

## Moral Crisis and Dress Code Consciousness in Higher Institutions of Learning

Dr. Usman Jimoh Abdulkareem<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Mohammed, Olanrewaju Kolapo<sup>2</sup>,  
Kwara State College of Education, Oro  
Kareemusman32@gmail.com, Mulank4real@gmail.com

### Abstract

*One of the best investments a country can make to secure its future in terms of political, sociocultural, and economic development is education. It is significant in predicting how powerful a country may be in the future. Globally, education is supposed to generate citizens who are efficient, trustworthy, and well-behaved. But at many of our educational institutions today, discipline which was formerly the defining feature of our educational system may be at an all-time low. The absence of discipline among students can take many different forms, including dishonesty, disrespect and disregard for elders and established authority, rudeness, exam malpractice, intoxication, drug misuse, sexual immorality, cultism, and indecent clothing. The rising rate of indecent dressing, particularly among female students at Nigerian higher institutions, might have a disastrous impact on the country's educational system if left uncontrolled. As a result, this essay addresses the nature of the clothing code on campus, its justification, some arguments against it, and its potential legal ramifications. To collect and analyse the necessary data, the writers turned to secondary data from published and unpublished sources such as textbooks, journals, newspapers, and online resources, as well as context analysis. The authors suggest, among other things, that the university should reorient the students on certain of their ideas that went against the professional ethics of teaching. The institutions should create more awareness on dress code using billboards, visible posters in strategic areas within the premises.*

**Keywords:** Moral crisis, dress code, consciousness, higher institutions.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the best investments a country can make to secure its future in terms of political, sociocultural, and economic development is education. It is significant in predicting how powerful a country may be in the future. In lieu of this reason, in the modern world, it is the primary duty of any government to ensure that its inhabitants have access to education. Education is perceived as the result of the teaching or the training of mind and character in every society. In addition to imparting knowledge, education aims to shape character. The development of the human individual considering their ultimate goal and the dignity of society is what education entails. All forms of education aim to bring forth the best in individuals, to replace falsehood with truth, and to ignorance combined with incapacity versus expertise. Education also produces wisdom and discipline, which are the cornerstones of human happiness.

Globally, education is supposed to generate citizens who are efficient, trustworthy, and well-behaved. But at many educational institutions today, discipline—which was formerly the defining feature of our educational system—may be at an all-time low. Students' lack of discipline can take different forms, including dishonesty, disrespect and disregard for authority

figures and elders, rudeness, tardiness, examination malpractice, drug and alcohol abuse, immorality, and cultism, including the wearing of indecent clothing.

According to Odeleye (2000), the goal of the dress code in higher education is to uphold and encourage values like decency, modesty, cleanliness, neatness, and appropriateness in attire that reflect basic sobriety and dignity and serve as a representation of the professional standing of faculty, staff, and students in their respective fields. As a result, numerous schools in Nigeria have announced and widely disseminated a clothing code.

The task of preparing instructors who can raise younger students morally falls on a number of institutions, particularly teacher-training institutes in Nigeria. This may not be feasible if the teacher-trainees exhibit moral bankruptcy and lack discipline in their acts, attitudes, behaviours, and attire. However, the prevalence of indecent attire has been alarmingly high in recent years, particularly among female students at Nigerian tertiary institutions. This was the case even though there were regulations in place that not only prohibited indecent attire in these facilities but also specified the penalties for violators. The Student Handbook for these Universities contains guidelines and policies regarding what constitutes appropriate student attire.

Higher education campuses should be seen as environment that encourages women to dress modestly. To achieve this goal, this paper will be presented using three key parameters to explain the nature of the campus dress code and its legal implications at educational institutions. Starting from the nature of the dress code on campus, the discussion will look at its justification as well as some arguments against it before concluding with a discussion of its legal ramifications.

### **Dress Code**

There are written and, often, unwritten dress code regulations. Like other elements of a person's physical appearance, clothing has social meaning, with various norms and expectations being appropriate based on the situation and occasion (Wikipedia). There are dress codes for specific jobs and social events. Every paramilitary and military organization has a set uniform. Officers may only wear the mufti when it is appropriate or while they are off duty. Similarly, other formal organizations (bankers, airlines, attorneys, doctors, etc.) also have dress rules.

Additionally, educational institutions have dress codes that apply to their pupils. Dress rules are enforced in many Nigerian educational institutions to guarantee that students adhere to a specific standard of decency when dressing for class (Gushee, 2004). A student's dress code may or may not represent their own preferences, but these choices must be made within the bounds of sensible guidelines and suitable standards that support the upkeep of a clean, healthy,

and productive learning environment. It is anticipated that each student's appearance and personal hygiene will support a good, secure, and healthful learning environment. While the school administration acknowledges that each student has a fundamental right to freedom, it is their duty to create and maintain a secure, safe, and orderly learning environment. Therefore, it is important to develop and enforce the dress code to make sure that students get the most out of their education. In many institutions that uphold modesty norms, however, struggle with aggregate and ensure everyone comply strictly to the rule. Covering of the body is not typically limited to dressing alone. However, on sometimes it may indicate the reverse, particularly on many events.

Guests dress politely for weddings, naming ceremonies, graduations, and other events. In Nigeria, friends and other guests dress alike for celebrations and other events. This traditional attire is called “Anko” or "Aso ebi". Since people dress decently to comply with the norms of the occasion, it is expected that individuals even without occasion should dress modestly for people to emulate that dressing good is part of values in the society. Additionally, members of different religious groups are expected to adhere to their respective clothing codes. In certain Nigerian churches, women are forbidden from donning see-through or short skirts, pants, tights, or any other clothing that bares the body. Like Islamic organizations, churches also mandate a certain attire for specific groups inside the church, such as the women's fellowship, chorus, and so on.

### **Nature of Campus Dress Code**

According to Pauly (2008), a dress code is a set of guidelines that specify acceptable clothing, much like in a school. Nonetheless, today's institution campuses have created an environment that encourages women to flaunt their attractive attire. For example, because of the daring and alluring ways that most students, especially the female students dressed for class, people who had visited university campuses in the past and in the present had questioned whether they were in an academic community or an enclave of fashion week. Anecdotal evidence from the corridors of many universities nowadays indicates that students are pushing the boundaries of appropriate attire. There are naked midriffs and halter tops, ultra-low-cut jeans with tight underwear visible above, and sheer blouses with vibrant bras peeking through.

Teachers and school administrators are often reduced to acting as the clothes police on campuses these days; a great deal of time and effort that could have been used for instruction is instead diverted into observing whether pupils comply with the dress code. According to Kayode (2005), this issue is more prevalent among girls and is spreading throughout both

industrialized and developing nations, undermining efforts to curb immorality among young people.

Every year, especially in the warm months, the concerns of educators and administrators grow. Although there have always been conflicts over school clothes codes, school administrators claim that this generation is different since so many students are going above and beyond what is considered appropriate in terms of new fashion trends. A more detrimental trend is the rise of TV reality shows, such as Big Brother Naija, which are taking over wealthy and developing nations and undermining efforts to curb youth immorality (Olori, 2003). As a result, it is important to remember that some nations have outlawed certain types of inappropriate clothing, which are typically listed in international travel guides, on the grounds that they "need proper clothing for the moral health of the nation."

Furthermore, certain universities in Nigeria, such as Lagos State University (LASSU), University of Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos (UNILAG), and Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), have established dress rules for their students. For instance, the Governing Council of Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria adopted the following rules for strict adherence by students in a special release sent to all students and headlined Dress code in the university:

- (1) It is forbidden to wear clothing that is sexually suggestive or that reveals areas of the body that should be hidden, including the thighs, navel, or chest.
- (2) Every student's identification must always be evident, meaning that their faces must be completely visible. Dressing in a way that makes it difficult to identify oneself presents major security risks; and
- (3) Each faculty is expected to develop additional policies specific to their area of study.

The consequences for breaking the guidelines were outlined, including the need that anyone showing up for academic events wearing clothing that does not adhere to these standards be asked to leave. In addition, the University of Lagos in Nigeria took a firm stand when it was noticed that some male and female students were dressing indecently on campus, even to lectures. These dresses were either too tight, too short, or exposed sensitive parts of the body. The institution felt that indecent models of dressing do not reflect the seriousness, dignity, and character-moulding nature of the academic enterprise. Each member of staff is allowed to use his or her discretion in dealing with situations as they arise, in a manner that ensures discipline is enforced (Gushee, 2004). Moreover, the instruction was convinced that loose dressing could result in general lowering of moral and academic standards in the university.

### **Reasons for Students Wearing the Clothes Not Listed in the Campus Dress Code**

Some studies claim that when students were questioned about why they wore these dresses even though some of them were forbidden from wearing them at home and because it went against their cultural and religious beliefs, they would always respond in the affirmative that it is in line with societies' vogue (Yahaya, 2013). According to their answers, some of them dress not in accordance with the Dress Code's specified categories in order to feel like they belong and wanting people to know that societies have changed. A few of them mentioned that they wore those clothes because they looked sophisticated. In addition, a few students claimed that they wear the gowns because their peers do, while others just love to wear them. From the foregoing, it may be inferred that most students who dress indecently are deviants and therefore do not know the implication of their anti-social behaviours in the society. It is therefore the responsibility of all to ensure these students are tamed because they contribute negatively to the development of the society.

### **The Purpose of the Campus Dress Code**

Many universities seem to follow the principle that important values like decency, modesty, cleanliness, neatness, and appropriateness in attire reflect initial dignity and sobriety and serve as a representation of the professional status of faculty, staff, and students in their respective fields. As a result, a lot of universities have issued widely known "dress code" standards, according to which "students should maintain a clear and well-cared for appearance in all settings on campus" (Fareo & Jackson, 2018). Many of these universities consider it inappropriate for people to wear clothing that is too short or tight, strapless, or exposing. This decision has become important to maintain modesty in the campus and to ensure students are controlled to conform with the rules and regulations of the institutions. This in essence will ensure they produce to the society students well behaved and reasonable individuals. Several universities, including UniLag, UI, and OAU, have additionally disclosed in their policies the kinds of attire that their male and female students are prohibited from donning. These include:

- (1) Any form of clothing that is too tight, including blouses, pants, and skirts.
- (2) Any clothing that exposes delicate body areas like the buttocks, upper arms, tummy, breasts, or chest.
- (3) Anything that isn't at least knee length, like dresses, miniskirts, and underwear.
- (4) It is not appropriate to wear beachwear, party wear, or bathroom slippers to lectures.
- (5) Attire like skirts, jeans, and t-shirts with derogatory and subversive inscriptions on them.
- (6) Jeans with low waistlines and hip-riders.

Some universities, like UniLag and OAU, have established two sanctions points to carry out this directive:

- (i) Exclusion of students from lectures and services, whereby instructors and administrators have the authority to reprimand or bar students from attending lectures and official functions if they are not appropriately attired.
- (ii) Counselling and record endorsement; if these violators fail to comply, they will be brought before the student disciplinary committee and have their records endorsed appropriately. Counselling will be provided based on the circumstances.

The announcement was supported by the fact that parents, in general, fully supported the university's efforts to ensure that students always wore appropriate clothing. Therefore, it is easiest to picture the argument that there would be pandemonium in public schools if there were no official school uniform or clothing code. It has been discovered that the dress code maintains school discipline, stabilizes the environment in the classroom, and encourages decorum. These findings are supported by real and reasonable connections to the educational system (Fareo & Jackson, 2018).

The rationale for the adoption of a dress code in universities needs to be based on more persuasive and tenable arguments, such as:

- (1) Upholding of academic standards.
- (2) Promotion of decorum and discipline in academic atmosphere.
- (3) Enforcement of morality and decency; and
- (4) Security awareness. However, it is the strangeness of the above assumption in a university setting that belies the adoption of a campus dress code.

Fareo and Jackson (2018) point out that some local faculties have adopted dress codes for their faculty members based on those of their foreign counterparts. For example, the Faculty of Pharmacy at Obafemi Awolowo University has adopted the same code as the Faculty of Pharmacy at Kuwait University. The Kuwait University Faculty of Pharmacy's Students' Handbook specifies a general and laboratory dress code for its students, which OAU adopted as well.

### **Female students**

- (1) Dressing should be neat and decent.
- (2) Jewellery should be kept to the minimum; ankle chains are not allowed.
- (3) Indecent clothing that are too short, tight-fitting or that exposes some parts of the body, veils that do not meet the professional dress code of the faculty's requirement for safety in the laboratories are not allowed.

### **Male students**

- (1) Dressing should consist of trousers, shirt and tie or simple native wear.
- (2) Students should not come to school in slippers.
- (3) Jewellery should be limited to cuff links, tie clips and wristwatches.

Oyeleye (2013) states that both male and female students must wear a clean, white, front-buttoned laboratory coat as well as appropriate length pants and name tags on their coats while in the lab. Thankfully, the following helpful addition can be found in the dress code that the university's Faculty of Science has set for its students:

It is not permitted to wear flowing dresses in the lab due to the possibility of corrosive chemicals spilling on other students or the wood bench. Such spills typically destroy lab benches and frequently skin. When it comes to concentration sulphuric acid; the burn it produces is long-lasting and leaves a permanent scar (Oyeleye, 2013).

The Council of Legal Education in Nigeria has outlined the following dress code for male students in its code of conduct for law students: dark suits, white shirts, black ties (not bow ties), black socks, and black shoes with white breast pocket handkerchiefs. The dress code for female students is a dark ladies dress and black shoes or a white shirt, dark jacket, and black skirts that cover the knees (dark suit). Stripped black pants may be worn under dark coats. No stitching or embellishments of any kind should be worn, and the only jewellery that is permitted is modest jewellery like watches and earrings.

### **Argument Against Campus Dress Code**

While the adoption of a dress code in elementary and high school or equivalent educational institution may be easily understandable, it may be difficult to find justification for the same phenomenon in tertiary institutions. Some of the strong reasons advanced against the sustainability of the campus dress code are that:

- (1) The university is a citadel of learning for various categories of matured persons with their enshrined fundamental rights.
- (2) The university is an international institution of repute subject to international standards.
- (3) The university contains people of different beliefs and backgrounds and in such a community, the social practices will obviously differ, and this calls for much tolerance.
- (4) Certain odd rules that were implemented in a polytechnic or other postsecondary institution would not be appropriate in a university context. In view of the and related issues, stronger justifications must be provided to support the legal consequences of the campus clothing code.

## **Legality and the Enforcement of Moral Dressing**

Law according to Fayokun (2005) drawing from Austin's Lectures on jurisprudence (1885) has been described as a rule or order coming from the sovereign or given by a political superior to a political inferior. Said another way, "law" is understood to be a set of guidelines for proper human behaviour, which includes a moral code or an established pattern of behaviour that is sanctioned. The sanction's main goal is to defend society from those who behave in an abnormal way. Without law, society's ability to survive would be threatened, and it would eventually fall apart.

In this sense, laws encompass the policies and guidelines put in place at educational establishments as a component of public law. Public law is a subset of law that deals with regulating behaviour on an individual, group, and organizational level by dividing up rights and obligations. Laws are defined as guidelines, directives, and procedures, some of which are outlined in public school notifications and circulars and are subject to legal proceedings (Fayokun, 2005). In Nigeria, for example, education law is a component of corpus Juris. The Constitution, Federal and State statutes, presidential directives, administrative rules, and a large body of case law are the sources of the legal instruments that have an impact on educational institutions.

The formal mechanisms for promulgating laws include those by which a statute is legislated into law or a school board regulation is made into law. Even if the processes are quite informal, a public-school administrator is promulgating law when they tell the kids in an assembly about a new dress code.

According to Fayokun (2005), formal punishments for noncompliance are frequently mentioned in laws. Most constitutional provisions do not explicitly or implicitly impose any penalties. Constitutions are intentionally drafted broadly to allow for additional clarity by legislative adoption; this includes the defining of punishments, which is necessary for their efficacy. However, subordinate legislations are typically filled with penalties. The power of a law is its capacity to compel people to obey its commands, either because they feel morally obligated to do so or because they fear the consequences of disobeying the authority; the penalties can be explicit or implicit, as in the case of the students in our example above, who understand that failure to comply with the new dress code will result in the principal taking appropriate action within the school to secure compliance (Fayokun, 2005). By defining the behaviour expected of certain individuals in certain circumstances, the law also defines roles.

## **Codes of Conduct**

Codes of conduct or codes of behaviour are designed to anticipate and prevent certain specific types of behaviour, e.g. conflict of interest, self-dealing, bribery, and inappropriate actions. Although, conduct codes can be brief, most often they are lengthy and detailed. The rationale for the detailed scope of this kind of code is that it is necessary to both protect the employee while at the same time protecting the reputation of the government. Most codes of conduct focus on the “do nots” rather than on affirmative obligations. That is, they detail specific actions in which employees are not to engage.

## **The Goal of Codes of Ethics**

According to this analysis, there are several advantages to using ethics rules in public service. First, rules of ethics raise the likelihood that people would act in ways, claims Olori (2003). They achieve this in part by emphasizing the nature of their deeds and in part by emphasizing the consequences of infractions. Furthermore, depending too much on codes may lessen the cost of doing an ethical deed. One instance could be of a governmental servant who receives a request for a government contract from his relative. It would be a moral decision on their behalf if there were no code. A code shifts the behaviour from not aiding a family member to doing the right thing and serves as a reminder to the civil servant that doing so is against expectations for civil servants and may result in loss of employment (Olori, 2003).

Second, public employees can be directed by strong ethics codes to take activities that lead to doing the right thing for the right reasons. It is important for ethical behaviour to become second nature, and strong norms enable elected leaders and bureaucrats to hold each other accountable for their deeds.

When a behaviour is repeated often, it gets embedded in the organization and instilled in the individual. Procurement and contracts provide a great example. To ensure impartiality, government procedures are frequently laborious. Contracting officials would be readily enticed to break the rules to speed up the process if efficiency were the only requirement. Nonetheless, it will be exceedingly difficult to defend awarding the contract to your wife's business based on efficiency if it is evident that impartiality is the primary value in performing your public duties.

Third, adhering to an ethical code does not negate an individual's moral independence or release a public worker from their duty to reason. At most, codes of ethics offer a compelling first justification for acting in a particular manner. Nevertheless, a compelling argument could overcome obstacles. It is expected that breaking the code is not the norm and that any exceptions to it must be supported by a higher ethical standard. When a public servant shuts

down a coal mine before the owners have had all available legal appeals for due process, they have a legitimate basis to do so. The need to carry out procedures objectively is subordinated to the greater priority of preserving the lives of the workers (Olori, 2003).

Fourth, codes of ethics might serve as a declaration of professional intent. In other words, it articulates the public service's dedication to a certain set of ethical principles. This is valuable in terms of cognition and emotion. In terms of cognition, it provides a person entering the public service with a defined set of values to which they should adhere. Civil servants are not always comfortable in this role, and codes can help to make expectations clear. The pride that comes from being a part of a profession or group can be fostered by codes. According to Lori (2003), pride plays a crucial role in inspiring people to view themselves as professionals.

## **CONCLUSION**

One of the policies dictating how students are expected to behave on campus is the dress code. Its goal is to guarantee that all students wear clothing that is appropriate for the teaching profession and the surrounding society values. Every pupil is expected to follow it. However, many students continue to have the incorrect impression of the Dress Code despite the widespread advertising, stringent enforcement of the Code, prescribed penalties for violators, and other consequences linked to breaking the Code. So, they can break it without consequence. Some parents, for example, find nothing wrong with any of these. Children of broken families may have good morals but treat them lightly; authorities may not take enforcement and sanctions seriously enough; foreign cultures may have influenced college students and young people in the modern world to be more lenient. Furthermore, by airing such demeaning programs as Big Brother Naija, the mass media has undermined all the efforts against moral pollution and nudity. In addition, the lack of religious beliefs among campus residents and the environment's corruption, which encourages drug addiction, prostitution, gangsterism, cultism, thuggery, and other forms of indiscipline among students worldwide, make the phenomenon of dress codes unachievable.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The elements, along with others, appear to have consistently impeded the implementation of dress codes for university students in Nigeria and other countries. It appears that we may have lost the fight against campus violence and cultism, particularly at Nigerian universities where reports of such incidents are common. This could mean that our hopes of producing a future generation of dependable, morally upright, responsible, and hardworking professionals may

have been dashed. Hopefully, this is untrue. Thus, in keeping with this spirit, the following suggestions are put forth:

- The university should reorient students regarding some of their ideas that were against the ethics of teaching.
- Broadcasting the dress code campaign both inside and outside the campuses.
- Robust mechanisms for enforcement and prosecution.
- They ought to raise consciousness regarding the Dress Code by utilizing billboards and prominent signs placed in key locations throughout the campus. The billboard ought to display images of students dressed nicely.
- Regular counselling of students
- Sound moral and religious guidance from an early age at home and in school, and
- The cooperation of all relevant parties (parents, educators, community leaders, the media, and others) should hopefully help the dress code become ingrained on campuses and even in the streets.
- Finally, the students should see themselves as role models who will be teachers or leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, they should be conscious of their mode of dressing.

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