

Colonization and Design Education in Brazil: *action research and decoloniality experiences in Fashion teaching*

DOI: 10.5965/259446301012026e8128

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em Artes, Moda e Design,
Florianópolis, Brasil.

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Publicado pela Universidade do
Estado de Santa Catarina

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Submetido em: 05/11/2025

Aprovado em: 30/01/2026

Publicado em: 01/02/2026

1 Introduction

Fashion design education in Brazil has historically been structured around Eurocentric frameworks, which are direct legacies of colonial processes that have shaped not only curricula, but also methodologies, visual repertoires, and the epistemologies legitimized within higher education institutions. Despite Brazil's rich cultural diversity — marked by Afro-Indigenous, popular, and peripheral forms of knowledge — these knowledges remain frequently marginalized in fashion programs.

Within this context, the article analyzes the project *Colonization and Design Education in Brazil*, developed in the Fashion Design program at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), with the aim of understanding how the coloniality of knowledge manifests itself in curricula and pedagogical practices, as well as of proposing decolonial pathways through educational, institutional, and extension-based actions. The research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in action research and formative narratives, articulating critical reflection with pedagogical transformation. The study demonstrates that decoloniality in fashion education should be understood as a continuous, collective, and situated process, capable of promoting significant curricular and epistemological shifts.

2 Development

The development of the study is grounded in the understanding that design and fashion, as institutionalized fields of knowledge, were historically constituted within modern and Eurocentric paradigms. In Brazil, the formalization of design education, inspired by models such as the Bauhaus and the Ulm School, reinforced a rationalist and universalizing logic that has little dialogue with local sociocultural realities. This structure has contributed to the reproduction of racial, cultural, and symbolic hierarchies within fashion education, favoring hegemonic narratives while rendering other forms of knowledge invisible.

Fashion, understood as a sociocultural phenomenon, constitutes a space of political dispute, intersected by markers of class, race, gender, and sexuality. In this sense, the coloniality of knowledge is expressed through the legitimation of certain bodies, aesthetics, and ways of dressing, while

others are systematically devalued. The curriculum, therefore, is not neutral but a symbolic and political territory in which epistemological disputes have materialized.

The research was developed within the NAIF – Center for Studies in Art, Innovation, Fashion, and Design, through the formation of a group of faculty members and students committed to rethinking fashion education from plural, anti-racist, and intersectional perspectives. The action research method proved to be fundamental in enabling the integration of theory and practice, allowing the investigative process to result in concrete transformations in the curriculum and in pedagogical practices.

2.1 Coloniality of Knowledge and Fashion Education

The coloniality of knowledge refers to the persistence of colonial epistemological structures that hierarchize forms of knowledge and produce what scholars describe as epistemicide—that is, the systematic delegitimization of knowledge produced by Afro-Indigenous peoples and non-hegemonic communities. In fashion education, this logic is manifested in the predominance of European references, the centrality of white and elitist narratives, and the exclusion of artisanal and popular practices.

The analysis of the curriculum of the Fashion Design program at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) revealed these asymmetries, exposing significant gaps in the representation of Black, Indigenous, and Latin American authorship. This diagnosis reinforced the need for pedagogical actions capable of problematizing these absences and expanding the theoretical and visual repertoire presented to students.

2.1.1 Curriculum as a Field of Dispute

The curriculum is understood as a field of symbolic dispute, constantly negotiated among institutions, faculty members, and students. Within fashion education, this reflects political decisions regarding the validation of certain types of knowledge while others are marginalized. The research indicated that revising the curriculum should involve more than simply adding new material; it necessitates a comprehensive evaluation of the foundational structures supporting instructional practices.

The creation of collective spaces for reflection, such as the study group, made it possible to problematize these disputes and promote epistemological shifts. The formative narratives collected from faculty members and students revealed experiences marked by symbolic exclusion, lack of representativeness, and the naturalization of Eurocentric standards, functioning as instruments of self-analysis and transformation.

1.1.1.1 Action Research Methodologies and Formative Narratives

The articulation between action research and formative narratives enabled the integration of knowledge production and pedagogical practice. The study was structured in three main stages: diagnosis of the curriculum and teaching practices; intervention through study groups, didactic experimentation, and course redesign; and collective evaluation, resulting in proposals for curricular revision.

This approach fostered the construction of a community of practice, in which faculty members and students collaborated through the sharing of experiences, knowledge, and affects. The narratives functioned as devices for critical reflection, revealing both the limitations and the potentialities of fashion education from a decolonial perspective.

2.2 Results and Pedagogical Developments

The results of the project demonstrate pedagogical, epistemological, and institutional advances. Among the main developments is the creation of the elective course *Fashion and Activism*, which institutionalized debates on diversity, representativeness, social engagement, and the political role of design. The course expanded students' critical repertoire and encouraged the development of projects with social impact.

A key result was creating @ativismonamoda extension project, which enhanced university-community integration. The initiative promoted collaborative experiences on social media, engaging youth from peripheral communities and transforming theoretical learning into concrete actions of communication and digital activism.

The expansion of bibliographic references and visual repertoires contributed to the revision of Eurocentric perspectives by incorporating Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and Latin American authorship. In addition, the

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defense of undergraduate theses addressing bodily plurality and representativeness evidenced the maturity of the debates fostered within the group.

The project also resulted in the publication of *Decolonial Zine: Fashion and Decoloniality in Brazil*, through an international partnership, as well as in the creation of institutional spaces for debate, such as the Working Group on Fashion, Extension, and Educational Management at the Colóquio de Moda. International roundtables and scientific publications further consolidated the academic recognition of the practices developed.

3 Conclusion

It is concluded that decoloniality in fashion education should be understood as a continuous, collective, and situated process that goes beyond punctual curricular reforms and requires transformations in everyday practices, pedagogical relationships, and legitimized epistemologies. The analyzed project highlights the potential of epistemologies of the South to promote significant shifts in fashion design education, contributing to a critical, plural, and socially committed form of training grounded in cognitive justice.

Despite the advances achieved, the study acknowledges the persistence of institutional challenges, such as internal resistance, faculty workload, and limitations in student retention policies. Nevertheless, the consolidation of the group as a community of practice and the resumption of the project point to the continuity of actions and the expansion of dialogue with other design programs in Brazil, strengthening teaching, research, and extension networks committed to social transformation¹.

¹ Translated by: Cyntia Tavares Marques de Queiroz, Bachelor's degree in Social Communication – Advertising and Publicity, 2000.

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