



Sewing Clothes, Weaving Meaning: A Qualitative Study of Fashion Shows as Transformative Learning in Vocational Schools of Fashion Design

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Abstract: Fashion shows in vocational education of Fashion Design in SMK have the potential as an integrative contextual learning media to build students' technical and nontechnical skills holistically. This study aims to examine the contribution of fashion shows to the development of creativity, communication, collaboration, product management, as well as the competence of design, textiles, patterns, and sewing techniques of students. Using a qualitative case study approach with in-depth interview techniques, observation, and visual documentation, the research was conducted at SMKN 3 Malang with five main informants. Data were analyzed through the Miles and Huberman model and member checking validation. The results show that student involvement in fashion shows encourages the exploration of market-relevant design ideas, structured teamwork, collective conflict resolution, and increased technical literacy through the use of digital technology. Teachers played an active role in production management and quality evaluation, while students showed increased confidence and work readiness. The activity also strengthened professional portfolios and networks through participation in events such as Malang Fashion Week. In conclusion, the fashion show proved to be a transformative learning platform that bridges the classroom and the industrial world. Future research is recommended to explore the impact of industry events on students' career networks across skill programs.

Keywords: Fashion Design, Event-Based Learning, Fashion Show, Vocational Education, Project-Based Learning

Menjahit Busana, Merajut Makna Makna: Studi Kualitatif tentang Peragaan Busana sebagai Pembelajaran Transformatif di Sekolah Kejuruan Desain Mode

Abstrak: Fashion show dalam pendidikan vokasi Desain Mode di SMK memiliki potensi sebagai media pembelajaran kontekstual yang integratif untuk membangun keterampilan teknis dan nonteknis siswa secara holistik. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji kontribusi fashion show terhadap pengembangan kreativitas, komunikasi, kolaborasi, manajemen produk, serta kompetensi desain, tekstil, pola, dan teknik menjahit siswa. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif studi kasus dengan teknik wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi visual, penelitian dilakukan di SMKN 3 Malang dengan lima informan utama. Data dianalisis melalui model Miles dan Huberman serta validasi member checking. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan siswa dalam fashion show mendorong eksplorasi ide desain yang relevan pasar, kerja tim terstruktur, penyelesaian konflik kolektif, serta peningkatan literasi teknis melalui penggunaan teknologi digital. Guru berperan aktif dalam manajemen produksi dan evaluasi kualitas, sementara siswa menunjukkan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dan kesiapan kerja. Kegiatan ini juga memperkuat portofolio dan jejaring profesional melalui partisipasi dalam ajang seperti Malang Fashion Week. Kesimpulannya, fashion show terbukti sebagai platform pembelajaran transformatif yang menjembatani ruang kelas dan dunia industri. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan mengeksplorasi dampak event industri terhadap jejaring karier siswa lintas program keahlian.

Kata Kunci: Desain Mode, Pembelajaran Berbasis Acara, Peragaan Mode, Pendidikan Kejuruan, Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek.

1. Introduction

Vocational education plays an important role in preparing young people to face the challenges of the world of work that demands not

only technical excellence, but also the ability to think creatively and collaboratively. In the Fashion Design expertise program at Vocational High Schools, these demands are increasingly

complex as students must be able to integrate aesthetic understanding, production skills, as well as sensitivity to the dynamics of the fashion industry. Unfortunately, many vocational education institutions are still stuck in a technical learning approach that is separated from the real context of the world of work. Syafruddin et al. (2025) asserted that vocational learning that is not contextualized will hinder the formation of cross-cutting competencies that are needed by the creative industry. In line with that, Widodo et al. (2024) underlined the importance of integrating soft skills into the vocational curriculum so that graduates are able to answer the challenges of the world of work holistically.

As a response to these conditions, fashion shows can be positioned as an event-based learning platform that is authentic, integrative, and transformative. This activity provides opportunities for students to be actively involved starting from the exploration of ideas, drafting of design concepts, production planning, to the presentation of work on the public stage. In the context of learning that emphasizes hands-on experience, Alvi et al. (2024) explained that performance-based projects can build reflective competence and long-term professionalism among vocational students. The creative process in this activity also trains students to consider market trends and product selling points, as outlined by Widiyawati et al. (2024) who stated that fashion education that is responsive to the industry requires a pedagogical approach that is applicable and contextual. In addition, active participation in fashion shows strengthens communication skills, time management, and collective conflict resolution. Coronado's (2024) even research shows that involvement in event-based learning can significantly improve students' resilience and self-confidence.

In vocational Fashion Design education, there is an increasing urgency to implement learning strategies that not only build technical mastery but also cultivate essential 21st-century skills such as creativity, communication, and collaboration. Conventional instructional approaches often emphasize isolated technical skills without adequately addressing the demands of real-world industry practices. This disconnect creates a significant challenge in preparing students for the competitive and fast-paced fashion sector. Fashion shows, as event-based learning experiences, offer a unique and immersive alternative that integrates classroom learning with industry-relevant performance. As emphasized by Panke & Harth (2023), creative practice-based approaches such as art and design

are highly effective in connecting student learning with professional realities, making the process more meaningful and future-oriented. Despite their growing adoption in vocational schools, the holistic impact of fashion shows on students' technical and nontechnical competencies remains underexplored. This study addresses the question: How do fashion shows function as effective learning platforms for the development of both technical and nontechnical skills in vocational Fashion Design education? The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of fashion shows in enhancing students' creativity, communication, teamwork, production management, as well as design, textile, patternmaking, and sewing skills. By uncovering the strategies, processes, and challenges involved in their implementation, this study is expected to contribute practical insights for improving vocational education and demonstrate the potential of fashion shows as transformative tools that bridge the gap between school and industry.

2. Methods

This research utilized Creswell's (2009) to qualitative case study approach deeply understand the dynamics of learning through fashion shows for vocational students majoring in Fashion Design. The research subjects consisted of two teachers and three students of SMKN 3 Malang who were actively involved in fashion show activities, purposively selected based on direct involvement and variety of perspectives. Data collection techniques were conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, documentation observation, and visual material search. Interviews focused on aspects of technical and nontechnical skills, as well as the impact of event-based learning on students' work readiness. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, accompanied by triangulation between sources to strengthen the validity of the findings. Data validation was conducted through member checking and audit trail recording. This approach is considered relevant because it is able to reveal the meaning and contextual process in project-based vocational learning practices.

3. Result and Discussion

The implementation of fashion show at SMKN 3 Malang proved to be an effective contextual learning media in building students' soft skills and hard skills. From the creativity aspect, students were given freedom in designing

fashion based on trend forecasting and market orientation. This encourages the emergence of fresh ideas that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also have selling points. Teachers emphasize that students' work should consider commercial viability, not just artistic expression (KJ/A.1; AI/A.1). This approach is in line with the findings of Prasetya et al. (2025) who stated that the integration of creative projects with market orientation fosters an innovative and realistic mindset in vocational education. To stimulate creativity, teachers facilitate students to participate in events such as Malang Fashion Week and various design competitions (KJ/A.2; AI/A.2). Digital media such as Pinterest is used as a source of visual inspiration in developing collection themes (S1/S.A.1; S2/S.A.1), in line with research by Widiyawati et al. (2024) who showed that digital visual boards accelerate the design exploration process.

In line with the development of creativity, students' communication skills have also improved significantly. This can be seen from the implementation of intensive and structured teamwork. The teacher implemented a progress reporting system and division of responsibilities that encouraged active interaction between members (KJ/B.1; AI/B.1). Effective communication proved to be the key to success in a collaborative project like this. Students are used to having open discussions, including when dealing with less active group members (S1/S.B.2; S2/S.B.2). Discussions also included the suitability of colors, silhouettes and accessories so that the collection appeared harmonious on the runway (S3/S.B.2). This practice reflects the findings of Hariyanto et al. (2023) which stated that project-based teamwork significantly improved vocational students' communication skills. Communication across generations is interpreted by students as a social learning process that enriches perspectives, as emphasized by Saputro et al. (2021).

This communication development naturally leads to strengthening aspects of team collaboration. In the group work process, students show high independence and collective responsibility. Teachers provide freedom in design but maintain work direction through a clear and structured timeline (KJ/C.1; AI/C.1). This approach reflects Moreira & Marques' (2025) findings project-based learning in fashion education can increase the sense of collective responsibility for the final outcome. The teacher emphasized the importance of collaboration by stating that the failure of one individual can affect the whole team (AI/C.2).

Students also strategized conflict resolution democratically (S1/S.C.2; S2/S.C.2), and the teacher was actively present when conflicts arose that had the potential to reduce design quality. This reinforces Aref's (2024) research that the success of creative collaboration is determined by the ability to resolve conflicts reflectively and structurally.

From the collaborative work, students also gained an in-depth understanding of product management, especially in planning and managing production flow. Teachers developed a two-month timeline that included the division of production schedules, fittings, and runway sessions (KJ/D.1; AI/D.1). Quality evaluation (QC) is carried out in layers by teachers as internal evaluators and the curator team as external parties (D.2). This strategy is in line with the ideas of Ni & Wang (2022) who emphasized the importance of layered assessment to ensure quality in fashion design education. Students also faced the challenge of managing their time amidst their busy academic activities. Some students used a trial and error approach in sewing and fixing designs (S1/S.D.1; S3/S.D.1). At the advanced level, students selected to participate in the Paris Fashion Show were selected based on design quality and production commitment (AI/D.2), affirming the findings of Kicken et al. (2009) on the importance of discipline and independence in portfolio-based vocational education.

These managerial competencies were further reinforced by students' consistent progress in mastering technical or hard skills, particularly in fashion design, textile exploration, patternmaking, and garment construction. Throughout the learning process, students were given the creative freedom to explore ideas while receiving structured guidance from teachers to ensure that every design outcome aligned with principles of marketability and real-world applicability. The assessment process emphasized originality, responsiveness to current fashion trends, and practical design functionality. To enhance digital creativity, students utilized applications such as Ibis Paint and Pinterest to sketch initial concepts, build moodboards, and explore visual references aligned with thematic group objectives. Textile knowledge was delivered through structured classroom sessions, while material experimentation was encouraged through independent exploration using digital and social media platforms. Group-based collaboration played a vital role in strengthening patternmaking skills, supported by teacher

assessments focused on construction accuracy and design translation. During the sewing process, students were trained to follow industry-grade standards through systematic internal quality control. This hands-on experience not only deepened technical expertise but also instilled professional discipline. To clearly

capture the synergy between teacher facilitation and student engagement across various skill domains, Table 1 offers a comparative summary that reflects how fashion shows serve as a dynamic learning platform bridging pedagogical intent with practical vocational outcomes.

Table 1. Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on the Implementation of Fashion Demonstration based on Skill Aspects

Aspect	Teacher Informants (KJ & AI)	Student Informants (S1, S2, S3)
Creativity	Fashion shows encourage student creativity, the use of trend forecasting books as a theme guide. The design must have marketability.	Use Pinterest for idea exploration. Designs are developed based on the big theme determined by the group. Trial and error is used for design experimentation.
Communication	The teacher implements a group work system with division of responsibilities and progress reporting. Intensive communication and negotiation were done when production constraints arose.	Open discussion and consultation with the teacher were very helpful. Passive members are encouraged to be active, including in making decisions on colors, motifs, and accessories.
Teamwork	Teachers give creative freedom but still monitor the timeline. Challenges arose when designs differed, but collaboration between teachers supported the success of the project.	Group discussions were used to determine the theme of the collection. Tasks were divided equally (1 student = 1 look). Conflicts are resolved democratically or with the help of the teacher.
Product Management	A two-month timeline is enforced. Teachers conduct internal QC, while MFW external curators screen the works. Works are prepared for national and international events.	Working time is limited, done during free hours. The tight timeline helps students complete designs efficiently.
Problem Solving	Teachers provide direct guidance if there are technical problems. Teamwork is emphasized to help each other complete the project.	Group discussion to solve technical problems. In case of difficulty, consultation is done to the teacher. Solutions are found together.
Design	Students are given freedom of design ideas, as long as they consider trends and marketability. Evaluation pays attention to originality and market relevance.	Using Pinterest and Ibis Paint app for design. Designs must match the moodboard and get teacher approval.
Textile Knowledge	Materials are taught in Teksmo subject. Material selection based on design concept. Fabric experiments are conducted in class.	Exploration of fabric techniques is done independently, using social media such as TikTok and Pinterest as references for creative fabric techniques.
Pattern	Each student makes their own pattern according to the design. Breaking the pattern must be approved by the teacher. The process is supervised from the beginning until the cutting of the fabric.	Experiencing difficulties in complex pattern shapes. Use foreign books or patterns. Evaluation is done by comparing the finished result with the initial design.
Sewing	Sewing practice hours were increased. Teachers control the quality of the stitches, the suitability of the design, and the selling value of the clothes through strict QC.	Sewing techniques follow industry standards. Students try techniques such as bishop sleeve and the use of Japanese zipper shoes.
Presentation of Work	Assessment based on professional documentation and impact on confidence. Participation in fashion shows is an indicator of student and school success.	Show funds are paid privately. Show experience enhances portfolio, confidence and career opportunities. Documentation is used for reflection of work.

The table above shows that there is a continuity of perception between teachers and students, where the fashion show is not only seen as a showcase, but also as a learning medium that facilitates various essential 21st century skills. The whole process culminates in the presentation of the work, which becomes an important milestone in shaping students' professional identity. Documentation from events such as Malang Fashion Week is utilized for evaluation and reflection, where students compare their work with other designers (KJ/J.1; S1/S.K.1). This participation strengthens the portfolio and increases students' confidence to continue to industry and higher education (S2/S.K.3; AI/K.2). This supports the opinion of Peng et al. (2023) that showcase events are a medium of transition from the classroom to the professional world. Positive impacts were also felt by the school, which received national recognition and increased interest from prospective students (KJ/K.3; AI/K.3). Interaction with designers from various regions expands networking and opens opportunities for collaboration (S1/S.K.2), as well as a means of integrating technical and non-technical skills thoroughly (S3/S.K.3). As Aerne & Bonoli (2023), argue the incorporation of cross-cutting skills in public events can create transformative learning spaces in the realm of vocational education.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on the research results, the fashion show at SMKN 3 Malang proved to be effective as an integrative contextual learning medium, able to build technical (design, textiles, patterns, and sewing) and nontechnical skills (creativity, communication, collaboration, product management, and problem solving) as a whole. This activity facilitates students to develop original ideas, adapt designs to market needs, and strengthen self-confidence through public events such as Malang Fashion Week. The continuity of perception between teachers and students shows that fashion shows serve as a bridge between the classroom and the world of work, and contribute to the formation of students' professional portfolios. In addition, hands-on experience in managing collaborative projects enhanced graduates' resilience and work readiness. For future research, further exploration of the effect of industry-based events on strengthening students' professional networks as well as a comparison of effectiveness with other vocational learning approaches across different skill programs and institutional settings is recommended.

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