
Perceptions of Stakeholders on Student Teacher's Wearing of School Uniforms: A Case of Some Selected Colleges of Education in Northern Region, Ghana

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ABSTRACT: *The study focused on two particular colleges of education in Ghana's Northern Region and explored stakeholders' perceptions of the use of school uniforms in colleges of education. The case study research design and qualitative methodology were used in the study. Convenience sampling was used to select fifty (50) stakeholders, including fifteen (15) tutors from Bagabaga College of Education, five (5) staff members from the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), fifteen (15) tutors from Tamale College of Education, and fifteen (15) employees from the Sagnarigu Municipal Education Office in Tamale. The tool utilized to gather information for the research question created for the study was an interview. The study's findings revealed that the majority of the study's participants felt that wearing a uniform fosters equality, unity, and makes student teachers from various socioeconomic backgrounds same, as well as eliminating bullying and gang activity in colleges. Based on the research, it was suggested that each academic year, student teachers should attend orientation to learn about the uniform policy at the colleges of education and to understand that wearing a school uniform does not belittle them as tertiary students. In order to execute a standard policy at the colleges, college administration must be adaptable. If a unified policy is implemented, it must be assessed to determine whether it is effective.*

KEYWORDS: uniform, dress code, perception, colleges, education, school, stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

The wearing of school uniforms has been a concern to many researchers and educationalists globally. This can be found in several research works; Student, teacher, and school counselor perceptions of national school uniforms in Malaysia (Woo et al., 2020). Teacher perceptions of how attire affects student behavior and academic performance: a case study (Ivery, 2019); Perception of mandatory school uniform and perceived social (Woo et al., 2020). The trend of dressing among tertiary students in Ghana (Atencah & Agye, 2018). Universities, elementary schools, and high schools used uniforms as hallmarks of class and status.

A school uniform is a uniform worn by students in educational settings or institutions. They are common in primary and secondary schools in various countries across Africa and the world. In societies where there are definite caste systems, in the case of students wearing uniforms, everyone dresses alike. School uniforms have been a traditional part of education in many nations since they were introduced by British missionaries around the end of the 19th century (The Star, 2010). School uniforms have become an essential part of the lives of most Malaysian students. Uniforms helped students to feel equal to others. It helped them to focus more on academics because everyone looked alike (Brookshire, 2016). The adaptation of dress codes and uniforms in school made students see each other as a family and a team instead of focusing on who had money or wealth and who did not is normally believe that wearing uniforms improve cohesion among students (Woo et al., 2020).

Ghana has forty-six (46) public Colleges of Education (Daily Graphic, 2020). Wearing of school uniform was mandatory in the Colleges of Education in Ghana for ages unlike in the universities where wearing of school uniform wasn't mandatory. There is constantly growing in the population of human settlement globally and building to meet the educational needs of the society is also constantly. According to Emmanuel (2015), in a growing number of school districts across the nation, students must wear a uniform. According to the United States (US) Department of Education, as cited in Emmanuel (2015), wearing a uniform can decrease the risk of violence and theft, instill discipline and help school officials recognize intruders who come to the school.

All the 46 Colleges of Education in Ghana have been upgraded to University Colleges and will offer a four-year Bachelor of Education degree with effect from 2018-2019 academic years, as part of efforts to improve the quality of teacher training in the country Kokutse, (2018). Wearing of school uniform was the pride for teacher trainees in the Colleges of Education across the country and a unique identity that depicted a learner, possessor, and transfer of knowledge with high respect in our society. Unfortunately, the news revealed by the Deputy Minister of Education in April 2016 has raised a lot of concerns among many students, lecturers, stakeholders, and educationalists in the country. It is against this background that the researcher sought to investigate student-teachers' perception regarding the wearing of school uniforms in some selected Colleges of Education in the Northern Region.

Statement of Problem

Students are generally identified about their level of education and affiliation from their uniform or a formal dress for ages. School uniform or dress code for college students has always been a controversial issue among various stakeholders of recent times. A debate on school uniforms for the colleges of education, now university colleges, continues to attract public attention. Despite the reported benefits, mandatory uniforms are controversial. A lot of parents and student teachers detest the idea of compulsory wearing of school uniform at the college level because they believe it suppresses the freedom of expression of students (Denise, 2018). However, it is common knowledge that since the introduction of the Bachelor of Education (B.ED) Program in the Colleges of Education four years ago, student teachers still wear uniforms. Interestingly, the researcher has observed that they do this only for lectures but immediately take them off and

change into their casual dresses for other on-campus and off-campus activities during the day. It is in light of the above that, the researcher sought to investigate stakeholders' perception on the wearing of school uniforms by Colleges of Education students in selected Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine stakeholders' perception on the wearing of school uniforms by Colleges of Education students in selected Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research question was formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders on student teachers use of uniforms at the colleges of Education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is hinged on Nathan (1986) when he formulated an analysis of clothing as communication which provides a framework within which uniform proponents claims can be better understood. He asserts that clothing can be considered a sign, which he defines as "anything that stands for something else." Clothing, as a sign, convey's information about values, beliefs and emotions. If the clothing that adolescents wear can be considered a sign, then that which they freely choose as individuals can be seen as conveying an expression of their personal identity. School uniforms, by contrast, are clothing which is selected by school officials and mandated to students. It is simple in style and color and it is intended to convey the institutional values of the school.

Within the context of an educational institution, school uniforms clearly function as a symbol of membership to the school community. The presence of a uniform in schools automatically implies a two-tiered hierarchical structure, those that wear uniforms (subordinates) and those that do not wear uniforms (superiors). School uniforms serve as a clear sign of this status distinction between students and faculty and therefore, certify the legitimacy of that distinction by all members. School uniforms act as suppressers of students' individuality by mandating standardization of appearance and removing student expression through clothing.

Concept of School Uniform

A school uniform is a uniform worn by students in educational settings or institutions. They are common in primary and secondary schools in various countries across Africa and the world. In societies where there are definite caste systems, in the case of students wearing uniforms, everyone dresses alike. School uniforms have been a traditional part of education in many nations since they were introduced by British missionaries around the end of the 19th century (The Star, 2010).

Worldwide Perspectives on School Uniforms

Uniforms are a prominent fixture in elementary and secondary schools worldwide. From South Africa to South Korea, uniforms and strict dress codes are often considered to be an important part of each country's collectivist environment (Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003). Within us, a more individualistic culture, perspectives on uniforms are diverse. Uniforms are typically associated with well-to-do establishments; however, they were first introduced in England in 1552 at a charity school (Scott, 2014,). The London school, Christ's Hospital, was designed to educate orphaned and poor children in the community (Scott, 2014). The founders clothed students in matching blue coats to create a sense of uniformity and cohesiveness. Uniforms are still an important part of school life in England, even though they have evolved over time.

In countries such as Australia, schools attempted to emulate English grammar school characteristics such as the use of uniforms. Today, there are many uniform schools in Australia, as well as schools that use the school "badge." The badge is the emblem of a specific school and can be found on student clothing such as polo shirts and sweatshirts. The badge represents consistency in Australia. Even as time passes, the institution's educational values remain. This serves to bring students together and fosters a strong sense of community. Depending on the school and whether it is public or private, the uniform requirements for Australian schools highlight specific character traits important to the school. These include perseverance and hard work, as well as respect for others.

South Korea, for example, was influenced by Japan and the United States' policies. Uniforms were introduced in South Korea to help with discipline, eliminate class differences between students, and improve academic performance (Park, 2013). Until the 1980s, all students in South Korea were required by law to wear identical uniforms (Park, 2013). Today, there is a little more leeway in terms of appearance; however, most uniforms are consistent across schools. Uniformity, according to Koreans, helps to "instill a sense of belonging in people and lead to better teamwork" (Park, 2013). They can instill discipline, send specific signals about individual roles, and set the tone for how organizations should be run (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). Uniforms are required by law in all public and private schools in South Africa, a former British colony. South African officials mandated uniforms for the same reasons that many other countries around the world do. Uniforms are used to instill a sense of unity and pride in the school, as well as to improve behavior and academic performance. However, because all students are required to wear uniforms, there have been numerous controversies. Many students have been unable to afford an education due to the strict mandate, as they are unable to attend school without a uniform.

Uniforms are an important part of education all over the world. Evidence and research support the idea that implementing uniforms in schools may improve discipline and create a better learning environment, according to Baumann and Krskova (2016), who studied uniforms in countries ranging from South Korea to Australia.

Perceptions of Stakeholders on Wearing School Uniforms

Most studies of school dress and behavior include information on school staff's views of the impact of policies on behavior. The perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators appear to support the idea that school uniform policies can improve school safety Bodine (2003); Chime (2010); Hawkins (2013). Students on the other hand, may not always hold the same views as adults. According to Bodine's (2003) uniforms increase school safety for 88 percent of parents and 86 percent of teachers, but only 43 percent of students agree. Another claim made by supporters of school uniforms is that a uniform policy can boost students' academic success (Sowell, 2012). Once again, the findings of this study were mixed. While Baumann and Krskova (2016) and Gentile and Imberman (2012) found an increase in academic achievement, Brunsma (2004), Sowell (2012), and Stockton and colleagues (Stockton et al., 2002) found no statistically significant increase in academic achievement with uniform policies. Gains in academic performance may be difficult to correlate with school uniforms because most schools implement a uniform policy in addition to a variety of other policies aimed at improving academic performance (Bodine, 2003; Sowell, 2012). Despite these challenges, some research indicates that teachers, parents, administrators, and even students believe that school uniforms contribute to improved academic success (Hawkins, 2013).

One of the primary justifications given by parents in favor of school uniforms is that uniforms help create a protected space free of "markers of economic disparity" (Bodine, 2003), thereby reducing social exclusion. However, some students and parents believe that controlling students' clothing restricts their freedom of expression and denies them the opportunity to learn to work with people who are different from them (Walker, 2007).

Most parents see the use of school uniforms as reducing morning preparation time, clothing arguments, and financial burdens on families (Andersen et al., 2002; Bodine, 2003; Brunsma, 2004; Chime, 2010; Walker, 2007). Some of the research suggests that parents' perceptions of their children may be influenced by their socioeconomic status. According to one study, parents with more education and income thought uniforms would be more financially burdensome. In other studies, parents have opted for a uniform program in an effort to reduce their children's concern about clothing (Bodine, 2003). Such potential links between socioeconomic status and perceptions of school uniforms have received relatively little attention in the literature. Students' perceptions of school uniforms, measured as a single factor, failed to show any significant relationship to socioeconomic status variables. When controlling for demographic variables, the correlation was even less. This suggests that the two factors of socio-economic status parent education and qualifying for free or reduced lunch, do not affect a students' perception of school uniforms. Aaron, Michael, Bry & Erin (2020).

However, the lack of difference in perception by socio-economic status may be a positive result for students of low socio-economic status. Wiederkehr et al., (2015) suggested that uniforms may help conceal some signs of low socioeconomic status, which may encourage students not to label themselves as having low academic value. The fact that the current study found little variation by SES in perceptions of the effects uniforms had on academics may support Wiederkehr's ideas that

students of high and low socioeconomic status who wear uniforms do not perceive their socioeconomic differences and thus perceive their academic value as equal. Many of these students had been at this school since kindergarten and had little experience looking for peers to socialize with by assessing another's clothing. Because students' socioeconomic status is concealed by the school uniform, all students appear equal in this regard. Andersen et al. (2002) proposed that students look for peer groups with similar socioeconomic status, which they first notice through clothing. Again, the fact that this study yielded similar results from students of various socioeconomic backgrounds could imply that students were socializing with peers from a wider range of socioeconomic backgrounds. This broad range of socialization may increase their sense of belonging at school because there is less fear of rejection from social groups of peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach to this research is a qualitative study. Hossain (2011:145) asserts that qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, to identify how their experiences and behaviors are shaped by the contexts of their lives such as the social, economic, cultural and physical contexts. Qualitative studies aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. Descriptive research survey was used in an attempt to describe some aspects of a population or an existing phenomenon by selecting unbiased sample of individuals to take part in the research. According to Boyle (2004:18) "surveys are good for asking people about their perceptions, opinions and ideas though they are less reliable for finding out how people actually behave".

Two main types of data were used in this study. These were primary and secondary data. The primary data included those that came from the interview and survey plans which formed the basis for the analysis. The secondary data involved data that were collected from the review of relevant books, journals magazines, newspapers and websites. Data was collected using interview and survey plans as instruments. Several strategies were used to ensure data quality. It is against this background that the researcher adopted the descriptive survey for the study because it will allow for the use of interview schedule and survey plans for the study which sought information from stakeholders' perception on the wearing of school uniforms by Colleges of Education students in selected Colleges of Education in the Northern Region of Ghana

Population and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study was all stakeholders in the Colleges of Education in Ghana. The target population for this study was constituted by Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), tutors from Bagabaga College of Education, tutors from Tamale College of Education and workers at the Sagnarigu municipal education office.

In all, convenience sampling was employed to pick fifty (50) stakeholders that is five (5) staffs from Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), fifteen (15) tutors from Bagabaga college of education fifteen (15) tutors from tamale college of education and fifteen (15) workers at the

Sagnarigu municipal education office, Tamale. . Convenience sampling was used for the study because it is a type of non probability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study Dornyei, (2007).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of Accessible Population of Stakeholders for the Study using convenience sampling

Stakeholders Population for the Study	Sampled
GTEC	5
Tutors of BACE	15
Tutors of TACE	15
Workers of Sagnarigu Education office	15
Total Population	50

Research Question: What is the perception of Stakeholders on student teachers use of uniforms at the Colleges of Education level?

This research question sought the perception of stakeholders on student teachers' use of uniforms at the colleges of Education level. Having taken an *Explanatory* dimension, the researcher sought the views of these key stakeholders in the Education industry to find out their perceptions on student teachers' use of uniforms at the colleges of education. Structured interview guide and survey plans were used to solicit the views of the respondents about student teachers use of uniform at the colleges of education.

With regards to how long respondents have been working in their current workplace and in what capacity, majority of them have stayed between four to nine years in their current workplace. The longest period being twenty years whilst the shortest being six months.

When asked whether respondents were for or against school uniforms, thirty (30) of them representing (60%) answered in the negative whilst fifteen (15) representing (30%) answered in the positive, with five (5) of them representing (10%) being indecisive thus have not taken any side.

When asked whether school uniform at the Colleges is a good idea or not, thirty-five of the respondents emphatically answered "no" representing (70%), whilst fifteen of them responded "yes" representing (30%). Some emerging themes from their comments are presented in the following paragraphs.

No! I think that once it has become a tertiary institution, at least they should go according to the norms of the issues of tertiarization, all the universities in the

country, none of them wears uniform. So I think they should not be wearing uniforms. (Respondent #18).

To me it is not a good idea, once they have turned tertiary; they have to allow them to move to the tertiary status. They have colleagues in the university who wear anything to class, maybe mufti, so I don't know why they have to be wearing uniform here. (Respondent #34).

Some of the respondents responded positive.

Yes! Uniform at the college is a good idea. . (Respondent #7).

Yes! Of course, a good idea it is. Reason being that the colleges of education are professional tertiary institutions who are supposed to train youth who are the future leaders to become responsible citizens.(Respondent #44).

Also, when asked whether they believed that school uniform at the Colleges of Education influences student teachers' behaviour or not, thirty five of the respondents representing (70%), answered in the positive, thus school uniform influences students behaviour, whilst ten representing (20%), respondents answered in the negative, thus school uniform not influencing students behaviour, five respondents representing (10%), were however indecisive, thus not being sure whether school uniforms influences behaviour or not. Some emerging themes from their comments are presented in the following paragraphs.

Yes, already dressing influences people's behaviour so wearing uniform or not wearing uniform will definitely influence their behaviour. So once they don't wear uniform they will be able to detect the type of person who wears what, they will wear different kind of dresses but with the uniform, you will come to realise that it is one sided. [Easy identification]. (Respondent #2).

Of course, yes. It influences their behaviours. Once they are in uniform they still behave like children. I think if they allow them to wear whatever they want to wear, they will behave like mature beings, they will behave accordingly because it is the uniform that is making them think they are students and that they cannot do anything on their own. [Curtail students' behaviour]. (Respondent #10).

Some of the respondents thought otherwise;

I don't think so, because it depends on how the institution is being regulated. There are some of the tertiary institutions that do not wear uniforms but are being regulated as to what to wear and what is not to be worn. (Respondent #23).

No, the uniform does not affect their behaviour. (Respondent #1).

In addition, respondents were asked to indicate the positive outcome of the school uniforms at the colleges of Education. Themes that emerge from that question included; "unity",

“identification”, “equality”, “uniformity” and “differentiation”. Their comments are presented in the following paragraphs.

It bridges the gap between the poor and the rich among the students. [Differentiation] (Respondent #5).

The only impact I will have to say is that it helps us to identify them. [Identification] (Respondent #32).

The positive outcomes are a lot but the more valid one is that most at the times when it's time for lectures, they all feel ok and equal. [Equality] (Respondent #17).

The positive outcomes are that it makes them look uniform and appear as one. [Equality] (Respondent #29).

Furthermore, respondents were asked about the negative outcome of school uniforms at the Colleges of Education in Ghana. Their responses were grouped under these broad themes;

“uncomfortability”, “non exposure” “negativity”. Their comments are presented in the following paragraphs.

It has brought a lot of negativities because now the thing is uniform and supposed to look uniform but here is the case you will see students, some will sew their own style, some short and some also long and more especially my dear pregnant ladies when their belly comes out you will see them struggling in the uniform a lot. (Respondent #39).

The students are not exposed within their training to dress in other capacities, because they have various forms of dressings for occasions, so because they are glued to using uniform, they are not exposed to dressing other ways. (Respondent #4).

Some however had opposing views.

I have not seen any negativity (Respondent #6).

When asked whether school uniforms for student teachers affect their academic performance, majority were of the view that there is no correlation between school uniform and academic performance, hence the former couldn't influence the latter.

No! It doesn't affect their academic performance because if you will perform well in academics, it is not the uniform that will determine. (Respondent #15).

No! Because uniform has nothing to do with their academics (Respondent #50).

No! Anyway maybe I am not thinking deep but I think no. (Respondent #16).

When further asked whether they have noticed any instances of academic achievement having a direct correlation to school uniforms at the colleges of Education, majority maintained they haven't

witnessed any correlation between academic achievement and school uniform. Their comments are presented below.

Personally no, maybe because I have not been here for long (Respondent #1).

No (Respondent #43).

No, it only plays the role of identification (Respondent #20).

Additionally, respondents were asked what role if any do they think uniform plays in the school culture. They were emphatic that aside some key broad themes under which their responses could be categorised; school uniforms didn't play any role in the school culture. Some emerging themes from their comments are presented below.

It makes the students look neat and appear decent, quite apart from that; I see none (Respondent #46).

Since the school uniform is supposed to bring about uniformity, here everyone is wearing what he or she wants and it's not uniform, so it does not play any role in the school culture (Respondent #13).

Respondents were also quizzed on what changes they would hope the uniforms bring about. Among the several themes under which respondent's answers could be grouped are "discipline", "loss of hope", "abolishment", "decency" and "modelling". Some emerging themes from their comments are presented below.

If the uniforms are abolished at the college level, I think it will bring to the students some kind of high morale. They will think they are equal as any of the tertiary institutions (Respondent #19).

I expect nothing more than the uniform being able to serve our purpose of decency so that it will be inculcated in the younger ones they are going to teach. (Respondent #2).

Moving on, stakeholders were asked their biggest improvement they have seen in student teachers who wear school uniforms. Key themes that ran through their responses include "decency", "discipline", "equality", "no improvement." Their comments are presented below.

I have not seen any (Respondent #2).

It increases their discipline (Respondent #26).

It makes them decent (Respondent #41)

When asked whether they support wearing uniforms at the colleges of education or not, respondents were split equally as to the position they took. Half of them (25 respondents) opted for the support of wearing of school uniforms, whilst the other half (25 respondents) supported otherwise. Some emerging themes from their comments are presented below.

Yes! I support wearing of uniform at the college, I said it differentiate them from the others [Differentiation] (Respondent #15).

I strongly support wearing uniform at the college. The reason is that, when everyone is in uniform. It makes you all feel equal irrespective of your financial or social status [Equality] (Respondent #23).

Other respondents thought otherwise.

No! I think I have explained that before, it downs the spirit of the student teachers with them knowing very well that their counterparts at the universities and polytechnics are not wearing uniforms. It appears that they are being oppressed against their will to do something to make them even feel like secondary school students [Oppressed] (Respondent #46).

No! because here is college and we classify college to be a tertiary institution now and then if students' teachers are wearing uniform it is as same as way back secondary school [Oppressed] (Respondent #12).

In furtherance, respondents were asked whether school uniforms had any influence on life outside of school. They were unanimous in their response as they all agreed that school uniforms had an influence on life after school of student teachers. Some emerging themes from their comments are presented below.

Yes! It does (Respondent #37).

Yes! The influence is that you will be easily identified (Respondent #18).

Of course! Because if a student teacher is wearing uniform and she is outside campus, people always see them to be students and not teachers in the making (Respondent #45).

Lastly, stakeholders were asked whether they think student teachers wearing school uniforms may be mocked by their counterparts in other tertiary institutions or not. Majority of them (42 respondents) responded in the positive whilst a few (8 respondents) responded otherwise. Their comments are presented below

It is true, most of the students at times feel mocked because they feel once colleges are now called tertiary (Respondent #9).

Yes! They will definitely be mocked at (Respondent #25).

Yes! Because wearing the uniform, some of the tertiary they mock at them saying they are still beneath or they are still young (Respondent #11).
Some stakeholders thought otherwise.

No! I don't think much because most people are aware that professionals are mostly identified by their dress code (Respondent #8).

No! (Respondent #36).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that stakeholders in this study considered school uniforms to improve attendance rates, and prevent students from forming gangs and groups that could result in further bad behavior even though some of the respondents had contrary views. Furthermore, they significantly related their perceptions of school uniforms to learners' academic achievement. The findings showed that most of the stakeholders agreed that Uniform makes student teachers from all economic background the same and this would go a long way to promote unity and eschew discrimination.

Recommendations

The recommendation was done in line with the research questions;

1. There should be workshops for student teachers to educate them on the uniform policy at the colleges of education and to let the student teachers know that school uniform is not to belittle them as a tertiary student.
2. College management must be flexible in implementing uniform policy at the colleges
3. If uniforms are implemented, they need to be evaluated to identify the effectiveness of the policy.
4. Student teachers should make known the benefits of wearing school uniforms

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