

THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON STUDENT BEHAVIOR: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The effects of school uniforms on student behaviour have long piqued the curiosity of researchers in the domains of psychology and education. The psychological and behavioural effects of these measures have received little attention, despite their broad implementation. This research will use a psychological framework to delve into how kids' social-emotional development, their ability to self-regulate, and their classroom engagement are affected by the wearing of school uniforms. The goal of this study was to examine the behavioural outcomes of kids throughout elementary school in connection to uniform requirements. The data utilised for this purpose came from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which included 6,320 students from the Kindergarten Class of 2011. There was no correlation between the presence or absence of a school uniform policy and improved academic performance, social skills, or attendance among students whose schools mandated uniforms. Both for-profit and non-profit schools showed the same patterns of performance. Regardless, there was a small uptick in attendance rates among kids from low-income families whose schools mandated uniforms. It is crucial to include the intrinsic psychological aspects of kids when analysing the success of school uniform legislation, as this study has shown. The pupils' drive, feeling of community, and individuality are all part of these traits.

Keywords: School Uniforms, Student Behavior, Psychological Perspective, Social-Emotional Development, Behavioral Regulation, School Engagement, Internalizing Behavior, Externalizing Behavior, Educational Psychology, Identity and Belonging

INTRODUCTION

Since a considerable amount of time ago, educators, politicians, and psychologists have all been discussing the influence that school uniforms have on the behaviour of students. In the belief that they assist students in maintaining their focus on the subject at hand, fostering a stronger sense of connection with their classmates, and enhancing discipline, several schools all over the world have implemented uniform rules[1]. Regrettably, there has not been nearly enough theoretical and empirical research conducted on the psychological impact of these laws, especially with regard to the behaviour of students. There is a dearth of research on the subject, which has resulted in the formation of attitudes that are strongly held. Those who advocate for uniforms feel that they bring about the much-required discipline

and order in the classroom, while others are sceptical that they can assist with the underlying emotional and behavioural difficulties that children have.

When seen from a psychological perspective, there are processes that are both internal and external that have an effect on individual conduct[2]. In the first category, there are things like necessities for clothes, while in the second category, there are things like the formation of an identity, motivation, self-esteem, and the feeling of belonging all included. Due to the fact that school uniforms impose both a literal and figurative uniformity, they have the potential to impact both the students' opinions of themselves and their perceptions of the other students at school[4]. Students' uniforms may have a modest but significant influence on their performance in both academic and social situations, according to the concept of "enclothed cognition," which suggests that this effect may be present among students. Similarly, according to social identity theory, students who wear uniforms have the capacity to either feel more connected to the group or more isolated, with varying behavioural impacts depending on the context and the individuals. This is because uniforms provide students with the opportunity to express their individuality[5].

The long-held idea that wearing a uniform would inevitably enhance behaviour is being called into question by recent research from the field of psychology[6]. Using data that is typical of the whole country, research such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) have shown that children attending uniformed and non-uniformed schools do not substantially differ from one another in terms of their participation in school, their social skills, or their ability to manage their conduct[7]. Surprisingly, children from low-income families have not shown a significant amount of improvement, which may suggest that environmental and socioeconomic factors reduce the effect of uniforms. In light of these findings, it is necessary to have a more in-depth understanding of the dynamic relationship that exists between the implementation of uniform laws and the psychological growth of students.

OBJECTIVES

1. To research how student behaviour is affected by school uniforms.
2. To investigate how students' identities and general wellbeing are affected psychologically by their outfits.

METHOD

This study makes use of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Work - Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K: 2011), which is a dataset that is typical of the whole country and follows 6,320 children from kindergarten through fifth grade. In order to investigate the impact that these restrictions have on the psychological well-being and behavioural tendencies of children, we restricted our sample to kindergarten students for whom data on school uniform requirements was available[8]. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all of the study results, while Table 1 presents descriptive data for all of the focus elements, split down according to the school uniform policy.

Table 1. Factor-Weighted Descriptive Statistics for Focal Covariates, Broken Down by School Uniform Policy Status[9].

Variable	Before Matching – No Uniform	Before Matching – Uniform	After Matching – No Uniform	After Matching – Uniform
Features of Children				
Male	.52	.47	.48	.48
White	.63	.32	.31	.31
Black	.07	.21	.15	.13
Hispanic	.17	.41	.42	.43
Asian	.04	.04	.07	.08
Other	.05	.03	.03	.04
English Language Learner	.12	.26	.32	.32
Poor Health Rating	.13	.15	.17	.17
Learning Experiences				
Full-Day Kindergarten	.82	.92	.92	.90
Catholic School	.02	.14	.14	.15
Other Religious School	.02	.08	.9	.08
Other Private School	.02	.04	.03	.02
Public School	.94	.73	.74	.72
Hours in Center-Based Pre-K (per week)	15.18	13.52	15.91	14.27
Hours in Before/After School Care (K)	5.93	9.62	5.84	9.78
Out-of-Home Care Before Pre-K	.75	.73	.72	.72
Household traits				
Two-Partner Household	.83	.75	.76	.77
Number of Siblings	1.51	1.11	1.54	1.16
Low Income	.42	.53	.57	.55
Mother College Degree or Higher	.32	.34	.32	.32
Father College Degree or Higher ¹	.32	.31	.1	.27
Mother Unemployed	.32	.34	.36	.37
Mother Employed Part Time	.24	.21	.21	.20
Mother Employed Full Time	.44	.44	.43	.44
Father Unemployed ¹	.08	.07	.15	.12
Father Employed Part Time ¹	.04	.06	.08	.08
Father Employed Full Time ¹	.85	.84	.77	.79
Number of Books at Home	103.45	70.97	66.73	113.78

Home Learning Activities (Scale)	2.93	2.84	2.84	2.84
School-Going Practices & Routines				
Bus to School	.34	.18	.20	.20
Distance to School (in miles)	4.92	4.88	4.66	4.73
Time to School (in minutes)	11.94	11.84	11.17	11.40
Regular Breakfasts at Home (per week)	5.52	5.28	5.23	5.19
Regular Dinners at Home (per week)	5.51	5.41	5.42	5.47

Table 2. Measures of Important Outcomes using Weighted Descriptive Statistics[10].

Time Point	Days Absent¹ (M, SD)	Social Skills (M, SD)	Internalizing Behavior (M, SD)	Externalizing Behavior (M, SD)
Kindergarten Fall	N/A	3.05 (0.56)	1.45 (0.47)	1.55 (0.57)
Kindergarten Spring	5.31 (4.33)	3.19 (0.57)	1.51 (0.47)	1.59 (0.61)
First Grade Spring	4.63 (3.94)	3.20 (0.57)	1.51 (0.47)	1.68 (0.57)
Second Grade Spring	4.81 (4.08)	3.18 (0.58)	1.56 (0.48)	1.68 (0.57)
Third Grade Spring	4.33 (3.76)	3.19 (0.61)	1.57 (0.53)	1.65 (0.58)
Fourth Grade Spring	4.38 (3.68)	3.19 (0.50)	1.56 (0.52)	1.63 (0.58)
Fifth Grade Spring	4.47 (3.84)	3.20 (0.61)	1.56 (0.51)	1.62 (0.58)

Uniform Policy Variable:

Kindergarteners were asked to fill out a survey asking school officials whether their school had a uniform policy[11]. This served as the basis for the creation of a binary variable that divided pupils into those attending schools with uniform policies and those without.

Behavioral Measures:

Teachers documented students' behavioural and social-emotional improvement using Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) measurements[12]. The following behaviours were assessed:

- Social Skills (collaborating, self-control, and learning)

- Internal practices like withdrawal or concern
- Externalising behaviours include aggression and disruption.
- Annual school absence, which may be coded mid-point.

Analytical Approach:

Our weighted OLS regression models compensated for several student, family, and school factors. These factors included gender, race, socioeconomic status, parent education, school type, and others[13]. State- and county-fixed effects were included to models to balance comparison groups and adjust for geographic policy changes. We looked for interaction effects to examine whether uniforms affected children differently by school type and socioeconomic status[14]. This all-encompassing analytical method allowed us to analyse school uniform rules' psychological effects on conduct by taking into account individual and contextual variables.

RESULT

First, we'll list the numerous schools that mandated uniforms and their students. We provide our main effect analysis before exploring outcome heterogeneity and finishing with supplementary analyses. Table 1 shows that 28% of American youngsters attended uniformed schools[15]. Only 54% of other religious institutions and 43% of private schools had a uniform policy, whereas 78% of Catholic schools did. Even fewer (21%) public school pupils attended uniformed schools. As a total, schools that enforced uniforms had a larger ratio of Black (20%), Hispanic (40%) and English Language Learners (27%) than those that did not (8-18%)[16]. Schools with uniforms served more low-income pupils (52% vs. 41%), whereas schools without uniforms served more White students (64% Vs. 31%). Table 1 shows descriptives by schools with uniform regulations and those without.

School Uniforms and Student Behaviour

After creating the descriptive picture of schools with uniform rules and student populations, we examined whether school uniform restrictions affected student performance. Table 3 illustrates two primary relationships between school uniforms and absenteeism, conduct, and social skills[17]. First, impact sizes across outcomes and grade levels were about 3% of a standard deviation, and school uniforms had absolutely little effect on students' performance. We have low confidence in a statistically meaningful relationship between school uniforms and student outcomes since just one of 24 correlations identified in our baseline model with varied variables was statistically significant[18]. None of these correlations remained significant following Benjamini correction. The magnitude of our baseline OLS model's inferred associations remained essentially constant when we estimated models incorporating state and county fixed effects and propensity scores (Table 3). Between kindergarten and fifth grade, school uniforms appear to have little effect on children's social-behavioral and attendance.

Table 3. Findings from Models Analysing the Effects of School Uniforms (K–5) [19].

Grade Level	Model	Social Skills	Internalizing Behavior	Externalizing Behavior	Absenteeism
Kindergarten	Covariate Adjusted	-0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.05)
	State Fixed Effects	-0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)
	County Fixed Effects	0.00 (0.04)	0.05 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)
	Propensity Score Model	0.00 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)
1 Grade	Covariate Adjusted	-0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
	State Fixed Effects	0.01 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
	County Fixed Effects	0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
	Propensity Score Model	0.05 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)
2 Grade	Covariate Adjusted	-0.10 (0.05)*	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.05)
	State Fixed Effects	-0.09 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.05)
	County Fixed Effects	-0.05 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.05)
	Propensity Score Model	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
3 Grade	Covariate Adjusted	-0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)
	State Fixed Effects	-0.00 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)
	County Fixed Effects	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.06)
	Propensity Score Model	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)
4 Grade	Covariate Adjusted	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)
	State Fixed Effects	-0.03 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)
	County Fixed Effects	0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)
	Propensity Score Model	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)
5 Grade	Covariate Adjusted	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)
	State Fixed Effects	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
	County Fixed Effects	0.03 (0.05)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)

	Propensity Score Model	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
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Varieties in the Results Attained by Students

After determining the average correlations between school uniforms and student outcomes, we examined how these links differed by socioeconomic status, school type, and school entry ability[20]. School type and baseline ability did not appear to affect outcomes. The connections between school uniforms and absenteeism varied by social level. School uniforms increased attendance by nearly 20% for low-income students[21]. In first and fifth grades, low-income children with uniforms had fewer absences than those without, but attendance was not affected by school uniforms for higher-income pupils ($p < 0.05$). In third and second grades, similar trends were detected ($ES = .10-.13$), but not statistically significant.

Additional Evaluations of Students' Educational Journeys

Along with the results from kindergarten to fifth grade, kids also shared their fifth grade experiences with issues such as school belonging, bullying, social anxiety, and closeness with instructors and peers. Several facets of school life have been the subject of discussions about school uniforms. Although these questionnaires were not sent to students in earlier grades, they were all asked to report on these supplementary items[22]. Our goal in creating these supplementary models is to shed light on the additional impacts of school uniform restrictions by taking into consideration the correlations between these self-reported outcomes and school uniforms, even after controlling for other variables [23]. These models omitted lag controls since they were not gathered during kindergarten enrolment. Children attending schools that enforce uniform policies and those who do not showed no variations in victimisation or social anxiety when we accounted for confounding variables (Table 4). School belonging was lower among students at schools that enforced uniform policy ($ES = 16\%$ of a standard deviation, $p < .001$) in comparison to schools that did not enforce uniform norms. Table 4 shows that even after accounting for propensity scores, state- and county-fixed effects, and a Benjamini adjustment, these results were still statistically significant [24]. There was no variation, as before.

Table 4. The Role of School Uniforms in Fifth Grade Students' Self-Reported Achievements[25].

Model Specification	School Belonging	Experiences of Bullying	Social Anxiety
Covariate Adjusted Model	-0.16 (0.05)*****	0.08 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
State Effects Model	-0.18 (0.05)*****	0.09 (0.05)*	0.04 (0.05)
County Effects Model	-0.19 (0.05)*****	0.09 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)
Propensity Score Model	-0.12 (0.04)**	0.05 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)

DISCUSSION

US public and private schools have adopted school uniforms in the three decades since its introduction. The growth in this sector has provoked debates amongst uniform policy supporters and opponents. However, empirical data supporting these discussions is scarce and outdated, especially for primary school[26]. Social Learning Theory says humans adapt to each situation by considering their ideas,

behaviours, and surrounds. Administrators and politicians have noted that school uniform restrictions affect pupils long-term owing to their effect on school atmosphere and the intricate reciprocal determinism equation. This research provided a longitudinal and nationwide perspective on elementary school uniforms to add to the literature[27]. It also sought to illuminate understudied components of student development, such as school uniforms, which affect long-term academic and personal performance. This raised many critical issues. First, school uniform requirements provide consistent and mainly null aggregate outcomes, according to the present study.

After controlling for children's characteristics, educational experiences, household characteristics, and school-going practices and routines, students whose schools required uniforms and those without had similar attendance, social skills, and externalising and internalising problems from kindergarten to fifth grade[28]. Due to small effect sizes, school uniform requirements did not cause statistically meaningful changes. Importantly, propensity score matching and state and county fixed effects to account for regional volatility did not change this pattern of generally null findings[29]. We found that fifth graders who wore uniforms reported less school belonging and wellbeing than their non-uniformed counterparts. These mixed findings contradict previous research that has shown school uniforms improve students' social and emotional development and previous studies that have found no correlation. Our study takes a countrywide picture, whereas most prior research on school uniforms has concentrated on specific districts. The reasons for these discrepancies are unknown[30].

However, Social Learning Theory does not prove that school uniforms changed pupils' social conduct. Another puzzle is that students' self-reports did not correlate with negative connections, but instructors' judgements of broader social conduct indicate generally null associations. The distinction between these criteria is particularly important: Teachers looked at broader indicators of students' social and behavioural adjustment, whereas students concentrated on school-related outcomes[31]. Thus, including student and teacher metrics helps provide a more full picture of school uniform performance. Although students' wardrobe choices may be one element of belonging, this does not explain why school uniforms diminish school belonging at certain institutions. These results invalidate the assumption that school uniforms promote camaraderie and uniqueness among students in this study.

The second major conclusion from this research was that primary schools that forced kids to wear uniforms did not regularly have social and behavioural issues, regardless of socioeconomic position or capacity to attend[32]. In particular, school uniforms failed to address economic and educational equality, which have dominated pro-uniform arguments and underpinned many school systems' and authorities' uniform requirements. Despite private schools being more likely to have uniform policies than public schools, we found no difference in school uniform policies and student outcomes across education sectors (National Centre for Educational Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013). To clarify, school uniforms had no effect on students' social-emotional, behavioural, and engagement results in public and private schools[33]. Overall, the research suggests that wearing a school uniform has comparable effects independent of a student's socioeconomic background or school type. The third and last trend was school uniforms reducing absenteeism among low-income kindergarten through fifth-graders. The data above is important since early elementary school has high absenteeism. Additionally, low-income children are twice as likely to miss school and have their learning significantly affected. Given the foregoing,

academics have long wondered where school absences are most widespread, particularly among at-risk communities.

Thus, this research suggests that low-income students may skip less school when obliged to wear a uniform, but not because they feel like they belong. Although these findings contribute to current research, there are some caveats to consider when interpreting this study. First and foremost, sending certain students to uniform-required schools and others to non-uniform schools was not random. Since unobservable confounds may affect our findings, we must interpret them carefully[34]. Our findings reveal that school uniform regulations have little correlational support and may have detrimental effects on student performance. A correlation is required to prove a causal effect. Second, this study provides an excellent national summary of school uniform outcomes from kindergarten through fifth grade, but it might have included secondary school and beyond findings. Simply put, our study factors did not correlate with high school or middle school student outcomes. More research is needed to determine how school uniforms impact upper-level course achievement[35]. Third, ECLS-K administrators were not questioned yearly on school uniforms, therefore the present study did not account for changes in school uniform regulations. Few students migrated between schools that needed and those that did not require uniforms, so we could not assess change among them. Only kindergarten to fifth-graders who attended the same school were included to reduce bias from school migration or other unknown confounds. This was done for the reasons stated.

This limits the applicability of our findings. Since alternative data sources were inconsistently available throughout primary grades, our study largely relied on teacher judgements of kids' socio-emotional competencies[36]. Our social and emotional development requirements for children are subjective and based on teachers' perceptions. Note that (a) our extra analyses included kids' self-reported school connections, and (b) there are few large-scale, nationally representative research with more objective social-emotional development assessments. Despite these drawbacks and possible future research, the present study offers a contemporary, nationwide perspective on school uniform debates. This research contradicts the assumption that school uniforms improve kids' social-behavioral and engagement outcomes[37]. The social-behavioral and engagement effects of students in schools with and without uniforms were similar. According to students' reports, those whose schools required uniforms felt more victimised and less like they belonged. If future replications employ different samples and methods, school uniforms may not improve kids' social, behavioural, and engagement results[38].

CONCLUSION

This psychology study reveals that school uniforms don't effect pupils' behaviour or mental health. According to large-scale, nationally representative longitudinal statistics, wearing a uniform did not improve children's social skills, internalising or externalising conduct, or absence rates from kindergarten to fifth grade. All statistical models showed this after controlling for state, county, and matched comparison groups. However, schools that require uniforms may have greater attendance rates among low-income pupils because they reduce peer pressure and wardrobe expense. However, kids at uniform-required schools reported more bullying and a worse sense of school belonging, showing that uniforms may negatively effect children' self-esteem, independence, and relationships with peers. These studies suggest that school uniforms may not improve kids' behavioural or psychological outcomes. School climate, instructor quality, and social and emotional support become more important. Thus, educators

and lawmakers should stress comprehensive student development and wellbeing above uniform requirements as a behavioural intervention.

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