

## **Communication Challenges in Fashion Portfolio Presentation: A Systematic Review of Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

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### **Abstract**

The transformation of higher education in fashion communication emphasises sustainable communication skills among students. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR), applying PRISMA protocol, aimed to identify the communication challenges faced by fashion design students at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. A total of 674 articles (2021–2026) were examined through thematic analysis. The findings showed five key themes: presentation readiness, communication competence, pedagogical structure, psychological factors and exposure and experience. Presentation readiness proved the most dominant factor (45.33%, n=306). The study proposes the use of comprehensive rubric-based assessment, formative feedback, peer critique, and studio-based experiences to enhance students' professional employability.

**Keywords:** Fashion Communication; Fashion Design Education; Communication Issues; Pedagogy Structure

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Fashion design education in Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is currently undergoing a significant paradigm shift. It not only emphasizes the mastery of traditional technical skills such as fashion illustration, pattern construction, sewing and collection development, but also demands students' ability to communicate effectively through verbal and visual mediums. In the context of an increasingly competitive and digitally driven global fashion industry, communication skills play a critical role in helping students explain design concepts, build collection narratives, convey brand identity and convince various stakeholders, including lecturers, peers and industry players. The development of digital technology, social media and online portfolio platforms has radically changed the way fashion design is presented. Students now not only need to produce creative designs but also need to master visual communication skills through mood boards, storyboards, digital portfolios, lookbooks and multimedia presentations to convey ideas in a more professional and high-impact way. This ability is increasingly important as the global fashion industry demands graduates who can combine creativity, digital literacy and communication skills in product development and the fashion marketing process. In line with the country's development aspirations, the Malaysian government, through the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Higher Education) and the post-2025 higher education roadmap emphasises the development of graduates with soft skills, communication, critical thinking, digital literacy and high marketability (Jawaid & Rajadurai, 2021). This agenda emphasises skills-based learning, industry experience and the readiness of graduates to face the needs of an economy based on innovation and creativity (Hashim et al., 2025). However, various

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studies and industry reports still show a significant gap, with graduates' communication skills being one of the aspects that employers often give negative attention to, especially in the ability to communicate ideas, interact professionally and produce effective presentations (Menggo et al., 2023).

## 2.0 Literature Review

Various studies and industry reports still show a significant gap, with graduates' communication skills being one of the aspects that employers often give negative attention to, especially in the ability to communicate ideas, interact professionally and produce effective presentations (McCoy & Chi, 2022). In the context of fashion education, this challenge becomes more complex as students are required to communicate abstract and creative design ideas through various visual and verbal communication mediums throughout the learning and academic assessment process (Younus et al., 2025). Failure to master these competencies not only affects their academic performance but also limits their potential to compete at the real industry level (Kumbhar et al., 2024).

### 2.1 Fashion Design Portfolio Presentation in Higher Education

Commonly, fashion students usually produce design portfolios during their studies. In the context of this article, a portfolio is not just a collection of works but a medium for students to present design concepts, process justifications, and results to lecturers, peers, or the industry (Noor et al., 2024). Findings related to fashion show that students are generally stronger in visual ideas such as mood boards, but still weak in strategic application, differentiation of board types, and use of boards for presentation communication (Farahiyah Inarah Putri, 2025; Ruzaini Nadira Nasaruddin, 2025; Wan Mohd Nasir et al., 2024). This is important because the design industry demands graduates who are not only able to produce good visuals but also able to explain the rationale for the design verbally (Sayuti et al., 2025).

### 2.2 Fashion Communication Skills

The rapid development of fashion education in the era of globalisation and digital transformation has increased the need for communication competencies among fashion students (Md Khairulanwar & Jamaluddin, 2025). In addition to producing creative and innovative design collections, students are also required to communicate ideas, concepts, design development processes and the aesthetic value of their work clearly and professionally (Drakou et al., 2024). In this context, effective fashion communication plays an important role in helping students integrate their work into a comprehensive, systematic portfolio that meets academic and industry expectations (Helal, 2022). Along with the increasing competition in the job market, fashion graduates are not only evaluated based on technical skills and design creativity, but also their ability to effectively convey ideas to various stakeholders such as lecturers, evaluation panels, clients and industry players (Papachristou & Zolota-Tatsi, 2024). Therefore, mastery of fashion communication competencies, including presentation skills, visual communication, use of professional terminology and storytelling techniques, has become an increasingly important element in today's fashion education (Lapolla & Copeland, 2023).

### 2.3 Communication Obstacle

Despite the increasing emphasis on communication skills in fashion education, previous studies have reported that many fashion students continue to face challenges when presenting their portfolios (Seau et al., 2018; Tuyen et al., 2025; Yusof et al., 2023). Portfolio presentations require students to integrate visual communication, verbal descriptions and storytelling design into a coherent presentation, which means a consistent, interconnected and easily understood delivery of ideas, designs or brand messages to the audience without any confusion (Alanadoly & Salem, 2024). However, the literature suggests that the opposite is true. Students often struggle to communicate design ideas effectively due to inadequate preparation, limited communication training and insufficient presentation experience. Several studies have also highlighted issues related to poor language proficiency, low presentation confidence and the absence of a structured communication framework to guide students throughout the presentation process. These challenges can affect students' ability to articulate design concepts, justify creative decisions and engage effectively with evaluators and industry stakeholders. As a result, communication-related barriers remain a significant concern in fashion education and can affect academic performance and professional readiness.

## 3.0 Research Methodology

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA protocol to identify communication issues and challenges among fashion design students in Malaysian Public Institutions of Higher Education (HEIs). This selection methodology involved the analysis of a total of 674 articles published over five years, from 2021 to 2026. The detailed article screening procedure is shown in Figure 1 below. Specifically, a methodological approach using visual descriptive analysis was conducted. The minimum value frequency data for the variables were plotted using a Multi-Series Line Chart. This graphical visualisation was generated using the Python programming language (version 3.x) utilising the Matplotlib library to ensure the precise plotting of data points, specific annotation of minimum values, and clear comparison of trends between data series. This data generation was carried out to achieve the main objectives of the research as follows: (i) to summarise the issues faced by fashion design students in presenting their portfolios during

assessment sessions. (ii) to define the types of communication challenges faced by fashion students in public universities. (iii) to select potential publication articles related to the issue; (iv) to filter the selected articles by implementing the PRISMA protocol to analyse the methodological approaches used in previous studies; (v) to determine appropriate themes that connect to the main issues; and (vi) to formulate the analysis using thematic analysis to process the data. (vii) to conclude the findings with strategies to strengthen students' communication skills.

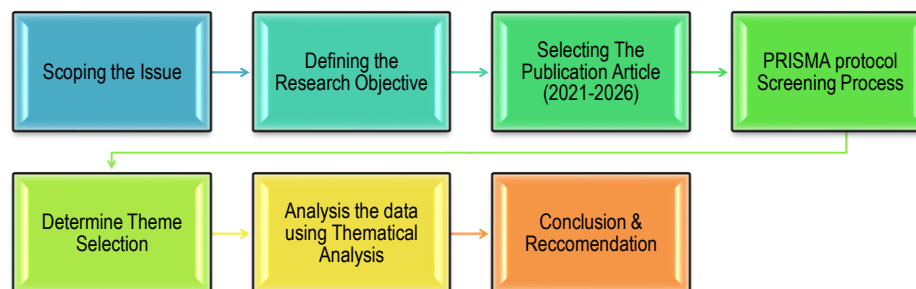


Fig 1. Research Methodology Flowchart  
(Source: Author, 2026)

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Five Categories of Themes



Fig. 2: Five Themes Categorised  
(Source: Author, 2026)

This study addresses communication issues and challenges among fashion design students at public higher education institutions in Malaysia. A methodological flowchart was specifically developed through qualitative research involving thematic analysis. The studies in Figure 2 determined five categorised main themes, such as presentation readiness, pedagogical structure, communication competence, psychological factors, and exposure and experience, based on 674 publication articles from 2021 to 2026.

### 4.2 Data and Analysis

The scatter plot analysis below reveals that unprepared portfolio presentations emerged as the most dominant communication-related challenge, accounting for 45.33% (n = 306) of the total recorded incidents. The visual distribution showed a clear upward trajectory from 2021 (n = 42) to 2025 (n = 97), indicating an increasing pattern over time. The clustering of higher frequency values in later years indicates that portfolio presentation difficulties have become increasingly prominent in the Malaysian fashion education context. This trend reflects students' limited ability to synthesise design concepts into increasingly complex visual and verbal presentation formats. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies that design students often face difficulties in integrating creative thinking with effective verbal communication during presentation sessions (Karlsson Häikiö, 2022). Similarly, lack of training (25.04%, n = 169) also showed a progressive increase, especially between 2023 and 2025, as illustrated by the increasing spread of data points in the survey scatter plot. In 2026, it was found to have declined across all records, since in the current year the likelihood of data is still waiting to be peer-reviewed or published publicly. Publication on high-impact journal platforms is strong evidence that its year-by-year trajectory is

increasing and has not yet been resolved in a significant way. However, there is a simultaneous increase in both issues, indicating that inadequate pedagogical support, limited communication training and insufficient presentation exposure remain major contributing factors affecting students' presentation readiness.

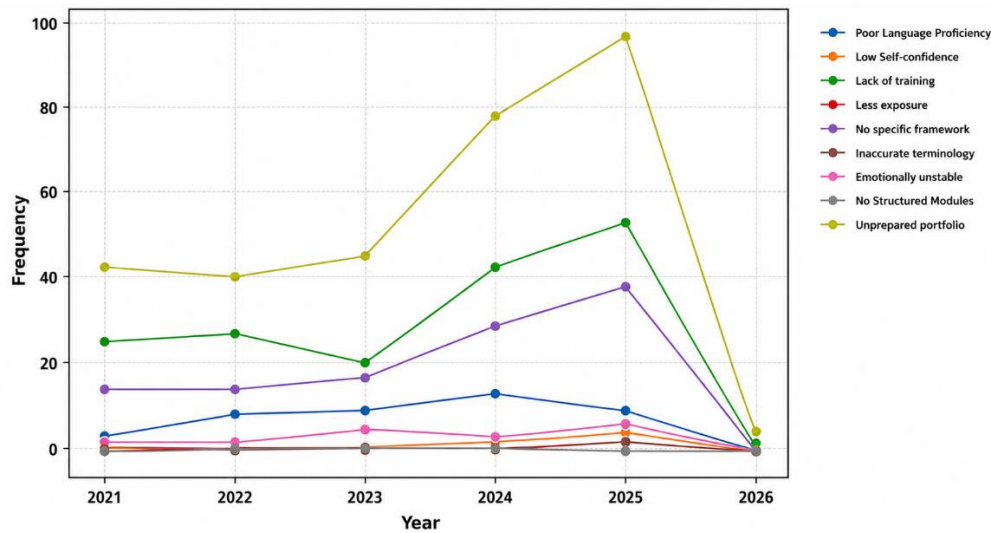


Fig 3. Trend Distribution Chart of Communication-Related Challenges Among Fashion Students in Malaysian HEIs (2021-2026).  
(Source: Author, 2026)

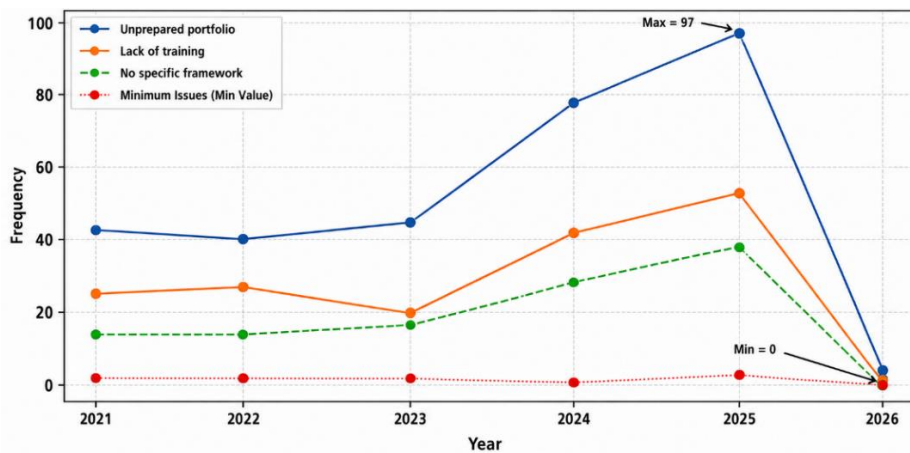


Fig 4. Presentation readiness chart.  
(Source: Author, 2026)

#### 4.2 Dominant Theme (Presentation Preparation)

The analysis shows that portfolio presentations are not prepared as the main issue (45.33%,  $n = 306$ ), reflecting a critical gap in the synthesis of design ideas that has increased consistently from 2021 ( $n = 42$ ) to 2025 ( $n = 97$ ). Closely related, lack of training (25.04%,  $n = 169$ ) also shows a significant increase (2023–2025), thus reinforcing the factors of teaching support and training opportunities as the main contributors to the weaknesses of student presentations. In contrast, inaccurate terminology and the absence of structured modules are minimal issues (0.74%,  $n = 5$ ), where the existence of these low-level issues still highlights fundamental weaknesses in communication and the use of professional terminology.

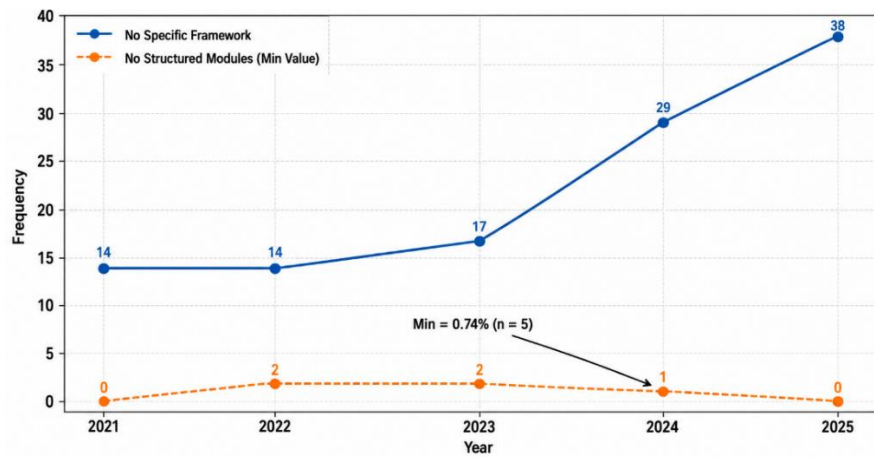


Fig 5. The pedagogical structure analysis chart.  
(Source: Author, 2026)

Meanwhile, Figure 5 shows that the theme of pedagogical structure, the absence of a specific framework, was the most dominant issue with 16.59% ( $n = 112$ ), while the absence of structured modules recorded the lowest frequency of 0.74% ( $n = 5$ ). The annual trend shows a continuous increase in the issue of the absence of a framework from 14 occurrences (2021) to 38 occurrences (2025), reflecting the increasing need for a more systematic pedagogical approach in fashion education. On the other hand, the low frequency of the absence of structured modules indicates that the literature emphasises more on the development of frameworks or implementation models than on the development of specific modules. This finding indicates that the absence of a clear framework, including presentation guidelines and rubric-based assessment, has the potential to affect the development of students' communication competencies (Suhairom et al., 2024). Therefore, the development of Fashion Communication skills supported by a comprehensive pedagogical framework is important to strengthen the quality of presentations as well as increase the readiness of graduates to meet industry needs.

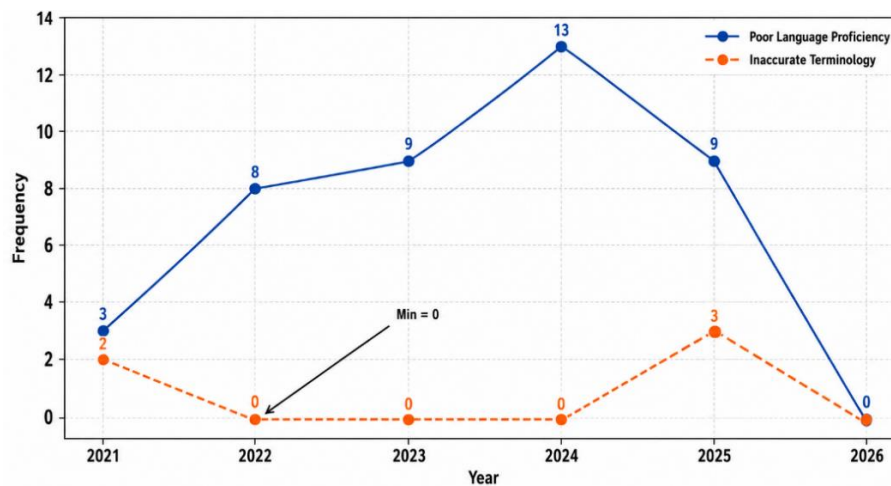


Fig 6. The communication competence analysis chart  
(Source: Author, 2026)

Figure 6 shows the critical themes related to communication skills, with poor language proficiency as the main challenge (6.22%,  $n = 42$ ). This issue emerged consistently and showed an upward trend with peaks in 2024 ( $n = 13$ ) and 2025 ( $n = 9$ ), affecting students' ability to articulate design concepts and justify creative decisions during portfolio presentations. In contrast, the use of inaccurate terminology recorded a minimal impact (0.74%,  $n = 5$ ) with zero values in certain years (2022–2024 and 2026), thus reflecting inconsistent reporting in the literature. Nevertheless, this issue remains relevant as it reveals gaps in industry-specific vocabulary mastery. Collectively, these trends demonstrate that students face two-dimensional limitations in general communication competence and specific terminology, reinforcing the urgent need for guided communication training and structured presentation practices in fashion education.

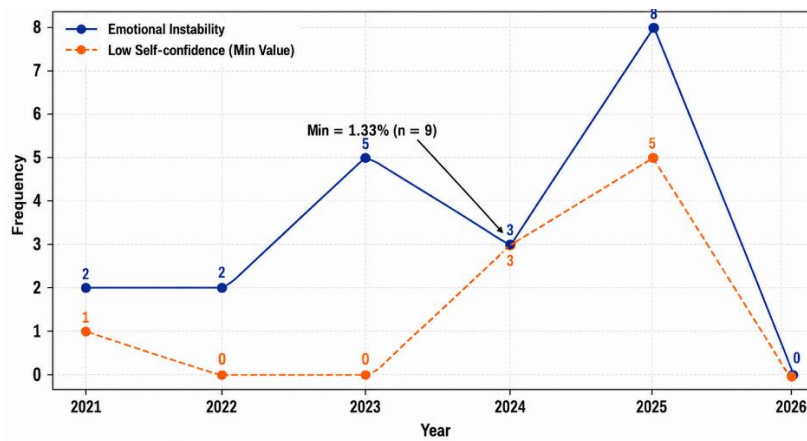


Fig 7. The psychological factors analysis chart

(Source: Author, 2026)

Figure 7 shows that in the psychological barrier theme, low self-confidence stated the lowest overall frequency of 1.33% ( $n = 9$ ), followed by emotional instability of 2.96% ( $n = 20$ ). Although both issues recorded lower percentages compared to other themes, the annual trend showed a clear increase, especially for low self-confidence between 2024 and 2025, while emotional instability reached its highest frequency in 2025 ( $n = 8$ ). This pattern indicates that psychological factors become increasingly significant when students are faced with high-impact presentations that require justification of ideas and professional communication. On the other hand, the existence of several annual minimum values (0) indicates that psychological aspects are still paid less attention in the literature compared to pedagogical issues, communication and portfolio development. However, the observed increasing trend indicates that affective factors have the potential to influence students' ability to convey design ideas confidently and effectively. This finding also supports the need to integrate elements of self-confidence, emotional regulation and psychological readiness in the development of the Fashion Communication skill to complement the training of technical and visual communication ability as well as to improve the effectiveness of students' presentations in academic and industrial contexts (Waluyo & Rofiah, 2021).

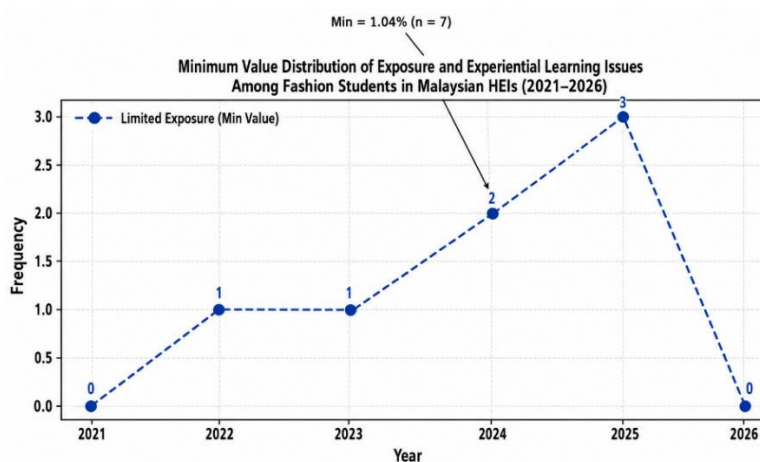


Fig 8. The exposure and experience analysis chart

(Source: Author, 2026)

The final theme in Figure 8 states that the analysis identifies is related to the issue of limited industry exposure. Quantitatively, this issue recorded the lowest value in the data set at only 1.04% ( $n = 7$ ) of total occurrences. However, this small percentage value should not be underestimated as it carries highly important implications for student employability. Scatter plot analysis shows a gradual increase in this issue starting in 2022. This phenomenon indicates a surge in awareness in the current literature that the lack of opportunities to engage in real-world or simulated industry environments is a critical constraint affecting the quality of graduates. The record shows minimum values of zero (0) in 2021 and 2026, illustrating that this exposure issue has not been consistently addressed in previous studies, thus revealing a significant gap in previous curriculum designs. Its frequency in the literature is low, and the implication is that

this limited exposure explicitly acts as a critical barrier to student job readiness. Without industry-oriented simulations, students experience a significant confidence deficit in communicating creative ideas and fail to adapt their communication strategies to the expectations of the real fashion job market dynamics. Therefore, these findings empirically confirm that this 1.04% figure is a critical indicator. It demands a drastic shift from a theoretical learning model to a comprehensive experiential learning approach. This is essential to ensure that students' communication performance not only meets academic standards but also aligns with the competency benchmarks outlined by the professional fashion industry outside the university.

## 5.0 Discussion

This section discusses in depth the implications of the findings from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) involving five main themes of communication barriers among fashion design students in Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA). Overall, the manifestation of empirical data proves that the issues faced by students are not isolated but rather exist in a chain of closely interrelated cause-effect ecosystems. The inability of students to prepare and present portfolios (45.33%,  $n = 306$ ) was detected as the most dominant manifestation of the problem, but this critical issue is structurally driven by the absence of a specific pedagogical framework (16.59%,  $n = 112$ ) at the curriculum level and limited language proficiency (6.22%,  $n = 42$ ). This chain of weaknesses further has an affective impact that triggers emotional instability (2.96%,  $n = 20$ ) and lowers self-confidence (1.33%,  $n = 9$ ) of students when faced with urgent academic assessments. Further, this chain of barriers is compounded by the lack of industry exposure (1.04%,  $n = 7$ ), which acts as a critical indicator of the graduates' industry readiness gap. Therefore, this chapter will unravel how the multidimensional interaction between technical weaknesses, pedagogical constraints, psychological impacts, and external industry demands shape the fashion communication landscape in the local higher education system through the sub-topics outlined below.

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study analyses 674 communication-related issues among fashion design students at Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs) between 2021 and 2026, adhering to the PRISMA protocol. The findings are synthesised into five key dimensions: presentation readiness, pedagogical structure, communication competence, psychological factors and exposure to experiential learning. Presentation readiness, specifically the failure to adequately prepare portfolios, emerged as the most dominant challenge. While students excel in creative-technical aspects, they struggle to translate ideas into coherent visual and verbal narratives. Structurally, these shortcomings stem from the absence of specialised pedagogical frameworks and formal communication modules across institutions. Without concrete benchmarks such as rubric-based assessments, the immeasurable development of communication competencies that meet industry standards is compromised, thereby compromising graduates' professional readiness. Furthermore, psychological factors such as low confidence and emotional instability were found to directly impact student performance, particularly during high-stakes assessments. Limited exposure to experiential learning also contributes to students' lack of adaptability within the professional ecosystem. Holistically, this study proposes a curricular shift in fashion education programs at Malaysian HEIs through four strategic interventions: first, developing a specific communication pedagogical framework for design studios; second, implementing standardized, objective, rubric-based communication assessments; third, integrating psychological support and emotional management training into presentation practices; and fourth, strengthening experiential learning activities such as industry simulations, peer critique sessions, and real-world fashion pitching sessions. This comprehensive research bridges the gap between academic expectations and the dynamics of the professional fashion industry.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of fashion education and instructional design by providing a comprehensive and empirically based taxonomy of communication barriers, the result of a systematic synthesis of 674 Articles (2021–2026) that have been published through the PRISMA protocol. From a pedagogical perspective, this study reshapes the conventional creative curriculum approach by revealing a critical structural gap, namely the absence of a guided performance framework and objective assessment rubrics that connect students' technical-artistic talents with their narrative articulation abilities. In addition, the findings linking affective factors and lack of experiential learning with career readiness act as a pragmatic blueprint for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It allows institutions to restructure academic assessment to align with performance benchmarks, professional practices, and the dynamics of pitching sessions in the real global fashion industry, thus bridging the gap between academic excellence and graduate employability.

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