

Exploring Student Voices: A Study on the Perceptions of Senior High School Students of Villahermosa National High School Toward School Uniforms

Dave Villegas Noval

Villahermosa National High School, Villahermosa, Cawayan, Masbate, Philippines

Publication history: Received: April 10, 2026; Revised: May 11, 2026; Accepted: May 13, 2026

Email of Corresponding Author: dave.noval@deped.gov.ph

Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of Senior High School students regarding school uniform policies at Villahermosa National High School in Cawayan, Masbate. Anchored on Erikson's Identity Development Theory and Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, the research examined how school uniforms influence students' identity, self-expression, social relationships, belongingness, discipline, and educational experiences within a rural Philippine public-school setting. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design using purposive sampling, particularly Maximum Variation Sampling, involving 15–20 Senior High School students. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation guides, while thematic and phenomenological analyses were used to interpret the data. Findings revealed that students generally perceived school uniforms positively as symbols of equality, discipline, school identity, and belongingness. Uniforms were viewed as mechanisms that reduce visible socioeconomic differences, strengthen institutional pride, and encourage proper conduct and academic focus. However, students also identified challenges related to physical discomfort, hot weather conditions, prolonged use, affordability, practicality, and limitations in self-expression. Despite uniformity in appearance, students expressed individuality through behavior, attitude, grooming, and interpersonal interactions. The study further found that uniforms contribute to social inclusion and peer interaction while reinforcing school culture and institutional expectations. The study concluded that school uniforms significantly shape students' educational experiences, identity formation, and sense of belonging. It recommends regular review of uniform policies to ensure comfort, affordability, practicality, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to students' needs through consultation and participatory decision-making. The study supports SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting inclusive educational practices, equity, and student participation in school governance. Its sustainability impact lies in encouraging student-centered, culturally sensitive, and context-responsive educational policies that strengthen institutional, community, and social sustainability within rural public schools.

Keywords: Belongingness; Discipline; Identity Development; School Culture; School Uniform Policies; Self-Expression; Senior High School Students; Social Identity; Student Perceptions; Student Voice

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in human development and social progress by preparing individuals to respond to changing societal demands. Within secondary education, high school serves as a critical stage for identity formation, social interaction, and academic development. Institutional policies, particularly school uniform policies, significantly shape students' educational experiences and perceptions. In the Philippines, school uniforms remain a widely practiced educational norm, especially in public schools, where they are often associated with discipline, equality, and school identity. However, despite their widespread implementation, students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding uniforms remain underexplored. Existing literature suggests that school uniforms influence identity formation, self-expression, social belonging, discipline, and educational culture. Studies also emphasize the growing importance of student voice in educational policymaking, highlighting the need to understand how students interpret institutional policies that directly affect their daily lives (Conner, Posner, & Nsowaa, 2022; Welton, Mansfield and Salisbury, 2022). Research further indicates that uniform policies operate differently depending on cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional contexts (Ansari, Shepard, and Gottfried, 2022; Reidy, 2021). Despite these findings, few qualitative studies in the Philippine rural context have explored students' authentic experiences regarding school uniforms. This study investigates the perceptions and lived experiences of Senior High School students at Villahermosa National High School in Cawayan, Masbate regarding school uniforms. Anchored on Erikson's Identity Development Theory and Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, the study explores how uniforms influence students' identity, social relationships, belongingness, and educational experiences within a rural Philippine public school setting.

1.1 Background of Senior High School Students' Perceptions on School Uniform Policies at Villahermosa National High School

School uniforms are widely implemented in educational institutions worldwide and are commonly viewed as mechanisms for promoting discipline, equality, and institutional identity. In the Philippine educational system, uniforms are deeply embedded in school culture and are frequently described as “great equalizers” that minimize visible socioeconomic differences among students (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2022). However, while adults and institutions often perceive uniforms positively, students may experience them differently depending on social, economic, cultural, and developmental factors. Research has shown that adolescence is a critical period of identity formation in which students negotiate institutional expectations and peer relationships. Schools serve as central environments where identity construction occurs, making institutional policies such as uniforms highly influential in shaping self-expression and belongingness. Contemporary educational discourse increasingly recognizes the importance of student voice in understanding educational policies and improving school climate (Conner, Posner, & Nsowaa, 2022). Similarly, Welton, Mansfield and Salisbury (2022) emphasized the transformative potential of student participation in educational governance. Although previous studies examined the effects of school uniforms on behavior, discipline, and academic outcomes, much of the literature focused on quantitative evaluations rather than students' lived experiences (Ansari, Shepard, and Gottfried, 2022). Consequently, there remains a need for qualitative investigations that explore how students perceive and interpret uniform policies in their daily school lives, particularly in culturally and economically distinct rural settings such as Villahermosa National High School in Masbate.

1.2 Themes and Insights on School Uniform Policies, Student Voice, Identity, and Educational Experiences

Related literature consistently highlights that school uniform policies affect students beyond appearance and dress regulation. Reidy (2021) argued that uniforms should be examined within broader educational, social, and health contexts, noting that their effectiveness varies according to socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Baumann and Krskova (2016) further stressed that uniforms must be understood within school culture and student welfare rather than as isolated disciplinary mechanisms. Student voice emerged as a recurring theme in educational research. Conner (2022) emphasized that authentic student participation in policy discussions improves educational practices and institutional responsiveness. Ngussa and Makewa (2014) similarly argued that students possess valuable knowledge about educational processes and that meaningful participation contributes to more effective policy implementation. Mitra (2018) further demonstrated that student voice initiatives can positively transform school culture and policy effectiveness. Studies also revealed mixed student perceptions regarding school uniforms. Woo et al. (2020) found that uniforms promoted equality and discipline but limited self-expression. Woo et al. (2020) similarly reported that uniforms symbolized discipline and structure while restricting individuality. Jones, Richardson, Jensen, and Whiting (2020) highlighted how socioeconomic background influences students' experiences with uniform policies, with some viewing uniforms as equalizers and others as financial burdens. Local studies reinforced these findings within the Philippine context. Javillonar and Vasquez (2019) found that students viewed uniforms through multiple dimensions, including identity, practicality, and economic implications. Beltran & Ibañez (2025) observed that uniforms promoted discipline and equality but occasionally restricted self-expression. Chavez et al. (2018) reported that students appreciated uniforms for fostering identity and equality while expressing concerns regarding comfort and flexibility. Overall, the literature demonstrates that school uniforms intersect with identity development, institutional culture, social belonging, discipline, and socioeconomic realities. It also underscores the importance of incorporating student perspectives into educational policymaking.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of School Uniform Policies in Rural Philippine Secondary Education

Globally, school uniforms remain common in both developed and developing countries, though perceptions and implementations vary across cultural and institutional settings. International studies reveal differing views regarding their impact on discipline, equality, identity, and educational outcomes (Reidy, 2021; Ansari, Shepard, & Gottfried, 2022). Research also indicates that uniforms may unintentionally create barriers for marginalized and economically disadvantaged students. Nationally, school uniforms are a longstanding educational practice in the Philippines and are commonly associated with discipline, institutional identity, and social equality. However, local research suggests that Filipino students experience uniforms in complex ways shaped by cultural expectations, economic realities, and developmental needs (Javillonar & Vasquez, 2019; Beltran & Ibañez, 2025). Locally, Villahermosa National High School in Cawayan, Masbate presents a unique rural context where uniform policies intersect with socioeconomic conditions, cultural traditions, and educational practices. Students in rural communities may encounter challenges related to affordability, accessibility, maintenance, and procurement of uniforms due to limited resources and varying family income levels. At the same time, strong community values and respect for educational institutions reinforce the implementation of uniform policies within the school setting.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Students' Identity, Social Belonging, and School Uniform Experiences

This study is anchored on Erik Erikson's Identity Development Theory, particularly the stage of Identity versus Role Confusion, which emphasizes adolescence as a critical period for identity exploration and self-concept formation. Erikson argued that adolescents seek coherent identities while negotiating social expectations and institutional demands.

Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman (2019) further emphasized the important role schools play in adolescent identity development. The study also draws from Tajfel & Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory, which explains how individuals derive identity from group membership and social belonging. Hogg (2016) emphasized that shared symbols, such as school uniforms, strengthen group identity and influence attitudes and behaviors. From this perspective, uniforms may foster school unity while simultaneously creating tension between individuality and conformity. The conceptual framework of the study centers on students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding school uniforms. Through phenomenological inquiry, the study examines dimensions such as identity and self-expression, social belonging, comfort and practicality, economic implications, school environment, and cultural expectations. These dimensions are shaped by contextual factors including socioeconomic background, peer relationships, school policies, and community culture within the rural educational setting of Villahermosa National High School.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale on Students' Lived Experiences of School Uniform Policies

Despite extensive literature on school uniform policies, several gaps remain evident. First, most studies focus on quantitative outcomes such as discipline, academic performance, and behavior, while limited research explores students' lived experiences through qualitative phenomenological approaches. Second, much of the existing literature originates from Western educational settings, with limited studies conducted in the Philippine context, particularly in rural public schools where socioeconomic and cultural conditions significantly influence educational experiences. Third, although student voice is increasingly recognized in educational policymaking, few studies systematically investigate students' authentic perceptions regarding school uniform policies. Existing research rarely provides in-depth opportunities for students to articulate how uniforms affect their identity, relationships, and sense of belonging. Finally, limited research integrates Identity Development Theory and Social Identity Theory in understanding how uniforms influence adolescent development and social belonging. This study addresses these gaps by examining the lived experiences of Senior High School students in a rural Philippine setting using a qualitative phenomenological approach.

1.6 Alignment of the Study on School Uniform Policies with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It supports SDG 4 – Quality Education by promoting inclusive, student-centered educational policies that consider students' lived experiences and well-being. Understanding students' perceptions of school uniforms contributes to improving educational environments and policy responsiveness. The study also aligns with SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities since school uniforms are often intended to reduce visible socioeconomic differences among students. Examining how students experience these policies may contribute to more equitable educational practices that are sensitive to varying economic conditions. Additionally, the research supports SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions by encouraging participatory and inclusive educational governance through the recognition of student voice in policy discussions and institutional decision-making.

1.7 Importance of Students' Perceptions on School Uniform Policies to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This study contributes to socio-economic, educational, community, and institutional sustainability by examining how school uniform policies influence students' educational experiences and well-being. Findings may guide policymakers, school administrators, and educators in developing more responsive and inclusive school policies that balance institutional objectives with students' developmental needs. The study also promotes educational sustainability by supporting student-centered approaches that enhance participation, belongingness, and positive school climate. Insights regarding affordability, accessibility, and student welfare may contribute to more sustainable educational practices in rural communities. Furthermore, the research contributes to community and policy sustainability by strengthening collaboration among schools, families, local communities, and educational stakeholders in addressing issues related to school uniform implementation. By foregrounding student voice, the study encourages more democratic, culturally sensitive, and context-responsive educational governance within Philippine public schools.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a Qualitative Phenomenological Research Design to explore and understand students' perceptions toward school uniforms. Phenomenology was selected because it focuses on understanding the meanings individuals attach to their lived experiences. The design enabled the researchers to examine how students experience, interpret, and make sense of school uniform policies in their daily educational lives. It also allowed deeper exploration of students' feelings, meanings, and interpretations regarding uniforms beyond superficial attitudes. The qualitative approach supported the collection of rich and detailed data through naturalistic inquiry using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Villahermosa National High School in Cawayan, Masbate. The school was selected because it implements a standardized school uniform policy and serves students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural

backgrounds within a rural public-school setting. The locale provided an appropriate environment for examining students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding school uniforms in the context of rural Philippine secondary education.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were Senior High School students currently enrolled at Villahermosa National High School who had direct and sustained experience with the school uniform policy. Participants were required to have completed at least one academic year in the school, possess direct experiences regarding the implementation of the uniform policy, and be willing to participate voluntarily. The study included students with varied gender, grade level, academic performance, and socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure diverse perspectives regarding school uniforms. Students who had limited exposure to the policy, were frequently absent, or were under disciplinary action related to uniform violations were excluded to minimize potential bias.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling, particularly Maximum Variation Sampling, to obtain diverse and information-rich participants. This non-probability sampling technique enabled the researchers to select participants who could best provide meaningful insights regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The sampling process considered grade level, gender balance, socioeconomic diversity, academic performance, and levels of school engagement. The study involved 15–20 students for in-depth interviews and 2–3 focus group discussions consisting of 6–8 students each. The sample size was considered appropriate for phenomenological inquiry because it prioritized data saturation and depth of understanding rather than statistical representativeness. This procedure ensured comprehensive exploration of students' experiences and perceptions regarding school uniforms.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized qualitative research instruments designed to gather in-depth information regarding students' perceptions toward school uniforms. The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions aligned with the objectives of the study. This instrument enabled participants to freely express their experiences, feelings, and perspectives while ensuring that key themes related to the benefits, challenges, meanings, and effects of school uniforms were explored. Probing questions were used to obtain more detailed responses. A focus group discussion protocol was also employed to capture shared experiences and collective perspectives among students. The discussions encouraged interaction and comparison of viewpoints regarding school uniform policies. In addition, an observation guide was utilized to document non-verbal cues, behaviors, and contextual factors during interviews and discussions to enrich data interpretation. All research instruments underwent validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for qualitative inquiry.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering was conducted systematically in three phases. The first phase involved preparation and ethical clearance, including obtaining approval from school authorities, securing informed consent from participants and parental consent for minors, pilot-testing interview guides and focus group protocols, establishing rapport with participants, and preparing recording and transcription procedures. The second phase involved the actual data collection process conducted over several weeks. Individual in-depth interviews lasting approximately 60–90 minutes were conducted with selected students to explore their personal experiences and meanings regarding school uniforms. Focus group discussions lasting approximately 90–120 minutes were also conducted to encourage interactive discussion and collective reflection on school uniform policies. The final phase focused on data verification and member checking. All interviews and discussions were transcribed verbatim, and participants were consulted to verify the accuracy of interpretations and clarify ambiguous statements. This process ensured that participants' voices and intended meanings were accurately represented in the study findings.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study employed qualitative data analysis techniques appropriate for phenomenological inquiry. The primary method used was Thematic Analysis, which involved familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, systematic coding of significant statements, development of themes, review and refinement of themes, and definition of final thematic categories. Phenomenological analysis was also applied to identify the essence of students' lived experiences regarding school uniforms. This involved horizontalization, identification of meaningful units, description of core experiences, and interpretation of how students understood and gave meaning to uniform policies. To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study employed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability procedures through prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, thick description, audit trails, peer debriefing, and reflexivity. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to organize, code, and analyze textual data systematically. All research procedures adhered to ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and protection of participants from potential harm.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Experiences and Perceptions Toward School Uniforms

3.1.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The participants were equally distributed between Grade 11 and Grade 12 students. Grade 11 respondents had approximately one year of experience in the school, while Grade 12 students had around two years of exposure to the school environment and its uniform policy. Some participants had also been enrolled in the institution since junior high school, providing them with longer familiarity with school policies and practices. These varying lengths of stay allowed students to provide broader and more meaningful insights regarding school uniforms. The findings suggest that the participants possessed sufficient experience and familiarity with the school environment to provide credible perceptions regarding uniform policies. Their prolonged exposure to institutional practices strengthened the reliability of their lived experiences and reflections concerning school uniforms.

3.1.2 Overall Experiences in Wearing School Uniforms

Most participants described wearing school uniforms as part of their daily routine that promotes discipline and preparedness for school. Students associated uniforms with readiness, responsibility, and proper conduct, as reflected in statements such as, "When I wear my uniform, I feel like I should act properly because I represent the school" (Participant 10, Grade 12). Others viewed uniforms as ordinary and habitual, while some expressed discomfort during hot weather and prolonged use. Students also identified equality, school identity, and discipline as the first ideas associated with school uniforms. In daily experiences, uniforms were viewed as part of routine school life while also influencing social interaction and feelings of belongingness among classmates. These findings indicate that school uniforms function not only as institutional dress codes but also as symbols of discipline, equality, and school identity. Students' perceptions reflect both positive and negative experiences, showing how uniforms shape their daily routines, social interactions, and emotional responses within the school environment. The findings support earlier discussions that uniforms influence students' preparedness, belongingness, and perceptions of institutional culture.

3.2 Benefits and Challenges of School Uniform Policies

3.2.1 Perceived Benefits of School Uniforms

Participants identified several advantages of school uniforms, including equality, discipline, convenience, belongingness, and focus on studies. Many students believed uniforms reduce visible socioeconomic differences among classmates, making everyone appear equal. Others shared that uniforms encourage discipline and proper behavior in school. Students also appreciated the convenience of not deciding what to wear daily, which simplified their morning preparation. Additionally, uniforms strengthened students' sense of belonging and allowed them to focus more on academics rather than appearance. The findings demonstrate that students generally perceive school uniforms positively in terms of promoting equality, discipline, and school identity. Uniforms also contribute to convenience and academic focus by minimizing concerns related to clothing choices and fashion competition. These perceptions reinforce the role of uniforms in supporting institutional order and strengthening students' connection to the school community.

3.2.2 Challenges and Difficulties in Wearing School Uniforms

Despite the perceived benefits, participants also reported challenges related to physical discomfort and prolonged use of uniforms. Many students described discomfort caused by hot weather, particularly during afternoon classes. Others explained that wearing uniforms for extended hours during busy school days and activities became tiring and inconvenient. Students noted that uniforms felt more comfortable during cooler weather and less physically demanding classroom days. These findings suggest that while students recognize the value of uniforms, practical concerns related to comfort and environmental conditions affect their daily experiences. The results highlight the importance of considering students' physical comfort and contextual conditions when implementing uniform policies. Although uniforms support institutional goals, they also present limitations that may influence students' well-being and school experience.

3.3 Impact of School Uniforms on Identity, Self-Expression, and Personal Development

3.3.1 Identity and Self-Expression

Students expressed that they continue to show their personality through behavior, attitude, interactions, grooming, and demeanor despite wearing the same uniform. Some participants believed uniforms positively influenced their self-perception by encouraging discipline and responsibility. Others stated that uniforms do not significantly affect their identity because personality is not determined by clothing. While several students felt they could still be themselves despite uniform requirements, others believed uniforms limited their ability to express individuality through fashion and personal style. The findings reveal that students experience a balance between conformity and individuality within the school environment. Although uniforms restrict fashion-based self-expression, students continue to develop identity through non-physical aspects such as personality and behavior. These results reflect the continuing negotiation between institutional conformity and personal identity formation among adolescents.

3.3.2 Personal Development

Participants generally believed that wearing school uniforms contributed to personal growth by developing discipline, responsibility, confidence, and awareness of equality. Students explained that uniforms made them more conscious of their roles as students and encouraged organized and accountable behavior within the school setting. Some participants also shared that uniforms reduced social comparisons and increased confidence because everyone wore similar attire. These findings indicate that uniforms influence students' personal development by reinforcing institutional expectations and promoting awareness of equality and responsibility. Uniforms also support students' confidence and belongingness by reducing visible social differences within the school environment. Overall, the results show that uniforms shape identity formation while still allowing space for individual growth and self-awareness.

3.4 Influence of School Uniforms on Social Relationships and Sense of Belonging

3.4.1 Social Interaction and Peer Relationships

Most participants believed that school uniforms promote equality among classmates and make social interactions more comfortable. Students explained that wearing the same attire reduces attention to social or economic differences, making it easier to communicate and build friendships. Some participants shared that uniforms created familiarity and reduced hesitation when interacting with new classmates. However, others believed friendships and communication depend more on personality and personal interaction rather than attire. The findings suggest that school uniforms contribute to a more inclusive and approachable social environment by minimizing visible social distinctions. Uniforms support peer interaction and comfort among students, although personal relationships remain largely influenced by individual attitudes and social behavior rather than clothing alone.

3.4.2 Sense of Belonging and Teacher Interaction

Many participants expressed that wearing the same uniform fosters unity, belongingness, and closeness among students. Uniforms created a feeling of being part of one group and strengthened students' connection to the school community. Participants also shared that teachers often emphasize discipline and proper conduct more strongly when students are in uniform because it represents the school. Others believed uniforms promote fairness in teacher treatment since all students wear the same attire. These findings indicate that uniforms reinforce institutional identity and strengthen students' sense of inclusion within the school environment. Uniforms also influence relationships between students and teachers by reinforcing expectations regarding discipline, equality, and proper behavior. Overall, the findings show that uniforms positively contribute to students' social experiences and institutional belongingness.

3.5 Role of School Uniforms in Promoting Equality, Discipline, and School Culture

3.5.1 Equality and Discipline

Most participants believed that school uniforms promote equality by reducing visible social and economic differences among students. They explained that uniforms lessen comparisons based on appearance and financial status, creating a more inclusive school environment. However, some participants acknowledged that uniforms only create equality in appearance because differences in personality, behavior, and background still remain. Students also shared that uniforms encourage discipline and proper conduct by reminding them that they represent the school and are expected to behave responsibly. The findings demonstrate that students perceive uniforms as important tools for promoting equality and reinforcing discipline within the school setting. Uniforms help create a structured environment that encourages appropriate behavior while minimizing visible social distinctions. However, the findings also suggest that equality through uniforms has limitations because personal and social differences continue to exist beyond appearance.

3.5.2 School Identity, Representation, and Pride

Participants generally viewed school uniforms as symbols of school identity and representation. Many students expressed pride in wearing their uniforms because it reflected their membership and belongingness to Villahermosa National High School. Others associated uniforms with organization, order, and institutional values. However, some participants expressed neutral feelings, explaining that uniforms had simply become part of their routine rather than a strong source of pride. These findings indicate that school uniforms strengthen institutional identity and students' sense of affiliation with their school community. Uniforms function as visible representations of school culture, discipline, and belongingness. While pride in uniforms varies among students, the findings overall suggest that uniforms positively reinforce school identity and community connection.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that school uniforms play a significant role in shaping students' identity, sense of belonging, equality, discipline, and daily school experiences at Villahermosa National Senior High School. Students generally viewed uniforms as symbols of school pride, unity, and institutional identity while also recognizing their role in promoting equality and reducing visible socioeconomic differences. However, students also identified concerns related to comfort, practicality, cost, and limitations in self-expression. Although uniforms contributed to discipline and orderliness, students emphasized

that school culture, teacher consistency, and institutional practices remain essential in reinforcing positive behavior. The findings further revealed that students value opportunities for participation in discussions regarding uniform policies, particularly on matters involving comfort, design, affordability, and practicality, highlighting the importance of student voice in educational decision-making.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that teachers and school administrators strengthen discipline through consistent positive modeling, fair implementation of school policies, and promotion of respect and responsibility among students. School uniform policies should be regularly reviewed to ensure that uniforms remain comfortable, climate-appropriate, practical, durable, and affordable for students and their families. The study also recommends strengthening collaboration with local suppliers to improve accessibility and quality of uniforms. Furthermore, regular consultations and feedback mechanisms involving students and parents should be conducted to ensure that school uniform policies remain responsive, inclusive, and reflective of students' actual experiences. Limited flexibility in uniform guidelines may also be considered to balance school identity with students' comfort and practical needs.

The study was limited to twenty (20) Senior High School students from Villahermosa National High School during the School Year 2022–2023, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other schools or educational settings. The research focused only on students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding school uniforms within a rural public-school context. Since the study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach using purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews, the findings relied heavily on participants' subjective experiences and personal interpretations. Additionally, the study was confined to a specific school environment and did not include perspectives from teachers, parents, or administrators, which may provide broader insights regarding school uniform policies.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study adhered to ethical research standards appropriate for qualitative phenomenological inquiry. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, confidentiality protection, informed consent, parental consent for minor participants, and the protection of participants from potential harm. Data gathering procedures involved securing approval from school authorities, conducting member checking, and ensuring that participants' voices and intended meanings were accurately represented throughout the study.

REFERENCES

- Ansari, A., Shepard, M., & Gottfried, M. A. (2022). School uniforms and student behavior: Is there a link? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 58, 278–286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.09.012>
- Baumann, C., & Krskova, H. (2016). School discipline, school uniforms and academic performance. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(6), 1003–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2015-0118>
- Beltran, R. M. L., & Ibañez, Z. P. (2025). Influence of “No School Uniform Policy” on students' self-confidence in academic participation. *Journal of Innovations in Pedagogy*. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.456>
- Conner, J. (2022). Who's afraid of student voice? The challenges of learning to listen to and learn from student feedback. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1361589.pdf>
- Conner, J., Posner, M., & Nsowaa, B. (2022). The relationship between student voice and student engagement in urban high schools. *The Urban Review*, 54(5), 755–774.
- Hogg, M. A. (2016). Social identity theory. In S. McKeown, R. Haji, & N. Ferguson (Eds.), *Understanding peace and conflict through social identity theory* (pp. 3–17). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29869-6_1
- Javillonar, M., & Vasquez, A. (2019). The school uniform policy from the students' perspective: Basis for policy improvement.
- Jones, A. B., Richardson, M. J., Jensen, B. T., & Whiting, E. F. (2020). Perceptions of school uniforms in relation to socioeconomic status. *RMLE Online*, 43(6), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2020.1759298>
- Mitra, D. (2018). Student voice in secondary schools: The possibility for deeper change. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(5), 473–487.
- Ngussa, B. M., & Makewa, L. N. (2014). Student voice in curriculum change: A theoretical reasoning. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 3(3), 23–37.
- Philippine Daily Inquirer. (2022, August). No rich or poor: School uniforms as the great equalizer. *INQUIRER.net*.
- Reidy, J. (2021). Reviewing school uniform through a public health lens: Evidence about the impacts of school uniform on education and health. *Public Health Reviews*, 42, 1604212. <https://doi.org/10.3389/phrs.2021.1604212>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1980-23483-001>

- Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A. M. G., & Volman, M. (2019). The role of school in adolescents' identity development: A literature review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31, 35–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-018-9457-3>
- Welton, A. D., Mansfield, K. C., & Salisbury, J. D. (2022). The politics of student voice: The power and potential of students as policy actors. *Educational Policy*, 36(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048211059718>
- Woo, J. M., Tam, C. L., Bonn, G., & Tagg, B. (2020). Student, teacher, and counselor perceptions of school uniforms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1871. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01871>