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Fashionable Loafers for Male Students

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Abstract
Male students of the Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi have preference for three kinds of footwear: loafers, boots, and dressing shoes. They rate loafers as highly preferred for three main reasons: trendiness, adaptability, and economy. This research aimed to design and produce fashionable loafers for male students. The descriptive research method was used to give details about the tools and materials used for the footwear, and the processes for making the loafers. The participatory product design method was used, where the would-be users of the footwear were involved in the design process – they were consulted for their views and comments right from the early design stages till actualisation of the product. The target population was 150 male students of the said Department; 100 were accessible. The simple random sampling method was used; data was collected through interviews and observation. The study recognised that the popularity, acceptability or attractiveness of the first pair of loafers can be seen in 3 ways: African wear or the look alike, the use of beads, and youthfulness of colour. Adaptability and economy of footwear do show up in the varied application of colour and material, for multipurpose use of the footwear. The integration of locally obtainable materials (beads, fabric and leather) and necessary design factors were determined after which manufacturing operations such as pattern cutting, closing, lasting, attaching, arrangement of beads, and finishing were gone through to realize the shoes. Two pairs of loafers were produced; one has bright and lively colours, the other, relatively darker but appealing colours.
Keywords: *Male students, fashionable, loafers, adaptability, economy*

INTRODUCTION

Male students attend different occasions at different times and require footwear that matches most of such activities/situations. Such activities include lectures, symposia, workshops, exhibitions, seminars, graduation ceremonies, drink-ups, weddings, parties, and religious activities such as church services, and choir rehearsals. The different dresses, for these occasions, usually call for corresponding footwear from a person (student) who is not a regular earner of income.

In a preliminary observational study on 'footwear that male students of the Department of the Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry have preference for, the researchers realised that the said male students had preference for three kinds of footwear: loafers, boots, and dressing shoes. The study revealed that students rated loafers as highly preferred for a number of reasons, cardinal among them being trendiness (footwear in vogue), adaptability (footwear that matches a variety of dresses for different occasions), and economy (cutting down on expenditure on footwear because many students have difficulty with time and finances for procuring different footwear, for different dresses, for different occasions). Consequently, this research aimed to design and produce fashionable loafers for male students.

The research question posed was: How can fashionable loafers be designed and produced for male students of the Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry?

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2013) 'fashionable' means 'following a style that is popular at a particular time'. One can talk, for example, about fashionable ideas, shoes, or wardrobes, long hair or thinking. The Macmillan Dictionary (2013) echoes the same thought in other words saying it means 'popular at a particular time'. This means fashionable footwear among male students of IRAI must be stylish and favoured.

Loafers is a general term for slip-on shoes. A dress loafer is a less casual, earlier type made with side gussets with elasticated inserts for easy removal, and snug when worn. This type has its greatest popularity in Britain (Antogiavanni, 2006). Loafers in general, and particularly for males, was introduced by shoemaker Nils Gregoriusson Tveranger (1874–1953) in Aurland, Norway according to Aurlandskoen og Oransje webdesign (n.d.). The first design was introduced around 1908. On returning to Norway at age 20, after a seven-year trip to North America (where he learned the craft of shoemaking) Nils introduced a new design called the 'Aurland moccasin', later renamed the 'Aurland shoe'. This was around 1930. Norwegians began exporting loafers to the rest of Europe, where visiting Americans chanced upon and took them up (Flusser, 2002).

The adaptability of things or persons has to do with how they lend themselves for use in different situations or for different purposes (The Macmillan Dictionary, 2013). Synonyms for 'adaptable' include 'multipurpose', 'versatile', 'all-purpose', 'universal', 'general-purpose', and 'multifunctional'. This research sought to design and produce loafers that are for multipurpose use.

Economy is about the careful, prudent management of resources, such as money, materials, or labour

(The Free Dictionary, 2013). It borders on efficient and sparing use of things. It was an aim to be prudent at the use of materials with the footwear.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Locally available materials such as fabric (Woodin), beads (plastic and glass), leather (regular and suede), paper (strawboard), and polyurethane ('bona') were used. The Woodin fabric that was used is the thick, tough type made up of four colours – red, orange, black and white (Fig. 1). By the researchers' and respondents' experience, it has strength and its colours hardly fade making it ideal for use for footwear. The use for footwear is actually an adaptation, of the fabric, for another purpose other than for dresses. Plastic and glass beads were employed for the shoes – plastic for one and glass for the other. The plastic beads were of two colours: red and white; that of the glass was one colour with two appearances, that is, transparent for one and semi-transparent but frosted white for the other.

The leather used was black suede with two textures: smooth and rough. Each was used for one shoe for the purpose of variety and choice. Paper strawboard was used for the middle section of the heel/sole. One shoe had one with black colour and other, a light brown. This material is tough and gives good support to footwear at the heel section. The last major material used is polyurethane (Fig. 2) which is popularly referred to as 'bona' by many shoemakers. It is tough and flexible allowing for a cushioned effect when walking in a shoe.

Fig 1: Woodin fabric

Fig. 2: Polyurethane Belt
(Detectamet Ltd., 2013)

Methodology

Research design, population and sampling

The descriptive research method was used to give details about the tools and materials used for the footwear, and the processes for making the loafers. The participatory product design method (Sanders, 2002) was also used, where the would-be users of the footwear were involved in the design process. In this case, they were consulted for their views and comments right from the early design stages till actualisation of the product.

The target population was 150 male students of the Department of IRAI at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Of this number, 100 were accessible. Of the 100, 18-24 year olds constituted 90 percent (90 respondents), 25-30 year olds constituted eight percent (eight respondents) and 31-36 year olds, two percent (two respondents) as shown in Figure 3.

The simple random sampling method was used and enabled the researchers to solicit the opinions of a range of users. Data was collected through interviews and observation.

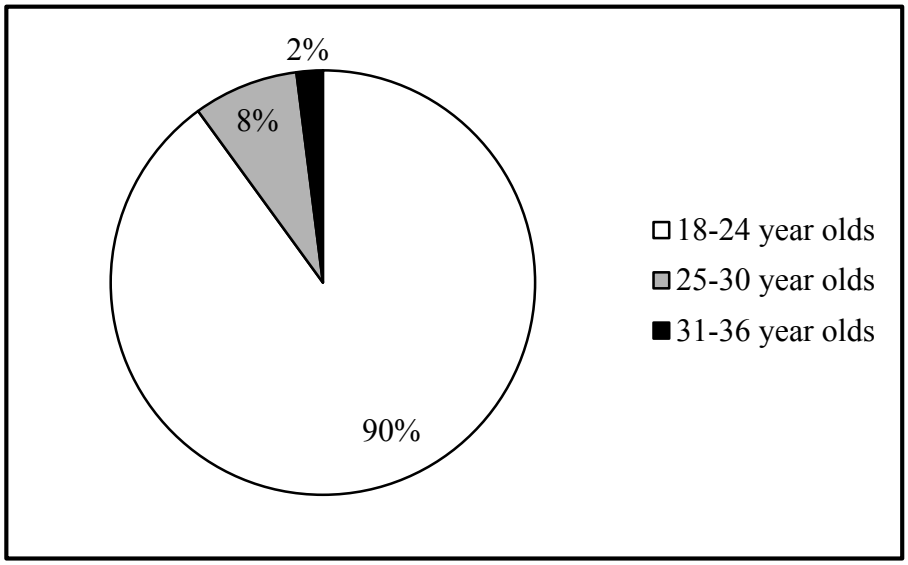

Fig. 3: Age distribution of respondents

Conceptualisation

The age range and foot size of the targeted users, target price, integration of locally obtainable materials (beads and fabric) informed the design the loafers. The age range was 18-36 years (youth); foot sizes were 42 and 44 because a good number of male IRAI students have sizes in the range of 42-46; and target price of 40 cedis was set to make the footwear affordable for most male IRAI students. Locally available materials such as beads, fabric, suede, paper board (strawboard), and polyurethane ("bona") were used. Additionally, contemporary activities that elicit the use of loafers were identified and gave a good foundation for the design. They included church weddings, fashion shows, movie premiers, music festivals, dinners, attending lectures, attending congregations and window shopping. Upon these bases intended designs/sketches were made that captured the style and nature of the would-be loafers.

Production process: First shoe

To start with, the footwear size was specified (size 44) and the design drawn on a paper. With the help of the design, templates of the patterns (upper, insole, outsole and heel) were cut from the straw board (Fig. 4).

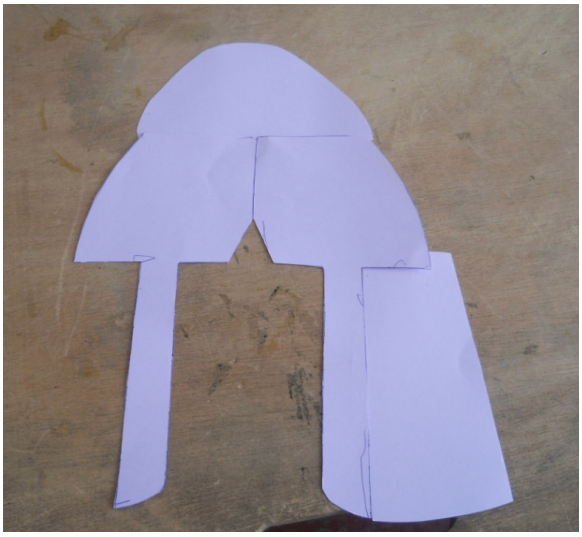

Fig. 4: Templates for the loafer (arranged)

At the third stage, the templates were used as basis to cut the actual patterns for the upper, insole, outsole and heel. Suede and fabric were used for the upper (Fig. 5), cellulosic paper board for the insole, and polyurethane ("bona") for the outsole and heel (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5: Pattern for the upper

Fig. 6: Polyurethane for the outsole and heel

The beads were strung on a thread with the help of a needle and were stitched onto the front side of the upper according to plan (Fig. 7). This represented the stages 4 and 5.

Fig. 7: Upper with beads affixed – First shoe

At stage 6, locally obtainable fabric (Woodin fabric) that matches the colours of the beads was chosen and cut according to pattern. Stage 7: Lining was fixed to the inner parts of the uppers with the help of shoemakers' glue (Type 99 Super Adhesive). The parts of the uppers were then sewn together (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8: The parts of the uppers sewn together

At the eighth stage, the insole was pinned to the last by means of small nails (Fig. 9). Stage 9: The uppers were placed over the last and fixed to the insole (Fig. 10) with the help of shoemakers' glue.

Fig. 9: Insole pinned to the last

Fig. 10: An upper placed around a last and fixed to an insole

Stage ten: The heel was glued to the outsole (Fig. 11); the glue was applied to the outsole and allowed to dry for some time before fixing it to the upper. This produced a strong bond. Finally (Stage 11), the shoe was given finishing touches by removing unwanted things such as excess glue, excess threads and dirt, and polished (Fig. 12).

Fig. 11: The heel glued to the outsole

Fig. 12: Finished pair of loafers (First shoe).

Production process: Second shoe

The operations that were executed for the first shoe were repeated in a similar fashion for the second (Fig. 13). Generally, the operations were: pattern cutting, closing, lasting, attaching, arrangement of beads, and finishing. The manufacturing procedure drew inspiration from the processes espoused by wiseGEEK, 2013.

Patterns that would come together to form the shoe were cut. They consisted of the sole, the bottom part; the insole, the internal part that is placed directly under the foot; the outsole, the layer that directly touches the ground; the heel, the bottom back part; and the upper, the part that holds the shoe on the foot. With closing, every one of the aesthetic coverings of the shoe was brought together. It involved piercing, punching, wedging, ridging of the uppers, placing them with lining and sewing them together. Lasting was then done; the upper was stretched over the last. Some force was applied to stretch the upper on to the different points of the last. This made the upper acquire the shape of the last, which is the intended shape of the shoe. The upper and the sole were put together (attached) via gluing with shoemakers' glue (Type 99 Super Adhesive). Needle and twine were used to string the selected beads in a harmonious but interesting pattern that complemented the footwear. At the finishing stage, cutting and trimming off of excess materials was done; as well, cleaning and polishing of the parts was done to make the shoe presentable (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13: Finished pair of loafers (Second shoe).

Beading technique (First shoe)

The beads were arranged with the ellipsoids (3.2mm x 4.2mm in size) twined to form two shapes (Fig 14). The first is a u-shaped curve with four rounded vertices on each side, and joined at a central curvy vertex at the base. The second shape, with had a single duplication of itself, is a shape with four rounded vertices on each side, but joined at the top by means of a sharp vertex; and joined at a central curvy vertex at the base.

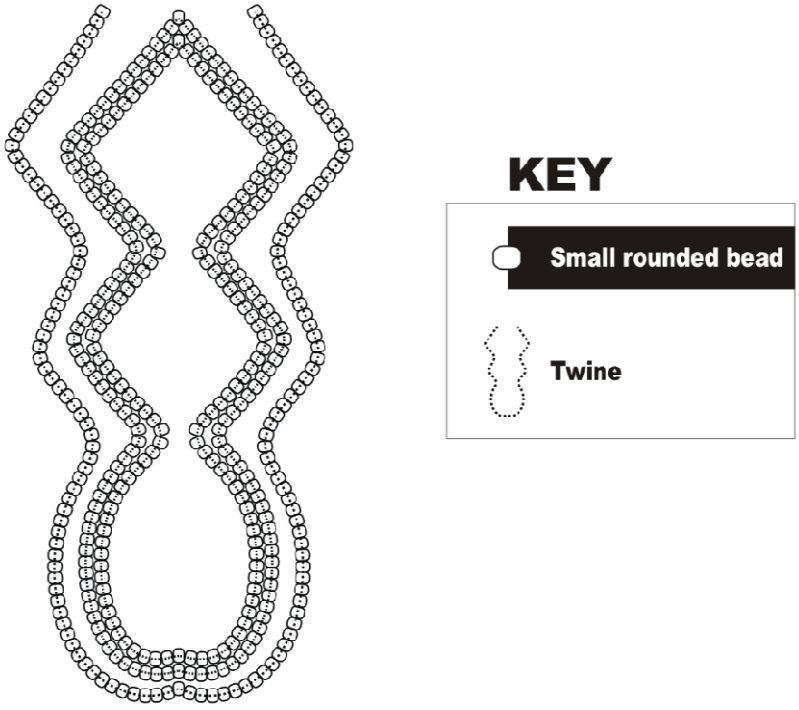

Fig 14: Beading technique (first shoe)

Beading technique (Second shoe)

The technique was made up of three elements: ellipsoid beads, small rounded beads, and twine. The beads were arranged with two small rounded beads (2.3mm x 3.0mm in size) interspersing the ellipsoids (8.8mm x 3.7mm in size) as in Figure 15.

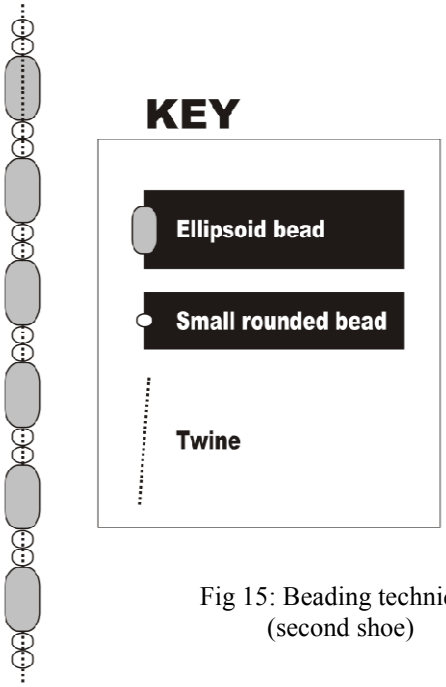

Fig 15: Beading technique
(second shoe)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Description

Two pairs of loafers were created through this research. The first (Fig. 12) is a size 44 loafer having four colours – red, orange, black and white. Materials used are fabric, suede, strawboard, polyurethane, plastic and glass beads. Its counter (the part that wraps around the back part of one's heel, stiffens the back part of the shoe giving it structure) was made of Woodin fabric; the heel has a height of one (1) centimetre, capped with polyurethane; the insole was made out of cellulosic paper board; and the outsole, polyurethane. The upper is made of suede and fabric giving the shoe appeal – the vamp in suede; the toe spring is mild giving the footwear enough grip on the ground; the decoration on the vamp is of beads and tassels made of same Woodin fabric; and the shank, mild but necessary giving comfort to the arch of the foot. The target age range was 18-35 years with a price of 40 cedis.

The second pair of loafers (Fig. 13) is also a size 42 loafer having five colours: black, semi-transparent but frosted white, light brown, dark brown and ash. Materials used for it are suede, strawboard, polyurethane, artificial leather strip, and plastic and glass beads. Its counter was made of suede with a single line of beads strung over it; the heel has a height of 1.40 centimetres, capped with polyurethane; the insole was made out of black cellulosic paper board; and the outsole, polyurethane. The upper is made entirely of suede and four separately placed strings of glass beads for enhancing the looks. The toe spring is also mild enabling the footwear to clench effectively to the ground during walking; the decoration on the vamp is of leather strips and fitted with larger plastic beads (light brown, and dark brown in colour) for the tassels. The shank is gentle but necessary giving comfort to the arch of the foot. The target age range was 18-35 years with a price of 40 cedis.

Fashionability, adaptability and economy (the first pair of loafers)

The popularity, attractiveness or acceptability of the first pair of loafers is seen in three ways: (1) African wear or look alike, (2) the use of beads, and (3) youthfulness of colour. The concept of the Friday wear (Ghana News Agency, 2007) as was promoted by ex-President John Agyekum Kufour during his second term in office between the year 2004 and 2008 made the consumption of made in Ghana, Africa fabric as well as their look alike, even if from elsewhere, increase. Ghanaians, in general, and corporations bought into the idea of wearing Ghana made fabric and their look alikes on Fridays to promote trade and culture. This trend influenced the use of such fabric for all kinds of things including footwear, especially where the fabric was strong enough for the purpose. The use of Woodin fabric makes the pair of loafers trendy (popular, attractive, and acceptable).

The use of locally made beads, as fashion accessories is attractive these days because of their form, pattern and the vast array of colour they portray. Among the Akans of Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire 'beads are often part of a royal treasury and during festivals, they are loaned out to relatives and members of the royal court.' (Travel Africa Magazine, 1999). The use of beads gives the impression of royalty, beauty and authority. To this end, the meticulous arrangement of beads of two colours, in six lines, makes the first pair of loafers appealing for use among male students.

It is commonplace to find the youth full of adventure and drive for trying all sorts of things. The combination of red, orange, black and white colours, in one shoe, is a statement of adventure and freedom of choice unlimited by social and academic pressures. According to the researchers' intent, red is strength and liveliness; orange is uniqueness and royalty; black and white represent transparency and truthfulness that youth are expected to subscribe to.

Adaptability and economy show up in the varied application of colour and material. The footwear matches all manner of dresses for different occasions – lectures, symposia, workshops, exhibitions, seminars, graduation ceremonies, drink-ups, weddings, parties, Sunday church services, choir rehearsals and services at the mosque. Simply put, the footwear is for multipurpose use helping to cut down how many shoes one should own for different dresses and occasions.

Fashionability, adaptability and economy (the second pair of loafers)

Being simple and impressive (strikingly different) is a desirable thing among many male students and people in general. The five colours – black, semi-transparent but frosted white, ash, light brown and dark brown – seem like three colours (black, ash and brown) because of their harmony. This portrays the pair of loafers as uncomplicated but remarkable for use for many kinds of male student activities. Black has the touch of exclusivity and class; ash, neutrality; browns, earthliness or straightforwardness all of which make the loafer a desirable thing among male students. Each student wants to be seen as unique or special in their own right. This is what the loafers portray.

In line with the first pair of loafers, adaptability of the second for all manner of dresses for different occasions makes the footwear suitable for multipurpose use. One can wear it for activities such as those listed for the first. This helps the student to be careful, be prudent at the management of resources, such as time, money, and materials. Monies that would have gone into much footwear, because of the pull of different activities, can easily be saved and used for relevant academic purposes. Among other things, economy is portrayed through the minimal use of beads (just a few of them), minimal sizes of the beads (only two sizes), simple arrangement of the beads (two small rounded beads interspersing the range of ellipsoids), and one dominant colour (black).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aimed at the design and production of fashionable loafers for male students of the Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry, KNUST. Its target were loafers that are trendy (footwear in vogue), adaptable (footwear that matches a variety of dresses for different occasions), and economic (cutting down on expenditure on footwear). The age range, foot size of the targeted users, target price, the integration of locally obtainable materials (beads, fabric and leather) and necessary design factors were determined after which manufacturing operations such as pattern cutting, closing, lasting, attaching, arrangement of beads, and finishing were gone through to realize the shoes. Two pairs of loafers were produced; one has bright and lively colours, the other, relatively darker colours.

The Ghanaian footwear industry and culture should be invigorated through allied governmental units and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This can be done via planning and redirecting their efforts, making them more accessible, towards rejuvenating small and medium scale footwear producers. A reason in support of this idea is that the techniques applied are user friendly and can be readily practiced by most people.

Leather twines can be used for stringing the beads that were put on the uppers instead of nylon cord. Leather is supple, durable and withstands tension and different temperatures. The stress that the cord for stringing the beads endures can be comfortably absorbed by leather and so prospective producers can try this as way of contributing to this research.

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