IMPACT OF FEMALE SCHOOL TEACHERS' DRESS CODE ON JOB PERFORMANCES: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN SAGA CITY, JAPAN

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Abstract: The study focuses on the dress codes of school teachers in Japan. Japan has relaxed the dress norms of school teachers over the years from a traditional/formal dress to a casual dress. We intended to examine if this change has a significant effect on the self-perceived job performance among school teachers in Japan with the purpose of seeking recommendations for many Asian countries like Sri Lanka in which traditional dress norms applied to teachers have not changed much or at all. A combined qualitative and quantitative study was conducted with three chosen prefectural schools in the Saga city, Japan. The quantitative study (n= 30) was a descriptive cross-sectional study which was done using a face, content and culturally validated self-administered questionnaire. The qualitative study was a thematic analysis based on in-depth interviews conducted using a semi- structured questionnaire until saturation of themes (n=5). Self-perceived comfort level and effect of the dress code on performing their jobs were assessed on a set of given scenarios related to their profession. The responses were recorded on five-point Likert scales. The subjects aged from 26 to 61 years old (mean =44±8 years). Wilcoxon Signed- Rank test indicated that the self-reported mean comfort score for casual dress of 25.75 is significantly higher than that of Kimono (mean score =10.77, p=.000). Most respondents believed that their job performance could be affected by the way they dress. In-depth interviews revealed the casual dress is convenient and comfortable for the duties they perform over traditional Kimono. Thus, Japan being successful in relaxing dress norms while sustaining the quality of education and cultural values sets an example to the countries that are more concerned about embodying cultural symbols in the appearance of teachers rather than their convenience and efficiency.

Key words: dress code; job performances; female; school teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Clothing is one of the essentials of human civilization. Primarily, it covers body and provides protection and bodily comfort (Huitt, 2004). Nevertheless, importance of clothing does not limit to covering human body. It is symbolic of one's culture, traditions, occupations, religion, etc. (Bhui et al., 2008). While clothing involves the subject areas of many fields, it has been largely discussed under sociology and economics in relation to the business world. If the world of work is considered, there are a lot of concerns about the dress of both men and women. Some companies have uniforms while some companies allow only formal clothing. Some other companies allow employees to wear casual clothing. Many studies have been conducted worldwide considering different occupations to find what types of clothing would best suit to the employees. Casual clothing at work is said to be first worn on the U.S west coast, with computer companies allowing programmers to dress comfortably with the purpose of encouraging creativity (Sigh & Kenneth, 2014). At present, 90% of the US office workers work in casual clothes at least once per week (Franz & Norton, 2001). Studies have proved that dressing down policy brings many benefits to the employees: comfort, increased camaraderie, better work environment, better attitudes at work, greater spontaneity, improved relation among employees and no added expenses to the company, eases tensions, improves communication between managers and employees (Franz & Norton, 2001). Accordingly, business casual has been recognized as an effective management tool to improve the organizational efficiency (Franz & Norton, 2001). Nevertheless, Workman and Johnson's study (1994) reported that well-dressed people tend to create first impression of success and power. In support of this idea, it has been revealed that if employees are dressed casually, they may perceive themselves as being in a casual, relaxed, and "laid-back" atmosphere rather than in an atmosphere that requires work, effort, and diligence (Franz & Norton, 2001: Singh & Kenneth, 2014). Hence, it is clear that the good or bad effects of dressing down or dressing up can be vary depending on the type of the dress, the work performed as well as the preferences and the expectations of the employees (Gorden et al., 1982).

The dress of teachers may have different and important implications compared to other professions. The school environment is complex as there are concerns about the dress of both teachers and students. Teaching can be considered as one of the fields in which dress is a great concern (Weber & Mitchell, 2002), as the way they dress can cause modeling wittingly or unwittingly (Simmons, 1996). According to Workman & Freeburg (2010) in a school environment, there can be policies regarding student dress; teachers may have supposed to be to the role models for students; and novice teachers may experience conflict between social and professional roles. Further studies have revealed that dress code policies may need to reflect school's values (Freeburg et al., 2016). Therefore, decisions regarding the dress of teachers is very important. Millions (2004) states the importance of professional dress for teachers because it has positive impact on student behavior. In support of this ideas Sampson (2016) reveals that wearing formal dress is an important component in the enhancement of the school climate. According to Simmons (1996) the dress sends a strong message about who teachers are as teachers as well as professionals.

Nevertheless, Bulter & Roesel's study (1989) indicates that neither formal nor informal style can be considered as most favorable overall but informally dressed teachers are generally seen as more sympathetic and fair while the more formally dressed teachers are viewed as more knowledgeable and controlled. In support of this idea Rollman's study (1980) reveals informally dressed teachers are perceived as friendly and flexible, while teachers dressed formally are perceived as most organized. On the other hand, studies based on the administrative view of the dress of teachers have revealed that formal dress can be considered as a positive assert that affect student achievement emphasizing that strong dress code beliefs do exist among administrators (Hudgins, 1971; Lang, 2010).

Moreover, teachers' dress has undergone changes as the dress down policies had implemented. Nevertheless, countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam and Myanmar have not relaxed dressing of female school teachers much or at all. Researcher's studies about Sri Lankan female school teachers' dress show that their dress at school (Saree) has been decided based on cultural grounds and has never changed with the time until now (Jayasooriya et al., 2020). Further, Sri Lankan teachers having worn Saree at school find difficulties in catering into dynamic role of the teacher, which results in decline of the perceived efficiency of their performances as a teacher and hence majority of teachers (54%) prefer to wear casual dresses considering comfort in teaching and performing extra-curricular activities including the easiness of handling the dress and moving wearing it. Nevertheless, the study revealed that, teachers wear Saree unwillingly just to be conform to the existing dress norms (Jayasooriya et al., 2019). While many Asian countries still practice traditional or formal clothing, Japan has shifted from traditional dress to formal dress in the post-World War II period (Francks, 2015) and gradually to casual dress as at present, which is a more relaxed form of clothing.

In addition to the change of their dress code, Japanese system of education is famous in the world due to its superior features that have made it one of the most advanced in the world. Japanese have nine years of compulsory education (Nemoto, 1999). Japanese students are well-known for their intelligence in mathematics and science and also as students who are well disciplined, rarely committing school violence and have little contact with drugs and alcohol (Nemoto, 1999). Their higher education system is also renowned as a highly prestigious system (Yonzawa, 2002). Hence, choosing of Japanese female school teachers for this study will enlighten us how the relaxing of dress norms has impacted on their work performances and to maintain the superiority of their school education system while considerable number of studies have stated the importance of a professional dress for teachers. Hence, Japan stepping forward with casual dress while many other Asian countries still get their teachers to wear traditional clothing at school can be seen as an interesting academic and a professional decision to be studied further. Therefore, the current study intends to understand the negative or positive circumstances that Japanese female teachers confront as a result of the changed dress policies. Study also seeks learn lessons from the Japanese context for the benefit of other countries which still practice traditional dress policies.

2. METHODS

The study was conducted in the Saga city, which is the capital city of Saga prefecture in Kyushu Island, Japan. Three prefectural schools were purposively selected for the study. They were mixed schools and they formed a sample considered homogenous as the social status, economic backgrounds and the human and physical resources available in the schools were not drastically different according to the background survey. A combined qualitative and quantitative study was conducted from April to November, 2018. The qualitative study was a thematic analysis based on in-depth interviews conducted using a semi- structured questionnaire until saturation of themes. Accordingly, it was consisted of five respondents selected by purposive sampling. Qualitative study was carried out with the support of a pre-prepared semi-structured interview schedule.

The quantitative study was a descriptive cross-sectional study (n=30) and the sample was consisted of randomly selected equal number of female school teachers from the three selected schools. Participation to the study was voluntary and the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study anytime. A face, content and culturally validated self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the study sample. The questionnaire was prepared in English and translated into Japanese and pre tested with 6 staff members of the university before use. The questionnaire was constituted of few sections in which the first three sections aimed at collecting socio-demographic data including the background of the school and the nature of work. Other sections were dedicated to collect data on expenses for dresses, dress preferences, perceived comfort levels in given eight situations (see Table 1), perceived formality and awareness about given nine situations, perceptions on body exposure, perceived ability to communicate through dress in a given eight situations, level of external influences from five selected groups of people (teachers and friends, family members and relatives, school administration, school community and the general public), perceived efficiency and effectiveness in performing four given tasks (ironing, washing, dressing and walking after dressed) wearing traditional and casual dresses, perceived effectiveness in teaching and performing extra-curricular activities wearing traditional and casual dresses, perceived vulnerability to risks, level of satisfaction of the dress/work and also the perceived level of impact of dress for job performances measured by five given statements.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software performing non parametric tests and descriptive data, while the results of the qualitative interviews and the general opinion statements given in the questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview results which were transcribed were categorized in order to find different and similar ideas. Afterwards they were analyzed generating codes and themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 *Japanese Schools and the Role of the Teacher*

Japanese education is compulsory for nine years: starting from six years old to fourteen years old. Students are required to spend six years in the elementary school, three years in the middle school and three years in the high school (Nemoto, 1999). Japanese teaching and learning activities are creative, modern and dynamic. They promote student centred learning. Hence, use of different types of activities in teaching and learning process can be seen. Moreover, Japanese use variety of teaching aids from most traditional form to most advanced forms including green boards, chalk, papers, text books, computers, video and Robot Assisted Language Learning (RALL).

Elementary and middle schools of Japan start at 8.30 a.m. in the morning. Lunch break is given at 12.30 p.m. and it lasts for 40 minutes. There are normally four classes/periods before the lunch break and one lasts for 40-45minutes. There is a 5-10 minutes break between two periods. During the lunch break students have many duties, as the lunch is provided by the school. They are supposed to carry the meals to the classroom, serve food and clean up afterwards. Teachers' role during the lunch break is also important. Teachers and students eat lunch together. They normally arrange their desks and chairs facing each other to have lunch. After the meal, there is a 20-minutes free time. Students use this time for cleaning the classrooms and common places. Afternoon classes begin afterwards. Lower elementary schools do not have classes after lunch. Upper elementary, middle and high schools have five or six afternoon classes per day. Classes finish before 4:00 p.m. The students normally do not go home after classes. They have after school clubs (*Bukatsu*), which are supervised by the teachers. These clubs are either sports clubs or clubs based on some subjects such as music and dancing, which help to gain deeper understanding about the subjects that they are interested in. Students leave school around 6:00 p.m. or later than that. Hence, teachers too have to stay after lessons to engage with the club activities. One teacher who was interviewed said: "The duration I am officially supposed to work is from 8:00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. But there are lots of things to do. So, I go back home around 7.30 p.m. almost every day"**.** Even during school vacations certain club activities continue. Hence, teachers have to attend to them. Another important thing about Japanese schools is, they do not have a janitorial service to do with the cleaning of the school. The students have to clean the school by themselves. Japanese schools allow time for this purpose every day and it is called "*Souji*". The teachers, including school administrators such as vice-principal and principal join with the students in cleaning the school premises. Therefore, the role of Japanese school teachers is very complex: not only do they involve in teaching the subject matters but also many other tasks. This has helped Japanese education system and school children to become top in the world. Moreover, Japanese female teachers' dress is convenient in performing their dynamic role as they have been given freedom to wear relaxed casual dresses.

Therefore, it is justifiable to state that, Japanese dress norms for female school teachers are in favour of boosting efficiency and effectiveness of the tasks which are performed by

teachers. Nevertheless, researcher's study about Sri Lanka shows that their activeness have been restricted to a greater extent by the dress Saree that they wear at school, as Saree is a dress with a complex design that restricts the movements of legs and hands and there are reported incidents of teachers being away from supporting students with activities outside the classroom considering difficulty of handling the dress (Jayasooriya et al., 2019). Hence, it is clear that, if Sri Lankan situation is concerned job performance of the female teachers may have been negatively affected by the complexity of the dress. This can also be true and applicable to any other country where complex dresses are used at work place.

3.1.2. *Socio-economic Characteristics of the Sample*

All the participants were from mixed and prefectural schools. All of them stated that they use their private cars to travel to the schools. Age of the participants under the study ranged from 26 to 61 years. The mean age of the sample was 44 years. Working experience of the participants ranged from six months to 37 years. Mean value of working experience was 18 years. They were all graduates holding degrees from faculties of education and/or teacher licenses. In Japan, it is a must to have a university degree to become a school teacher. As per the records the average monthly income was 210,846 Japanese Yen (JPY). Average cost of a dress worn to school was 30,642 JPY. According to the information provided, respondent teachers taught to different age groups: elementary (23%), lower secondary (40%) and upper secondary (23%). They taught different subjects. The elementary school teachers have stated that they teach many subjects. There were teachers teaching Arts, Commerce, English, Japanese, Music, Physical Education, Science and Social Sciences in the sample. Majority of them were Japanese language teachers (26%). Teachers rated the degree of involvement of physical activities in the subjects they teach. There were 26% of teachers who stated the physical involvement is medium and there were 63% teachers who stated that physical movements in teaching are high or very high, while there were only 11% of responses reported low or very low. Accordingly, it seems that most of the subjects that the teachers in the sample teach involve physical activities. Furthermore, according to the data provided, a teacher works from 3 hours up to 29 hours a week, with an average of 16 hours.

3.1.3.   *Preferences and Perceptions about Dress Code*

All the respondent teachers marked casual dress as the current dress as well as their preferred dress over Kimono, which they normally wear for formal functions. Furthermore, they were asked to rate the level of comfort of casual dresses and Kimono (assuming if they were supposed to wear it). They rated the level of comfort on a five-point Likert scale. They were given 8 situations to rate (see Table 1). The finding clearly shows that Kimono is uncomfortable at all the given situations compared to the casual dress. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test also proved that casual dress is significantly more comfortable than Kimono ($p < 0.05$).

Table 1 Comparison of perceived comfort of Kimono and casual dress.

	Situation	Mean score for casual dress	Mean score for Kimono
1.	During sunny/ hot days	3.14	1.14
2.	During rainy/cold days	3.11	1.18
3.	During pregnancy	3.04	1.18
4.	During sports meet	3.07	1.14
5.	During special events (e.g.: school prize giving)	3.00	1.18
6.	During school trips	3.18	1.23
7.	While doing physical activities, including walking	3.07	1.23
8.	Weekend events	3.00	1.27

Source: Sample survey data

Note: Likert Scale: 1- very uncomfortable to 5- very comfortable

Furthermore, respondents were also asked questions regarding the ability that a dress has to communicate in different situations on a five-point scale (1-very low and 5- very high). They were given eight different situations namely: express oneself as a teacher, to maintain social status, to show that you are trustworthy, to show your seriousness, to express your authority, to express nationalism, to get social acceptance and recognition, to maintain distance between you and your students. A single variable was computed for the analysis. Majority of the respondents believed that the ability to communicate through dress they wear is moderate (mean =24.43). The questions related to efficiency of the dress in four given situations (as shown in Table 2) were measured by the time factor and the respondents were asked to mark the time spent. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test revealed that the majority of the school teachers finds that the time taken for doing things was significantly shorter when wearing casual dresses compared to Kimono.

Table 2 Mean scores of efficiency measures in terms of time.

Description	Dress	Mean Score	P
Time taken for ironing	Casual dress	3.22	
	Kimono	2.15	0.014
Time taken for washing	Casual dress	3.07	
	Kimono	1.63	0.005
Time taken for getting dressed	Casual dress	3.26	
	Kimono	1.50	0.002
Time taken for walking with the dress	Casual dress	3.33	
	Kimono	1.60	0.001

Source: Same as Table 1

Note: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test Sig. (2 tailed) value, $p<0.05$.

Likert Scale: 1- very high to 5- very low

Respondents ranked the degree of influence that they may have in deciding what to wear at school on a five-point Likert scale (1=very low and 5= very high), from five different groups of people: teachers and friends, family members and relatives, school administration, school community and the general public. The mean score was 3 and it shows that the external influences are moderate. Furthermore, no respondent reported any inconveniences that were caused or any accidents that they faced due to their current casual dress. Despite their experience in vulnerability to accidents, they were also asked to rank the perceived risk on a five-point Likert scale; 1= very high and 5= very low. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test proved that the perceived safety of wearing casual dress (mean score=3.4) is significantly higher compared to Kimono (mean score= 2.1) ($p<0.05$).

Moreover, the respondents were asked to mention if they are satisfied with the current dress code on a five-point Likert scale: 1- Highly dissatisfied, 3- neither dissatisfied nor satisfied and 5- highly satisfied. This resulted in a mean score of 3.5, which means many are marginally satisfied with their current casual dress code. What type of dress (e.g. uniform, which is very common in Japanese organizations) could further increase their satisfaction, was beyond the scope of this survey? Respondents of the study were also given five statements to mark their level of agreement on a Likert scale (Table 3). Mean score of the single computed variable was 15.79. This shows participant's views were moderate in general.

Table 3 Measures on to what extent the dress affects job performances

	Situation	Mean score
1.	The dress I wear to school positively affects productivity of my teaching	3.18
2.	The dress I wear to school positively affects productivity of other duties I perform, except teaching. (e.g.: Extracurricular activities)	3.11
3.	Effectiveness of my teaching is positively affected by the dress I wear.	3.11
4.	Effectiveness of multiple duties I perform at school other than teaching is positively affected by the dress I wear.	3.18
5.	The dress I wear to school is supportive to perform my duties.	3.21

Source: Same as Table 1
Notes: Descriptive statistics
Likert scale: 1= not at all to 5= yes, certainly

3.1.4 *Japanese Teachers' Comments on Dress Code and its Relation to Job Performances*

Interviews were conducted with five teachers, who were willing to express their ideas. Key responses of the interviewees were analysed using thematic analysis generating codes and themes as shown in the Table 4. These interviews, observations of old photographs and available literature revealed that the female school teachers in Japan have worn Kimono/Yukata at schools before World War II and very formal clothing like suit afterwards.

At present Japanese female teachers wear simple casual dresses to school. Though it was difficult to find written evidences on why the dress was changed from Kimono/Yukata and formal dresses and eventually to casual dresses, it was revealed from the interviews that this was basically to promote teacher-student interactions, make it convenient for teachers to work in school (even during hot and humid summer) and also to promote efficiency and productivity of the teaching learning process, as relaxed dresses enable teachers to walk around the class freely and to engage actively in teaching. Figure 1 depicts a real classroom situation in which a teacher, with a decent casual dress, is engaged in teaching music and students are carefully following her.

Figure 1 A Japanese teacher engaged in teaching in a

According to the in-depth interviews, the majority believed that, in contrast to the traditional Kimono, the casual dress is comfortable and easy to handle, thus best suits as a dress code for teachers. Moreover, since casual dress is easy to clean and dry the teachers found it appropriate as a regular wear. They were all satisfied with their current dress code. They clearly explained how important it is, for them to have a relaxed dress, as the role of the teacher in the school requires lots of movements. Japanese teachers are not allowed to wear revealing dresses and they too have some standards related to body exposure, colours and designs, as the participants of the interviews stated. Accordingly, they are supposed to wear decent casual dresses. When deciding a dress code to work, teachers believed that the major concerns should be exposing the body as less as possible, formality and the easiness to handle. Teachers never wanted to wear Kimono at school.

They stated that they like Kimono but not as a regular work attire. According to some of the respondents, considerable number of teachers ride bicycles to the school and it is not comfortable if they are dressed in a complex way. Furthermore, the respondents explained that the role of the teacher in Japanese schools is very dynamic. Therefore, a dress which is convenient is an important requirement for them. They believed that dress can be a mental and physical support for teachers to perform their duties if it does not bother them. They also added that teaching cannot be done wearing heavy and tight dresses. Teachers also believed that colours that annoy children or that are quite bright should not be worn at schools.

Table 4 Coding framework for the results of the interviews from Japanese teachers

Participant comment	Initial coding	Categories	Themes
Very formal clothing is not easy to handle. I change clothes depending on the situation to look decent (Interviewee 1)	Not very formal Easy to handle	Look fairly formal and easy to handle	Decent and formal looking dress
Should be clean and easy to handle. Should look formal (Interviewee 2)	Easy to handle Look formal		
Should be easy to handle especially in an emergency. Does not exposure bodies because there are lot of teenage students. (Interviewee 3)	Protective in an emergency Less exposure	Less exposure and easy to handle	
Japanese women hardly wash or iron Kimono as they do not usually use them. Not good as a regular wear (Interviewee 4)	Kimono is not good as a regular dress	Simple and regular	Simple and regular wear
An official dress should look formal and simple (Interviewee 5)	Formal and simple		

Source: Personal Interview responses

3.2. Discussion

Japanese teachers wear relaxed, decent looking casual dresses at school. Everyone liked their current dress norms as they find it comfortable and convenient. A few teachers preferred to wear Kimono for special events and weekend events in the school, but not every day. They perceived casual dresses more comfortable compared to their traditional dress. Respondent teachers did not necessarily believe that their dress affect non-verbal communication in a considerable manner. Japanese teachers were not necessarily forced by an authority, community or family members to wear certain clothes. They found casual dress more effective and efficient in terms of time taken to perform certain tasks. Teachers' perceived risk was significantly high for Kimonos.

Teachers believed that an efficient dress should be easy to handle, light, average length, simple design, easy to maintain and wear, does not restrict hand or leg movements, and look formal and decent: preferably no decoration, single colour, and does not expose their bodies. In line with some of the previous research findings (Franz & Norton, 2001) the results revealed that the casual dress of Japanese school teachers is favourable to their teaching career. Proving Gorden, et al's (1982) idea, the preferences of Japanese teachers are taken into consideration as their current dress norms are in favour of their preferences. Furthermore, while Japanese school students have a busy schedule, they nonetheless seem to be well disciplined, especially during lessons and lunch break. This shows that present findings are in contrast with Sampson's (2016) ideas of wearing a formal dress by teachers for the positive enhancement of the school climate. Moreover, the results of the study prove that an employee should be able to be professional without having to dress like one because employees' behavior and the communication should be professional while employees may dress casual.

Similarly, the behaviour of the Japanese teachers found to be dressed up: formal and decent, along with a well-developed education system and a curriculum and it is evident that Japanese students are well disciplined and respectful to them disapproving previous research findings which stated the importance of formal clothing of teachers for student achievements (Lang, 2010) and student behavior (Millions, 2004). Hence, it shows that it is behavior and the decency that matter for a teacher at school than the fact that the dress is cultural/traditional or modern as long as it is decent.

4.   CONCLUSION

Japan, which is the third largest economy of the world having a very good education system, presently allows its school teachers to wear casual dresses to schools by relaxing their traditional/formal past dress norms. The quality of the dresses is defined to ensure less exposure, less decorations and fancy look ensuring the simplicity and decency. Japanese teachers basically believed that an efficient dress should have some qualities such as: lightness, average length, simple design, easiness to maintain, wear and handle, preferably no decoration, single colour and also a dress that does not restrict hand/leg movements. Teachers believed their casual dresses were more comfortable than Kimono ($p < 0.05$), efficient, time saving, less vulnerable to risks compared to Kimono ($p<0.05$) and formal looking. Hence, they prefer their current casual dress and believe that it supports the dynamic role that they are supposed to play in schools. Therefore, it should be understood that appearance of a teacher should be formal to a certain extent without challenging the comfort and preference of the wearer as it can cause declining of the performances.

Accordingly, Japan sets an example to countries such as Sri Lanka, which are more concerned about cultural symbolism and socially constructed knowledge about the appearance of teachers (Weber and Mitchell, 2002). Japan has managed to relax dress norms years ago and is still sustaining the quality classrooms, quality of its teaching and learning activities along with admirable teacher personalities. Hence, efforts should made to focus more on the teacher personality and the school curriculum rather than making their appearance symbolic of culture.

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