

Authentic Student Learning Through the Young Modest Fashion Designer Fest Competition

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Abstract-Authentic learning, which emphasizes the application of knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, is considered essential in preparing students to face career and life challenges. This study explores the potential of fashion competitions, particularly the Young Modest Fashion Designer Fest (YMFDF), as an authentic learning platform for students. The main objective of this study is to identify how the elements of the YMFDF competition contribute to students' authentic learning experiences, as well as to analyse students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the programme in enhancing design skills, creativity, critical thinking, and soft skills. Using a quantitative approach with document analysis, data were collected from YMFDF participants, mentors, and organizers. Preliminary findings indicate that the competition provides an environment rich in practical challenges, guidance from industry professionals, and opportunities to interact with stakeholders, thereby fostering problem-solving skills, teamwork, and time management. In addition, exposure to the holistic fashion design process, from concept development to marketing, was found to strengthen students' theoretical understanding and stimulate innovation. This study concludes that fashion competitions such as YMFDF have significant potential to be integrated as an important component of formal education curricula, offering an innovative and relevant pedagogical approach in developing competent and competitive fashion designers. The findings also suggest that more project-based and industry-driven programmes should be introduced to enrich students' learning experiences.

Keywords: Authentic Learning; Fashion Competition; Young Modest Fashion Designer Fest; Fashion Education; TVET Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of 21st-century education and the TVET agenda now demands a shift towards authentic learning to bridge the gap between theory and practice, thereby enhancing graduate employability through training aligned with current industry needs (Sulasmi, 2024; Mustapha, 2022). This need is particularly urgent in the dynamic fashion industry, where young designers can no longer rely solely on conventional technical skills but must also master digital technologies such as CAD and 3D prototyping while possessing strong soft skills (Rahman & Hashim, 2023). To address these challenges, the Young Modest Fashion Designer Fest (YMFDF) serves as an experiential learning platform that functions as a simulation of real career experiences under industry pressures (Barber & Miller, 2025). Through its strategic focus on the modest fashion segment, which has become a global commercial phenomenon, YMFDF successfully integrates academic input with market realities to produce competitive graduates who are prepared to enter the fashion industry (Ismail, 2023).

Fashion design competitions as a form of informal learning have gained increasing attention in fashion education. These competitions not only serve as platforms for students to showcase their talent and creativity but also function as real-world simulations that test technical skills, resilience, and problem-solving abilities within limited time frames. Through participation in competitions, students have the opportunity to build portfolios and self-confidence, receive professional feedback, and expand their industry networks. To fulfil this need, Community College Bukit Mertajam has organized the Young Modest Fashion Designer Fest (YMFDF) from 2023 to 2025, a fashion competition focusing on modest fashion design. Initially conducted at the national level, the programme was upgraded to the international level in 2025. The programme was specifically designed as an authentic learning platform involving Polytechnic and Community College students, enabling them to experience the entire process of designing and producing a fashion collection in a practical setting. YMFDF not only strengthens students' technical competencies but also builds confidence, creativity, and understanding of industry standards. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of YMFDF in enhancing the skills of TVET students in the field of fashion through an authentic learning approach.

The existing fashion curriculum still lacks structured authentic learning platforms, making it difficult for institutions to provide comprehensive practical experiences that bridge the industry competency gap among students. Furthermore, the potential of fashion competitions is often overlooked and has not been fully explored as a holistic pedagogical tool within academic assessment systems. To address this gap, the Young Modest Fashion Designer Fest (YMFDF) serves as a dual-purpose intervention that exposes students to realistic business simulations while simultaneously developing technical skills, digital competencies, and entrepreneurial mindsets in an integrated manner.

This study was designed to achieve two main objectives in evaluating the impact of the programme on student development, to identify the specific elements within the YMFDF programme that directly contribute to students' authentic learning experiences, to analyse students' perceptions regarding YMFDF's effectiveness in elevating design capabilities and creative drive. The participants consisted of 40 POLYCC students representing Polytechnics and Community Colleges in the Northern Region. Each institution sent representatives comprising both male and female

POLYCC students to participate in the programme. A total of 20 institutions participated, with each institution represented by 2 POLYCC students.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter explains how the study was conducted using effective techniques to collect data based on the research objectives. The findings will be analysed to answer the research questions posed. Information regarding the research design, respondents, framework, data sources, research instruments, procedures, analytical methods, and research assumptions are presented. In this study, the researchers examined students' perceptions of the effectiveness of YMFDF in enhancing authentic learning experiences, design skills, and creativity. This study employed a descriptive research design using a survey method, which was deemed suitable for obtaining preliminary information and insights. In terms of population and sampling, the participants involved in this study consisted of 35 programme participants. The collected data were analysed using cluster and random sampling methods to determine the sample size involved. The research instrument employed was a questionnaire, as it is practical and cost-effective. However, this method has certain limitations due to individual sensitivity and the possibility that some information cannot be disclosed. Nevertheless, questionnaires enable the assessment of attitudes, views, and perceptions. According to Mohamad Najib (1999), questionnaires are accurate, time-saving, and easier to distribute compared to interviews and other data collection methods:

Section A – Programme Background Information

Section B – Students' Authentic Learning Experience Level

Section C – Improvement in Students' Design Skills and Creativity

Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, the appropriate sample size for this study was 32 respondents. This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey research design involving 35 Fashion and Apparel students from POLYCC who participated in the programme. Several simple random sampling techniques were applied to ensure that each sample adequately represented the respective programme areas. The programme area involved was Fashion and Apparel. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A consisted of 10 questions related to the programme background. Similarly, Section B contained 10 items measuring the level of students' authentic learning experiences, focusing on the specific elements of the YMFDF programme that directly contributed to these experiences. Section C comprised 10 questions related to the improvement of students' design skills and creativity. The measurement in Section C focused on students' perceptions of the extent to which YMFDF was effective in enhancing their design skills and creativity. All items in Sections B and C employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Responses for all three sections were measured using the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Slightly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), and 5 = Strongly Agree (SDA). Feedback on the questionnaire items and necessary revisions were incorporated to improve the validity of the instrument. Subsequently, 35 students participated in the pilot study. To determine the level of authentic learning experiences and the level of improvement in design skills and creativity among POLYCC Fashion and Apparel students, descriptive statistical analyses involving mean scores and standard deviations were employed. The interpretation of mean scores for authentic learning experiences and the improvement of design skills and creativity was based on the scale shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Score Interpretation

Minimum Score	Interpretation of Minimum Scores
1.00-2.00	Low
2.01-3.00	Moderately Low
3.01-4.00	Moderately High
4.01-5.00	High

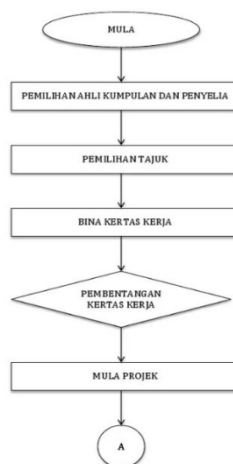


Figure 1. Project Planning Flow Chart

Figure 1 illustrates the project implementation planning process from the initial planning stage until the completion of the project.



Figure 2. Project Planning Gantt Chart

Figure 2 presents the project planning Gantt Chart, which was used to ensure systematic and organized implementation and to serve as a reference to prevent delays in project execution.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' Authentic Learning Experience Level

Table 2 presents in detail the percentages and frequencies of programme participants regarding the level of students' authentic learning experiences. The authentic learning experience was measured and evaluated based on the overall mean score and the highest response frequency among the respondents. The findings indicate that participants demonstrated a high level of authentic learning experience, as reflected by the overall mean score of 4.43 and a standard deviation of 0.81. Furthermore, Item B4, "I know how to determine difficult and important leadership tasks," recorded the lowest percentage at 89.2% (Agree = 24.3%; Strongly Agree = 64.9%). In contrast, Item B7, "I always seek ideas that I enjoy incorporating into my designs," recorded the highest percentage at 91.7% (Agree = 27.4%; Strongly Agree = 64.3%). Therefore, the results indicate that programme participants possessed a high level of authentic learning experience, as evidenced by the agreement percentages for all items exceeding 90.0%.

Table 2: Students' Authentic Learning Experience Level

Item	STS No.	%	TS No	%	KS No.	%	S No.	%	SS No.	%
B1	2	3.1	3	3.7	1	2.0	10	24.6	19	66.6
B2	2	2.9	4	3.4	1	2.6	11	27.4	17	63.7
B3	1	2.3	5	4.3	1	2.3	12	31.1	16	60.0
B4	3	3.7	2	3.1	4	4.0	10	24.3	16	64.9
B5	4	3.4	3	3.7	1	1.7	14	36.9	13	54.3
B6	1	1.7	5	5.1	1	2.0	13	28.6	16	62.6
B7	1	2.6	2	3.1	1	2.6	11	27.4	20	64.3
B8	1	1.1	6	5.4	2	2.3	12	27.7	14	63.4
B9	3	3.7	2	2.9	2	2.3	13	28.9	15	62.3
B10	1	1.7	3	3.7	2	3.4	17	39.4	12	51.7
Mean Score	4.43									
Standard Deviation	0.81									
Level	High									

3.2 Improvement in Design Skills and Creativity

Table 3 shows that the overall mean score for the level of improvement in design skills and creativity among programme participants was 4.44, with a standard deviation of 0.81. The highest percentage was recorded for Item C1, "I have high aspirations regarding my design skills and creativity," with 94.0% agreement (Agree = 31.4%; Strongly Agree = 62.6%). Meanwhile, Item C10, "I always welcome attention," recorded the lowest percentage at 90.3% (Agree = 30.6%; Strongly Agree = 59.7%). Overall, the students who participated in the programme demonstrated a high level of design skills and creativity, as evidenced by the agreement percentages for all items exceeding 90.0%.

Table 3. Improvement in Design Skills and Creativity

Item	STS No.	%	TS No	%	KS No.	%	S No.	%	SS No.	%
C1	2	2.3	2	2.3	1	1.4	11	31.4	19	62.6

Item	STS		TS		KS		S		SS	
	No.	%	No	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
C2	1	0.9	7	6.0	3	2.0	12	32.0	13	59.1
C3	5	4.3	1	2.0	2	2.6	9	23.4	18	67.7
C4	3	3.7	5	4.3	1	0.9	14	29.7	12	61.4
C5	2	3.1	4	4.0	1	1.7	13	29.4	15	61.7
C6	1	2.9	1	2.9	2	3.1	12	26.9	19	64.3
C7	2	2.6	4	4.0	1	2.3	15	30.6	13	60.6
C8	3	3.7	2	3.4	1	1.7	13	27.4	16	63.7
C9	1	1.7	5	4.3	2	2.9	10	24.3	17	66.9
C10	3	3.7	3	3.1	2	2.9	14	30.6	13	59.7
Mean Score	4.44									
Standard Deviation	0.81									
Level	High									

3.3 Discussion

The cultivation of authentic learning experiences and high levels of creativity can contribute significantly to effective organizational management. The level of design skills and creativity demonstrated a strong relationship with authentic learning experiences. Likewise, the authentic learning experience level among POLYCC fashion students who participated in the programme was found to be high. Individuals with strong design skills and creativity are better equipped to generate ideas and solve problems encountered in the fashion industry. These capabilities enable them to explore, evaluate, and capitalize on design opportunities more effectively.

4. CONCLUSION

The study found that POLYCC fashion students who participated in the programme possessed a high level of confidence in mastering design skills and demonstrated strong creativity as aspiring fashion designers. Both authentic learning experiences and the levels of design skills and creativity were found to be high. Therefore, it is evident that authentic learning experiences and design skills have a strong positive relationship with students' creativity. Overall, the findings suggest that environmental factors play a significant role in influencing the entrepreneurial development of POLYCC students. In addition, institutions should adopt serious, effective, and consistent approaches in fostering entrepreneurial thinking and entrepreneurial leadership practices among students. Such efforts contribute not only to students' professional development but also to their physical and mental well-being, thereby supporting their pursuit of academic and career excellence.

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