

Bridging Career Guidance and Industry Readiness: A Systematic Literature Review of Vocational High School Students in Fashion Design Education

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Abstract

The rapid transformation of the fashion industry, driven by digitalization and sustainability transitions, has increased the complexity of career pathways and competency demands for vocational graduates. However, a persistent mismatch remains between the skills developed in vocational education and those required by the industry. This study aims to systematically examine the career guidance needs of vocational high school students in fashion design education and their relation to industry readiness. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. The review included 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2026 and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. This timeframe was selected to capture recent developments related to digital transformation and sustainability trends in vocational and fashion education. Data were analyzed using thematic synthesis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and research gaps. The findings indicate that career guidance needs extend beyond informational support, encompassing self-awareness, career decision-making skills, employability competencies, industry exposure, and opportunity creation. Among these, career adaptability and employability emerge as key factors associated with students' readiness for the labor market. The review also reveals ongoing gaps in curriculum relevance, soft skills development, and alignment with industry practices. The study suggests that more effective career guidance in vocational fashion education involves integrating work-based learning, digital tools, industry partnerships, and entrepreneurial orientation. Rather than proposing a definitive model, this review highlights the need for a more integrated and competency-based approach to career guidance. These findings contribute to the ongoing discussion on strengthening the role of career guidance in enhancing industry readiness within vocational education contexts.

KEYWORDS

career guidance; fashion design; systematic literature review.

Introduction

Rapid technological advancement, digitalization, and shifting consumer behavior have significantly reshaped the global fashion industry, transforming not only production systems but also workforce expectations (Catherine et al., 2025; Nurfitri et al., 2021a). Contemporary fashion careers increasingly demand hybrid competencies, including creative design thinking, digital literacy, entrepreneurial capability, and the ability to navigate dynamic and non-linear career trajectories (Hughes et al., 2021; Subrahmanyam, 2025; Trebilco, 1984). In this context, vocational education—particularly fashion design programs at the secondary level—

plays a critical role in preparing students for entry into a highly fluid and competitive labor market.

Despite this growing importance, a persistent mismatch exists between the competencies developed in vocational education and those required by the fashion industry (Sun & Ha-Brookshire, 2025a). While vocational graduates often demonstrate adequate technical skills, they frequently lack key employability competencies such as career planning, decision-making, adaptability, and professional identity development (Godden, 2022). These limitations are especially consequential in the fashion sector, where careers are often portfolio-based, project-driven, and reliant on informal networks. Unlike more linear professions, success in fashion careers depends not only on technical expertise but also on the ability to continuously reposition oneself within evolving market and creative contexts.

Career guidance has been identified as a critical mechanism for supporting students in navigating complex career pathways by enhancing self-awareness, confidence, and alignment between individual competencies and labor market demands (Allen, 2016; Arshad et al., 2018). Theoretical perspectives such as Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasize adaptability, self-regulation, and experiential learning as key dimensions of career development (Robertson, 2018a). However, in the context of vocational fashion education, these constructs require contextual reinterpretation. For example, career adaptability in fashion involves managing freelance and portfolio careers, self-regulation relates to creative autonomy and project-based workflows, and experiential learning often takes the form of industry collaboration, internships, and participation in fashion events or digital platforms (Di Fabio et al., 2022; Fauziah et al., 2022).

This indicates that career guidance in fashion education must extend beyond conventional approaches to incorporate industry-specific practices and creative career dynamics. Although the importance of career guidance in vocational education has been widely acknowledged, its application within vocational fashion education remains underexplored and fragmented. Existing studies predominantly address career guidance in general vocational contexts, with limited attention to the unique characteristics of fashion careers. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive synthesis that systematically examines how career guidance can support industry readiness among vocational high school students in fashion design programs. Therefore, a systematic literature review is needed to consolidate existing knowledge, identify key themes and gaps, and provide a more coherent understanding of career guidance needs within this specific educational and industry context.

There is a shortage of specific guidance in vocational fashion education literature that addresses the most urgent, and critical, needs for development of industry

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Description
Inclusion Criteria	Empirical or review studies on career guidance, career development, or career counseling
	Studies conducted in vocational education or TVET contexts
	Research focusing on employability, work readiness, or industry alignment
	Studies explicitly or implicitly related to fashion, design, or creative industries
Exclusion Criteria	Journal articles indexed in Scopus or Web of Science
	Non-peer-reviewed works (e.g., conference abstracts, editorials)
	Studies not available in full text
	Research not written in English

focused career guidance frameworks that will enhance employability and career flexibility of students in the fast-changing world of fashion.

This study will identify existing gaps in literature and systematically analyze and synthesize existing literature on career guidance and vocational fashion education, particularly in relation to defining needs that will increase students' preparedness for the fashion industry. The aims of this study are: (1) To identify the most relevant and critical components and aspects of career guidance for vocational high school students in fashion design programs. (2) To evaluate to what extent career guidance frameworks fully incorporate the needs of the industry, particularly those related to employability, career flexibility, and professional orientation. (3) Identify the gaps and shortcomings in the present body of research regarding career guidance in the context of vocational fashion education. (4) Identify new and inventive methods in career guidance that prepare people for the workforce, especially those that involve experiential learning and the use of technology.

Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize and critically analyze existing research on career guidance needs in vocational fashion education (Borenstein et al., 2011; Merchant et al., 2014). The review follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency, methodological rigor, and replicability. The review process consists of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using two major academic databases, namely Scopus and Web of Science, selected for their comprehensive coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed publications. These databases are widely recognized for indexing reputable journals across education, vocational training, and industry-related research, making them suitable for capturing relevant studies in vocational fashion education.

A systematic search strategy was developed using a combination of Boolean operators (AND, OR) and carefully selected keywords to reflect the core constructs of the study. The search terms included variations and combinations of the following keywords: "career guidance," "career counseling," "vocational education," "TVET," "fashion design," "fashion education," "employability," and "industry readiness." Truncation and phrase searching were applied where appropriate to maximize search sensitivity while maintaining relevance.

The full search string and query structure are presented in Figure 1 to ensure transparency and facilitate replication of the study.

Research unrelated to student career development or vocational education
Duplicate records across databases

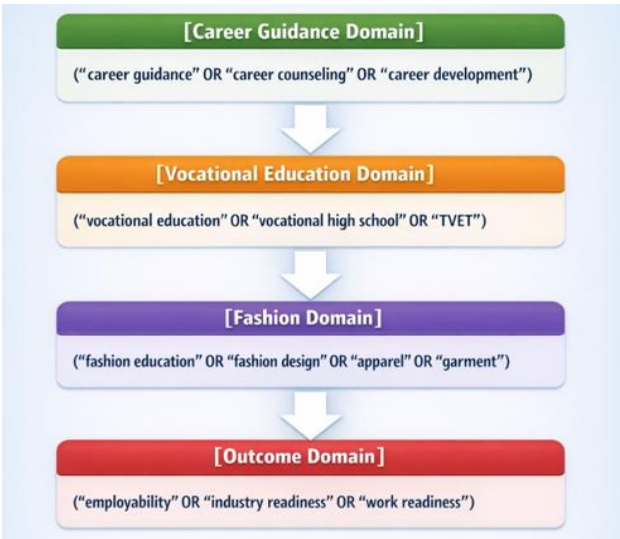


Figure 1. Search Strategy

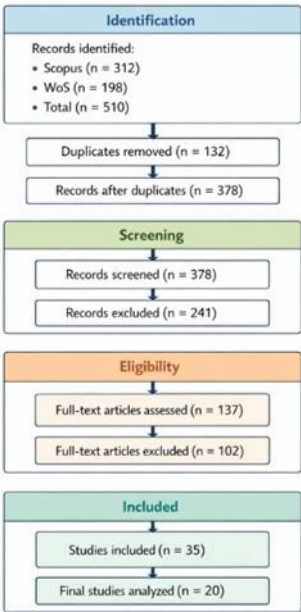


Figure 2. Study Selection Process

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (See [table 1](#)).
Study Selection Process
The study selection followed the PRISMA flow procedure.
(See [figure 2](#)).

Quality Assurance, Data Analysis, and Data Extraction
To ensure consistency and precision in capturing relevant information from each study, a structured data extraction protocol was developed. The extracted data included author(s), year of publication, research objectives, study design and methodology, participant characteristics, and key findings related to career guidance. Particular attention was given to competencies and indicators associated with employability, as well as implications for vocational fashion education.
The extracted data were analyzed using thematic synthesis, following a systematic coding process. Initially, open coding was conducted to identify recurring concepts and patterns across the selected studies. These initial

codes were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding, which enabled the development of higher-order themes related to career guidance needs and industry readiness.
To enhance the reliability of the analysis, the coding process was conducted independently by two reviewers. The preliminary coding results were compared and discussed to ensure consistency in interpretation. Any discrepancies or ambiguities in coding and study classification were resolved through iterative discussion until consensus was reached. In cases where disagreements persisted, the interpretation was refined by revisiting the original studies to ensure alignment with the source data.
Furthermore, theme validation was performed by examining the consistency of patterns across multiple studies and ensuring that each theme was supported by sufficient empirical evidence. This process strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Through this

rigorous analytical approach, the study generated qualitative insights that informed the synthesis of key themes and research gaps in career guidance within vocational fashion education.

Using a thematic synthesis method, descriptive and interpretative data analysis was accomplished. This study was opened through open coding, where the recurrent themes and concepts were linked to the literature concerning the career guidance needs. As a result, the aforementioned codes were subjected to compression through axial coding, whereby the concepts were arranged into composite components such as career adaptability, employability, decision-making, and exposure to industry. Ultimately, selective coding was the process used to integrate the components into a cohesive framework that describes and explains the context of vocational fashion education and the career guidance needs.

The synthesis that was done integrated descriptive analysis that examined the exists, and the distribution of the studies as were classified to the themes, and the interpretative analysis that examined the foundational theoretical and conceptual relations. These complementary approaches enabled the study to do away with explaining the research and to carry the career guidance to the depth where it contributed industry readiness.

Conducting a quality assessment on the included studies was done to increase the rigor of the review. The studies evaluated showed varying degrees of clarity on the objectives of the research, appropriateness of the methodology, the findings' validity and reliability, and the relevance to the topic of study. The review's credibility was also strengthened by studying the quality of the research and final analysis.

Reliability was further demonstrated by the transparent and replicable search strategy, active adherence to the established inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the structured protocol for data extraction. The study's validity was bolstered through the selection of research reports from the Scopus and Web of Science databases, and the cross study findings' triangulation. Additionally, the analysis was developed using the existing body of knowledge on the various theoretical frameworks of career development, which also provided a foundation for the interpretation of the findings.

Result and Discussion

Table 2. Key Findings from Reviewed Literature

Title	Research Question / Purpose	Key Findings
Balancing skills in the digital transformation era: The future of jobs and the role of higher education. (Goulart et al., 2022a)	To evaluate the relationship between professional profiles required by IT companies and what students are taught in IT-related programs in higher education institutions (HEIs).	HEIs must go beyond technical knowledge transfer to comprehensive education focused on personal development and soft/social/emotional skills. Soft skills are critical for employability. Partnerships between HEIs and HR managers are essential to close the skills gap (focus on Brazil/developing economies).
University students' perception of employability and workability skills for the workplace in the digital era (Л16 et al., 2023)	Explore university students' perspectives on the significance of competencies developed during studies for future-oriented employability and workability in the digital/green transformation era.	There is a gap between students' understanding of competencies and their actual possession of them. Recommendations include enhanced competency development to prepare students for evolving workplaces.
Empowering Visual Communication Design	Explore how universities in Asia prepare aspiring fashion designers for	In China, graduates are well-equipped with both soft and hard skills and succeed in

This systematic literature review analyzes 20 selected studies to address the four research questions underpinning this study. The findings are structured into four interrelated thematic areas, each aligned with a specific research question. These themes capture key patterns, recurring insights, and identified gaps in the literature. A detailed overview of the thematic synthesis is provided in [Table 2](#).

Primary Components of the Career Guidance Requirements Within Vocational Fashion Education (RQ1)

The analysis identifies that career guidance needs in vocational fashion education extend beyond the provision of career information and reflect a set of interrelated dimensions. The reviewed studies consistently highlight five key areas that shape students' preparedness for entering the fashion industry. First, self-understanding and identity development emerge as foundational needs. Several studies indicate that students require structured support to recognize their interests, strengths, and potential career pathways, as well as to develop a professional identity aligned with the demands of the fashion industry (Fauziah et al., 2022).

In this context, self-branding becomes particularly relevant, as fashion careers often rely on individual creativity and personal positioning within competitive markets. Second, career planning and decision-making skills are identified as areas requiring further development. The literature suggests that many students experience difficulty in translating their technical competencies into viable career trajectories, indicating limitations in career awareness and strategic decision-making processes (Nashikhah et al., 2018).

Third, the importance of employability skills is consistently emphasized across the reviewed studies. These include communication, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving, which complement technical competencies but are often insufficiently developed within existing vocational curricula (Triyono et al., 2023b) Fourth, industry exposure and experiential learning are highlighted as critical components of effective career preparation. Evidence from multiple studies suggests that students benefit from direct engagement with industry practices through internships, work-based learning (WBL), and project-based activities, which enhance their understanding of real-world professional contexts. Fifth, entrepreneurial competencies are particularly significant in the context of fashion careers. Given the prevalence of freelance work, self-employment, and portfolio-based careers in the fashion industry, students require skills related to business

Title	Research Question / Purpose	Key Findings
Students to Support Tourism Village through Entrepreneurship Education (Evangeline et al., 2025)	the workforce through skills and curricula.	industry; other countries (e.g., Pakistan) lag. University curricula and skills training are key factors in shaping industry readiness.
The Role of Career Guidance in Preparing Vocational School Students in the Building Construction Department for the Workforce(Zulaikhah et al., 2024)	Analyze the role of career guidance in preparing vocational high school students (building construction dept.) for the workforce (industry, higher education, or entrepreneurship).	Career guidance plays a very significant role (68.8%) in work readiness; the remaining 31.2% is influenced by other factors (motivation, talents, etc.). Students reported it helps them recognize potential, explore opportunities, and plan careers.
Positive psychology and career development (Robertson, 2018b)	Examine the impact of automation, robotics, and AI on work and propose steps for career development experts to prepare students and workers.	Workers face increasing instability; career experts should advocate for displaced workers, transform educational institutions, and expand counseling interventions. Social cognitive career theory can guide preparation for less stable careers.
Developing Fashion Design Vocational Career Guidance Module (Azizah et al., 2020)	Develop and test a feasible, practical, and effective career guidance module for fashion design vocational students/teachers.	The module is very feasible (4.71/5), very practical (88%), and effective (N-Gain 82.37%). It is suitable as vocational teaching material for industrial career paths in fashion.
Readiness of fashion education and training institutions management in facing the industrial revolution 4.0 and society 5.0 (Nurfitriah et al., 2021b)	Determine the readiness of fashion education and training institutions' management (via POAC functions: planning, organizing, actuating, controlling) for IR 4.0 and Society 5.0.	Institutions need strategies across all management functions aligned with digital and human-centered development. Good readiness requires curriculum updates, infrastructure, and adaptation to new technologies and competencies.
Impact of Fashion Entrepreneurship Programme on Entrepreneurial Interests, Intention and Competencies(Jamaluddin et al., 2019)	Examine the impact of a fashion entrepreneurship program (mentor-mentee, seminars, trainings) on students' entrepreneurial interests, intentions, and competencies.	Significant positive correlation between interests and intentions. Perceptions of interest, intention, and competencies were high at program end, though no significant direct link to intentions/competencies due to time constraints. Structured, timely programs are recommended.
Career Guidance Media in Vocational High Schools: A Literature Review of Its Role in Enhancing Students' Career Readiness (Puspitasari et al., 2025a)	Identify and summarize research on media use in career guidance services at vocational high schools (SMK) and its role in career readiness.	Career guidance media are essential strategies (not just tools) for bridging students to labor market demands. Digital media, e-modules, and student-centered approaches (multiple intelligences, interest profiling) are effective. Collaboration with industry is crucial.
Career Adaptability for Sustainable Workforce Development: A Systematic Review in Vocational Education (Makwa et al., 2023.)	Analyze career adaptability in TVET for sustainable workforce development (concept, importance, interventions, framework).	Career adaptability fosters work readiness, job satisfaction, resilience, and economic competitiveness. Key influences: professional identity, self-efficacy, work-based learning. Multidisciplinary collaboration (education-industry-government) is needed.
Career management in digital age: a study of leadership's competencies and practices applied for IT professionals (Macedo et al., 2023)	Identify key competencies and career management practices of leaders in large IT organizations for Generations X and Y in remote/digital work environments.	Relevant competencies: manager's career guidance role, generational management, knowledge-worker leadership, affiliative relationships. Practices: training diagnostics, frequent communication, talent promotion, adapted career plans, differentiated coaching, and employee protagonism.
The Role of Emerging Technologies in Academic Career Development(Michael Onyema et al., 2024)	Examine how emerging technologies (AI, ML, VR, IoT, etc.) impact academic career development (research, training, collaboration).	Emerging technologies break distance barriers and enable limitless access to resources, publications, virtual training, mentoring, and collaborations. Challenges in Nigeria (digital divide, infrastructure) remain, but ETs act as a catalyst for career progression.
Fashion Entrepreneurship and On-The-Job Training for Bachelor Students of Fashion Design Education in the Merdeka Belajar Era(Kharnolis et al., 2021)	Design and analyze "Merdeka Belajar" on-the-job training implementation in fashion entrepreneurship for fashion design students.	Planning, guidance, supervision, and assessment vary by fashion business type (designer, modiste, consultant, creative product). Institutions should integrate fashion entrepreneurship into curricula as on-the-job training sites.
Fashion Design Education and Sustainability: Towards an Equilibrium between	Examine how Polish fashion schools approach sustainability in curricula (art, craftsmanship, business	Fashion education needs multidimensional curriculum adjustments for sustainability. In Poland, insufficient public support, institutional

Title	Research Question / Purpose	Key Findings
Craftsmanship and Artistic and Business Skills?(Murzyn-Kupisz & Hołuj, 2021)	dimensions) and global/Polish challenges.	issues, and low consumer awareness exacerbate the challenge. Equilibrium among craftsmanship, artistic, and business skills is required.
Utilization of Work-Based Learning Program to Develop Employability Skill of Workforce (Craftsmen) In Construction Industry Towards Industrial Development(Stephen & Festus, 2022)	Examine WBL utilization to develop employability skills of construction craftsmen; identify challenges and improvement strategies.	WBL enhances soft, technical, and vocational skills. Challenges: poor fit with traditional schooling and weak TVET-industry collaboration. Strategies: frequent parent-teacher communication, progress reports, and deriving skills from actual work.
The entrepreneurial motivations, cognitive factors, and barriers to become a fashion entrepreneur: A direction to curriculum development for fashion entrepreneurship education(Lang & Liu, 2019)	Identify motivations, cognitive factors, and barriers to becoming a fashion entrepreneur to inform curriculum development.	(Findings point to curriculum directions based on motivations, cognition, and barriers; full details in remaining pages emphasize entrepreneurship education needs.)
Drivers and Enablers of Digital Readiness in the Fashion Industry: A Systematic Literature Review(Sun & Ha-Brookshire, 2025b)	Conceptualize fashion digital readiness and identify drivers/enablers using change readiness theory and Porter's Diamond Model.	6 main drivers and 21 enablers identified; proposes FDR-D,E framework. High failure rate of digital transformations due to resistance and slow response; multidisciplinary insights expand change readiness theory to fashion.
Vocational education's growing focus on employability skills: A bibliometrics evaluation of current research(Triyono et al., 2023a)	Investigate employability skills research trends, contributions, and relationships in vocational education (2003–2022).	Rising focus on employability skills, higher education, curricula, and vocational training. Key journals identified. Provides visual/quantitative insights and highlights research gaps for future discussions.
A Quantitative Assessment of Theoretical Practices Behind Work-Based Learning to Facilitate Student Career Readiness (Maló, 2025)	Assess theoretical practices of work-based learning (WBL) and their effectiveness in facilitating student career readiness.	(Doctoral dissertation; findings focus on quantitative evaluation of WBL practices for career readiness – full details in remaining 19 pages emphasize theoretical-to-practice alignment.)
Entrepreneurial Interest and Career Development of Vocational High School Graduates Fashion Design in the Digital Era (Vitariyanti et al., 2024)	Fashion-design SMK graduates show rising creativity/innovation; digital skills (apps, security, troubleshooting) are key to entrepreneurship; SMK–industry collaboration essential.	Qualitative (interviews/observations); only 2 schools; small sample (n=10); no quantitative entrepreneurial outcome measures.

planning, opportunity recognition, and market awareness. Taken together, these findings suggest that career guidance in vocational fashion education should not be viewed as a collection of isolated supports, but rather as an integrated system of competencies. This system reflects a complex ecosystem in which personal development, employability, industry engagement, and entrepreneurship are interconnected in shaping students' readiness for the labor market.

How Career Guidance Contributes to Preparedness for the Industry (RQ2)

The findings indicate that career guidance plays a significant role in shaping students' readiness for the fashion industry; however, its implementation remains uneven across contexts and dimensions. Across the reviewed studies, there is strong and consistent evidence that career guidance contributes to the development of employability skills—particularly communication, adaptability, and career decision-making—through structured interventions such as work-based learning and industry engagement. In contrast, moderate evidence suggests that career guidance supports the development

of self-identity and career adaptability, although these aspects are often addressed indirectly and lack systematic integration within vocational curricula. Furthermore, emerging but less consistently supported trends indicate that career guidance may enhance entrepreneurial orientation and self-branding, which are particularly relevant in fashion-related career pathways. However, these elements are typically discussed at a conceptual level rather than being empirically evaluated across multiple studies.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while career guidance is widely recognized as important for industry readiness, its impact varies depending on how comprehensively it is implemented. The imbalance reflects a stronger emphasis on general employability skills, with comparatively limited attention to identity development, entrepreneurship, and the specific demands of non-linear fashion careers.

It has been documented that career guidance greatly assists work readiness (Al-Adwan et al., 2018). This includes being able to evaluate oneself, having a plan for a career and the understanding of the opportunities available to them. This is all dependent on how the guidance programs are constructed and implemented ([Caballero et](#)

al., 2026).

Three major trends can be observed.

Prevalence of informational approaches: Most guidance for careers focuses on information dissemination and not on the processes of reflection, skills development, or experiential learning.

Little alignment to fashion industry: Most career guidance programs do not seem to consider the unique characteristics of the fashion industry, such as rapidly changing trends, portfolio-based careers, or the need for entrepreneurship.

The development of technologically-enhanced guidance: Career guidance through digital media, e-modules, and online platforms demonstrates the ability to improve access and engagement in career guidance. These approaches provide the possibility for personalized and flexible career exploration (Puspitasari et al., 2025b).

While the guidance for careers is pointed out as being important for the readiness for the industry, it is evident that the guidance is not adequately integrated with the vocational education and training system.

Deficits Between Outcomes of Vocational Education and the Demands of the Fashion Industry (RQ3)

A notable and recurring finding across the reviewed studies is the persistent imbalance between educational outcomes in vocational fashion programs and the expectations of the industry. This mismatch is not uniformly distributed but can be understood through four key gap dimensions identified through thematic synthesis (Powell et al., 2024; Yakubu & Bayong, 2025). This inequality can be divided into four different segments:

a. Competency Gap

While vocational education focuses on the teaching of technical skills, the fashion industry is requesting:

- creative thinking
- flexibility
- digital skills
- interpersonal skills

b. Curriculum-Industry Misalignment

Graduates appear unprepared for the current challenges in the industry. This is attributed to the delays in response of universities to:

- digital changes in the fashion industry
- sustainability
- agility in the global market

c. Scant Career Orientation

Students show minimal knowledge on:

- the variety of career opportunities available in the fashion industry
- freelance, portfolio-based work, and entrepreneurial opportunities
- This incapacitates them in managing intricate career pathways.

d. Institutional Readiness Constraints

Lack of industry partners, inadequate digital learning resources, and insufficient structural arrangements for collaboration in educational institutions are barriers to the implementation of effective career guidance.

New Methods for Improving the Efficiency of Career Guidance (RQ4)

Several approaches have been identified in the literature as potentially effective in strengthening career guidance within vocational fashion education. However, their relative effectiveness varies in terms of feasibility, scalability, and contextual suitability for vocational high school settings.

Among these, work-based learning (WBL) and industry partnerships emerge as the most strongly supported and contextually relevant approaches. These methods provide direct exposure to professional practices and are consistently associated with improved employability and industry awareness. Nevertheless, their implementation often depends on the availability of industry networks and institutional capacity, which may limit scalability, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

In comparison, the use of digital tools and career platforms appears to offer higher scalability and flexibility. These tools can facilitate career exploration, portfolio development, and access to labor market information. However, the literature suggests that their effectiveness is contingent upon digital literacy levels and the extent to which they are integrated into structured guidance programs rather than used as standalone resources.

Entrepreneurship-oriented guidance is identified as particularly relevant for the fashion sector, given the prevalence of freelance and portfolio-based careers. While this approach aligns closely with industry characteristics, the evidence base remains relatively limited, and its implementation often requires curriculum adaptation and teacher capacity development.

Finally, integrated experiential learning models, which combine project-based learning, internships, and reflective guidance, appear promising in bridging multiple competency areas simultaneously. Although these approaches demonstrate strong conceptual alignment with industry needs, their practical application requires careful coordination across curriculum, industry partners, and assessment systems.

Overall, the findings suggest that no single approach is sufficient in isolation. Instead, the most effective career guidance strategies are those that integrate multiple methods, balancing contextual feasibility with the specific demands of the fashion industry. In particular, WBL and industry partnerships appear to have the strongest empirical support, while digital and entrepreneurial approaches offer complementary value with greater potential for scalability.

Integrated Synthesis

Regardless of the context, the data suggests that for effective career guidance in vocational fashion education to be realised, there has to be an evolution of the exhaustive, out-dated, and information-dispensing services to a developmental, systems approach that incorporates:

1. career adaptability
2. employability skills
3. industry engagement
4. experiential learning

Only then, and in response to the intricate nature of the career avenues available in the fashion industry, can a promise be made to the students regarding the enhancement of their employability prospects for the foreseeable future.

This review synthesizes existing evidence on career guidance needs in vocational fashion education and highlights persistent discrepancies between educational practices and industry expectations. Based on the analyzed studies, these discrepancies are most consistently reflected in gaps related to curriculum relevance, employability skills, and industry exposure, as identified across multiple sources in the review (Soproni, 2023).

Results also led to the confirmation of the fact that career guidance has an undeniable impact in contributing to students' preparedness to enter the industry. This is specifically true when career guidance programs assist students to increase their self-awareness, formulate career plans, and identify opportunities (McGuirt et al., 2020).

Results also showed that most career guidance practices and programs are still at the informational-level and fragmented, thus limiting their impact in preparing students to develop the higher order-specific competencies such as adaptability and the professional-identity (Fletcher Jr et al., 2018). This is consistent with the literature in vocational education that emphasizes the fact that employability is not a product of only technical training; but rather an intricate combination of psychosocial and behavioral components (Kamble et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the importance of career adaptability and employability skills as the constructs that mediate the other variables (Goulart et al., 2022b). Whereas some of the previous studies have examined some of the constructs in isolation, the present study attempts to converge the constructs and demonstrate the three variables as one in order to determine their interactive effects on the readiness of students to operate in the fluid and demanding environments. These competencies are of utmost importance especially in relation to the fashion industry which is characterized by constant changes, project-based work, and entrepreneurial opportunities (Onyema et al., 2024).

The research shows that there continues to be a mismatch between the outcomes of vocational education and training and the needs of the industry. This mismatch is apparent in three areas. They are (1) lack of soft skills (2) the curriculum does not reflect the current digital and sustainability trends and (3) not enough access to industry practice. These findings strengthen the case for vocational education to be more industry relevant and future-oriented.

The study identified some of the new approaches to career development that include work integrated learning, digital career coaching and partnerships with industry as the main drivers of effective career development. This is a pivot to more experiential and digitally integrated learning which is aligned with the shifting competencies required of the fashion industry.

It may be said that the role of career guidance is to integrate the curriculum, industry, and student, in a more seamless manner. Without this, vocational education and training will continue to produce graduates who are competent in the technical aspects of the job, but they will lack the skills to confront the challenges of a career in the real-world.

Novelty

This study offers a practical contribution by synthesizing evidence on how career guidance in vocational fashion education can be more closely aligned with industry expectations. While previous studies on vocational guidance have emphasized its general role in supporting employability, the findings of this review indicate that, within the context of fashion education, career guidance is often insufficiently connected to the specific demands of industry practice, particularly in relation to non-linear and portfolio-based career pathways.

A key contribution of this study lies in its integration of findings across multiple studies to highlight the need for a shift from predominantly school-centered guidance practices toward more industry-oriented approaches. This includes greater emphasis on work-based learning, industry engagement, and competency development that reflects current labor market dynamics. Rather than proposing a wholly new model, this review consolidates and extends existing insights by situating career guidance within the specific context of vocational fashion education, which has received comparatively limited attention in prior systematic reviews.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that career guidance may be more effective when embedded within curriculum and learning processes that integrate industry exposure, experiential learning, and opportunities for students to develop adaptive and entrepreneurial competencies. This reframing positions career guidance not only as a support service but as a contributing element to industry readiness. However, this interpretation should be understood as a synthesis-based implication of the reviewed literature, and further empirical studies are needed to examine its implementation across different educational contexts.

Theoretical Contribution

This study also contributes to the theoretical development of vocational education by reinterpreting the role of career guidance through the lenses of Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory. While these frameworks emphasize adaptability, self-regulation, and experiential learning in career development, the findings of this review suggest that their application within vocational fashion education remains only partially realized.

Based on the synthesized evidence, this study extends these theoretical perspectives by situating career guidance not as a peripheral support function, but as a more integrated component of competency development within vocational curricula. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that key constructs such as career adaptability, identity formation, and experiential learning are closely linked to students' readiness for industry, particularly in non-linear and portfolio-based fashion careers.

In this regard, the study proposes a conceptual shift toward an industry-relevant and competency-oriented learning ecosystem, in which pedagogy, career guidance, and industry engagement are more explicitly interconnected. This interpretation is grounded in recurring evidence highlighting the importance of employability skills, industry exposure, and entrepreneurial competencies across the reviewed literature.

Rather than advancing a new standalone theory, this contribution lies in extending existing career development frameworks into the specific context of vocational fashion education. It highlights how theoretical constructs such as adaptability and self-regulation may operate differently in creative and dynamic labor markets. Consequently, vocational education is conceptualized not only as a site for technical skill acquisition, but as a developmental environment that supports adaptive, career-ready graduates capable of navigating complex and evolving industry conditions.

Conclusion

This study synthesizes evidence on career guidance in vocational fashion education and identifies persistent gaps that influence students' readiness for the fashion industry. Five key areas of need are consistently highlighted across the reviewed studies: career self-awareness, career decision-making, employability skills, industry awareness, and entrepreneurial competencies. Among these, employability skills and career adaptability emerge as the most strongly supported factors associated with successful transition into the labor market.

The findings also reveal an ongoing mismatch between vocational education outcomes and industry expectations, particularly in relation to curriculum relevance, soft skills

development, and access to meaningful industry exposure. These gaps indicate that existing career guidance practices remain insufficiently aligned with the dynamic and non-linear nature of fashion careers. Implications

The review suggests that more effective career guidance in vocational fashion education requires a shift toward integrated, industry-oriented approaches. Strategies such as work-based learning, industry partnerships, digital career guidance tools, and entrepreneurship-oriented learning appear to offer complementary value in addressing identified gaps.

Rather than functioning as a supplementary service, career guidance may be more impactful when embedded within curriculum and competency development processes. This positioning supports the development of graduates who are more adaptive, resilient, and responsive to evolving industry demands.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes by integrating constructs from career development theories—particularly career adaptability, employability, and experiential learning—into the context of vocational fashion education. This integration highlights the need to

contextualize career guidance frameworks within creative and portfolio-based career environments.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the review is restricted to publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which may exclude relevant studies from other databases or grey literature. Second, the relatively small number of fashion-specific studies limits the breadth of contextual insights. Third, as with many systematic reviews, there is a potential for publication bias, where studies with significant findings are more likely to be included.

Additionally, the reliance on secondary data limits the ability to validate findings across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Future research is therefore recommended to employ empirical approaches, including quantitative and mixed-methods designs, to test and refine the conceptual relationships identified in this review. Further studies could also explore the applicability of these findings across different institutional settings and creative industry sectors.

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