

# **CHAPTER 8:**

## **ADAPTATION OF PUNCH NEEDLE EMBROIDERY AS AN ADDED SURFACE DESIGN ON AFRICAN WAX PRINTS FOR NIGERIAN FASHION**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Surface decoration is the outward decoration given to the fabric. According to Naik and Wilson (2009), surface designing refers to the external embellishment given to a fabric. They further defined it as a structural and applied design on any substrate. And mentions that there are countless varieties of decorations that are used to enhance the surfaces of fabrics but their techniques differ. The clothes and type of embellishment depend on the specific end-use. The most prevalent techniques used to enhance some textile materials to aid their consumer acceptance are dyeing, printing, painting, embroidery, weaving and industrial surface finishes. Each technique has its own characteristics for instance, dyeing is carried out to add colours to the fabric using dyes, printing is used to impress an image onto a surface using paint or ink (Sleigh-Johnson 2009), weaving is used to create structural and decorative designs (Naik and Wilson (2009), by combining basic and fancy weave structures. Varieties of woven designs can be achieved by blending different fibres, and sources. The other surface finishes without adding any colour produce some peculiar pattern effects which transform the physical appearance of the fabric. Another technique of embellishing the surface of the fabrics through threadwork is called embroidery. A lot of Nigerian fashion designers have used

embroidery and other techniques in enhancing African wax fabrics to make them more appealing to wearers and buyers and also to reduce monotony.

In past and present times African wax fabrics have been utilized extensively in fashion. Elsworth (2009) in Bada (2013) says that in the fashion industry today, and all over the world, the Nigerian culture is being borrowed and incorporated into styles, signatures and works of partakers of the industry. He also said that the simple wearability of such materials as African wax prints has made the fabric not only a runway creation but everyday and even red carpets and movie premier wear of choice for the Hollywood big names.

Djirackor (2013) proclaimed that just as Africa is not one big country, African print comes in many distinct types of styles applied to diverse fabrics, with their printing techniques and purposes. Super Wax, Dutch, Java, super print, Ghana wax, Cote d'Ivoire wax, Togo wax, Nigerian wax, veritable wax, Bogolan, Batik, Bazin, Kente print and mud wax prints are some of the various prints used for both traditional and contemporary African styles, which non-Africans most commonly and indistinctly refer to as African print. He further stated that bold colours, stark combinations, and a wide range of patterns from geometric, animal and floral to even political messages and portraits of public figures—all are used to create garments for both men and women.

Therefore, this study was theoretically guided by the creative ideas of some Nigerian fashion designers such as Deola Sagoe, Amaka Osakwe, Lisa Folawiyo and Ituen Basi who have been experimenting and reinventing indigenous Nigerian fabrics to turn them into contemporary fashionable wear (Jennings 2011) so that they will not go into extinction. They have been experimenting with indigenous fabrics to come up with appropriate cloth to suit the current trends in Nigeria. For instance, Lisa Folawiyo (Jewel by Lisa is her cloth line) in Arise fashion shows at New York fashion week for spring /summer 2010 and Paris fashion week for

Autumn/winter 2010/11 showcased the results from an exploration carried out on the embellishment of the African print cloth with sequins, beads and crystals to give it a new look to suit the contemporary fashion globally. She further introduced her own custom-made African wax print-inspired prints on cotton, georgette and royal or shantung silk fabrics which she introduced into contemporary fashion. She also showcased some apparel she produced with batik and mud cloth-inspired prints on velvet, linen, silk, satin and chiffon to typify African style. It has been observed by this study that most African contemporary designers working towards international fashion seasons have always combined culture in their designed apparel.

This study also agrees with Ituen Basi who changed the African wax fabrics to adorable apparel through her patchwork on the fabrics, plaiting with the pieces of fabrics to form part of the clothes and colour-blocking techniques to suit the recent trends in fashion. She further redesigned adire and aso-oke by combining them to form styles which are being worn in contemporary fashion in Nigeria. All these concepts that centred on re-invention and transformation helped this study to practically explore the possibility of using punch needle embroidery to enhance African wax fabrics to add something new to the variety of embroidered African wax fabrics, add value to them and aid their sustainability.

### **African wax fabrics and embellishment**

African wax prints are common fabrics found in Africa especially West Africa to be precise. They are of different categories of quality due to the processes of manufacturing. They are usually produced in the industry using hundred per cent cotton fabrics with batik printing. These wax prints are visibly present in the international and African fashion scenes. Nigerian fashion designers have begun to utilize these African wax prints to produce some apparel for different kinds of occasions which can withstand any kind of competition outside the continent because they believe

that they are indigenous to them. Some of these fabrics are constructed into different styles of wrappers, blouses, shirts, trousers, gowns, dresses, clothing accessories – earrings, bangles, hats, necklaces, bags, shoes, slippers, hand fans, bowties, ties, hair ruffles, bands and other fashion accessories. The African wax prints bear some surface designs which are in the form of printed designs with dyes, resin and printing inks based on African culture and worldview. Some of these designs are named after some personalities, cities, recent happenings in the society, buildings, sayings and occasions. To further enhance the surface of the already sewn wax prints to make them more appealing to the onlookers and attract more patronage, they are either beaded, embroidered with machine and hand or decorated with Swarovski stones, crystals and other trimmings but it is rare to find any of these wax-printed fabrics to the best of this study's knowledge which has been decorated with punch needle embroidery as an added surface decoration. This is the main thrust of this paper. This study embellished some sewn African wax-print fabrics using the needle punch technique of embroidery.

### **Designing of clothes with embroidery in Nigeria**

The endorsement on most African clothes that usually projects their origin is the type of embroidery applied to them. Many designers of African descent utilize embroidery designs on their sewn apparel. Once those designs are seen by an onlooker, they are recognized as African designs. Each part of African embroidery can be distinguished from one another based on their motif designs which showcase different ethnic cultures and worldviews.

In Nigeria for instance, the history of embroidery dates back to centuries (Uduma, 2012), it is an essential part of Nigerian fashion which is cannot be neglected because of its symbolism. It occupies an important place in traditional Nigerian fashion. Even though Western clothes are being utilized by many people, embroidered clothes in Nigeria will not be ignored. They are still

worn for important ceremonies. According to Ikande (2018), embroidery is an excellent addition to a sewn outfit. It is one of the ancient and common types of fabric decoration in Nigeria. Each feature of the design and pattern adds value to the cloth. Uduma (2012), further mentions that history has it that the art of embroidery has been in practice by the Nupe, Hausa and Yoruba in Nigeria for a very long time (Heathcote 1976). Most of these embroidery were usually done by hand while recently, some are done with the aid of embroidery machines. These embroidery designs are done on capacious clothes known as *babarinda / agbada*. Different types of stitches are used to embroider different designs on these apparel to depict prestige and status. According to Saidu (2013), running, straight, chain, open chain, ladder, stem, satin, blanket and cross stitches are used in Hausa embroidery. He further observed that some motifs embroidered on those Hausa clothes are *dagi* (northern knots), *aska biyu* (two knives), *aska tara* (nine knives), *linzami*, *gidan biyar* (five columns), *tambari* etc. Some of the yarns used are cotton, wild silk or imported threads (Saidu, 2013) on traditional hand-woven or imported fabrics which could be made of natural or synthetic fibres. Uduma (2012) is of the view that embroidery that the art of embroidery was not practiced by the Igbo, but rather they had uli body designs which were converted to embroidery designs by the missionaries for table linens in the town of Arochukwu. Most cloth designers, still repeat old designs on fabric while constructing traditional clothing. They usually turn these clothes into pieces of artworks that are decorative and intricate based on their tradition but for fashion purposes.

Researchers like Heathcote (1979) and Umar (2010) to mention but a few have written extensively on Hausa embroidery however, it has been observed by this study that not much has been done as regards utilizing punch needle embroidery in decorating indigenous African clothes. Therefore, this study seeks to address the issue of decorating African wax printed clothing with punch

*Adaptation of Punch Needle Embroidery as an Added Surface ...*  
needle embroidery technique to suit the contemporary fashion in Nigeria.

		
Plate 1: Machine embroidery. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2019)	Plate 2: Machine embroidery. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2019)	Plate 3: Machine embroidery. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2019)

### **Hand needle Embroidery**

This is the art of decorating fabrics or other materials using a needle to apply thread or yarn. It has also been defined as the ornamentation of textiles with decorative stitchery, (Ganderton 1999). It is an ancient craft which comprises a lot of history and embroiderers all over the world use the same stitches. She further mentions that design patterns vary from place to place but the techniques of stitching remain the same. The art of embroidery dates to ancient Egypt and China. History has it that this needle art developed from the task of mending clothes. As people used their needles on holes and torn seams they found out the decorative

possibilities of sewing. Embroidery arts have always relied on several basic stitches as their foundation. The invention of embroidery machines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a major development in the practice of embroidery. This development enabled the availability of massproduced, machine-embroidered goods to be available to those who could not afford hand-embroidered products. Home embroidery machines were not common until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before clothes and other items of domestic furnishing were mass produced, they were made at home and decorated with embroidery. Embroidery was used to decorate the household linens and garments. In different countries of the world, people concentrated on their own type of embroidery and these were given different names. During the medieval period, workshops located in Agra- northern India, created magnificent embroidered art for medieval rulers. Persian embroidery was used to decorate clothing items which conferred status and beauty on its owners. In many regions of the world, hand-embroidered items were used to showcase the high status of their owners. For example in the Middle East, the upper class were the only ones that could afford hand embroidery. Persia, India, the Orient and European countries regarded embroidery to be a mark of distinction. In African communities, embroideries can also be found in different communities such as in Senegal, Togo, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Ghana and many others. In Nigeria, embroidery is found on Hausa and Yoruba caps, and some men's and women's traditional clothing. This is usually done by machine or hand using various embroidery stitches and threads.

There are a total number of 264 hand stitches according to Ganderton (1999). They are as follows: chain, buttonhole, or blanket, running, whipped running, double running, back, split, threaded back, stem, cable cross, couching, satin couching, pearl, coral, double knot, chain, square chain, twisted chain, cable chain, broad chain, rope, scroll, paris, fern, Bosnian, chevron, thorn, cross, long-armed cross, zigzag, herringbone, closed herringbone,

shadow, basket, wheatear, Russian chain, petal, zigzag chain, rosette chain, loop, Vandyke, ladder, blanket, buttonhole, closed buttonhole, single feather, up and down buttonhole, open Cretan, feather, closed feather, double feather, chained feather, Pekinese, laced button hole, interlaced band, magic chain, singalese chain, threaded chain, guilloche, raised chevron, backstitched herringbone, raised lattice band, double herringbone, twisted lattice band, butterfly chain, raised chain band, diagonal woven band, striped woven band, Portuguese border, straight, arrowhead, seeding, St. George cross, ermine, square boss, star, woven star, woven cross, French knot, pistil, bullion knot, Danish knot, four legged knot, sword, fly, sheaf filling, crown, sorbello, Palestrina knot, link, lazy daisy, berry, long tailed daisy, detached wheatear, tulip, woven spider web, ribbon rose, ribbed web, buttonhole wheel, shisha, damask darning, double darning, brick and cross filling, satin, surface satin, encroaching satin, long and short, buttonhole filling, stem filling, leaf, open fishbone, attached fly, close fly, Cretan, close Cretan, Romanian couching, Bokhara couching, spiral couching, couched filling, laid trellis, back stitch trellis, Japanese darning, cloud filling, wave filling, window filling, pulled wave filling, three sided , honeycomb filling, Russian filling, diagonal raised band, ridged filling, punch, cobbler filling, step, mosaic filling, diagonal satin filling, ringed back stitch filling, Algerian eye, outlined diamond outlet, hem, ladder hem, serpentine hem, antique hem, Italian border, four sided, chevron border, diamond border, laced insertion, insertion bundles, Cretan insertion, knotted insertion, buttonhole insertion, needle weaving bars, zigzag clusters, corded clusters, Antwerp edging, sailor edging, looped edge, half chevron, scalloped edge, ring picot edge, buttonhole eyelet, overcast eyelet, square eyelet, upright gobelin, gobelin filling, Parisian, Hungarian, Hungarian diamond, single twill, double twill, bargello, chevron, Hungarian ground, straight cushion, Scottish diamond, diamond, long stitch triangles, lozenge, straight Milanese, double brick, brick filling, long and short brick,

basket filling, half cross, basket weave tent, tent, trammed tent, gobelin, encroaching gobelin, reverse sloping gobelin, canvas stem, Florence, cashmere, diagonal, byzantine, jacquard, Moorish, Milanese, mosaic, cushion, Scottish, checker, cross, diagonal cross, double cross, upright cross, diamond cross, Smyrna cross, double leviathan, diagonal tweed, broad cross, cross-corner cushion, Brighton, rice, plaited gobelin, Greek, plait, fishbone, fern, fir, Rhodes, half Rhodes, star, eye, diamond eye, fan, rya, turkey, houndstooth, knitting, old wheatsheaf, tied gobelin, French, pineapple, arrow etc. (Ganderton 1999). These stitches remain the fundamental techniques of hand embroidery today.

Some of these embroidery designs have some peculiar names given to them for easy identification and selection. These stitches are grouped into four –

- a. Lines and borders
- b. Filling stitches
- c. Openwork
- d. Needlepoint

### **Border stitches**

These are the largest and most extensively used group of stitches. They include flat, looped and knotted techniques. They are used to create broad, decorative straight lines, frames and edgings. They can also be worked in straight or curved rows, singly as outlines or repeated to form a filling to cover a larger area. Some examples are Paris, fern, Bosnian, chevron, thorn etc.

### **Composite border stitches**

They are the most decorative group of stitches and can be worked in single rows or repeated to produce multi-coloured fillings with intricate surface textures. It could be a combination of two or even three stitches and some of them could be created by embellishing the basic outline and border stitches with interlacing. Some

examples of this type of stitches are Pekinese, laced buttonhole, interlaced band, magic chain, singalese chain etc. a blunt needle should be used to carry out this exercise and the fabric should be mounted in an embroidery frame so as not to misrepresent the stitches.

### **Filling stitches**

Under filling stitches, there are powdered filling, isolated, open and solid filling stitches.

#### **Powdered filling and isolated stitches**

These stitches are worked singly and vary in size. The larger ones are usually for emphasis while the smaller ones are repeated to form a powdered filling. The stitches can be arranged in different ways to form a dense textured surface. Ganderton (1999) believes that a design often requires a powdered filling to be contained within an area which has been defined with an outline or border stitch. Some examples are as follows: arrowhead, straight, seeding, St. George cross, ermine, star etc.

#### **Open and solid filling stitches**

**According to** Ganderton (1999), open fillings do not cover the background completely, while solid fillings are dense and should be worked in a thick thread that covers the cloth completely. Some of them have developed as shading stitches using different closely related coloured threads. The constant repetitive usage of these stitches, can produce a slight three-dimensional effect, especially for flowers and foliage. The fabric to be utilized for this practical should be mounted in a frame for all the filling stitches. Some examples of these stitches are damask darning, double darning, brick and cross filling, satin, surface satin, long and short, buttonhole filling etc.

### **Pulled fabric stitches**

These stitches are used to decorate household linen but their variety and elaborate patterns become more noticeable when coloured threads are used. They form all over designs which vary in their thicknesses. The fabric should be mounted in a frame but should not be stretched too taut so that the stitches can be worked evenly. Strong threads are recommended by Ganderton (1999) for this exercise to match the background fabric and also pull each stitch tightly to draw the fabric threads together. Some examples are window filling, three-sided, honeycomb filling, Russian filling, punch etc.

### **Drawn threads and insertion stitches**

These stitches developed as a method of producing a decorative neatened edge on a piece of fabric. They are usually worked on even weave fabric from which various lines of threads have been pulled out. The remaining threads are bunched together with tightly pulled stitches to form a regular pattern. Insertion stitches are also known as faggoting. They have developed from their old patterns of seams to a group of intricate stitches which can be utilized on plain or even weave fabric. The two edges being joined must be mounted on paper so that the stitches can be stitched evenly. Some examples of these stitches are single hem, serpentine hem, antique hem, Italian border, four-sided, chevron border, diamond border etc.

### **Cutwork and edging stitches**

These kinds of stitches give a decorative finish to a hem and look exactly effective when worked in a thick twisted thread. Ganderton (1999) advises that the stitches should be spaced repeatedly, and can be used on even weave or plain weave fabrics. They can be used to decorate collars, mats and garments; they could also be combined with satin stitch to create designs. These designs can be worked on with or without a frame. Some examples are Antwerp

edging, scalloped edge, sailor edge, looped edge, buttonhole eyelet, overcast eyelet etc.

### **Straight needlepoint stitches**

This group of stitches includes stripes, zigzags, diamonds and other geometric patterns which be stitched horizontally or vertically so that the thread lies parallel to the grain of the canvas. These stitches can be worked without a frame but one must be careful and the thread, yarn or wool used must be thick enough to conceal the background completely. Some examples are upright Gobelin, Gobelin filling, Parisian, Hungarian, Hungarian diamond, single twill etc.

### **Diagonal needlepoint stitches**

These stitches are worked at a slant across the thread intersections. This can distort the square weave of the canvas even when the fabric worked on is mounted on a frame. Therefore Ganderton (1999) advises that the finished piece should be stretched and blocked back into shape. Some of these stitches are done using single or double canvas. The thickness of the thread or yarn must be matched to the weight of the canvas to conceal the background completely. Some examples are half cross, basket weave tent, tent, gobeline, encroaching gobelin, canvas stem, Florence, cashmere, diagonal byzantine etc.

### **Cross and star needlepoint stitches**

These stitches include all the stitches that are worked with a combination of horizontal, vertical and diagonal stitches. Cross stitches feature two or more straight stitches that cross over each other while the individual stitches that constitute the star stitches are discharged from a central point. Ganderton (1999) suggests that the heavier cross variations should be utilized on double canvas because they conceal better while other stitches should use single canvas. She also advises that the thread should be thick enough to

cover the entire canvas and should all be worked in a frame. Some examples of these stitches are cross, diagonal cross, double cross, upright cross, diamond cross diagonal tweed, Smyrna cross etc.

### **Looped and tied needlepoint stitches**

This group includes advanced stitches which can be used when unusual textures and multi-coloured are required.

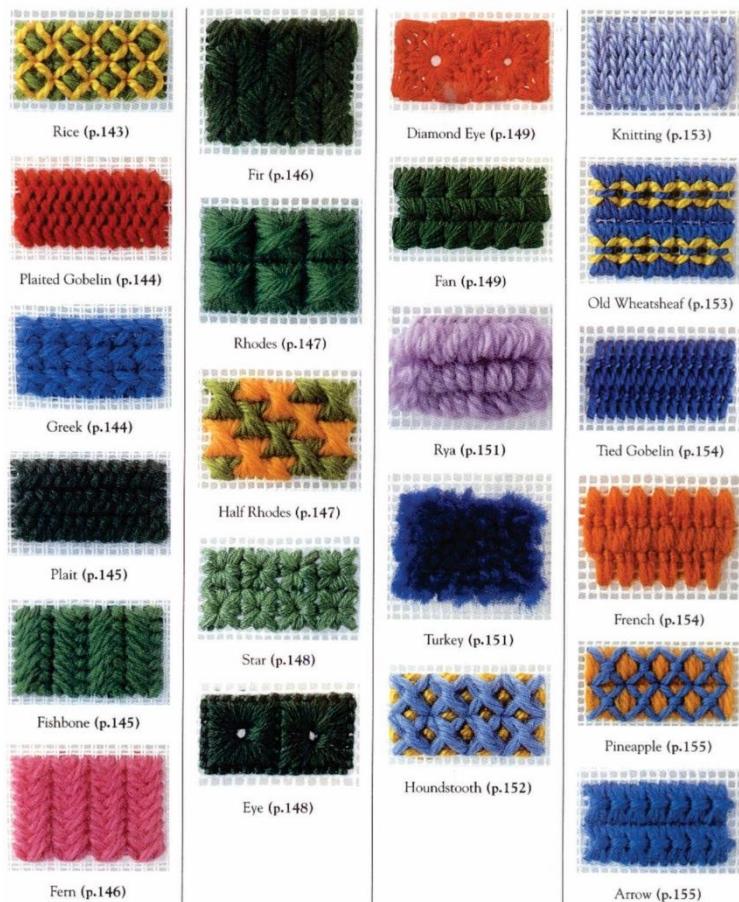


Plate 4: Hand needle Designs

Looped rya and turkey stitches are used traditionally for rugs and are appropriate for stitching elevated areas in a design to achieve a luxurious finish when trimmed. The tied and twisted stitches consist of long straight stitches held down with shorter stitches to achieve a thick, ridged effect. The stitches in this section should be worked in a frame on a single canvas, ensuring that the thread and yarn used cover the entire background thread. Some examples are rya rug, turkey, houndstooth, knitting, old wheatsheaf, tied gobelin, French, pineapple arrow etc.

### **Punch needle embroidery**

Punch needle embroidery is also known as needle punching, needle punch work, punch needle work, punch needle work, punch work or *igolochky*. This is a technique that uses a hollow needle that is threaded with a thread or fibre. When the needle is punched into the fabric, it leaves a little loop of thread on the other side. The loops are repeated to fill the design created. Bird (1981), defines a punch needle as a technique involving the punching and looping of a thread or ribbon in a particular design through a ground cloth. This group of loops are called piles. They can be of various sizes, looped or uncut. The special needle is thin, hollow and varies in length. The point of needle is pointed and very sharp. The thread goes down the length of the hollow needle and exits through an eye at the point.

Harer (1972), finds out that the origin of punch needle embroidery is not clear. Some people trace its origin to ancient Egypt, while others cite medieval Europe – (Britain, Germany, and Russia) as its place of origin. According to Poskin (2017), the punch needle has been around for a very long time. She further mentions that ancient Egyptians used hollowed bones from birds' wings as needles for the craft and it's been used through the ages to depict a lot of things from floral scenes to portraits. However, this punch needle embroidery has been utilized by some artists to produce some works like landscapes, abstract designs, designs on

plain cloths, portraits etc. but this embroidery has not been utilized effectively to enhance African wax fabrics. Therefore, this study sought to address that issue by conducting an exploration of using punch needle embroidery on African wax fabrics to see if it will be appropriate as a surface an additional surface design on African wax fabrics just like machine embroidery.

According to Steward (2009), to produce this work a fabric with a design drawn on the reverse is placed in a tensioning frame like an embroidery hoop. With the help of an embroidery hoop, a series of loops are made on the surface of the fabric, using the fingers to hold the loops initially in place. These series of loops give the design a carpet-like appearance and a soft texture depending on the type of thread used. As the needle is punched through the fabric, a gauge on the needle determines the length of the loop. There are varieties of punch needles but the differences are in the materials they are made from – plastic or metal handles and the ability to adjust the length of the loops which is responsible for the height of the finished design. A threader is also needed and it is very important to place the fabric tight in a hoop or frame with an interlocking lip. The fabric usually utilized for this experiment is tightly woven quite unlike some other stitches. This enables the loops to be attached firmly to the fabric. The fabric is usually 65% polyester and 35% cotton. If there is a fabric that one is not so sure of, a fusible interfacing could be attached to the back using an iron. The punch needle makes use of a variety of threads. Any thread or fibre that can pass through the punch needle even a 2mm ribbon can be utilized.

This study observed that since the design to be punched is not on a plain fabric, there is no need for tracing paper, pencils and a lightbox because the designs are already on African wax fabrics. The outlines are usually the first places to punch using the particular colour for that area before filling the inside. The stitches should be as close as possible ensuring that the background is fully covered. Once a mistake is made, it could be corrected by carefully

*Adaptation of Punch Needle Embroidery as an Added Surface ...*

and slowly pulling the stitches from the back. Once they have been removed the fingers are run over the fabric to put it back into place. Constant ripping can weaken the fabric.

### **Studio Exploration**

The materials needed for the punch needle embroidery experiment are:

- a. Embroidery hoop
- b. Punch needle
- c. Threads or yarns of different sizes and colours
- d. A pair of scissors
- e. Punch needle threader
- f. African wax fabrics

		
Plate 5: embroidery hoop	Plate 6: punch needle	Plate 7: acrylic yarn



### **Step 1. Stretch the fabric**

The African wax fabrics was stretched in the embroidery hoop after attaching the fusible was interfacing at the wrong side of the fabric. Once the punching started, precaution was taken by making sure from time to time that the hoop was still holding the cloth tightly.



Plate 9: stretching the fabric in the embroidery hoop.

## **Step 2. Load the punch needle**

The punch needle was loaded by inserting the threader tool into the needle. The threader was inserted vertically through the top of the needle and sent down and out through the bottom of the tool. The thin wires of the threader were pried open to run the embroidery floss through. The tab at the top of the threader was used to pull the needle back out through the top of the needle to enable the threader to come completely out of the punch needle tool. This brought out the embroidery floss up and out from the top of the needle. After this initial step, the tip of the threader was inserted horizontally through the second hole in the tip of the needle. The floss was pulled further out through the first hole previously threaded and ran through the wires at the tip of the threader. The tab was pulled back out of the hole to complete this segment of threading the needle.

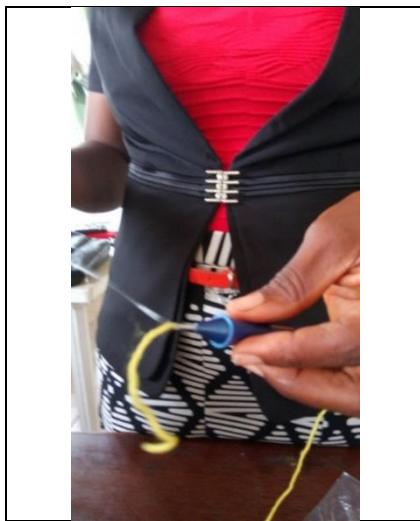


Plate 10: threading the punch needle with the acrylic yarn.

## **Step 3. Punching**

The punching was started from the outlines of the designs before filling the inside. The thumb was to hold the tail in place as the first rows were punched. This study observed that the shorter the distances between the punches, the tighter the loops were. The first rows were not very straight but it was corrected by filling them in. When the designs were done, the areas that were not previously missed were filled in. In this studio exploration, the work was not done from the inside like on plain fabrics because of the interfacing at the back of the fabric. This interfacing was used to fortify the fabric. It was done side by side in a continuous line. As the work progressed, the big loops were trimmed so as not to catch them on something and unravel the work.



Plate 11: punching exercise



Plate 12: the finished work

## Conclusion

Over the years till date, embroidery has been an essential part of Nigerian fashion. This has been used to display prestige and rank

traditionally for men in some societies in Nigeria. In Nigerian contemporary fashion to be precise, both men and women from different tribes and tongues wear clothes decorated with hand or machine embroidery as a surface design but the use of punch needle embroidery on clothes has not been sufficiently utilized in the Nigerian fashion scene. Also, its utilization of African wax fabrics has not been adequately showcased in Nigerian fashion. The experiment carried out on African wax fabrics using the punch needle technique proved that this technique is appropriate for further enhancement and produced good results. The clothing produced could be used for different occasions. The utilization of this technique has given birth to a reduction of boredom emanating from the common machine and hand embroidery. This study is of the view that the punch needle technique should be used to decorate some clothing made with African wax fabrics in contemporary fashion to create variety and also sold for economic purposes. It strongly suggests that some people should be encouraged to acquire the skill of using this punch needle to embellish African wax fabric wears, practice it as a vocation and utilize it to earn a living. In line with the above, this technique of decorating a textile surface will be popularized and employed often in Nigerian contemporary fashion.

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