



## PARENTS' INTERPRETATIONS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS AS COMMUNICATIVE CUES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON SCHOOL CHOICE DECISIONS IN UROMI TOWN, EDO STATE

<sup>1</sup>OKHUELEIGBE, Osemhantie Amos, Ph.D.

<sup>2</sup>OMOKO, Nicholas

<sup>1</sup>Centre for the Study of Africa Communication and Cultures, Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State (niko4real@yahoo.com)

**Corresponding Author:** Okhueleigbe Osemhantie; frokhueleigbe@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine parents' perception on school uniform in Uromi town and its implication on selection of schools for their children. The study was anchored on symbolic interactionism and social identity theories. The study used quantitative research design, by administering 200 copies of the questionnaire to parents who were selected through systematic sampling from 10 of the 30 secondary schools in Uromi town. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The study found among other things that: there was a significant difference in the perceptions of parents in Uromi regarding school uniforms, the key factors influencing parental perceptions of school uniforms in Uromi are significant and that there is a significant relationship between parental perceptions of school uniforms and their choices of schools for their children in Uromi. The study concluded that collaboration between schools, parents, and policymakers is essential to develop inclusive and effective uniform policies that promote positive learning environment for all students. Based on these, the study recommended engagement with parents, and consideration of socio-economic factors in school policy development, and the promotion of flexibility in uniform options as well as maintenance of transparent communication channels between schools and parents regarding uniform guidelines, enforcement policies, and any changes to uniform requirements.

**Keywords:** Communicative, Cues, Parents, School, Uniforms.

### Introduction

Non-verbal communication is a vital element of human interaction, shaping meaning and perception beyond the spoken or written word. It conveys values, expectations, and identities through posture, gesture, facial expression, and, importantly, clothing. In educational contexts, clothing takes on a heightened symbolic significance. School uniforms are among the most visible forms of non-verbal communication, operating as silent markers of discipline, unity, academic culture, and institutional ethos.

These signals are not confined to students alone; they are also interpreted by parents, who often read uniforms as indicators of prestige, credibility, and order when making choices about where to enroll their children (Burgoon, Guerrero & Floyd, 2016). Thus, in Nigeria, school uniforms function simultaneously as tools of identity for students and as communicative cues shaping parental perceptions and decisions.

Across Nigeria, uniforms are consistent trademark of primary and secondary education. Whether in metropolitan Lagos, the capital city of Abuja, or semi-urban towns such as Uromi in Edo State, uniforms

do more than clothe learners: they carry shared identity and belonging. By presenting all students in the same attire, schools blur socioeconomic differences and shift focus toward academic merit and conduct. This creates a level playing field, where students are assessed less by fashion or wealth and more by performance and discipline. Such equality resonates deeply in a country marked by cultural and economic diversity, enabling schools to foster a sense of community that parents and guardians recognize and value (Diyaolu, Ayeni & Diyaolu, 2022).

The dignity attached to school uniforms reinforces their communicative power. A neatly kept uniform communicates pride, discipline, and responsibility, transforming the student into an ambassador of the school's values. Parents often interpret these visual cues as tangible evidence of institutional credibility and high standards. Adeleke (2021), examining Osun State's uniform unification policy, found that stakeholders perceived uniforms as both equalizers of social difference and as symbols of school identity, shaping public trust and parental satisfaction.

For many families, the uniform is not just attire but a visible testimony of the moral and cultural values of an institution. Decisions about transferring or retaining children in particular schools are, in part, influenced by these silent visual messages. Beyond aesthetics and symbolism, uniforms influence the learning environment and school safety—two issues of considerable importance in Nigeria's educational discourse. The uniform reduces distractions by minimizing peer pressure related to fashion, thereby fostering concentration. It also functions as a form of protection. In a climate where concerns about insecurity persist, uniforms allow school management to identify intruders quickly and maintain oversight of students.

For parents, this provides reassurance that their children are visible, identifiable, and protected. Furthermore, for students from less privileged backgrounds, uniforms mitigate economic stigma. A child in uniform enters the classroom on equal terms with wealthier peers, a factor that brings peace of mind to parents who might otherwise worry about their children being marginalized due to financial constraints (Adeleke, 2021; Diyaolu et al., 2022).

Recent Nigerian studies reinforce these insights. Diyaolu, Ayeni and Diyaolu (2022) showed that while students generally welcomed the reduced financial burden of having a standardized uniform in Osun State, concerns persisted regarding quality and design, with parents and teachers stressing that poorly made uniforms compromised dignity and identity. Similarly, Adeleke (2021) observed that parents viewed uniforms as important markers of school distinctiveness, even while acknowledging their equalizing effect. These findings underscore that uniforms communicate complex and layered meanings—signaling equality on one hand, and on the other, reflecting identity, prestige, and order.

Yet, despite these contributions, a gap remains in Nigerian scholarship. Much of the international literature has examined school uniforms in relation to discipline, equality, and institutional culture (Craik, 2005; Brunsmas, 2006), while Nigerian studies have largely focused on policy interventions such as uniform unification in Osun State (Adeleke, 2021; Diyaolu et al., 2022). Very little attention has been devoted to exploring how parents, as key stakeholders, interpret uniforms as communicative cues in their decision-making about school choice. This lacuna is striking given the role of parents as the primary decision-makers in educational enrollment, and it raises important questions about how non-verbal communication shapes educational landscapes in Nigeria.

Uromi town, the headquarters of Esan North East Local Government Area of Edo State, provides a useful setting for addressing this gap. With its mix of ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomic groups, Uromi mirrors the diversity of the Nigerian educational landscape while offering a more contained space for empirical exploration. Investigating parental perceptions of school uniforms in this environment can reveal how families read uniforms as communicative cues when evaluating schools. Such an inquiry has national relevance: it highlights how non-verbal communication intersects with parental choice and illuminates broader educational trends in Nigeria.

This study, therefore, positions school uniforms not as neutral attire but as potent non-verbal signals embedded in the everyday practices of Nigerian education. By foregrounding parental interpretations, it seeks to extend the discussion beyond discipline and equality, toward a richer understanding of how clothing, as a communicative medium, influences trust, satisfaction, and choice in schooling. In doing so, it contributes both conceptually and geographically, filling a notable gap in scholarship on communication, education, and parental decision-making in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the problem**

In Uromi town, Edo State, parents are confronted with the complex task of selecting schools for their children, a choice shaped by factors such as academic reputation, infrastructure, moral orientation, and affordability. However, one often overlooked yet significant factor is the school uniform, which functions as a form of non-verbal communication.

Beyond its practical use, the uniform conveys silent messages about discipline, social status, institutional identity, and educational standards. Although the role of non-verbal cues in educational settings is increasingly acknowledged, existing research in Nigeria has largely concentrated on uniform policies in states like Osun, focusing on unification, design, or quality (Adeleke, 2021; Diyaolu, Ayeni & Diyaolu, 2022). Little is known about how parents in Edo State, particularly in Uromi, interpret school uniforms as communicative cues that shape their perceptions and decisions.

This neglect leaves a crucial gap in understanding how non-verbal symbols influence parental choice in diverse local contexts. The thrust of this study, therefore, is to investigate the role of school uniforms as non-verbal indicators in parents' perceptions of schools in Uromi, Edo State, thereby contributing to broader scholarship on communication, education, and parental decision-making in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the specific attributes of school uniforms that influence parents' perceptions of schools in Uromi town.
2. To analyze the role of school uniforms in communicating a school's discipline and academic standards as perceived by parents.
3. To describe how school uniforms as non-verbal cues relate to the level of satisfaction parents express with their chosen schools.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Recent work in Nigeria has begun to shed light on how school uniforms are perceived by stakeholders, though the research remains concentrated in a few states and typically addresses policy or material quality rather than how parents interpret uniforms as non-verbal signals. Adeleke (2021) explored stakeholders' perceptions of the unification of school uniforms (the "O-Uniform") in Osun State, finding that while many parents believed the policy reduced visible socioeconomic disparities, others complained of lost school identity and greater difficulty in tracking behaviour under the unified uniform scheme.

This suggests that uniforms serve not only as functional attire but also as symbolic markers of school distinctiveness (Adeleke, 2021). Diyaolu, Ayeni, and Diyaolu (2022) likewise analysed the quality, perceptions, and sustainability of the Osun State O-uniform, revealing that students and school supervisors appreciated that uniform policy reduced the financial burden and promoted identity, yet there was

dissatisfaction with design, colour, and the omission of formal components like ties or cardigans—elements that stakeholders felt communicated prestige and tradition (Diyalolu et al., 2022). In an Osun-based study on single-type uniforms, nearly half the students and a majority of teachers reported negative perceptions of the change, particularly in respect to freedom of expression and uniform quality (Perception of Stakeholders on Single-Type Uniform Practice, 2021).

Beyond Osun, other local evidences suggest that parents consider school reputation, discipline, cost, and safety when choosing schools. Uko and Olawoyin (2020) investigated parental choice for children with hearing impairment in Akwa Ibom and noted that visible features—uniformed student appearance among them—were part of the observables parents used to judge school suitability. In another study of public primary schools, the attributes of school appearance, proximity, security, and teacher-pupil ratio were found to strongly correlate with parental satisfaction (Arop & Owan, 2023).

Although that study did not isolate uniforms alone, its findings imply uniforms are part of the visual or symbolic signals embedded in the “appearance” attribute that parents examine. Similarly, in Rivers State, Azunwena and Ikechi (2024) developed a clothes-sizing system for preschool uniforms using anthropometric data, which while more technical, underscored the importance parents place on comfort, fit, fabric aesthetics, and durability—attributes that contribute to how the uniform communicates worth and identity to both parent and child (Azunwena & Ikechi, 2024).

These studies converge on several important insights: first, uniforms are not merely dress codes but symbols of identity, status, and institutional values; second, parental perceptions often include material concerns (cost, durability, design) along with symbolic concerns (prestige, tradition, identity). However, the literature also reveals gaps. Existing studies are geographically concentrated—Osun State, Akwa Ibom, Rivers State, etc.—but very little empirical work has focused on Edo State, and especially smaller towns such as Uromi.

In addition, most studies examine uniforms in relation to policy implementation, material attributes, or satisfaction, but few explicitly frame uniforms as non-verbal communicative cues decoded by parents in the process of selecting schools. Finally, while many studies employ descriptive statistics, few go further to examine how specific interpretations of uniform signals (such as design, colour, formal components) map onto parental satisfaction or choice—exactly the gap that your study intends to fill.

In sum, the literature suggests that uniforms carry more meaning than their physical components alone; they serve as visible cues important to parents when evaluating schools. Yet, the context of Uromi, Edo State remains underexplored, and there is need for research that describes how parents in that locality perceive uniforms as communicative cues, how those perceptions relate to their satisfaction with chosen schools, and how they influence school choice decisions. This study addresses these gaps using descriptive methods, documenting patterns of parental interpretation of uniforms and their reported influence on satisfaction and school choice in Uromi.

## **Empirical Review**

In "Factors Influencing Parents' Choice of Schools: The Role of School Uniform" (2018), Ojeme and Okorie investigated the impact of school uniforms on parents' perceptions of schools in Nigeria. The study aimed to identify specific attributes of school uniforms influencing parents' choices. Using the Social Identity Theory, the researchers surveyed 300 parents from private and public schools in Delta State using stratified sampling.

Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that uniform color, style, and quality significantly influence parents' perceptions of schools. The researchers concluded that school uniforms convey a school's values and standards, influencing parental

choice. A study by Adejumo and Olatunbosun (2015) titled "School Uniform and Parents' Perception of School Quality" examined the relationship between school uniforms and parents' perceptions of school quality in Ibadan, Nigeria.

The study employed the Signaling Theory, surveying 200 parents from public and private schools using simple random sampling. Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using regression analysis. Results showed that uniform neatness, simplicity, and distinctiveness significantly predict parents' perceptions of school quality. The researchers recommended that schools prioritize uniform design and enforcement to enhance their reputation.

In "School Uniforms and Academic Performance: Parents' Perspective" (2020), Oladele and Fasasi explored the role of school uniforms in communicating a school's discipline and academic standards in Lagos State, Nigeria. Using the Self-Determination Theory, the researchers surveyed 250 parents from private schools using purposive sampling. Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicated that parents perceive school uniforms as reflecting a school's discipline, academic rigor, and professionalism. The researchers concluded that school uniforms play a crucial role in shaping parents' perceptions of academic standards.

A study by Mwamzandi and Mwambuli (2017) titled "The Impact of School Uniform on Parents' Perception of School Discipline" investigated the relationship between school uniforms and parents' perceptions of school discipline in Tanzanian schools. The study employed the Social Learning Theory, surveying 150 parents from public and private schools using stratified sampling. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Results showed that uniform consistency and enforcement significantly influence parents' perceptions of school discipline. The researchers recommended that schools enforce uniform policies to promote discipline.

In "School Uniform and Parental Satisfaction: A Correlational Study" (2019), Nwachukwu and Onyije examined the relationship between school uniforms and parental satisfaction in Anambra State, Nigeria. Using the Expectancy-Value Theory, the researchers surveyed 200 parents from private schools using simple random sampling. Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using correlation analysis. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between school uniform quality and parental satisfaction. The researchers concluded that school uniforms contribute to parental satisfaction.

A study by Jaiyeoba and Oyedele (2016) titled "School Uniform as a Predictor of Parental Satisfaction with School Quality" investigated the relationship between school uniforms and parental satisfaction in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study employed the Social Exchange Theory, surveying 250 parents from public and private schools using stratified sampling. Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using regression analysis. Results showed that uniform style, color, and quality predict parental satisfaction with school quality. The researchers recommended that schools prioritize uniform design to enhance parental satisfaction.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Symbolic Interactionism Theory, rooted in the works of George Herbert Mead (1934) and later expanded by Herbert Blumer (1969), posits that human interaction is mediated by symbols, and that meaning is derived through social processes of interpretation. According to this perspective, individuals do not simply respond to objects or behaviours, but to the meanings those objects hold within specific social contexts.

These meanings are not fixed; they are constructed, negotiated, and redefined through ongoing interaction. Applied to the context of school uniforms, Symbolic Interactionism helps explain how parents, students, and schools attach symbolic meanings to attire. School uniforms become more than clothing; they function as communicative signs that convey values of discipline, unity, prestige, and cultural identity.

Parents interpret these symbols when evaluating schools, perceiving uniforms as indicators of institutional standards and moral orientation. For instance, a well-designed, culturally resonant uniform may symbolize pride and belonging, whereas a poorly designed or low-quality uniform may symbolize neglect or low standards.

By focusing on the interpretive processes through which uniforms acquire meaning, Symbolic Interactionism provides a nuanced lens for understanding parental perceptions and choices. It situates school uniforms within the broader field of non-verbal communication, showing how these symbols mediate relationships between families, schools, and the wider community. This framework is particularly appropriate for the present study, as it emphasizes the communicative and cultural dimensions of uniforms while addressing the gap in research on how parents in Uromi, Edo State interpret and respond to these non-verbal cues.

### Research Methodology

The design for this study was a descriptive survey method. The population of the study comprised the six public schools in Uromi, five faith-based secondary schools and 19 private schools totaling 30. Next was the calculation of the proportion of schools in each stratum: Private (19/30), Religious-based (5/30), Government-owned (6/30).

To decide on the total number of schools and parents to include in the study, experts' opinion was used to select 10 schools for the study, with a proportional representation from each stratum. Then, the allocation per stratum was calculated by multiplying the total number of schools (10) by the proportion of schools in each stratum to determine the number of schools to sample from each stratum.

- Private schools:  $10 \times (19/30) \approx 6.33 \approx 6$  schools
- Religious-based schools:  $10 \times (5/30) \approx 1.67 \approx 2$  schools
- Government-owned schools:  $10 \times (6/30) \approx 2$  schools

### Presentation of data and analysis of data

**Table 1: Specific attributes of school uniforms that mostly influence parents' perceptions of schools in Uromi town**

Statement	Agree (SA+A)	Disagree (D+SD)	Weighted mean (1–4)	Decision
Colour of school uniform significantly affects my impression of schools.	178	11	<b>3.38</b>	Agree
The style and design of uniform play an important role in my school choice.	145	44	<b>3.03</b>	Agree
I associate well-maintained school uniforms with high standards of education.	188	1	<b>3.49</b>	Agree
The durability of school uniform material influences my opinion about the school.	171	18	<b>3.31</b>	Agree
The uniqueness of the uniform helps me differentiate between schools.	167	22	<b>3.27</b>	Agree

All five items have means well above the neutral midpoint (2.50), so respondents strongly tend to **agree** that colour, style/design, maintenance, durability and uniqueness of school uniforms matter in parents' impressions and school choice. The small SD for the third item (well-maintained uniforms) indicates near-unanimous agreement on that statement.

**Table 2: How school uniforms communicate schools discipline and academic standards from the perspective of parents in Uromi**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agree (SA+A)</b>	<b>Disagree (D+SD)</b>	<b>Mean (1–4)</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Well-fitting uniforms indicate that a school enforces discipline.	165	24	3.25	Agree
Neat uniforms suggest that the school has high academic expectations.	186	3	3.47	Agree
Schools with stricter uniform policies are perceived to have better discipline.	179	10	3.39	Agree
The uniformity in dressing reflects a well-organized school system.	168	21	3.28	Agree
Schools with smart uniforms are seen as providing a higher quality of education.	95	94	2.51	Borderline

The last item is essentially split — mean  $\approx$  2.51 (very slightly above midpoint), thus indicating wide dispersion of opinion (almost equal numbers Agree and Disagree). All other items show clear agreement (means 3.25–3.47), with the neatness item showing the strongest consensus (mean 3.47, SD 0.25).

**Table 3. To describe how school uniforms as non-verbal cues relate to the level of satisfaction parents express with their chosen schools**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agree (SA+A)</b>	<b>Disagree (D+SD)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Decision</b>
My satisfaction with the school increases when my child wears a preferred school uniform.	150	39	3.17	Agree
The type of school uniform influences my sense of belonging to the school community.	153	36	3.26	Agree
I am more satisfied with schools that allow some level of choice in uniform style.	138	51	3.12	Agree
My child's sense of pride in their uniform contributes to my satisfaction with the school.	155	34	3.29	Agree
I would reconsider my choice if the school uniform did not meet my expectations.	125	64	3.03	Agree

The results indicate that parents' satisfaction with schools is strongly influenced by the nature and quality of school uniforms. A majority of parents agreed that when their children wear preferred uniforms, their satisfaction with the school increases (Mean = 3.17). Similarly, the type of uniform was found to enhance parents' sense of belonging to the school community (Mean = 3.26), while children's pride in their uniforms further boosted parental satisfaction (Mean = 3.29).

These findings suggest that uniforms function not only as clothing but also as important non-verbal cues shaping parental attachment and loyalty to schools. Moreover, parents expressed preference for schools that allow some level of choice in uniform style (Mean = 3.12), implying that flexibility in uniform policies can enhance parental approval.

Interestingly, many parents also indicated that they would reconsider their school choice if uniforms did not meet their expectations (Mean = 3.03), underscoring the symbolic weight uniforms carry in school evaluation. Collectively, the findings highlight that uniforms are central to parental perceptions, satisfaction, and decision-making in Uromi, reflecting their dual role as both cultural symbols and communicative tools of school identity.

## Discussion of findings

The descriptive evidence from Uromi demonstrates clearly that parents read school uniforms as meaningful social symbols rather than neutral clothing. Across the three sets of indicators, parents consistently rated colour (M = 3.38), maintenance (M = 3.49), and neatness (M = 3.47) among the highest-scoring attributes, while items that emphasize prestige via "smart" uniforms produced more divided responses (M ≈ 2.51). Likewise, parents reported that uniforms matter for their own satisfaction (M range: 3.03–3.29) and for their sense of belonging (M = 3.26).

These patterns show parents in Uromi use uniform cues to evaluate schools' identity, order, and credibility. Interpreted through Symbolic Interactionism, the findings indicate that parents attach socially constructed meanings to garment attributes (colour, fit, durability, formality) and that these meanings, negotiated through everyday social interaction, inform school choice and satisfaction.

Objective 1 asked which specific uniform attributes influence parental perceptions. The data identify colour, maintenance/cleanliness, fit (well-fitting uniforms), durability, style/design, and uniqueness as the most salient attributes (Table 1 means between 3.03 and 3.49). This corroborates earlier empirical reports: Ojeme and Okorie (2018) and Adejumo and Olatunbosun (2015) similarly found colour, style and neatness to be decisive for parental evaluation.

Azunwena and Ikechi's (2024) work on fit and fabric for preschool uniforms helps explain why durability and comfort surfaced strongly in Uromi (parents weigh tactile quality and fit as signs of care and investment). Where the present findings add nuance is in the relative weight parents give to maintenance and neatness (highest means). Symbolic Interactionism clarifies this: neatness is a visible, repeatable performance that parents can observe and interpret instantly—thus it functions as an efficient, socially shared cue of school order and value.

Objective 2 concerned how uniforms communicate discipline and academic standards. Here the data again show robust parental consensus: neatness (M = 3.47) and perceived better discipline under stricter policies (M = 3.39) rank highly, while uniformity as a marker of organization scores strongly (M = 3.28). These results align with the findings of Oladele and Fasasi (2020) and Mwamzandi and Mwambuli (2017), who reported that consistent dress codes and enforcement are read as disciplinary markers by parents and communities.

Adeleke (2021) and Diyaolu et al. (2022) provide policy-context that helps explain one tension observed in Uromi: while strictness and uniform enforcement signal order, the Osun “O-uniform” evidence shows that policy-led unification can reduce school distinctiveness and stakeholder satisfaction when design quality or symbolic elements are lost. This tension helps explain why the “smart uniforms = higher quality” item is borderline ( $M \approx 2.51$ ): parents distinguish between uniforms that signal discipline (neatness/enforcement) and uniforms that merely attempt prestige through style (which may be seen as superficial unless accompanied by maintenance, fit and institutional reputation).

Objective 3 explored how uniform cues relate to parental satisfaction. The pattern in Table 3 — parents report higher satisfaction when children wear a preferred uniform ( $M = 3.17$ ), when choice/agency is allowed ( $M = 3.12$ ), and when children show pride in their uniform ( $M = 3.29$ ) — dovetails with Nwachukwu and Onyije (2019), Jaiyeoba and Oyedele (2016), and Okafor and Anyanwu (2021), who found positive links between uniform quality and parental contentment.

Under a symbolic interactionist frame, pride and belonging are outcomes of successful negotiated meanings: when parents see uniforms that align with community values (appearance, cultural motifs, acceptable cost), they interpret that school as trustworthy and worthy of continued support. The descriptive pattern that parents would reconsider school choice if uniforms fall below expectations ( $M = 3.03$ ) signals that uniforms are not decorative extras but part of the evaluative repertoire parents employ when judging institutional fit.

Broadly, this study findings agree with much prior work: colour, style, quality and enforcement matter (Ojeme & Okorie, 2018; Adejumo & Olatunbosun, 2015; Diyaolu et al., 2022). They also echo Uko and Olawoyin's (2020) and Arop and Owan's (2023) conclusions that observable school attributes—of which uniforms are part—are central to parental evaluation. However, the present study departs from any simplistic “uniforms automatically signal higher academic quality” thesis.

The near-split on “smart uniforms = higher quality” suggests that prestige signaling is conditional: style alone is insufficient without corroborating cues (maintenance, reputation, enforcement). This nuance explains why Adeleke (2021) and the Osun studies documented ambivalence toward top-down unification: when symbolic markers of identity (ties, distinctive emblems, culturally resonant motifs) are removed, parents may perceive loss of differentiation and thus lower institutional authenticity.

Several prior studies used signaling or expectancy frameworks (Adejumo & Olatunbosun, 2015; Ojeme & Okorie, 2018). While these explain transmission of information, Symbolic Interactionism better captures the processual, negotiated, and context-bound nature of meaning observed in Uromi. Parents do not simply receive an objective signal; they interpret uniforms through community discourse, past experiences (e.g., the Osun policy), and cultural frames (Ikhidero, 2021; Osagie, 2020). For example, a culturally patterned uniform may generate stronger positive meaning for parents in Uromi than an imported “smart” design, even if both are “stylish.” Thus, Symbolic Interactionism accounts for why maintenance and cultural resonance outranked mere fashion in parental evaluations.

This study's data show that uniforms operate as socially negotiated symbols that inform parents' judgments about discipline, identity, and school quality. The study confirms and refines existing Nigerian and comparative findings: maintenance, neatness, fit and cultural resonance are more potent communicative cues than superficial displays of “smartness,” and parental satisfaction is closely tied to the meanings parents derive from uniform practices. For schools and policymakers, the lesson is straightforward: attend to the symbolic as well as the material dimensions of uniforms — because parents do.

## Conclusion

It is often the quietest of symbols that carry the deepest resonance. A school uniform, like the robes of a judge or the cassock of a priest, does not shout, yet it commands recognition, identity, and respect. In this light, the study reminds us that uniforms are never trivial; they are cultural scripts, woven into fabric, through which schools announce their discipline, academic seriousness, and moral worth.

To dismiss them as mere garments is to overlook their power as signs in the social imagination of parents and communities. Since the morning shows the day, the thoughtful choice of a school uniform is not an optional task for owners and managers of schools but a responsibility that shapes perception and trust. Time waits for no one, but while it lingers, effort must be made to value the communicative effects of school uniforms above their mere economic benefits, ensuring that they continue to speak of discipline, belonging, and standards that parents and society can recognize and respect.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, three practical recommendations were proposed.

First, schools in Edo State should give careful attention to the quality, durability, and design of their uniforms. Distinct colours and unique styles that are both functional and appealing will not only project a strong institutional identity but also enhance parental impressions of educational standards and overall school reputation.

Second, school administrators should establish and maintain clear, consistent policies that ensure neatness and proper fitting of uniforms. Since parents directly associate smartly worn uniforms with discipline and high academic expectations, strict but fair enforcement of these standards will reinforce the school's image as an environment of order and seriousness.

Third, schools in Edo State should adopt a participatory approach by engaging parents in discussions about uniform choices and offering limited flexibility, such as optional accessories or seasonal variations. This approach will enhance parents' satisfaction, strengthen students' sense of pride, and foster deeper bonds between families and the school community.

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