

"Changing Perspectives In Fashion Education In Indian Context: Addressing The Challenges Of Skill Gaps And The Need For Theoretical And Practical Perspectives"

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Abstract

Fashion education is undergoing significant transformation as it confronts the evolving demands of a globalized, technology-driven, and socially conscious industry. Despite the prestige of many fashion programs worldwide, a persistent disconnect remains between academic training and professional expectations. Graduates often leave institutions with impressive creative portfolios but insufficient technical skills or practical experience, revealing a widening skills gap that employers regularly cite as a critical issue. At the same time, fashion education has been criticized for not giving enough attention to important theoretical topics like cultural studies, sustainability, ethics, and critical thinking. As the fashion industry faces big challenges—such as climate change, inclusivity, and the rise of digital technology—there is a increasing need for professionals who not only have strong technical skills but also the knowledge to understand and deal with these complex issues.

This research paper explores the dual challenge of bridging the skill gap and strengthening theoretical foundations in fashion education. It argues for a more integrated pedagogical approach that balances hands-on technical training with interdisciplinary approach. The paper examines current educational models, identifies limitations in both practical and theoretical instruction, and highlights innovative strategies adopted by institutions. These include industry partnerships, real-world project-based learning, digital and sustainability-focused curricula, and greater emphasis on critical and cultural theory.

Key words: *fashion design education, inclusivity in fashion design education, industry connect, cultural values.*

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I. Introduction

By analyzing the changing landscape of fashion education, the paper proposes a reimagined framework that prioritizes adaptability, critical awareness, and practical relevance. Ultimately, it calls for a systemic shift in how fashion is taught, moving beyond the traditional divide between craft and theory—to develop graduates who are not only industry-ready but also capable of shaping fashion's future in meaningful, responsible, and intellectually grounded ways. Fashion education today stands at a transformative crossroads, shaped by rapid technological advancements, evolving industry demands, and shifting cultural values. While traditionally rooted in craft, design, and practical studio work, fashion education has increasingly recognized the need to incorporate theoretical knowledge that fosters critical thinking, ethical awareness, and socio-cultural sensitivity. At the same time, the industry reports a growing gap between the skills graduates possess and those required in professional contexts. Employers frequently note deficiencies in practical capabilities like digital proficiency, sustainable design techniques, and interdisciplinary collaboration—competencies now central to the 21st-century fashion economy. This dual concern—skill gaps and theoretical underdevelopment—highlights an urgent need to re-evaluate how fashion is taught, what knowledge is prioritized, and how students are prepared to navigate the complexities of an ever-changing global industry.

The gap between academic instruction and professional readiness is particularly evident when students graduate with strong conceptual portfolios but lack the technical expertise or adaptability to meet real-world challenges. This disconnect is often aggravated by curricula that still prioritize aesthetic innovation over market relevance, craft over computation, and tradition over transformation. On the other hand, programs that focus heavily on technical training sometimes neglect the socio-cultural, historical, and critical theory dimensions that enable designers to think reflectively and ethically. As fashion grapples with issues like sustainability, diversity, decolonization, and digitalization, it is not enough for students to know how to construct garments or operate software. They must also understand the cultural, environmental, and political implications of their work. This

highlights a pressing educational dilemma: how can institutions balance hands-on skill development with healthy academic inquiry to cultivate holistic, future-ready fashion professionals?

Reforming fashion education to address both practical skill gaps and theoretical deficiencies requires a paradigm shift in both pedagogy and institutional priorities. The integration of interdisciplinary learning, industry partnerships, digital literacy, and critical theory must become central rather than peripheral components of curricula. Collaborative projects, real-world briefs, and cross-departmental exchange can equip students with practical expertise, while critical studies in fashion history, ethics, sustainability, and media theory can provide them with intellectual tools for thoughtful practice. These changes should also focus on being inclusive and accessible, so that students from all backgrounds have the same chance to benefit from and contribute to fashion education. As the fashion industry becomes more complex and diverse, the way we teach fashion must also grow and adapt. This paper looks at how fashion education can improve by closing the skills gap and helping students become both knowledgeable and thoughtful fashion professionals.

II. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design to examine how fashion education in India can more effectively integrate technical skills with theoretical and critical knowledge. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this study as it allows for a deep, contextual understanding of complex educational dynamics and the evolving needs of the fashion industry.

To gather comprehensive insights, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. These included fashion educators, curriculum designers, industry professionals, and recent graduates. The interviews focused on understanding existing challenges in fashion education, identifying perceived skill gaps, and exploring the role and relevance of theoretical learning within current curricula.

In addition to interviews, a review and analysis of academic curricula from selected fashion institutions was conducted. This helped evaluate the balance between hands-on technical training and the inclusion of theoretical subjects such as sustainability, ethics, digital literacy, and cultural studies. The analysis aimed to uncover how well-rounded the educational offerings are in preparing students for real-world challenges.

The research also examined case studies of institutions that have implemented innovative teaching models. These case studies offered valuable examples of educational practices such as industry collaboration, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary coursework that successfully blend theory with practice.

All data collected was thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns, shared concerns, and effective strategies. This approach enabled the study to build a grounded understanding of the reforms needed in fashion education to produce graduates who are both professionally competent and intellectually engaged.

III. Results And Discussion

This study reveals two major challenges within contemporary fashion education: the gap between technical training and industry expectations, and the marginalization of theoretical knowledge. Interviews with faculty and industry professionals highlighted that while students often graduate with strong creative portfolios, they lack essential technical competencies such as pattern-making, garment construction, and digital proficiency. Employers expressed concern over the time required to upskill graduates for professional roles, indicating a misalignment between academic preparation and real-world demands.

Equally concerning is the limited integration of theoretical and critical content in fashion curricula. Subjects such as sustainability, cultural studies, ethics, and critical thinking are frequently treated as peripheral, rather than essential to design education. Students expressed a desire for deeper engagement with these topics, noting their relevance in addressing contemporary industry issues like environmental impact, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

Despite these gaps, the study identified innovative practices in select institutions. These included interdisciplinary modules, real-world project-based learning, digital tool integration, and embedded sustainability frameworks. In these settings, educators took on more facilitative roles, encouraging critical reflection and collaborative learning. Students from these programs demonstrated stronger conceptual understanding and adaptability.

Overall, the findings emphasize the need for an integrated pedagogical approach that values both technical skills and critical inquiry. Fashion education must evolve to produce graduates who are not only technically capable but also culturally and ethically informed—prepared to navigate and shape a rapidly changing industry. This calls for systemic curricular reform, institutional support, and stronger collaboration between academia and industry.

IV. Conclusion

This study highlights the urgent need for a more integrated and responsive approach in fashion education that bridges the gap between technical proficiency and critical theoretical understanding. As the fashion industry

grapples with complex global challenges—ranging from sustainability and digital transformation to inclusivity and ethical responsibility, educational institutions must evolve to produce graduates who are not only creatively and technically skilled but also intellectually equipped to engage with these issues.

Findings from interviews, curriculum analyses, and case studies reveal that while some institutions are implementing innovative strategies—such as project-based learning, industry partnerships, and interdisciplinary curricula—many still fall short in providing a balanced educational experience. The marginalization of theoretical subjects, particularly those rooted in cultural, ethical, and sustainability discourses, continues to limit students' ability to critically reflect on their practice and the broader impact of fashion.

To address these shortcomings, fashion education must adopt a more holistic pedagogical model that values both hands-on technical training and critical, reflective thinking. This requires institutional commitment to curriculum reform, faculty development, and meaningful collaboration with industry. By embracing such changes, fashion programs can better prepare students for the realities of a rapidly evolving industry and contribute more thoughtfully to its future direction.

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