

Full Length Research

School Uniform and the Perceptions on its Unification in Nigeria: A Case Study

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The study examined stakeholders' perception of the initiative to unify all school uniforms in Osun state, Nigeria. It determined the unification effects; differentiated school attendance in pre-unification and post-unification periods. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population consisted of all residents of Osun State, Nigeria from varied works, age and social status. Multi staged sampling technique was adopted to select two cities from the state using a convenient sampling technique and 50 respondents from each of the cities using a random sampling technique to field the Likert-scaled, self-developed and validated questionnaire named Perceptions of School Uniform in Osun State (POSU). The study found stakeholders' perception of unified school uniform policy closing gaps between the rich and poor; constricts freedom of choice, encourage conflict and, demean governments' interest in education. It also found overt effects of unification including unique identity for public schools, encouraging truancy and difficulty in tracing mischievous learners. The differentiated school attendance in pre and post-unification periods dropped from 90 to 66.5 percent in aggregate of enrollees to attendees. The study concludes that stakeholders and school attendees preferred the varieties in school uniforms existing prior to unification. It recommends a return to statuesque.

Keywords: O'Uniform, identity, dress code, unification, differentiation.

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INTRODUCTION

School Uniform has its origin traceable to 16th-century England wherein exists the oldest school uniform still in use. The Christ's Hospital Boarding school founded in 1553 under Edward VI admitted fatherless and other poor children from Horsham, West Sussex and other nearby parishes and educated them. The children wore blue cloaks reminiscent of the cassocks worn by clergy, along with yellow stockings donated by London citizens which led to the famous nickname – 'Bluecoat Schools' (Scott, 2014). As of January 2021, students at the school proudly still wear the same distinctive long blue "housey" coat, accompanied by breeches for boys and; the long pleated skirts for girls; the famous yellow socks, the

typical school tie and the leather belt, "girdle" or "broadie" now replaced by the white cotton bands; uniforms with mild customization (Dudman, 2021); it is the oldest school uniform existing (Fig.1). In 2011, when Christ's Hospital surveyed its students, 95 percent voted to keep the traditional uniforms. Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1989) described Uniform - "to clothe in or furnish with a set of similar garments to obtain a single form or pattern." This must be differentiated from the dress code. While the former is mandatory and specifying, the latter is only required but leaves some choices such as colors and design up to the person.

According to Carr (2017), the United States followed the traditional use of uniforms established in England and was generally limited to private and parochial schools.

One exception was found in government-run boarding schools for Native American children, first established in the late 1800s, where the children, who had been removed from their families, were dressed in military-style uniforms.

In Nigeria, education was facilitated by different ethnic groups prior to colonization. Adefule (2018) asserted that the onset of colonization introduced western style education to present-day Nigeria and ab initio, vocational education was the major, traditional form of education. Some schools of thought also presented that, the Islamic preceded western education in Nigeria (Graham, 1966 in Ayanlowo & Bello, 2015).

The first primary school was established by the Methodist Mission and christened Nursery of Infant Church in 1843 at Badagry. The school was renamed in 1945 as St. Thomas Anglican Nursery and Primary School and housed in the nations' first-story building in Badagry before moving to Topo, Badagry where its vestiges are to date (Fig.2). Interesting to know that the unwillingness of non-Christians instigated the establishment of the first public (colonial government-sponsored) primary school in 1899 – Government Primary School, Lagos. The schools all have uniforms.



(Annabel Pulvermacher and Arthur Hannavy: Christ's Hospital School, courtesy Carr, 2017)

Figure 1: The oldest school uniform existing - Christ's Hospital Boarding School, England.

Concerns about safety, belief that uniforms make 'school rooms more orderly and more disciplined' make many schools adopt the tradition of specified, unique uniform. According to Mitchell (1996), President Clinton and the Department of Education adopted uniforms in public schools which had since gained widespread adoption in the United States.

The State of Osun, Nigeria did the unification of school uniforms (O-Uniform) as part of the effort to create a unique identity for her students, promote indigenous culture and stimulate the local economy. This innovation ensures uniformity and engenders a unified sense of belonging among all government-owned public primary and secondary school pupils (Osun.gov, 2017).



Figure 2: Relic of Nigerian First Primary School

Some seven hundred and fifty thousand (750,000) uniforms were provided to students in all public schools across Osun State. This might have attracted additional socio-economic benefits to the State such as the building of the biggest Garment Factory in West Africa, named Omoluabi Garment Factory located in Osogbo which employed some 3000 workers into the garment production industry (Osun.gov, 2017). The political claims of improvements in discipline, non-cognitive skills formation such as self-esteem, and academic ability as justification for uniform adoption notwithstanding; the influence of uniforms on students in the short and long terms remain unclear.

In this paper, therefore, investigations were made to verify the perceptions of stakeholders on the unification of public-school uniforms in Osun State. It also perused the influence of uniform's unification on school enrolment and attendance and, the perceived effects it waved. The following questions were sought to be answered:

- What are the perceptions of stakeholders on the unification of public-school uniforms in Osun State?
- Are there any influence of uniform's unification on school enrolment and attendance? and,
- What were the effects waived by the uniform's unification?



Figure 3: Osun Unified School Uniform
(The Governor - Engr. Rauf Aregbesola flanked by Osun State primary school pupils - All in uniform)

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design is employed. The population for the study comprised entire educational stakeholders in Osun. The sampled population consist of a hundred individuals randomly selected at two strategic places (Osogbo and Ile-Ife). The research instrument includes a self-designed questionnaire – ‘Perceptions of School Uniform in Osun State (POSU)’. The instrument is subdivided into two sections – the demographic variables and 35 Likert scaled variables on views, influence, and effects of uniform’s unification on learners and society. The questionnaire was scrutinized and content validated by test construct experts. In as much as content validity is the most important concern to educators (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1978), the researcher corrected and harmonized the content of items appropriately to study objectives. Secondary data were also collected through the State Universal Basic Education Board on school enrolment from specific schools in the conveniently sampled cities for data on enrolment and attendance in the study areas. Study subjects’ consents were appealingly sought and randomly selected individuals were engaged on willing terms. Completed questionnaires were returned on agreement mostly online. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated the perceptions of stakeholders on the unification of public-school uniforms in Osun State. Hence, the first research question was - what are the perceptions of stakeholders on the unification of public-school uniforms in Osun State?

Table 1 presents the perception of stakeholders on ten different variables including aesthetic, discipline, uniformity of education system, government interest, initiate conflict, differentiating teachers from students, economic succor for parents, negating freedom of choice, bridging gap in-between the rich, and poor and public symbol of commitment.

Table 1: Stakeholders perception of uniform unification

S/N	Items	S/A	A	D	SD
1	Unified uniform make school aesthetically beautiful	60	20	10	10
2	It is a way to subject student under school discipline	54	23	7	16
3	It enforces uniformity in the states' education system	42	30	12	16
4	It expresses government interest	30	25	5	40
5	It's importation of conflict into the system	20	30	40	10
6	Unified uniform differentiates teacher and student	60	20	10	10
7	An economic succor for parents	41	21	23	15
8	Unified uniform negates freedom of choice	38	15	14	33
9	Unified uniform closes the gap between rich and poor	60	10	15	15
10	A public symbol of commitment and school improvement	21	60	4	15

The results revealed that the initiative to unify school uniforms in state schools is aesthetically acceptable to stakeholders. It also indicated uniform control as a means of injecting discipline. The results further showed the unification of uniforms as a differentiation strategy between students and teachers. Stakeholders accepted the attempt as economic succor for parents and equilibrium between haves' and have-nots'. It, however, connotes negative interests in the educational system by the government. It also reveals the possibility of conflict and denial of free choice of dressing mode. It strengthens public commitment to improve the education system.

According to the State government on her website (<http://osun.gov.ng/education/ouniform>), 'the unification of school uniforms is part of an effort by the State of Osun to create a unique identity for our students, promote our culture and stimulate the local economy. This innovation ensures uniformity and engenders a unified sense of belonging among all government-owned public primary and secondary school pupils.' Similar schools of thought embraced the unification of school uniforms as an innovative step to add on to safety and reduce aberration in the schools. School uniforms are thought to permit enhanced security, reduced peer pressure, and decline in attention diversion for learners. School uniforms are meant for equality. Same clothes for all students help reduce various factors like jealousy, comparison, and dispute among students. Nigeria consists of various classes of people - the rich, middle class and, the poor - hence everyone cannot afford good quality clothes and thus this is where the school uniform policy comes in handy. The study hereby found stakeholders' perception of unified school uniform policy hanging on a balance. While it closes gaps between the rich and poor, it constricts freedom of choice, encourages conflict and, demean governments' interest in education.

The second research question sought to be answered by the study is - Are there any influence of uniform's unification on school enrolment and attendance? Table 2 below clears the air on this with the supportive discussions.

Table 2: Influence of School Uniform's Unification

Year	Class	Pre-Unification Classes						Year	Class	Post-Unification Classes					
		Term 1		Term 2		Term 3				Term 1		Term 2		Term 3	
		Class enrolment	Class attendance	Class enrolment	Class attendance	Class enrolment	Class attendance			Class enrolment	Class attendance	Class enrolment	Class attendance	Class enrolment	Class attendance
2008	Pry 1	122	109	123	96	122	98	2013	Pry 1	105	70	102	67	102	71
	Pry 4	118	100	115	90	105	89		Pry 4	100	69	110	86	102	67
2009	Pry 1	110	98	118	93	119	89	2014	Pry 1	100	72	102	66	103	84
	Pry 4	111	99	110	92	105	89		Pry 4	95	59	98	61	95	68
2010	Pry 1	100	90	102	89	103	95	2015	Pry 1	111	65	105	89	110	76
	Pry 4	100	98	103	95	106	89		Pry 4	107	76	100	68	120	76
2011	Pry 1	101	89	103	97	102	95	2016	Pry 1	116	99	107	92	104	100
	Pry 4	99	85	104	92	105	90		Pry 4	112	89	102	93	114	101

- Field survey, 2018

The study also found the school wears unification policy influencing school enrolment and attendance. The differentiated school attendance in pre and post-unification periods widens as shown in the Table. The differentiated school attendance in pre and post-unification periods dropped from 90% to 66.5% in aggregate of enrollees to attendees.

The final research question of the study is - What were the effects waived by the uniform's unification? The findings were coded in the table below:

Table 3: Effects of Unification of School Uniform

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	Creates unique identity for students	55	19	16	10
2	Places investment in the hands of few	25	40	10	25
3	Enhances a sense of equality among schools	14	35	6	45
4	Help prevents bullying	5	15	20	60
5	Difficult to trace truants and mischief-makers	80	5	5	10
6	Eases student's morning routine	30	30	10	30
7	Promotes free education policy of the government	51	7	3	39
8	Aids school consciousness in learners	7	50	20	23
9	Reduces sense of individualism in pupils	40	15	25	20
10	Competitive spirit among students is reduced	30	25	15	30
11	Encourages absenteeism in schools	60	10	20	10
12	Students resent the unification rebelliously	48	30	2	20

The study found overt effects of unification as opined by the sampled population to include a unique identity for public schools, encouraging truancy and difficulty in tracing mischievous learners, encouragement of absenteeism in schools and promotion of free education policy of the government. The respondents further indicated that the policy did nothing in the amelioration of bully syndrome in the schools and has no reduction effect on the competitive spirit among the learners.

The mandatory uniform policy in Osun State, Nigeria is among measures focused on public school reform by the State. Proponents of school uniform as reformation in the past emphasized or contend that uniformly affects students' safety by lowering student victimization (Scherer, 1991 in Brunisma & Rockquemore, 1998), decreasing gang activity and fight (Kennedy, 1995; Loesch, 1995 in Brunisma & Rockquemore, 1998), and differentiating strangers from students in school buildings (Department of Justice, 1996; Gursky, 1996 in Brunisma & Rockquemore, 1998). Some also advocated that uniforms increase learning and positive attitudes towards school through enhanced learning environments (Stover, 1990), heightened school pride (Jarchow, 1992 in Brunisma & Rockquemore, 1998), increased students' achievement (Thomas, 1994), high level of preparedness (Thomas, 1994) and conformity to organizational goals (LaPointe, Hollman & Alleyne, 1992; Workman & Johnson, 1994 in Brunisma & Rockquemore, 1998). Furthermore, wearing school uniforms was associated with decreased behavior problems by increasing attendance rates, lowering suspension rates and decreasing substance use among the student body

(Gursky, 1996). School uniform favorites' attributed psychological outcomes such as increased self-esteem (Thomas, 1994), increased spirit (Jarchow, 1992), and reinforced feelings of oneness among students (LaPointe, Holoman & Alleyne, 1992) to wearing uniforms.

This study provided an updated view to the assertions that wearing a school uniform can create a unique identity for students but does not enhance equality nor decrease behavioral problems such as bullying. The unification of public-school uniforms increased difficulty in tracing truants and mischievous students among others and restrict related investment to the privileged few. In a relationship, results hang on the balance as depicted in the study on the promotion of free education policy as the uniforms are not completely free for students; influence children's sense of individualism, and; reducing competitiveness.

The perception of educational stakeholders is in tandem with researches opposed to the adoption of compulsory uniform policies in times past who stressed the legal, financial and questionable effectiveness of such policies. The legal concerns focus on the supposition that requiring a uniform violates children's rights (Thomas, 1994; Virginia State Department of Education, 1992 in Brunisma & Rockquemore, 1998) and that, rather than unique identity as a glory, it is a sort of classification forced on a predominantly minority and poor student population for which no empirical evidence exists to support the numerous and varied claims of uniform proponents.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while unification of public-school uniforms in Osun State might have bridged the gaps between the rich and poor; it limits the freedom of choice of parents and learners, loudly encourages conflicts thus, demean the state's interest in education. Also, it grossly reduced school attendance and in effect, encouraged truancy, increased the difficulty in tracing mischievous learners and failed to reduce bully and competitive spirits amongst the learners despite the economic succor it gave the parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the government of Osun State, Nigeria and other states and organs of government should intervene in the education industry positively and systemically. This means striking a balance between the will of the government and other educational stakeholders – parents and learners inclusive with the view that parental support is a key factor to compliance in wearing uniforms.

A consideration of legal ramifications of policy decision is also needful. This could be achieved via the utilization of experts and professionals who will consider pre- and post-policy implications effects rather than imposed ideologies that will deface the fledgling school system.

Alternatives to mandatory policy should be given consideration while making the uniforms available and inexpensive. And finally, the school safety framework should be drawn alongside the dress code policy.

Until these are considered and applied, the study recommends a return to the statuesque as subscribed by the respondents.

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