STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS DRESS CODES: A CASE STUDY OF THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS EDUCATION, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a presentation of a case study which investigated attitudes of students on dress codes at the main campus of the College of Business Education (CBE) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania between 2013 and 2014. The study reflects the functionalist perspective on an organisational culture of a higher learning institution. Data were collected using naturalistic observations, oral presentations and large group discussions. Analysis was performed using the Grounded Theory Method. Findings revealed that overall student attitudes were in conformity with the college dress codes, with exception of only a few students who were violating the college dress codes. The conclusion was that the majority of students were supportive of the college dress codes. The researcher recommends another study to investigate why some students still continue dressing indecently in spite of their knowledge of the requirements of the dress codes.

Key words: Dress code, decent dressing, indecent dressing.

INTRODUCTION
Generally speaking, dress codes are written or unwritten rules with regards to clothing which reflect circumstances, occasions and certain jobs. Mantyi-Ncube and Langwenya (2014) have submitted that a dress code is a set of rules that describe acceptable or required clothing. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014 Android edition) shows that the words “dress code” were first used in 1968 and they refer to a set of rules about what clothing may or may not be worn at school, office, restaurant, and other special places. Often times, they reflect formally imposed standards of dress. Such rules are often observed among the military personnel, health professionals, bankers and lawyers to name but a few professionals. The rules on dress codes do not necessarily mean people should wear uniforms though uniforms depict compliance to certain dress codes. Many organizations seek to maintain minimum standards of modesty by prohibiting any piece of clothing that is likely to expose larger parts of the body or any sensitive parts of the body such as thighs, breasts or stomach. According to Asaju (2013) dress codes in an educational institution could allow an individual's preference; but, such preference must be moderated within the constraints of reasonable rules and appropriate standards consistent with the maintenance and promotion of a positive, safe and healthy environment for learning.

At the College of Business Education, the dress code was officially introduced in 2009 through an instrument called “College of Business Education (General Conduct, Disciplinary Proceedings, and Penalties) Students' By-Laws 2009” through a directive of the Governing Body (GB) of the College. Section Nine of the Students' By-Laws is entitled “Students' dress code” and it categorically prohibits the following articles of dress: jeans with holes, mesh type or see through clothes, trousers hanging under buttocks, very tight trousers (also tight skirts and blouses), dress or skirts with excessive slit, any dress that leaves the stomach, waist, chest or back open, shorts or skirts that do not cover the knees when seated, earrings for men, unbuttoned shirts, any type of dress that cover entire face, pajamas, flip flops or slippers, any dress that leaves the underwear or breasts visible, hats or caps worn backwards, clothes with inappropriate graphics, slogan, or abusive language and plaiting hair for men. Indecent or inappropriate dressing in this paper is therefore understood to be any kind of dressing that falls within the stipulations of the said dress code.

The importance of the dress code at CBE is manifested in the fact that the College requires the new students and their parents to sign a form containing the dress code before the Commissioner for Oaths to show their commitment to it. The dress code also stipulates that the college may deem any piece of dress as inappropriate from time to time to
monitor possible new styles of dress that may violate the established dress code (CBE, 2014). Penalty to the
offenders are hinged upon frequency of violations and may amount to denial of access to college premises and
academic services, the highest penalty being suspension from the college for a period not exceeding three months
(CBE, 2009).

The present paper is a case study which investigated views of students on dress codes at the main campus of the
College of Business Education (CBE) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Involving certificate students for two consecutive
academic years, the study began in 2013 and culminated in 2014. The objectives of this study were two: (1) To find
out whether students' attitudes towards dress codes were positive or negative (2) To explore other students’
opinions/views about the dress codes.

Admittedly, investigating students' attitudes towards college dress codes can be a daunting task due to the loaded
meaning of the word “attitude. Augoustinos and Walker (1995) points out that “[a]lthough attitudes have been the
single most researched topic in social psychology, what is meant precisely by the term is more often than not left
tacit, vague and inconsistent”. In spite of that they, however, agree that the definition of attitude as evaluation is
becoming increasingly common and that's why attitudes are expressed in the language of ‘like/dislike',
'approach/avoid' and 'good/bad’. In this study, the word attitude is used to simply mean a way of thinking and feeling
about something that can affect a person's behaviour in line with Kaveh et al.'s (2015) concise definition of attitude as
a person's evaluation of desirability or undesirability of a behaviour and its outcomes. To clarify their definition,
Kaveh et al.(2005) illustrate their meaning by saying that in case a student believes that following the dress code will
be beneficial in improvement of his/her position inside and outside the institution and that the commitment to the
dress codes will cause no restrictions in his/her interactions, that student will have a positive or desirable evaluation
of the dress codes and will therefore be interested in following them.

LITERATURE REVIEW
It is well known that making the best possible impression through proper attire is important when seeking
employment and research has already shown that most employers who recruit new college graduates believe a
candidate's overall appearance influences their opinion about selecting that candidate (Hoover, 2013). Studies have
also shown that elegance and dressing pattern of the academics and their students are of utmost importance (Koushan
et al., 2008) because they are part of what projects the image of the academic institutions (Kaveh et al., 2015).

It is from that vantage point, therefore, that students are expected to view dress etiquette with special attention as it
reveals something about the future of a job candidate's personality and professionalism (Bovée and Thill, 2008). It is
along the same understanding that Stephano (2014) argues that a dress code in a higher learning institution can be a
training tool for enhancing students' future professional image. However, according to Bovée and Thill (2008) some
students fail to recognize the need to adjust their dress appearance as they transition to professional life because they
think such an issue is of minor consequence. In a study carried out in Nigeria, Chukwudi and Gbakorun (2011) found
that the negative attitude by some students towards dress etiquette and the resultant indecent dressing among students
of higher learning institutions was largely "a product of modelling top movie stars”.

Of course, students' negative attitudes towards dress codes are a product of many things apart from being influenced
by top movie stars or the entertainment industry in general. Ikwuba (2012) noted that as a result of globalization
trends, a drastic change in the cultural life of African countries has been promoted vigorously by Television, Radios,
Newspapers, Magazines and the Internet since 1990s, thus bringing into Africa foreign values, norms and ideologies
from the West. One such aspect of the influence of the West through media was what Ikwuba referred to as the
"craze-like dressing pattern among young people which feature mostly in institutions of learning” (p.87). Based on
the above, it is, therefore, understandable why Omede (2011) challenges the African mass media as agents of
national socialization and sensitization, to have a sense of their own responsibility to confront indecent dressing and
rightly shape our young people by displaying attire that encourages our students to dress decently.

Apart from the mass media, scholars have also highlighted other factors that influence students’ dress habits. According
to Kiran (2002) the adolescents' way of dressing can be influenced by their social status, level of
education and peer pressure. Ojo and Bidemi (2008) add that the adolescents' way of dressing is affected by social
approval, anxiety, modernity and the mere tendency for showing off. Moreover, students dress habits have also been

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found to be impacted by society's culture, traditions, values and religious beliefs (Noori, 2002; Mantyi-Ncube and Langwenya, 2014; Kaveh et al., 2015).

Some scholars had investigated students' dress habits in other countries such as Nigeria (e.g. Ikwuba, 2012 and Asaju, 2013), Ghana (e.g. Ofori, et al., 2014) and Iran (e.g. Kaveh, et al., 2015), but this author could not locate any past study that had been conducted in Tanzania on that topic. That gap in literature was, therefore, deemed important and timely by the author to warrant a study on students’ attitudes towards dress codes at the College of Business Education in Tanzania.

METHODOLOGY

This research was essentially qualitative in nature and it had no predetermined theoretical framework but after the data analysis, it became clear that the study reflects the functionalist perspective on an organisational culture of a higher learning institution. Barker and Angelopulo (2012) posits that although there are many approaches to understanding organisational cultures, the functionalist paradigm is one of the most notable ones. The functionalist approach is concerned with the administration and control of an organisation through its management to make it function more smoothly, efficiently and productively (Barker & Angelopulo, 2012). Functionalists, therefore, believe that human behaviour in the organisation can be determined or controlled by use of external influences such as codes of conduct and written rules that represent the image of the organisation (Neher, 1997). This understanding reflects CBE's belief that through enforcement of a dress code students will comply and help the college to run its activities smoothly and achieve its intended goals.

This study took one year to be completed, the first point in time being the months of October and November 2013 when the researcher used Oral Presentations (OPs) and Large Group Discussions (LGDs) to gauge new certificate students’ feelings of the college they had joined a month earlier. This was repeated for another batch of new certificate students in October and November 2014. In practice, the OPs were performed through class groups of between 6-12 students who were given an open question which asked them to write an essay describing their "experience" at the college since they joined until that point in time. The question included nothing explicit about the dress code. That essay would later be presented orally in class after availing a written copy of the oral presentation to this author. LGDs were then used as follow-ups to the issue of dress and appearance that had surfaced naturally from the OPs. The LGDs were conducted as intensive discussions of a class size audience (between 40-180 students). Both OPs and LGDs were administered during classroom interactions in the Business Communication classes that this author taught.

In addition to the OPs and the LGDs, the researcher used naturalistic observations (NOs) throughout the year to evaluate the general appearance of all the certificate students as projected within the campus (inside and outside the classes). He observed such things as the styles of the dresses, length of clothing, exposure or protection of sensitive body parts, dress size whether tight or not, dress transparency, et cetera based on the college dress code and his subjective value judgements.

Convenience sampling was used for ease of access to the respondents as the researcher could easily conduct the research using available students within the classes and campus. The total number of respondents involved in the study using OPs and LGDs for the two consecutive academic years was 1398 students, representing a total of 138 groups. Out of those 138 groups and 1398 students, 33 groups comprised 305 students representing the year 2013 and 105 groups comprised 1093 students representing the year 2014. Furthermore, of the 138 groups, 103 groups (with 974 students) commented on the dress issue in their presentations while 35 groups (with 424 individual students) did not comment anything on the dress issue as they explained their life experiences at CBE.

Data analysis was performed as soon as the data were available using the Grounded Theory Method. The Grounded Theory Method is derived or “grounded” in the research participants' own understanding of a phenomenon leaving the researcher as someone who has to enter the respondents' world to learn or interpret their understanding instead of imposing his/her understanding on them (Auberbach & Silverstain, 2003). The user of the Grounded Theory Method seeks to learn naturally from the respondents by letting the respondents themselves set the agenda from start to end (Auberbach & Silverstain, 2003) while s/he poses as a learner, probing for clarifications and looking for
natural themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Cooper & Schindler, 2009 and Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

For the data from Naturalistic Observations done throughout the year, the researcher analyzed the students' appearance and dress styles on day to day basis as he interacted naturally with the students within campus. Any conspicuous dress phenomenon was noted and interpreted using the researcher's impressionistic value judgements and his understanding of the guidelines in the college dress code.

The Oral Presentations and the Large Group Discussions were transcribed through a process called “data sampling, that is, only the relevant parts of Oral Presentations and Large Group Discussions were transcribed and coded to reduce the vast amount of time of the analysis process if every word and reaction would be transcribed (Saunders et al., 2009). Typically, the researcher would read and listen carefully to all the group oral and written presentations looking for key words such as dress, dress code, clothing, appearance, et cetera and try to understand what the students meant. He would then transcribe and code those relevant parts from all the papers and oral presentations and then check and compare to see any emerging themes. Then he would elicit class discussions to gauge students’ perspectives on the themes and statements after all the groups had presented their papers orally, this time involving all the students regardless of whether the group had earlier commented on the dress code or not. The researcher would note more emerging issues in the student comments and immediately bring them up for further discussion until there was “saturation”, which simply means there was no more new ideas coming up but only repetitions (Auberbach & Silverstain, 2003). After the class sessions, the researcher would do more critical reflection on both the transcriptions and the classroom discussions to make sure nothing relevant to the study was carelessly forgotten.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following sections present results from the analysis of the Naturalistic Observations (NOs), Oral Presentations (OPs) and the Large Group Discussions (LGDs). The findings for OPs and LGDs are also summarised in Table 1 below. It was interesting to note that the issue of dress attracted many comments from the students though it was not mentioned explicitly in their class assignment. Although some students did not comment on dress codes at all in their OPs and some gave unclear or neutral views that were hard to interpret in terms of their attitude towards dress codes (comments such as “we are told to follow the college dress code”), yet they were involved in the LGDs and hence their views were finally captured. The data analysis yielded seven themes as presented below.

**Theme 1: Conformity to the Dress Codes**

It was observed that overall student appearance was in conformity with the college dress code, with exception of only a few students who were violating the college dress codes. Students told this researcher that the few violators of the dress code were from the college hostels within campus or a few off-campus students who came with additional dresses and changed them when they were inside the campus. The disobedient students took advantage of the weakness of the College for placing more emphasis on checking students who entered through the college main gates and somehow relaxed on those who were inside the college.

The male violators were observed to wear trousers hanging under buttocks, very tight trousers, slippers and hats or caps worn backwards. On the part of the female violators problems related to wearing see-through clothes, very tight trousers, tight skirts and blouses, skirts with excessive slit and short skirts that made them uncomfortable during sitting.

**Theme 2: Dress Code as a Symbol of College's Image and Morals**

A total of 478 (35%) students commented that adherence to college dress codes projects a good image of the college and it shows that the college cares about morals of its students. They argued that a college with no guiding rules for the behaviour of its students does not really care about its students beyond meeting them in class. Some of the statements about the dress code from the data include:

- “...it portrays a respectful picture of the college to the outside community”
- “...by the dress code CBE is now different from other colleges”
- “Through the dressing codes this college nurtures good behaviour”
- “This shows how serious the college is with student morals...”
Theme 3: Dress Habits as a Reflection of Student Image
This theme was discussed differently by 266 (19%) students. They argued that students who are properly dressed in accordance with the college dress code appear smart, well-behaved, respectable, acceptable, disciplined, student-like, morally decent, professionally-oriented and truly educated. Some of their statements include the following:

- “The dress code makes students look smart...”
- “We become respected through our ways of dressing...”
- “By keeping our dress code we look like students and as true future professionals, not as hooligans...”
- “Dressing properly helps us to look like educated people and not like street boys and girls”

Theme 4: Student Beliefs on Dress Code and Decent Dressing
A total of 110 (8%) students claimed that the college dress code enhanced respect among students and towards lecturers and other college staff. Most male students said decent dressing made it possible for them to study comfortably and concentrate on academic issues especially during classes. They also believed it protected them against mind distractions and sexually oriented temptations and therefore by extension the dress code protected them against HIV/AIDS. The majority of female students considered decent dressing as a way of projecting their self-worth and respect for their womanhood. Some of the statements under this theme include the following:

- “Dressing properly is a sign of understanding who you are as a woman”
- “Good dressing can lead to good concentration on academic matters and it can shield us against HIV/AIDS”
- “The dress code makes students study comfortably especially when girls are sitting”
- “The dress code brings peace and harmony among students by saying 'No' to tight and short clothes”

Theme 5: Dress Code as a Representation of Tanzanian Culture
A small number of students totaling 36 (3%) also supported the college dress code arguing that it helped students to reflect their cultural roots. They claimed that because most Tanzanians are naturally decent in dress and do not approve immodesty, the college dress code was a good thing and it was helping students to keep Tanzania's dress values. Some of their comments include the following:

- “Another thing we have experienced at this college is to behave like Tanzanians and not like people of other countries in dressing styles...”
- “CBE enacted laws which prohibit students to wear clothes which are not in favor with the society of Tanzania such as short skirts, skin tights, trousers below the waist (mtepesho/mlegezo)...”
- “Some of the students do not dress decently as if we have forgotten our cultural norms”
- “At CBE students wear clothes and apply ornaments and make-ups but it is according to Tanzanian culture”

Theme 6: Students' Appreciation of the Dress Code Implementation
This theme had a total of 242 (17%) students who praised the College for not only having the dress code in place but also for overseeing its implementation. Some of the strategies mentioned for implementing the dress code policy included refusing students from entering classes as well as barring them from going into or outside the college. Some of their statements include the following:

- “Students who do not wear as instructed are not allowed to enter classes”
- “The college and the gatekeepers are strict when students are getting in or outside the college”
- “At CBE the dress code policy is strict and has been given first priority”
- “The college discipline is high because the College does not allow transparent clothes and trousers hanging under buttocks”

Theme 7: Students' Criticism for Weakness to Enforce the Dress Codes
A total of 255 (18%) students criticized the way the College practically enforced the dress code. They pointed out that the college system was weak in controlling improper dressing because it mainly depended on security guards at the main gates while some students were inappropriately dressed inside the college. Some of their comments are such as:

- “Some girls dress disrespectfully against the rules and make the college to look like an
entertainment centre”

- “Although there is a policy on dress codes there are still some students who distract us from not concentrating on studies because of their inappropriate dresses. Strong measures should be taken against those who are not observing the dress codes”
- “Since we came here we are seeing a contradiction because some students still appear in short and transparent dresses, ear rings and hanging trousers for boys, mini-skirts and trousers with holes totally against the dress code”
- “Some girls are still wearing short dresses like music dancers in order to trap men”

Table 1: Summary of Themes from Oral Presentations and Large Group Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR PERCENTAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dress Code as a Symbol of College’s Image and Morals</td>
<td>478 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dress Habits as a Reflection of Student Image</td>
<td>266 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student Beliefs on Dress Code and Decent Dressing</td>
<td>110 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dress Code as a Representation of Tanzanian Culture</td>
<td>36 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Students’ Appreciation of the Dress Code Implementation</td>
<td>242 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Students’ Criticism for Weakness to Enforce the Dress Codes</td>
<td>255 (18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
In this section the author briefly synthesizes the results and discusses their meaning. Where possible, results have been weaved with literature to provide more insight into the findings.

Based on the naturalistic observations, it is clear that there was a strong conformity for the college dress code as most of the students were seen dressed decently within campus. These results contrasted sharply with the findings of a study conducted by Ikwuba (2012) at Benue State University in Nigeria where "the dressing style of majority of the students was indecent and completely unacceptable". Also these findings differ with the findings in a study based on students' self-reports conducted at Shiraz University, Iran which showed that conformity of clothes to the university's dress code was far below the expected level for both male and female students (Kaveh et al., 2015). The few students at CBE who were violating the dress codes were appearing discordant with the general tenor of student appearance and sometimes they attracted criticism from their peers.

The same support for the dress code is reflected in the students' comments during Oral Presentations and Large Group Discussions. Most students saw the dress code as a reflection of a positive image about their college (35%) and about themselves (19%). This view is confirmed by Ikwuba's (2012) study who had found that indecent dressing can ruin the public image of an academic institution if left unchecked. Stephano (2014) argues that adherence to a dress code in a higher learning institution is a training for enhancing students' future professional image. Along the same line a minority of the participants (18%) still thought CBE was not being strict enough to curb the few who were still undermining the image of the college by violating the dress rules. This resonates with Omede (2011) who argues that it is not enough to have good dress codes in academic institutions but the most important thing is to enforce them. On the other hand, almost the same amount of students (17%) recognized the College's effort to enforce the dress codes and appreciated for the steps taken to enforce the dress rules.

Furthermore, the support for dress code is implied by the 8% of participants who perceived the dress code as being symbolic of women's dignity, a positive academic environment, respect between students and staff and a shield against sexual temptations and HIV/AIDS. Another minority of 3% believed the dress code helped
Tanzanian students to reflect cultural roots and modesty. All of these views/opinions are supported by some scholars. Asaju (2013) and Stephano (2014) believe that since the primary objective of an academic institution is to foster learning, a good dress code in higher learning institutions should be able to promote a positive learning environment instead of discouraging it. On sexual temptations and resultant diseases, Ikwuba (2012) had found that students believed indecent dressing could contribute to sexual immorality and the spread of HIV/AIDS among students and between male academic staff and female students. Chukwudi and Gbakorun (2011) and Ikwuba (2012) point out that a code of dressing has a tendency to give a perception of people's ability to preserve specific heritage and social cultural values.

CONCLUSION
The findings strongly indicate that the majority of students were supportive of the college dress codes and therefore implementation of the rules should be enhanced. However, it is also clear from this study that the dress codes were still challenged or evaded by a few students who decided not to follow them even after having signed a form of conformity.

RECOMMENDATION
This researcher recommends another study which will examine why some students still continue dressing indecently in spite of their knowledge of the requirements of the dress codes. If that study is conducted, more knowledge could be garnered for understanding this subject more and for helping in the formulation of better dress rules that could possibly be accepted by all students in various campuses of higher learning.

REFERENCES


CBE.(2014). College of Business Education Dress Code. Issued to new students as part of College’s Admission and Joining Instructions.


