![DEFSA logo — Design Education Forum of Southern Africa]

Vulindlela – making new pathways

17th DEFSA conference – 21│22 September 2023

South African futurism: Students' vision of future aesthetics in fashion design

Terese Potgieter, STADIO (School of Fashion)
Diandra Schreuder, STADIO (School of Fashion)
James Poulsen STADIO (School of Fashion)

Abstract

While considering new pathways in design, we envisioned the futuristic aesthetic of fashion in the South African context. Although fashion designers work with complex and multifaceted problems, the cornerstone of good design remains beautiful aesthetics; thus, when imagining the progression of South African design, we start with an investigation of aesthetics.

No one viewpoint can adequately describe South African aesthetics due to the country's multicultural history and makeup. The question of South African aesthetics is thus best researched from the perspective of multiple participants and how they each view their cultural aesthetic based on their heritage. In a student project, we asked what 'South African Futurism' is to gauge students' viewpoints on the future of South African fashion aesthetics from the student's heritage lens. The term futurism, used in the project, means to 'represent a dynamic vision of the future'.

Students were asked to research their heritage through a collection of visual images to present their idea of futuristic South African aesthetics. Students completed a visual analysis of their research using the following elements of fashion design, identified as the big five elements: shape, proportion, texture, design details, and colour. Students applied their research outcomes to a series of futuristic shirt designs that included a textural application.

From the design outcomes produced by the students, a case study was conducted to observe and describe the five design elements as perceived by the students. This paper will present key insights into the future of South African fashion aesthetics based on how the students reimagined design elements from their heritage to envision futuristic South African fashion.

Keywords: Fashion design aesthetics, heritage, South African futurism, student perspectives.

Introduction

Through a review of literature, we found that fashion identity and culture are often viewed through a Western lens. A substantial number of studies have been conducted on Eurocentric and Anglo-American fashion and dress (Jenss 2016, p. 4). This focus in literature misrepresents Fashion as a Western phenomenon. Furthermore, there has been an emergence of a need for the Africanisation of curriculum to address historical biases within African educational systems (Mugume 2017; Shizha &

Kariwo 2014). Within this context, the need for research that considers fashion identity and culture from an African perspective becomes paramount.

One way in which this gap can be addressed is through the idea of Neo-Africanism. Neo-Africanism within the design field challenges Western design principles by embracing, redefining, and celebrating African identity, culture, aesthetics, and craft practices (Irele 1990; Mitchell 2019; Taye 2021; Yalae 2008). Based on this idea, students were asked to research the aesthetic elements within their own South African heritage and present their vision of futuristic South African fashion by reimagining these aesthetic elements in a design for a shirt.

Before students could research aesthetics within their own cultures, we first had to provide a theoretical basis to define the concept of aesthetics. To this end, theory on the elements and principles of design were used to identify signifiers that could guide students' research on aesthetics and serve as an analysis tool for the findings in this paper. The elements and principles of design used to guide successful aesthetic outcomes in fashion were identified in the literature. These elements are then further narrowed down to five main elements of design emphasised by the institution where the research was conducted, namely colour, shape, proportion, texture, and design details. Students researched their heritage by identifying these elements within their culture to reimagine them in futuristic designs that represent these key aesthetic principles.

A case study was conducted to analyse each element in the students' projects visually and holistically to describe the students' interpretations. These findings were then used as prompts to create an AI-generated image with Midjourney to present what the students' futuristic interpretations could look like and present an imagined futuristic South African garment.

Cultural identity as design inspiration in fashion design

The histories of our respective cultural aesthetics have always been sources of inspiration for fashion designers. The aesthetic elements within cultural traditions help designers develop contemporary adaptations (Faerm 2010, p. 45). However, a need for the Africanisation of fashion curriculum and a view on cultural aesthetics from a Neo-African perspective has developed. As such, an argument has been constructed below through a literature review to identify the need for the findings presented in this paper.

This literature review explores three concepts to contextualise the objective of this study; firstly, it looks broadly at existing textbooks that specifically focus on fashion identity and history from a Western perspective used in fashion design education; secondly, it considers Africanisation of curriculum; and lastly, it focuses on Neo-Africanism in design, as a means of Africanising curriculum.

A reflection on the perspectives in literature concerning fashion identity and history

Fashion design textbooks are valuable resources for understanding the intricate relationship between fashion, identity, and history. While numerous textbooks cover various aspects of fashion design, many specifically cover fashion identity and history from a Western perspective. By reflecting on these resources below, we identify that fashion identity and history within design education are shaped primarily through a Western lens.

Crane (2000) analyses the complex interplay between fashion, identity, and societal structures in the book Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing. The textbook discusses how Western fashion choices reflect and shape personal and collective identities. Another widely utilised textbook in fashion design education, published by the Kyoto Costume Institute (2006), titled

Fashion history from the 18th to the 20th century, also offers a detailed examination of fashion's evolution during the Enlightenment, Victorian eras, and beyond. This textbook emphasises the significance of Western fashion trends and how these trends shaped societal norms and individual identity of the times. McDowell (2012) comprehensively explores fashion history from ancient times to the present in the textbook *Fashion: the definitive history of costume and style*. This textbook examines the evolution of Western fashion, highlighting the influences of social, political, and cultural factors on fashion identity during various eras (McDowell 2012). The Fashion Book (Phaidon Press 2013) offers an encyclopaedic overview of fashion, showcasing key designers, iconic garments, and influential trends. This textbook serves as a visual guide to Western fashion by allowing readers to understand its historical development comprehensively. Barnard (2021, p. 3) also compiles various scholarly essays in the textbook *Fashion theory: a reader*, discussing fashion as a cultural and historical phenomenon. This collection of essays explores Western fashion identity in relation to broader sociocultural contexts (Barnard 2021, p. 3).

Many fashion design textbooks focus on fashion identity and history from a Western perspective, and each examines the multifaceted nature of fashion and its impact on cultural identity. Although these textbooks serve as valuable references for fashion design students, in South Africa, examples of textbooks that develop critical thinking around the complex relationship between fashion, identity, and history from an African perspective are limited.

This section has identified that fashion identity and culture in fashion design education are often viewed through a Western lens. The following section will unpack the Africanisation of curriculum, including the African perspective in education.

The necessity of Africanisation of curriculum

In recent decades, the Africanisation of curricula has emerged as a significant discourse in education and aims to address historical biases within African educational systems. Various scholars (Asante 1991; Brock-Utne 2002; Mugume 2017; Sifuna & Otiende 1996; Shizha & Kariwo 2014) have explored the need to incorporate African perspectives, knowledge, values, and experiences into curriculum and pedagogy to foster a more inclusive and culturally relevant educational experience for African students.

Prominent research by Asante (1991, p. 170) titled 'The Afrocentric idea' provides a theoretical framework for incorporating African perspectives into various disciplines. Asante (1991, p. 170) argues that the Africanisation of curriculum promotes a sense of identity and empowerment among African students and challenges dominant Western narratives. Sifuna and Otiende (2006, p. 15) explore the tensions between globalisation and African education, emphasising the possibilities and challenges of Africanising education in the face of global influences. Additionally, Brock-Utne (2002, p. 131) critically examines the impact of globalisation and Western educational policies on African education. The author highlights the importance of African countries reclaiming and reshaping their educational systems according to their cultural contexts and needs.

Authors such as Shizha and Kariwo (2014) and Mugume (2017) also examined the history and challenges of education in specific African countries, focusing on the post-independence period. These authors shed light on the debates surrounding the Africanisation of curriculum and argue that Africanising education can contribute to social transformation, identity development, cultural preservation, and decolonisation in African societies.

The necessity for more research concerned with fashion identity and culture from an African perspective in fashion design education is thus not only based on the lack of available texts but also the importance of this type of research for the transformation and Africanisation of curriculum, as identified in this section. This section highlights the need for more studies to be conducted from an African perspective to bridge the education gap and emphasise the relevance of Africanising the curriculum. The third section of the literature review will focus on Neo-Africanism, specifically in design, as a tool to Africanise curriculum.

Neo-Africanism in design as a means to Africanise curriculum

Neo-Africanism within the design field is a concept that aims to redefine and celebrate African identity, culture, aesthetics, and craft practices (Irele 1990; Mitchell 2019; Taye 2021; Yalae 2008). It seeks to challenge Western design principles' dominance and embrace African traditions' richness and diversity (Mitchell 2019; Taye 2021). Exploring Neo-Africanism in design involves reinterpreting and incorporating traditional African aesthetics into contemporary design (Mitchell 2019). Mitchell (2019) says this involves a deep understanding of indigenous art forms, patterns, symbols, and motifs adapted to modern contexts. The integration of African aesthetics promotes cultural pride and encourages the preservation and revitalisation of traditional design practices (Taye 2021, p. 32).

Neo-Africanism in design represents a movement that celebrates and redefines African cultural identity and aesthetics and challenges the dominance of Western design paradigms (Irele 1990; Mitchell 2019; Taye 2021; Yalae 2008). Africanisation of curriculum can be addressed through Neo-Africanism; incorporating indigenous aesthetics and emphasising local practices makes new perspectives within the design field possible for designers, including South African fashion design students.

A project based on Neo-Africanism was given to students to create a curriculum that contributes to the Africanisation of design education. Students had to research aesthetic elements from their heritage and reimagine them in a shirt design to demonstrate their vision of futuristic South African fashion. Within the growing interest in Neo-Africanism and the context of design, Taye (2021, p. 49) suggests that further research and critical discourse are necessary to refine the theoretical foundations and practical applications of Neo-Africanism, highlighting the importance of projects such as this. More examples are needed of how Neo-Africanism can be practically applied in Fashion education to Africanise curriculum.

Elements and principles of design as signifiers in fashion for fashion identity

To further expand on the theoretical foundation of the students' project, we looked at how the elements and principles of design could be used as signifiers to identify various aesthetic aspects within the students' heritage. These signifiers were used as a guideline for students' research and an analysis tool to develop a description of their work.

The elements and principles of design play a crucial role in determining the success and comprehension of visual design aesthetics across various disciplines and how visual design aesthetics are understood and considered successful. This section will first contextualise the elements and principles of design within art and design to examine the broad context and discuss how they work together. This section will then explore their application in the field of fashion practice. Lastly, it will examine how these elements and principles are applied within the academic institution where the study was conducted.

Design elements and principles in art and design

The earliest artworks on cave walls to the current image-saturated environments have been studied by theorists and artists to establish principles that justify their compositional appeal. These principles are known as design elements (Webb 2010, p. 28). Essentially, the elements of design are the 'raw ingredients' that determine the visual appeal of a design's aesthetics. Therefore, how is design aesthetics understood by the audience it is intended for? Can they visually read the design, positively respond to it or place value on the design viewed (Webb 2010, p. 28)? These design elements can be categorised as follows: line, shape/form, texture, space, motion, value, and colour (Pipes 2003, p. 13).

The application of design principles determines how these elements are combined to create pleasing aesthetics. The design principles represent the elements to achieve a successful design outcome (Webb 2010, p. 70). The principles of designs can be categorised as follows: harmony/unity, balance, scale/proportion, emphasis, rhythm, and pattern/repetition (Pipes 2003, p. 173). While the design's success is often intuitively determined by the designer, applying the design principles often influences the audience's perception of its value (Webb 2010, p. 70). The elements and principles must function together and cannot be applied independently. Therefore, the successful blending, manipulation, and combination of the design elements guided by the principles determine the success of the design outcome.

According to Adams (2013, p. 158), the elements and principles of design form the framework that governs good design, including how the design is created and evaluated and its communicative value. The aesthetic quality of a design comprises two elements: the process and the product. The process involves planning to achieve the intended outcome, while the product refers to the resulting arrangement that encompasses the outcome of the process (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 2).

Design elements and principles in fashion

According to Siaw et al. (2014, p. 2), understanding the elements and principles of design is vital to successful design processes and aesthetically pleasing outcomes in fashion design. The language of clothes and the messages conveyed through our fashion choices reveal a lot about our identity and understanding of what we wear. Ignorance of the design elements and principles within the fashion can make a design look out of place (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 2).

There is a consensus that the design elements and principles within the fashion design discipline are interconnected (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 3). These elements can be categorised as shape, colour, texture, and line (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 3). Form or shape refers to the structure of an item, the shape is 2D, and form being the 3D interpretation, incorporating length, width, and depth (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 3). Line can be identified as a continuous mark made on a surface or refer to the implied line found in the shape and silhouette of a garment (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 3). Line conveys width, length, direction, focus, and feeling and can contribute to conveying a specific mood (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 3). Line can also be part of the fabric as a print, weave, or a design detail such as a yoke or style line (Siaw et al. 2014, p. 3). Colour as a design element is characterised by hue, value, and intensity. It can also convey elements such as warmth and coolness, linking to a garment's overall mood and feel. Texture refers to the drape and feel of fabric, whether stiff or soft, and can be implied or tactile, depending on the fibre construction of the textile.

According to Siaw et al. (2014, p. 3), the principles of design within the fashion discipline are rhythm, emphasis, proportion, balance, and unity. These principles inform how the elements are combined and manipulated. Rhythm can create movement in a design by leading one's eye from one part to another. Rhythm can happen through the repetition of elements such as line or colour. Emphasis is

the principle that draws the viewers' attention to a specific part of the design, whether through colour or detail. Proportion refers to the relationship between the various parts of the design, for example, the size of a collar or pocket, compared to the rest of the garment. It also refers to the proportions of the garments on the body, such as the placement of the hemline and neckline in relation to the body. Balance can be symmetrical or asymmetrical and considers the design, whether the various components work together harmoniously to deliver a pleasing outcome. When harmony or unity is achieved, the design outcome is successful, as all elements and principles look right together. Harmony or unity is difficult to define, as it is a principle and the overall goal of any design.

Design elements and principles applied within the academic institution

Within the academic institution where the study was conducted, the elements and principles of design are taught at a first-year level, informing students' understanding of the foundation of design. The students are introduced to the elements as tools and the principles of the way these tools are used. Five main design elements are emphasised once the students enter their second year of study. While the use of other elements and principles of design are also recognised, these five elements are highlighted as key elements to assist students during their ideation process. These elements, collectively called the "Big 5 Elements", include shape, proportion, texture, colour, and design details.

Although design details are not explicitly classified as elements or principles, they are essential to consider when designing a garment. The details inform the shape and fit of the garment, as well as the functionality and aesthetic success. The way these details are incorporated within the garment is directed by the elements and principles of design.

In conclusion, the elements and principles of design are fundamental in shaping the success and comprehension of visual design outcomes across various disciplines, including fashion design. Within the academic institution where the study was conducted, key elements are identified to guide the design process and are informed by the elements and principles of design. Overall, the "Big 5 Elements" framework is used to govern good design, together with the elements and principles of design that guide applying these elements – playing a crucial role in creating technically sound, functional, and aesthetically pleasing garments.

Research methodology

This paper envisions a futuristic fashion aesthetic in South Africa, as presented in a project completed by students. A group of students was tasked with researching the aesthetics from their cultural heritage based on five elements and principles of design used in fashion: shape, proportion, texture, design details, and colour. The students were then required to reimagine these elements in a futuristic shirt dress design.

These projects were visually analysed and observed to describe the key aesthetic elements as perceived by the students. The key descriptions for each individual design element were then utilised to create visual representations of what each of these elements could look like in a futuristic shirt design. This was accomplished through the use of the AI image generation program Midjourney. As a final step, all of these key elements were then combined and used as prompts to create one final AI-generated image, showcasing the collective visual outcome of all the students' work and presenting a possible futuristic South African aesthetic based on the students' imaginings.

Research approach and methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which seeks to gain insights and understanding from the perspective of the individuals under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p. 1). The primary objective of this study was to comprehend how different individuals perceive the aesthetics within their own culture and how they envision these aesthetics in futuristic designs. Given this aim, a qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate as it describes how people interpret and make sense of their world (Babbie 2016, p. 99; Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p. 6).

A case study was conducted to observe and describe the five design elements and principles, as perceived by the students, from the design outcomes they produced. Case studies such as this involve empirical inquiry that relies on direct and indirect observation (Yin 2014 p. 16). A case study is a qualitative approach that allows researchers to examine a phenomenon within a specific context (Muratovski 2016, p. 49). The context of this case is defined by a project that a group of second-year students completed on South African futurism.

A case study approach is most suited to this study, as case studies explore a specific project within a real-life context to holistically describe and capture multiple participants' perspectives and offer a comprehensive understanding of the case (Thomas 2011, p. 3). By focusing on direct observation of the student's project, this case study will provide valuable insights into students' perception of the aesthetics in their heritage and how it can evolve in fashion design.

Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to combine all the data to derive meaning from it (De Vos et al. 2011, p. 397). Muratovski (2016, p. 53) suggests first interpreting the single instances to compare and synthesise the findings to identify commonalities. This approach was followed to analyse this case study. First, the students' projects were grouped according to their cultural backgrounds, and then each individual project within the group was analysed. The projects within each group were then considered collectively to identify the aesthetic elements and principles within each culture. Lastly, all the findings were compared to develop a holistic description of the aesthetic elements identified in the students' projects. This analysis demonstrated how students perceive aesthetics within their respective cultures and how they envision them in the future.

Lastly, the image generator program Midjourney was utilised to develop images that visually represent the findings. The key findings in each of the aesthetic elements or principles, namely shape, colour, proportion, texture, and design details, were used as prompts to create images in Midjourney to firstly demonstrate each individual design element, and secondly the collective visual outcome of the case, representing students' vision of future aesthetics in Fashion Design.

Ethics

The institution where the study was completed advised that this is a negligible low-risk study as none of the participants was directly involved in the data collection process. Because the data was observed from work already completed by students, no further permission was required from the institution or students to complete the study.

Discussion of results

Due to South Africa's multicultural history, the country has a diverse makeup, and no single perspective can fully capture the essence of South African aesthetics. Therefore, the study considered the viewpoints of multiple participants, each reflecting on their own culture's heritage and aesthetics. The participant group was selected from two second-year fashion classes. Only students whose work

was complete and completed according to the assignment's instructions were selected for the study. The participant group consisted of nine Afrikaans students, five Zulu students, three isiXhosa students, two Sotho students, two Jewish students, one Venda student, one Cape Malay student, one Ndebele student, and one Islamic student, clearly demonstrating the diversity of cultures found in South Africa. In classifying their culture, students were allowed to choose the criteria that resonated most with them. Students opted to define their culture based on one of two primary factors: their language or religion.

It is important to note that this research does not accurately generalise cultural aesthetics. As a single case, it solely represents the viewpoints of the students whose work was observed. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the views expressed in this research reflect the personal interpretations and perspectives of the students regarding their own culture. The primary objective of this study was not to develop precise descriptions of aesthetics within South African cultures and their future adaptations. Instead, the aim was to present a futuristic South African design based on students' interpretation of South African aesthetics.

A holistic description of the results according to the elements and principles of design

While considering new pathways in design, we envisioned the futuristic aesthetic of fashion in the South African context. As highlighted in the literature review, aesthetics in fashion were identified in this project through the five elements and principles of shape, proportion, texture, design details, and colour. Each element has been holistically considered and described across all cultures to identify the most relevant aesthetics for a South African context. The main descriptions that emerged for each design element were then input into the image generation AI program Midjourney. This was done to generate visual representations that could suggest what the aesthetics of a futuristic South African shirt design might look like.

Shape

The Afrikaans, Zulu, Ndebele, Cape Malay, and Islamic students described the shapes in their research as simultaneously structured and rounded. In their heritage research, the Afrikaans students described the shapes as a combination of structured forms, including rectangular, square, and trapezium shapes, and organic rounded shapes, such as circular and hourglass silhouettes. In the Zulu students' research, garment shapes are simultaneously structured with rectangular, triangular, and square shapes and rounded through the cocoon and oval shapes. The most common shapes found in the students' research are a combination of structural shapes such as rectangular, triangular, and trapezium shapes combined with organic rounded shapes featuring circular and hourglass silhouettes. The structural shapes are most often featured in the top part of the garment, while the circular shapes dominate in the bottom part of the garment.

Shape summary as AI prompt	
A shirt dress with a combination of structural shapes such as rectangular, triangular, and trapezium shapes combined with organic rounded shapes featuring circular, hourglass silhouettes. The structural shapes are featured in the top part of the garment, while the circular shapes dominate in the bottom part of the garment.	
Key descriptors_structured shapes	**AI-generated visual representation**
Rectangular	
Square	
Trapezium	

Key descriptors_rounded shapes	
Organic	
Hourglass	
Oval	
Cocoon	
Circular	

Figure 1: Developed by Stability.ai 2023, a futuristic vision garment shape

Proportion

The Zulu, Ndebele, and Jewish students' designs mainly featured loose proportions that hang away from the body in the top half of the garment. However, as the other cultural groups presented, the most prominent proportions are a fitted top with a flared bottom and volume in the sleeves, which are either rounded or flared. The top part of the garment occupies one-third of the body, while the bottom occupies the remaining two-thirds. These proportions were especially prominent in the work of the Afrikaans students. In these students' projects, the divisions were often accompanied by high necklines reminiscent of garments in the Victorian era. These proportions were also repeated in these students' futuristic designs, suggesting that they are considered key features in Afrikaans cultural aesthetics by the students.

Proportion summary as AI prompt	
A shirt dress with a fitted top and a flared bottom. Voluminous sleeves are either rounded at the top and flared at the bottom. The top part of the garment occupies one-third of the body, while the bottom occupies the remaining two-thirds.	
Key descriptors_figure proportions	**AI-generated visual representation**
Fitted top	
Flared bottom	
Top occupies one third of the body	
Key descriptors_sleeve proportions	
Voluminous proportions	
Flare	
Round silhouette	

Figure 2: Developed by Stability.ai 2023, a futuristic vision garment proportion

Colour

The colours described by the students were primarily based on decorative details found in their respective cultures. In their heritage research, the Zulu students presented two prominent colour palettes. The first consisted of brown, black, white, and beige, based on animal hides included as a textural design detail. The second palette included primary colours such as blue, white, and red, derived from design details such as geometric prints and beading.

For the isiXhosa students, white, black, and orange were the three most noticeable colours featured in their historical and futuristic designs. The Venda student also presented a combination of neutrals and brighter colours, with a colour palette consisting of white and beige, accentuated by touches of orange, green, blue, yellow, and purple in the futuristic designs.

Combining neutrals with brighter colours is a common theme in most students' work. We can conclude that the Ndebele, Sotho, Cape Malay, and Islamic students' work also featured neutral colours, such as white, black, and brown, complemented by brighter colours, including yellow, red, blue, green, orange, and pink. The two Jewish students, however, had a unique colour palette consisting of neutral colours combined with maroon, bright blue, dark blue, beige, grey, and gold accents.
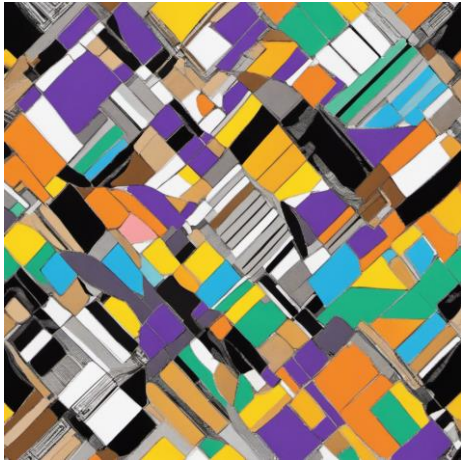
Colour summary as AI prompt	
Shirt dress with a neutral colour palette such as white, black, and brown. Decorative and geometric details in the shirt feature bright colours such as yellow, purple, blue, green, orange and pink.	
Key descriptors_neutral colour palette	**AI-generated visual representation**
White	
Black	
Brown	
key descriptors_bright colours	
Yellow	
Purple	
Blue	
Green	
Orange	
Pink	

Figure 3: Developed by Stability.ai 2023, a futuristic vision garment colours

Texture

In the project, students were asked to apply their research to a shirt dress design, meaning that most garments were made from smooth cotton shirting fabric. However, many of the garments incorporated implied texture through prints. Geometric prints were presented by the Zulu, isiXhosa, Venda, and Ndebele students. The Sotho, Venda, and Jewish students also used traditional prints to imply texture. An especially interesting element was an Arabic calligraphy print created by the Islamic student. Textural details were further enhanced through beading and embroidery and the inclusion of blankets by the Sotho and Ndebele students.

Texture summary as AI prompt	
Shirt dress with implied texture through South African geometric print. Textural elements through African beading	
Key descriptors_implied texture	**AI-generated visual representation**
Geometric prints	
Key descriptors_textural elements	
South African beading	
South African embroidery	

Figure 4: Developed by Stability.ai 2023, a futuristic vision garment textures

Design details

There was a wide variation of design details across the projects. As the task was to design shirt dresses, many typical shirt elements were observed in the students' work, such as cuffs, collars, button stands, pleats, gathers, ruffles, panelling, and pockets. These elements are not necessarily culturally specific but are commonly used in shirt designs worldwide. Culturally specific design details were primarily expressed through the various print designs mentioned in the previous paragraph. The use of beading and geometric shapes was evident in the heritage references and futuristic designs of the Zulu students, suggesting that these elements are considered key factors representative of Zulu culture.

Some culturally unique design details included the Islamic Hijab, isiXhosa draped headcloths, and the use of leopard skin by the Zulu students. According to one of the participants, "Xhosa people have a close relationship with cloth and beads [...] as fabric trims and finishes convey messages", which is evident in the isiXhosa students' projects, where geometric shapes created through beading or prints are prominent features. Additionally, the inclusion of embroidery as a decorative detail in the futuristic designs of the Afrikaans and Ndebele students was observed.

Garment details summary as AI prompt	
Shirt dress with cuffs, collars, button stands, pleats, gathers, ruffles, panelling, and pockets. The shirt dress must include South African geometric shape print, South African beading and South African embroidery details.	
Key descriptors_shirt elements	**AI-generated visual representation**
Cuffs	
Collars	
Button stand	
Pleats	
Gathers	
Ruffles	
Panelling	
Pockets	
Key descriptors_decorative elements	
South African beading	
South African embroidery	
Geometric prints	

Figure 5: Developed by Firefly 2023, a futuristic vision garment design details

Conclusion

This paper aimed to gauge students' perceptions of the future of South African fashion aesthetics based on their cultural heritage. The diversity of cultures that made up the participant group (Afrikaans, Zulu students, isiXhosa, Sotho, Jewish, Venda Cape Malay, Ndebele, and Islamic) demonstrates the complexity of cultural research in South Africa, as multiple viewpoints need to be considered. Despite the various cultural backgrounds that were used as inspiration for the student projects, their design outcomes had many similar aesthetic elements. However, further studies must be conducted to unpack the reason behind these similarities. The purpose of this study was only to identify the aesthetic elements from students' work that could inform a vision of what futuristic aesthetics could look like in South Africa.

To develop a vision of futuristic aesthetics in South Africa, a way had to be found to present the findings visually and collectively. In order to do this, an AI-generated image was produced, as seen in Figure 1 below, to represent the collective interpretation and analysis of students' work. Keywords from each of the five design elements and principles were identified. These keywords were then woven together to create a prompt for input into a generative AI imaging tool, Midjourney. The prompt used: *contemporary fashion featuring fitted top proportions with structured shapes and exaggerated sleeves, and bottom proportions with flared shapes, including accent colours of yellow, red, blue, green, orange, and pink, with textures of embroidery, beading, and geometric print*, produced impactfully, and original designs that visually describe a possible futuristic perspective of a diverse, multicultural, South African aesthetic.

Figure 6: Developed by Midjourney 2023, a futuristic vision of South African fashion aesthetics

References

Adams, E 2013, 'The elements and principles of design: a baseline study', *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 157–175.

Asante, MK 1991, *The Afrocentric idea*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

Babbie, E 2016, *The basics of social research,* 4th edn, Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, Belmont.

Barnard, M 2007, *Fashion theory: a reader*, Routledge, Oxford.

Brock-Utne, B 2002, 'Whose education for all? The recolonization of the African mind', *International Review of Education*, vol. 48, pp. 131–144.

Crane, D 2000, *Fashion and its social agendas: class, gender, and identity in clothing,* University of Chicago Press Chicago.

De Vos, A, Strydom, H, Fouche, CB & Delport, CSL 2011, *Research at Grass Roots*, 4th edn, Van Schaik, Pretoria.

Faerm, S 2010, *Fashion design course,* Barron, New York.

Irele, A 1990, 'The African imagination', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 49–67.

Jenss, H 2016, *Fashion studies: research methods, sites, and practices*, Bloomsbury, New York.

Kyoto Costume Institute 2006, *Fashion: a history from the 18th to the 20th century,* Taschen, Cologne.

Mendes, V & De La Haye, A 2012, *Fashion: the definitive history of costume and style,* DK Publishing, London.

Merriam, SB & Tisdell, EJ 2016, *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. 4th edn, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Mitchell, L 2019, *Neo-African artist Dennis Osadebe's new work begs us to Stand for Something,* Design Indaba, South Africa, viewed 14 June 2023, <https://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/neo-african-artist-dennis-osadebe%E2%80%99s-new-work-begging-us-stand-something>.

Mugume, AG 2017, 'Africanization of education: a necessity for social transformation', *African Journal of Education, Science, and Technology*, vol. 3 no. 3, pp. 57–65.

Muratovski, G 2016, *Research for designers: a guide to methods and practice,* Sage, Los Angeles.

Phaidon Editors 2016, *The fashion book,* Phaidon Press, New York.

Pipes, A 2008, *Foundations of art and design*, Laurence King Publishing, United Kingdom.

Shizha, E & Kariwo MT 2014, *Education in Zimbabwe: From liberation to neo-liberalisation,* Cambria Press, New York.

Siaw, S, Kermevor, A & Dzramedo, B 2014, 'The appropriate effects of elements and principles of designing apparel in fashion', *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences,* vol. 2, no.9, pp 1–12.

Sifuna, D & Otiende, J 2006, *an introductory history of education,* African Books Collective Gaborone.

Taye, A 2021, 'Rethinking pan-Africanism: the quest for supra-state formation and authentic development in Africa', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 1–22.

Webb, J 2010, *Design principles,* AVA Publishing, Switzerland.

Yalae, P 2008, *Neo-Africanism: the new ideology for a new Africa,* Trafford Publishing, Bloomington.

Yin, R 2014, *Case study research: design and methods*, 5th edn, Sage, Los Angeles.