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Assessing Effectiveness of Workplace Experience Learning in HND Fashion Design TVET Programmes: Insights from Fashion Design Facilitators in Ghana

Phyllis Mensah [1*], Harry Barton Essel [2], Akosua Tachie-Menson [2], Benjamin Tawiah [3], Abena Okyerewa Siaw [4]

[1] Department of Fashion Design and Textiles Education, University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Kumasi, Ghana.
[2] Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.
[3] Department of Industrial Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.
[4] Department of Fashion Design and Textiles Education, University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Kumasi, Ghana.

Correspondence (*)
Name: Phyllis Mensah

Affiliation: Department of Fashion Design and Textiles Education, University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Kumasi, Ghana.

Email: phyllismensah@aamusted.edu.gh

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the effectiveness of WEL from the facilitators' perspective, recognising their pivotal role in shaping student outcomes. By focusing on facilitators' perspectives, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how WEL contributes to skill development, industry readiness, and employability for fashion design students, as well as to identify areas where the implementation of WEL can be strengthened to better serve both students and the evolving needs of the fashion industry in Ghana.

Methodology/Design: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with WEL facilitators from four institutions: Sunyani, Kumasi, Bolgatanga, and Cape Coast Technical Universities, as part of a qualitative study design. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify tendencies in how WEL facilitates the advancement of entrepreneurship within fashion education.

Findings: The study found that WEL enhances the development of entrepreneurial competencies by establishing a crucial connection between theoretical knowledge and practical business application. Participants indicated that students acquired essential skills, including self-efficacy, creativity, customer service, and business planning. Nonetheless, drawbacks were noted, including inconsistent mentoring, insufficient monitoring logistics, and a divergence between industry practices and academic goals.

Practical and Social Implications: The findings indicate the imperative to enhance WEL frameworks by integrating entrepreneurship into academic curricula, formalising industry-academic partnerships, and employing digital technology for monitoring and support. Enhancing these components will enable WEL to align more closely with the nation's goals for the growth of the creative sector and young employment.

Originality: This study positions WEL as a transformative learning environment for cultivating future fashion entrepreneurs, thus contributing a constructivist perspective to the discourse on technical and vocational education in Ghana.

Keywords
Constructivism, Fashion Design, TVET, Youth Employment, Workplace Experience Learning.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is gaining attention as a platform for preparing students with the practical and entrepreneurial skills expected for the changing labour markets (Kissi et al., 2020). In Ghana, TVET has gained heightened policy attention as a response to high youth unemployment, low industrial productivity, and the urgent need to build human capital for national development (Kissi et al., 2020). Within the Higher National Diploma (HND) framework, particularly in

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fashion design. Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) serves as a critical bridge between theoretical classroom instruction and practical industry application (Folson & Awuah, 2020).

Key stakeholders play a pivotal role in the success of Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) within the HND fashion design program. Students are at the centre of this process, engaging directly with industry partners who provide the essential environment for practical skill development and mentorship (Mensah et al., 2026). Academic institutions coordinate placements, ensure curricular alignment, and support students throughout their experiential learning journey (Folson & Awuah, 2020). Regulatory bodies, such as CTVET and NABPTEX, provide oversight and quality assurance, while government and policymakers shape the broader environment through supportive policies and funding (Naeem et al., 2023). The collaborative efforts of these diverse groups ensure that WEL is meaningful, relevant, and transformative for fashion design students. Facilitators (Supervisors) from both academia and industry offer guidance and assessment, helping students achieve learning objectives (Naeem et al., 2023; Gyampoh et al., 2025). WEL, commonly referred to as an industrial attachment or internship, is integral to competency-based training because it provides students with real-world exposure, enhances adaptability, and fosters entrepreneurial mindsets (Johnson, 2024; Usman et al., 2025). For fashion design students, whose professional success depends on creativity, technical competence, customer engagement, and business acumen, WEL provides an authentic platform to test and refine their skills while cultivating networks in the creative economy (Lindner, 2020). There is evidence that students who complete a structured WEL are better suited for careers in both wage employment and entrepreneurship (Njenga, 2026). Irrespective of these benefits, evidence shows that WEL's effectiveness in Ghanaian HND Fashion Design programmes is inconsistent in supervision, limited in placement opportunities, and poorly aligned with academic curricula and industry practices (Mensah et al., 2026; Gyampoh et al., 2025). The challenges weaken WEL's potential as a transformative learning process and limit its contribution to entrepreneurial readiness.

Most existing studies have focused on student perspectives or general outcomes of WEL across various disciplines, often overlooking the specific context of fashion design and the critical insights facilitators can offer (Stoyanova et al., 2025). The unique pedagogical and industry demands of fashion design require a tailored approach to workplace learning. Yet, little research has systematically captured facilitators' viewpoints on the strengths, weaknesses, and real-world impact of WEL in this setting. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the experiences and assessments of fashion design facilitators, offering a nuanced understanding of WEL effectiveness that can inform policy, curriculum development, and industry collaboration in Ghana's TVET sector.

This study is unique in that it considers the views of fashion design facilitators, a less-explored group whose contributions to student supervision, mentoring, and assessment are critical to WEL's achievement. It also uses a qualitative, theory-driven approach to include nuanced experiences and learning processes, providing insights that go beyond statistical or policy-level evaluations. The study sought to explore the effectiveness of WEL from facilitators' perspectives regarding its role in students' knowledge construction, skill acquisition, and entrepreneurial development within Ghana's TVET sector. The study is anticipated to benefit a range of stakeholders. Academic institutions and facilitators can use these findings to refine curricula and support mechanisms. At the same time, policymakers and regulatory bodies may draw on the evidence to shape targeted policies and quality assurance standards. Industry partners stand to gain a clearer understanding of how to foster more meaningful mentorship and collaboration, and students will benefit from improved learning experiences that better prepare them for employment. Additionally, the study enriches academic discourse on WEL in Ghana's fashion design sector, providing a foundation for future research and sectoral development.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1| Workplace Experience Learning in TVET

Workplace Experience Learning (WEL), often known as industry attachment or practicum, is an essential component of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs (Mensah et al., 2026). This helps students go beyond theoretical classroom learning by directly working in an actual work environment, where they can apply their skills in practice (Folson & Awuah, 2020). Fashion design students engage in practical learning that encompasses garment manufacture, pattern cutting, customer engagement, and entrepreneurial exposure, all crucial for their post-graduation preparation (Appiah, 2023). The incorporation of Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) into Higher National Diploma (HND)

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Fashion Design programs in Ghana is a curricular mandate that integrates academic education with practical industry exposure (Appiah, 2023). The objective is to support graduates in developing employable skills and cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset. Institutions vary in their approaches to supervision, assessment, and quality assurance across their respective placements (Mensah et al., 2026).

2.2| Challenges in Implementing Workplace Experience Learning

Despite its evident promise, challenges in implementing workplace experience learning persist, diminishing its effectiveness in Ghana's TVET institutions. A primary challenging issue is the insufficient coordination between institutions and industry. Mensah et al. (2026) stressed that many universities lack formal links with industry stakeholders, making it difficult to align student learning objectives with practical activities at their respective attachment placements. Supervision and feedback are also deficient domains. Asamoah-Atakorah et al. (2024) assert that students may complete the majority of their industrial training with minimal or no interaction with their institutional supervisors. Lack of oversight limits the potential for directed learning and introspection, both of which are essential for personal and professional development (Mensah et al., 2026). Additionally, the gap between the knowledge students gain in academic environments and the skills needed in industry has been a major concern. Okolie et al. (2020) indicate that many skills gained in classrooms are not needed for contemporary industry requirements. This gap leaves students feeling inadequately prepared and less confident when entering industrial environments. In addition, universities in underdeveloped regions most often encounter difficulties in securing appropriate placement options for their students. Ali et al. (2021) observe that the scarcity of fashion-related firms in these areas disadvantages students, resulting in inequitable access to quality industry exposure.

2.3| The Role of Facilitators in Enhancing WEL

Facilitators, generally the instructors or lecturers overseeing WEL, are pivotal in maximising students' attachment experiences. Their duties encompass preparing students for placements, collaborating with firms, and evaluating students' progress (Piaget, 1970). Their deep engagement in both the academic and practical aspects of WEL gives them a stronger standing for their ideas, which is essential for identifying deficiencies and producing recommendations. However, the perception of facilitators has not been extensively studied, particularly in HND Fashion Design education. Their viewpoints regarding student adaptation to the workplace, the extent of support from industry mentors, and the effectiveness of learning outcomes warrant greater scrutiny.

2.4| Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT)

The theoretical contribution of Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT) (Figure 1a) is central to understanding both the learner's and the facilitator's roles in Workplace Experience Learning (WEL). CLT posits that learners actively construct knowledge through direct experience, reflection, and interaction with their environment, rather than passively absorbing information (Fosnot, 2013; Pillay, 2024). In the context of WEL, this means that students take ownership of their skill acquisition by immersing themselves in authentic industry situations, experimenting with new techniques, and learning from the outcomes of their actions. Facilitators, drawing on the principles of CLT, do more than deliver content; they create supportive environments where learners can engage in problem-solving, collaborative tasks, and critical reflection. By guiding students through real-world challenges and encouraging them to connect theory with practice, facilitators help deepen understanding and foster the development of transferable skills.

Thus, CLT not only underscores the importance of active, experiential learning for students but also shapes the facilitator's role as a mentor who scaffolds and enriches the learning process. The integration of CLT into WEL ensures that both learners and facilitators are engaged in a dynamic, interactive process that leads to meaningful and lasting skill development. In this context, learners are positioned as active participants in their own development. Through direct involvement in industry settings, they not only apply what they have learned in the classroom but also construct new understanding by navigating real-life challenges, solving problems, and reflecting on their experiences. This hands-on approach fosters deeper learning, adaptability, and confidence, which are essential for success in the dynamic field of fashion design. Facilitators play a complementary role grounded in these same theoretical perspectives. Rather than merely transmitting knowledge, facilitators act as guides, mentors, and co-learners. They

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help bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing support, feedback, and opportunities for critical reflection (Mensah et al., 2026). Facilitators structure the learning environment, set clear expectations, and encourage learners to take initiative and responsibility for their growth. By doing so, they enable students to maximise the benefits of experiential learning, ensuring that skill acquisition during WEL is purposeful, relevant, and transformative. Thus, theory underpins both the learner's active engagement in skill development and the facilitator's role in scaffolding and enhancing that process.

This methodology is particularly pertinent to WEL in fashion design. Attachments provide students with exposure to industry activities, meetings with experienced workers, opportunities to address design and production challenges, and exposure to entrepreneurial practices (Shinkaruk et al., 2023). Effective mentorship, an essential element of WEL, is intimately linked to constructivist theory. Effective mentorship serves as scaffolding, bolstering learners' confidence and competence as they develop. In the absence of this support, students may struggle to derive significant learning from their internships (Asogwa et al., 2023). Ncube et al. (2024) and Lindner (2020) underscore the significance of experiential, reflective learning in cultivating entrepreneurial competencies within TVET. These findings support the fact that students gain the greatest benefit when learning in authentic environments, where they can put concepts into practice in classrooms and develop through experiential learning. The Constructivist Learning Theory offers a robust framework for understanding how WEL sharpens entrepreneurial and practice competencies in fashion design students. This study emphasises real-world, reflective, and transformative learning processes that are relevant for optimal TVET expectations.

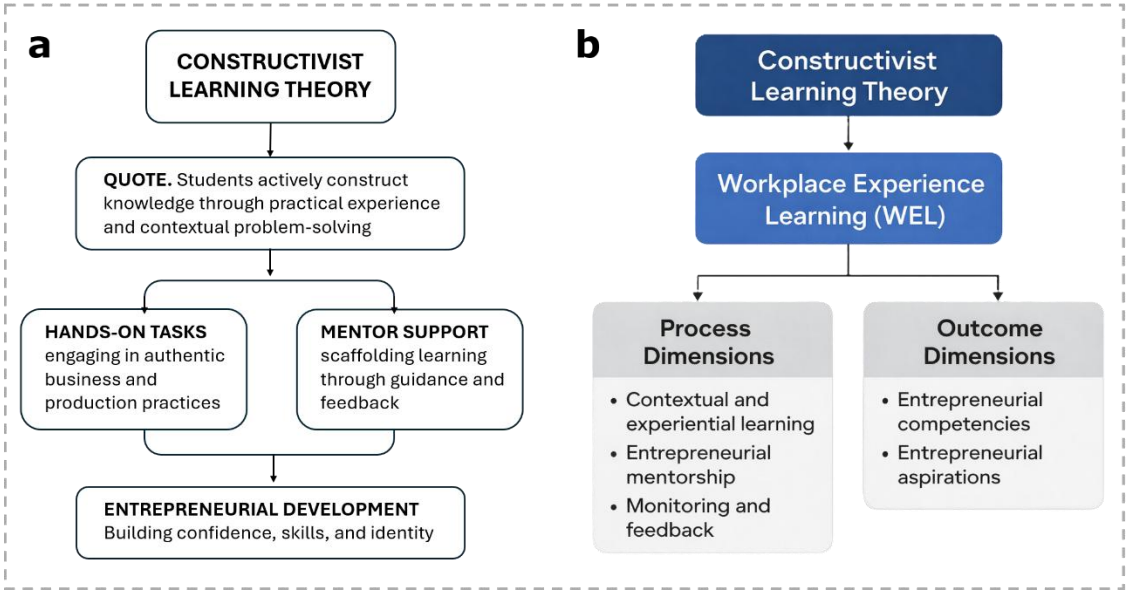


Figure 1. (a) Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1972; Hausfather, 1996)
(b)Conceptual Framework (authors own creation, 2025)

The conceptual diagram (Figure 1b) depicts the Constructivist Learning Theory within an educational framework. It visually illustrates the active construction of knowledge by learners through: authentic learning environments (e.g., real-world tasks such as WEL), social interaction with peers and mentors, reflection and problem-solving, and prior knowledge serving as a foundation for new understanding. This figure illustrates WEL's alignment with Constructivist concepts, highlighting active engagement, contextual experience, and the cultivation of entrepreneurial abilities through involvement in significant work-based environments.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1| Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed a case study design, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and informed by Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT). This methodological approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to gain in-depth insights into the

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effectiveness of Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) from the perspectives of fashion design facilitators involved in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes at the selected Technical Universities, which served as the case study. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena in which understanding participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and meanings is essential (Gautam, 2023). The interpretivist paradigm aligns with this approach, as it emphasises understanding social realities through individuals' subjective experiences. In the context of WEL, facilitators' perceptions, reflections, and narratives provide rich data that quantitative methods might overlook. Moreover, Constructivist Learning Theory underscores the value of examining how knowledge and skills are actively constructed in real-world settings, thereby supporting qualitative methods that enable open-ended exploration and nuanced analysis.

3.2| Research Setting and Population

The research was conducted at four public technical universities in the Ashanti, Bono, Central, and Upper East regions of Ghana: Kumasi Technical University, Sunyani Technical University, Cape Coast Technical University, and Bolgatanga Technical University. These institutions were intentionally selected for their established and active Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) programs within the HND fashion design curriculum, as well as for their reputation for employing experienced facilitators with specialised expertise in fashion design. Justification for this population and location centres on the need to capture diverse institutional perspectives and practices across Ghana's geographic regions, thereby enriching the study's findings. Choosing universities with robust WEL structures ensures that participants and the professors and instructors directly responsible for supervising and mentoring students during industrial attachments possess relevant, firsthand experience with the implementation and outcomes of WEL. This targeted population provides rich, contextually grounded insights into the effectiveness and challenges of WEL, making their perspectives especially valuable for addressing the study's objectives and contributing to the development of best practices in fashion design TVET programmes across Ghana.

3.3| Sampling Procedure

The sample for this study was selected using purposive sampling, with three facilitators chosen from each participating university, resulting in a total of 12 facilitators. This sample size was determined based on the qualitative research aim of achieving depth rather than breadth, and to ensure the collection of information-rich data. The decision to include 12 participants enabled a manageable yet comprehensive exploration of diverse experiences and insights across institutional and regional contexts (Alaba et al., 2026). All facilitators invited participated in the study. Each had at least 3 years' experience supervising WEL students; this inclusion criterion ensured that participants possessed substantial expertise and familiarity with the WEL process. Their selection was further guided by their direct involvement in key aspects of WEL, including performance reviews of student productions during attachments, mentoring roles, and liaising with industrial partners. This aligns with the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT), which emphasises the importance of actual learning environments and expert facilitation.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n = 12)

Gender	Rank/Qualification	Specialization	Role in WEL Programme	Years of Experience
Male	Senior Lecturer	Fashion Design	WEL Coordinator	10
Female	Lecturer	Textile Technology	WEL Supervisor	7
Female	Lecturer	Fashion Merchandising	Placement Facilitator	5
Male	Lecturer	Garment Construction	Industry Liaison	8
Male	Senior Lecturer	Fashion Design	WEL Coordinator	12
Female	Lecturer	Textile Technology	WEL Supervisor	6
Female	Lecturer	Fashion Design	Placement Facilitator	4
Male	Lecturer	Garment Construction	Industry Liaison	9
Female	Senior Lecturer	Fashion Merchandising	WEL Coordinator	11

Fashion and Textiles Review, **2026**, Volume 7, Special Issue, Pages 81-95, https://doi.org/10.35738/ftr.v7.2025.51

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Male	Lecturer	Fashion Design	WEL Supervisor	5
Female	Lecturer	Textile Technology	Placement Facilitator	7
Male	Lecturer	Fashion Design	Industry Liaison	6

3.4| Data Collection Method

The principal method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the principal method of data collection because they offer flexibility to explore facilitators' experiences and perspectives in depth while ensuring that key topics relevant to the research objectives are consistently addressed (Chand, 2025). This approach allows participants to express their views in their own words, providing rich, detailed data that can reveal nuanced insights about the effectiveness of Workplace Experience Learning (WEL). Additionally, semi-structured interviews align well with the study's interpretivist and constructivist orientation, supporting the exploration of subjective meanings and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participant (Piri et al., 2025). Under the direction of a flexible set of open-ended questions, these were done both in person and online. The interviews concentrated on participants' opinions on WEL's objectives, difficulties experienced, results noted, and recommendations for development. Every 45 to 60 minutes' conversation was videotaped with permission; field notes helped to capture observations and nonverbal signals. Consistent with the constructivist focus on cooperative meaning-making, this approach gave opportunities for communication and introspection.

3.5| Data Analysis

For data analysis, the study employed Braun and Clarke's six-step approach to thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023). This involved first familiarising oneself with the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts, then generating initial codes from meaningful segments of text. For example, after coding responses about students' skill development, themes such as "growth in technical proficiency" and "emergence of entrepreneurial mindset" were inductively derived directly from facilitators' descriptions. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and clearly defined before being organised into the final report. NVivo 12 software facilitated systematic data management, coding, and retrieval throughout the process. Data saturation in this study was determined during the iterative process of data collection and analysis. As interviews progressed, the researchers continually reviewed and coded the data, closely monitoring for emerging insights or themes. Saturation was considered achieved when subsequent interviews no longer produced novel information and responses became repetitive, indicating the main themes had been thoroughly explored across the participant sample (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This point was reached before the end of the twelfth interview, as no new codes or categories were identified in the final transcripts. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the study incorporated member checks with participants, peer debriefs among the research team, and maintained an audit trail documenting all significant methodological and analytical decisions. This ensured credibility and transparency in the interpretation of facilitators' perspectives on students' development of technical and entrepreneurial skills through Workplace Experience Learning.

3.6| Ethical Considerations

The ethics board of the collaborating institutions approved the study. Every facilitator involved gave informed consent, was assured of their privacy, and was advised of their right to withdraw at any time. Participants' identities were safeguarded through the investigation. Every piece of information gathered was preserved securely and used only for scholarly purposes.

4 | PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1| WEL as a Platform for Real-World Learning

Facilitators from all three technical universities defined WEL as more than just a formal requirement; it's a practical, immersive process that gives students hands-on experience in real-world fashion-industry situations. This captures the constructivist theory that active participation and personal involvement in practical tasks help develop knowledge. "*WEL is a structured practical attachment allowing students to apply and test their academic knowledge in real-life business environments*." Facilitator 1 from STU: "*This is the chance for the student to move from classroom theory to actual corporate and manufacturing*

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settings." (CCTU Facilitator 2) "*WEL helps fashion students to internalise how creative and business processes mix in real life*." (STU Facilitator 3). Facilitators agreed that the attachment process exposes students to dynamic, often erratic corporate environments, encouraging learning by observation, engagement, and reflection.

4.2| Developing entrepreneurial identity

Interviews revealed that WEL develops important entrepreneurial skills, including confidence, decision-making, and flexibility. Facilitators pointed out that students become entrepreneurs by negotiating chores on their own and reflecting on results, not just by following directions. "*WEL is vital; it gets students ready to create jobs as well as to enter the workforce*." (STU Facilitator 1). "*Key entrepreneurial skills, such as Pricing, client handling, and production timeline management, are taught to students*" (CCTU Facilitator 1). "*It gets students ready to think more like entrepreneurs than just tailors*." Facilitator 2 for KTU "During WEL, one male student launched a custom menswear brand on Instagram. He is still in operation." (Second STU Facilitator). "*One student designed a kente fusion collection working with a supervisor and started it post-WEL*." (Third facilitator for KTU). These illustrations show how WEL helps fashion entrepreneurs develop their sense of self in line with the constructivist perspective, which holds that learning is connected to the development of identity through experience.

4.3| The Mentoring Gap

In constructivist learning, scaffolding and mentoring are essential for guiding students toward understanding challenging events. Facilitators admitted that the level of mentoring during WEL varied widely, thereby influencing students' realistic goals. "*Most mentors are cooperative; some are too busy to provide close oversight*" (First facilitator for STU). "*Not all students get mentoring, those placed in family-run or informal settings struggle*" (BTU Facilitator 2). "*Some students benefit much, others claim task restrictions limited their learning*" (Facilitator 3 in KTU). "*Where mentoring is strong, academic and industry tasks align well, for instance, in costing and customer service*" (STU Facilitator 1). Students could think, adapt, and develop if help was available. But little mentoring reduced many students' opportunities to absorb business knowledge and to enhance their personal growth.

4.4| Monitoring and Resource Constraints

Reflective learning calls for consistent direction and feedback; nonetheless, facilitators frankly discussed the challenges to efficient monitoring, particularly institutional and logistical ones. "*The workload of faculty limits the depth of supervision we can offer*" (Facilitator 2 for CCTU). "*We need more engagement seminars and travel help to visit remote placements*" (STU facilitator 3). Monitoring would be much improved with mobility support for digital tracking tools and site visits. Second facilitator for CCTU: Students risk disengaging or misreading key lessons without consistent interaction or feedback, thereby reducing the transformative power of WEL.

4.5| Academic and Industry Gap

Many facilitators observed that some host companies did not fully embrace their educational responsibility; at times, they treated students more like extra workers than learners. This does not align with the constructivist idea of active and meaningful participation. "*Students gripe about being treated more like assistants than students*" (Facilitator 1 from STU). "*Some of the companies do not give mentoring and documentation top priority, which makes assessment difficult*" (First facilitator from CCTU). "*Some placements are in businesses too small to provide proper training*" (Facilitator 3 for CCTU). "*Firms are often not ready to mentor; facilitators have limited tools*" (STU Facilitator 3). The lack of shared deliverables between companies and educational institutions reduces students' readiness to take responsibility for their learning in work environments.

Facilitators recommended curriculum adjustments to support reflection, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship, making WEL an even more constructivist learning tool. "*Make entrepreneurship not a separate course but part of WEL assessment*" (STU Facilitator 1). "*Embed WEL assessment with a mini business-plan project*" (First facilitator from CCTU). "*Make entrepreneurial reflection a necessary part of WEL reports*" (Facilitator 3 in BTU). "*Faculty and companies should co-design project-based WEL activities*" (STU facilitator 3). "Offer preplacement instruction emphasising entrepreneurship and professionalism" (STU facilitator 2). These suggestions complement CLT's focus on individualised, experiential learning and help to foster increased student involvement.

Fashion and Textiles Review, **2026**, Volume 7, Special Issue, Pages 81-95, https://doi.org/10.35738/ftr.v7.2025.51

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4.6| Proposed Reforms: Repositioning WEL as an Incubator

Many of the facilitators hoped WEL might develop into more than just an internship; it might become a controlled environment where students could launch real businesses. This vision fits constructivist concepts of active, student-led education. "*WEL can be a launchpad for youth employment if we frame it as a startup opportunity, not just a skill-building phase*" (Facilitator 1 from STU). "*WEL could become an incubator for student-led fashion businesses; more structure would enable this*" (Facilitator 1 from CCTU). "*We should see WEL as a Launchpad, students can prototype ideas and develop business confidence if supported well*" (Facilitator 3 from CCTU). This perspective presents students not just as interns but also as innovators, a perfect result for any constructivist learning approach.

5 | DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The discussion draws on insights from facilitators at four Ghanaian technical universities. It discusses the findings in light of Constructivist Learning Theory and critically links them to the study's objectives, research questions, and relevant literature. The discussion focuses on WEL's role in fostering entrepreneurial abilities, the challenges encountered in its delivery, and the institutional interventions needed to strengthen WEL's contribution to fashion entrepreneurship in Ghana, drawing on the facilitators' insights.

5.1| WEL as a Platform for Real-World Learning

The analysis of facilitators' perspectives clearly positions WEL as a critical mechanism for bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and the complex realities of the fashion industry. This aligns with the central tenet of Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT), which asserts that learners build knowledge most effectively through direct, meaningful engagement with authentic tasks (Zaretsky, 2021; Mishra, 2023). Facilitators' descriptions of WEL as a "structured practical attachment" and a "chance for the student to move from classroom theory to actual corporate and manufacturing settings" reflect the CLT focus on contextualised learning, in which students are not passive recipients but active constructors of meaning (Zajda, 2021). Analytically, this finding challenges the sufficiency of classroom-based pedagies in technical and vocational education, particularly for disciplines such as fashion design that require both creative problem-solving and business acumen. The facilitators' consensus is that WEL allows students to develop hybrid skillsets, technical, creative, and entrepreneurial, that are best nurtured through situated learning experiences (Jones et al., 2021). This supports the argument that knowledge and skills in TVET contexts are context-dependent and socially mediated, underscoring the limitations of decontextualised, theory-heavy instruction (Njenga, 2026). Furthermore, facilitators observed that students' exposure to the unpredictability and dynamism of the workplace fosters adaptive expertise. This observation aligns with the CLT model, which posits that reflective engagement with complex, real-life situations promotes deeper learning and greater adaptability. The "erratic corporate environments" referenced by facilitators serve as catalysts for critical reflection and iterative learning, key processes in CLT frameworks (Fosnot, 2013). The evidence from this study suggests that WEL's effectiveness stems not simply from the opportunity for practice but from the structured immersion in the authentic settings where fashion industry norms, challenges, and innovations are encountered. This immersion compels students to move beyond rote application of classroom knowledge and instead engage in higher-order cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Zajda, 2021). Consequently, the facilitators' accounts reinforce the theoretical proposition that meaningful, context-rich experiences are indispensable for the development of professional competence in TVET. The findings highlight a need for policymakers and curriculum designers to continue emphasising experiential, constructivist-aligned approaches in fashion design education, ensuring that WEL remains central to both skill acquisition and professional socialisation (Jackson et al., 2022).

5.2| Developing entrepreneurial identity

The findings demonstrate that Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) plays a fundamental role in fostering entrepreneurial identity among HND fashion design students, and this can be situated within the framework of Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT) and related identity development literature. Facilitators consistently described how WEL nurtures core entrepreneurial competencies such as confidence, decision-making, initiative, and adaptability by requiring students to manage tasks independently, make real-time business decisions, and reflect critically on their outcomes (Mensah et al., 2026). These processes move beyond passive knowledge acquisition and exemplify the constructivist

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principle that learners construct understanding and develop professional identities through authentic, situated experiences (Singh et al., 2025; Lavina et al., 2020). For instance, facilitators highlighted practical entrepreneurial tasks embedded in WEL pricing, client handling, and production scheduling that mirror actual business operations in the fashion industry. This aligns with the notion where learners gradually assume more central, entrepreneurial roles within professional communities of practice (Fosnot, 2013). The process of negotiating responsibilities and initiating projects, such as launching a menswear brand on Instagram or starting a kente fusion collection, illustrates how WEL operates as a transformative context for identity construction. Through these first-hand experiences, students begin to view themselves not merely as technical practitioners, but as proactive creators and entrepreneurs, a transition supported by CLT's assertion that identity and learning are deeply intertwined (Mensah et al., 2026). The evidence also aligns with broader literature on entrepreneurship education, which suggests that exposure to real-world challenges and authentic roles is pivotal to cultivating entrepreneurial intentions and identities (Yadav et al., 2026). The facilitators' examples of students who launched businesses or brand projects during their WEL placements highlight the program's impact in bridging formal education and entrepreneurial practice, thereby contributing to the development of job creators rather than just job seekers. WEL functions as more than a technical training ground; it is a crucible for the formation of entrepreneurial identity. The constructivist learning theory provides a robust framework for understanding how meaningful engagement in real-world contexts transforms students' self-perceptions and future aspirations within the fashion industry (Fosnot, 2013).

5.3| The Mentoring Gap

The findings reveal a significant "mentoring gap" within Workplace Experience Learning (WEL), highlighting the uneven nature of student support and its consequences for learning and skill development. From a constructivist perspective, effective scaffolding and mentorship are foundational for guiding learners through complex, real-world challenges and supporting the co-construction of knowledge (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). Facilitators' accounts indicate that while some students benefited from active, engaged mentors who provided meaningful feedback and opportunities for reflection, others, especially those placed in informal or family-run businesses, received limited guidance and were restricted in their tasks. This variability in mentoring directly impacts the degree to which students can engage in higher-order thinking, adapt to new situations, and integrate academic and industry knowledge. Where robust mentoring was present, facilitators observed a stronger alignment between academic objectives and workplace demands, particularly in areas like costing and customer service. This reflects the constructivist principle that expert guidance enables learners to bridge the gap between what they can do independently and what they can achieve with support. Conversely, insufficient mentoring led to missed opportunities for business learning and personal growth, undermining WEL's potential as a transformative, identity-building experience (Syafrudin & Purwanto, 2025). Students in environments lacking adequate mentorship struggled to participate fully or benefit from authentic work experiences, often relegated to routine or peripheral tasks. This not only restricts skill acquisition but also limits the development of entrepreneurial identity and agency, key goals of WEL and of constructivist-informed education (Zajda, 2021). These findings underscore the necessity for intentional mentor preparation and placement strategies in WEL programs. Ensuring consistent, high-quality mentorship is critical for realising the full benefits of experiential, constructivist learning and for supporting students' transition from theory to professional competence and entrepreneurial self-concept.

5.4| Monitoring and Resource Constraints

The challenges of monitoring and resource limitations, as identified by facilitators, directly impede the realisation of constructivist learning principles within WEL. According to Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT), effective learning arises from dynamic guidance, continuous feedback, and opportunities for reflection as learners engage with authentic tasks (Zaretsky, 2021). Facilitators' reflections, such as "the workload of faculty limits the depth of supervision we can offer," and the call for "more engagement seminars and travel help to visit remote placements," highlight how institutional and logistical constraints undermine the scaffolding essential for guiding students through challenging, real-world experiences (Syafrudin & Purwanto, 2025). When supervision is inconsistent due to heavy faculty workloads or insufficient mobility support, the "zone of proximal development," where learners can achieve more with guidance than on their own, remains underutilised (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). Moreover, the absence of effective digital tracking tools and limitations on site visits mean students may not receive the formative assessment or timely feedback required for deep reflection and meaning-making. As a result, students are at risk of disengagement or misinterpreting key lessons, inhibiting the internalisation of knowledge and skills that should result from immersive workplace exposure (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). This shortfall

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weakens the transformative power of WEL, as reflective learning is curtailed without consistent interaction and support. Therefore, aligning with the tenets of constructivist learning theory, the study underscores that adequate resource allocation for supervision, mobility, and digital monitoring is not merely logistical but fundamentally pedagogical. Addressing these constraints is critical to ensuring that WEL achieves its intended outcomes: facilitating authentic engagement, supporting reflective practice, and fostering the holistic development of students' professional and entrepreneurial identities (Zajda, 2021).

5.5| Academic and Industry Gap

The findings reveal a persistent gap between academic expectations and industry practices regarding the implementation of WEL, directly challenging the constructivist ideal of active, meaningful participation in authentic learning environments. According to Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT), students should not only be present in real-world settings but should also engage in purposeful activities, receive guided mentorship, and participate in reflective processes that foster deep learning and identity formation (Zajda, 2021). However, facilitators reported that host companies sometimes view students as additional labour rather than as learners, neglecting their educational responsibilities and providing minimal mentoring or structured learning opportunities. This misalignment is evident in facilitators' observations: students often feel "treated more like assistants than students," and some businesses are "too small to provide proper training." The absence of adequate mentoring and documentation, along with a lack of collaboration between faculty and industry, undermines students' ability to take responsibility for their learning. Without shared deliverables or clear educational objectives, the co-construction of knowledge, a cornerstone of constructivist pedagogy, is compromised (Fosnot, 2013). The facilitators' recommendations for curricular reform are firmly grounded in constructivist principles. Suggestions such as embedding entrepreneurship and reflective projects into WEL assessment, requiring business-plan development, and facilitating co-designed, project-based activities between faculty and industry partners aim to make WEL more than a passive experience (Fosnot, 2013). These changes would more fully realise CLT's emphasis on experiential, individualised learning, where students are encouraged to reflect, solve real-world problems, and develop entrepreneurial mindsets (Mensah et al., 2026). Moreover, the call for preplacement instruction on entrepreneurship and professionalism addresses the need for students to be better prepared to navigate complex industry environments and to seek out learning opportunities proactively, in line with CLT's focus on learner autonomy and agency (Mensah et al., 2026).

5.6| Proposed Reforms: Repositioning WEL as an Incubator

The vision of WEL as a startup launchpad marks a significant evolution in the role of experiential learning within technical and vocational education. It aligns strongly with constructivist learning theory's emphasis on active, student-centred engagement. Facilitators' aspirations for WEL to serve as an incubator for student-led fashion businesses reflect the CLT principle that authentic, meaningful participation in real-world tasks not only builds skills but also fosters innovation, agency, and entrepreneurial identity (Dianova & Citraro, 2022). By reimagining WEL as more than a traditional internship, transforming it into a structured environment where students can prototype business ideas, test products, and develop enterprise confidence, institutions position students as creators and problem-solvers rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This approach embodies the constructivist belief that learners construct new understandings by acting on their environment and reflecting on those experiences (Fosnot, 2013). Facilitators' calls for greater structure and support underscore the need for guided scaffolding, another cornerstone of CLT, to help students move from initial experimentation to sustainable business ventures (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). When WEL is framed as a launchpad, students are empowered to take ownership of their learning and future career paths, consistent with the constructivist goal of cultivating lifelong learners and innovators (Mensah et al., 2026). Implementing this vision would require curricular and organisational adjustments, including integrating business incubator components, entrepreneurship mentorship, and assessment frameworks that value innovation and enterprise development. Such reforms would not only bridge the gap between education and industry but also realise WEL's transformative potential as a catalyst for youth employment and economic growth.

6 | CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) in Ghana's HND fashion design TVET programmes is a critical bridge between academic preparation and professional practice, supporting the development of both technical and entrepreneurial skills. The analysis, grounded in constructivist and experiential learning theories, underscores the transformative potential of WEL when students are

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actively engaged, well-mentored, and provided with reflective opportunities in authentic work environments. However, significant challenges persist, including inconsistent mentoring and monitoring, resource limitations, disconnects between academic and industry expectations, and underutilization of WEL as an innovation platform. Addressing these gaps is essential for maximising the educational and economic impact of WEL in the fashion sector. The study further proposes the following recommendations.

- Integrate structured reflective practice into the WEL curriculum, ensuring students systematically analyse and document their workplace experiences to deepen learning and bridge theory with practice.
- Embed entrepreneurial tasks such as business plan development, client management, and brand prototyping into WEL assessments to foster entrepreneurial thinking and identity among students.
- Establish formal mentor training and clear guidelines for industry partners to ensure consistent, high-quality mentoring and scaffolding across all placements.
- Invest in digital monitoring tools and provide logistical support for faculty site visits to enable continuous supervision, timely feedback, and effective student engagement during placements.
- Foster collaborative curriculum design between academic institutions and industry partners, ensuring shared educational objectives, meaningful deliverables, and alignment of expectations for student learning.
- Develop WEL incubator initiatives that provide students with targeted support to launch real business ventures during their attachments, transforming WEL into a genuine launchpad for youth entrepreneurship.

7 | LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights into facilitators' perspectives on the competency of Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) in HND Fashion Design TVET programs in Ghana, certain limitations must be addressed to place the findings in a proper context. First, the study relied solely on facilitators' views. Although facilitators play a primary role in directing, overseeing, and evaluating students during their workplace attachments, their perspective represents only one dimension of the WEL experience. The absence of student perspectives and industry mentors' insights introduces potential bias by excluding the lived experiences of learners and employers' expectations, both of which shape WEL outcomes. These groups might have provided a more holistic understanding of how WEL operates in practice and its influence on skill and entrepreneurial development. Second, the research's geographical scope was a limitation. The study was conducted at four public technical universities selected to reflect regional diversity. Even though this approach is more representative, the result may not fully apply to all TVET institutions in Ghana, particularly private colleges, informal apprenticeship systems, or specialised design academies that often operate under different conditions. As such, the generalizability of the findings is somewhat limited.

Third, the research focused on facilitators' views at a specific time. This is a temporal limitation, meaning the study could not evaluate the long-term effects of WEL on students' career outcomes, such as entrepreneurship, employability, or business sustainability. A longitudinal approach could have been more effective in tracing how WEL experiences evolved into real entrepreneurial businesses or sustained careers in the fashion sector over time. Again, the study was influenced by practical resource constraints. The inability to capture certain institutions and technological limitations influenced the breadth of data collection. These limitations may have restricted the consideration of diverse perspectives that could have enriched the results. Irrespective of these limitations, the research suggests an important outcome for understanding WEL in Ghana's HND Fashion Design programmes. Acknowledging these constraints also opens avenues for further research that can address the identified gaps and build on the insights presented here.

8 | SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Building on the insights and limitations identified in this study, several directions for future research are recommended to broaden and deepen the understanding of Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) in HND Fashion Design TVET programmes in Ghana. First, future studies should seek to incorporate multiple perspectives, including those of students and industry mentors. By gathering data directly from learners

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in WEL placements, as well as from employers and industry supervisors, researchers can develop a more comprehensive and balanced picture of how WEL operates and its impact on skill acquisition, professional identity, and entrepreneurial outcomes. Triangulating these viewpoints will help to mitigate bias and reveal factors that may not be visible from the facilitator's standpoint alone. Second, expanding the geographical and institutional scope of research is essential. Further studies should include private TVET institutions, informal apprenticeship systems, and specialised design academies. Exploring the dynamics of WEL in diverse educational and industry contexts will improve the generalizability of findings and capture the variation in challenges, resources, and opportunities faced by different stakeholders across Ghana's fashion education landscape.

Third, longitudinal research designs are needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of WEL. Tracking students over time from their participation in WEL through to their career trajectories would offer valuable insights into how workplace learning translates into entrepreneurship, sustained employment, and business growth. Such studies could also investigate the lasting influence of WEL on graduates' adaptability, innovation, and professional development. Finally, future research should leverage technological tools for data collection and analysis and explore the impact of digital monitoring and support systems on the effectiveness of WEL supervision and student engagement. Overcoming resource and logistical barriers through innovative methodologies could enhance the robustness and reach of subsequent studies.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting this study's findings were collected through qualitative interviews; hence, data are not available to ensure full participant confidentiality.

ETHICAL APPROVAL STATEMENT

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at KNUST approved the set of questions prior to data collection. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study; therefore, their consent was obtained before they proceeded to answer the interview questions. Also, the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were assured.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilised ChatGPT(OpenAi) as a language-support tool of the manuscript. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

ORCID

Phyllis Mensah - https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9372-4767
Harry Barton Essel - https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7232-3640
Akosua Tachie-Menson - https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6727-4151
Benjamin Tawiah - https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1756-8965
Abena Okyerewa Siaw - https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3219-3568

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Phyllis Mensah (PhD) is a passionate fashion design educator with over 20 years of experience in both the classroom and the industry. She has a lifelong passion for fashion and a dedication to fostering the future generation of fashion designers. She holds a Master of Technology and Philosophy in fashion design and textiles. As a fashion design educator at University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (USTED), she is dedicated to providing a comprehensive fashion education that combines traditional techniques with contemporary practices. Her teaching philosophy emphasises creativity and critical thinking, preparing students for the dynamic fashion industry.

Harry Barton Essel (PhD) is an Associate Professor at KNUST, specialising in Art Design and Educational Technology. With a multidisciplinary focus, he contributes to Publishing Studies and Integrated Rural Art and Industry. His PhD in Art Education explored electronic submission systems and advanced institutional repositories. He has held leadership roles, including Head of Department and PI of the UNIHUBS Project Ghana, both of which have enhanced digital literacy and employability. His research spans AI chatbots in higher education, machine learning models, educational data science, cyberpsychology, computational thinking, and hybrid learning models. Passionate about youth development, he also teaches programming to children, fostering innovation and creativity.

Akosua Tachie-Menson (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology, Faculty of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. Regarding educational qualifications, I completed my secondary education at St. Monica's Senior High School. Subsequently, I pursued a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art (Painting) and a Doctor of Philosophy in Art Education at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, both in Kumasi, Ghana. My research areas are Higher Education, Instructional Design/ Design and Production of Instructional Resources, Art Education, Teacher Education, Educational Research, General Education, Instructional Media, and Teaching and Learning.

Benjamin Tawiah (PhD) is a senior lecturer in the Department of Industrial Art (Fashion and Textiles), at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). He holds a B.A. Industrial Art (Textiles), KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana, Postgraduate Diploma in Management Information Systems, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Accra, Ghana, Master of Engineering in Textile Engineering from Jiangnan University, China, and a PhD in Textile and Clothing Technology from

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the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests focus on sustainable polymer nanomaterial composites, sustainable textile colouration and sustainable fashion.

Abena Okyerewa Siaw is a fashion educator who mentors and inspires future fashion innovators by developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills through academic knowledge and hands-on experiences. She holds a Master's Degree in Art Education, a Master of Fine Art in Textile Design, and an MPhil in Fashion Design, with research interests in Vocational Education and Sustainability in the Fashion Industry. With a multifaceted background, she equips students with the necessary skills to navigate the industry's dynamic nature, emphasising ethical sourcing, manufacturing processes, and product life cycles. She is dedicated to fostering creativity, innovation, and technical expertise in students while emphasising sustainability in the fashion industry.