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## **Effect of Dress Codes to High School Students' Behavior, Self-Expression, and Academic Performance as Perceived by Students, Parents, and Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

The study aimed to explore how dress codes influence students' behavior, self-expression, and academic performance. It employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating structured and semi-structured surveys along with a thematic analysis to comprehensively analyze participants' responses. Moreover, convenience sampling was used in gathering data from 40 participants which included students, parents, and teachers of a Catholic School in the City of Baliwag. The findings revealed that most participants believe dress codes promote professionalism, unity, and discipline while reducing peer pressure and distractions. However, there is also a significant concern that strict implementations limit self-expression, reinforce gender stereotypes, and negatively affect students' body image and self-esteem. While participants support gender-neutral uniforms and student involvement in dress code policy decisions, others believe that policies should be determined solely by school authorities. Additionally, the study found a strong desire for flexibility during special events and recognition as well as a need for inclusivity particularly concerning gender-specific attire. Overall, the study suggests while dress codes serve an important function in maintaining order and discipline, they should be updated to better reflect the needs and identities of students. Thus, recommendations are proposed to balance institutional values with student comfort and inclusivity.

*Keywords: Dress Codes, Educational Policies, Inclusivity, School Environment, Self-Expression, Student Behavior*

### **Introduction**

Dress codes in the Philippines have been a subject of a debate for the longest period. The guidelines are typically regulated to assert uniformity and discipline and are designed to

promote equality and minimize distraction among students. On the impact to academic performance, dress codes are a complex topic to deliberate although local and international studies highlight the huge impact on students. Another considerable point is that the provision of dress codes balances the conducive learning atmosphere and addresses the practicality among students, crucial in assessing its influence to academic performance. On school uniforms policies, it is most often perceived by many as positive since it reduces bullying while improving attendance rates (Fuller & Ball, 2024). In contrast, Mimmo (2012) mentions school-wide uniform policies can force students to dress similarly making others feel taking away their freedom of expression potentially decreasing their creativity.

Gentile and Imberman (2012) analyzed student-level panel data from a large urban school district in the United States. Results showed the introduction of school uniforms had modest positive effects on student behavior, including reduced disciplinary incidents and improved attendance. However, the impact on academic achievement was limited and varied across different student populations, suggesting that while dress codes may contribute to a classroom order, their influence on learning outcomes is inconclusive. Ojogbane et. al (2020) also examined the impact of dress codes on the undergraduate students' academic performance at the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria. Results showed indecent dressing was associated with a decreased academic focus, primarily due to the distractions it caused. Thus, it is emphasized that appropriate implemented dress codes could support academic discipline.

Contrastingly, on self-expression, Teen Vogue (2018) identifies a real-life case in Texas where a male student was suspended for wearing makeup, triggering public discussions on gender norms and the suppressive nature of traditional dress codes in the school settings. The incident reflects broader concerns that rigid dress policies can inhibit students' identity expression, particularly in the LGBTQ+ community. This underscores a significant social and emotional dimension often overlooked in academic assessments of dress codes.

Sharing the same objective, Compton (2004) tested the connection between dress codes and the academic achievement of the public-school students in the United States. As explicitly stated in the study "uniforms are a source of affiliation," it identifies where students are from

and their year level. Nevertheless, uniforms are one of the key elements in improving students' classroom behavior that can reduce the causes of school crime or violation (Myers & Cameron, 1990). Dress code policies in public schools in the United States are classified and defined into two major characteristics: firstly, upheld by the state and federal courts in the First and 14th Amendments Complaints; and secondly, defined based on the gender, racial inequities that served as a basis on the implementation of the dress codes (Torries, 2024)

Mariveles et. al (2020) identified that wearing school uniforms has been one of the problems faced by the Pamantasan ng Cabuyao due to the huge number of students who enter the campus. The security guards have a hard time monitoring the students' attire at all times; some students do not wear their Identification Data (ID). In response, the study aimed to build an excellent system that may possibly enhance the security system and school integrity, especially in identifying students who enter the premise. They integrate technology that recognizes student uniforms upon entering the school. Indeed, uniforms can be a good basis for determining the profile of students, which unleashes the potential of grasping the other perspectives of uniforms in the school.

In the context of Religious of the Virgin Mary RVM Catholic schools in the Philippines, dress code policies are designed to reflect the institution's values, promote a conducive learning environment, and foster respect among students. These schools, rooted in a rich tradition of Catholic education, emphasize principles such as modesty, integrity, and respect. However, feedback from students, parents, and educators indicates dress code policies may sometimes be perceived as overly restrictive or inconsistently enforced. This has led to dissatisfaction and confusion among students regarding acceptable attire, raising critical questions about equity and inclusivity within these guidelines.

The study seeks to explore the effect of school uniforms on the behavior, self-expression, and academic achievement of the students in the perspective of students, parents, and teachers

## **Review of Related Literature and Study**

School dress codes are one of the indicators and parameters students are expected to adhere. Such policy encourages students to be disciplined while participating in various activities. Undeniably, some genders have a hard time dealing with these policies as they limit expressing their identity through dressing. Meanwhile, there are also sexist assumptions that led to

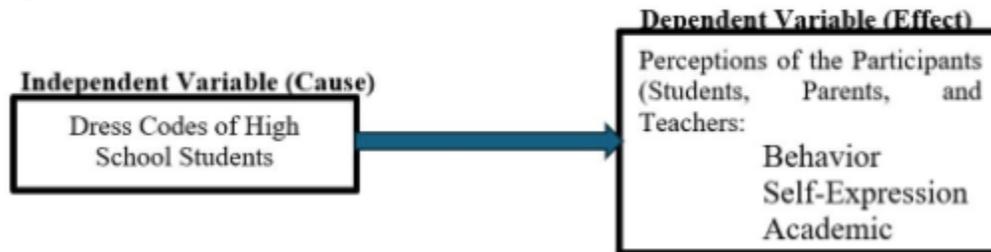
inappropriately address students based on their preference as individuals (ACLU of Texas, 2024) Overall, dress codes may outline the types of textiles or clothing permitted by the institution by considering factors such as: students' race, gender, religion, and some other characteristics defining a person. In the deregulatory authority of private institutions, especially Catholic schools, students are guided with the standards and values are grounded with the Bible.

According to Yeban (2016), school dress codes are designed rules or policies students are mandated to wear. Dress codes significantly tackle around the globe specifically the world of Law, Civil Rights, and also the education. They can also be associated with the topics concerning gender identity and sexual expressions which was seconded and legally reviewed by Atty. Susan Mills Richmond, Esq. (2023), one of the seasoned attorneys in New York who peer reviews and edits legal perspectives and articles.

DepEd Order No. 065 in 2010 highlights non-wearing of school uniform can potentially lessen family expenses. In addition, the rising cost of the expenses and the deflation of the national economy here in the Philippines brought by the pandemic, wearing uniforms will no longer be required as per the former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in 2022. In contrary, the guidelines in other field such as in the business or corporate field, wearing a uniform is highly encouraged to protect company's image and ensure that customers transact with legitimacy (Reuters, 2021).

Social and cultural aspects are some of the considerations in making changes. In the United Nation, the ongoing debate about the impact of school uniform to students and in educational settings is highlighted. As the situation emphasizes, this study is not just relevant to educational policy but also on cultural and social norms of those involved in the learning community. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence is being requested so the policies will address any decision related to school and policies per se (Fuller, 2023).

**Figure No. 1**  
*The Conceptual Framework of the Study*



This study utilized Independent Variable (IV) and Dependent Variable (DV) or the Cause-and-Effect paradigm. The IV was the Dress Code of High School Students, while the DV covered the Perceptions of the Participants on the effect of dress codes to behavior, self-expression, and academic performance.

### **Statement of the Problem**

What is the effect of high school dress codes on students' behavior, self-expression, and academic performance, as perceived by students, parents, and teachers?

1. How do students perceive the effect of high school dress codes on students' behavior, self-expression, and academic performance?
2. How do parents perceive the effect of high school dress codes on students' behavior, self-expression, and academic performance?
3. How do teachers perceive the effect of high school dress codes on students' behavior, self-expression, and academic performance?

### **Methodology**

George (2025) defines mixed-methods approach as combining essential elements of qualitative and quantitative research. This is widely used in multidisciplinary fields where both numerical data and descriptive insights are necessary. It allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of complex situations by integrating statistical analysis with detailed narratives. By utilizing both methods, a more comprehensive perspective on the research problem is achieved making it valuable for studies requiring an in-depth exploration. In the context of this study, this was appropriate since it measured both non-numerical and numerical responses. This study also used cause-and-effect-approach to analyze and determine the significant influence of the first variable to the second variable.

According to Cuemath (n.d.), frequency distribution table presents the outcomes of data collection in a structured way that incorporates the applications of tables. On the basis of frequency, researchers can easily find the relationship of the variables. In support, Frost (2021) mentions that frequency distribution tables are employed to observe the frequency of numbers or results appears. The tables enable the reader to easily observe the result of the data gathering process.

Thematic Analysis is a structure which consists of descriptive data (Naeem et al., 2023). It employs comprises conceptual model that allows reader easily understand concepts. Moreover, thematic analysis enables organization which assists research to formulate themes making qualitative data appear organized and easy to interpret. The study employed a framework method, which according to Gale et al. (2013), is a systematic and structured approach to theme analysis. This allows researchers analyze qualitative data in a more transparent, organized, and comprehensive manner using the predefined objectives or recurring themes.

As stated by Simkus (2023), convenience sampling is a non-probability technique commonly used to collect data based on the most accessible and available group. Commonly, the selection process on the sampling focuses on the availability rather than the criteria on how the participants are chosen.

According to Brown (2006), Likert-type Scale with even-numbered scales have no neutral point. Likert rankings encourage the respondent to conclude even when the respondent might not even agree. It has a strong view about Likert scales using odd numbers provides a choice between indecision and neutrality. It allows the responders to give a neutral response or decide what they feel about a specific topic or question. One advantage of using a Likert scale is that it may lessen the likelihood of response bias, which is when people make decisions based on how they feel (Fernandez & Randall, 1991).

## **Results and Discussion**

Table 1 categorizes the 40 participants' profiles into three columns: students, parents, and teachers. A total of 31 responses were collected from students, accounting for 77.5% of the overall sample. Parents contributed 7 responses, representing 17.5%, while teachers provided 2 responses, equating to 5%. This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of dress codes, but some limitations were identified such as the sample size, who are predominantly students, limits the generalizability of findings across diverse educational contexts with regard to dress codes. Additionally, the study focuses on one institution, which restricts understanding of broader cultural and socioeconomic influences.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of the Participants*

Respondents' Profile	# of Respondents	Percentage
Students	31	77.5%
Teachers	2	5
Parents	7	17.5
Total	40	100%

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of stakeholders' perceptions regarding the importance of dress codes in high school. Among the 40 respondents, 75% or 30 respondents agreed that dress codes are important, while 10% or 4 were unsure, and 5% or 2 disagreed. Students had the highest agreement rate at 67.74% (21 out of 31), followed by teachers at 100% (2 out of 2), and parents at 100% (7 out of 7). This aligns with the findings of Santos and Marasigan (2021) which reported the high levels of dress code policy adherence and self-discipline among university students. Both studies highlight a strong acceptance of dress codes in educational settings, suggesting that dress codes are widely perceived as essential for maintaining discipline and order in schools.

**Table 2**  
*Frequency Distribution Table on the Stakeholders Perceptions on the Importance of Dress Codes in High School*

Respondent Type	Yes	Maybe	<u>Depends</u>	No	Not Sure	Total
Teacher	2	0	0	0	0	2
Student	21	4	0	2	4	31
Parent	7	0	0	0	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution of stakeholders’ reasons for believing that dress codes are important in high school. The most cited reason was “Promoting a more professional environment” (33.8%, 24 out of 71 responses), followed by “Fostering a sense of unity and belonging” (26.8%, 19 out of 71 responses) and “Teaching students to dress appropriately” (25.4%, 18 out of 71 responses). Meanwhile, stakeholders who selected “Reducing distractions in the classroom” were at 12.7% (9 out of 71 responses), and only one response was categorized as “Not Applicable”. These findings indicate that professionalism, unity, and appropriate dressing are the most valued aspects of dress codes in high school. This is consistent with the findings of Anaba (2022) about the perceptions of the stakeholders on student teacher’s wearing of school uniforms. The study found out that the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators support that school uniform policies can improve school safety, which is also an identified gap of conducted study.

**Table 3**

*Frequency Distribution Table for Stakeholders about the Reasons Why Dress Codes are Important in High School Students*

Reason	Teacher	Student	Parent	Total
Promoting a more professional environment	2	18	4	24
Teaching students to dress appropriately	1	9	3	18
Fostering a sense of unity and belonging	2	12	2	19
Reducing distractions in the classroom	1	5	1	9
Not Applicable	0	1	0	1
<b>Total Responses</b>	6	45	10	71

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution of stakeholders’ perceptions about self-expression. Among the 40 respondents, 60% agreed with self-expression, while 32.5% disagreed, and 10% was unsure. Students had the highest “Yes” responses at 64.52% (20 out of 31), followed by teachers at 50% (1 out of 2) and parents at 28.57% (2 out of 7). The findings indicate that while the majority support self-expression, a significant portion, particularly parents, do not fully agree with it. This is aligned with the report made by U.S. Government Accountability Office (2022) emphasizing the need for equitable and safe dress code policies, reinforcing the idea that well-designed dress codes can contribute to a positive school climate.

**Table 4**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Stakeholders about Self-Expression*

Respondent Type	Yes	Not Sure	No	Total
Teacher	1	1	0	2
Student	20	3	8	31
Parent	2	0	5	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 5 presents the frequency distribution of stakeholders' reasons why dress codes limit students' self-expression. The most cited reason was "Restricting individuality and creativity" (30.6%, 19 out of 62 responses), followed by "Enforcing gender stereotypes" (27.4%, 17 out of 62 responses) and "Impeding personal style and fashion choices" (19.3%, 12 out of 62 responses). Meanwhile, "Promoting conformity over uniqueness" was identified by 14.5% or 9 out of 62 responses, while 5 responses (8.1%) were marked as "Not Applicable". These findings indicate that the primary concerns about dress codes relate to limitations on personal expression and reinforcing traditional gender norms.

**Table 5**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Participants about the Reasons why Dress Codes limit Self-Expressions of the Students*

Reason	Teacher	Student	Parent	Total
Restricting individuality and creativity	1	16	2	19
Enforcing gender stereotypes	1	16	0	17
Impeding personal style and fashion choices	1	8	3	12
Promoting conformity over uniqueness	0	8	1	9
Not Applicable	0	4	1	5
<b>Total Responses</b>	3	52	7	62

Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of stakeholders' perceptions regarding policies on gender-specific uniforms. Among the 40 respondents, 45% (18 out of 40) believed that uniforms should be the same for all genders, while an equal 45% (18 out of 40) agreed that they should be different for boys and girls, and 10% (4 out of 40) were unsure. Students were divided equally (45.16% each for both perspectives, 14 out of 31), while teachers (100%, 2 out of 2) supported uniformity, and parents leaned slightly toward gender-specific uniforms (57.14%, 4 out of 7). These findings highlight a split in opinion, with no clear consensus on gender-specific uniform policies. Meanwhile, an article in Education for Equality (2024) discusses the benefits of gender-neutral uniforms, highlighting how students choose attire they are comfortable with, potentially enhancing focus and participation in school activities which can be a significant factor to consider based on the participants diverse opinions.

**Table 6**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Participants about the Policies in Gender-Specific Uniform*

Respondent Type	No, they should be the same for all genders	Yes, they should be different for boys and girls	Not Sure	Total
Teacher	2	0	0	2
Student	14	14	3	31
Parent	2	4	1	7

Table 7 presents the frequency distribution regarding the impact of dress codes on students' behavior. Among the 40 respondents, 65% (26 out of 40) agreed that dress codes influence behavior, while 25% (10 out of 40) disagreed, and 10% (4 out of 40) were unsure. Students had the highest agreement rate at 64.52% (20 out of 31), followed by parents at 71.43% (5 out of 7) and teachers at 50% (1 out of 2). These suggest that a majority of stakeholders perceive dress codes as having a behavioral impact, although a notable minority disagrees. Contrastingly, Ordway (2018) indicates that uniforms have no direct effect on the students' behavior as it indicates that it suppresses students' "freedom of expression".

**Table 7**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Participants about the Impact of Dress Codes on Students' Behavior*

<b>Respondent Type</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Total</b>
Teacher	1	1	0	2
Student	20	8	3	31
Parent	5	1	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 8 presents participants' view on whether dress codes contribute to an inclusive environment. Among the 40 participants, 72.5% (29 out of 40) agreed that dress codes promote inclusivity, while 12.5% (5 out of 40) disagreed, and 15% (6 out of 40) were unsure. Students had the highest agreement rate at 67.74% (21 out of 31), followed by parents at 85.71% (6 out of 7) and teachers at 100% (2 out of 2). These indicate a general belief that dress codes support inclusivity, though some respondents remain uncertain or disagree. In relation to inclusivity, Pendharkar (2022) emphasizes the three arising common issues on dress codes which disproportionately target girls, black students, and LGBTQIA students. This contradicts study findings.

**TABLE 8**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Participants on How Dress Codes Create an Inclusive Environment*

<b>Respondent Type</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Total</b>
Teacher	2	0	0	2
Student	21	4	6	31
Parent	6	1	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 9 illustrates that the participants' perspectives on the negative effects of strict dress codes. Among the 58 total responses, the most commonly cited concern was impairing students' body image and self-esteem (34.48%), followed by creating a hostile or judgmental atmosphere (24.14%) and contributing to a culture of objectification (20.69%). Additionally,

shaming or embarrassing students was mentioned in 13.79% of responses. In addition, teachers provided the least responses (3), while students contributed the most (46), indicating that students may feel more directly affected by these issues. Parents also acknowledged negative effects but to a lesser degree. The presence of 4 “Not Applicable” responses suggests that some participants do not perceive strict dress codes as having negative effects. In connection, Sabit (2021) reveals that strict monitoring of students’ clothing can create conformity which can negatively impact students’ self-expression, and promote monotonous environment with little creativity.

**Table 9**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Participants about the Negative Effects of Strict Dress Codes*

Negative Effect	Teacher	Student	Parent	Total
Creating a hostile or judgmental atmosphere	2	10	2	14
Impairing students’ body image and self-esteem	1	19	0	20
Contributing to a culture of objectification	0	8	4	12
Shaming or embarrassing students	0	7	1	8
Not Applicable	0	2	2	4
<b>Total Responses</b>	3	46	9	58

Table 10 shows that participants believe dress codes should be most relaxed during school dances or prom (29 responses), sports events (28), and spirit weeks (25), with graduation ceremonies (17) receiving the least support. Students expressed the strongest opinions (76 responses), while teachers had the fewest (6), indicating a more neutral stance. Parents mostly supported flexibility for school dances and sports events. Friedmann (2019) highlights the importance of easing dress code policies, particularly during physical education classes and hot weather. He noted that such circumstances have prompted student to protests advocating for more lenient dress code rules to ensure comfort and practicality.

**TABLE 10**

*Frequency Distribution Table of the Participants about the Occasion or Events where Dress Codes should be Relaxed*

Occasion/Event	Teacher	Student	Parent	Total
Spirit weeks or themed events	2	19	4	25
School dances or prom	1	22	6	29
Sports events or games	2	23	5	28
Graduation ceremonies	1	12	4	17
<b>Total Responses</b>	6	76	19	74

Table 11 reveals that the majority of the participants, 72.5% (29 out of 40) believed student input is important in dress code decision-making, while 20% (8 out of 40) thought it should be solely decided by parents and teachers. A small percentage, 7.5% (3 out of 40), remained uncertain, highlighting a strong support for student involvement in shaping dress code policies.

According to Perry-Hazan and Somech (2023), student participation is crucial in assessing whether educational goals are met, particularly when students are actively involved in the decision-making processes. Their engagement not only reflects the success of school initiatives but also promotes a more inclusive and responsive educational environment.

**TABLE 11**  
*Frequency Distribution Table about the Involvement of the Students in the Decision-Making Process about Dress Code Policies*

Response	Teacher	Student	Parent	Total
Yes, student input is important	2	25	2	<b>29</b>
No, it should be solely decided by parents and teachers	0	3	5	<b>8</b>
Not sure	0	3	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 12 reveals that 40% (16 out of 40) supports placing restrictions on clothing items with logos or messages, while 37.5% (15 out of 40) opposes such restrictions. Meanwhile, 22.5% (9 out of 40) remains not sure, indicating a divided stance on the matter presented. With regard to visible logos, it is undeniable that shirts bearing imprinted logos or messages often convey personal beliefs, attitudes, or expressions of the wearer. The above responses indicate a nearly equal divide in perspectives on whether such clothing should be prohibited. Nakazawa (2005) highlights that certain indicators justify the restriction of these logos, especially when they promote negative behavior, revolutionary ideologies, or affiliations with gang culture. These considerations lend support to the implementation of a plain dress code policy, which may help in fostering a more neutral and focused educational environment.

**Table 12**  
*Frequency Distribution Table on Placing Restriction on Clothing Items with Logos or Messages*

Response	Teachers	Students	Parents	Total
Yes	2	10	4	<b>16</b>
No	0	12	3	<b>15</b>
Not Sure	0	9	0	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 13 shows that the most prioritized factor in modifying dress code policies is safety and security concerns, selected by 36.9% (31 out of 84). Climate and weather conditions followed at 33.3% (28 out of 84), while individual student preferences accounted for 22.6% (19 out of 84). Cultural norms and sensitivities are the least considered at 19.0% (16 out of 84), highlighting a stronger emphasis on safety and practicality over personal or cultural aspects. To support the result, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2022) reveals that dress codes disproportionately affect Black students, female students, and those identifying as LGBTQ+.

often through vague language like “inappropriate” or “distracting.” These terms are frequently subject to interpretation, leading to unequal enforcement. As such, stakeholders may recognize that policies must be explicitly worded and universally applied to prevent discriminatory practices in school settings.

**Table 13**

*Frequency Distribution Table about the Factors Should be Considered in Creating, Modifying Dress Code Policies*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Total Selections</b>
Cultural norms and sensitivities	2	12	2	<b>16</b>
Climate and weather conditions	2	22	4	<b>28</b>
Safety and security concerns	2	24	5	<b>31</b>
Individual student preferences	2	16	1	<b>19</b>

Table 14 highlights the perceived positive impacts of dress codes on students. The most cited benefit, at 34.1% (30 out of 88), creates a sense of discipline and structure. Other key benefits include preparing students for professional environments (25.0%), encouraging equality (23.9%), and reducing peer pressure and bullying (18.2%), reflecting a belief in dress codes' role in fostering order and fairness. According to Essex (2020) schools with structured dress policies often reveal the importance of preparing students for professional settings, where appearance and adherence to guidelines are expected.

**Table 14**

*Frequency Distribution Table about the Positive Impacts of Dress Codes on Students*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Teacher s</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Parent s</b>	<b>Tota l</b>
Preparing them for future professional environments	2	16	4	<b>22</b>
Reducing peer pressure and bullying related to appearance	1	12	4	<b>16</b>
Encouraging equality among students	1	16	4	<b>21</b>
Creating a sense of discipline and structure	2	21	7	<b>30</b>

The thematic analysis aligns with insights from Freeburg and Workman (2018), who emphasize that dress codes and uniforms serve as part of a school’s social structure, facilitating students' growth into self-actualizing individuals. The first analysis focuses on the impact of dress codes on academic performance, where participants largely perceive that dress code has no direct impact on the academic success. However, some participants also highlight indirect benefits, such as fostering professionalism and focus, which align with the findings Santos and Marasigan (2021) emphasizing discipline and structure as key advantages.

**Table 15**

*Thematic Analysis of Responses of the Participants on Dress Code and Academic Performance*

Themes	Response Count (Frequency)	Rank
Dress code does not affect academic performance	17	1
Dress code boosts confidence and comfort	8	2
Dress code helps maintain focus and professionalism	6	3
No definite opinion / N/A	5	4
Dress code has both positive and negative effects	2	5
Dress code fosters unity and discipline	1	6.5
Dress code hinders self-expression and creativity	1	6.5

The second analysis focuses on self-expression, where concerns about limitations on individuality and creativity are prominent, resonating with Soriaga et al. (2019) who noted the restrictive nature of strict dress codes on students' motivation and confidence. The analysis pointed the need for adaptive policies that balance institutional values with inclusivity and personal expression, reflecting the broader challenge of designing dress codes that cater to diverse student needs while maintaining order and discipline in the school. These findings provide actionable insights for schools to consider more flexible and inclusive approaches to dress code policies.

**Table 16**

*Thematic Analysis of Responses on Proposed Dress Code Changes*

Themes	Response Count (Frequency)	Rank
No changes needed / Supports existing dress code	12	1
More comfortable uniforms based on weather	7	2
Relaxing or modifying specific dress code rules	7	3
Allowing more student self-expression	5	4
Allowing civilian clothes during events or weekly	3	5
Making the dress code more inclusive (LGBTQ+, body types)	2	6
Modifying hair policies (length, dye, style)	3	7
No definite opinion / N/A	5	8

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The study findings highlight the critical role of dress codes in nurturing professionalism, discipline, and unity within the school environment. A majority of participants, which include students, parents, and teachers, recognize these benefits and their contribution to creating a structured atmosphere conducive to learning. However, concerns about dress codes limiting self-expression, reinforcing gender stereotypes, and affecting body image are prevalent nowadays, particularly among students and some parents. These concerns underline the need

for policies that will equalize institutional values and individuality. Additionally, the study revealed divided perceptions regarding restrictions on clothing with logos or messages, indicating the need for clearer and more consistent guidelines. While dress codes are perceived to enhance discipline and equality, their impact on academic performance remains inconclusive, suggesting that uniforms alone are not significant determinants of academic success. The findings also emphasize the importance of inclusivity, with strong support for accommodating cultural, religious, and gender-specific attire, and providing flexibility during special events. Moreover, the study identified a gap in addressing the role of uniforms in promoting safety and security within the school premises and outside, an area that can be used in further exploration or implication.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of designing flexible, inclusive, and adaptive dress code policies. By addressing gaps and incorporating stakeholder feedback, schools can create environments that uphold discipline while promoting individuality and inclusivity, cultivating both personal growth and professional readiness among students.

## Recommendations

1. Regularly review dress code policies to ensure they remain relevant and fair to all students. Allow student representatives to contribute to discussions on dress code revisions, fostering inclusivity and shared decision-making.
2. Ensure that dress code enforcement is done without discrimination. Address dress code violations through guidance rather than harsh punishments to maintain a supportive and non-hostile school environment.
3. Provide feedback to school administrators about student concerns regarding dress codes, especially during events or specific circumstances, to ensure that policies remain practical and considerate.
4. Examine the direct impacts of dress codes on measurable outcomes, such as academic performance, attendance rates, or behavioral records. Comparative studies between schools with strict and relaxed dress code policies could offer deeper insights into their effectiveness.

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