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FASHION ILLUSTRATION AS A VISUAL-COMMUNICATIVE TOOL FOR DEVELOPING DESIGN THINKING AND PROJECT-BASED COMPETENCE IN FUTURE DESIGNERS

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Abstract. *The article explores fashion illustration as an important visual communication tool for developing design thinking and project competencies among future designers in contemporary design education. The study analyses the role of fashion illustration in the professional training of design students, particularly in visualising creative ideas, conceptual exploration, and the development of design solutions. Special attention is paid to traditional artistic techniques, such as hand drawing and sketching, which foster visual perception, creative imagination, and artistic expression. The findings demonstrate that the systematic use of fashion illustration in the educational process enhances students' creative and imaginative thinking, supports the development of project-based competencies, and improves visual communication skills essential for professional design practice. The study highlights the pedagogical potential of fashion illustration as an effective tool for developing creative competencies and supporting the professional training of future designers.*

Introduction. In contemporary cultural and educational contexts, design is increasingly understood not only as an artistic practice but also as a mode of thinking that integrates creative, analytical, and communicative processes. The growing importance of visual culture has significantly influenced approaches to the professional training of future designers, particularly through the integration of visual thinking, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary teaching methods [8].

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Within this context, fashion illustration plays an important role in the development of designers' professional competencies. As a form of visual communication, it enables designers to convey the concept of a garment and explore form, composition, and stylistic solutions, combining artistic interpretation with project logic within the design process.

Research in design thinking emphasises the importance of sketching in generating creative ideas and developing conceptual thinking. Cross (2001) argues that design activity involves a specific mode of knowledge that integrates analytical and visual forms of thinking, enabling designers to model future objects at the stage of idea visualisation [6]. Similarly, Goldschmidt (1991; 2006) highlights that sketching serves as a key tool for developing design concepts and stimulating the search for innovative solutions [9; 10]. In design education, sketching therefore functions not only as a representational technique but also as a cognitive instrument that supports the development of design thinking. Project-based learning further contributes to the development of practical design skills, creativity, and students' ability to solve design problems independently [3, 15, 16]. Recent research in fashion design education highlights the growing role of visual tools in designer training. Studies by Kim (2014) demonstrate that the use of fashion illustration in the educational process supports the development of students' creative potential and individual design style [12]. Hur (2025) also shows that systematic practice in fashion illustration enhances the professional expressiveness of students' design solutions [11].

Despite these contributions, the pedagogical role of fashion illustration as a visual communication tool for developing design thinking and project competencies among future designers remains insufficiently explored. Existing studies mainly focus on the artistic and aesthetic aspects of fashion illustration or on sketching techniques, whereas its pedagogical potential for fostering students' project-oriented thinking requires further investigation. This study, therefore, examines fashion illustration as a visual communication tool that supports the development of design thinking and project competencies in contemporary design education.

This study aims to examine fashion illustration as a visual communication tool for developing design thinking and project competencies in future designers within contemporary design education. Particular attention is given to the pedagogical potential of fashion illustration in fostering students' visual thinking, enhancing their creative abilities, and integrating traditional artistic techniques into design practice. The novelty of this study lies in considering fashion illustration not only as an artistic method of visual representation but also as a pedagogical tool that supports the development of design thinking and project-based competencies in design education.

Main material. In contemporary design education, the development of design thinking is considered a fundamental component of professional training, as it integrates creativity, analytical reasoning, and project-based problem solving. An important tool for developing these competencies is fashion illustration, which enables students to visualise design ideas, experiment with form, and create conceptual representations of design solutions. Fashion illustration plays an important role in the design process as a form of visual communication [8]. It enables designers to convey the concept of a garment and represent essential design features, including silhouette, fabric texture, and stylistic elements of a collection. In this way, it facilitates communication between the designer, the client, and the potential consumer. Moreover, fashion illustration allows designers not only to present design concepts but also to explore different forms, proportions, and decorative elements, making it an effective tool for conceptual exploration and creative experimentation. Particular attention in design research is paid to the role of sketching in the creative process. Goldschmidt (1991) argues that sketching is a key tool in the development of design ideas, enabling designers to visualise and refine concepts during the creative process [9]. Therefore, sketching and visual illustration play an essential role in design education, as they enable students to externalise ideas and engage in iterative creative exploration. Subsequent studies emphasise that sketches function as a medium for exploring alternative design solutions and supporting conceptual development during the design process [10]. In particular, research indicates that sketching helps designers externalise ideas and generate new insights while developing a design concept [10, 17]. For this reason, sketching is widely used in design education as a methodological tool for developing students' visual thinking and creative design skills.

The development of design thinking and project competencies among future designers has been widely discussed in contemporary pedagogy and design theory [13]. Numerous studies address cognitive processes in design activity, the role of visual thinking in the creative process, and the implementation of project-based learning in the professional training of designers [14]. Cross (2001) developed the theoretical foundations of design thinking, describing design as a distinct mode of knowledge that integrates analytical and visual forms of thinking [6]. A similar perspective is supported by Dym et al. (2005), who emphasise the importance of integrating creative and engineering approaches in the design process to generate innovative solutions [7]. An important area of contemporary research concerns the implementation of project-based learning in design education. Barrows (1996) defines problem-based learning as an effective educational approach that supports the development of practical professional skills and fosters students' critical thinking [3]. Similar conclusions are presented in the works of Chabanna (2023),

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Lutsenko (2018), and Lysenko (2024), who demonstrate that project-based activities facilitate the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical experience and contribute to students' readiness for professional practice [5, 15, 16]. Within this context, particular attention is also given to the development of visual thinking as a foundation of creative design activity. Research by Tversky (2011) shows that visualising ideas functions as an important cognitive tool that supports analysis and the generation of new design solutions [17]. In design education, sketching plays a key role in visual exploration, helping designers externalise ideas, experiment with form, and refine design concepts during the creative process [10]. In this sense, sketching not only functions as a visual representation technique but also as a cognitive mechanism that supports the development and transformation of design ideas during the creative process.

Another important area of research concerns the role of fashion illustration in the development of designers' professional competencies. Kim (2014) emphasises that the use of fashion illustration in the educational process contributes to the development of students' creative potential and the formation of their individual design style [12]. Hur (2025) also indicates that working with fashion illustration helps students communicate design ideas more effectively and strengthens their professional competencies [11]. In the educational process, fashion illustration is applied at different stages of project development. At the initial stage, fashion illustration helps define a garment concept and establish its main compositional features. During the development stage, it enables designers to refine form, proportions, and decorative elements. At the final stage, presentation illustrations communicate the overall stylistic idea of the collection. Practical learning tasks aimed at creating fashion sketches and illustrations play a particularly important role in the development of design thinking. They encourage students to engage in iterative cycles of ideation, visualisation, and refinement that characterise the design thinking process. At the same time, these activities allow students to explore different stylistic approaches and experiment with body proportions, colour solutions, and decorative elements of a garment design. Through sketching, students not only practise artistic techniques but also develop conceptual thinking and strengthen their skills in the visual analysis of design solutions.

An example of such learning activities is a series of fashion collection sketches created by students of the Faculty of Art and Graphic Design (Figure 1). The presented works combine various artistic techniques, including collage, linear graphic drawing, and the use of markers and liners, which enhance the visual expressiveness of the images and emphasise the stylistic characteristics of the design concept.



Fig. 1. **A series of fashion illustrations (markers, liners)**

*Source: author's educational practice (2025), Ushynsky University,
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The analysis of the presented works indicates that the use of various artistic techniques enables students to effectively convey the plastic characteristics of form, the dynamics of the silhouette, and the decorative elements of clothing. Through the creation of such illustrations, students develop an understanding of composition, colour harmony, and line rhythm, which are essential elements of the design process. The presented examples also demonstrate the students' ability to interpret design ideas visually and experiment with stylistic solutions. The combination of different graphic techniques enhances visual expressiveness and allows students to explore alternative design approaches. Moreover, producing a series of sketches fosters iterative design thinking by encouraging designers to develop multiple alternative solutions from a single concept. This approach allows students to investigate the potential of a design idea more thoroughly and identify the most effective compositional solutions.

The practice of integrating fashion illustration into the educational process shows that systematic work with sketches contributes to the development of students' creative thinking, the formation of an individual design style, and the enhancement of their professional competencies. Thus, the systematic use of fashion illustration in design education supports the development of design thinking, the formation of project competencies, and the preparation of future designers for professional activity in the contemporary fashion industry.

Conclusion. The findings show that the use of fashion illustration in the educational process contributes to the development of key project competencies among future designers, including creative thinking, visual communication, and the ability to analyse and present design solutions. Practical experience in the use of fashion illustration in the learning process confirms that the development of sketch series and illustrative concepts of fashion collections contributes to the formation of flexible thinking, the development of an individual design style, and

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the ability to engage in creative design practice. As a result, students not only master artistic techniques but also develop systematic design thinking necessary for professional activity in the contemporary fashion industry. Thus, fashion illustration can be considered an important pedagogical tool that integrates artistic, communicative, and project-based functions and supports the comprehensive development of professional competencies among future designers.

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