



Original Article

Designing the Thinking to Reinterpret "Mother" through Kebaya Design

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Abstract: Everyone will certainly agree how significant a mother's role is in a family. Without minimizing the father's role, the mother's figure in Eastern culture is closely related to domestic affairs at home, one of which is parenting. Eastern educational patterns tend to create boundaries between parents and children, often presenting their dilemma, especially in urban areas where all parents generally work to get a better life. Artsy people who tend to be introverted and have difficulty conveying their feelings verbally try to overcome this by presenting a mother figure as their design inspiration. This paper is design-based research by taking samples of the modern kebaya development process in the Visual Communication Media Class Academic Year of 2022/2023. The design development will use a 5 steps design thinking approach, with design conceptualization developed together with students from the Fashion Communication Class from the same academic year. This paper will investigate approaches that organically emerge in the collaboration process. An empirical study is conducted through a qualitative method to understand how peer-to-peer private discussion will help develop a design with a heart-touching background.

Keywords: Mother; Kebaya; Collaboration; Story telling.



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1. Introduction

Most of us will agree that mothers play a significant role in a family (Morgan, 2006). Without minimizing the father's role, the mother's figure in Eastern culture is closely related to domestic affairs at home, one of which is parenting (Bruce, 1995). In Eastern culture, the mother is key in educating and raising children (Trofholz et al., 2018). Mothers can be a place to lean on for their children and even become a center for education and role models for children (Chawla, 2007; Gofen, 2009). However, it is no longer surprising that the relationship between mother and daughter generally has its tension. Along with the development of parenting theory, many young people, from the 90s to the millennials, increasingly have access to how different East and West parenting styles are that raise comparisons to their parents, especially mothers (Swanzen, 2018).

The figure of a working mother adds complexity in building healthy and easy communication between mother and child. According to [Jannah \(2022\)](#), working mothers are mothers who, besides taking care of the household, also have responsibilities outside the home, either in offices, foundations, or self-employed, with a range of 6-8 hours a day. This still does not include overtime, official duties, or conflicts that may arise in professional life, which are likely to carry over into personal life. The dominance of time spent in the working life, the potential for long-distance relationships with family (in this case, children) due to work commitments and children's education options, as well as competitive relationships within the family, can be fundamental things that affect the harmonious relationship between mother and child, especially daughters.

Understanding this phenomenon, the research team investigates how this relationship will affect the individual design of fashion design students. The uniqueness of homogenous design students in terms of their characters, learning styles, and creativity becomes the red thread in this study. Women generally dominate study programs related to design in Indonesia. Society's tendency to categorize design as a learning process requiring precision and delicacy makes this specialization seem dedicated to women. The Fashion and Textile Design Program at Petra Christian University is no exception. This program is unique compared to the others because the dominance of women reaches 99%, making this area look like a girls' school. This program is a hands-on-based design program that emphasizes conceptual skills before the realization of work.

The study involved two courses across study programs, namely "Visual Communication Media (VDM)" from the fashion line, which is all women, and the "Fashion Design" course from the communication science, which is more heterogeneous. In the "Visual Communication Media" course, students must make a personal kebaya design that they will use for graduation purposes. Unlike the previous year, which gave independence to students to seek their sources of inspiration, in the academic year of 2022/2023, students were asked to understand the relationship between kebaya and women. After this, they were asked to take the closest female figure in their life as design inspiration. This project collaborated with the "Fashion Communication (FC)" course from the Communication Studies Program from the same academic year to discuss and retell the design process of each student in the form of visual media together.

2. Materials and Methods

The study conducted in this research used an empirical qualitative approach. This study focuses on extracting ideas to reach a big concept that becomes an agreement between the designer and the narrative that can be used. This empirical research documents the design thinking method approach passed in the VDM and FC courses. This research involved 28 fashion students, 31 communication science students, 3 fashion mentors, and three lecturers, the research team who designed the collaboration framework. Before starting each class at the beginning of the semester, the research team discussed understanding the big picture, the possibility of collaborative assignments, and schedule agreements. This collaborative activity was then carried out for 7 weeks by carrying out 4 steps of design thinking (DT): emphasizing, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing ([Dam & Siang, 2018](#)). These stages may be conducted in non-sequential manners. However, for the study, the stage will be delivered sequentially with chances to redo previous steps where necessary.

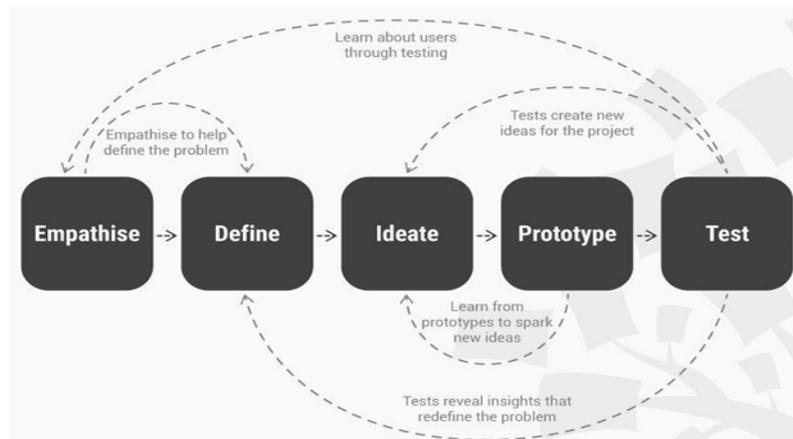


Figure 1. Design Thinking Model

Source: [Dam & Siang \(2018\)](#)

Each step is conducted individually by each student. Each fashion design student will be paired with one communication student from the end of the emphasis step. 1 senior designer will mentor every 8 fashion students to guide the data analysis and develop the prototype. The mentor will not be involved in developing collaboration media until the test stage since the number of fashion design students is less than that of communication students. Some communication students will share the same fashion design students as their subject to develop the narrative. The activities conducted and outputs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Methodologies and Expected Outcome

DT step	Fashion students' activity	Fashion students' output	Communication students' activity	Communication students' output
Emphasize early stage	Collecting kebaya data, understanding market, looking for other kebaya designers as typology	Literature review and typology	Collecting data, understanding kebaya, media review, market study	Selection of media and audience review
Emphasize end stage	In-depth discussion with communication students, clarify ideas	Acknowledge significant women	In-depth discussion with fashion students, taking footage, have the consent, clarify ideas	Background story draft, footages
Define	Data analysis, stating problem, making concept	Problem statement, design concept, mood board	Defining coverage angle	Coverage angle (later will be used as exhibition title)
Ideate	Making schematic design	Final sketch for prototyping	Brainstorming on media selection, campaign strategies, visualization	Campaign strategy
Prototype	Production	Kebaya to wear	Production	Individual cover video Group cover video
Test	Display and exhibition	Exhibition	Display and exhibition	Exhibition

Figure 1 shows the model of collaboration used by stage.

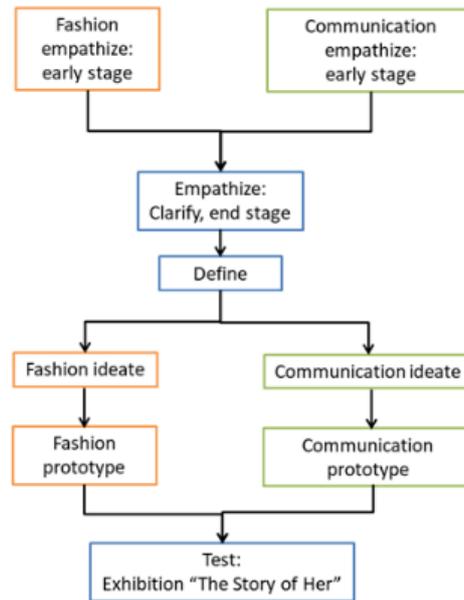


Figure 2. Collaboration Model

3. Results

This section will focus on the discussion only on the 3 parts that become the collaboration stages. These three stages will be presented in a narrative method to expose the challenges and solutions carried out in class.

3.1. Empathize

At this stage, VDM class students (fashion class) looked for data about kebaya, its development, models favored by the market, and kebaya designers and their work. This data was then shared with FC class students (communication science class). At this early stage, the data provided by VDM students was quite interesting because it displays modern kebaya elements that are no longer limited to classic kebaya. It's bolder, and the deconstructive form gives a lot of room for designer creativity. After the presentation of the design data was distributed, FC students tried to study the relationship between kebaya and women, in this case, mothers. The survey data found that 86.6% of respondents used kebaya for certain event needs. In addition, respondents also identified kebaya with brocade and curves. 76% of respondents agree that kebaya can be used by all groups and is used as a daily lifestyle. 54.35% of kebaya is quite in demand by the public. Therefore, designers need to create more creations to be able to touch people's buying interests. 78.1% of respondents like kebaya, which is comfortable and easy to use. 51.37% of respondents said the price of kebaya was quite affordable for Generation Z of Indonesian society. 77.9% of Instagram's social media is used to find kebaya references. 76.65% of respondents will also go straight to the outlet store to try on the kebaya.

Kebaya is a regional dress widely known by women in Indonesia, generally worn at certain moments such as graduations, weddings, and official state events. The kebaya worn by urban women narrates multiple identities, namely not only as national dress and regional clothing but also reflects personal identity, gender identity, class identity, and multicultural identity. Urban women articulate themselves through the kebaya they wear as a form of dialectic and negotiation with prevailing values in society (Trismaya, 2019). As a cultural product, the identity of the kebaya is not fixed because of the hybridization of various cultural forms. Historically, it is estimated that the kebaya was influenced by India, China, the Netherlands, and Portugal. On the basis of Javanese tradition, kebaya signifies class identity through its pattern, namely the aristocratic and commoner classes. In addition, the type of material, the quality of the stitches, and the symbolism of the motifs on the batik cloth worn as skirts also mark the user's identity. In modern urban society, kebaya is a marker of social class through the lines of design, and the quality of the kebaya produced by the designer will determine what level the wearer is at (Trismaya, 2019).

3.2. Define

When the FC class students communicated their ideas about the design point of view that will be narrated, it seemed that the VDM class students already had their ideas. They initially couldn't agree on the figure of the woman to use as the inspiration would be their mother. The difference in understanding the task and the idealism of the design makes them feel much more attached to and own the kebaya design. Hence, it is difficult for them to accept that this kebaya can be seen as a form of appreciation for the mother. In order to overcome this problem, a special meeting was held between the lecturers in charge and VDM class students. This activity aimed to understand the root of the problem so that the solutions given can be understood and the students cannot merely carry out instructions. At this meeting, it was discovered that most participants were worried about being asked to change their design to follow the wishes of the FC class students. They misunderstood the form of collaboration that was carried out.

Others have relationship issues with their mother, so they find it difficult to continue this collaborative development process because, in the process, they are asked to talk more about their mother. The VDM class happens to be all women in that academic year. At this stage, the most common mother-daughter relationship problem was communication. Whether it's in the form of a lack of time together, strict parenting patterns from parents or comparisons among siblings, or the need to convey expectations that are difficult for them to do verbally. After understanding and agreeing that the existing form of collaboration will not completely change their design, the collaboration can be resumed. At this stage, some students got back to the empathize stage and collected more and more new points of view for the story's narrative. In addition to individual student discussions between programs, FC class students also carry out discussions in their own classes with the supporting lecturers. This discussion aims to determine the main theme that will be used. This discussion resulted in the theme "The Story of Her" as the name of the activity to be carried out. This theme will also become a common thread and shared concept in the FC class work narrative videos. This project aimed to deliver the unspoken messages and hopes to the mother as a female figure.

3.3. Test

The test is one of the most important stages in the Design Thinking process, where you discover whether your idea solves the user problem uncovered during the Empathize stage. The test stage was initially planned as a small internal exhibition. However, because the shape of the kebaya made by the students was unique and coincided with the kebaya event held by the Surabaya City government, the exhibition was held on a larger scale. It involved the participation of the academic community and the deputy mayor as representatives of the capitals of the City of Surabaya. Activity information was conceptualized differently than general information on campus activities. Suppose activities are generally published solely in digital form this time. In that case, the information is made using offline media to arouse the curiosity of the academic community passing through the campus area. Information is carried out using mannequins and information boards placed at several strategic campus spots for 2 weeks during the class registration period.

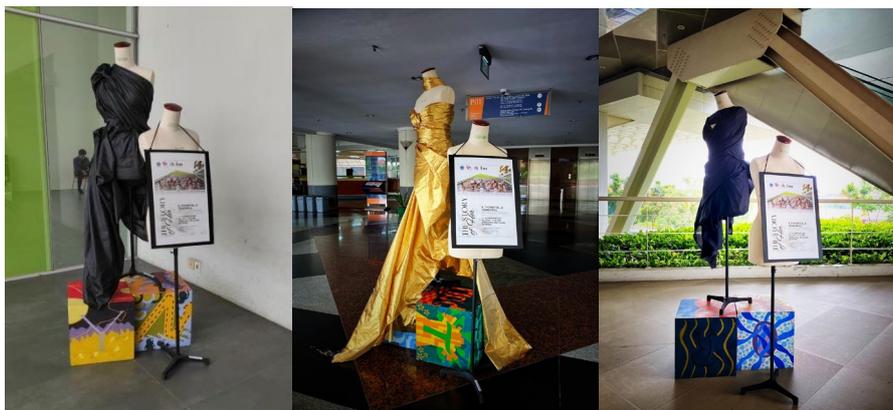


Figure 3. Mannequins Display

"The Story of Her" Exhibition was held two weeks later, on the first week of the new semester. This exhibition invited all civitas academics, from staff, students, and lecturers to rectors from internal parties. Apart from that, this activity also invited the deputy mayor of Surabaya to deliver the opening remarks. This activity received good enthusiasm from the participants, who actively participated in leaving messages for their mothers in the interactive spots provided. In addition, several parents also attended as a form of

appreciation for their children's work. There were 5 representatives of the best kebaya who carried out their work in fashion shows. They can convey messages to their parents directly.



(a)



(b)



(c)

(d)

(e)

Figure 4. Exhibition Situation

4. Results and Discussion

In its implementation, students in the field experience difficulties, especially at stages that require collaboration. Differences in their mind models influenced their learning style and communication; Therefore, it may be one of the things that will contribute significantly. According to [Gregorc \(1985\)](#), four combinations of the strongest mind styles provide an organized way to consider how the mind works. These are Concrete Sequential (CS), Abstract Random (AR), Abstract Sequential (AS), and Concrete Random (CR) ([Davis, 1994](#)). Each type has common traits, as shown in Figure 5. The students from the design program in the VDM class generally have AR patterns. This pattern is very easy to get carried away with. Still, it is not easy to follow structured general instructions orally and convey basic thoughts and ideas verbally in a structured form. However, they will perform well in a non-competitive environment and involve hands-on testing.

Meanwhile, students from the FC class tend to be more systematic analytical, and move in a structured order. When these two types are found, it takes a more personal delivery and a longer time regarding shared ideas for the AR type to be able to absorb the idea in question before deciding. In the form of structured tasks and tight deadlines, when these two opposite types meet, there is potential for conflict to occur. Due to its traits that make it difficult to convey messages verbally and in a structured manner, footage taken in several meetings and casually conducted in unstructured interviews produced a good impact. It was proven in the repeated shootings carried out by FC class students. This unstructured interview also helped VDM class students explore small ideas that emerged in the interview session to find concepts that fit their mother's figure. Previously, fashion students made designs from literal concepts, such as being inspired by roses, which will be applied to rose motifs. However, in this task, they must find out more about the figure of the mother.

CONCRETE SEQUENTIAL	ABSTRACT SEQUENTIAL
<p>This learner likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> order logical sequence following directions, predictability getting facts <p>They learn best when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> they have a structured environment they can rely on others to complete this task are faced with predictable situations can apply ideas in pragmatic ways <p>What's hard for them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in groups Discussions that seem to have no specific point Working in an unorganized environment Following incomplete or unclear directions Working with unpredictable people Dealing with abstract ideas Demands to "use your imagination" Questions with no right or wrong answers 	<p>This learner likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> his/her point to be heard analyzing situations before making a decision or acting applying logic in solving or finding solutions to problems <p>They learn best when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> they have access to experts or references placed in stimulating environments able to work alone <p>What's hard for them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being forced to work with those of differing views Too little time to deal with a subject thoroughly Repeating the same tasks over and over Lots of specific rules and regulations "sentimental" thinking Expressing their emotions Being diplomatic when convincing others Not monopolizing a conversation
CONCRETE RANDOM	ABSTRACT RANDOM
<p>This learner likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> experimenting to find answers take risks use their intuition solving problems independently <p>They learn best when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> they are able to use trial-and-error approaches able to compete with others given the opportunity to work through the problems by themselves <p>What's hard for them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrictions and limitations Formal reports Routines Re-doing anything once it's done Keeping detailed records Showing how they got an answer Choosing only one answer Having no options 	<p>This learner likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to listen to others bringing harmony to group situations establishing healthy relationships with others focusing on the issues at hand <p>They learn best when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in a personalized environment given broad or general guidelines able to maintain friendly relationships able to participate in group activities <p>What's hard for them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having to explain or justify feelings Competition Working with dictatorial/authoritarian personalities Working in a restrictive environment Working with people who don't seem friendly Concentrating on one thing at a time Giving exact details Accepting even positive criticism

Figure 5. Mind Styles

Source: Gregorc (1985)

Taking the example of the five best works displayed in the fashion show at the exhibition "The Story of Her", students interpret this figure by taking their inspiration from their mother's favorite, resemblance, values, and common traits of the mother. Even though they don't get much together with their mothers because all the mother figures in the following examples of work are working mothers and or live separately from their daughters, the help from colleagues in the FC class can formulate their thoughts and longing for a mother figure in a mature work concept. These are five samples of the interpretation:



Figure 6. Kebaya Design from VDM Class

Source: Kusumadewi & Jerusalem (2023)

Sample 1, entitled "Her Ethereal World" by Chavella Christensia

This work is inspired by the story and struggle of R.A. Kartini in upholding women's emancipation. The designer remembers the tough figure of his mother, who never complained about giving the best for her family, like RA Kartini's total struggle. The choice of lace fabric motif conforms to the concept of 'Her

Ethereal World' with a combination of geometric shapes and natural floral motifs. Blue is the main color to support the design concept where blue gives the impression of being strong and steadfast as well as peace and harmony. The persistence and struggle of the mother figure is embodied in the kebaya design silhouette, which is firm, bold, and dramatic and gives a charismatic impression.

Sample 2, entitled "Soft Blush" by Angela Tanujaya

This work was inspired by the Hortensia flower, the designer's mother's favorite flower. This flower has soft colors and can change color if the soil's acidity changes. This flower symbolizes the figure of a mother who can brighten up the atmosphere and support the environment around her, but she needs other parts to survive. The yellow-gold color symbolizes a very precious mother figure as well as a form of love and gratitude.

Sample 3, entitled "O'ginevra" by Angelicia Indrawati

O'ginevra comes from the word "ocean," which means sea and "ginevra" means wave. The waves on the sea inspire the light blue color combination of this kebaya design, and several pearl details symbolize the sea's beauty. Many things and lessons can be learned from the waves at sea, including sincerity, not giving up, and consistency. It is hoped that the wearer of this kebaya will be aware that behind a great child must be a mother with these three characteristics.

Sample 4, entitled "Hashira" by Fiona Jeannice

This kebaya design is inspired by a royal atmosphere with tall pillars that look luxurious, aesthetic, and majestic. The designer chose the pillars as inspiration because of the mother's obligation in the family as a support through educating intellectuals, goodness, and truth, which are important pillars in life. Sample 5 entitled "Her Purest Heart" by Ehn (2017), elevates the concept of asters. Daisies mean loyalty, love, beauty, purity, chastity, patience, and simplicity. The meaning contained in the white daisy can describe the figure of a woman who is gentle and kind, like the heart of a mother who is very gentle and loving towards her child.

5. Conclusions

Design inspiration can come from anywhere, anytime, and anywhere. The mother figure is no exception, whose role is so important and conventionally has high hours of togetherness. But in today's urban society, the presence of working mothers has become common. The relationship between parents and children, especially in this case, mother and daughter, is an interesting matter to discuss and serves as design inspiration for interpreting a mother figure. The activities recorded in this paper are a form of student collaboration from fashion and communication science programs in their third year of study. In its implementation, students in the field experience difficulties, especially at stages that require collaboration. Differences in their mind models influenced their learning style and way of communication. Therefore, it may come as one of the things that will contribute significantly. The students from the design program in the VDM class generally have abstract random (AR) patterns. Meanwhile, students from the FC class tend to be more systematic and analytical and move in a structured order (concrete sequential/ CS and abstract sequential/ AS). It is a challenge for AR types to think deeply in the context of tasks and systematically communicate these thoughts. The habit of design students who directly present ideas through pictures must be challenged in this assignment. The presence of peers from the FC class helps to formulate values and design inspiration from the complicated thinking of an AR to become more systematic.

Unstructured interviews helped VDM class students explore small ideas that emerged in the interview session to find concepts that fit their mother's figure. The design process in this study sequence ended at the test stage by using an exhibition entitled "The Story of Her." All students' works from kebaya to videos were presented in this exhibition to gain appreciation. There were 5 representatives of the best kebaya designs were carried out in mini fashion shows. The designers of these 5 best works interpret "mother" from their mother's favorite resemblance, values, and common traits of mother. Even though they don't get much together with their mothers because all the mother figures in the following examples of work are working mothers and or live separately from their daughters, the help from colleagues in the FC class can formulate their thoughts and longing for a mother figure in a mature work concept.

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