

**DRESS CODE: A PANACEA TO INDECENT
DRESSING AND CULTURAL BREAKDOWN IN
NIGERIA TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

— — — — —
Esther Omoniyi MOFOLUWAWO

and

'Toyin OYELADE

¹Department of Social Studies;

²Department of Educational Foundations,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education,

Abstract

This paper examines the meaning of dress code and the reason why the dress and dressing are an important aspect of culture. The paper investigated the perception of lecturers' and students' on why dress code is a panacea to indecent dressing and cultural breakdown in Nigerian tertiary institutions. In carrying out the study, simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 students and 100 hundred lecturers. A two-point Likert scale was used to collect data on reduction of indecent dressing and promotion of decency and morality among students. The findings of the study suggest that introduction of dress code and sanctions on defaulters as introduced in some universities, and pasting of posters and handbills that preach against indecent dressing on the campuses could be good measures to control indecent dressing in Nigeria's tertiary institutions.

Introduction

Clothing is one of the basic needs of man. It is a primary need and its primary aim is for covering. Clothing is not meant for beauty, beauty is within that radiate without. In every society, primitive, developing or developed community, there are certain accepted standards of dressing that are considered right, proper and appropriate, while other forms of clothing are looked upon as wrong, improper or inappropriate (Hoin, 1981). She also opines that in a group, there are some social norms which govern the clothing behaviour of that group; such as folkways, customs, mores and laws. Folkways are the usual ways of doing things but are not enforced, while customs are rooted traditions and religious.

Also more, on the other hand are social norms, or taboos. Clothing habits that are related with the control of sexual relationship in a society is part of the mores of a group; organization or community. It is considered a healthy practice to put on clothes that adequately cover certain sensitive parts of the body. Ezinwo (2002) opines that it is one's husband, wife or medical personnel that are allowed with obvious reasons when necessary to see those sensitive areas. For a woman, her breast, armpit, buttock and thigh are to be covered especially in public. Edukugbo (2004) opines that mores are enforced through social sanctions; taboos are negative mores and taboos vary from society to society. Robinson (2001) explains that the role played by clothing in stimulating or diminishing sexual urge is symbolic of the moral standard of a given culture. Indecent dressing that exposes the erogenous zones of female attracts undue attention from males which do lead to sexual harassment that at times leads to rape.

Higher institutions of learning in Nigeria are facing challenges associated with indecent dressing among undergraduate on campuses at an unprecedented rate. As a result, some of the institutions have put in place dress code to counter the ills and to improve the quality of education. Ebonugwu (2004) and Robinson (2001) assert that dress code in Nigeria is not new. Religious groups, government workers, bankers, nursery, primary and secondary school students, marriage and burial ceremonies all have dress codes.

The issue of dress code in tertiary institutions is also, more often than not gender biased. Most of the female, undergraduates, NCE,

polytechnic students have shifted from their socially approved mode of dressing to offensive and provocative styles. Various authors have emphasized this situation. Akubue (2003), Olorri (2004), Ebukugbo (2004), Ebonugwu (2004) and Ezinwo (2002) are of the opinion that very skimpy shirts, short tight blouses that expose the stomach, tiny trousers, topple dress and tops are some of the crazy undergraduate dresses. Some of them do 'sag' and some wear 'spaghetti blouses'. It is obvious that these students dress in such a way that they leave nothing for imagination of their beholder, and that through their dressing, they subject themselves to various forms of sexual embarrassment from the opposite sex including students, lecturers and visitors. Kingsley (2008) listed some reasons for introducing dress code in some tertiary institutions as follows: to maintain dignity of human hood, to curb sexual harassment, to reduce incessant rape on campuses, and to keep cultural value of the people of Nigeria in the areas of dressing and so on.

Why do we put on dress and what is an indecent dressing?

Fashion has traditionally been considered as a form of collective behaviour because it constantly introduces something novel into the society. Anderson and Taylor (2002) explains that people wear clothing for protection and concealment of their bodies, but they also wear fashionable clothing to feel a part of a group and to differentiate themselves. Today students of tertiary institutions put on indecent dresses for the following reasons: to get attention of other people, to stand out among other people, to allure the opposite sex or out of ignorance. Indecent dressing is on the increase in Nigeria today because most people dress up according to the style in vogue to feel among and belong even if they go half-naked.

In most tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the type of fashion being paraded by some students on campus do not give the feeling of acceptable by the other members of academic community. This motivated the authorities of these institutions to enact dress code to curb the ugly incidence from becoming status symbols and among the youths and thereby eroding the societal values and virtue.

Indecent dressing means putting on offensive, unbecoming, improper clothes. Adejumo (2007) and Ajere (2008) opine the issue of

indecent dressing is critical and a complete deviation from traditional purpose of putting on clothes. They stress further that there is a dress code that specifies that ladies should be dressed in a way that would not be nudity, exposure of chest, cleavages back and middle thighs. The reason is because the sight of a lady half nude sends sexual signal to the brain of the guys who if not able to control themselves resort to rape of such a lady.

Wilfred (2007) further asserts that students who resorted to be wearing clothes for the purpose of embarrassing their male counterparts sexually have completely deviated from the purpose of wearing clothes and even Nigerian culture. He affirms that originally, clothes were not meant for fashion or beauty but to cover man's nakedness as contained in the Holy Bible Genesis chapter 3 verse 7 "Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked sewed fig tree leaves together to cover their nakedness".

Commenting further Deji and Ayo (2008) see dressing as a nature designed act or process that helps man to cope with various weather conditions. To them, the types of clothes to be worn are supposed to be determined by the prevailing weather, but they lamented that female students nowadays no longer put on clothes to suit the weather instead they put on whatever they feel satisfy their desire. Clothing that is meant for cover has now become an instrument of destruction on campuses. This is because skimpy, transparent and sexy dresses worn by female undergraduates send wrong signals to the male counterparts. Such dresses that expose the breast or show exact size and shape of buttock can elicit sexual responses in male and sometimes can lead to raping of such a girl: thus her glory of womanhood is abused and perhaps destroyed by someone who would not marry her. Added to these consequences is the vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. This is thus why it is expedient that decent clothes should therefore be worn in our campuses so as to curb incessant vices like rape, sexual harassment, unwanted pregnancy and the spread of various diseases. Indecent dressing should therefore be considered a deviation from the Nigerian culture and a factor in the breakdown of the Nigerian culture.

Dressing as an Aspect of the Nigerian Culture

Culture is a way of life. It is the aggregate of a particular country or groups custom and beliefs. It is a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group. One significant aspect of culture is the mode of dressing in different societies. A particular way of dressing reveals the ethnic background of an individual. In Nigerian society, the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba culture are the three predominant cultures and examining their dressing culture is noteworthy.

The Yoruba women usually wear the traditional Buba as blouse which could be long or short sleeve. It is worn on the wrapper called Iro and usually worn with a matching headscarf or headtie called Gele. The traditional male attire is called a danshiki and is equivalent to a shirt but could be unisex. The Hausa people have a more restricted dress code due to religious beliefs. The men are easily recognizable because of their elaborate dress which is a large flowing gown known as Babbanriga and a robe called Jalabia and Juanni. Men also wear colourful embroidered caps known as Fula and may also wear a Tuareg style turban around this to veil the face (known as Alasho or Tagelmust). The females wear wrappers called Abaya made with colourful cloth with a matching blouse, headtie and shawl.

Modern Igbo traditional attire for men is generally made up of the Ishiagu top which resembles the Danshiki worn by other African groups. It is worn with trousers and can be worn with either a traditional title holder's hat or with the Igbo stripped men's hat known as Ukpu Agwu. For women, a puffed sleeve blouse (influenced by European attire) along with two wrappers and a headtie are worn. This shows that a particular way of dressing reveals the ethnic background of an individual.

However, it is obvious from the brief description of the dressing culture of the three prominent tribes in Nigeria that indecent dressing has no cultural basis; hence, it is a cultural breakdown. Indecent dressing in Nigeria today is one of the pointers to the fact that our cultural heritage has been thrown into the mud; especially as it could lead to a loss of cultural heritage. In fact Ajere (2008) buttresses this assertion by saying that any nation that forgets its cultural heritage has lost its value forever. Ismail (2007) however blames modernisation and civilization for the different styles of dressing that can be found

in the society today; and the opinion of Olaoye (2005) reaffirms this. According to Olaoye, the type of cloth or dress that one wears speaks volumes about a person. Thus, dress serves as a talking guide as well as a decoder which communicates message about a person, place or thing.

Meanwhile, the trend of indecent dressing has been traced to modernity or civilization (Hanzen 2004). Modernity is a concept that has been associated with western nations especially in colonial African. Abiodun (2010) states that discourse of modernity and civilization as propelled by globalization through the acceleration of Information Communication Technology (I.C.T) have spread different modes of dressing across the globe and this has emanated nudity in the society. Osawe (2007) submits that the unspoken dress code of "bare-as-you-dare" is prevailing in Nigerian tertiary institutions among female students all in the name of modernity and civilization.

Deepak (2005) argues that:

"Many feel that indiscipline and rash behaviour are effect of liberation and globalization. Hence, globalization is swallowing up traditional ways of thinking and living, bringing about lopsided development. This is bound to affect the young minds. Everybody feels that American culture is ideal because the economic system has proved itself. We follow the West blindly tripping where they tripped and stumbling where they fall". P. 7

The experts show that cultural right cannot be neglected in any plan aimed at achieving human development (Abiodun, 2010). World over, dressing is seen as a culture but the difference is that each society has pattern that suit their taste. Therefore, there should be proper consideration for the original Nigerian dressing culture in the adaptation of foreign dressing among students of our tertiary institutions today. Indecent dressing is a breakdown in the Nigerian culture as far as dressing is concerned. It is a deviation from the Nigerian culture. It is one of the most controversial and widely discussed breakdown in the Nigerian culture.

Statement of the Problem

Institutional arrangements require certain norms known as code of conduct of dressing designed by the authorities to ensure strict adherence to good dressing habit. This study was therefore designed to determine the extent to which dress code can be used as a panacea to curb indecent dressing and cultural degradation among students of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Hence, the following research questions are hereby raised for the study.

Research Questions

- (i) To what extent can dress code reduce indecent dressing in Nigerian tertiary institutions?
- (ii) To what extent does dress code promote morality and decency among students of tertiary institutions?

Methodology

Two tertiary institutions were selected through random sampling technique. These institutions are Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomoso and Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED), Oyo. In each of the higher institution, one hundred and fifty (150) students were selected giving a total of three hundred (300) students and also fifty (50) lecturers each were selected from the two institutions given a total number of one hundred (100) lecturers. Altogether, a total number of four hundred respondents participated in the study. The response expected from the respondents was a modified Likert scale either of Agreed or Disagreed. Two sets of questionnaires were drawn, the first aimed at finding out from 100 lecturers how dress code can be a panacea to indecent dressing in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The second set is formulated to find out from 300 students how dress code can promote morality and decency among students of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Each of the questionnaire used consist of two sections 'A and B' while Section A was based on the personal data of the respondents, Section B was based on the need being investigated into. Simple percentage was used to analyze the responses of the respondents.

Results and discussion

Research question 1:

To what extent can dress code reduce indecent dressing in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Answer to this question is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Lecturers' Responses

S/N	Statements	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
1	Students of tertiary institutions are matured enough to choose their dress pattern.	75	75%	25	25%
2	Dress code helps to reduce sexual harassment between lecturers and students.	90	90%	10	10%
3	Dress code curbs indecency in the tertiary institutions.	75	75%	25	25%

agreed while 25% disagreed.

Research question 2

To what extent does dress code promote decency and morality among students in tertiary institution?

Answer to this question is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' response

The table above shows that 220% of the respondents (73.2%) accepted

S/N	Statements	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%
1	Dress code promotes and encourages decency and morality among students in tertiary institutions.	220	73.3%	80	26.7%
2	Dress code disallows freedom of dressing.	120	40%	180	60%
3	Dress code put into consideration students' different background.	250	83.3%	50	16.7%

From the foregoing, it has been noted that indecent dressing encourages immorality, indecency and cultural degradation. The study therefore reveals that majority of lecturers and students in tertiary institution believe that dress code improves morality, curbs indecency and reduce sexual harassment. The result also reveals that dress code disallow freedom of dressing since fashion is recognized as a good trend when modesty applied, the principle of dress code in many tertiary institutions is apparently to promote and embrace important values, cleanliness, neatness, modesty and decency. This will portray appropriateness in dressing which reflect initial dignity and sobriety through which staff and students represent the professional status of their respective discipline.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study it could be recommended that students should not be allowed to wear all tight clothes which reveal sensitive parts of the body such as burst, chest and buttocks. Lecturers should not wear inappropriate outfits such as knickers, miniskirts, party wears, beach wears and bathroom slippers. All tertiary institutions should introduce and implement dress code and apply sanctions on defaulters. Posters and handbills which preach against indecent dressing on campuses should be pasted in campuses to inform about the value of decent dressing.

References

- Adejumo, A. O. (2007). De-Sanitation of the Environment. *The Nation*. 5th August, p. 7.
- Ajere, O. (2008). Perception of Fashion Reform on Skimpy Dressing among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. A Contribution in the NJSE 2008, University of Ilorin. Ilorin: Josiwais Printing Press.
- Akubue, B. N. (2003). Preference for Clothing Styles among Female Undergraduates Students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Research Issues in Home Economics Research Association of Nigeria (HERAN).
- Anderson, A. and Taylor, S. (2002). *The Sociology: Return Movement in Fashion and Facts*. USA: Machill Publishers.
- Deepak, K. R. (2005). Dress Code to Please Whom? Online edition of *Indians National* Newspaper. Retrieved from <http://www/htm> on 15 September, 2011.
- Deji, T. S. and Ayo, M. M. (2008). *Dress Code to Kill: New Generation Ideology*. Benin City: Ekwe Printing Press.
- Ebonugwo, M. (2004). University of Lagos Dress Code for Decency. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/2004070700282> on 15 September, 2011.
- Edukugho, E. (2004). Unilag Senate Okay Dress Code for Students.
- Ezinwo, I. (2002). Indecent Dressing among Women. *Independent Monitor*, April 16, p. 10.
- Hoin, M. J. (1981). *Fashion and Mankind: Second Skin Clothing*. Retrieved from <http://www.vanguard.com/articles/2002/f/catures/fed1796/2004.html>
- Ismail, M. (2007). Dressing Code Will Foster Academic Development. *Sunday Tribune* 5th August, p. 7.
- Kingsley, O. C. (2008). *Fashion and Belief*. Enugu: Vision Publications.
- Nwabueze, C. I. (2006). *Fashion Versus Academic Activities*. Unpublished M.Ed Thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nsukka, Nigeria.
- Olaoye, R. A. (2005). Communicating with Clothes: A Study of Cloth among Edo in Nigeria. *Africa Update*, xii (3) 1 – 17.

- Olori, T. (2004). Culture – Nigeria Indecent Dressing Banned on the Campuses IPS – Inter Press Service. Retrieved from <http://www.IPSnews.net/internaasp?10news200010> on 22 September.
- Osawe, T. (2007). Many People who Own and Run Schools are not Educationist. Daily Sun, 4th June, p. 12.
- Robinson, R. I. (2001). Girls Teen Fashion Topic for Chat Room Debate. Retrieved from <http://www.milwankeetecc.wi.us/rime.4303/16.htm> on 30 September 2011.
- Wilfred, G. A. (2007). Influence of Western Culture in Our Fashion Style. Unpublished B.Ed Project in the Department of Social Studies, University of Ado-Ekiti.