Assessment of Textile and Apparel Curriculum in Mongolia from the Academia and Industry Perspectives

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The Textile and Apparel (T & A) industry has become an important sector in Mongolia, which provides income and employment for almost 30 percent of the population (Lecraw, Eddleston, & McMahon, 2005). Mongolia is the second largest cashmere producer in the world, with about 28 percent of the world's production, after China (USAID, 2011). Despite the significant presence of the T & A industry in Mongolia, the current T & A curriculum in Mongolian higher education is not up to the standard of meeting the needs for the T&A industry. Present researchers found that previous research assessed the T & A curriculum in developed countries like the U.S. (Hines & Swinker, 1998); however, little academic research has assessed the T & A curriculum in third world countries (e.g., Mongolia). Thus, the purpose of this research is to assess the T & A curriculum in Mongolian higher education to provide some fundamental suggestions for improvement meeting the four-year baccalaureate program, Meta-Goals, developed by the International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA, 2008).

A qualitative research approach was used to investigate the T & A curricula and to identify skills and attributes required in the T & A industry in Mongolia. Individual semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling collected data from academia and industry professionals in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Seven professors and five industry professionals participated in the interview. The interview questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Mongolian by a researcher fluent in both English and Mongolian. Prior to conducting the interview, the translated questionnaire was pretested by two native Mongolian graduate students at one of the universities in Mongolia. The pretests ensured the wording clarity of the questionnaire. All interviews were audio recorded for transcription with the participants' permission. The transcribed data were interpreted by the researchers using the qualitative techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The researchers perused each interview transcript and then compared across the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding from the participants' perspectives. This data analysis involved data reduction, part-to-whole comparison, categorization, and integration.

The professors described the current curriculum in the T & A program and the career options after graduation. The industry professionals evaluated the skill levels of the T & A program graduates. Then, the professionals revealed the skills and attributes that were essential in the Mongolian T & A industry in which the graduates were not well trained. Both industry professionals and professors provided suggestions as to how to improve the current T & A curriculum at the colleges and universities. Results from both academic and industry participants indicated that six courses were currently missing in the T & A curriculum: 1) brand management,

2) merchandising, 3) marketing, 4) knitwear design, 5) textile science, and 6) internship. Industry professionals also indicated that some personal traits were important for the successful preparation of students for careers in the Mongolian apparel industry. These included 1) good personality, 2) professional attitude, and 3) effective communication skills. In addition, the professors noted that an entrepreneurship course was needed due to the students' strong interests in running their own apparel businesses in Mongolia upon graduation.

In conclusion, this study confirmed that Mongolia T & A curriculum needed drastic improvements in order to prepare future leaders of the industry who will be able to impact the Mongolian T & A industry positively, and ultimately the industry, to become more competitive in the global market. First, by offering fashion merchandising and retailing courses that are most in need. Most of local (domestic) manufacturers do not have access to distribution of their products to international markets; therefore, creating and promoting products with international visibility is the top priority for the industry. Furthermore, offering an entrepreneurship course may also help students advance their knowledge in marketing and distribution strategies. Second, to meet the current global market demand, ensuring high-quality products, including trendy design development, is essential (USAID, 2007). As found by the results, offering knitwear design and textile sciences courses can meet the need in this area. All of these courses (e.g., merchandising, marketing, knitwear design, and textile science) are topics to be included in the T & A curriculum suggested by the ITAA Meta-Goals. Finally, it is also important to develop an education system to train new and to retrain current faculty members who can offer and teach the courses to students. In the long run, T & A academia can collaborate with the Mongolia Education Department and the fashion industry as one body to actively solve this current issue. An outside third party, such as ITAA, can also provide support through on-line and off-line teaching resources. Supporting T & A education in third world countries directly impacts these industries and these countries in particular, and ultimately it can make the world become a better place in which to live.

<div align="center">References</div>

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