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Professional garment repair education in Finland

Fashion and Textile Design
Master's Thesis

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Abstract:

Extending product lifetimes through repair is a central strategy in the circular economy. However, professional education in garment repair and alteration remains limited in Finland. In Finland, garment repair professionals are primarily trained as bespoke dressmakers, sewing professionals, or tailors, as no dedicated qualification exists for garment repair and alteration. This thesis explores Finnish garment repair professionals' perceptions of (1) how well current education meets the practical needs of working life and (2) the skill and training needs professionals identify within the sector.

Data were collected through a survey conducted between 4 and 27 February 2026, yielding 184 responses. After exclusions, 155 responses from vocationally qualified respondents were analysed. Quantitative multiple-choice responses were analysed statistically, while qualitative data from open comment fields were examined through inductive content analysis.

The findings suggest that current vocational education does not adequately meet the practical needs of the sector. Repair and alteration competencies appear to be developed largely through internships and work experience rather than formal education. Respondents also perceived sewing and garment-making education to have weakened in recent years, negatively affecting the development of repair and alteration competencies.

Alteration was generally perceived to be better supported in education than repair, although demand for additional training was strong in both areas, particularly at the beginning of a professional career. Specific training needs included material-based repair, knitwear repair, men's suits, leather garments, and evening gowns. Additional education was widely expected to improve work efficiency and profitability. Clear needs were also identified in business-related competencies, particularly pricing and profitability management.

The thesis highlights the need to further develop vocational education to better respond to the realities of the garment repair sector and suggests exploring repair-oriented online learning solutions, as well as strengthening professional knowledge exchange and peer learning in the field.

Keywords: clothes repair, mending, extending clothing lifespan, garment repair and alteration service, circular economy, vocational education and training



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Tiivistelmä:

Tuotteiden käyttöiän pidentäminen korjaamisen avulla on keskeinen strategia kiertotaloudessa. Vaatteiden korjaamiseen ja muokkaamiseen kohdennettu koulutus on kuitenkin Suomessa vähäistä. Suomessa vaatteiden korjausalan ammattilaiset ovat pääasiassa mittatilausompelijoita, ompelijoita ja räätäleitä, sillä vaatteiden korjaamiseen ja muokkaamiseen ei ole omaa tutkintoa. Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan suomalaisten vaatteiden korjausalan ammattilaisten näkemyksiä siitä, (1) kuinka hyvin nykyinen koulutus vastaa työelämän käytännön tarpeisiin sekä (2) millaisia osaamis- ja koulutustarpeita alan ammattilaiset tunnistavat.

Aineisto kerättiin kyselyllä, joka toteutettiin 4.–27.2.2026 ja johon saatiin 184 vastausta. Poissulkujen jälkeen analyysiin sisällytettiin 155 ammatillisen koulutuksen suorittaneen vastaajan vastaukset. Monivalintavastaukset analysoitiin tilastollisin menetelmin, ja avointen kommenttikenttien laadullinen aineisto analysoitiin induktiivisen sisällönanalyysin avulla.

Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että nykyinen ammatillinen koulutus ei vastaa riittävästi alan käytännön tarpeisiin. Korjaus- ja muokkausosaaminen näyttäisi kehittyvän pääasiassa työharjoittelun ja työkokemuksen kautta muodollisen koulutuksen sijaan. Vastaajat kokivat myös, että ompelun ja vaatteiden valmistuksen koulutus on heikentynyt viime vuosina, mikä edelleen heikentää korjaus- ja muokkaustaitojen kehittymistä.

Muokkaustyön koettiin olevan koulutuksessa paremmin edustettuna kuin korjaustyön, mutta lisäkoulutuksen tarve oli vahva molemmilla osa-alueilla, erityisesti uran alkuvaiheessa. Tunnistettuja koulutustarpeita olivat erilaisten materiaalien korjaus, neulevaatteiden korjaus, miesten puvut, nahkavaatteet ja juh lamekot. Kehittämistarpeita tunnistettiin myös liiketoimintaosaamisessa, erityisesti hinnoittelussa ja kannattavuuden hallinnassa.

Tutkielma korostaa tarvetta kehittää ammatillista koulutusta vastaamaan paremmin vaatteiden korjausalan käytännön realiteetteja sekä ehdottaa verkkopohjaisten oppimISRatkaisujen sekä ammattilaisten tiedonvaihdon ja vertaisoppimisen vahvistamista.

Avainsanat: vaatehuolto, korjausompelu, paikkaus, kiertotalous, kestävä kehitys, ammatillinen koulutus

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Preface

First of all, I want to thank my partner, Markus, who encouraged me to complete the master's programme and write this thesis. Without your support and belief in me, I would not have completed this thesis.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Johanna Oksanen, for all the guidance and support throughout the process. Thanks also to Elina Korri, Veera Jussila, Auri Kohola (STJM), Mialeena Pärssinen (EDUFI), Johanna Räsänen (EDUFI), and Mari Rantanen (Statistics Finland) for your valuable input and contributions to this thesis.

I would also like to thank all the garment repair professionals who participated in the survey for this thesis. Without your input, this thesis would not have been possible. Lastly, I would like to express my deepest thanks to Tex-Inno for supporting this thesis.

Oulu, May 2026

Maria Manninen

1 Introduction

Repair is a key component of the circular economy and plays a crucial role in product lifetime extension (PLE), as it enables faulty or damaged products to return to use. In this sense, repair is considered a higher-value circular strategy than recycling, as it preserves a product's original function and embedded value rather than requiring the breakdown and reprocessing of materials, as recycling does. (Bakker, 2024, pp. 17–18; Potting et al., 2017, pp. 4–5)

Extending garment lifetimes has become a widely recognized objective in research on sustainable clothing use and consumption (e.g. Dao & Joyner Martinez, 2024; Laitala & Klepp, 2018; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Wiedemann et al., 2023). At the same time, shortcomings in the current garment repair infrastructure have been identified (Berninger et al., 2024; Manoochehri et al., 2022), and investment in repair infrastructure has been recognized as essential in supporting the transition to a genuinely circular textile economy (Bhatnagar et al., 2025). A well-functioning repair sector depends on the availability of skilled professionals, making education a fundamental component in supporting the development of the sector. For this reason, examining professional education related to garment repair is both timely and necessary.

Professional education specifically tailored to garment repair is currently very limited in Finland, which raises the question of whether professionals working in the field receive sufficiently relevant training. This study therefore examines how well current education meets the practical needs of garment repair professionals in Finland, identifies potential skill gaps, and evaluates possible development needs within vocational education and training (VET). In doing so, the thesis aims to contribute to the potentially necessary development of garment repair-oriented education in Finland.

In practice, garment repair professionals in Finland are trained professionals in garment making and sewing, such as bespoke dressmakers, tailors, and sewing professionals. No dedicated educational pathway currently exists for garment repair and alteration as a distinct professional specialisation. Garment repair services are primarily provided by sole entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises, both in Finland (Ahlstrand, 2024; Nieminen, 2023; Väinämö, 2017) and across Europe (Manoochehri et al., 2022, pp. 32–33).

No broader international review of garment repair education appears to have been conducted, nor was it within the scope of this study to carry out a systematic international comparison. However, some examples suggest that more specialised educational pathways do exist

elsewhere. In Germany, an official vocational training programme specifically focused on clothing repair and alteration is available (Federal Ministry for Education, n.d.). In France, the *School of Repair*, specialising in clothing and shoe repair education, was launched in September 2025 (Gabrielson, 2026). A broader international review would be valuable in order to better understand the educational conditions across Europe.

The repair sector is widely recognised as facing profitability challenges (Frisk, 2023; Berninger et al., 2024; Manoochehri et al., 2022). In craft-based professions, profitability is closely linked to skill level, work speed, and efficient working methods. In garment repair and alteration, one of the key challenges lies in the limited potential for standardisation and repetition. Unlike mass production, repair work involves a wide variety of unique and often unpredictable tasks, making it more difficult to establish highly efficient, routine-based workflows. (Frisk, 2023, p. 48) As a result, the quality of education may have a direct impact on profitability, as insufficient skills can reduce efficiency and productivity, thereby weakening business viability. For this reason, it is particularly important to examine whether education could play a role in supporting the economic sustainability of the sector as well.

One reason for the sector's profitability challenges lies in the declining price of clothing, which weakens the competitiveness of repair in comparison to purchasing new garments. Research suggests that the lower the purchase price of a product, the less consumers are willing to pay for repair (e.g. Karell & Niinimäki, 2025; Laitala et al., 2021; McQueen et al., 2023). Consumer goods are often manufactured in countries with low labour costs, while repair services are provided in countries where labour costs are significantly higher (Cooper & Salvia, 2018).

Research specifically focused on professional garment repair education appears to be extremely limited. Within the scope of this study, no directly comparable research from Finland or international contexts was identified. However, at the same time, research related to garment repair and care has increased significantly in recent years, suggesting growing recognition of the topic's importance. Research topics include, for example, consumers' interest in using repair services (e.g. Karell & Niinimäki, 2025; Zhang & Hale, 2022), consumers' repair and care skills, habits and motivations (e.g. Gwilt, 2021; Kettunen et al., 2025; Laitala et al., 2021; Laitala & Klepp, 2018, 2019; McNeill et al., 2020; McQueen et al., 2023; McQueen, McNeill, Huang, et al., 2022; McQueen, McNeill, Kozłowski, et al., 2022; Norum, 2013; Potdar et al., 2024), repairability of garments (Sigaard, 2025) and state of garment repair services (Jiang et al., 2025).

The motivation for conducting this study stems from my own professional background in garment care. In 2018, I founded in Finland a company specialising in textile and leather care

and restoration. In 2020 I co-authored the book *Huolla* (Gummerus), a handbook on garment, shoe, and leather care. This professional background has contributed to the identification of the research problem and to an interest in the development of the field.

This thesis utilized OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) to support language editing, translation assistance, and the identification of relevant sources throughout the research process. The author takes full responsibility for all content and has reviewed the work in its entirety.

1.1 Research aim and questions

This thesis aims to explore the perceptions of garment repair professionals regarding the adequacy and potential development needs of garment repair-related education in Finland.

Research questions:

1. How does education meet the practical needs of garment repair professionals in Finland?
2. What kinds of skill and training needs do garment repair professionals identify within the sector in Finland?

Data to answer these questions is collected through a survey targeted at Finnish garment repair professionals. The methodology of the study is discussed more closely in Section 2.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Garment repair sector in Finland

Garment repair services are mainly provided by small sewing studios and tailoring shops in Finland. Repair services may also be offered by for example laundries and sewing-oriented retail shops. Also, many clothing brands provide repair services for their own products. However, most of the Finnish clothing brands offer the repair services through external repair service platform, which further subcontract the work to external sewing studios (Menddie, n.d.-a). This means, clothing brands "own" repair services are not usually separate from ordinary sewing studios.

There are two online service platforms for garment repair currently operating in Finland: Menddie and Vuota. These platforms aggregate garment repair and cobbler services into a single online marketplace, allowing consumers to purchase repairs online and send their items

by mail for repair (Menddie, n.d.-b; Vuota, n.d.). Thus, like clothing brands repair services, these platforms are not separate from ordinary sewing studios, or do not affect on the total amount of garment repair services in Finland.

Amount of garment repair services in Finland

In regards of the amount of garment repair services in Finland, there is no comprehensive statistical information available on the number of garment repair service providers in Finland. This is primarily because these enterprises are dispersed across several industry classifications (TOL), many of which include a wide range of other activities. As a result, statistics do not provide a clear overview of the sector, and thus, there is no list available of all garment repair services operating in Finland.

In the Finnish Standard Industrial Classification (TOL 2025), clothing repair and maintenance are included in the residual category 95290 Repair and maintenance of personal and household goods n.e.c., which also covers a wide range of other repair activities, such as the repair of bicycles and sports equipment (Statistics Finland, 2025b). In contrast, the repair and maintenance of footwear and leather goods have a distinct classification (Statistics Finland, 2008). According to Statistics Finland, the distinction stems from traditional differences in business activity: cobblers have typically specialised primarily in repair work, whereas sewing studios and tailoring shops have been regarded mainly as producers of new garments, with repair services forming only part of their activities (Mari Rantanen, personal communication, 11 February, 2026).

In addition, many sewing businesses appear to have chosen production-oriented categories such as TOL 14 Manufacture of wearing apparel (Statistics Finland, 2025a), as they also design and produce new garments besides repair work. This category, however, includes for example clothing brands and manufacturers as well. The mapping of clothing repair service providers is further complicated by the fact that repair services may also be offered by for example laundries and sewing-oriented retail shops – which, again, falls under different TOL-categories.

Finland's Standard Industrial Classification (TOL) is, in accordance with EU regulations, identical to the EU's NACE classification at the four-digit level, while NACE is in turn aligned with the United Nations' ISIC classification at the two-digit level. The Finnish TOL classification is five-tiered, with the fifth level reflecting national specificities. (Mari Rantanen, personal communication, 11 February, 2026) In practice, this means that when the fifth digit of the classification code is zero (0), Finland follows the same level of detail as the EU's NACE

classification and has not introduced a national subcategory (such as in 95290 Repair and maintenance of personal and household goods n.e.c). When the fifth digit is non-zero (1–9), Finland has subdivided the four-digit NACE category into more detailed five-digit national categories. (Mari Rantanen, personal communication, 11 February, 2026) Thus, in theory, it would be possible to create a separate category for garment repair within the Finnish TOL classification. This would constitute a subcategory of the four-digit class 9529 and would result in the following structure:

- 9529 Repair and maintenance of personal and household goods n.e.c.
- 95291 Repair and maintenance of garment
- 95292 Other repair and maintenance of personal and household goods n.e.c.

However, such classifications are introduced only when the activity is of significant national volume or policy relevance – typically requiring at least 50 enterprises whose principal activity falls within the category. To date, no such proposal has been made for clothing repair. (Mari Rantanen, personal communication, 11 February, 2026)

Despite the lack of precise statistical data, it is possible to approximate the scale of the sector through alternative sources. A company search conducted using the Fonecta Finder service identified 621 companies associated with the search term “*ompelimo*” (sewing studio). The search was done on 9th February 2026. The results indicate that “*ompelimo*” is a widely used designation among sewing service providers and many companies incorporate this term into their business names. The Fonecta Finder search retrieves the term from all textual fields in company profiles, including names, descriptions, and category labels.

To gain a deeper understanding of the field and to collect contact information for the survey, all 621 companies were manually reviewed. The range of actors proved highly diverse. Although time constraints prevented a systematic categorisation of all companies, several recurring characteristics were observed:

- Home-based sewing studios are common, particularly in smaller towns.
- Many businesses are sole proprietorships.
- Most companies offer both repair and alteration services in addition to dressmaking and/or tailoring.

- Fabric and sewing supply shops may also provide repair services.

Out of the 621 companies identified, 486 were considered relevant for this study after excluding clearly unrelated businesses. For comparison, the European estimate based on data from Germany is approximately one sewing professional per 10,000 inhabitants (Manoochehri et al., 2022, pp. 33–34). Applying this ratio to Finland’s preliminary population estimate of 5,650,933 inhabitants as of 23 April 2026 (Statistics Finland, 2026) suggests that there are approximately 565 sewing professionals in Finland.

These two figures are not directly comparable, as besides many garment repair businesses operate as sole proprietorships, others may employ additional staff or host freelancers working within the same premises. Consequently, the total number of individual sewing professionals is likely higher than the number of companies identified through Fonecta Finder. Nevertheless, the two estimates are of a similar magnitude. Taking the midpoint between them (566 and 486) yields approximately 526, which can be rounded to 530.

However, it must be considered that the figure from Fonecta Finder includes a substantial number of companies for which only minimal information – such as the company name and sewing related category – was available. In regards of the survey, the contact was nevertheless included on the distribution list as a precaution to gain as many respondents as possible. It was assumed that respondents in this type of survey would be capable of assessing the relevance of their participation. Moreover, it may be unlikely that busy sewing entrepreneurs would respond to a survey that does not pertain to their activities. Additionally, it was noticed that the search with Fonecta Finder lacked some companies, which again affects the reliability of the result. These lacking companies were added manually to the list of survey recipients.

1.2.2 Garment repair education in Finland

In Finland, garment repair and alteration are included within Qualification in Textiles and Fashion in vocational education and training (VET). Under the qualification it is possible to choose between ten specialization options, as for example a tailor, bespoke dressmaker or cobbler. Specialization option for garment repair and alteration is not offered. VET in Finland has three qualification levels: 1. Basic Vocational Qualification, 2. Further Vocational Qualification, and 3. Specialist Vocational Qualification. (Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI], 2025a, 2025b, 2026a)

Since 2018, after VET reform (see section 1.2.3), garment repair and alteration may have been selected as an optional module, which is 15 competence points (CP) for Basic Vocational Qualification (180 CP in total) (EDUFI, 2026) and 45 CP for Further Vocational Qualification (150 CP in total) (EDUFI, 2025a). Specialist Vocational Qualification (120 CP) does not offer garment repair and alteration related studies (EDUFI, 2025b).

The scope of the repair and alteration module in Further Vocational Qualification is prominent but as Further Vocational Qualification is primarily competence-based and the amount of contact teaching is often limited compared to basic vocational education, it may be less suitable for individuals seeking to acquire foundational skills prior to entering working life. Further Vocational Qualifications are generally intended for individuals who already possess prior work experience in the field. Consequently, learning is largely based on workplace learning and independent practice. Although formal employment is not strictly required, completing the qualification typically presupposes access to a workplace or similar environment in which vocational competences can be demonstrated in real work tasks. (EDUFI, 2025a; Omnia, n.d.; Stadin AO, n.d.)

Some institutions may offer additional possibilities to train repair and alteration skills during the Basic Qualification (Jaana Rantakoivu, personal communication, 12 December, 2025; Mia Turunen, personal communication, 10 December 2025). Thus, there may be some differences between educational institutions regarding the educational package, besides all follow the same qualification requirements defined by EDUFI. In addition, other modules within textile and fashion qualifications may include elements of garment repair and alteration, even though this is not explicitly specified in the qualification requirements. Modules related to garment construction and sewing further provide essential competences for repair and alteration. (Jaana Tamski, personal communication, 11 December, 2025; Päivi Mäkelä, personal communication, 10 December 2025).

Until 2009 clothing and textiles were separate qualifications at the Basic Qualification level (EDUFI, 2009). However, they remained separate at the further and specialist qualification levels until the reform in 2018 (EDUFI, 2018b, 2018a). During 2000–2009 there were one optional module (5 study weeks) within the Basic Vocational Qualification in the field of clothing dedicated to repair and alteration (EDUFI, 2000). Repair and alteration studies were not included in the Further Vocational Qualification or in the Specialist Vocational Qualification in clothing between 2005 and 2018 (EDUFI, 2005c, 2005d, 2017a, 2017b). Thus, education

possibilities related to repair and alteration have increased after VET reform as part of garment making related education.

In the textile sector, in contrast, two optional modules focusing on the care and repair of textiles were offered between 2005 and 2011/2014: one as part of the Further Vocational Qualification in Textiles until 2011 (EDUFI, 2005b, 2011) and another within the Specialist Vocational Qualification in Textiles until 2014 (EDUFI, 2005b, 2014). However, the scope of these modules is difficult to define, as both qualifications were competence-based, meaning that assessment was based on demonstrated skills rather than the duration of studies. Nevertheless, the qualification requirements suggest that these modules were relatively comprehensive.

In addition to vocational education, textiles and fashion can be studied at universities and Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. However, these higher education programmes primarily prepare students for roles in areas such as design, production, research, business, and marketing, whereas vocational education is more specifically oriented towards technically skilled, craft-based roles. (Finnish Textile & Fashion, n.d.).

1.2.3 Cost-cuttings and structural changes in vocational education

Vocational education and training (VET) has undergone significant cost-cuttings and structural changes over the past decade in Finland. First, major funding cuts of approximately 190 million euros were implemented between 2015 and 2017 (Alanko-Kahiluoto, 2018). This was followed by a comprehensive reform of VET. The reform introduced several structural and pedagogical changes. Its core elements included the introduction of individualized learning paths, a stronger emphasis on workplace-based learning, the integration of youth and adult education into a single system, and the implementation of a performance-based funding model (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a) More recently, new funding reductions of approximately 120 million euros were decided in 2024 and were being implemented from 2025 onwards, further shaping the operational conditions of vocational education (Kohola, 2024; Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö [OAJ], 2025)

In addition to these challenges, several parallel developments have further influenced especially craft-oriented VET. The integration of technical and textile crafts in basic education in 2016, together with a reduction in the overall amount of craft education in basic education, has influenced students' preparedness and interest in craft-related fields. Also, the time spent with mobile phones has increased, further disengaging young people. (Muurinen & Lukinmaa, 2025)

The extension of compulsory education from the age of 16 to the age of 18 in 2021 has created further challenges at the vocational schools as the student population has diversified and there are significantly more students with need of special support. Also, the need for demanding support is increasing. (Lamppu, 2026; Tapola & Lukinmaa, 2026) Behavioral problems, violence, and school dropout rates have increased in vocational schools in the 2020s as most of those who previously did not continue their education are now attending vocational schools (Miettinen et al., 2025).

The proportion of students requiring special support is higher in the textile and fashion field than in other fields in general. Since the extension of compulsory education in 2021, this proportion has increased by 11 percentage points (from 17% to 28%). In comparison, in other fields the increase has been 3 percentage points (from 11% to 14%) over the same period. (Mialeena Pärssinen, unpublished presentation, 12 March 2026) The relatively high proportion of students requiring special support in the textile and fashion field may be explained by the tendency of students who face challenges with theoretical studies to enter craft-based fields. Such fields may also be perceived as more supportive or rehabilitative learning environments for students requiring additional support. (Auri Kohola, personal communication, 21 April 2026)

Also, the number of non-native-speaking students is growing rapidly. In ten years, the number has more than doubled. Approximately one in five students is a non-native speaker. (Lamppu, 2026) The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), of course, also had a profound impact on teaching arrangements and learning environments (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021) However, as the demand for support is increasing, learning support is being reformed in vocational education in August 2026 with a goal to secure the adequate support for students in need of special and demanding support to complete studies (EDUFI, 2026a)

Overall, these simultaneous reforms and resource constraints have had challenging effects on vocational education, including in the textile and fashion sector. According to Finnish Textile & Fashion, recent government budget cuts have threatened vocational education in the textile and fashion in several educational institutions across Finland. The number of course modules offered has been reduced, teaching resources have been cut, and it has even been decided to completely discontinue training programs in the textile and fashion as part of cooperation negotiations among education providers. At the same time, increasing EU green legislation (see section 1.3.2) is creating new skill requirements within the textile and fashion sector, particularly in relation to circular economy – including skills related to product repair. (Kohola, 2024)

The effects of VET reform in vocational education

The reform fundamentally restructured all vocational qualifications. The number of qualifications was significantly reduced from approximately 360 to around 150, and the remaining qualifications were made broader and more competence based. This restructuring aimed to enable greater flexibility within qualifications and allow students to specialise through optional units rather than through narrowly defined programmes. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a)

In the textile and fashion sector, this meant that previously more specialised study paths were integrated into broader qualification structures to respond to the changing needs of the labour market and employers more effectively. However, while the reform created new opportunities for developing versatile competences, it also reduced the extent to which students could specialise deeply in specific areas during their initial training. (Finnish Tailors' Association, n.d.) The reform also contributed to the modernisation of curricula of the textile and fashion sector. New competences related to circular economy and sustainable development were incorporated into qualifications, reflecting broader changes in the industry (EDUFI, 2019, 2022).

One of the central features of the reform was the shift towards individualized learning through personal competence development plans (HOKS). This was thought to enable more flexible and competence-based learning pathways, allowing students to focus on acquiring only the skills they lack. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017b) Access to education was further improved through a rolling admissions system, enabling students to enrol throughout the year to complete either full qualifications or parts of them. However, practices regarding the rolling admissions system vary between institutions. Also, the national joint application system continues to serve primarily young people completing basic education. The new system sought to support lifelong learning and allow individuals to enter education at different stages of their careers. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017c)

While these approaches have increased flexibility and may shorten study durations, particularly for adult learners, they have also introduced new pedagogical challenges particularly in relation with the integration of youth and adult education. The integration of youth and adult education has resulted in increasingly heterogeneous student groups. Vocational classrooms may include students with diverse educational backgrounds, ages and support needs. This can make it more demanding for teachers to provide instruction that meets the needs of all students. (Palmu, 2019)

The reform and cost-cuttings together have decreased contact-teaching significantly across all fields. The reform shifted the focus of instruction from contact teaching towards workplace-based learning. One-third of educational institutions report having reduced contact teaching to save costs. According to the vocational teachers' union, contact teaching per degree program has decreased by an average of over 300 hours over the past decade, equivalent to approximately three months of study – and about 1,400 hours since the turn of the millennium. (Miettinen et al., 2025) According to AMKE, too much self-direction has been expected from students. There are both qualitative and quantitative shortcomings in the support and guidance provided to students regarding their studies. (Lamppu, 2026)

1.3 Theoretical context

1.3.1 Defining garment repair

Before defining garment repair, it is useful to first examine the broader concept of garment care to understand the role of repair within it. Garment care can be approached from both cultural and social perspectives – such as norms, etiquette, and values – as well as from technological and scientific perspectives, including material technology and care practices (Haugsrud et al., 2024, p. 48). However, this thesis concentrates on the technical aspects of garment care, focusing on how care is practically carried out and implemented.

A review of the literature on garment care indicates that the concept appears to lack a clear definition. Haugsrud et al. (2024) introduces activities related to laundry, repair, wearing and storage as practical forms of garment care and summarizes garment care through examples of different care activities:

“...a range of daily practices such as dressing and undressing, putting them away, dropping them or folding them neatly, and keeping them clean. There are several small nuances and subconscious hand movements, for example in how a zip is pulled up...” (Haugsrud et al., 2024, p. 51)

Nayak & Padhye (2015) approach the topic from the perspective of material technology, focusing on various failures and forms of damage that occur in garments and hinder their serviceability, thereby creating a need for different care activities. Factors such as pilling, abrasion, colour fading, snagging, stains and dimensional change are discussed. In addition, the book chapter addresses laundering practices, care labelling, and storage.

Garment care manuals (Kiuru et al., 2020; R. Nayak & Ratnapandian, 2018; Steamery, 2024; Teerisuo, 1952) seems to lack clear definition all together focusing solely on the instructions, tools and other information related to garment care.

Based on the sources above a following definition is suggested to shortly summarize the concept of garment care in this thesis: *Garment care encompasses all activities undertaken by consumers or care professionals that aim to extend a garment's lifespan by preventing and addressing degradation and failure, as well as by avoiding the premature disposal of garments and materials. These activities include, for example, washing and stain removal, repair and reinforcement, alteration and remake, protection and storage, as well as practices related to how garments are worn and used.*

Product care in general is discussed in a similar manner in the study by Ackermann et al. (2018), which examines consumers' perspectives on product care:

“...Thus we define the term product care, which does not only include repair and maintenance, but all activities initiated by the consumer that lead to the extension of a product's lifetime. These activities can be executed by the consumer him/herself or by a service. Product care goes beyond repair and maintenance, as it covers also preventive measures, such as protective covers for smartphones.”
(Ackermann et al., 2018, pp. 380–381)

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize the importance of design in relation to garment care, namely how care and repair possibilities are integrated during the design phase (van Nes & Cramer, 2005; Vezzoli & Manzini, 2008)

Care labels provided by manufacturers play a central role in garment care by assisting consumers and professional cleaning services in selecting appropriate care method (R. Nayak & Ratnapandian, 2018, p. 147). Textile care instructions are communicated through five standardized care symbols and their variations. These symbols follow the internationally recognised ISO 3758 standard and are derived from the GINETEX symbol system. Current care labelling primarily focuses on cleaning and ironing, while information related to repair and other forms of garment care remains absent. Instructions concerning repair or surface restoration, such as de-pilling, are voluntary for manufacturers. (Katri Pylkkänen, unpublished presentation, 14 November 2026)

Defining garment repair

In English, *mending* and *repair* are often used interchangeably when referring to garment repair. However, repair is the more commonly preferred term, including in textile-focused research,

even though mending is more specifically associated with textile-related practices. (Sekules, 2025, p. 902) Based on the related literature, mending is typically associated with hand-based repair practices (see Khounnoraj, 2024; Noguchi, 2020; Rodabaugh, 2018) whereas repair is more often used in connection with machine-based sewing practices (Lewallen, 2024; Singer, 1985).

Similar semantic distinctions can be observed in the Finnish language. The term "*parsinta*" (mending/darning) usually refers specifically to hand-based repair practices (see Teerisuo, 1952; Wikberg, 2025). In contrast, when referring to machine-based repair, the term "*korjaus*" (repair) is commonly used. This can be observed by examining the price lists of sewing studios, where the term "*korjausompelu*" (repair sewing) is predominantly used to denote machine-based repair services.

In addition, the Finnish term "*paikkaus*" (patching) is used to describe various repair techniques, primarily in relation to holes or other localized damage (Wikberg, 2025). This distinction is also reflected in book translations: Arounna Khounnoraj's book *Visible Mending* is translated into Finnish as "*Parsi ja paikkaa – näkyvästi!*" (Khounnoraj, 2021), while Erin Eggenburg's book *The Mending Directory* is translated as "*Paikkauksen parhaat palat*" (Eggenburg, 2022).

Middleton (2015) finds a gendered setting between the words mending and repair in English language, suggesting that mending is usually connected with women's handwork, whereas repair is more neutral and widely used in different occasions related to repair of other products as well. Sekules (2025) further notes that, historically, mending has lacked a clear official definition. She cites (Durrani, 2019, p. 15) and (König, 2013, p. 571), who explain that the practice of mending has been considered too obvious or banal to require specification. Sekules (2025) also observes that a definition is absent from specialist references such as *The Needleworker's Dictionary* (Clabburn, 1976) and the latest *CIETA Vocabulary of Technical Terms* (Monnas & Guelton, 2021) She suggests that this omission is "...likely because it would be as unnecessary as a coding manual explaining the internet."

However, Sekules emphasizes that there are still individuals and contexts where clarification is needed. Thus, she proposes the following definition of mending:

"Mending is a reconstitutive technology of the soft. "Soft" is stipulative, denoting fiber goods, textile, basketry, cordage, yarns, and skins; "technology" elevates a debased, covertly gendered, technique to a grander skill level, and "reconstitutive" covers a range of outcomes, implying beneficial alteration. Mending is a self

effacing technology that embraces humility, hybridity, and insignificance—qualities that deserve attention in environments shattered by their opposites: hubris, monoculture, power. The unit of mending is a mend—a patch, a darn, a closed tear, or any more or less discernible stitched intervention. A mend is always caused by wear patterns, a signpost of embodiment that connects flesh and fabric: an intimate matter everted.” (Sekules, 2025, p. 902)

While this definition is philosophically rich and precise at the social and theoretical level, it may not be suitable for general use when concrete explanations are required. For instance, (Laitala & Klepp, 2018, p. 5) and (Durrani, 2019, pp. 21–22) further highlight the importance of a precise definition in relation to empirical studies, arguing that clear definitions are essential to ensure that participants consistently understand what is meant by garment repair and mending, thereby improving the reliability of research results.

In addition to mending, the word *darning* is used to describe repairing by hand. However, the definition for darning seems to be variable. Khounnoraj (2024) presents mending as an umbrella term including also different techniques of darning. Darning, according to Khounnoraj (2024, pp. 25–33) is a set of mending techniques by hand refilling the hole or worn-out area with different stitches and weaving techniques. In contrast, Noguchi (2020) seems to use the word darning as an umbrella term for different kinds of repair techniques by hand, including patches. Durrani (2019, p. 24) lists darning as a technique used for invisible mending.

Rodabough (2018) discusses garment repair as part of broader field of sewing. However, it is important to distinguish repair from dressmaking. Dressmaking concerns the creation of new garments from uncut or unstitched fabric, whereas mending refers to practices aimed at restoring existing garments through various stitching and sewing techniques (Durrani, 2019, p. 24). Despite this conceptual distinction, dressmaking, sewing, and repair are closely interconnected in practice. This is reflected in professional sewing studios, which commonly offer services for both the production of new garments and the repair of existing ones.

When discussing the distinction and relationship between repair and dressmaking, it is important to consider practices that transform old garments into new ones. This concept of remaking falls somewhere between repair and dressmaking, as it may involve techniques and approaches from both areas. Several terms are used to describe this type of activity, including *redesign*, *remaking*, *upcycling*, *remanufacturing*, and *repurposing* (English, 2025, p. 1). English (2025) proposes using the term remaking as an umbrella concept to encompass all these various approaches to transforming old garments into something new.

Returning to the topic of repair, garment repair can be divided into different categories based on the intended outcome and the specific needs addressed. Sennett (2008, p. 238) distinguishes between two forms of repair: *static repair* and *dynamic repair*. According to Sennett, static repair refers to interventions that restore a product while preserving its original appearance, while dynamic repair, in contrary, involves repair practices that intentionally alter the product's appearance or intended use, i.e. remaking and upcycling which were discussed above. In addition to static and dynamic repair, Teerisuo (1952) introduces the concept of *preventive repair*. Preventive repair can be applied either to new garments, for example by reinforcing areas subject to heavy wear such as elbows, or to garments showing early signs of deterioration, such as reinforcing knitwear using duplicate stitch (swiss darning).

Sennett's division is somewhat similar with the concepts of *visible* and *invisible mending*. In visible mending the repair is rather emphasized than hided, for example by using threads in contrast colours (Durrani, 2019, p. 24). Examples of different visible mending are for example Japanese Sashiko and Boro -techniques (Mullett-Bowlsby & Mullett-Bowlsby, 2021), and different embroidery and decorative applique techniques (Durrani, 2019, p. 24; Teerisuo, 1952). In contrast, invisible mending aims to make repairs as inconspicuous as possible (Durrani, 2019, p. 24) . This can be achieved, for example, by re-knitting or re-weaving the damaged area using the original thread, or by replacing the entire damaged section in matching fabric (Teerisuo, 1952).

And lastly about alteration. Garment alteration is the process of modifying an existing clothing item to improve its fit, comfort, or functionality without significantly changing its original style or purpose. This typically involves adjusting dimensions, seams, hems, or closures to better suit the wearer's body measurements, preferences or posture. (Lewallen, 2024)

In this study, the term *repair* is used instead of *mending*, as it is more widely understood term. As discussed above, repair is also commonly associated with machine-based methods, which are the most frequently used practices in sewing studios – which are in the central focus of this thesis. In this thesis, repair is employed as an umbrella term encompassing a range of practices aimed at preserving or prolonging the usability of garments. Based on the literature reviewed above, repair is further divided into four subcategories, which are presented in Figure 1 below.

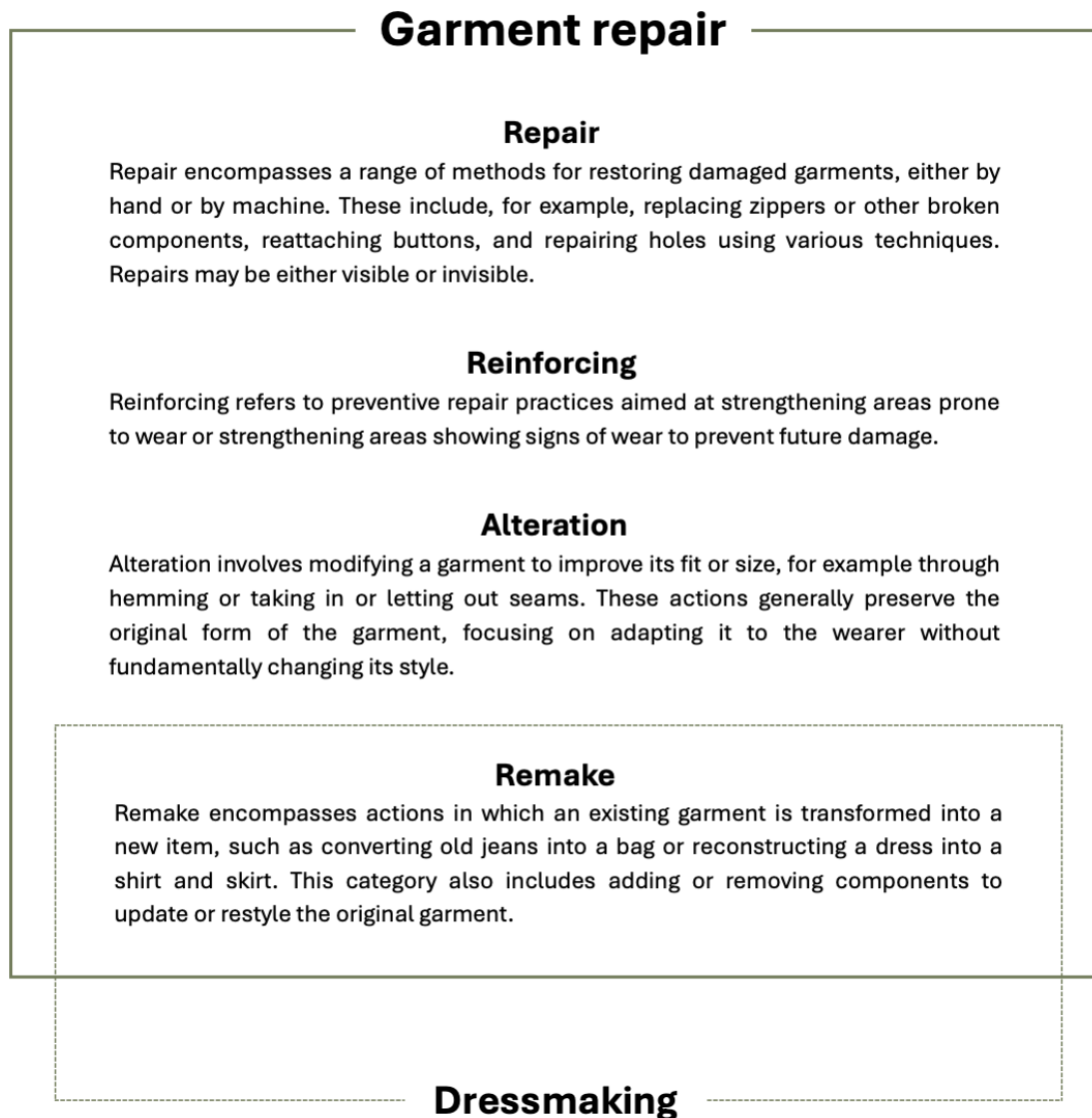


Figure 1. Explaining the concept of garment repair. Own creation based on literature review in section 1.3.1.

1.3.2 The role of repair in the circular economy and EU green policy frameworks

In essence, circular economy (CE) can be defined as an economic model that seeks to keep products and materials in use and circulation for as long as possible, thereby minimising waste generation and pollution (Bakker, 2024, p. 17). Circular economy is operationalised through so-called R-strategies, which represent a hierarchy of circular actions ordered according to their effectiveness in minimising resource loss and environmental pressure (Potting et al., 2017, pp. 4–5). As illustrated in Figure 2, repair constitutes a key component of circular economy and is considered a higher-value circular strategy than recycling, as it preserves a product's original

function and embedded value rather than requiring the breakdown and reprocessing of materials, as in recycling. (Bakker, 2024, p. 17-18).

As discussed in section 1.3.1, garment repair constitutes of several subcategories: (1) repair, (2) alteration, (3) reinforcing, and (4) remake (Figure 1). These subcategories can be seen to position within the R-strategies from R4–R7 (Figure 2). However, reinforcing could also be conceptualised as a distinct circular strategy positioned above repair, as its primary function is to postpone or prevent the need for future repair interventions.

Smarter product use and manufacture	R0 Refuse	Make product redundant by abandoning its function or by offering the same function with a radically different product
	R1 Rethink	Make product use more intensive (e.g. through sharing products, or by putting multi-functional products on the market)
	R2 Reduce	Increase efficiency in product manufacture or use by consuming fewer natural resources and materials
Extend lifespan of product and its parts	R3 Re-use	Re-use by another consumer of discarded product which is still in good condition and fulfils its original function
	R4 Repair	Repair and maintenance of defective product so it can be used with its original function
	R5 Refurbis	Restore an old product and bring it up to date
	R6 Remanufacture	Use parts of discarded product in a new product with the same function
	R7 Repurpose	Use discarded product or its parts in a new product with a different function
Useful application of materials	R8 Recycle	Process materials to obtain the same (high grade) or lower (low grade) quality
	R9 Recover	Incineration of materials with energy recovery

Figure 2. Circular economy R-strategies, from Potting et al. (2017).

Repair plays a crucial role in product lifetime extension (PLE), as it enables faulty or damaged products to return in use. The environmental advantages of extending product lifespans are expected from slower material flows and decreased production. (Cooper, 2020) Thus, it is important to understand that PLE alone don't straightly decrease climate and environmental

impacts, but the most benefits arise if PLE replaces or delays the need for replacement and further decreases production demand. However, further research is needed to better understand the relations between product lifetimes and material flows and the influence of consumer and industry behaviour over them. (Maldini et al., 2025; Wiedemann et al., 2023, p. 7)

Repair and care practices can also function as meaning-making processes that can strengthen emotional durability and by that way also support longer garment use (Fletcher & Kate, 2016; Kettunen et al., 2025; Konovalov et al., 2023; Neto & Ferreira, 2023). Extending garment lifetimes is a widely recognised objective in sustainable clothing consumption research (Kettunen et al., 2025; Laitala & Klepp, 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020) Dao & Joyner Martinez (2024) created a sustainable clothing use taxonomy based on systematic literature review of 77 articles published from 1991 to January 2022. Their study identifies repair as a key dimension of sustainable post-purchase clothing use, alongside sustainable care and wear practices. (Dao & Joyner Martinez, 2024)

Repair in the EU's circular economy policy framework

The European Green Deal provides the overarching policy framework guiding the EU's transition towards a climate-neutral economy by 2050 (European Commission, n.d.-f). Within this framework, the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) serves as one of the EU's key policy instruments, for example, advancing resource efficiency, sustainable product design, and circular business models (European Commission, n.d.-a). The CEAP places particular emphasis on the textile sector, which is recognised as one of the most resource-intensive and environmentally impactful industries in Europe (European Commission, n.d.-e)

To address these challenges, EU introduced the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles in 2022, which aims to transform the textile and footwear sector towards a more circular systems. The strategy addresses the full lifecycle of textile products, including production, consumption, and end-of-life management. It also recognises product longevity and repair as key enablers of circularity. (European Commission, n.d.-e)

A central regulatory instrument supporting these objectives is the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), which entered into force in July 2024. ESPR replaced the previous Ecodesign Directive and expanded its scope from energy-related products to nearly all physical products, including textiles and garments. (European Commission, n.d.-c) The regulation establishes a framework through which product-specific ecodesign requirements will be

introduced later through delegated acts (Delre et al., 2025, p. 10). As such, ESPR is a key implementation mechanism of the CEAP and the Textile Strategy.

To support the development of textile-specific ecodesign requirements, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) has conducted a preparatory study on textiles. This process has involved stakeholder consultation, allowing registered participants – including NGOs, industry representatives, experts, and other interested actors – to contribute through written feedback and consultation workshops. The third and final milestone working document was published in December 2025. (European Commission, n.d.-d)

Repairability has been identified in the textile preparatory work as a potentially relevant product aspect under the ESPR framework; however, its role in the emerging regulatory framework remains uncertain. Reasons for this include for example the inherent heterogeneity of textile products, which makes the development of harmonised product requirements particularly challenging, as well as the creative nature of the fashion and textile industry, where design diversity is a defining characteristic that regulation should avoid constraining. In addition, consumer behaviour introduces further complexity, as repair decisions are influenced by many factors such as aesthetic preferences and the cost of repair. (Delre et al., 2025, pp. 127–130)

From the author's perspective, however, the most significant barrier to developing harmonised repairability requirements for garments is the current lack of empirical evidence identifying the most common repair barriers and enablers that could realistically be addressed through regulation. To establish meaningful and feasible requirements, a stronger evidence base is needed regarding recurring garment failure points and repair challenges. In this regard, extensive engagement with garment repair professionals could provide valuable practical insight into the most common repair obstacles. Rather than attempting to regulate the repairability of all textile and garment products uniformly, regulatory efforts may be more effective if they focus on specific recurring repair barriers.

Lastly, the Right to Repair Directive, which entered into force in 2024, establishes broader measures to promote product repair both within and beyond the legal guarantee period. Under this directive manufacturers of products, for example, must repair their products within a reasonable time and for a reasonable price. Also, manufacturers are required to make information about repair services for their products easily accessible, provide indicative prices for the most common repairs for their products and offer spare parts at reasonable prices. However, the directive applies only to products for which EU law sets repairability requirements, meaning textiles would fall within its scope only if such requirements are introduced through

future product-specific legislation, such as a delegated act under the ESPR. In addition, member states are obligated to adopt at least one measure to support repair within their territory. These may range from financial incentives, such as repair vouchers, to non-financial actions, including awareness campaigns and training in repair skills. (European Comission, n.d.-b)

2 Methodology

2.1 Methodological rationale

Data were collected through a survey targeted at Finnish garment repair professionals. Rather than a sample survey, the study aimed to be conducted as a census as the target population is relatively small. Census study refers to a study, in which the whole target population is targeted (Vehkalahti, 2014, pp. 45–46). However, several uncertainties remain regarding the identification of the entire population of garment repair professionals in Finland. These uncertainties are discussed in section 1.2.2.

As the Finnish garment repair sector has received very limited academic attention to date, an exploratory research approach was adopted. In this context, a survey method was considered more appropriate than for example interviews, as it enables the collection of data from a broader range of respondents within a relatively short period of time. Survey allows for the mapping of diverse perspectives across the field and facilitate an understanding of the scope of the issue through multiple indicators, that is, through responses to a structured set of questions (Vehkalahti, 2014, pp. 12–13).

Although in-depth interviews with representatives of educational institutions would have been valuable, the scope of this master's thesis was limited. Therefore, the data collection focused primarily on the perspectives of professionals working in the garment repair sector. However, the education sector is addressed in the theoretical framework (sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3). In addition, certain aspects were clarified through email correspondence with several vocational teachers, as well as with a representative from the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) and a representative from Finnish Textile & Fashion.

It was recognised that obtaining enough survey responses can be challenging. This is due to multiple and interrelated factors, such as the proliferation of online surveys (survey fatigue), the widespread use of mobile devices (information overload), and the increasing volume of information requests (Dillman et al., 2014, pp. 34–37; Vehkalahti, 2014, p. 48). Despite these challenges, the survey method was retained because the target group was expected to be relatively engaged and willing to respond, given that the garment repair sector has received limited research attention in Finland. Informal discussions with professionals working in the field also indicated strong interest in the topic. Nevertheless, the possibility of insufficient responses was acknowledged, and interviews were prepared as an alternative data collection strategy if needed.

2.2 Sampling and participant outreach

As the aim of the study is to generate knowledge to contribute to the potentially necessary development of garment repair-orientated education in Finland, the most relevant insights could have been expected from individuals who completed their qualifications under the post-2018 reform (see section 1.2.2) to gain up-to-date insights. For this reason, the survey was initially considered to be limited to individuals who had studied and graduated under the revised system. However, the survey was ultimately targeted at all professionals working in the field of garment repair, as individuals with longer careers could also provide valuable insights into the topic. In addition, the sample was not restricted based on respondents' employment status (e.g., whether they were entrepreneurs, employers, or working full-time or part-time in garment repair), as such a restriction was not considered necessary for the purposes of this study. This decision reflects the study's focus on garment repair education at a general level, rather than on specific employment categories.

The participants were contacted using mixed communication method. Mixed communication refers to method, where different communication channels (i.e. email, social media, SMS) are employed to invite respondents to participate while maintaining a single response mode (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 48). Mixed communication method is used to increase the possibility of sample members to encounter with the survey. In addition, visibility across multiple channels may serve as a reminder and build trust that the survey is legitimate and thus increase participation. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that reminder in different channel works better than multiple reminders on the original channel. (Dillman et al., 2014, pp. 426–427)

In this study, the survey was chosen to distribute as an open link to sewing oriented Facebook-group and shared with the help of garment repair-oriented social media influencers on Instagram. Email was sent to relevant contacts identified through Fonecta Finder. This method was chosen as it was acknowledged that not all are active in social media – or otherwise encounter the survey in social media. In contrast, it is possible that for some email could not work that well, as for example due to email overload, or that the person is not active on email in general (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 427). It would have been possible to send the survey through SMS as well, but this option was primary left out as too many contact might irritate people and thus have a opposite impact. In addition, SMS-link would have been subject for fee, which was part of the reason it was left out. However, for those who did not have public email address, but only a telephone number, the number was taken in case of more responses was needed. SMS-mode was thus kept as an option for these respondents.

The survey remained open for 24 days, from 4 February to 27 February 2026. The relatively long data collection period was partly due to the time required to gather contact information from Fonecta Finder. To expedite the research process and to maximize the responses via the online link, contact collection from Fonecta Finder continued while the online link was already active. In addition, the reason for a long data collection period was partly due to social media influencers, as their availability could not be anticipated. The extended time frame also allowed potential participants to encounter the survey at different times via email and social media.

Online link

Total number of respondents through the online link was 52. The link was first published at “*Ammattina ompelu*” -Facebook group on 5 February. “*Ammattina ompelu*” is a closed group for sewing professionals with 1230 participants (on 4 February). Reminder was published on 18 February. In addition, a few garment repair influencers were asked to share the survey. Veera Jussila (@käsityökekkerit) with 18k followers on Instagram, shared the survey on her Instagram story on 5 February. Anni Ignatius (@sormustin) with 13,2k followers on Instagram, shared the survey on her Instagram story on 9 February. The survey was also shared on the authors own LinkedIn -account on 5 February .

Email link

The emails were sent between 9 February and 17 February in several batches as contact information was gradually collected from Fonecta Finder. The reminder was sent on 24 February. The email was sent to 408 companies as 78 out of total 486 companies from Fonecta Finder did not have public email address available. Total number of respondents through the email link was 132 and the response rate 25%. SMS-link was not needed to send as online link and email link together gained enough responses.

2.3 Survey Design

Prior to designing the survey, a thorough preliminary investigation was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the field to be able to develop a credible and contextually relevant survey instrument. A careful groundwork is essential for enhancing the validity of the data and for encouraging participation by ensuring that the questionnaire would be perceived by respondents as meaningful, credible and relevant to their professional context (Dillman et al., 2014, pp. 148–149).

The first stage of the preparatory work consisted of a thorough review of the vocational education system and textile and fashion education in Finland. This review ensured the accurate use of terminology related to qualifications and degree titles and provided an overview of the pathways for studying garment repair in Finland. This review also provided insight into how education in the field of textiles and fashion has evolved over time, thereby supporting the subsequent analysis of survey responses. The findings of this preliminary review are presented in sections 1.3.2. and 1.3.3.

The second stage of preparation involved familiarising with the sector and its diverse working models. This understanding developed partly during the process of collecting contact information from Fonecta Finder but was further informed by reviewing discussions in the “*Ammattina Ompelu*” -Facebook group and through informal conversations with professionals working in sewing and garment repair. The results of this sectoral exploration are presented in Section 1.2.2.

The third stage focused on defining key terminology. Garment repair is a broad concept that can be interpreted in multiple ways, and different terms may be used within the field. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to clarify and define the key concepts (section 1.3.1). Particular attention was paid to the Finnish translation of the term alteration, for which multiple alternatives exist. To ensure terminological accuracy and relevance to practitioners, input was sought from members of the “*Ammattina Ompelu*” -Facebook group, where the vast majority indicated that the term “*muokkaus*” is the most commonly used equivalent for alteration. In this thesis, the term repair is used as an umbrella concept encompassing both repair and alteration; however, in the survey instrument the two were addressed separately to maximise clarity and precision. These terms were introduced at the beginning of the survey to clarify their meaning for respondents within the context of this study.

Cover letter

Cover letter serves as the introductory interface of the survey. It provides essential information about the study, including its purpose, the rationale for conducting the survey, the identity of the researcher, and the intended use of the responses. A key function of the cover letter is to motivate potential respondents to participate. (Vehkalahti, 2014, pp. 47–48) Establishing trust and encouraging engagement are therefore central considerations, as respondents may be more likely to participate when they perceive that their answers may contribute meaningfully to an issue, they consider important (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 81).

The cover letter (Appendix) was designed to be as concise as possible while remaining clear and motivating. The research topic was introduced only briefly at the beginning, as it was assumed that the subject itself might be of interest to the target group. Next, a short statement clarified who was invited to participate. This was considered important due to the diversity of actors within the field, including variations in professional experience and modes of work which was noticed during the preliminary review of the sector. This was followed by a set of motivational statements emphasising the value of each individual response and professional experience. It was also noted that no comparable study had previously been conducted in Finland, thereby underscoring the significance of participation. Finally, to ensure transparency regarding the use of the data, respondents were informed that the responses may also be utilised in a future doctoral study by the author. This was also intended to enhance the perceived credibility of the research and to convey the broader significance of the topic beyond the master's thesis.

When sharing the survey in the "*Ammattina Ompelu*" Facebook group, an additional personal comment was posted under the post to emphasize on motivation for conducting the study, with the aim of further strengthening credibility and encouraging participation. Although including a personal motivation statement in the cover letter was initially considered, it was ultimately omitted to maintain brevity.

Question Design

A traditional and recommended approach to question design is to decompose research questions into measurable domains and subdomains, and subsequently into individual survey questions (Dillman et al., 2014, pp. 125–126; Vehkalahti, 2014, pp. 20–21). In this study, however, a different approach was adopted, as the research questions and the overall aim of the study were relatively concrete. Therefore, rather than breaking the research questions into smaller categories, they were approached somewhat directly and supplemented with additional supporting questions.

Following pilot testing with a member of the target group, a new dimension was incorporated into both the survey and the research design. In addition to examining technical craftsmanship related to garment repair, a business-oriented perspective was introduced. This decision was based on the observation that most professionals in the garment repair sector operate as entrepreneurs and that the economic viability of the field is often challenging (Berninger et al., 2024; Korjausaloite.fi, 2026). Ultimately, the survey questions were organised into two subdomains, in addition to background information: 1. Garment repair and alteration skills, and

2. Business skills. However, a relatively straight approach to the research questions was still preserved. The questions were just divided under these different subdomains.

To facilitate ease and speed of response, and thereby potentially increase the response rate, all questions were designed as close-ended. Close-ended questions were favoured also due to ease of analysing them compared to open-ended questions. However, comment boxes were provided under each question to allow respondents to elaborate on their answers and to introduce qualitative insights into the survey data. These comment boxes also enabled the identification of perspectives not anticipated during the survey design phase. The survey can therefore be characterised as semi-structured. Furthermore, additional details provided in the comment boxes were intended to help compensate for the limitations of closed-ended responses.

The answer options were presented consistently from positive to negative throughout the survey, as this order is generally familiar to respondents (Dillman et al., 2014, pp. 181–182). Research on the effects of response order has produced mixed findings. For example, Christian et al. (2009) found that response order does not substantially affect results, although placing positive options first may reduce response time. In contrast, de Leeuw (2018) suggests that presenting negative options first may lead to more neutral responses. However, to minimise potential confusion, the positive-to-negative ordering was retained across all questions.

Response options in matrix questions were provided using a five-point ordinal bipolar scale with a neutral midpoint: *Well, Fairly well, Neither well nor poorly, Fairly poorly, Poorly*, as well as an additional option *I don't know*. Throughout the survey, relatively short scales were used to facilitate ease of response and data analysis (Dillman et al., 2014, pp. 179–180). The inclusion of the *I don't know* option was intended to accommodate respondents who felt unable to evaluate the item. However, upon reflection, this option could potentially have been omitted thorough the survey to encourage more considered responses (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 165).

In addition, it was noted later that the questions thorough the survey could have been made even more neutral by adding the negative point to the question as well. For example, the formulation “*Please evaluate how well your education...*” could have been revised to “*Please evaluate how well or unwell your education...*” (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 163). The survey questionnaire is provided in appendix.

2.4 Data analysis

2.4.1 Data cleaning

In total, 184 respondents completed the survey between 4 and 27 February 2026. A total of 18 respondents who reported having no education in the field of textiles and fashion were excluded from the results, as the study focuses specifically on professionals' experiences of the relationship between education and working life within the sector of garment repair. In addition, 11 respondents who held only a degree from a University of Applied Sciences were decided to exclude from the results, as higher education programmes primarily prepare students for roles in areas such as design, production, research, business, and marketing, rather than for the craft-based technical work required for garment repair. Thus, the sample represents only those who have craft-based vocational qualification in the field of textiles and fashion.

Following this data cleaning step, the final sample consisted of 155 respondents. This represents approximately 29% of the estimated population of around 530 garment repair professionals in Finland, based on the proposed European average and information obtained from Fonecta Finder (see section 1.2.1). The need for data cleaning could have been avoided by restricting the survey to respondents with a vocational qualification. However, this mistake provides additional insight into the distribution of practitioners within the garment repair field in Finland.

2.4.2 Data analysis method

As mentioned in section 2.3, all survey questions were designed as closed-ended. However, a comment box was provided for each question to allow respondents to elaborate on their answers and thus introduce qualitative insights into the dataset. The survey gained a substantial number of comments, which formed a critically important part of the data. Without the comments, the interpretation of the results would have been significantly more challenging.

The quantitative data, consisting of multiple-choice responses, were analysed using statistical methods, while the qualitative data, derived from comment fields, were analysed using inductive content analysis. In addition, the some findings were reflected with those of Palmu (2019). Palmus' thesis examined the effects of vocational education and training (VET) reform on bespoke garment making education.

Furthermore, discussions in the “*Ammattina Ompelu*” Facebook group (Facebook discussion, 2026), as well as background information on challenges in vocational education presented in Section 1.2.3, were used to contextualise and interpret the findings.

Statistical analysis

The results from the predefined response options were analyzed using statistical methods. The analysis utilized the features of the Webropol platform, which was used to design and facilitate the survey and process the collected data. Webropol automatically quantifies responses by reporting the number and percentage of respondents selecting each option and generates basic visualizations. The results were further refined manually into more informative graphical representations using a conventional color scheme commonly associated with Likert scales: green (positive), yellow (neutral), and red (negative).

Depending on the question, responses were examined either as a whole or comparatively across respondent groups with varying lengths of work experience (Vehkalahti, 2014, p. 122). Initially, the intention was to compare responses primarily based on educational background and year of graduation. However, this approach proved impractical due to the highly diverse educational backgrounds of respondents and the fact that respondents had graduated across six different decades. Therefore, comparisons between respondents were ultimately conducted based solely on length of professional experience. This comparison between experience-based groups became a central component of the analysis and provided valuable insights into how education has evolved over time from the perspective of professionals working in the field.

Comparisons were also conducted between predefined response selections and open-ended comments in order to identify potential inconsistencies (Vehkalahti, 2014, pp. 68–69) and to deepen the interpretation of the results where necessary. This comparison is illustrated in Figure 3 using color coding: green indicates a positive response selection, yellow a neutral response, and red a negative response.

Comments organized according to the respondents' level of professional experience.

Each respondent on separate row.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE / TOPIC	Korjausta pitäisi opettaa erikseen / erikseen	Opetuksen taso on huono (työvä- länsä päivinä)	Korjausta opettaisiin vähän tai ei oikein / koulutus painottuu uusien vaatteiden valmistukseen	Korjaustaidot olen oppinut harjoittelussa / töissä / itsi (ei koulussa)	Harjoittelu kuormittaa yrittäjiä / Yrittäjät opettavat korjaustaitoja oppilaille	Vaatteen rakenteiden / materiaalien/ ompeleustekniikoiden ymmärtäminen auttaa korjaamista ja muokkauksia.	Korjaustaitoja on vaikea opettaa koulussa
		2.1 Koulutuksen taso on tärkeitä erityisesti näitä olen koulut perustuksella opettanut.	viisityt ajat kun suoritin vaatteita ei Pitäisi olla enemmän mahdollisuutta harjoitteluun töissä työväillä, koska sillä on parhaiten opit asia.	viisityt ajat kun suoritin vaatteita ei Pitäisi olla enemmän mahdollisuutta harjoitteluun töissä työväillä, koska sillä on parhaiten opit asia.			
			2.1 Vaatteiden oikean rakenteen hallinta tulee tekemällä paljon erityisesti vaatteita, näitä olen saanut hyvän koulutuksen kautta. Muokkauk- se ja korjaustaidot käsitellään opitteen harjoittelussa.	2.1 Vaatteiden oikean rakenteen hallinta tulee tekemällä paljon erityisesti vaatteita, näitä olen saanut hyvän koulutuksen kautta. Muokkauk- se ja korjaustaidot käsitellään opitteen harjoittelussa.			
			2.1 Koulutuksessa ei ollut tarpeeksi vaatteiden korjaamiseen keskeistä opetusta.				
16 – 20 years (N = 18)							
			2.1 Opetusluokan vaatteiden korjausta ei opetettu lainkaan, opti oli suurel vettä työstäminen, värimuut- os opti tase lukivat muokkauksia, samat korjaustaidot pitäisi nähdä hukan perusteella kuin korjaamisesta.	2.1 Opetusluokan vaatteiden korjausta ei opetettu lainkaan, opti oli suurel vettä työstäminen, värimuut- os opti tase lukivat muokkauksia, samat korjaustaidot pitäisi nähdä hukan perusteella kuin korjaamisesta.		2.1 Opetusluokan vaatteiden korjausta ei opetettu lainkaan, opti oli suurel vettä työstäminen, värimuut- os opti tase lukivat muokkauksia, samat korjaustaidot pitäisi nähdä hukan perusteella kuin korjaamisesta.	2.5 Korjaus on usein niin tapauskohtainen, etten ole vaima, missä määrin koulutus päivitetä aktiivisella, jossa työ on tärkeitä vaatteita ja kutsu-muokkauksia.
			2.1 Korjausopetus meillä ei koulussa ole.				
			2.1 Ei koulutuksessa käsitelty lainkaan vaatteiden muokkauksia tai korjausta tällöin, ainakaan tällöin vaatteita on alusta asti. Muokkaukset koulutuksesta lähtyivät ihoni käytöstä - mutta värimuut- os muokkauk- se on ihan eri asia, kun värikäsi sovelletaan.				
						2.1 Perustaidot saunarakenteista ja materiaalitekniikasta ne hyvin koulussa tase käsiteltiin työ opettanut peruste- sovelletaan näitä perustaitoja.	
						2.1 Korjausosa sovelletaan opitua tase.	
						Materiaalitekniikka, ei mitään kange- käyttöä, mikä korjalla se vaati. Työväillä, ei riittävästi koulutusta työväillä käytti ymmärtää, kun jo vaatteita vaatteita lähdetään purkamaan. Asiakaan välttyä, ei että välytyt ja ajatuksen ei mitään korjauksen suoksi huomioon päin.	
			2.1 Korjausopetus ei paljoa ollut koulussa opit vain perusopetus				
21 – 30 years (N = 37)							
		2.1 Ennen opit koulussa kaikki tarvittava opetusta ja koulutuksessa Työ harjoittelu kesti vain muutamia vkoja. Tämä päivinä opetukset työväillä 200 harjoittelu osamitta määlin. Yhteistyötä en kukaan opettamaan harjoittelijoita.		2.1 Ennen opit koulusta kaikki tarvittava opetusta ja koulutuksessa Työ harjoittelu kesti vain muutamia vkoja. Tämä päivinä opetukset työväillä 200 harjoittelu osamitta määlin. Yhteistyötä en kukaan opettamaan harjoittelijoita.			



Color coding after response selections.

Figure 3. Categorizing open-ended comments in Excel.

Inductive qualitative content analysis

The open-ended responses were analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis. The analysis began with a systematic categorizing process, where comments including same topics were grouped. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2024) The comments were also organized according to the respondents' level of professional experience to enable comparison across respondents with different length of experience (Figure 3). The categorization was carried out systematically across the entire dataset, and the data were reviewed multiple times. Although numerous topics emerged from the data, only those that were most frequently mentioned and most relevant to the research questions were selected for further analysis. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2024)

The analysis incorporated a quantifying phase, in which the frequency of topics was examined by identifying how many respondents referred to each topic. This was done to assess the relative prominence of topic within the dataset and to support the credibility of the analysis.

(Krippendorff, 2004) Each respondent was counted only once per topic, even if they mentioned the same issue multiple times across different responses. This approach ensured that the analysis reflected the number of respondents addressing a topic rather than the total number of mentions. The use of quantification in this context complements qualitative interpretation by providing a systematic way to identify recurring patterns in the data. This is consistent with the tradition of content analysis, which has historically combined qualitative categorization with the possibility of quantifying data to describe how content is distributed across categories.

(Krippendorff, 2004) While some categories were based on a relatively small number of responses, they were included when they demonstrated meaningful connections to the study context or aligned with findings from previous research.

3 Results

The survey was conducted in Finnish. For the purposes of presenting the results, the questions and quotations have been translated into English. OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) was used to support the translation process in order to improve efficiency. The author has reviewed all translations and takes full responsibility for their accuracy.

3.1 Characteristics of the survey respondents

Respondents were represented across all predefined experience categories, ranging from under one year of prior experience to over 30 years of experience in garment making, repair, and/or alteration. Experience in garment making, was included in the question because many repair tasks rely on the same technical competencies used in garment construction, such as sewing techniques, pattern understanding, and knowledge of materials. For this reason, including garment making in the experience measure was considered appropriate for capturing respondents' overall professional experience in the field of garment making and sewing. Also, as these activities often overlap in sewing studios, it was assumed that respondents would find it easier to evaluate their overall experience across garment making, repair and alteration rather than distinguishing between these.

Overall, 52% of respondents (N = 81) had worked in the field for over 20 years, whereas only 16% (N = 24) had between less than one and five years of experience. The remaining 31% (N = 50) had been working in the field for 6–20 years. (Figure 4)

1.1 How long have you worked in garment making, repair, and/or alteration?

Amount of respondents: 155

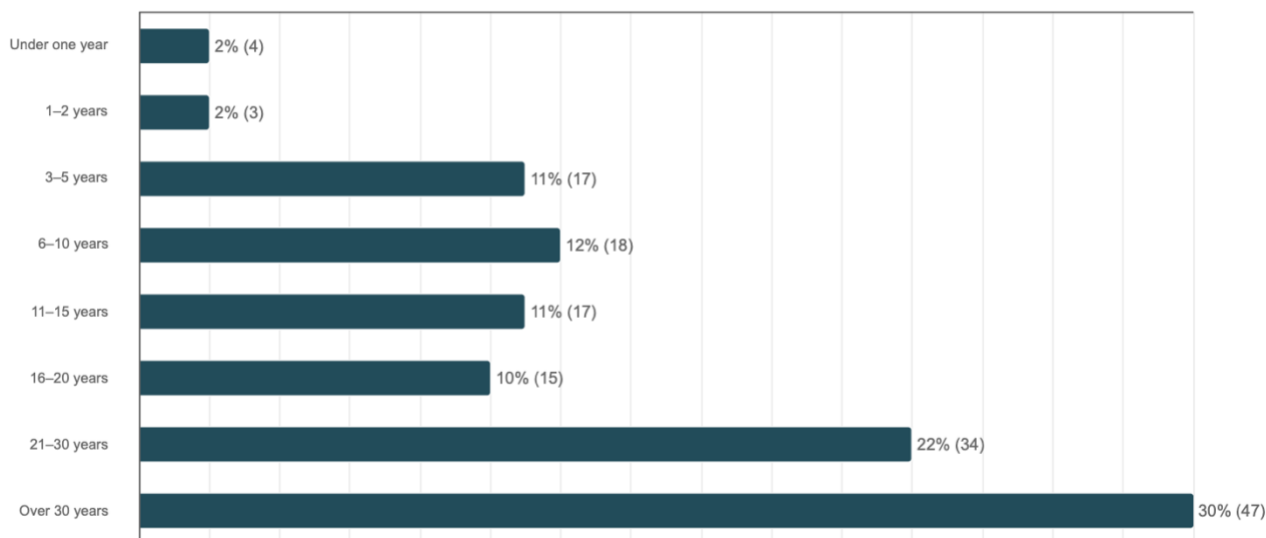


Figure 4. Respondents length of experience in the field of garment making, repair, and/ or alteration.

From the perspective of the study's objectives, this distribution is not optimal. The most relevant insights would be expected from individuals who completed their qualifications under the post-2018 reform (see section 1.2.2), and who would therefore have had a maximum of 5 years of work experience in the field at the time of the survey. For this reason, it might have been advantageous to restrict the survey to those who had completed their qualifications under the post-2018 reform or otherwise target the survey more specifically towards this group in order to obtain more up-to-date insights of vocational education in the field. However, respondents with more extensive experience provided valuable perspectives on current education in the open-ended comments, as many had hosted several interns in their businesses during their careers.

Educational background

The question regarding educational background was designed as a select-all-that-apply question, allowing respondents to select all qualifications they have completed within the field of textiles and fashion (Figure 5).

1.2 Which qualification in textiles and fashion have you completed?

Amount of respondents: 148
Amount of options selected: 234

VQ = Vocational Qualification
UAS = University of Applied Science

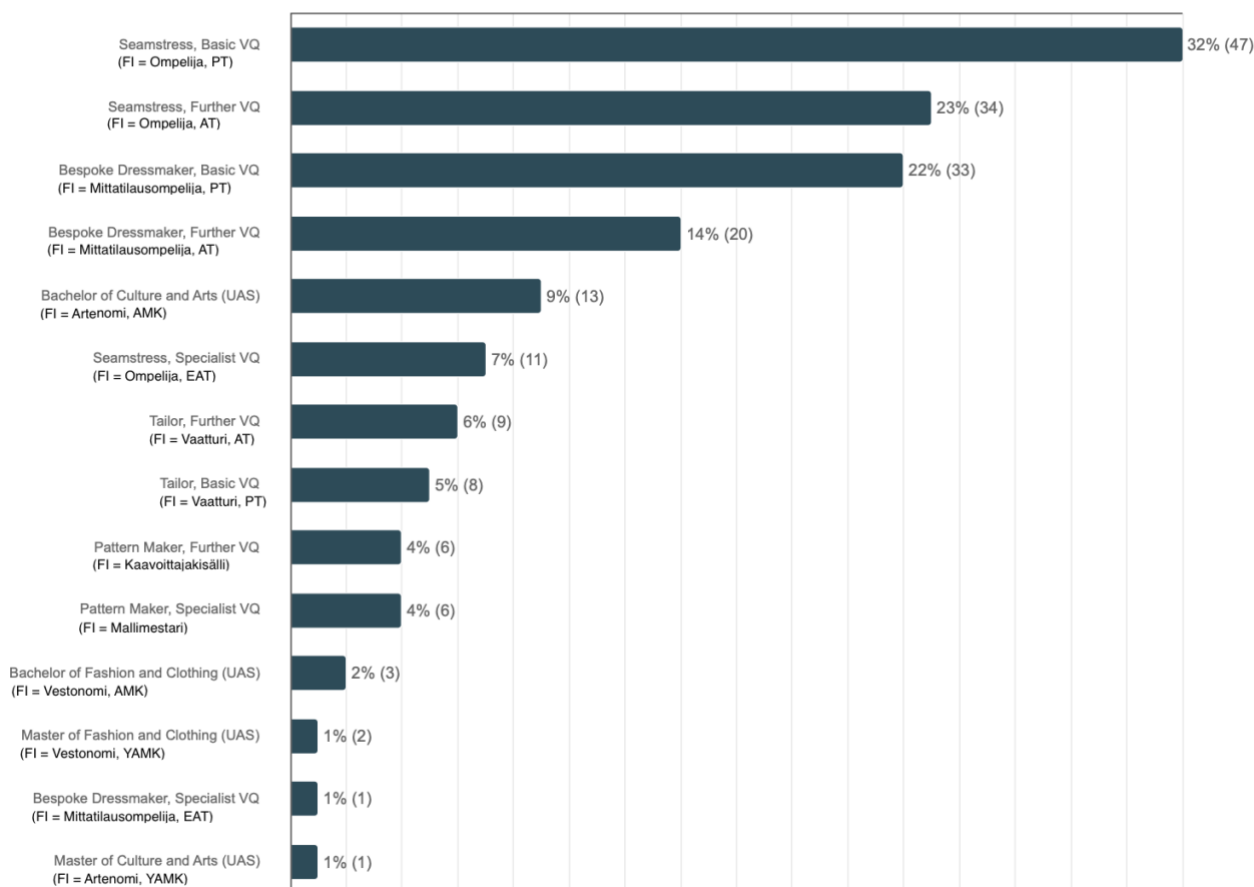


Figure 5. Respondents educational background.

As respondents had completed their education over a period spanning six decades, their educational backgrounds varied considerably. In addition, as degree titles have changed over time, a significant proportion of respondents (26%, N = 38) selected the option “Other”.

Current employment status

Although comprehensive research and statistical information on the sector are limited, it is generally understood that the garment repair sector is largely composed of entrepreneurs, particularly sole entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises, both in Finland (Ahlstrand, 2024; Nieminen, 2023; Väinämö, 2017) and across Europe (Manoochehri et al., 2022, pp. 32–33). The results of the survey are consistent with this general understanding of the sector (Figure 6).

The question regarding current employment status was designed as a select-all-that-apply question, allowing respondents to select all options that applied to their current working

situation. This approach was chosen because it was acknowledged in advance that employment arrangements in the sector are often diverse and overlapping.

1.4 Select the option(s) that best describe your current employment status.

Amount of respondents: 152
Amount of options selected: 268

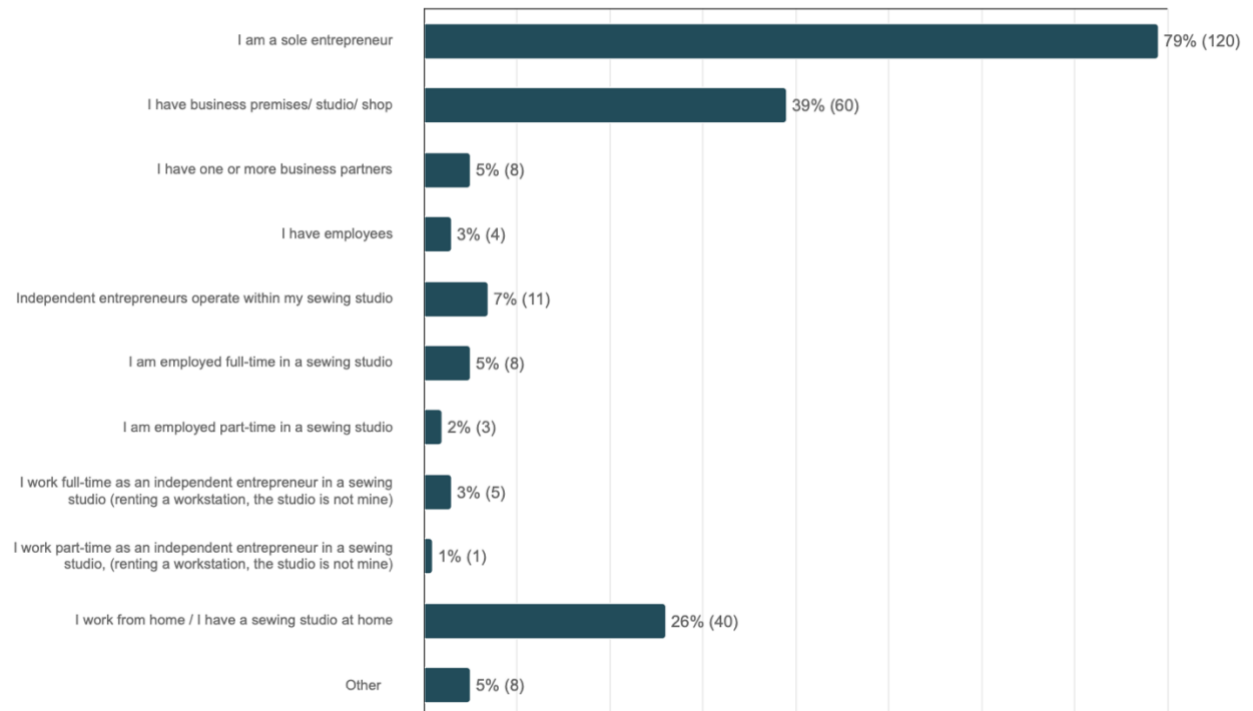


Figure 6. Current employment status of the respondents.

The majority (79%, N = 120) reported working as sole entrepreneurs, while only 5% (N = 8) indicated having business partners and 3% (N = 4) reported having employees. These results suggest that operating as a sole entrepreneur without employees is the most common form of business activity in the sector. 39% (N = 60) reported having separate business premises, whereas 26% (N = 40) worked from a home studio. This indicates that home studios are relatively common in the field. Only 5% (N = 8) reported working as full-time employees, and 2% (N = 3) as part-time employees. Furthermore, 4% (N = 6) reported renting a chair or workstation within another company's premises, indicating a form of self-employment within shared or hosted work environments.

Eight respondents selected the option "Other". Two respondents from these reported engaging in garment repair as a "hobby business", and two indicated that they also work as teachers alongside their sewing and repair activities. One respondent reported working in the garment

repair department of the Finnish Defence Forces, and another in an unspecified gear maintenance and repair department. One respondent reported working in a worker-owned cooperative, and one indicated selling fabrics and sewing supplies in addition to their sewing work.

3.2 Education in sewing and garment making has weakened, thereby also affecting the repair competencies of initiating sewing professionals

As discussed in section 1.2.2, a dedicated specialisation option in garment repair and alteration is not offered as part of Qualification in Textiles and Fashion in VET. Instead, garment repair and alteration can be selected as an optional module, which is 15 CP for Basic Vocational Qualification (180 CP in total) (EDUFI, 2026a) and 45 CP for Further Vocational Qualification (150 CP in total) (EDUFI, 2025a).

According to the open-ended comments, repair and alteration work does not appear to have been taught more extensively in previous decades either, including in the 1970s, when the oldest respondents received their education. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the qualification requirements for the textile and fashion sector from 1995 onwards (EDUFI, 1995–2026; non-public research data held by the author). Qualification requirements published prior to 1995 were not available from the Finnish National Agency for Education.

However, as shown in Figure 7, when respondents were asked to assess how well their education has met the needs of working life in relation to (1) repair and (2) alteration, the proportion of positive responses increases consistently with greater levels of experience in regards of repair. The trend is more uneven, and also more positive, in regards of alteration, but similar in direction.

2.1 Please, evaluate how well your education has met the needs of working life

Amount of respondents: 154



Figure 7. Respondents' perceptions of how education corresponds to the needs of working life in relation to (1) repair and (2) alteration.

Open comments emphasise that sewing and garment making skills form a prerequisite for the development of repair and alteration competencies. These include, for example, knowledge of sewing machines and sewing techniques, garment construction, pattern making, and materials:

“...before carrying out repair, one must first master the basic principles of garment making.” (Respondent with 21–30 years of experience)

“Repair work involves applying previously learned knowledge: material knowledge, such as how fabrics behave and what machines are required, as well as understanding work sequences. When working with finished garments, one must be able to interpret the construction in reverse.” (Respondent with 16–20 years of experience)

“Although repair was not taught at all during my studies, understanding pattern making and the production process provides a strong foundation for it.”
(Respondent with 21–30 years of experience)

“In my view, repair and alteration require pattern-making skills and mastery of different working methods. A basic education in clothing construction is needed for repair work.” (Respondent with over 30 years of experience)

As shown in Figure 7, experiences related to alteration are more positive than those related to repair across all experience groups. According to the open-ended comments, this is explained by the closer relationship between alteration and garment making. Alteration typically involves working with more consistent structures and seams familiar from garment making, whereas repair may involve different skills and also often more creativity and know how in material structures – for example when repairing holes in different materials.

In regards of the quality of the education, total of ten respondents very bluntly reported in the comment fields that, in their experience, the quality of education in sewing and garment making has declined. Such observations were present across all experience groups.

“Today’s education is highly inadequate and does not prepare students for working life. I have had several interns, and have witnessed this situation firsthand.”
(Respondent with over 30 years of experience)

“In today’s vocational institutions, far too little actual sewing is taught, including techniques and working methods.” (Respondent with 21–30 years of experience)

“The level of education has declined further, based on what I have heard from a vocational student.” (Respondent with 11–15 years of experience)

“Having had interns in my own business, it is unfortunately clear that the same shortcomings in education persist. In addition, the level of instruction in sewing itself is concerning.” (Respondent with 6–10 years of experience)

“The teaching was insufficient; I feel that I have largely learned independently. Overall, the education was poorly organised and limited in scope... It is possible to graduate as a bespoke dressmaker without having adequate skills.” (Respondent with 1–2 years of experience)

The results of the question 2.1 (Figure 7), together with the open-ended comments, suggest that the quality of sewing and garment-making education has declined over time, most clearly during the past 10–15 years. Similar concerns emerged in a discussion involving 20 participants in the Finnish Facebook group “*Ammattina Ompelu*” during April 9–11, 2026 (non-public research data held by the author).

However, it should be noted that the number of respondents in the individual experience groups was relatively low, which may affect the reliability of the results. In addition, substantial

variation may exist between educational institutions, particularly in terms of the amount of contact teaching provided (Miettinen et al., 2025). Similar observations also emerged in the discussion involving 20 participants in the Finnish Facebook group “*Ammattina Ompelu*” during April 9–11, 2026 (non-public research data held by the author). This may also partly explain the variation in responses observed in this survey.

A comparison of the chosen response options (Figure 7) and open-ended comments for the question 2.1 indicates that respondents appear to have interpreted the question in different ways. Some seem to have based their responses on the overall quality of education supporting the development of repair and alteration skills (reflected in more positive responses), while others appear to have responded based on the absence of specific training in repair and alteration (reflected in neutral and negative responses).

Total of five respondent selected positive response option (“well”, “fairly well”), despite reporting that they had primarily learned repair skills through work experience or internships rather than in formal education. In contrast, 21 respondents who selected negative response options (“poorly” or “fairly poorly”) similarly reported that they had learned repair skills independently rather than through education.

In addition, 16% of all respondents (N = 25 regarding repair and N = 24 regarding alteration) selected a neutral response option (“neither well nor poorly”) and 1% (N = 2) on both repair and alteration selected “I don’t know”. Thirteen of these respondents indicated in the comment boxes that their education had not included repair or alteration, or that these topics had been covered only to a very limited extent. It therefore seems that some respondents selected a neutral option because repair and alteration were not a substantial part of their studies, and they did not feel able to evaluate their education in relation to these skills. These divergencies may introduce further uncertainty into the results. However, besides the neutral selections would be interpret as negative, the conclusion would be the same.

Also, it is possible that the passage of time has affected older respondents’ ability to accurately assess the role of education in the development of their repair and alteration skills. There are also indications that some older respondents may have interpreted informal learning – such as home-based practices, workplace-based learning, or learning from colleagues – as part of their “education”, and based their responses on these experiences – again introducing uncertainty into the results.

3.3 Garment repair skills are mainly learned in internships and in working life

A total of 30 open-ended comments across all experience groups indicate that repair and alteration skills were not taught, or were taught only to a very limited extent, through formal contact teaching. Instead, respondents reported that these skills were primarily acquired during internships or later in working life, either independently or with the support of colleagues.

According to information provided by a vocational teacher, the module in garment repair and alteration in Basic Vocational Qualification (15 CP) may be completed today (1) entirely through contact teaching, (2) partly through contact teaching and partly through workplace-based learning, or (3) entirely through workplace-based learning. The mode of delivery depends on the institution and factors such as the size of the student group, as well as the preferences and motivation of individual students (Veera Jussila, personal communication, 13 April, 2026). Some institutions also offer additional opportunities to develop repair and alteration skills (Jaana Rantakoivu, personal communication, 12 December, 2025; Mia Turunen, personal communication, 10 December 2025). Thus, today there are differences between institutions in both the amount of repair and alteration education provided and the extent of contact teaching within these subjects.

More broadly, however, the increased emphasis on workplace-based learning following the VET reform (see section 1.2.3) has raised concerns among entrepreneurs across several sectors. Many companies feel that vocational institutions have shifted too much responsibility for training onto workplaces, which may reduce productivity and place strain on business operations (Miettinen et al., 2025).

Similar concerns emerged in this study. A total of six open-ended comments indicated that entrepreneurs feel that students enter workplace training too early, without sufficient basic skills. Given that most companies in the sector are small and often operate as sole entrepreneurs (Figure 6), their capacity to provide guidance is limited. Some respondents reported that they have even stopped accepting interns due to the demands involved:

“Nowadays, students are sent to a two-month internship without knowing the basics. As a sole entrepreneur, I do not have time to train interns.” (Respondent with 21–30 years of experience)

“Over the years, I have had students on internships and have gladly taken them in, but now I have had to inform that I can no longer do so if my time is spent monitoring even the simplest tasks and the quality of their sewing. I have always wanted to give them real work rather than cleaning tasks, as they are supposed to be there to learn through work. However, current education continues to reduce contact hours,

which does not support skill development. You cannot become a good sewer if you do not sew.” (Respondent with over 30 years of experience)

“Students in the textile and fashion field today know relatively little when they arrive for their internships. It often seems that they lack the basic skills required to begin working. Workplaces must therefore provide extensive guidance. At times, I feel more like a teacher than a workplace supervisor.” (Respondent with over 30 years of experience)

This development may further complicate access to workplace learning placements in the future and thus introduce further challenges on gaining the skills needed in working life. Similar concerns emerged in a discussion involving 20 participants in the Finnish Facebook group “*Ammattina Ompelu*” during April 9–11, 2026 (non-public research data held by the author). Comparable findings were also reported in the thesis by Palmu (2019), in which 14 entrepreneurs and 12 vocational teachers in sewing and garment making were interviewed regarding their views on education and skill requirements for bespoke dressmakers. Entrepreneurs in Palmu’s thesis wish that there would be more contact teaching for repair and alteration before students enter their internships (Palmu, 2019, p. 38).

3.4 There is a need for additional education in garment repair and alteration

As discussed in section 1.2.1, it is common for sewing studios to offer both garment making services, and repair and alteration services. In this study, total of 85% (N = 131) respondent reported that at least half of their work is focused on repair and alteration. 50% of all respondents (N = 78) reported that their work consists mainly of repair and alteration. (Figure 8)

1.5 What proportion of your work currently consists of repair and/or alteration tasks?

Amount of respondents: 155

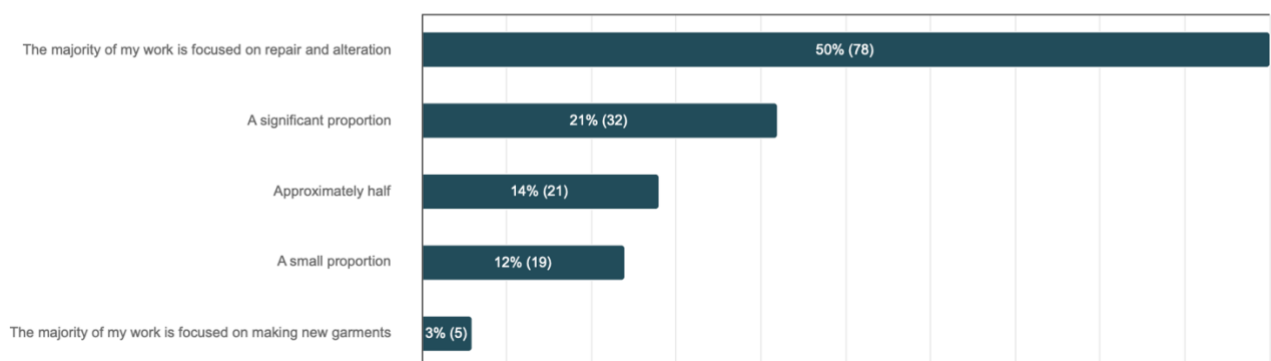


Figure 8. Respondents’ focus of work.

This distribution may, however, be influenced by the focus of the study, as those primarily engaged in garment making may have been less likely to respond to the questionnaire. In the thesis by Palmu (2019) the distribution was around 50/50 between the companies interviewed. Five out of thirteen companies reported that their work consisted mainly of repair and alteration, while an equal number focused primarily on garment making. Three companies indicated that repair and alteration accounted for roughly half of their work. (Palmu, 2019, pp. 20–21) As the study by Palmu focused on garment making skills and education, the sample may reflect a more neutral distribution of tasks within the field.

Four open-ended comments provided indicated that the amount of repair and alteration work has increased over time. All of these respondents had been working in the field for over 30 years:

“During my career as an entrepreneur, I have worked on everything from wedding dresses to dog clothing. Nowadays, I only do repairs. It is clear that made-to-order garment making has declined.”

“Repair work has increased significantly during my entrepreneurial career, and people have learned to value garment repair skills more.”

“...I often hear that repair work is not taught in schools at all. However, it is currently a major source of employment, and training should be available beyond workplace placements.”

“The situation changed after COVID-19. Before that, about half of my work consisted of new products. People stopped attending cultural events, for example, and no longer needed new clothes.”

Taken together, these results suggest that repair and alteration play a significant role in the business activities of sewing studios.

The respondents were also asked if they would carry out additional education in garment repair or alteration if such would be available. All respondents (100%, N = 7) with 0–2 years of experience and 71% (N = 12) of those with 3–5 years of experience considered it at least possible that they would undertake further training in both repair and alteration. (Figures 9 and 10) In addition, total of nine respondent across nearly all respondent groups commented that they think that repair and alteration should be taught more during the studies:

“Alteration work is a discipline of its own and should be taught separately.”
(Respondent with 3–5 years of experience)

“More repair work should be taught in schools, including practical tips, tacit knowledge, and skills such as mending.” (Respondent with 11–15 years of experience)

2.2 If professional-level additional training in garment repair were offered, would you participate?

Additional training would be organised in a way that allows studies to be completed alongside work, for example through evening classes.

Amount of respondents: 155

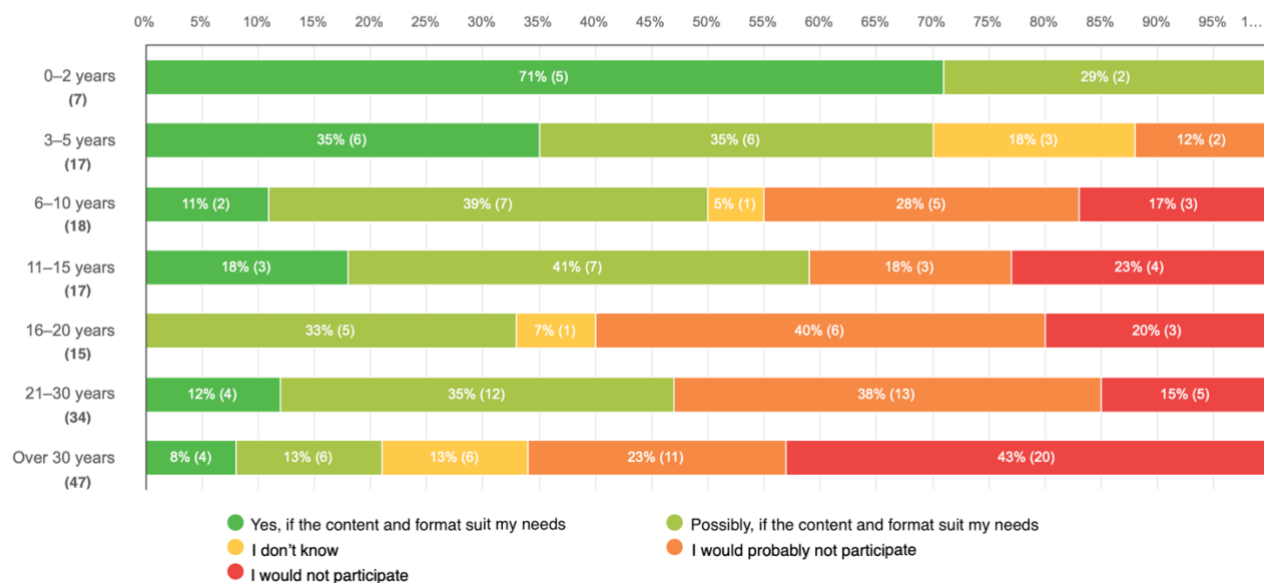


Figure 9. Respondents interest towards additional training in garment repair.

2.3 If professional-level additional training in garment alteration were offered, would you participate?

Additional training would be organised in a way that allows studies to be completed alongside work, for example through evening classes.

Amount of respondents: 154

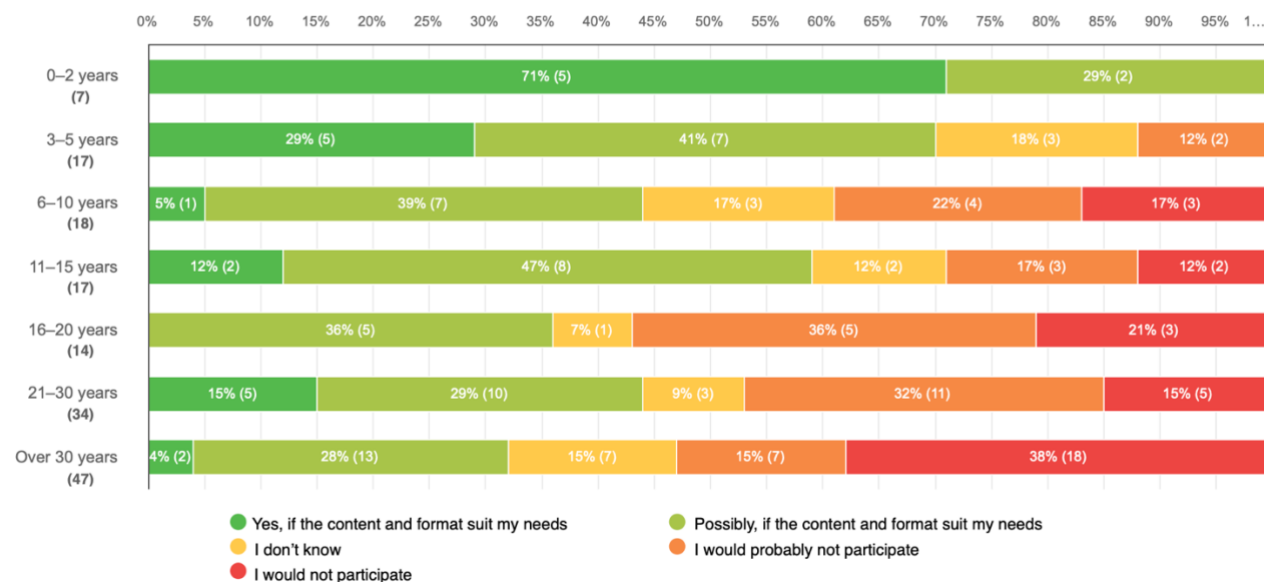


Figure 10. Respondents interest towards additional training in garment alteration.

After approximately five years of work experience, the proportion of respondents interested in further training begins to decline more clearly. After 16 years of experience, the proportion of those who are not interested in additional training exceeds those expressing positive attitudes towards additional training. Nevertheless, still among those with over 30 years of experience, 21% (N = 10) of respondents considered it at least possible that they would undertake further training in repair and 32% (N = 15) in alteration.

Interest in additional training is relatively similar for both repair and alteration, although training related to alteration gathered slightly more interest. This is interesting, as results in question 2.1 (Figure 7) suggest that education provides stronger support for the development of alteration skills than for repair skills. One could thus assume that repair would gather more interest compared to alteration. This discrepancy may stem from the fact that the quality of education is generally perceived to have declined and that both of these areas are covered only briefly during basic education.

The most common reasons for a lack of interest in additional training were associated with the length of professional experience and age, as respondents often felt that they had already acquired the necessary skills or were too old to pursue further education. A total of 29 open-ended comments referred to these factors. However, four older respondents with extensive experience noted that additional training would have been beneficial earlier in their careers. Although most respondents with long careers considered additional training less important, some emphasised that continuous learning and skill development remain valuable through the whole career. All of these respondents have 21–30 years of experience in the field:

“In this profession, one is never truly finished. There is always something new to learn, and one encounters garments made in many different ways.”

“Demanding repairs can always be improved, and new ways of working can be developed... It is entirely possible that a new method could make the work faster or easier. I am very particular about quality, and customer satisfaction has been high – but there is always room for improvement.”

“I already have extensive experience in repair and alteration sewing, but there is always something new to learn.”

Two respondents reported that they currently work or have previously worked as vocational teachers. Both agreed that repair and alteration skills should be taught more extensively during education. One respondent considered the current 15 CP module to be too limited for acquiring the skills required in working life, while the other suggested that a 45 CP repair module should be available within the Basic Vocational Qualification, with contact teaching.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the areas of repair and/or alteration in which they would like to receive additional professional training. The question was designed as a select-all-that-apply question. The question included 23 predefined options, in addition to “I don’t need additional education” and “Other.” (Figure 11)

2.4 In which areas of repair or alteration would you like to receive professional-level additional training?

Amount of respondents: 143
Amount of options selected: 551

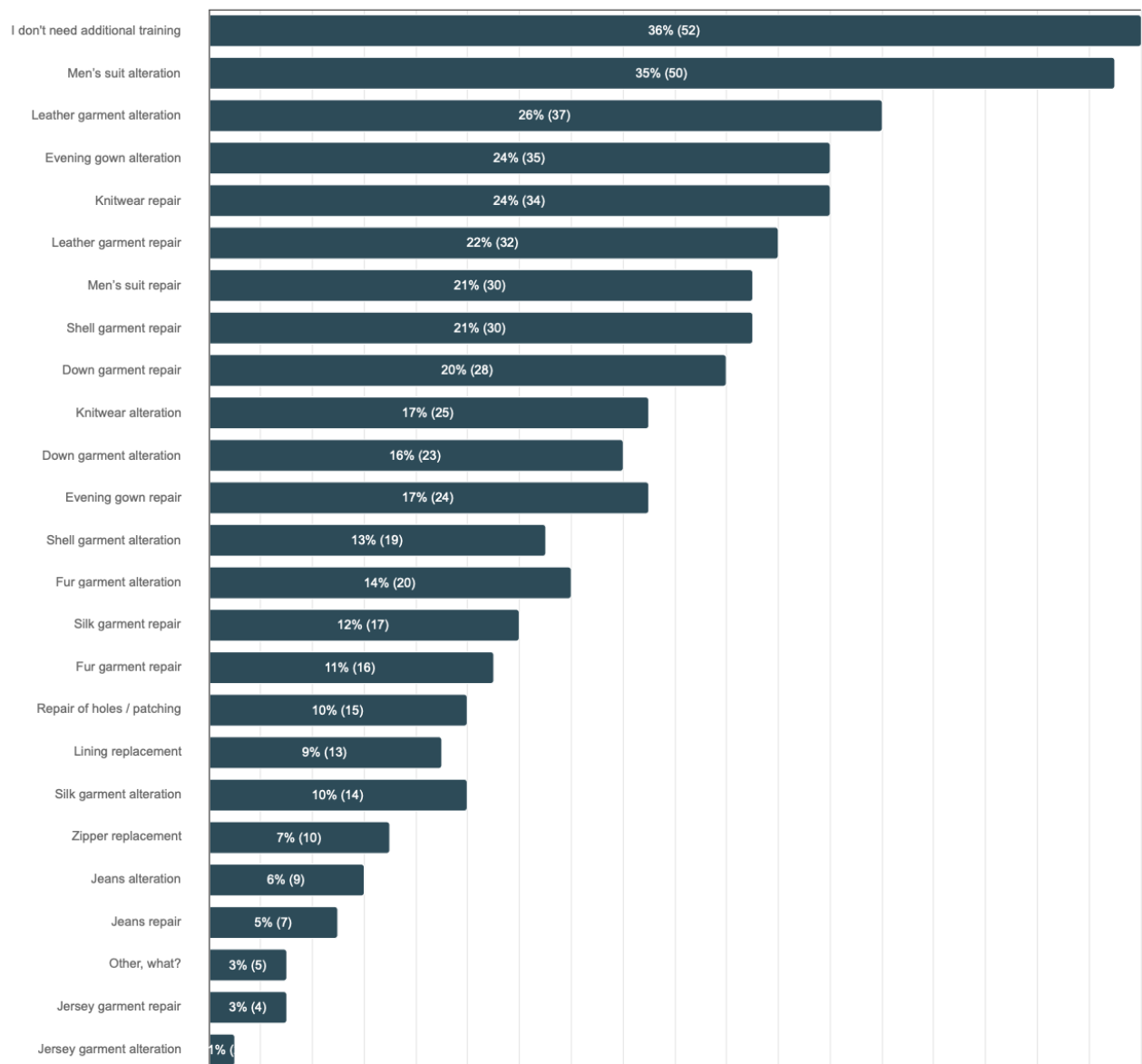


Figure 11. Areas of skill development needs.

A total of 143 respondents answered this question, resulting in 551 selections. The lower response rate in this question may be explained by the high proportion of respondents with

extensive experience in the field, who are less interested in additional training – and thus answering additional questions about skill development needs.

The need for developing different skills is highest at the early stages of career, which is consistent with the results of the questions 2.2 and 2.3 (Figures 9 and 10). On average, respondents with 0–2 years of experience selected ten different skill areas for development. In contrast, for example among those with over 16 years of experience the average number of selected skill areas was half of this. The average number of skill development needs was calculated by excluding respondents who selected the option “I don’t need additional education” from both the total number of respondents in each experience group and the total number of selections. (Figure 12)

Lenght of experience	Amount of different skills
0-2 years	10
3–5 years	7
6-10 years	5
11-15 years	5
16-20 years	4
21-30 years	4
Over 30 years	3

Figure 12. Average amount of individual skill development needs per experience group.

The proportion of respondents who selected the option “I don’t need additional education” (36%, N = 52) corresponds with the results of Questions 2.2 (“If professional-level additional training in garment repair were offered, would you participate?”) and 2.3 (same question regarding garment alteration) (Figures 9 and 10), in terms of the distribution across experience groups. Notably, none of the respondents with 0–5 years of experience selected this option.

The greatest interest was expressed in training related to men’s suits, leather garments, evening gowns, and knitwear. In contrast, repair and alteration of jersey garments and jeans attracted the least interest. Among all respondents, repair and alteration of men’s suits generated the highest level of interest (56%, N = 70). This may be explained by the fact that tailoring and dressmaking are distinct fields of specialisation, but demand for repair and alteration of men’s suits exists as well within "ordinary" sewing studios that lack tailoring skills. Total of 15

respondent (10%) had tailoring related education. Only 2 out of these were interested in additional training in regards of repair or alteration of mens suits.

An open-ended comment from one respondent indicate that mens suits are important from a business perspective and that they represent a consistent “client group” within the field:

“Men’s suits provide a steady source of income for repair professionals, so their repair must be carried out to a high standard in order to maintain the trust of clients who invest in high-quality garments.” (Respondent with over 30 years of experience)

The option “Other” was selected by five respondents. The additional comments referred to topics such as specialised materials and protective clothing, visible mending, pattern making, and skills related to profitability and quality of work.

The responses to the question regarding specific skill training needs show some correspondence with the open-ended comments to question regarding refusal of repair tasks due to insufficient skills (Question 2.8 in Appendix). In this question, the items most frequently mentioned as having been refused due to lack of skills or appropriate equipment were: (1) fur garments (N = 21), (2) leather garments (N = 15), (3) men’s suits (N = 9), and (4) evening gowns (N = 4). However, although fur garments were most frequently reported as being refused – primarily due to a lack of appropriate equipment, machinery, or training – interest in additional training related to fur repair or alteration remained relatively low. Reasons given for refusing such work included ethical concerns, allergies, and the specialised equipment required.

Another recurring reason for refusing certain types of work in addition to insufficient skills was the lack of appropriate machinery. A total of eight respondents mentioned this as a factor, particularly in relation to fur and leather garments. Machinery plays a significant role in shaping the range of services offered by sewing studios, and entrepreneurs must critically assess which machines and equipment provide the greatest return relative to their investment costs.

3.5 Additional education can enhance the profitability of garment repair businesses

In craft-based professions, profitability is closely linked to the development of skills, work speed, and efficient working methods. However, in the field of garment repair and alteration, one of the key challenges lies in the limited potential for standardisation and repetition (Frisk, 2023, p. 48). Unlike mass production, repair work often involves a wide variety of unique tasks, making it more difficult to establish highly efficient, routine-based workflows. This challenge was highlighted in some open-ended comments. Some respondents were also skeptical if repair and alteration skills can be taught because of this:

“Garment repair is often unprofitable from a business perspective. Each task is unique, and even minor repairs must be individually assessed and planned. During the work process, threads and needles need to be changed across different machines, and time is also spent on customer service and communication. In many cases, the time required exceeds what customers are willing to pay for the service. The work is also difficult to scale: within a working day, only a physically limited amount of work can be completed. Ultimately, this leads to an economic ceiling that is difficult to surpass.” (Respondent with 11–15 years of experience)

“Each garment requiring repair is unique and demands a tailored, case-specific approach. Such expertise is difficult to acquire solely through formal education.” (Respondent with over 30 years of experience)

“Repair work is often so case-specific that it is uncertain to what extent formal training reflects everyday practice, where tasks must be completed in a sustainable and cost-efficient manner.” (Respondent with over 16–20 years of experience)

Despite these constraints, the results show that additional education is believed to improve productivity, particularly at the early stages of a career. Respondents were asked whether further training could enhance the efficiency of their repair or alteration work and, consequently, the profitability of their business. All respondents (100%, N = 7) with 0–2 years of experience and 88% (N = 15) of those with 3–5 years of experience considered this at least somewhat likely. (Figure 13)

These findings suggest that additional education may play a significant role in improving the profitability of work in particularly early-stage sewing professionals by accelerating the development of efficient working practices. Even among more experienced respondents, the perceived benefits remained evident: 47% (N = 8) of those with 11–15 years of experience considered further training at least somewhat likely to enhance efficiency and profitability.

2.5 Could additional training improve the efficiency of your repair and/or alteration work and thereby increase its profitability?

Amount of respondents: 154

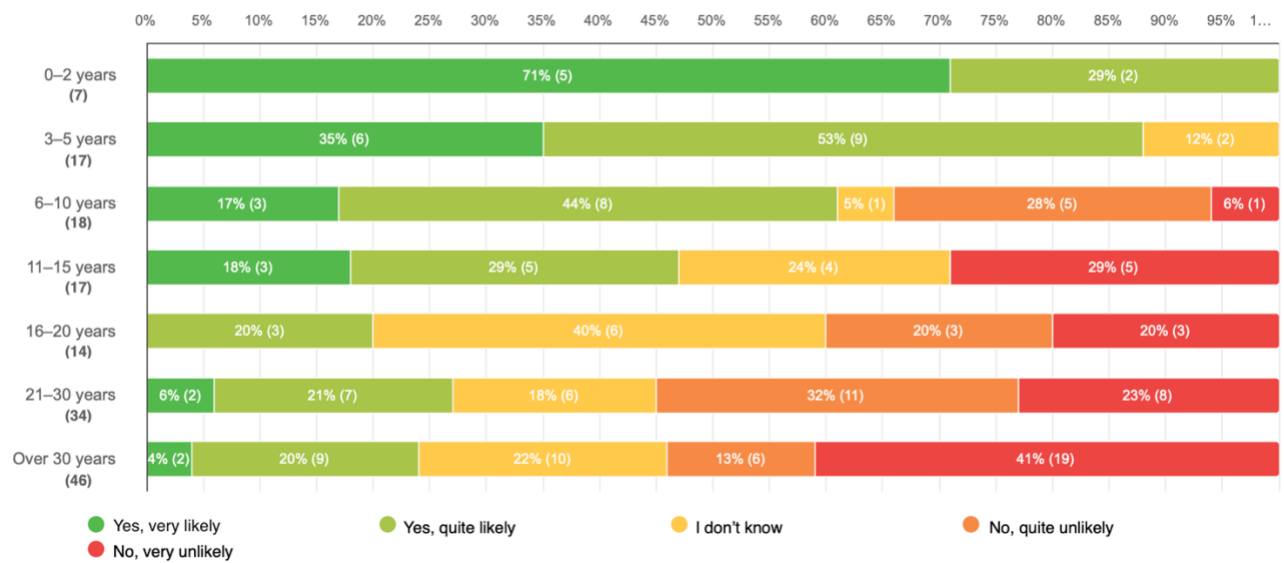


Figure 13. The impact of additional training on profitability of garment repair and alteration work.

3.6 Practical training on pricing and profitability is needed in the garment repair sector

Respondents were asked to assess how necessary they consider the development of their skills in the following areas: (1) pricing of their work, (2) improving the profitability of their work, (3) business development, and (4) marketing and communication.

Across all respondents, the majority considered the development of these skills to be at least fairly necessary. The distribution of responses was relatively similar across all skill areas, both among all respondents (Figure 14) and across different experience groups (Figures 15–18). In nearly all experience groups and across all skill areas, over 50% of respondents indicated that developing these skills would be at least somewhat necessary (Figures 15–18).

3.2 Evaluate how necessary you consider the development of your skills in the following areas:

Amount of respondents: 152

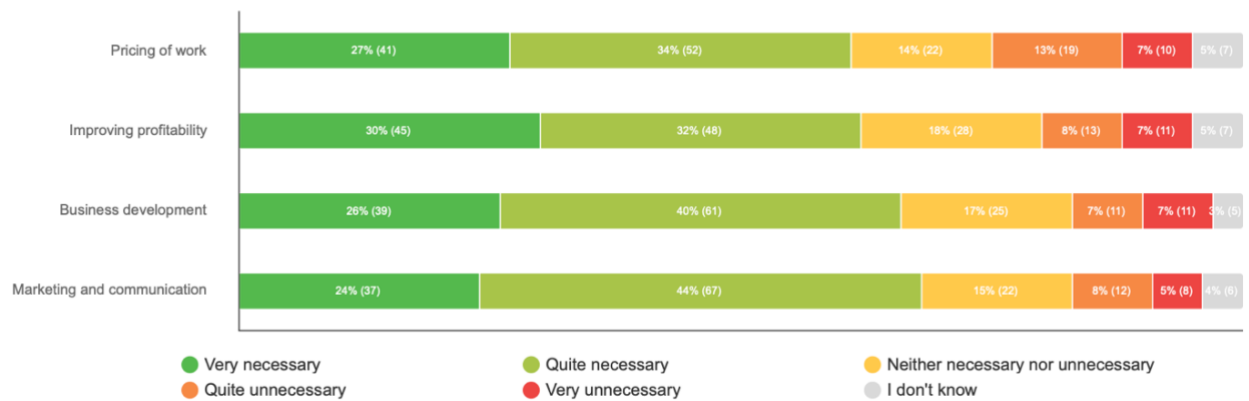


Figure 14. Perceived necessity of developing different business related skills. (All responses together)

Only somewhat notable exception emerges among respondents with over 30 years of experience. In this group, the development of marketing and communication skills, as well as business development skills, are perceived as somewhat more necessary than development of skills regarding pricing and profitability. This may be explained by significant changes in the marketing landscape, in particularly the rise of social media and digital marketing, which may require older professionals to update their practices. In contrast, approaches to pricing and profitability may be more stable over time. These differences were also reflected in some open-ended responses.

Overall, the distribution across experience groups follows a pattern similar to that observed in previous questions related to repair and alteration skills. The perceived need for skill development is highest at the early stages of a career.

3.2 Evaluate how necessary you consider the development of your skills in the following areas:

Amount of respondents: 152

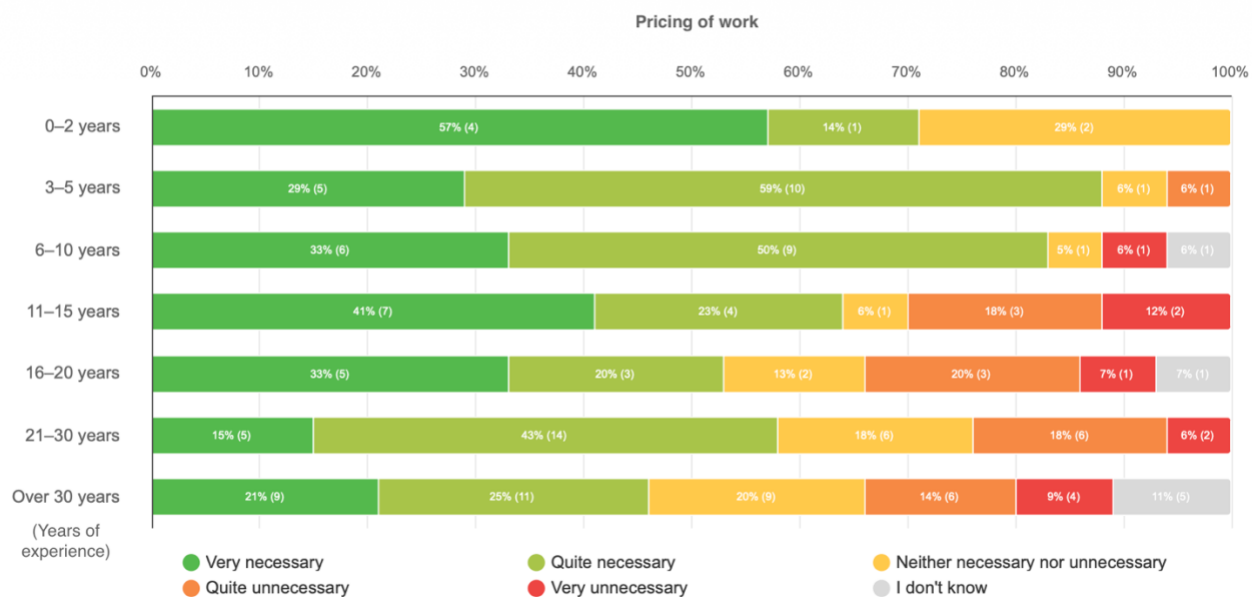


Figure 15. Respondents perceived necessity of developing skills related to pricing of work.

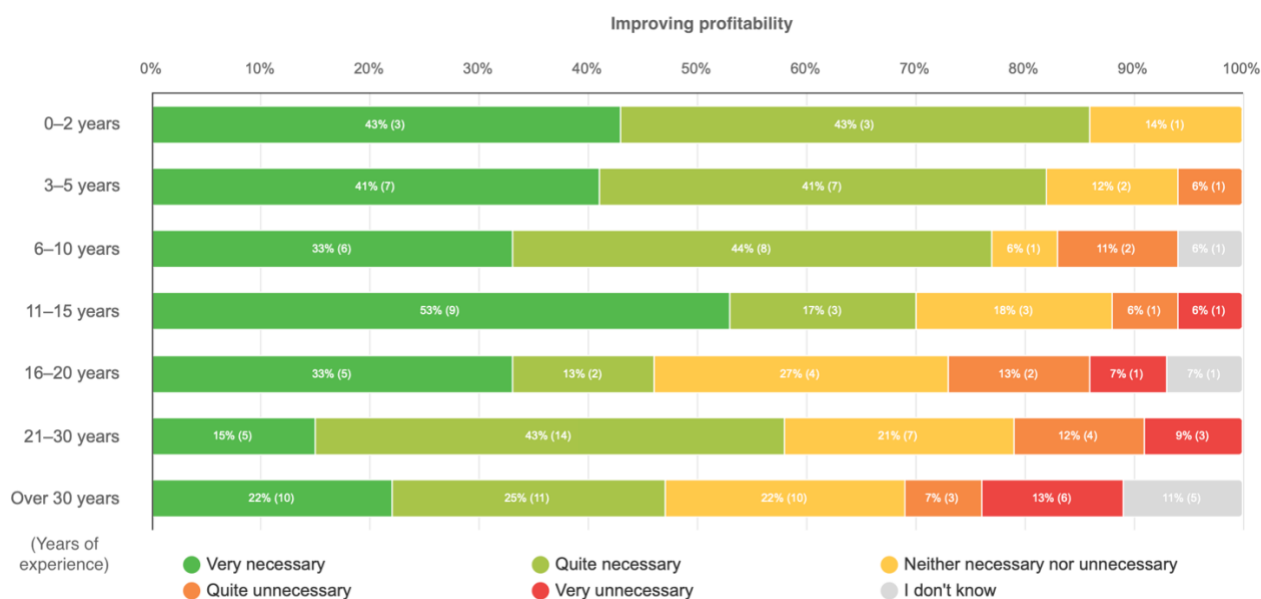


Figure 16. Respondents perceived necessity of developing skills related to improving profitability of their work.

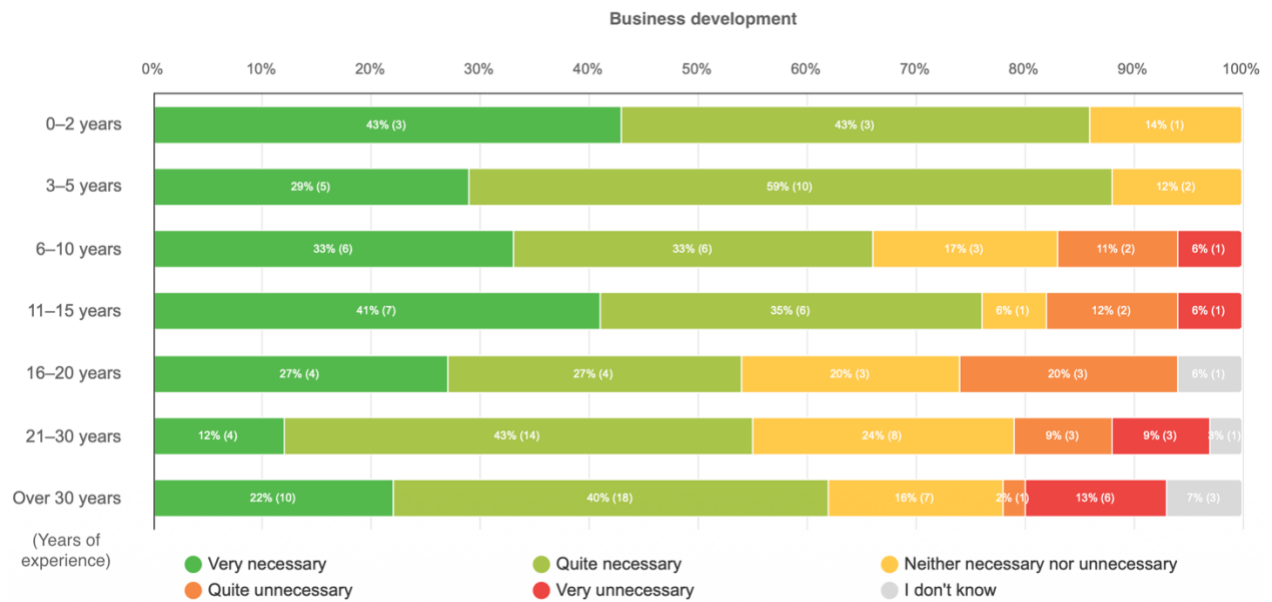


Figure 17. Respondents perceived necessity of developing skills related to development of business.

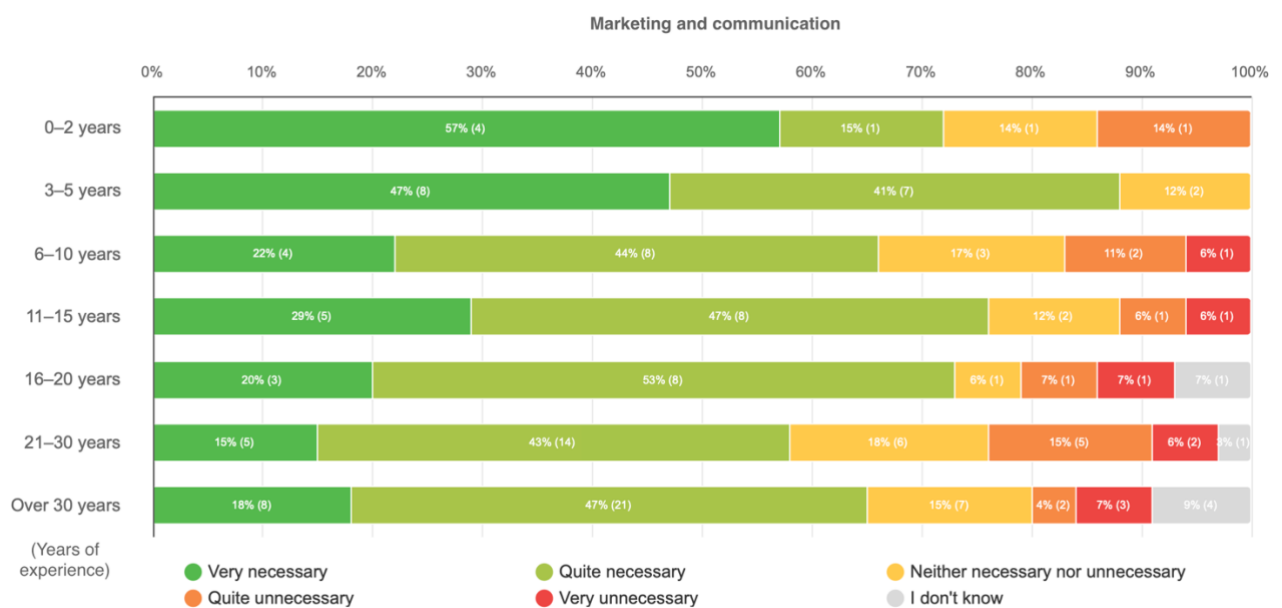


Figure 18. Respondents perceived necessity of developing skills related to marketing and communication.

Respondents were also asked whether they would participate in additional training related to these topics. All respondents with 0–2 years of experience (100%, N = 7), and approximately 70% of respondents with up to 20 years of experience, considered it at least possible that they would undertake further training in these areas. (Figure 19)

3.3 If training related to the above topics were offered specifically from the perspective of garment repair and alteration business, would you participate?

The training would be organised in a way that allows studies to be completed alongside work, for example through evening classes.

Amount of respondents: 152

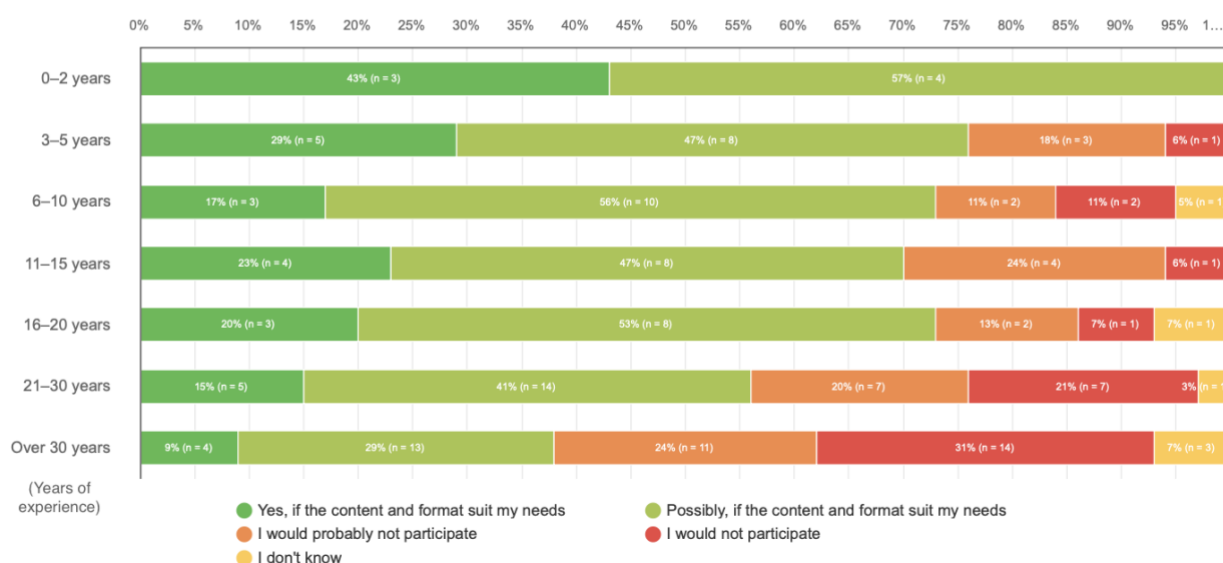


Figure 19. Respondents interest towards additional training in business related skills.

Although the distribution across different business related skill areas was relatively even (Figures 14–18), uncertainty related to pricing emerges the most from the open-ended comments. A total of eight respondents commented on challenges related to pricing, either in their own work or in the field more broadly among colleagues. This uncertainty appears to be particularly pronounced at the early stages of the career. However, one respondent with 6–10 years of experience also reported continued uncertainty:

“We were given some kind of pricing formula, but I still compare my prices with those of local sewing professionals and feel uncertain about pricing.” (Respondent with 6–10 years of experience)

“We were not given any guidance on pricing repair work during our studies. This is something that causes frustration almost daily. Garments are individual, as are their repairs, so pricing constantly requires adjustment.” (Respondent with 3–5 years of experience)

“Pricing is very difficult, and there should definitely be more guidance on it.” (Respondent with 3–5 years of experience)

“When it comes to pricing, I believe every practitioner in this field would benefit from further support.” (Respondent with 11–15 years of experience)

Today, entrepreneurship-related studies can be selected as optional modules within all Vocational Qualification levels in Textiles and Fashion. At the level of the Specialist Vocational Qualification, business development is also embedded in the compulsory modules. (EDUFI, 2025a, 2025b, 2026a)

In addition, at all qualification levels, a separate mandatory module is dedicated to the development of skills related to productization, communication, and marketing. The scope of this module increases from 10 competence points in the Basic Vocational Qualification to 15 competence points in the Further Vocational Qualification and 30 competence points in the Specialist Vocational Qualification. This progression indicates a systematic deepening of marketing-related competencies, including communication, content production, and the presentation and commercialisation of products and services. (EDUFI, 2025a, 2025b, 2026a)

Marketing and communication related mandatory modules have been part of qualifications since 2017–2018. However, it is interesting that besides this, development of marketing and communication skills are perceived as nearly similarly important with other subjects listed among respondents with shorter (0–5 years) experience as well (Figures 15–18). This may be explained by the fast development of marketing space and thus need to develop skills constantly.

Despite the presence of these broader business-related competencies, pricing and profitability are not addressed as distinct or explicit areas of learning at any qualification level. In the Basic and Further Vocational Qualifications, these themes are embedded indirectly in the studies within concepts such as cost awareness and working practices. At the Specialist level, economic aspects are considered in a more strategic manner, for example through cost estimation and the evaluation of resources and expected outcomes within development projects. Nevertheless, concrete skills related to pricing of individual work tasks or systematically developing profitability seems to remain largely implicit throughout all qualification levels. (EDUFI, 2025a, 2025b, 2026a)

Overall, the qualification framework places strong emphasis on marketing, communication, and, at higher levels, strategic business development, while practical competencies related to pricing and profitability are less explicitly defined. This imbalance may contribute to the challenges related to pricing of work reported by respondents. However, it needs to be mentioned that this analysis is made solely based on the qualification requirements and comments from the survey. Further interviews with representatives from educational institution are needed to build a comprehensive understanding about the issue.

4 Discussion

4.1 Main findings

This study sought to examine how well education meets the practical needs of garment repair professionals in Finland, and what kinds of skill and training needs professionals in the sector identify. To address these questions, a survey was conducted in Finland in February 2026 among garment repair professionals, with a total of 155 responses analysed.

Garment repair professionals in Finland are primarily bespoke dressmakers, sewing professionals, and tailors, as no dedicated qualification exists specifically for garment repair and alteration. These qualifications are acquired through VET in Textile and Fashion. The results of this study show that garment repair and alteration services are mainly provided by small sewing studios, typically operating as sole proprietorships. To work as an employee is really rare in the field.

4.1.1 RQ 1: How does education meet the practical needs of garment repair professionals in Finland?

Regarding the first research question of how does the education meet the practical needs of garment repair professionals in Finland, the findings suggest that vocational education in sewing and garment making has weakened over recent decades, particularly during the past 10–15 years. This decline has also negatively affected the development of repair and alteration competencies of professionals working in the field. This result is especially significant because garment repair and alteration skills are strongly dependent on foundational competencies in garment making and sewing. In other words, the ability to repair and alter garments usually requires a solid understanding of for example, different constructions of garments, materials, and sewing techniques.

Despite the introduction of optional modules related to garment repair and alteration in 2018, this is not reflected in the results of this study. On the contrary, respondents with 0–2 (N = 7) and 3–5 (N = 17) years of experience in the field had the most negative perceptions on how well education meets the needs of working life in regards of repair and alteration (see section 3.2, Figure 7). However, there are some limitations on this interpretation. These limitations are discussed in section 4.1.3.

Several structural factors appear to have contributed to the perceived weakening of sewing and garment making education. These include for example a reduction in contact teaching due to budget cuts in VET, as well as the VET reform in 2018, which significantly increased the role of workplace-based learning (Miettinen et al., 2025; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a). At the same time, the integration of youth and adult education, individualised learning paths, rolling admissions and the extension of compulsory education from the age of 16 to the age of 18 in 2021 have led to increasingly heterogeneous student groups, introducing new pedagogical challenges. According to the Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training (AMKE), the current system places excessive emphasis on students' self-direction, while support and guidance remain insufficient. (Lamppu, 2026)

Also, the proportion of students requiring special support is higher in the textile and fashion field than in other fields in general (Mialeena Pärssinen, unpublished presentation, 12 March 2026). This may be explained by the tendency of students who face challenges with theoretical studies to enter craft-based fields. Such fields may also be perceived as more supportive or rehabilitative learning environments for students requiring additional support. (Auri Kohola, personal communication, 21 April 2026) In addition, the number of non-native-speaking students is growing rapidly. In ten years, the number has more than doubled, further introducing challenges to the education. (Lamppu, 2026)

With regard to the impact of education on the profitability of work, the majority of respondents with 0–10 years of experience in the field (N = 42), consider it at least quite likely that additional training in garment repair and alteration could improve the profitability of their work. Among respondents with 0–2 years of experience, 71% (N = 5) reported that this would be very likely, while the remaining 29% (N = 2) considered it quite likely. This result suggests that more comprehensive education in repair and alteration – or at least, higher-quality education in garment making and sewing in general – could positively influence the profitability of work, especially at the early stages of career and entrepreneurship. This is particularly relevant in the garment repair sector, where profitability is inherently challenging due to the labour-intensive nature of the work and the limited potential for standardisation and repetition of work (Frisk, 2023, p. 48). Consequently, strong foundational skills play a crucial role in enabling professionals to apply their knowledge effectively in highly variable situations. As most professionals work as sole proprietorships, opportunities for informal learning from colleagues are also limited.

While practical experience gained through work is also essential for skill development, the findings highlight the importance of solid foundational education. Without sufficient basic skills, learning through work becomes slower and less efficient, directly affecting productivity and income. Time spent on trial and error during work has a direct impact on efficiency and, consequently, profitability of work.

4.1.2 RQ 2: What kinds of skill and training needs do garment repair professionals identify within the sector in Finland?

Regarding the second research question, the findings indicate that current education supports the development of alteration skills to a greater extent than repair skills. This is explained by the closer relationship between alteration and garment making: alteration work typically involves garment constructions (e.g. seams and hems) familiar from garment making, whereas repair work often requires dealing with the structure, characteristics and behaviour of the material itself.

Material-based repair often emerges as a distinct area of expertise that requires in-depth knowledge of textile structures and materials. Repair of knitwear, in particular, is a distinct field of expertise requiring deep knowledge on knitting. These type of competences seems to be less directly supported by current education in sewing and garment making, according to the qualification requirements in textile and fashion. Optional modules related to material construction (e.g. knitting and weaving) are available as part of Basic Vocational Qualification (EDUFI, 2026a), but they are mainly oriented towards industrial production and do not directly address the needs of manual repair work, where understanding fabric damage, wear, and appropriate repair techniques are in focus.

Despite these differences, interest in additional training was found to be relatively similar for both repair and alteration. This may reflect a broader perceived decline in educational quality and limited exposure to both areas during initial training.

Other specific training needs identified in the survey include skills related to men's suits, leather garments, and evening gowns. Among all respondents, repair and alteration of men's suits generated the highest level of interest. This may be explained by the relatively small number of trained tailors among respondents. While tailoring and dressmaking are distinct fields of specialisation, demand for the repair and alteration of men's suits also exists within general sewing studios that may lack tailoring expertise. This demand may further be linked to the higher

value of such garments, as higher-quality items are usually more likely to be repaired than lower-priced clothing (Karell & Niinimäki, 2025; Laitala et al., 2021).

The findings also highlight a clear need for business-related competencies. In particular, respondents reported uncertainty regarding pricing of their work especially at the early stages of their careers. While business and marketing topics are included in vocational education, practical training in pricing and profitability appears to remain limited and largely implicit in the curriculum. (EDUFI, 2025a, 2025b, 2026a).

The need for additional training is naturally highest, both in regards of craft-based and business based skills, at the beginning of the career, when foundational skills are still developing and experience is limited. However, at the same time, more experienced professionals also expressed interest in developing their competencies, particularly in areas such as marketing and business development, reflecting changes in the operating environment.

4.1.3 Limitations of the survey

Finally, it is important to note that the results do not provide direct insight into how the currently available repair-focused modules in VET are perceived. The survey did not specifically target respondents who had completed these modules and it is not sure if the respondents have executed these modules. In other words, the findings do not directly answer how the content of the current repair-oriented modules in VET in textile and fashion corresponds to the needs of working life. To obtain this information, the survey should have been more precisely targeted at individuals who had completed their qualification after the 2018 VET reform and also completed these modules. In this respect, the data collection has limitations. However, from a broader perspective, this limitation does not substantially alter the overall conclusion regarding the perceived weakening of sewing and garment making education which creates an important foundation for the development of repair and alteration skills.

Also, the survey nevertheless provides indicative evidence regarding the scope of the current repair oriented modules. Two respondents with experience as vocational teachers suggested that repair and alteration should be taught more extensively than today. One noted that the current 15 CP module for repair and alteration in Basic Vocational Qualification is too limited to develop adequate skills needed in working life, while another suggested that a broader module of 45 CP should be available within the Basic Vocational Qualification.

4.2 Reflections on developing professional garment repair education in Finland

Due to cuts to VET implemented by the Finnish Government, vocational education in the textile and fashion sector is under serious threat (Kohola, 2024). Given Finland's current economic situation and ongoing public spending adjustments (The Ministry of Finance of Finland, 2025), increases in VET funding appear unlikely in the near future. From this perspective, it is important to consider alternative and cost-effective ways of strengthening education and expertise in the field of garment repair and alteration – both for vocational students and for professionals already working in the field.

4.2.1 Development of online-based learning as part of VET in textile and fashion

Online-based learning may offer a flexible way to participate in additional training especially alongside work. Several respondents in the survey specifically identified distance learning as the most suitable format for additional education. Lifelong learning appears particularly important in the garment repair sector, where the variety of products, materials, constructions, and repair situations encountered in practice are virtually unlimited.

Online education may potentially offer a cost-effective complementary solution, particularly in situations where financial constraints limit the availability of traditional contact teaching. In this respect, online-based learning supported by instructional videos could be an option worth further exploration. Although the development of high-quality online education requires initial investment, digitally supported and blended learning models may prove cost-effective over time due to their scalability. (Ortagus, 2020) However, in speaking of initial Basic Vocational Qualification in a craft-based field, it is of course important that students first master the basic skills through traditional contact teaching to be able to further develop skills through more independent online-based learning.

Practice-based subjects such as garment repair and alteration naturally require a substantial amount of instructional video content, which may create challenges in terms of implementation costs. For this reason, careful cost-benefit analysis is essential, and implementation models that maintain reasonable production costs should be considered. During the planning phase, it would be important to consult experts in video-based online education to ensure pedagogically effective and economically viable solutions. Collaboration with media-related vocational education programmes could offer practical opportunities for more cost-efficient content production.

Encouragingly, during the final stages of this study, it became apparent that educational solutions of this kind have already begun to emerge within the field. The “*Saumatonta osaamista tekstiili- ja muotialalle*” (“Seamless Expertise for the Textile and Fashion Industry”) project focused on developing online-based learning solutions for sustainable development-related modules within textile and fashion VET. As part of the project, a web-based course was developed for the current 45 CP repair-focused module within Further Vocational Qualification. (Aarnio et al., 2025) This suggests growing recognition of the need for more flexible and accessible digitally delivered forms of education in the field.

This development is particularly encouraging given that the repair-focused module in question appears to be underutilised. According to statistics from the Finnish National Agency for Education, only 33–37 students completed the module between 2021 and 2025 (Vipunen, 2026). One possible explanation may be that further vocational education is largely competence-based and often rely heavily on workplace learning and independent practice, rather than structured teaching. While this model supports flexible recognition of prior learning, it may be less effective in situations where professionals seek practical guidance to improve efficiency in specialised repair and alteration work.

As discussed earlier, time spent on trial and error, experimentation, and independent problem-solving directly affects efficiency of work and, consequently, profitability of the business. For professionals working in a labour-intensive field where most operate independently, more structured and practically oriented learning opportunities may therefore be particularly valuable. In this respect, online-based education may potentially offer a promising solution by combining flexibility with instructional support.

4.2.2 Strengthening knowledge exchange among professionals in the field

The survey findings show that knowledge sharing among professionals in the field is perceived as valuable, and that opportunities to observe the working methods of other practitioners in the field are considered particularly beneficial for professional development. One potential avenue worth further exploration could thus be how knowledge exchange and peer learning among garment repair professionals could be better supported and strengthened.

At present, professional knowledge is exchanged relatively actively in the Finnish “*Ammattina Ompelu*” Facebook group, which provides a positive indication that professionals in the field are willing to share knowledge and support one another. However, this raises the question of

whether such informal knowledge exchange could be further developed and made more systematic.

In addition, an association called “*Ompelualan Yrittäjät ry*” (“Association of Sewing Industry Entrepreneurs”) operated for approximately 30 years in Finland, but the organisation was dissolved in 2024 due to declining membership and insufficient recruitment of new members (Ompelualan Yrittäjät, n.d.). Despite this, it may be worthwhile to explore whether a renewed form of professional association or network could be established, taking into account the current needs and expectations of entrepreneurs in the field and considering how such activities could be modernised. Organised professional collaboration could also create opportunities to secure external funding for initiatives aimed at strengthening peer learning, knowledge exchange, and professional development within the sector.

Lastly, as discussed in Section 1.2.1, garment repair does not currently have a separate category within the Finnish TOL classification, meaning that no comprehensive statistical data is available on the size, structure, or development of the sector. Establishing a dedicated TOL category for garment repair would make it possible to collect more precise statistical information, thereby increasing the visibility of the field and potentially also strengthening its political recognition.

In principle, creating a separate category for garment repair within the Finnish TOL classification would be feasible. According to Statistics Finland, the creation of a new TOL category requires at least 50 enterprises whose principal activity falls within the proposed category. Based on the results of this study alone, this threshold would easily be met. Total of 78 respondents reported that the majority of their work is focused on repair and alteration. The survey reached approximately 29% of the estimated population of around 530 garment repair professionals in Finland, based on the proposed European average and data obtained from Fonecta Finder (see Section 1.2.1). A renewed professional association or industry network could potentially promote the establishment of such classification category. More comprehensive statistical information on the field could, in turn, support advocacy efforts and facilitate applications for external funding by providing more concrete evidence of the size and development of the sector.

4.3 Suggestions for further research

As discussed in previous section, online-based learning as part of VET could be an option worth further exploration to support the development of expertise in the field of garment repair and

alteration – both as part of Basic Vocational Qualification and Further Vocational Qualification for those already in working life.

However, before broader implementation can be considered, several practical questions require further examination. First, it needs to be investigated how and if online learning is currently utilised within textile and fashion VET in Finland to better understand the institutional resources and competencies required for producing online education – especially with a large amount of video-material needed in this case. It is also important to evaluate how the online-materials developed in the *“Saumatonta osaamista tekstiili- ja muotialalle”* project have been implemented and received in practice, especially from the perspective of cost-benefit analysis.

In addition, the potential for collaboration between educational institutions should be explored. Rather than each institution developing separate digital learning materials independently, collaborative models could provide a more resource-efficient approach. More detailed data would also be needed to identify which specific repair and alteration skills and thematic areas should be prioritised in online course development, both from the perspective of vocational students and professionals already in working life.

Second, further research is needed on how knowledge exchange and peer learning among garment repair professionals could be better supported and systematised in practise. And if a renewed professional association could enable this work. More in-depth qualitative research is required to understand how realistic more structured forms of collaboration would be and what would be the best modes of such collaboration from the perspective of professionals working in the field. In addition, the practical feasibility of such initiatives requires further study, including possible funding models for the development of and coordination of association and peer-learning activities and materials. As profitability in the garment repair sector is often challenging, it would be particularly important to examine how active contributors could be compensated for the development work, as participation in such initiatives would likely reduce the time available for income-generating repair work.

Third, further research is needed on young people’s attitudes towards garment repair work and entrepreneurship within the sector. The findings of this study suggest a potential mismatch between vocational education and the realities of working life. Repair and alteration work forms a significant part of the business activities of sewing studios in Finland, and many businesses are focused entirely on garment repair and alteration. In addition, broader societal developments – such as EU green legislation and the growth of circular economy practices – may further increase demand for repair services in the future. Despite this, no dedicated

vocational qualification or clear specialisation pathway currently exists for garment repair and alteration. Instead, professionals working in the field typically hold qualifications in dressmaking, sewing, or tailoring.

At the same time, bespoke dressmaking appears to remain the most attractive educational pathway within VET in textile and fashion, in contrast to for example industrial sewing which is clearly more unpopular (Auri Kohola, personal communication, 21 April 2026). There may be a possibility that garment repair is not perceived as attractive and prestigious as bespoke garment making among young students. However, this assumption requires empirical investigation. Further research should therefore examine how young people perceive garment repair work, entrepreneurship in the sector, and the attractiveness of repair-focused career paths. Such knowledge would be highly valuable in assessing the potential for establishing a dedicated repair-focused qualification pathway, or at minimum, for strengthening repair-related content within existing vocational qualifications. However, the popularity of the current repair and alteration specialized module in Basic Vocational Qualification gives encouraging indications. In 2025 The Basic Vocational Qualification was completed by approximately 435 students whereas approximately 279 completed the module in repair and alteration (Vipunen, 2026).

5 Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that current vocational education does not adequately meet the practical needs of garment repair professionals in Finland. Clear deficiencies were identified in both craft-based and business-related skills.

Repair is a central component of the circular economy, and the importance of circular economy principles has strengthened both in EU regulation concerning the textile and fashion sector (Lüttin, 2026) and in Finland's national strategic policy framework (Ministry of the Environment, 2026). However, this development does not yet appear to be fully reflected in vocational education in Finland. Although repair-related content has been added to VET in textile and fashion, the findings of this study suggest that this has not been sufficient to offset the broader perceived weakening of sewing and garment-making education, which forms the essential foundation for the development of repair and alteration skills. As one respondent aptly noted, "Before carrying out repair, one must first master the basic principles of garment making."

The garment repair sector suffers from low profitability (Berninger et al., 2024; Manoochehri et al., 2022). As garment repair work is highly labour-intensive and characterised by limited opportunities for standardisation and repetition, strong foundational skills are particularly important. Without sufficient basic skills, learning through work becomes slower and less efficient, directly affecting productivity and income. In this way, strong foundational education may also have a direct impact on the profitability of work.

In addition to craft-based competencies, the study identified clear needs for business-related skills, particularly in pricing and profitability management. These needs were most pronounced among early-career professionals, although experienced professionals also expressed interest in developing competencies related to business development and marketing. This suggests that competence development in the field should not be understood only as initial vocational training, but also as an ongoing lifelong learning need.

The findings also reveal a broader contradiction between the realities of the field and current education. Alteration and repair work constitute a significant share of the revenue of sewing studios, and many businesses focus entirely on repair work. The volume of repair work in relation to bespoke garment making also appears to have increased. Despite this, no qualification specifically focused on garment repair is currently available. Instead, professionals working in the field are trained as bespoke dressmakers, tailors, or sewing professionals.

This study contributes to the field by giving voice to garment repair professionals, a group that has received very limited scholarly attention despite its practical importance for circular textile systems. By making visible the perspectives and development needs of professionals working in the field, the study contributes to the discussion on how education could better respond to the realities of garment repair work in Finland.

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Appendix



Kysely vaatteiden korjausalan koulutuksesta ja osaamistarpeista

**Jos sait kutsun sähköpostitse, voit siirtyä suoraan seuraavalle sivulle. Tämä sivu sisältää samat tiedot kuin sähköposti.*

Kyselyyn vastaaminen vie noin 10 minuuttia.

Kysely on suunnattu kaikille vaatteiden korjausta ja muokkausta työkseen tekeville henkilöille. Vastaamaan ovat tervetulleita sekä vasta-alkajat että alan kokeneet ammattilaiset, riippumatta siitä, teetkö korjaus- ja muokkaustöitä pääsääntöisesti vai muiden töiden ohessa.

Kyselyn tavoitteena on selvittää, millaisia näkemyksiä vaatteiden korjauksen ja muokkauksen ammattilaisilla on alan koulutuksen riittävydestä ja kehittämistarpeista Suomessa. Kyselyssä sinulla on mahdollisuus jakaa omia kokemuksiasi ja näkemyksiäsi. Vastauksesi ovat tärkeitä, sillä vastaavaa tutkimusta ei ole toistaiseksi tehty Suomessa.

Vastaamalla kyselyyn annat luvan käyttää vastauksiasi osana tutkimusta. Saadut vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja anonyymisti, eikä kyselyyn vastanneita voida tunnistaa aineistosta tai lopullisesta työstä. Tutkimusaineistot säilytetään tietoturvallisesti.

Kysely on osa Maria Mannisen pro gradu -tutkielmaa. Kerättyä aineistoa hyödynnetään pro gradu -tutkielmassa sekä mahdollisesti myös tulevassa väitöskirjatutkimuksessa.

Kiitos ajastasi ja arvokkaasta panoksestasi tutkimukseen!

Lisätietoja:

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Lapin yliopisto, Taiteiden tiedekunta
Muodin ja tekstiilisuunnittelun koulutusohjelma

Kyselyn käsitteet

Alla on lyhyesti avattu, mitä *vaatteiden korjauksella* ja *vaatteiden muokkauksella* tarkoitetaan tässä kyselyssä:

Vaatteiden korjauksella tarkoitetaan kaikkia toimenpiteitä, joiden tarkoituksena on kunnostaa vaurioitunut vaate ja palauttaa sen käyttökelpoisuus. Korjaus voi olla esimerkiksi rikkiinäisten osien vaihtamista, vaateen paikkaamista tai kuluneiden kohtien vahvistamista.

Vaatteiden muokkauksella tarkoitetaan kaikkia toimenpiteitä, joiden tarkoituksena on säätää vaateen kokoa, parantaa sen istuvuutta tai muokata vaatetta muulla tavoin paremmin käyttäjälleen sopivaksi.

1. Taustatiedot

1.1 Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt vaatteiden valmistuksen, korjauksen ja/ tai muokkauksen parissa?

- ☐ Alle vuoden
☐ 1–2 vuotta
☐ 3–5 vuotta
☐ 6–10 vuotta
☐ 11–15 vuotta
☐ 16–20 vuotta
☐ 21–30 vuotta
☐ Yli 30 vuotta
☐ En osaa sanoa

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

1.2 Minkä tekstiili- ja muotialan tutkinnon olet käynyt?

Valitse kaikki suorittamasi tutkinnot ja lisää perään valmistumisvuosi. Arvio riittää, jos et muista tarkkaa vuosilukua. Jos et löydä sopivaa vaihtoehtoa, voit valita "Jokin muu" ja kertoa opintoistasi kommenttikenttään.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| ☐ Ompelija, Perustutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Mittatilausompelija, Perustutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Vaatturi, Perustutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Ompelija, Ammattitutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Mittatilausompelija, Ammattitutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Vaatturi, Ammattitutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Ompelija, Erikoisammattitutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Mittatilausompelija, Erikoisammattitutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Vaatturi, Erikoisammattitutkinto | <hr/> |
| ☐ Ompelijakisäli | <hr/> |
| ☐ Vaatturikisäli | <hr/> |
| ☐ Kaavoittajakisäli | <hr/> |
| ☐ Neuleenvalmistajakisäli | <hr/> |
| ☐ Ompelijamestari | <hr/> |

- ☐ Vaatturimestari _____
- ☐ Mallimestari _____
- ☐ Neulemestari _____
- ☐ Artenomi, AMK _____
- ☐ Artenomi, YAMK _____
- ☐ Vestonomi, AMK _____
- ☐ Vestonomi, YAMK _____
- ☐ Muotoilija, vaatetusala _____
- ☐ Muotoilija, tekstiiliala _____
- ☐ Jokin muu, mikä/ mitkä? _____
- ☐ Minulla ei ole tekstiili- ja muotialan tutkintoa

Voit tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

1.3 Oletko suorittanut muita vaatteiden korjaus- tai muokkaustaitoja tukevia koulutuksia tai kursseja?

Jos vastasit kyllä, kerro kommenttikenttään mitä kursseja tai koulutuksia olet käynyt. Voit myös halutessasi kertoa, miksi et ole suorittanut lisäkoulutuksia tai -kursseja.

- ☐ En
- ☐ En muista
- ☐ Kyllä, mitä?

Voit tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

1.4 Valitse nykyistä asemaasi parhaiten kuvaavat vaihtoehdot.

Jos et löydä sopivia vaihtoehtoja, voit valita kohdan "Muu, mikä?" ja kertoa asemastasi omin sanoin kommenttikenttään.

- ☐ Olen yksinyrittäjä
- ☐ Minulla on oma liiketila

- ☐ Olen yrittäjä (minulla on yhtiökumppani tai -kumppaneita)
- ☐ Minulla on työntekijöitä
- ☐ Ompelimossani työskentelee yrittäjiä
- ☐ Olen kokopäiväisenä työntekijänä ompelimossa
- ☐ Olen osa-aikaisena työntekijänä ompelimossa
- ☐ Työskentelen kokopäiväisesti yrittäjänä ompelimossa ("vuokrapenkillä", ompelimo ei ole minun)
- ☐ Työskentelen osa-aikaisesti yrittäjänä ompelimossa ("vuokrapenkillä", ompelimo ei ole minun)
- ☐ Teen ompelutöitä kotona (ei varsinaista liiketilaa)
- ☐ Muu, mikä?

Voit tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

1.5 Kuinka suuri osa töistäsi on tällä hetkellä korjaus- tai muokkaustöitä?

- ☐ Suurin osa – työni painottuu vaatteiden korjaukseen ja muokkaukseen
- ☐ Merkittävä osa
- ☐ Noin puolet
- ☐ Pieni osa
- ☐ Työni painottuu uusien vaatteiden valmistukseen

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2. Vaatteiden korjauksen ja muokkauksen taidot

2.1 Arvioi kuinka hyvin koulutuksesi on vastannut työelämän tarpeita

[illegible]

	Hyvin	Melko hyvin	Ei hyvin eikä huonosti	Melko huonosti	Huonosti	En osaa sanoa
Vaatteiden muokkauksen osalta?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.2 Jos vaatteiden korjaukseen liittyen järjestettäisiin ammattitason lisäkoulutusta*, suorittaisitko opintoja?

**Lisäkoulutusta järjestettäisiin siten, että opintoja olisi mahdollista suorittaa töiden ohessa esimerkiksi iltaopintoina.*

- ☐ Kyllä, jos sisältö ja toteutus sopivat minulle
- ☐ Mahdollisesti, jos sisältö ja toteutus sopivat minulle
- ☐ En osaa sanoa
- ☐ Todennäköisesti en suorittaisi
- ☐ En suorittaisi

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.3 Jos vaatteiden muokkaukseen liittyen järjestettäisiin ammattitason lisäkoulutusta*, suorittaisitko opintoja?

**Lisäkoulutusta järjestettäisiin siten, että opintoja olisi mahdollista suorittaa töiden ohessa esimerkiksi iltaopintoina.*

- ☐ Kyllä, jos sisältö ja toteutus sopivat minulle
- ☐ Mahdollisesti, jos sisältö ja toteutus sopivat minulle
- ☐ En osaa sanoa
- ☐ Todennäköisesti en suorittaisi
- ☐ En suorittaisi

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.4 Mihin korjauksen tai muokkauksen teemoihin liittyen toivoisit ammattitason lisäkoulutusta?

Voit valita useita vaihtoehtoja ja tarkentaa vastaustasi kommenttikenttään.

- ☐ Vetoketjun vaihto
- ☐ Vuorin vaihto
- ☐ Reikien korjaus/ paikkaus
- ☐ Miesten pukujen muokkaus
- ☐ Miesten pukujen korjaus
- ☐ Neulevaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Neulevaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Untuvavaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Untuvavaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Kuorivaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Kuorivaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Farkkujen muokkaus
- ☐ Farkkujen korjaus
- ☐ Trikoo-vaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Trikoo-vaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Silkkivaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Silkkivaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Nahkavaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Nahkavaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Turkisvaatteiden muokkaus
- ☐ Turkisvaatteiden korjaus
- ☐ Juhlamekkojen muokkaus
- ☐ Juhlamekkojen korjaus
- ☐ Muu, mikä/ mitkä:
- ☐ En koe tarvitsevani lisäkoulutusta

Voit tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.5 Koetko, että lisäkoulutus voisi parantaa tekemäsi korjaus- tai muokkaustyön tehokkuutta ja siten lisätä toiminnan kannattavuutta?

- ☐ Kyllä, hyvin todennäköisesti
- ☐ Kyllä, melko todennäköisesti
- ☐ En osaa sanoa
- ☐ En, melko epätodennäköisesti
- ☐ En, hyvin epätodennäköisesti

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.6 Koetko, että lisäkoulutus voisi parantaa tekemäsi korjaus- tai muokkaustyön laatua ja sitä kautta asiakastyytyväisyyttä?

- ☐ Kyllä, hyvin todennäköisesti
- ☐ Kyllä, melko todennäköisesti
- ☐ En osaa sanoa
- ☐ En, melko epätodennäköisesti
- ☐ En, hyvin epätodennäköisesti

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.7 Millä tavoin olet kehittänyt vaatteiden korjaus- tai muokkaustaitojasi (töiden teon lisäksi)?

Voit valita tarvittaessa useita vaihtoehtoja.

- ☐ Korjaamalla omia tai läheisten vaatteita
- ☐ Lukemalla alan kirjallisuutta
- ☐ Katsomalla YouTube-videoita
- ☐ Katsomalla Instagram-videoita

- ☐ Katsomalla Facebook-videoita
- ☐ Katsomalla TikTok-videoita
- ☐ Kysymällä neuvoa työkaverilta tai alan kollegoilta
- ☐ Kysymällä neuvoa sosiaalisessa mediassa
- ☐ Jokin muu, miten?
- ☐ Taitoni kehittyvät riittävästi töiden kautta

Voit tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

2.8 Oletko joutunut kieltäytymään korjaus- tai muokkaustyöstä taitojesi riittämättömyyden vuoksi?

- ☐ En
- ☐ En osaa sanoa
- ☐ Kyllä, minkälainen työ / työt oli kyseessä?

Voit tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

3. Liiketoiminnalliset taidot

3.1 Arvioi kuinka hyvät valmiudet koulutuksesi on antanut:

	Hyvät	Melko hyvät	Ei hyvät eikä huonot	Melko huonot	Huonot	En osaa sanoa
Työn hinnoitteluun?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Yrityksen kannattavuuden kehittämiseen?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Yrityksen liiketoiminnan kehittämiseen?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Markkinointiin ja viestintään?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

3.2 Arvioi kuinka tarpeellisenä näkisit osaamisesi kehittämisen seuraavilla osa-alueilla:

	Hyvin tarpeellisenä	Melko tarpeellisenä	En tarpeellisenä enkä tarpeettomana	Melko tarpeettomana	Hyvin tarpeettomana	En osaa sanoa
Työn hinnoittelu	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Työn kannattavuuden kehittäminen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Yrityksen liiketoiminnan kehittäminen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Markkinointi ja viestintä	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

3.3 Jos edellä mainittuihin teemoihin liittyen tarjottaisiin lisäkoulutusta* nimenomaan vaatteiden korjaamiseen/muokkaamiseen liittyvän liiketoiminnan näkökulmasta, suorittaisitko opintoja?

**Lisäkoulutusta järjestettäisiin siten, että opintoja olisi mahdollista suorittaa töiden ohessa esimerkiksi iltaopintoina.*

- ☐ Kyllä, jos sisältö ja toteutus sopivat minulle
- ☐ Mahdollisesti, jos sisältö ja toteutus sopivat minulle
- ☐ Todennäköisesti en suorittaisi
- ☐ En suorittaisi
- ☐ En osaa sanoa

Voit halutessasi tarkentaa vastausta tähän:

Kiitos vastauksistasi!

Heräsikö jotain muita ajatuksia aiheeseen liittyen? Voit halutessasi kirjoittaa ne tähän.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Saako sinua haastatella aiheeseen liittyen?

Mikäli olet kiinnostunut osallistumaan mahdolliseen haastatteluun, jätähän sähköpostiosoitteesi alla olevaan vastauslaatikkoon. Sähköpostiosoitettasi ei voida yhdistää aikaisemmin kyselyssä antamiisi vastauksiin.
