

Method of Producing Couture Garment in Nigeria: Issues and Improvement Strategy

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Abstract

A couture garment is a personalised and unique creation designed according to an individual's request, based on fabric type, design, and body measurement. Its production requires advanced methods, as the process is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and demands intricate design, handcrafted techniques, and meticulous attention to detail. However, couture garments produced in Nigeria are often of low quality, largely due to inappropriate methods of production. This paper investigates the methods and challenges in couture garment production in Nigeria. It first presents the concept of couture garment, then identifies issues in Nigerian couture production methods, including poor design, delays in production, and the creation of low-quality garments that fail to satisfy clients. The study introduces the use of Task Instruction Sheets as an improvement strategy. It recommends the development and adoption of Task Instruction Sheets to enhance production methods and improve the quality of couture garments in Nigeria, thereby ensuring greater customer satisfaction.

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Background to the Study

Couture designers aim to produce high-quality garments tailored to individual customer preferences. Couture garments are personalised and unique creations made according to specific requests regarding fabric, design, and body measurement. Their quality depends largely on the precision of design, the choice of fabric, and the accuracy of fit. The production process involves several stages, including designing, fabric selection, muslin preparation, draping, cutting, basting, stitching, and finishing (Shaeffer, 2001). It often requires a collaborative effort involving the designer, professional dressmakers, and tailoring specialists, each contributing advanced skills and expertise (Nudelman, 2009).

Despite this high level of craftsmanship, the Nigerian context reveals challenges. Many locally produced couture garments fall short in terms of quality, fit, design, construction, and durability (Ugba & Ugba, 2013). Factors contributing to these shortcomings include reliance on inadequate methods or techniques (Oluah, 2013) and a lack of technical knowledge in couture production (Eckerson, 2012). Consequently, Nigerian couture producers struggle to deliver garments that meet international standards and customer expectations.

To address these challenges, the introduction of Task Instruction Sheets is proposed as an improvement strategy. A Task Instruction Sheet provides a step-by-step guide on how to execute sub-tasks such as designing, assembling, or finishing garments (Course Hero, 2021). It fosters clarity, consistency, and efficiency in production, helping producers achieve higher quality outcomes. Previous studies, such as Igbo (1990), have demonstrated the effectiveness of instructional sheets in teaching clothing construction skills. Applied in couture production, Task Instruction Sheets could improve workmanship and enhance customer satisfaction. The aim of this paper is to investigate the issues in methods used for producing couture garments in Nigeria and to explore Task Instruction Sheets as a practical strategy for improving production quality.

Materials used in Couture Production

The materials and techniques used in couture are what make it unique and distinguishable from ready-to-wear clothing. The use of luxurious fabrics, intricate embellishments, and skilled craftsmanship are what set couture apart from other forms of fashion. The materials used in couture include:

1. **Fabrics.** The fabrics used in haute couture/couture are of the highest quality. These include silk, chiffon, organza, tulle, and lace (FasterCapital, 2024). These fabrics are often embellished with embroidery, beading, and other decorative techniques. The choice of fabric is a critical element in haute couture, as it can make or break the design. For example, silk is often used for its lustrous appearance, while chiffon is used for its lightweight and sheer qualities. The fabrics are classified into natural fabrics, specialty fabrics, sustainable materials and leather and fur. Natural fabrics (silk, wool, and cotton) are of high quality, durability and versatility. Specialty fabrics (tulle, chiffon, and organza) add texture and dimension to their designs and are used for layering, creating depth

and movement in a garment. Specialty fabrics are also lightweight and delicate, making them perfect for creating intricate details and embellishments. Sustainable materials such as organic cotton, bamboo, and recycled fabrics are used to create garments that are not only stylish but also environmentally conscious, while leather and fur are used to create unique and luxurious pieces. However, there has been a growing trend towards using faux leather and fur, as designers strive to create garments that are both stylish and ethical. The color, pattern, texture, and print of the fabric, and how they complement or contrast with the design elements, such as seams, buttons, and zippers, are considered while choosing fabric (FasterCapital, 2024).

2. **Embellishments.** Couture garments are renowned for their intricate embellishments. The embellishments used in couture include beading, embroidery, lacework, and appliqué. These techniques are often used to create intricate patterns, designs, and motifs. The embellishments are often done by hand, making each garment unique and one-of-a-kind.
3. **Other materials.** Other materials used in couture are high quality, beautiful and attractive materials such as buttons, zippers and tread with matching color.

Traditional method used in couture garment production

The traditional method used in couture garment production involves many techniques. The techniques used in couture garment production include:

1. **Designing.** Designing of couture garment involves conceptualization of design, creation of mood board, creation of sketches and technical drawings, choosing of fabrics, colors, and embellishments, pattern-making and draping (Siddiqui, 2023). In a nut shell, the process begins with an idea or a sketch, which is then translated into a pattern.
2. **Pattern making.** This technique involves laying out of all the paper pattern pieces, tracing the desired size lines with a red pencil or highlighter, cutting along the lines traced, draping of muslin, folding fabric in half so that the raw edges are lined up, pinning of the pattern pieces to the fabric as indicated, cutting of fabric along the edges of the paper pattern piece snipping notches (Kofi-bruce, 2021). Pattern making therefore involves pattern laying and pattern cutting.
3. **Draping.** Draping is another technique used in couture garment production. It involves manipulating fabric to create a three-dimensional shape on the body (Eckerson, 2012). This technique requires a great deal of skill and expertise. The designer must have an in-depth understanding of the fabric and how it will drape on the body.
4. **Sewing.** Couture garments are made to measure, ensuring a perfect fit for the client. The tailoring techniques used are of the highest quality, with great attention to detail. The garments are often constructed using a combination of hand sewing and machine sewing techniques (Eckerson, 2012). The use of these techniques ensures that the garment is of the highest quality and will last long.
5. **Finishing.** The finishing technique involves attaching fasteners, trimming of edges, removing of stains, repairing or adjusting of fit and pressing of the constructed couture garment (Shaeffer, 2001).

These materials and techniques used in haute couture are what make it unique and distinguishable from other forms of fashion. The techniques require a great deal of skill and expertise, and the garments produced are of the highest quality.

Issues of Method used in Production of Couture Garments in Nigeria

Haute couture is a highly specialized and exclusive form of fashion that requires exceptional craftsmanship and attention to detail. As such, its method of production faces several challenges that threaten its survival. The issues with the method of production of couture garments in Nigeria include:

1. **Use of poor design:** Couture design is a process that requires a high level of skill, creativity, and attention to detail and use of modern tools. Skilled couture designers and producers are few in globally (FasterCapital, 2024) with countries like Nigeria having the full effects. According to Ugba and Ugba (2013), domestic garment producers in Nigeria are unable to provide couture satisfaction in terms of quality and design. So majority of couture garment produced in Nigeria produced with poor design. Another cause of use of poor design in Nigerian couture production is non-use of modern tools such as Adobe instructor (design software) in designing. Majority of couture garment produced in Nigeria do not use design software for designing their garments (Ugba & Ugba, 2013).
2. **Delay in production:** The process of creating an haute couture/couture garment is a labor-intensive and time-consuming as it involves intricate design, handcrafted techniques, and attention to detail (Eckerson, 2012). It is a true art form that requires a lot of patience, time, and skill. Producers who have not mastered these techniques find it difficult to complete production in expected time. In addition, couture garments are made with standard pattern equipment and construction techniques that consume much time. This has resulted in delay and continuous manufacture of some substandard couture garments (Eckerson, 2012). Additionally, there is decline in the number of skilled artisans who can create haute couture/couture garments (FasterCapital, 2024). A producer may find it difficult to get artisans that will create couture garments and this leads to delay in production.
3. **Production of poor-quality garments that dissatisfy costumers or clients:** Creating a couture garment is a complex process that requires a lot of skill, patience, and attention to detail (Kofi-bruce, 2021). From the initial design to the final fitting, each stage of the process is done with precision and care. As explained above, majority of couture garment produced in Nigeria are of poor design. Poor design of clothing leads to poor quality of clothing and costumer's or client's dissatisfaction. In addition, there is decline in the number of skilled artisans who can create couture garments and use of unskilled artisans in couture production can cause poor quality of garment. Additionally, the high cost of creating couture garments makes it difficult for designers to used high quality materials, and this can cause poor quality of garment.

Improvement Strategy

The improvement strategy for production of couture garments in Nigeria is use of Task Instruction Sheets (TIS). The Task instruction sheet is a sheet that provides logical, step-by-step procedures on how to complete a sub-task (Course Hero, 2021) such as how to design, assemble, or finish clothe. The TISs are characterized by activities that engage learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to solve problems, complete projects, and reach decisions. Task Instruction Sheets therefore, help trainees/learners as in this case; couture garments producers to complete the production of quality garments for customer's satisfaction. The typical format of a Task Instruction Sheet consists of task sheet number that follow the code of the last information sheet preceding the task sheet, title that describes the task in a few words, performance objectives (statements which identify the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude the learner should gain and display as a result of the learning activity), supplies/ materials that will be needed in the performance of the task, steps/ procedure (procedure for completing the task), assessment method (a list of methods used in evaluating the performance of the trainee on the particular task), and performance criteria checklist-a list that will give immediate feedback on the performance of a trainee as he practices the task or skill (Course Hero, 2021).

Conclusion

This work has identified and analyzed the issues of the method used in production of couture garments in Nigeria and improvement strategy. The work has revealed that the issues with the method of production of couture garments in Nigeria include use of poor design, delay in production and production of poor-quality garments that dissatisfy costumers or clients. The work has also revealed that the improvement strategy for production of couture garments in Nigeria is use of Task Instruction Sheets.

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