

Influence of “No School Uniform Policy” on Students’ Self-Confidence in Academic Participation

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Abstract. This mixed-methods study aimed to determine the level of students' perception of the "No School Uniform Policy" and its relationship with their self-confidence in key skills, including collaboration, communication, creativity, innovation, self-direction, critical thinking, and the use of technology. Conducted at Matanao National High School, Barayong National High School, and Marber National High School, the study employed a survey questionnaire adapted from existing research, administered randomly to respondents, and supplemented with qualitative interviews. The quantitative results revealed a statistically significant but weak positive relationship between students' perception of the policy and their self-confidence across all key skills examined. The qualitative data yielded four emergent themes: self-expression, confidence in clothing style, confidence in an academic setting, and the feeling of independence. These themes support the quantitative findings, suggesting that while the effect is not strong, the "No School Uniform policy" contributes positively to students' self-confidence. The study concludes that the policy can be a viable strategy for fostering student growth in both academic and personal development domains through increased comfort, expression, and interaction.

Keywords: Key skills; No school uniform policy; Self-confidence.

1.0 Introduction

The global discourse surrounding school uniforms has sparked ongoing debate within the education sector. While some believe that uniforms promote unity, discipline, and school identity, others argue they suppress students' individuality and limit their expression. This divide is reflected in diverse practices across the world. Countries such as Cyprus, the United Kingdom, Ireland, India, and Australia have widely adopted school uniform policies, particularly in private institutions, while public schools are less consistent in their implementation. Similarly, countries such as Japan and China have adopted a uniform style, often inspired by athletic designs. Uniforms are also commonly worn in Latin America and Arab countries, such as Tunisia and Spain, albeit with variations between public and private institutions. On the other hand, modern Russia generally does not require uniforms, except in a few prestigious or private schools.

According to Singh (2022), a well-designed, inclusive uniform policy can promote both physical and mental well-being among students, regardless of gender or identity. Kobayashi (2021) emphasized that perceptions about uniform policies are shaped by cultural values, educational philosophies, and societal norms, which all influence their implementation and impact. In the Philippines, DepEd Order No. 65 s.2010 addresses economic barriers by removing mandatory uniform requirements in public schools, aiming to increase access to education (Marcelo, 2022). The policy supports student participation by encouraging gender inclusivity, creativity, and self-confidence (Abarca, 2022).

Self-confidence plays a vital role in student success, not only in academics but also in personal and social development (Ferrer et al., 2023). As noted by Malipot (2022), the Philippine education system prioritizes student empowerment and teacher development to enhance engagement and improve learning outcomes. Literature, such as "Sa Mga Mata ni Migoy," highlights the correlation between self-confidence and academic performance, suggesting that policies that enhance self-worth are beneficial (Cruz, 2018). Punzalan (2018) found that allowing students to dress according to their preferences increased comfort and self-assurance. Universities like De La Salle University and the University of the Philippines have adopted this approach, granting students the freedom to choose their attire.

In line with DepEd Orders No. 45 s.2008 and No. 65 s.2010, Matanao National High School, Marber National High School, and Barayong National High School in Davao del Sur did not enforce school uniforms, thereby fostering self-expression and equality. Despite existing literature on school uniforms and student development, limited studies have explored the direct relationship between the "No School Uniform Policy" and students' self-confidence in key 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, self-direction, and technology use. Therefore, this study aims to examine this relationship and investigate how the policy contributes to students' self-confidence, to inform educational institutions on how to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Conducted using a non-experimental statistical design, qualitative data analysis was performed using a phenomenological methodology that involved in-depth interviews and observations to identify frameworks and patterns.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in the large schools of the MABAMA (Matanao, Magsaysay, Bansalan) cluster in Davao del Sur. Public schools, namely Matanao National High School, Marber National High School, and Barayong National High School, are the participating research locales.

2.3 Research Participants

To select respondents for the quantitative data, the researchers employed stratified random sampling, ensuring a representative sample population for each subgroup. The sample size was calculated using Slovin's Formula, with a precision margin of 0.05. A total of 370 respondents provided quantitative data, with 174 from Matanao NHS, 115 from Marber NHS, and 81 from Barayong NHS. Purposive sampling was employed to select nine key informants for the research objectives. The informants were verified students from Barayong National High School, Marber National High School, and Matanao National High School.

2.4 Research Instrument

A modified survey questionnaire was employed in the study to gauge students' opinions regarding the Philippines' lack of a school uniform policy. The tool was developed based on a 2012 study, which evaluated six key proficiencies: collaboration, communication, creativity, innovation, self-direction, critical thinking, and technology use. Bray et al. (2020) developed a tool to assess students' confidence in key skills (SICKS). Participants' agreement with the statements on the questionnaire was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. Open-ended questions were used in the qualitative portion to determine how students felt about the impact of the school uniform ban on their confidence in critical thinking abilities.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

This study employed specific steps to collect the necessary data. Firstly, the researcher wrote a letter to the Office

of the Schools Division Superintendent to conduct the study in the large schools of the MABAMA cluster. Second, the researchers wrote letters to the respective principals of Matanao National High School, Barayong National High School, and Marber National High School, requesting permission to conduct the study in their schools. Third, the researcher administered the quantitative instrument to respondents randomly, ensuring the privacy of their responses. Fourth, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the quantitative data gathered. Then, qualitative data is collected and analyzed based on the quantitative results. Lastly, the data were used to answer the study's objectives.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This research study adhered to ethical guidelines in its conduct. The study addresses several ethical issues, including potential harm, informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used to prevent identification and to achieve anonymity. Participants' rights and welfare were protected by granting them the freedom to make well-informed decisions free from outside interference. Privacy agreements with informants and all individuals who have access to the research data help ensure confidentiality and data integrity. Additionally, the researcher recognized that the informant's participation could be harmful and ensured they were not under any obligation to respond, even if it made them uncomfortable. These ethical considerations facilitate a transparent and accountable research community.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of Students' Perception of "No School Uniform Policy"

Students have overwhelmingly supported the "No School Uniform Policy," giving it a high rating of 3.43. Given that the policy has been shown to improve academic performance and reduce bullying incidents, a substantial portion of the student body supports it. Additionally, the policy has a significant impact on building school spirit and a sense of community. Students believe that the absence of a uniform requirement fosters a strong sense of school spirit and community, which in turn increases engagement, cooperation, and self-assurance.

Table 1. *Level of Students' Perception on "No School Uniform Policy"*

	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	Encourage greater school spirit and foster a stronger sense of community.	3.92	High
2	Is a viable strategy for enhancing the academic performance of students	3.17	Moderate
3	Increase student concentration by eliminating distractions in the classroom.	3.19	Moderate
4	An efficient approach to mitigating bullying associated with apparel.	3.65	High
5	Minimize the occurrence of cliques centered around attire.	3.42	Moderate
6	It is an effective way to decrease school-based gang-related behavior.	3.46	Moderate
7	Do not inhibit students' creativity.	3.24	Moderate
8	A financially viable substitute for the lack of standardization in student educational attire.	3.28	Moderate
9	It is a method that effectively enhances student conduct.	3.44	High
10	Is a viable approach to enhancing education.	3.55	High
	Overall	3.43	High

The policy has successfully decreased the number of harassment incidents involving clothing, which may help lessen bias and scrutiny toward students due to their clothing choices. This result, however, runs counter to Williams and Littlefield's (2018) research, which indicates that differences in clothing or fashion may make a student a target of bullying. As an illustration of bullying brought on by clothing differences, a study by Paljakka (2023) noted verbal abuse aimed at a student for wearing out-of-date clothing.

The moderate agreement among students that the "No School Uniform Policy" could improve academic performance was indicated by the second statement's lowest average score of 3.17. An educational setting without uniforms might be friendlier and more diverse, which would strengthen peer relationships and create a greater sense of community. By reducing distractions and allowing students to focus better on their academic responsibilities, feeling comfortable in their attire can also improve overall well-being. In summary, it has been demonstrated that the "No School Uniform Policy" enhances students' overall well-being, fosters community cohesion, and improves academic achievement.

3.2 Level of Students' Confidence with Key Skills

This section explores the level of students' self-confidence in key skills, including collaboration, communication, creativity, innovation, self-direction, critical thinking, and the use of technology.

In terms of Collaboration

With a mean score of 3.83 overall, as shown in Table 2, the study concluded that students were highly confident in their ability to collaborate. When working with peers to set goals and create plans for their groups, this confidence was clear. This supports the claim made by Martin and Borup (2022) that providing collaborative opportunities enhances student confidence and engagement. Teachers who encourage group or partner work also foster social interaction and collaborative learning. Students can divide tasks, share ideas, and learn from one another's viewpoints using this approach.

Table 2. *Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills in Terms of Collaboration*

Indicators		Mean	Interpretation
1	Collaborate in small groups or pairs to accomplish a mission.	3.92	High
2	Set objectives and develop a strategy for your team in collaboration with other pupils.	4.00	High
3	Make output from the ideas and help of other students.	3.56	High
Overall		3.83	High

Additionally, it imparts critical competencies necessary for future success in the workplace and academia, including collaborative teamwork, effective communication, and conflict resolution. The average score of 3.56 indicates that students can successfully integrate their contributions to produce cohesive outcomes, demonstrating a significant level of self-assurance when working together to produce items.

In terms of Communication

With a mean score of 3.51, the study shows that students have a high level of confidence in their critical communication skills. With a high mean score of 3.61, the ability to prepare and deliver oral presentations is the most critical skill. Students are proficient in a variety of media platforms and exhibit strong communication skills, especially in oral presentations. Nonetheless, a moderate rating of 3.34 suggests that students may benefit from enhancing their confidence in communicating, particularly when responding to questions from the audience. To improve public speaking and Q&A sessions, educators and educational institutions should consider implementing communication training programs, seminars, or exercises.

Table 3. *Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills in Terms of Communication*

Indicators		Mean	Interpretation
1	Deliver ideas effectively by manipulating media rather than writing.	3.61	High
2	Create and deliver an oral presentation in a crowd.	4.59	High
3	Respond questions promptly in a crowd.	3.34	Moderate
Overall		3.51	High

The study also lends credence to the notion that students believe they can communicate effectively through non-traditional written mediums, such as multimedia and posters. However, when speaking in front of large crowds, students frequently feel timid and less confident, according to a study by Ho et al. (2023).

In terms of Creativity and Innovation

The study examines the level of confidence students have in their critical creativity and innovation-related skills. The findings demonstrate that students are highly confident in their ability to devise original solutions, experiment with ideas, and generate creative responses to challenging problems. They view adaptation, experimentation, and ongoing development favorably, all of which are critical for promoting innovation and creativity. Students also exhibit a moderate willingness to devise original solutions by applying creative and unconventional thinking.

Table 4. *Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills in Terms of Creativity and Innovation*

Indicators		Mean	Interpretation
1	Try new ideas to enhance output.	3.82	High
2	Provide a solution to a problem.	3.48	Moderate
3	Make something original to express self.	3.90	High
Overall		3.73	High

This result is consistent with research by Urrego and Valencia (2021), which indicates that encouraging creativity increases self-confidence. Students who regularly participate in creative projects gain a better understanding of their development, areas of expertise, and areas for growth. They are also aware of the traits required to overcome

challenges and adjust to changing circumstances. The study emphasizes the importance of promoting. The study emphasizes the importance of encouraging students' inventiveness and creativity.

In terms of Self-direction

Students have a high level of self-confidence in their learning abilities, with a mean score of 3.66 across all variables. It is demonstrated by their ability to monitor their progress and make necessary adjustments to complete tasks, demonstrating proactive self-management and responsibility for performance and learning; they also have a high level of self-assurance in evaluating the quality of their completed assignments, demonstrating a propensity for self-assessment and a pursuit of excellence; even though the mean score for incorporating expert, instructor, or peer feedback to enhance work is moderated.

Table 5. *Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills in Terms of Self-direction*

	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	Observe progress and adjust to complete a task.	3.76	High
2	Check the quality of output before finishing.	3.74	High
3	Use constructive criticism to be better.	3.46	Moderate
	Overall	3.66	High

Self-confidence encourages self-direction, enabling students to evaluate their work and consider the opinions of peers, teachers, and others before submitting it. Students' self-assurance and self-regulation were significantly enhanced when self-directed learning was used as an instructional strategy (Zamnah & Ruswana, 2019).

In terms of Critical Thinking Skills

Students have a moderate level of confidence in their ability to think critically (mean score of 3.47 for all assertions), are confident in their ability to solve complex problems and draw their conclusions based on data analysis (mean score of 3.56 is commendable), have a high mean score of 3.59 in discerning reasoned analysis and judgment, and are self-assured in examining a variety of arguments, opinions, or potential solutions (mean score of 3.25 for problem-solving and responding to open-ended questions, indicating that students have a moderate level of confidence in their abilities and comprehension.

Table 6. *Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills in Terms of Critical Thinking Skills*

	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	Answering open-ended questions.	3.25	Moderate
2	Making conclusions based on data analysis.	3.56	High
3	Analyze different perceptive to provide solution.	3.59	High
	Overall	3.47	Moderate

Students who learned argumentation, reasoning, explanation, and inquiry reported a discernible improvement in their critical thinking skills, according to a survey conducted by Ceneciro et al. (2023). People who engage in critical thinking are better equipped to apply concepts and contribute to class discussions with greater assurance and dexterity.

In terms of Use of Technology

With a mean score of 3.72, as shown in Table 7, the study indicates that students are highly confident in their ability to use technology. They are skilled at efficiently managing assignments, promoting group projects, and utilizing digital tools for educational objectives. They also exhibit excellent communication and digital literacy skills.

Table 7. *Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills in Terms of Use of Technology*

	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1	Manipulate technology to work with teams.	3.67	High
2	Manipulate technology to keep record.	3.60	High
3	Manipulate technology to share information.	3.90	High
	Overall	3.72	High

Technology is essential to education because it can be effectively incorporated into curricula, facilitates the delivery of instruction, serves as a support system, and enhances the overall learning process. Technology has changed education from being passive and reactive to being dynamic and interactive (Nagasubramani & Raja, 2018).

3.3 Relationship between the "No School Uniform Policy" and Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills

Table 8 shows the relationship between students' perceptions of a "No School Uniform Policy" and their confidence in critical skills. The findings indicate that while there are weak positive associations for all diverse skills, students may become more confident in self-direction, critical thinking, technology use, collaboration, communication, creativity, and innovation, as well as self-directed learning. The study highlights the potential effects of the policy on students' academic progress and psychological well-being, as well as the significance of positive perception in fostering academic achievement.

Table 8. Relationship Between the Level of Perception of "No School Uniform Policy" and the Level of Students' Self-Confidence with Key Skills

Students Self-Confidence	Perception of "No School Uniform Policy"			
	r-value	Degree of Relationship	p-value	Decision
Collaboration	0.324	Weak positive	<0.001	Reject Ho ₁
Communication	0.267	Weak positive	<0.001	Reject Ho ₂
Creativity and Innovation	0.354	Weak positive	<0.001	Reject Ho ₃
Self-direction	0.331	Weak positive	<0.001	Reject Ho ₄
Critical Thinking	0.365	Weak positive	<0.001	Reject Ho ₅
Use of Technology	0.294	Weak positive	<0.001	Reject Ho ₆

Recent studies by Cham et al. (2018) and Rathee (2023) suggest that loosening dress regulations or eliminating school uniforms can foster students' independence, uniqueness, and creativity, thereby enhancing their critical thinking, communication, and technological skills. The study also supports the claim made by Knipp and Stevenson (2022) that students who attended New Orleans Public Charter Schools and other schools with inconsistent policies had lower self-confidence.

By allowing students to make choices based on their values and preferences, the absence of school uniforms fosters self-direction, confidence in using technology, teamwork, communication, creativity, critical thinking, and self-expression. Students' autonomy encourages them to explore and develop their talents in various spheres of life, which in turn fosters a positive learning environment.

3.4 Contribution of "No School Uniform Policy" to the Development of Students' Self-Confidence

Four themes were derived from the participants' responses, each of which describes how the "No School Uniform Policy" affected their self-confidence. Themes include self-expression, academic setting confidence, confidence in clothing style, and a sense of independence. The subsequent content provides detailed explanations of each theme, along with responses related to the fundamental themes.

Table 9. Thematic map of the contribution of "No School Uniform Policy" to the development of the students' self-confidence

Codes	Themes
Allow them to express themselves	Self-expression
Express themselves by choosing their fashion	
Express their inner/true selves	
Express their clothing style	Confidence in Clothing Style
Wearing of aesthetic clothes	
Wearing of comfortable styled outfits	
Boost confidence in communicating by wearing comfortable, nice clothes	Confidence in Academic Setting
Can do well in class because of the clothes they wear	
Freedom to choose what to wear	Feeling of Independence

Self-expression

The students have shared how the "No School Uniform Policy" helped them to express themselves. Students can freely express themselves through their clothing choices, showcasing their unique personalities, interests, and values. The implementation of the policy allows for a diverse range of outfits that reflect the individual identities and backgrounds within the school community. Participants have shared:

"A no-school-uniform policy helps develop a student's self-confidence, as it allows them to express themselves more freely." (P1)

"I can express myself through choosing my fashion style. A no-school-uniform policy contributes to us students boosting our self-confidence by allowing us to express our inner, true selves." (P3)

"I believe that there should be no school uniform policy because I can express myself. I feel confident that I can express myself

through what I wear, as long as it is not against the school's regulations." (P4)

Because it permits students to freely express their personalities, interests, and values through their clothing choices, the "No School Uniform Policy" has played a significant role in students' self-expression. To reflect the diverse range of identities and backgrounds within the student body, this policy encourages the display of a wide variety of clothing. Because they can choose their fashion style and feel confident in themselves, students have stated that the policy helps them express themselves more freely, which in turn helps them develop their self-confidence. According to a study by Knipp and Stevenson (2022), there is more freedom of expression when there is no school uniform than when there is. Students' autonomy and self-efficacy are fostered through this creative inquiry, ultimately increasing their self-confidence. However, Ahrens and Siegel (2019) contend that conflicts over dress codes and public scrutiny of students' wardrobe choices can cause anxiety and distraction for students. Overall, it has been demonstrated that the "No School Uniform Policy" enhances students' confidence and ability to express themselves.

Confidence in Clothing Style

Students' confidence in clothing design is significantly impacted by the "No School Uniform Policy." When participants wore appropriate clothing that reflected their style, they reported feeling more comfortable and confident. Since clothing is worn for every occasion and has a profound impact on one's confidence and sense of self, it has a pervasive effect on people. Some participants mentioned that they feel more confident when they dress in more comfortable clothing that does not violate school rules. Because they can choose an outfit that is appropriate for the school, they prefer to wear "civilian attire." The lack of a school uniform policy can help students feel more confident by encouraging them to wear items like crop tops and loose-fitting jeans. Participants have shared:

"No school uniform policy influenced me by choosing clothes that give me self-confidence, like crop tops and baggy jeans. The so-called aesthetic style." (P3)

"My clothing style is usually wearing colored shirts paired with jogging pants or pants as long as they are still formal and decent for school. My self-confidence increases every time I go to school because I like and am comfortable with what I am wearing." (P4)

As an example of the contagion effect, adolescents also reported being influenced by the fashion and aesthetic trends prevalent in the school setting. Students' self-confidence and sense of belonging may be impacted if they adopt trendy clothing or peer-accepted trends. Teenagers are one of the most idealistic, fashion-forward, and clothes-conscious social groups. However, research conducted by Glewwe et al. (2021) revealed that when schools do not have uniforms, economic disparities in dress can become more noticeable, which can embarrass and isolate students from lower-income families who may not be able to afford the same expensive or fashionable clothing as their peers.

Confidence in an Academic Setting

Students' confidence in academic settings is positively impacted by the "No School Uniform Policy." Experiences like classroom reporting, involvement in school events, and competitions helped some participants become more self-assured. Compared to students from institutions with uniform policies, those without uniform policies gave themselves a higher self-confidence rating. They discussed how their self-confidence increased as a result of feeling at ease in their clothes, which in turn contributed to their academic success. The policy further improves students' academic performance because they are better able to respond to questions and engage with others when they believe their clothing exudes comfort, beauty, and confidence. Participants have shared:

"Boost my confidence, ma'am. I perform well in class because I feel comfortable in what I wear." (P6)

"Will wear comfortable clothes so that I can be confident when communicating with other students and my teachers." (P7)

"When I am wearing comfortable and nice clothes, then I feel confident when answering questions from my teachers and co-students." (P8)

George and Bhanupriya (2022) highlighted the relationship between academic success and self-assurance, demonstrating that higher levels of self-assurance are associated with improved academic performance in areas such as communication and teamwork. In conclusion, research indicates that students' confidence in academic settings is positively impacted by the "No School Uniform Policy." Students are more likely to participate in group activities and perform better academically when they feel comfortable, have self-assurance, and are attractive.

Feeling of Independence

Schools place a strong emphasis on "Independence," because it shows how much they value students' self-confidence and self-worth. By giving students the freedom to choose their clothes, schools foster a sense of value and appreciation for their viewpoints and preferences. Through critical thinking and introspection, this decision-making process enables students to develop life skills beyond the classroom. Participants have shared:

"I can choose what I want to wear for that day to make that day perfect." (P2)

"But if you have the freedom to wear the clothes you want, either formal or casual, it seems that people will approach you differently based on your clothing." (P4)

"I am more free to wear anything I want, depending on the style I choose. I feel even more confident that I do not wear a uniform because I was given a chance to wear the outfit I want." (P5)

Participants said it boosts their confidence to be able to choose what they want to wear on a given day. Their observation underscores the importance of individual agency and autonomy in fostering positive self-concepts, suggesting that uniform policies may not have a substantial impact on students' self-confidence. To succeed academically and professionally in the future, students must develop a sense of independence and self-sufficiency. By giving students freedom and responsibility over what they wear on campus, the University of the Philippines (UP) and the University of Mindanao (UM) have been fostering this culture.

3.5 Corroboration of the Study

The study examines how students' self-confidence is influenced by the "No School Uniform Policy." According to the study's quantitative component, students retained a favorable opinion of the policy, saying that it fosters academic achievement, reduces bullying, improves instruction and morale, encourages creativity, and creates a workable plan to stop bullying involving clothing. It has been discovered that the policy improves behavior, reduces disciplinary actions, and enhances academic achievement without compromising creativity levels.

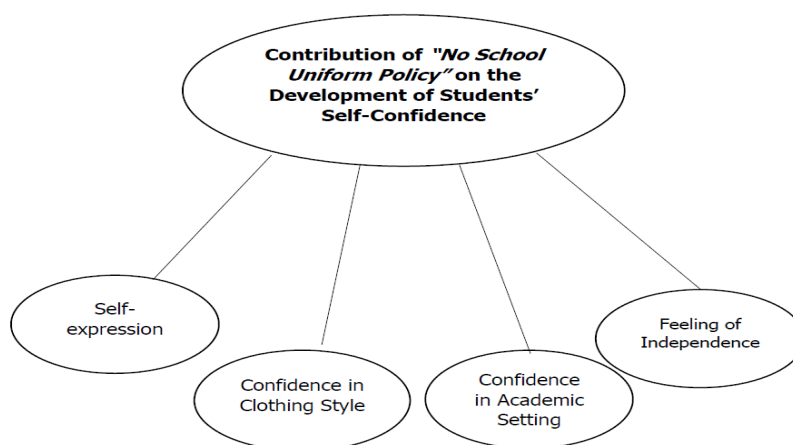


Figure 1. Contribution of "No School Uniform Policy" on Students Self-Confidence with Key Skills

The study's qualitative component examined themes like independence, self-expression, confidence in one's academic performance, and confidence in one's wardrobe choices. These conclusions were corroborated by the quantitative results, which showed that giving students the freedom to dress as they like promotes a sense of accountability and ownership, thereby improving behavior and academic performance. This freedom encourages creativity and independence while saving money for schools that do not require uniforms. According to the study's findings, the "No School Uniform Policy" has a significant impact on how students view themselves, their confidence in their skills, and their overall classroom experiences.

4.0 Conclusion

Students are generally in favor of the "No School Uniform Policy," according to the study, and they have a great deal of faith in their abilities to work together, communicate, be creative, innovate, be self-directed, and use technology. They have a moderate level of confidence in their ability to think critically, however. In these areas,

the policy has contributed to an increase in students' self-confidence, which is influenced by their sense of independence, self-expression, and confidence in their academic environment and fashion sense. The findings imply that the policy is an effective strategy for raising students' academic performance. The policy should be fully implemented, with inclusive dress code guidelines in place, innovative teaching strategies employed, and students allowed to wear whatever makes them feel more confident and secure. It is recommended that further investigation be conducted into how the policy affects private schools, faculty, and staff.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, proposal writing, data gathering, data analysis.
Author 2: data analysis, revising, and conceptualization.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The author declares that upon the completion of this paper, there was no conflicting party or interest.

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