

Communication Challenges in Fashion Portfolio Presentation: A systematic review of Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

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Abstract

Effective communication is crucial in fashion portfolio presentations, demanding that students integrate visual, verbal, and narrative competencies. This study systematically examines the communication challenges faced by fashion design students at public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. A systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA protocol was conducted on literature published between 2021 and 2026, followed by a thematic analysis. Five themes emerged: presentation readiness, pedagogical structure, communication competence, psychological factors and exposure and experience. Findings highlight the need for structured communication training, assessment, feedback and industry-oriented learning to enhance students' professional readiness and the quality of their educational experience.

Keywords: Fashion Communication; Portfolio Presentation; Communication Competence; Quality of Life

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1.0 Introduction

Fashion design education at Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is undergoing significant transformation in response to an increasingly competitive and digitally driven fashion industry. Traditionally, fashion graduates were expected to master core skills such as fashion illustration, pattern making, garment construction and collection development. Today, they are also required to communicate creative ideas effectively through visual and verbal means, particularly during portfolio presentations. Students must not only showcase their creative work but also articulate design concepts, justify creative decisions, construct coherent collection narratives, and communicate professionally with lecturers, evaluation panels, peers and industry practitioners (Lapolla & Copeland, 2023; Sayuti et al., 2025). The increasing use of digital technology, social media and online portfolio platforms has further expanded these communication demands. Students are expected to integrate visual tools such as mood boards, storyboards, digital portfolios, lookbooks and multimedia presentations with effective verbal explanations. Professional readiness therefore increasingly relies on creativity, digital literacy, visual communication and oral presentation proficiency (Drakou et al., 2024; Papachristou & Zolota-Tatsi, 2024). These competencies align with current priorities in Malaysian higher education, which increasingly emphasise communication skills, critical thinking, industry readiness and graduate employability (Hashim et al., 2025; Noor et al., 2024; Sayuti et al., 2025). Despite these expectations, communication-related challenges remain evident among higher education students, particularly in oral presentation,

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language proficiency, interpersonal communication and professional communication preparedness (Menggo et al., 2023; Waluyo & Rofiah, 2021; Younus et al., 2025). In fashion education, portfolio presentations are particularly demanding because students must integrate visual evidence, design narratives, professional terminology, verbal explanations and justification of creative decisions. Existing studies have identified challenges related to presentation readiness, communication competence, pedagogical support, psychological factors and exposure to professional practice (Suhairon et al., 2024; Younus et al., 2025). From an educational perspective, effective communication may also contribute to the quality of students' academic experiences. This is evidenced by increased self-confidence, the fostering of meaningful learning, more active engagement in lectures and holistic preparation for entering the workforce.

However, these issues have largely been examined separately across diverse educational contexts rather than systematically integrated within Malaysian Public HEIs. This fragmentation represents a significant research gap, as the patterns and relative prominence of communication challenges affecting fashion design students remain insufficiently consolidated within Malaysian public higher education. A systematic synthesis is therefore needed to establish a clearer evidence base and identify areas requiring pedagogical intervention. Accordingly, this study aims to systematically review and synthesise current literature on communication challenges associated with fashion portfolio presentations, with relevance to Malaysian Public HEIs. Specifically, the study seeks to identify key communication challenges to fashion students' portfolio presentations, categorise these challenges into major thematic dimensions and examine their implications for strengthening communication pedagogy and portfolio presentation practices in fashion design education.

2.0 Literature Review

Higher education requires the ability to communicate disciplinary knowledge effectively in academic and professional contexts. Studies indicate that students' communication readiness is influenced by language proficiency, self-confidence, feedback, pedagogical support, presentation practice and professional exposure (Hashim et al. 2025, Waluyo & Rofiah, 2021; Menggo et al., 2023; Younus et al., 2025). In fashion education, these competencies also involve visual communication, digital technologies, collaborative practice and industry-oriented learning (Lapolla & Copeland, 2023; Drakou et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies position fashion communication as a multidimensional competency integrating visual, verbal, pedagogical and professional dimensions. However, these dimensions are examined separately across different educational contexts, providing limited synthesis of their influence on fashion portfolio presentations.

2.1 Fashion Design Portfolio Presentation in Higher Education

The presentation of students' creative output during the design process, for example, the conceptual development within their fashion design portfolios, must align with current technological trends. Beyond merely showcasing visual work, students must consistently articulate their design concepts and the rationale behind their creative interpretations to assessors from both academia and industry. Effective portfolio presentations therefore require coherent visual organisation alongside the integration of visual, verbal and narrative communication to communicate design intentions effectively. A study by Farahiyah Inarah Putri (2025) highlights distinct limitations in constructing narratives on students' visual boards, while Wan Mohd Nasir et al. (2024) argue that these limitations underscore the need to align digital storytelling with the organisation and communication of ideas. Similarly, industry-oriented learning enhances communication and collaboration skills among fashion students (Lapolla & Copeland, 2023). Collectively, these studies demonstrate different but complementary dimensions of portfolio communication, ranging from visual storytelling and narrative construction to professional communication through industry-oriented learning. Thus, effective portfolio presentation requires multiple communication competencies rather than reliance on visual quality alone. However, research examining how these competencies collectively influence fashion portfolio presentation remains limited.

2.2 Fashion Communication Skills

Mastery of visual narratives in both verbal and digital formats is a critical element of communication skills, enabling fashion students to effectively translate their creative concepts. The evolution of digital technology has expanded this competency by transforming how fashion ideas are developed, visualized and presented (Drakou et al., 2024; Papachristou & Zolota-Tatsi, 2024). Furthermore, industry-oriented learning highlights communication and collaboration as essential elements for professional readiness (Lapolla & Copeland, 2023), while higher education studies in Malaysia highlights communication skills as a crucial component of graduate employability (Hashim et al., 2025; Noor et al., 2024). Overall, these studies demonstrate that fashion communication is an integrated professional competency rather than merely an isolated soft skill. Nonetheless, insufficient attention has been paid to how this competency is specifically applied during fashion portfolio presentations.

2.3 Communication Challenges in Fashion Portfolio Presentation

Despite the growing emphasis on communication skills in fashion education, studies indicate that students continue to face challenges when presenting their portfolios (Seau et al., 2018; Tuyen et al., 2025; Yusof et al., 2023). Effective portfolio presentation requires the integration of visual communication, verbal articulation and design storytelling to clearly convey design intent and creative decisions. Furthermore, inadequate preparation, limited communication training and insufficient presentation experience can hinder students' ability to develop these competencies. These challenges are interconnected rather than isolated; limited pedagogical support and a lack of structured communication frameworks can impede presentation development, while language barriers and low confidence levels may compromise students' ability to articulate and justify their creative choices. Limited exposure to real-world presentation scenarios and

industry-oriented experiences can also contribute to insufficient portfolio readiness. Generally, these challenges demonstrate that effective portfolio presentation depends not only on individual communication skills but is also influenced by pedagogical structures, psychological readiness and professional exposure. Consequently, these communication-related challenges have implications for academic performance, professional readiness and the overall quality of the students' educational experience.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, guided by the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, to analyze communication challenges associated with fashion portfolio presentations in higher education, with relevance to Malaysian Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the 2021–2026 publication period. The study's scope encompasses communication competence, oral/portfolio presentations, visual/multimodal elements, language, psychological factors, pedagogy, assessment and industry-based learning. From an initial 674 records, 375 (dating from 2021–2026) were retained, while 299 records falling outside this timeframe were excluded. Following the removal of 6 duplicates, the remaining 369 records underwent title and abstract screening; this process eliminated 260 out-of-scope records, leaving 109 reports for full-text retrieval. Of these, 61 reports could not be retrieved in full-text format, resulting in only 48 reports being assessed for eligibility based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the full-text assessment, 30 reports were excluded for failing to meet eligibility criteria, such as studies lacking clear communication-related findings or focusing solely on marketing and technical competence, leaving a final set of 18 studies for qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis. Data from these eligible studies were systematically extracted, coded and categorised according to reported communication challenges to form five key themes: Presentation Readiness, Pedagogical Structure, Communication Competence, Psychological Factors and Exposure and Experience. Descriptive frequencies and percentages were used solely to support the interpretation of thematic patterns rather than for inferential statistical analysis.

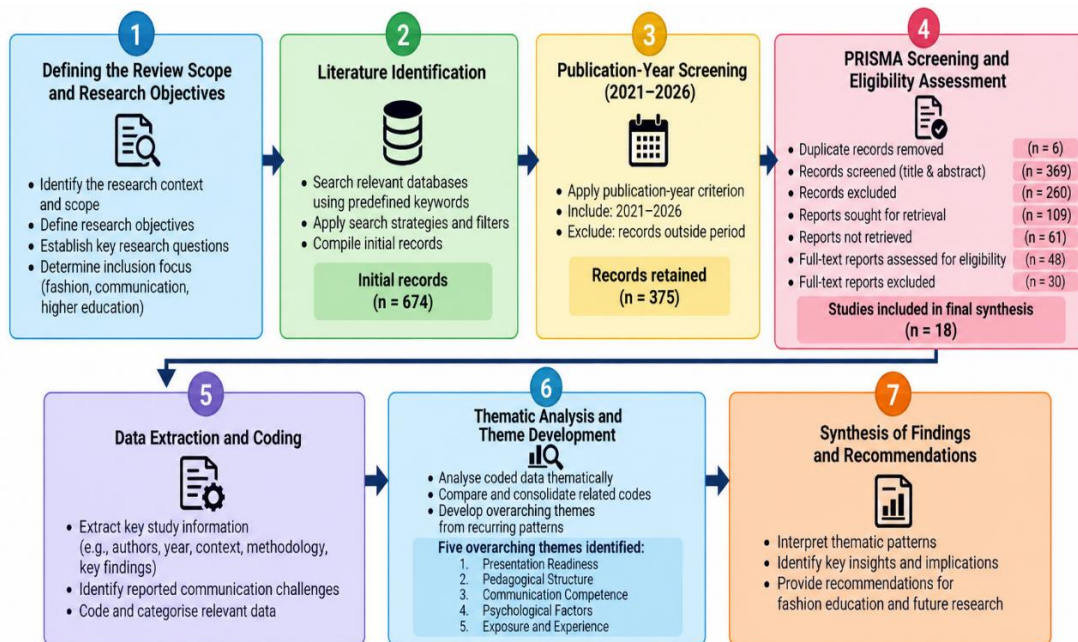


Fig 1. SLR and Thematic Analysis Process
(Source: Author, 2026)

Theme frequencies were calculated based on the number of included studies reporting each theme, while percentages were determined using:

$$P_t = \frac{n_t}{N} \times 100$$

where P_t represents the percentage for each theme, n_t the number of studies reporting the theme, and $N = 18$ the total number of included studies. Multiple-theme coding was permitted.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Five Categories of Themes

A thematic analysis of the studies meeting the criteria identified five main categories of communication challenges: presentation readiness, pedagogical structure, communication competence, psychological factors and exposure and experience. These themes

represent recurring communication-related issues in the reviewed literature and provide an analytical framework for interpreting the study findings.

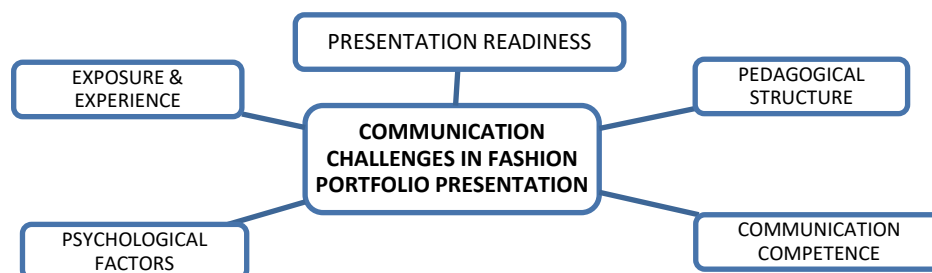


Fig 2. Thematic categories resulting from the SLR
(Source: Author, 2026)

4.2 Data and Analysis

A thematic analysis of the literature reveals five key categories of multidimensional communication challenges faced by higher education students. First, Presentation Readiness extends beyond the visual quality of portfolios; students often struggle to coherently articulate design concepts and decision-making processes. Second, Pedagogical Structure highlights a lack of structured training, specific frameworks and communication modules, indicating that these skills should be taught systematically rather than treated as implicit outcomes. Third, Communication Competence requires the integration of visual narratives, professional terminology and language proficiency to justify creative decisions. Fourth, Psychological Factors such as anxiety, nervousness and low confidence impair the ability to articulate ideas during assessments, a challenge closely linked to the student's level of prior presentation experience. Finally, Exposure and Experience underscore the limited opportunities within authentic or industry-oriented learning environments, which restrict students' ability to adapt professional communication strategies. Collectively, the interplay of these five factors demonstrates that communication challenges are not isolated issues, providing a critical foundation for developing academic support to enhance students' professional readiness.

4.3 Interrelationship of Communication Challenges

Based on the study, the findings indicate that communication challenges in fashion portfolio presentations are not isolated issues; rather, they form a multidimensional network of interconnected relationships that drive improvements in portfolio presentation quality and student professional readiness. This interaction establishes that the "Presentation Readiness" dimension, focusing on content and delivery methods (what and how to present) is associated with the "Pedagogical Structure" through the provision of structured training, specialised communication frameworks, module integration and assessment and feedback mechanisms. Simultaneously, "Communication Competence", encompassing effective delivery skills such as verbal articulation, language proficiency, mastery of specialised design terminology and persuasive visual narratives, is closely linked to the students' "Psychological Factors." Levels of self-confidence and the ability to manage emotions, anxiety and nervousness during critique sessions are cultivated and strengthened through the dimension of "Exposure and Experience," facilitated by authentic learning environments, interactions with diverse audiences and industry-oriented simulations. Overall, this analysis of interrelationships confirms that effective portfolio presentations and student career readiness can only be achieved holistically through a balanced integration of communication competence, structured pedagogical support, extensive practical exposure and robust psychological preparedness.

4.4 Distribution of Communication-Related Challenges

Theme frequency refers to the number of included studies in which each theme was identified. Given that individual studies can contribute to more than one thematic category, the total frequencies and percentages do not necessarily equate to 18 studies or 100%, respectively. Percentages were calculated using the 18 studies included in the final synthesis as the denominator. A descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the distribution and relative prominence of the communication challenges. Figure 4 below shows that Communication Competence was the most frequently identified theme, reported in 17 studies (94.4%), followed by Pedagogical Structure in 14 studies (77.8%), Presentation Readiness in 10 studies (55.6%), Exposure and Experience in eight studies (44.4%) and Psychological Factors in five studies (27.8%). The frequency of themes in this analysis refers to the number of included studies in which each theme was identified; as a multi-theme coding approach was employed, individual studies could contribute to more than one category. Consequently, percentages were calculated independently using the 18 final studies as the denominator to represent the proportion of studies reporting each theme, meaning the total frequency and percentage do not necessarily sum to 18 studies or 100%. Overall, this descriptive distribution demonstrates the multidimensional nature of communication-related challenges, with Communication Competence and Pedagogical Structure receiving the most attention across the examined literature. However, the lower frequency of Psychological Factors should not be interpreted as an indication of low importance; rather, it reflects that these factors were explicitly addressed in fewer studies, thereby supporting the interpretation of recurring thematic patterns without constituting inferential statistical evidence.

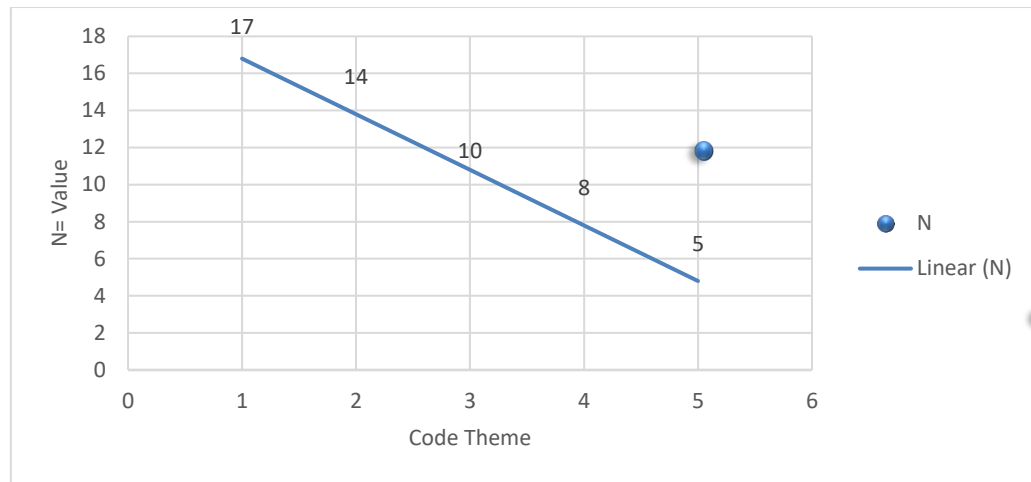


Fig. 4. Distribution of Communication-Related Challenges across the Included Studies (N = 18)
(Source: Author, 2026)

5.0 Discussion

Research findings indicate that Communication Competence 17/18(94.4%) emerged as the most frequently identified theme, indicating that communication challenges extend beyond oral delivery to encompass linguistic, visual, interpersonal and multimodal competencies. This finding aligns with the study by Lee (2021), which conceptualized presentation competence in higher education through the integration of linguistic, visual, vocal and non-verbal elements. Similarly, Menggo et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of structured learning experiences in developing students' interpersonal communication skills. The significance of the Pedagogical Structure aspect 14/18(77.8%) suggests that communication competence should not be viewed solely as an individual student trait. This interpretation is supported by Hashim et al. (2025), who identified training, curriculum and institutional support as crucial factors in the development of communication-related soft skills within the Malaysian higher education context.

Regarding the Presentation Readiness 10/18(55.6%) highlights the importance of preparation and repeated practice in enabling students to organise and articulate their ideas coherently. This finding corresponds with Roslim et al. (2023), who identified preparation, practice and lecturer support as important elements of effective student presentations. Exposure and Experience 8/18(44.4%) further extends this interpretation by emphasising opportunities to practice communication in authentic contexts. Within fashion education specifically, Lapolla and Copeland (2023) demonstrated that industry-oriented collaborative learning provides students with opportunities to develop communication and professional interaction through applied learning experiences. Together, these findings suggest that communication development may be strengthened when presentation practice relates to authentic and professionally relevant learning environments. Although Psychological Factors 5/18(27.8%) were reported less frequently, their lower occurrence should not be interpreted as lower importance. Roslim et al. (2023) identified anxiety, fear of failure, self-confidence, language proficiency and audience-related concerns as factors associated with students' presentation experiences. This is also consistent with Waluyo and Rofiah (2021), who examined the relationship between self-confidence, teacher feedback, English proficiency and oral presentation skills.

These findings suggest that psychological preparedness interacts with communication competence and presentation experience rather than functioning as an isolated challenge. Collectively, the convergence across these studies supports the multidimensional interpretation generated by the present review: effective fashion portfolio communication involves communication competence, structured pedagogical support, presentation readiness, psychological preparedness and exposure to authentic learning experiences. For Malaysian Public HEIs, this synthesis supports more explicit integration of communication development within fashion curricula through structured presentation practice, formative feedback, critique, multimodal communication and industry-oriented learning. Rather than representing a validated intervention, these findings provide an evidence base for future research to develop and evaluate more structured approaches to fashion communication education. These challenges may also have broader implications for students' educational experiences and well-being, although quality of life was not directly evaluated as an outcome in the reviewed studies.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study concludes that communication challenges in fashion portfolio presentations constitute a multidimensional issue involving communication competence, pedagogical structure, presentation readiness, exposure and experience and psychological factors. Based on the 18 studies included in the final synthesis, findings indicate that effective portfolio communication relies not merely on students' verbal abilities but requires the integration of visual, linguistic and multimodal communication, alongside pedagogical support, presentation training and authentic experiences. The need for a more structured pedagogical approach is further supported by research in Malaysian higher education, which highlights a gap in the teaching of multimodal presentation skills. Considering this, Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to more explicitly integrate communication development into fashion education curricula, incorporating elements such as structured presentation training, formative feedback, critique sessions, multimodal

communication and exposure to professional contexts. Adequate preparation and training, alongside lecturer support, are recognized as crucial factors in helping students become more effective communicators. This approach has the potential to strengthen students' communication portfolios and professional well-being, while contributing to a more positive educational experience and overall well-being. Future research should focus on developing and validating a structured fashion communication module and evaluating its effectiveness within the context of fashion degree programs at Malaysian public HEIs.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes to the fields of fashion education and design communication by providing an evidence-based synthesis of the communication challenges associated with fashion portfolio presentations in higher education, with relevance to the context of Malaysian public universities (HEIs). Drawing on 18 studies included in the final synthesis, the research categories the identified challenges into five interconnected dimensions: Communication Competence, Pedagogical Structure, Presentation Readiness, Exposure and Experience and Psychological Factors. This classification broadens the understanding of portfolio communication by demonstrating that presentation effectiveness relies not only on students' verbal abilities but also on visual and multimodal communication, pedagogical support, preparation, authentic experiences, and psychological readiness. From a pedagogical perspective, this study establishes a foundation for examining the more explicit integration of communication development into fashion education curricula encompassing structured presentation training, formative feedback, critique sessions and industry-oriented learning experiences. It also provides an empirical basis for future research aimed at developing and validating structured fashion communication modules, specifically within the context of fashion degree programs at Malaysian public universities. Overall, these contributions have the potential to help bridge the gap between academic design competence, portfolio communication and the professional preparation of graduates.

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