

Future Directions for Fashion Design Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The paper tries to address the key question: 'what is the role of the fashion designer in the emerging creative economy of Sri Lanka?' The answer rests upon the tasks of the Sri Lankan fashion design education and the readiness of the fashion designer qualifies via its training. Data collection was undertaken through a questionnaire in 2012. The participants were the locally qualified fashion designers who have completed their preliminary fashion design studies between 2004 and 2011. Data analysis was carried to discuss the young fashion designers' educational experience, work experience, personal goals and achievements, and consciousness about the local fashion industry. The research concludes that the fashion business and marketing knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and know global perceptions of fashion design practice are knowledge gaps within the questionnaire participants. If fashion design education adapts to the future directions of the fashion industry, Sri Lanka too can expect much advantage via its practices.

Keywords: Fashion designer, Fashion design education, Sri Lanka

Introduction

'Fashion' is a highly creative industry in the global context. Many nations enjoy economic benefits for being a participant in the global fashion industry system. Sri Lanka exposed to the system from export-oriented manufacturing end, at a time when apparel manufacturing was considered as a significant contributor for national development. Since the initiation, Sri Lanka moved up the apparel value-chain in manufacturing and today, it is renowned for quality and ethical production. At present, the industry's challenge is to achieve a sustainable economic development. In order to achieve that, both government and the private sectors have identified the potential need for fashion design to be developed into current systems. Identifying this need, fashion design education was introduced in the country to adequately prepare the fashion designers in 2000.

The fashion designer careers differ from other fashion industry career positions due to the significance of its creative practice. From the company's perspective, fashion designers are bringing economic advantage by meeting the buyer options and/or fulfilling the changing consumer demands. Designers are generally major decision makers, trend creators and inventors of new experiences. But in Sri Lanka's current situation, designers who have not reached manager level have not got the chance of making decisions that could introduce major changes to manufacturing and production.

Sri Lanka can expect much social, economic and environmental advantage via fashion design practice and the fashion designer is the identified key figure in this venture. Sri Lanka's fashion education so far has succeeded in meeting the prime need of the country, namely, filling the creative class gap within the fashion industry. The first generation of fashion graduates has taken the initial creative job vacancies in the context. They have succeeded within the system and the industry too welcomes the benefits.

The research is an attempt to examine how young fashion design talents in Sri Lanka are being shaped under the local higher education system to face the challenges and, how they are being

given an opportunity to participate in the creative economy to enhance a sustainable local fashion industry for the country. In doing so, the paper tries to address the key research question of 'What is the role of the fashion designer in the emerging creative economy of Sri Lanka?'

Data was collected through a questionnaire. It was prepared using Qualtrics web-based survey software to be answered online. It was carried out as an anonymous survey where the participants were given the freedom not to answer any question as they desired. Both open-ended and close-ended questions were included. However, online questionnaires are not very popular in Sri Lanka. Yet, the participants belong to the group those who are very familiar with global networking and have individual access to the Internet.

Identification of the sample

Since the fashion design education is introduced in Sri Lanka in year 2000, not more than 700 have qualified from all the fashion institutions up until year 2011. A sample of fifty participants from those who qualified from three selected fashion design courses were sought to take part in answering the questionnaire. The three initiatives are namely, (i) Fashion and Textile Design (BDes) – Department of Integrated Design, University of Moratuwa (UoM), (ii) Fashion Design and Product Development (BFDPD) – Department of Textiles and Clothing Technology, UoM and (iii) Fashion Design – Academy of Design. At the time of the sample identification stage, these three fashion education providers were selected deliberately as sub-groups because they were identified as the frontiers in creative fashion education in the island. However, it was identified that this specific target group is approximately 500 out of the total of 700 mentioned above. The variables in the selected category are the age from 20 to 34 years and the year of preliminary fashion education completion from 2002 to 2011.

Preparation and distribution of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was prepared under six sections; (i) personal details, (ii) educational experience, (iii) personal goals, (iv) work experience / personal achievements, (v) government collaborations and (vi) fashion industry awareness. Other than the personal details section, other five carries one open-ended question each to let them express their views at will. Yet, they were given the option not to answer any question as they wished. The main focus was to do a qualitative analysis at this exploratory research. When analysing data these sections were considered separately to get a more in-depth sense of their ideas.

To distribute the questionnaire, a snowball sampling¹ technique was used. Primarily, social-media was used to send the online questionnaire. It was only open for three months. Within the time duration the questionnaire had to reach more than fifty to be able to collect a minimum of fifty results. Through the channels the questionnaire reached approximately eighty and at the end of the given time period it was completed by fifty-six participants. Out of that there were two incomplete answers where a total of fifty-four carries useful data for the analysis.

Data analysis

As the participants are from three different courses and from different batches there can be contradictory views about their experiences. Without projecting any bias towards the course they have studied, the analysis is particularly done to discuss the common opinions of the majority. Out of the six sections that were used to prepare the questionnaire, four sections were considered to analyse data. They are: (i) *educational experience*, (ii) *work experience*, (iii) *personal goals and achievements* and (iv) *consciousness about the local fashion industry*.

Educational experience

In discussing the educational experience, main analysis is done based on the satisfaction level each claimed on the question being asked in the questionnaire, which is; '*how satisfied are you with your fashion design education?*' Apart from one participant even having 'no particular reason' saying he or she is 'very dissatisfied' with the local fashion design education received, all the others are in the views from 'neutral' to 'very satisfied'.

Table 1: Questionnaire responses to the question: 'How satisfied are you with your fashion design education?'

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very Dissatisfied	1	2%
2	Dissatisfied	0	0%
3	Somewhat Dissatisfied	0	0%
4	Neutral	5	9%
5	Somewhat Satisfied	8	15%
6	Satisfied	24	44%
7	Very Satisfied	16	30%
	Total	54	100%

The reasoned out comments for their answers can be categorised mainly under six areas. They being due to;

- (a) the quality and the facilities of the education,
- (b) how the education helped at personal achievements and desires
- (c) suggestions, and
- (d) negative aspects

The main positive comments that highlighted *the quality and the facilities of the education* are for having 'enough resources', simple teaching methods and training under an educated local and international teaching staff. Fashion design teaching resources are very limited in the country. Therefore, it is very clear the respondent have carefully used the term 'enough resources' at the explanation. Other comments of saying the participants are satisfied due to gaining a 'very competitive' knowledge which is enough to start on own or to work for a company, having a practical education throughout and having a very supportive staff to help understand the vision while develop their creativity, also describe the quality of the education they had.

The next most noticeable factor is that majority of the positive comments are on how much has the education they had *guided them at their personal achievements and desires*. As individual achievements, the most common answer given is that they have been able to get a good job in the local export oriented textiles and apparel industry because they have qualified in fashion design. Among other reasons, the highlighted explanation that placed the education in higher position is,

'the things and the subject matters I have learnt always helped me to polish my knowledge and sharpen my skills. It helped me to climb the ladder to my dream job.'

Other interesting comments regarding personal desires are of saying, 'I really enjoy my life for what I learnt', 'as a fashion design student I never felt bored about studies' and,

'Fashion design was my passion. I define everything as fashion. Fashion...its limit-less. No barriers. And the way I learnt fashion is not just theory. I got an exposure to do what I love to do through my education.'

Some are happy for being able to apply what they have learnt, and some as well for being able to work head-to-head with other designers of world famous brands. Apart from all this, one intriguing answer was mentioning that he/she is thankful to the local free education system where he/she got the chance to become a fashion designer. All these responses, which are all positive aspects, show how much they enjoy of studying a creative field, which is specifically fashion within the local context.

The next important comment, which carries *as a suggestion*, is that,

‘if the fashion market was more developed (in Sri Lanka) it would have been so much easier to understand cycles of the fashion world.’

There is always a starting point for everything in this world. It is clear by this comment that the person specifically a fashion designer who thinks that there should be a ‘fashion industry’ in Sri Lanka but at the same time has not realised that the starting point could be initiated through him/her.

There are few *negative aspects* about the fashion training as well, and they can be useful when revising the curricula in due course. Such negative comments are mentioning of not having much resource such as, material, equipment, technical knowledge and teachers and, learning about fashion as a general design field which did not cover the important aspects that specifically relates to fashion. And these knowledge gaps have been identified only after starting working in the industry. Because fashion is a globalized subject, on the basis of considerable working experience, one respondent claimed that the education was not sufficient to achieve success internationally. And another says, the possibility of becoming a ‘real fashion designer is rare’. Use of the word ‘real’ may denote he/she is comparing the work they have to do within Sri Lanka with the renowned fashion designer’s practices of a fashion city in the Western world. Another descriptive negative comment was, ‘I was in the first batch of the (design) course. There was no fashion tutors to guide us and I mostly learnt Fashion from books.’

Within the negative comments, one positively says ‘even though it was not the perfect syllabus, the design education that I had, shaped me to who I am today’. Another similar answer was,

‘When we joined the fashion design – course – it was really new to the faculty..., with lack of resources (lecturers etc.) for us to learn. Mostly we were – guided through – experimental education – which – was so exciting for us (being all new to us). – But when we entered the industry, we realised that we have missed many things –’

According to the research findings, the above negative issues are justifiable. These fashion design courses are new to the education system in the country. Therefore teaching resources are limited; most of all, the teaching staff. If any study program does not find any subject experts locally either do not have foreign university collaborations, they are sure to have faced this situation. But in the present day, these types of replies should not be expected by any fashion education provider in the country as they are now more than a decade old in the system.

Work experience

Work experiences differ immensely with the year of completion of the fashion design education. As was expected, the questionnaire respondents are from the years 2004 to 2011. Each respondent has worked for a different length of time up to the day they answer the questionnaire since graduation. Different categories of answers show how far they have come in a career which they must have thought about greatly as a fashion design student. All those who are employed at present are generally satisfied with their careers. In analysing the work experience the data is considered in three sub categories based on the year of their fashion design training completion. They are; (1) 2004 – 2005, (2) 2006 – 2008 and (3) 2009 – 2011 [refer to table 2].

Table 2: The year of fashion design training completion and the age group, the Questionnaire participants' belong to

Year of fashion design training completion	Number of respondents	%	Age group
2004 – 2005	11	20%	32 – 34 years
2006 – 2008	19	35%	27 – 31 years
2009 – 2011	24	45%	22 – 27 years

Those who finished fashion design studies in 2004 – 2005 have passed many milestones in their career life than the rest. Starting the careers from junior positions, some have even come to manager positions having five to seven years of working experience up the ladder. Though some have held fashion merchandiser and design developer positions as well, at present all the respondents are employed in either, designing or management duties or involved in fashion design education. These positions are either fashion related or connected with self-employment. Those who mentioned as 'self-employed' are calling themselves freelance designers or entrepreneurs. This identification of being entrepreneurs is a very positive aspect in the research.

One respondent from all the questionnaire respondents who was also from this '2004-2005' category has been involved in fashion journalism as well. It is a fascinating trend to realise that a person with much fashion design knowledge, can consider a role in journalism. This is a neglected area in Sri Lanka. Fashion was never brought to life in written format with a proper fashion vocabulary. Without having the adequate fashion knowledge some journalists have tried to talk about fashion in an amateurish way that has become very annoying even to the present day.

The respondents' justifications on the question of how satisfied are they with their present employment suggest that they have secured exciting creative careers. One says, he created his dream job, which did not exist, and now he sees himself as an entrepreneur. Others say, they enjoy for having a chance to practice design and/or fashion development, being able to work for a reputable company and to work for an international brand is exciting. They do not particularly mention the income which other two categories have done.

However, many of the 2004-2005 graduates are married and seem satisfied with the careers as it is, because of personal life commitments. Marriage is a social norm in Sri Lanka where it is considered in the present day at least to get married before the age of thirty. Therefore changing careers or finding a different path even though it directs towards achieving their goals they may have had as students, seems an idle mission in their lives.

The next group consists of participants who graduated between 2006 – 2008. Those that fall in to this category have also worked in creative careers starting from junior designer positions to design manager positions at present. They exactly have followed the same fashion design related careers as the previous category did. However, being able to solve problems and showing leadership qualities, some have become design managers in the buyer accounts in the export oriented apparel companies within much shorter period of time than the previous group. Apart from one who is unemployed, all the other respondents are involved in fashion related employment where two entrepreneurs stand in the crowd as well.

Studying a fashion design course makes everyone want to practice only design anywhere in the world. But people change careers according to the context all the time. A similar descriptions given by one participant to the question how much satisfied are they with their present employment;

'I always wanted to work as a fashion designer. But I still couldn't and now working as a development merchandiser. However, as it is a fashion related job, I am somewhat satisfied about it.'

But whenever they get the chance to practice what they have been learning for several years they talk about it with much satisfaction. Though they learnt many other fashion industry related subjects or practiced skills within their tertiary education, they all talk mainly about wanting to do only 'designing'. A contradictory answer is given by another who has changed her local context focus job to an export oriented job;

'... I was first started (working) as a fashion designer in the local industry, but thinking of going forward with the export market ... to learn more on international designing, trade and trends, - I joined the export oriented apparel industry as a product developer'

The fashion design graduates have pride when they know their design-involved products are bought by overseas customers. Therefore, the majority enjoy working in the export apparel industry. Today, some companies have moved forward with design departments where fashion design graduates are assigned to do designing using their knowledge and talents. Another mentioned, 'They (the company) give good opportunities for hard work'. These opportunities usually have relationships with promotions and salary increases. Having mentioned that, the graduates are satisfied with the salaries they were given as well. In contrast, an entrepreneur who is also very satisfied with what she does says, 'I am engaged in what I truly enjoy (doing). I have the authority to decide on the entire designing and manufacturing of my garments'. This explanation shows that there are some who want to do things on their own in spite of what they earn.

The third sub group of questionnaire participants of 2009 – 2011 graduates are the most recent to have entered the industry. Although they have only graduated recently few claim to have never worked in fashion related industry yet. Somehow, others are involved in fashion related design, development and merchandising jobs where they are still young in the field to get managerial positions. No any respondent mentioned they are into fashion journalism or fashion photography. But in recent times, a huge trend is seen in the country for photography, which will be another potential creative path for the fashion design graduates to consider of practicing in the future.

Having a considerable number of graduates employed in the industry at the time when the 2009-2011 cohorts entered the job market perhaps made them uncertain of securing in the field of fashion design. In that case if they get the slightest chance of employing at any fashion related job they are more than satisfied. Therefore most of the explanations for their employment satisfaction are about being able to get any job in relation to fashion design. A very simple explanation given by one respondent; 'Now I am a fashion designer' shows how enthusiastic it is for him/her to be recognised as a 'fashion designer'. Apart from this type of comments, it is significant to see few commenting on having a satisfactory income, which other previous two categories have not paid much attention to.

Personal goals and achievements

Education always directs people towards achieving goals. As graduates of an emerging creative economy, the questionnaire participants too must have had many goals as students. The questionnaire asked respondents to select one of three answers or select 'other' to give their own explanation as to their goal as a fashion design student. The choices were; i) create my own fashion label in Sri Lanka, ii) work for a famous international fashion brand and iii) work for the export oriented garment industry in Sri Lanka.

Table 3: Responses on the question, 'What was your goal as a fashion design student?'

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Create my own label in Sri Lanka	25	46%
2	Work for a famous international fashion brand	11	20%
3	Work for the export oriented garment industry in Sri Lanka	6	11%
4	Other	12	22%
	Total	54	100%

Majority selected the first choice and those who answered 'other' have also mentioned '*creating their own label in Sri Lanka*' with an additional idea, such as wanting to create their own label and extend it to the international level, create their own label while working in the export industry and create their own label after getting some experience working in the industry. Those who have equalled or exceeded the expectations in achieving this goal have somehow managed to start a clothing-line under a self-owned label. But they are still at the very beginner level. Financial instability is a challenge they face. Those who have not met with the expectations do not talk about it as a failure yet. But they comment; 'still planning to start my own business', 'still gathering knowledge to achieve the goal', 'still didn't get the required experience to achieve the goal' and 'still work in process'. Another response embellishes these comments;

'As a fashion design student I was dreaming to work with an international famous fashion brand to see and feel how a fashion designer really describes (him or herself). And (then) go for the goal of (creating) my own label. Learnt many things at implant training and when working in the industry. Working for the export industry provided me the technical and managerial skills that will be needed when creating my own label. Therefore now I have stepped a little forward with much knowledge and skill towards my own brand creation.'

All these explanations show that they are also still holding to their main goal, even though they know they have many challenges in the path. However, it is very interesting to find out that there is a good number of fashion graduates scattered all over with common expectations and beliefs, with a need to place their stamp at least in the Sri Lankan fashion industry.

The next most selected personal goal they had, as a fashion design student is to '*work for a famous international fashion brand*'. More than half of those who selected this claims they equalled their expectations. Some of them are satisfied by being able to work in the export apparel industry where they get the chance to work in the buyer accounts of reputed international brands. The comment which proves this is; 'I am working for Victoria-Secret – USA brand as a regional design consultant'. Another who is short of expectations holds an opposing comment;

'though we get to work for international fashion brands (in the export apparel industry) it's not up to the same level (of satisfaction) as working directly to those brands.'

Another respondent has pointed out a very common issue in the job market. It is, requiring of industry experience to get a job while you need somebody to offer a job at the first place to gain experience. The related response was about the difficulty of finding an employment with a famous fashion brand where they require at least three years of industry experience. And to gain experience the most possible place is to work in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. As a recently graduated person now it is difficult to get a job in the local industry either.

'*Working for the export-oriented garment industry in Sri Lanka*' has not been a key goal of a majority. And even those few who selected it are satisfied at being able to get employment in such a company. This has been the choice of the minority as a goal, but when analysing data it is clear

that this is what the majority is involved in at present. And as analysed in the previous section of *Work experience*, they are basically satisfied with what they had to do by getting employed in the local export-oriented apparel industry.

Consciousness about the local fashion industry

The primary focus of the research is based on the future fashion industry of Sri Lanka. In this setup when analysing the fashion design graduates' transition to the industry, it is vital to understand their views about the current and future aspects of the fashion industry in the country. 'Fashion' is not a 'basic-need' for any country. But it can be a 'social-need'. On top of every aspect, at present the global fashion industry is a multi-billion dollar business. In the global context, Sri Lanka is only one jigsaw piece in this business as a quality apparel manufacturer.

Therefore, the question 'how do you see the present fashion industry in Sri Lanka?' was posed to the participants, who belong to the creative class in the country, specifically the group of 'Fashion designers'. The answer options were, 'as a business', 'as an art or craft', 'as a social need' and another option was placed for open explanations. This was a question which expected diverse explanations. However, only three of the total respondents have given a different explanation. One comments, 'It's a mess'. Another sees it as 'an art and craft oriented business', while the third sees, 'fashion as a small business opportunity, but apparel as a social and economic need'. Other than these three answers 67% of the participants sees fashion industry in Sri Lanka as a business opportunity [refer to table 4]. Some identified it as a social need where a very few select it as an art or craft. The participants were not asked a follow-up question to justify the selected answer. Since this questionnaire was initial research conducted in the selected context, this question was included to understand the local fashion designers' perspective about the current situation in the country. However, this question and answers could direct to further research studies.

Table 4: Responses on the question, 'According to your understanding how do you see the present fashion industry in Sri Lanka?'

#	Answer	Response	%
1	As a business	36	67%
2	As an art or craft	4	7%
3	As a social need	11	20%
4	Other	3	6%
	Total	54	100%

The majority of the participants who have seen the fashion industry in Sri Lanka as a business also see that fashion has a better future than what the country is experiencing today. If the participants, the fashion designers, were given an opportunity to create their own clothing line, the majority's selection was to do 'better fashion for moderate price'. A slightly lesser number selected 'branded clothing for a higher price' while very few chose 'branded high fashion for a very high price' [refer to table 5]. Because Sri Lanka is a developing country, 'price' is a major deciding factor for consumer buying patterns. Therefore the majority's selection is the most realistic within that context. Then again 'better fashion' means there has to be a design involvement. There is a niche market for branded clothing as well, if the brand personality carries a value for the marked price.

Table 5: Responses on the question, ‘Considering the present local consumer demands and if you were given the opportunity to have your own clothing line, what would be your target group?’

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Basic and commodity apparel for low price	1	2%
2	Better fashion for moderate price	26	48%
3	Branded clothing for a higher price	17	31%
4	Branded high fashion for a very high price	6	11%
5	Other	4	7%
	Total	54	100%

More than 80% of the respondents see fashion as a promising field in future Sri Lanka. This is a very positive answer and the justifications provide evidence for the development of plausible fashion industry in the country. The questionnaire respondents have already experienced the changes and identified several norms of the current industry that they believe are providing the basis for building a better future for fashion within the country. They are:

- i) having a developing fashion industry in the country
- ii) lot of new young designers emerging with a knowledge in fashion
- iii) having many young designers now in the industry who are trying to provide better fashion but for a common target group therefore creating a competition among them
- iv) by stepping in to the field of fashion, there exist many career paths, such as creative, technical and business

In addition another respondent claims,

‘there are potential designers who can understand the spirit of the country and can act accordingly. They will be able to do significant changes in the industry’.

These ideas all together are the existing strengths in the industry that can be advantages for a better fashion industry for the country.

Apart from that, most of the respondents have identified the demand in the market for fashion goods and the changing trends of buying patterns. The respondents identified main trends in the current local market are:

- i) people becoming more fashion conscious every day and fashion becoming a very basic statement of individuals
- ii) growing demand for unique designer wear and branded clothing
- iii) people being more cautious of design and quality rather than just price
- iv) people wanting to follow latest international trends and want to see a diversity in the market
- v) developing of different lifestyles around the fashion industry in the country

Apart from these, another very descriptive comment provides a comprehensive explanation;

‘People in Sri Lanka are now much interested in fashion and branded clothing. People see fashion as an icon in their lives. That view is gradually developing. (Therefore) there would be a better future for (those who involved) in the field (of Fashion). However, it is only happening in the major cities of the country, such as Colombo and Kandy. The reason behind this is only the people of upper middle and high (income) are interested in fashion, since they love it and can afford it.’

These give a clear identification that there are opportunities for industry development if appropriate strategies and policy settings are adopted.

However, one respondent claims,

'I do not think we have a fashion industry in Sri Lanka yet. It's still an apparel industry which has the monopoly among few manufacturers. People are not yet aware of fashion and only very few among them are following real fashion in each and every season. They will take few years to understand what fashion is and then they will start following it.'

The first two sentences describe the reality as seen by another fashion designer. But then again having mentioned 'following real fashion in each and every season' leads to many more questions. Why is it that people need to 'follow' what another does? And what is 'real fashion'? In Sri Lanka what are the 'seasons'? If a fashion designer is aware of the context more realistically he/she can answer these with a good design solution. This type of an answer again draws us back to the starting point of questioning his/her design training.

Few commented on the current strengths and some on the opportunities while few have brought explanations as suggestions. One who claimed that currently many new young designers are emerging with fashion knowledge suggests that 'if the target markets are identified by them wisely', there would definitely be a good future for the fashion industry in the country. Similarly another mentioned:

'With the war ending, Sri Lanka is now an emerging market just waiting to be developed. Do believe we need to develop it wisely so that it does not become the stereotypical commercial fashion arenas we see around the world. We have a chance to combine Sri Lankan culture into our perception of fashion and market it that way to the consumer. Give the consumer a new kind of edge to their fashion experience in Sri Lanka. Make our own stamp on fashion the same way that Japan is doing.'

This explanation shows how aware some fashion designers in the current industry are about the future potential of the industry.

However, there is another set of respondents which is less than 20% of the total who do not see fashion as a promising field in future Sri Lanka. Their main concern is the economic condition of the country. They consider that the image of 'fashion' as very luxurious and expensive products is not suitable to a developing economy like Sri Lanka. This group of respondents suggest that the people who can afford fashion goods are only a very small fraction of the total population. And due to a low consumer base, they suggest that there will not be a successful future for fashion in Sri Lanka. This is a very narrow minded view of a minority. If the fashion design graduates are not being trained to think out of the box without just following the existing trails, there has to be loop-holes in the education they received.

Conclusion

Creative education and creative industries do not have a long history in the Sri Lankan context. It is being introduced and people are getting used to it many years after they were introduced and practiced in many other western countries. However, the questionnaire participants who belong to this new creative class of the country having been educated in the field of fashion design are a pioneering qualified creative group in the Sri Lankan fashion industry. Data collection through this type of a questionnaire among this group has not been done previously in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this attempt can be considered as a good start for the industry creative practitioners and the education providers to think beyond their usual practices and link what they have been doing with the outer world.

However, a decade old fashion design education system has provided a good number of fashion design graduates to the industry. As it is a very new experience for the youth and the industry, a lot of graduates face many problems in breaking the existing industry systems. Almost all the fashion design graduates try to enter the prevailing export oriented apparel industry in search of a job as it is the very realistic job that has been projected in front of them. Fashion design graduates have had different goals as students other than working in the apparel manufacturing industry, as example, wanting to see their own fashion label in the market. However, satisfactory conditions of the current employment opportunities do not encourage them to search for different career paths.

For those who want to break from the prevailing job system, there are many challenges in front of them in achieving their goals. Only very few have tried to step out of the usual system in search of achieving their goals. However, in the present day, there are industry collaborations of fashion designers uplifting programs around the country. Therefore, there are some realistic opportunities in front of them which could act as stepping stones. Yet, most of the designers' goals are couched in terms of economic advantage.

The reality is that the young designers, who want to have a label, are also aware of not having a customer group to market their products to. In that case, their business and marketing knowledge seems very rudimentary. Other than fashion business knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and know global perceptions of fashion design practice to succeed in the future are also their lacking areas. Lack of such knowledge has been identified as a gap in the curriculum. Within the emerging fashion industry of the country, these subjects seem highly relevant teaching areas for design students. However, these subjects have to be well thought ahead and should be merged with current world trends along with local social, environmental and economic advancements. Then the fashion designer can create new business opportunities in order to develop a designer focus industry beside the mass production for export focus that currently exists.

As the questionnaire reached the participants through social networks and further via the snowball technique, the unpublished personal feedback were very positive. Some respondents have not even realised that they do belong to a rising creative class in the country and that there is a whole group of people within that category who could do a change in the current practices. Now that a first group of fashion designers is in the industry, it is high time for the fashion design education providers to rethink the national development pattern and revise their curriculums appropriately. The national fashion industry bosses; the export oriented apparel manufacturing companies are well aware of the sustainable practices. Therefore, there is increasing awareness in the current Sri Lankan fashion industry for sustainable systems to be adopted and developed. Yet, it is not well incorporated in the education systems. This again brings back the same conclusion of the need for significant curriculum revision to take account of global fashion trends, the potential of a creative economy to drive Sri Lanka to achieve national development for the future.

Endnote

¹Snowball sampling: In this method, participants or informants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study. Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit "hidden populations," that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies. (Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide)