedient as taking into account the various perspectives from different cultures in the industry will enable students, staff and professionals to make informed decisions since they will have a holistic knowledge of the fashion industry.

Furthermore, educational policies and regulations, whether focused on curriculum development, staff recruitment, student/teacher ratio or staff welfare, are predominantly initiatives from the government or education bodies, and they determine the direction of an educational system.

On this foreground, the role of governments and education bodies in policy implementation must be emphasised.

This paper aims to identify the relationship between decolonising fashion curricula and policy and the implementation constraints in fashion education policies. Then it analyses strategies that facilitate policy implementation processes —smart policy design, inclusive stakeholder engagement, conducive context and a coherent implementation strategy. The paper then offers a framework and guidelines for action based on these dimensions, which can help policymakers design, analyse, and carry out the procedures involved in implementing their educational decolonisation policies.

This paper was originally presented at the Commonwealth Fashion Council's Fashion Education Symposium on the 30th of November, 2022.

The Relationship Between Fashion Education And Policy

Fashion education has become a tool for challenging and revamping the industry. The university is an environment capable of influencing how the next generation thinks. Fashion schools teach students about more than creating pieces or converting trends into products. They also serve as the bedrock for promoting conversations on societal values. Undoubtedly, well-educated students will become professionals who can look around, think critically about their place in the industry and propose solutions to some of fashion's biggest problems.

Knowledge about social and environmental challenges in the fashion industry has increased among students, educators, academics, and industry professionals, and fashion universities are paying attention to these shifting orientations. A significant problem is that of decolonising the fashion curriculum. According to Dr Ben Barry, Dean and Visiting Associate Professor of Equity and Inclusion at Parsons' School of Fashion, "the faculty of fashion schools are predominantly influenced by whites and people with Western-based ideas, making it quite difficult for the curriculum and teaching materials to be inclusive" (Barry, 2020).

Hence, faculty, staff, and students are becoming less inclined to support Western-dominated narratives and would promote undervalued creatives and cultures instead. Fashion education faces a dilemma due to this trend toward representing and exposing designers from underrepresented groups, such as people of colour and non-Western regions. How academic fashion institutions respond to this change will significantly impact the industry and shape the next generation of students.

"the faculty of fashion schools are predominantly influenced by whites and people with Western-based ideas, making it quite difficult for the curriculum and teaching materials to be inclusive".

- Dr Ben Barry

The Relationship Between Fashion Education And Policy (Continued)

Decolonising the fashion curricula involves including the various perspectives from different cultures that exist in the industry. It is not just about creating diverse and inclusive educational programmes but also about changing the systems that have enabled racism in all aspects of fashion education. According to Dr Greef, the co-founder and Director of the South African-based African Fashion Research Institute, "taking the concept of decoloniality on board means recognising that we don't have to erase the world as it is, but to acknowledge that other narratives exist" (Ngubane, 2022). On the other hand, education policy implementation is the series of actions taken by the government and other relevant stakeholders to carry out the goals and objectives in a specific policy which affects the education system at various levels.

Fashion education policy implementation is crucial because it significantly changes the fashion curricula according to the policy objectives. It is multidirectional because actors at different points of the education system will influence the implementation process. It is also contextualised in that institutions and societal shocks and trends –e.g. in culture, demography, politics and economy- will affect the education system and the ways in which a policy is implemented in fashion education. In the words of Heidi Safia Mirza, Professor author of *Dismantling Race in Higher Education*, "we [speak about racial] equality; we have wonderful policies, great legislations, but nothing changes because fundamentally the [educational] structures remain unchanged" (Biondi, 2020).

Constraints In Implementing Fashion Education Policies

1

Poor coordination among authorities

Coordination is a significant public administration and policy issue. It has been identified as one of the primary challenges in policy implementation. The success or failure of policies is determined by the positive and strategic coordination of all stakeholders participating in the policy implementation process. It is also imperative to note that the necessity for coordination will also differ among countries and policy areas. Some policy areas may function successfully with minimal attempts to coordinate with others, whereas others may necessitate significant policy integration and coordination. As a result, while some methods of coordination may work in some situations, they will not work in others. Hence, stakeholders need to use the optimal coordination mechanisms for the educational policy they desire to execute.

2

The absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Policy monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a continuous process of gathering and assessing information to determine whether progress is being made toward pre-specified policy goals and objectives and to highlight any unintended (positive or negative) consequences of a policy project and its activities. Monitoring is generally done to track progress and performance as a basis for decision-making at various stages of an effort or project. In contrast, evaluation is a more generalised review of facts or experience to determine the extent to which the initiative has achieved its goals or objectives. It is an essential component of the project cycle and excellent management practice. The absence of these mechanisms in implementing educational policies can have detrimental effects on the realisation of the policy.

Constraints In Implementing Fashion Education Policies

3

A lack of recognition that the core of change processes requires engaging people

The people tasked with implementing a policy may not be familiar with its terminology. With a significant number of outspoken stakeholders in the education sector, policymakers are encouraged to plan for engaging stakeholders as early as feasible in the policymaking process, as well as to communicate the policy's aims, objectives, and methods. Involving stakeholders in the design process may serve numerous purposes, including ensuring that the essential message and logic of the policy are appropriately delivered to actors and building consensus around the objectives, tools, and other means to achieve the policy goals. Doing so can increase support for the policy, reducing the number of actors who may oppose it during the implementation process.

Policy implementation processes and mechanisms must be revised to adapt to new complex governance systems. As fashion education policies are seldom fully implemented and evaluated, there is little change in learning opportunities and outcomes for most learners, reinforcing the need to decolonise the fashion curricula.

Effective Strategies That Aid Policy Implementation

Smart Policy Design

The policy design, the way a policy is debated and framed, the logic it suggests between the policy problem and the solution it offers and the feasibility of the procedure determine to a great extent whether a policy can be implemented and how. A policy to decolonise the curricula should be directed towards specific target groups of users and beneficiaries. Curricular reforms, for instance, should include changing the content and the pedagogical methods of the global curricula to enhance the quality of teaching and learning performance. In this case, the policy has two targets: teachers and students. Labelling targets ensures that policy goals and targets are clear and concrete for reform implementation to be successful.

Conducive Context

Formal and informal social constraints regulate any education system's implementation process. Contextual determinants refer to the elements that constitute the environment in which the educational policy unfolds: the institutional structure and existing policies. Societal trends also shape the implementing environment. Societal trends define the issues that arise in the education sector and how they are perceived. Hence, changes in social, economic and technological conditions affect the possibility for a policy to be implemented and, as such, must be considered in framing and implementing policies.

Effective Strategies That Aid Policy Implementation

Coherent Implementation Strategy

The policy should provide an implementation strategy to realise its goal, but such a strategy should be flexible enough to cope with the unexpected. Five elements of a good implementation plan include:

- Task allocation and accountability;
- Objectives and tools;
- Resources;
- Timing; and
- Communication and engagement strategy with education stakeholders.

While the policy design includes mostly its theoretical underpinnings, the implementation strategy is the operational plan explaining how to make the policy happen in effect.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement

Education policies are implemented by people, making them central to the implementation process because of their characteristics and interactions with other determinants. Whether and how key stakeholders are recognised and included in the implementation process is crucial to its effectiveness. In curriculum development, key actors include principals, teachers, students, school boards, and education material providers. The national government also has relevant institutions that should be included, such as evaluation, inspection or improvement agencies, research agencies, teacher training institutions, ministries of education and their staff and unions.

Policy Recommendations To Decolonise The Fashion Curricula Effectively

A. Holistic Curriculum Development

The global fashion curriculum currently relies heavily on Western ideologies. It, therefore, makes the contributions of indigenous, African, East Asian, and South Asian fashion seem subdued as they are rarely taught. The need to develop inclusive curricula in fashion education has led to movements such as "*Why Is My Curriculum White*", staged by the Student Union Bournemouth University, aimed at tackling a Eurocentric curriculum. Policies to develop an inclusive curriculum that requires non-western theories to be implemented for a fully represented learning experience are necessary to decolonise the fashion curricula.

B. Research and Publishing

Research informs decisions. Research is one of the most significant gaps in fashion education globally. Policies that foster collaboration between fashion institutions to promote research and inclusion of traditionally marginalised perspectives should be developed. This will create more inclusive fashion resources that empower stakeholders in fashion academia to make decisions backed by adequate information.

C. Equitable Representation Across All Levels in Institutions

There is a significant underrepresentation of diverse talent in fashion schools, which continues through all levels of influence and leadership in fashion education. In a 2016 study, NACAC, in collaboration with AACRAO, gathered information from 559 institutional chief admission officers and college presidents. Of those who participated in the study, only 15 per cent identified as non-white for the former and 17 per cent for the latter. With shifting orientations, policy implementation will aid the clamour to make fashion education more diverse in fashion institutions.

D. Development of Inclusive Teaching Material

Policies aimed at developing effective teaching materials will promote the decolonisation of the fashion curriculum. The role of inclusive teaching materials is paramount to achieving a decolonised curriculum. Providing inclusive and diversified teaching materials, resources, and course contents relatable to all racial groups will aid a decolonised fashion curriculum climate.

Conclusion

Decolonisation is a complex process that requires a rethink of the relationship between fashion and society at different levels. Young researchers and new educators are graduating, and they need teaching materials that reproduce different identities as a support, as well as teachers who are committing to be more progressive in their classes and want to make them a tool for change.

Learning about the reality of other societies will ensure that the next generation of fashion leaders can look at the world more generously and understand the contribution of different cultures to the industry, thereby promoting inclusivity. According to Frederica Brooksworth, Founder of the Council for International African Fashion Education, "[Decolonisation] only comes through education, so we must focus on decolonising the curriculum, not only in North America and Europe but also in Africa" (Ngubane, 2022).

As fashion education policies are rarely fully implemented and evaluated, there is little change in learning opportunities and outcomes for most fashion schools and students. Implementation is a multidirectional process entailing continuous interaction between policymakers, the public, and implementers.

If policymakers and stakeholders want policies to be effective and improve education, they need to share a common understanding of implementation to be able to work together on the process. Policy implementation for decolonising the fashion curriculum is complex but possible and will require collective effort and proper strategy.

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