

THE SCHOOL UNIFORM IN EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL HISTORY: FROM UNIFORMITY TO MODERN EDUCATIONAL REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The school uniform has historically functioned as a regulatory tool for students' external appearance, reflecting the prevailing social, cultural, and political values that have shaped the educational policies of each era. Throughout European history, the uniform was instituted as a means of discipline, social control, and the reinforcement of collective identity, particularly during the formation of national education systems. Its establishment was linked to the logic of mass education, the promotion of equality, and the maintenance of a neutral, serious educational environment. However, from the second half of the 20th century onwards, post-war societal changes and the assertion of individual freedoms gradually led to a questioning of the universal and standardized use of school uniforms. The educational process progressively adapted to broader social transformations that marked a shift toward social emancipation, recognition of diversity, and the adoption of more progressive pedagogical approaches.

In the current European educational landscape, dress codes remain in effect, even though school uniforms have been abolished in many countries. Students' appearance continues to be regulated through informal or formal rules, shaping the dress protocol within the school environment. The relationship between clothing, individual expression, and respect for the school setting raises dilemmas, as freedom of choice is at times perceived as progress and at other times as a threat to social cohesion. A comparative geographical perspective highlights diverse perceptions regarding the role of the uniform, confirming the close connection between educational policy, social class, and cultural norms. Considering the changing social values of the 21st century, revisiting regulatory frameworks on dress emerges as a significant process of educational adjustment.

Keywords: School uniform, school appearance, social identity, social cohesion, freedom of expression.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The school uniform, as an institutional practice developed and established within the framework of modern educational systems, clearly reflects the historical shifts and pedagogical conceptions that have shaped the evolution of European education from the 19th century to the present day. School attire was not merely a matter of daily practicality, but a symbolic expression of the student's relationship with institutions of authority, social norms, and educational ideals. From the early forms of structured formal instruction within medieval monastic circles to contemporary pedagogical theories of equality, school clothing has

mirrored prevailing notions of discipline, order, and personal identity, as well as how children perceive and express themselves (Heathorn, 2000).

During the late Middle Ages, education was a privilege of the few and was mainly associated with ecclesiastical institutions. Students in monastic schools often wore garments similar to those of monastic orders, not only to enforce discipline but also to cultivate a sense of submission and alignment with the spiritual mission of the community. The uniform held both functional and symbolic significance, serving as a boundary between everyday life and the religious-spiritual pursuit of knowledge (Orme, 2006). It was a sartorial affirmation of the child's separation from their social background and their integration into a strictly regulated, hierarchical, and disciplined learning environment shaped by religious and normative rules.

The advent of the Renaissance was accompanied by new forms of school organization, often supervised either by state authorities or religious reform movements originating from both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Despite the shift away from monastic exclusivity, the idea of uniformity in school attire persisted and was even reinforced. School uniforms were systematically adopted as a means of controlling both the body and the mind, serving the disciplinary logic of emerging state education. Clothing became a tool for reinforcing collective identity and submission to the rules of the educational institution (Foucault, 1975).

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the school uniform became an integral part of mass education, which developed alongside the formation of nation-states. The student's appearance now formed part of the school's public image and a mechanism of social normalization. The school uniform functioned not only as a tool of social distinction but also to mitigate social disparities between children from working-class and bourgeois backgrounds. The idea of standardized clothing for all students, regardless of social origin, represented an expression of Enlightenment demands for equality within the field of education (Green, 2013).

The experience of the 20th century, especially following the two World Wars and the strengthening of social institutions by organized states, led to more open and progressive perceptions of education. In many European countries, the mandatory school uniform was reduced or abolished. This shift reflects the cultural transformations brought about by the emergence of individual rights, critical thinking, and the emphasis on personal expression within schools. However, in traditional or private schools, the school uniform was maintained and reinforced as a symbol of identity and prestige, highlighting the persistent tension between freedom and discipline within the educational environment (Brunsma, 2002).

This article examines how attire within the school setting is linked to the historical phases of European education and how the notion of the school uniform assumes new meaning in the 21st century. The aim is to analyze the evolution of this practical application not as an isolated phenomenon, but as an element of a dynamic process concerning the formation of educational culture, the relationship with state authority, and the way society perceives, interprets, and evaluates the function and purpose of schooling. The central inquiry addresses, on the one hand, the historical development of the school uniform within the European educational context and, on the other hand, its contemporary role, which is shaped by the tension between the desire for autonomy and the need for institutional cohesion.

2.0 THE SCHOOL UNIFORM IN THE EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN EDUCATION

Clothing within the educational sphere has historically served as an indicator of the school's social, cultural, and institutional function throughout the European historical trajectory. Before the establishment of state education systems, schools were organized in close association with the Church or urban educational structures, and clothing operated not only as a means of differentiation but also as a symbolic practice. In the monastic and ecclesiastical schools of the Middle Ages, students adhered to specific dress codes that reflected the strict hierarchy, commitment to spiritual discipline, and their separation from the lay population. The simplicity and monochrome nature of the uniform expressed integration into an institutionalized discourse associated with catechism and discipline (Le Goff, 2005).

In early modern universities, particularly from the 16th to the 18th century, student attire functioned both as a marker of social status and as a signifier of academic identity. In certain universities in Central and Northern Europe, students wore cloaks and distinctive head coverings; in some cases, they were even entitled to carry a sword, a symbol of the masculine, elite character of their education and of the legal protections they enjoyed within the institutional framework of the university. In this way, clothing made social hierarchy visible and reinforced acceptance of one's social status according to the norms and stereotypes of the period (Clark, 2006).

During the 18th century, with the ascendancy of Enlightenment ideals and the reorganization of schools under state supervision, the need for uniformity and rationalization of the educational process became prominent, ushering in new forms of discipline. Student clothing began to exhibit standardized features, especially in military, classical, or technical schools under the supervision of the state or local aristocracy. The uniform gradually evolved into a mechanism of discipline and social adaptation, while simultaneously serving as a tool for internalizing rules and cultivating a collective school ethos that preserved social order and discipline (Foucault, 1975).

The institutionalization of school uniforms in 19th-century public schools was closely tied to the rise of mass state education systems that developed after the Industrial Revolution. As states sought to incorporate large numbers of children into the classroom, the enforcement of a unified appearance functioned as a means of managing behavior and organizing daily school life. The school uniform was treated as a mechanism of assimilation, a way to silence social inequalities and strengthen the collective identity of the student body. At the same time, it served the ideal of the disciplined, industrious, obedient student, as conceived within the educational policy frameworks of the nation-states (Bowen, 2003).

The school uniform stands as one of the most emblematic examples of the relationship between clothing, social class, and educational discipline. In the early state-run schools, the standardized uniform went beyond enforcing external conformity; it also functioned as a means of integrating students into a unified and disciplined social organism. At a time when education was expanding into broader social strata, attire became a tool for combating class distinctions. Students, regardless of their social or economic background, were expected to adhere to the same rules and conform to a common school image, emphasizing individual obedience to the institution and social uniformity (Baudrillard, 1998).

Despite variations across countries, the uniform served as a central symbol of "public" and "normative" education, imbued with both ideological and moral significance. Uniform

appearance among students was a key element in school regulations and part of a broader view that education molds citizens who are expected to conform to institutional standards of behavior and presentation (Trentmann, 2016).

The 19th century, marked by the dynamic development of industrialism and the expansion of public education, led to the strengthening of national identity through schooling. The school uniform became a determining factor in integrating children into the social fabric and in maintaining the disciplined functioning of the school community. In many industrialized nations, the uniform was the first form of state intervention in education, aiming to eliminate social differences and enforce a unified ideology of discipline (Foucault, 1975). Its implementation was linked to the modernization of educational institutions, as 19th-century education policies sought to bolster national identity and impose social norms through the standardization of the school environment.

At the same time, this was tied to the conception of childhood as a life stage requiring strict guidance. Clothing symbolized “proper” behavior and rule compliance, while failure to conform or resistance to school discipline was often equated with social deviance. An ideological mechanism took shape, expressed in various ways across schools in Northern Europe and Britain, where the institutionalization of uniform dress, accompanied by strict rules for maintaining school appearance, was directly connected to the model of military disciplinary structure, which had a profound influence on everyday school practices (Dant, 1999). In England in particular, student attire was associated with the tradition of private schools, which, although slightly differentiated, maintained a strict standard of regulated dress until the end of the 19th century.

The school uniform became established as an element of disciplinary normality and pedagogical control, reflecting state aspirations to shape a unified educational culture capable of fostering a sense of belonging and minimizing visible social differences within the school environment. The association between clothing and childhood identity during this period offers a deeper understanding of how attire is interwoven with the broader processes of educational and social organization (Hedges & Schneider, 2005).

From the mid-19th century to the 20th, the social and political transformations in Europe brought significant changes to the education system, simultaneously affecting students’ modes of dress. The emergence of new pedagogical conceptions, combined with broader social restructurings, led to the gradual reshaping of both school organization and students' outward appearance, which acquired an increasingly disciplinary and ideological character. From the 1950s onward, the gradual weakening of strict dress codes in schools was linked to the spread of progressive pedagogical approaches and the growing recognition of the importance of individual freedom within the educational context (Hargreaves, 2001).

Despite continuing pressure to maintain disciplinary standards, public schools began to adjust their dress policies, adopting a more flexible approach aligned with the social and political developments of post-war Europe. By contrast, private schools retained stricter dress codes, reflecting patterns of social distinction and a desire for privileged education associated with the upper class. The differences between public and private schools became increasingly pronounced, with public schools facing strong social and political pressures to adapt to new

social realities, while private schools remained more firmly attached to traditional values and strict school discipline (Anderson, 2006).

The relaxation of strict dress codes was closely associated with the recognition of the value of progressive educational theories that dominated the second half of the 20th century. Theories advanced by thinkers such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire emphasizing individuality, personal expression, and critical thinking, introduced a new perspective on the function of schools and their relationship with society.

In public schools, the gradual easing of strict dress rules was linked to the need to adapt the education system to evolving pedagogical theories, which focused on promoting students' individuality and autonomy. The acknowledgment of the importance of freedom and creativity in student development contributed to a transformation of school identity, which until then had been constrained by the rigid mandates of school attire (Dewey, 1938).

The social upheavals of the 20th century, coupled with the recognition of individual rights, laid the groundwork for a fundamental re-evaluation of the education system, impacting institutional structures and their organizational functioning. At the core of these changes were progressive pedagogical theories, especially those of Paulo Freire, which emphasized the need to create a school environment that does not merely transmit knowledge, but also fosters critical thinking, active participation, and freedom of expression. Within this new educational framework, strict and restrictive dress guidelines began to be regarded as outdated, as it became evident that fostering student autonomy, including personal expression and self-determination, is an integral part of the learning process. Consequently, the acceptance of diversity and the promotion of critical thinking became the cornerstones for shaping a more open, participatory, and democratic educational environment (Freire, 1996).

Education thus moved toward redefining the relationship between students and schools, resulting in greater freedom and diversity in students' dress, embracing respect for individual identity and fostering a sense of social belonging. However, this evolution was not confined to European schools alone; it extended to former colonies, where European educational policies continue to exert influence. Despite the political independence of many colonial countries, school attire remained a strong element of their educational heritage. The school uniform, once associated with colonial oppression, evolved into a symbol of modernization and a drive for excellence in education, even in countries striving to shed their colonial legacy. The persistence of this tradition was tied to younger generations' aspirations to re-establish the school as a site for cultivating social values and integrating into the global cultural landscape. Thus, the school uniform, as an institution, remained a symbol of social uniformity and institutional identity, while in some cases continuing to reflect the national and cultural values of these countries (Mamdani, 2002).

The influence of European pedagogical traditions in former colonies was pivotal in shaping how educational systems conceptualized their societal role. The notion of school discipline as well as the acceptance of the uniform as a tool for social awareness remains a part of the cultural and educational identity of these countries, even decades after the colonial era (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

It is notable that, while 20th-century Europe witnessed a gradual move away from strict dress codes with the rise of progressive pedagogical theories and the strengthening of individual freedoms, former colonial territories retained the school uniform as an instrument of cultural imposition and social control. In Europe, the relaxation of dress codes signaled a process of democratization and social equality, whereas in the colonies, the uniform remained largely unchanged, serving as a symbol of submission and social distinction (Said, 1978; Hargreaves, 2001).

The social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly following mass mobilizations for student rights and labor movements, intensified the trend toward greater freedom of expression and individuality with regard to student dress. The end of the century marked a gradual departure from strict control and the imposition of standardized attire, promoting individuality as an integral part of the educational experience. This soft transition affected not only European educational systems but also those in former colonies, which were entering periods of independence and undergoing profound social transformations (Rury & Mendez, 2025).

In Europe, the gradual lifting of dress restrictions was associated with broader processes of modernization and the expansion of democratic values, as younger generations more boldly introduced the notion of personal freedom and individual autonomy into social and educational life. In many countries, schools began to adopt more relaxed dress policies, with public schools allowing for greater diversity in students' appearance, while private schools often retained traditional, stricter requirements. This divergence between the two types of schools reflected broader social differences and the values that shaped teaching and education (Ghosh, 2011).

2.1 The School Uniform as a Pedagogical and Social Phenomenon

For many years, the school uniform was a central feature of the educational environment, encompassing social, pedagogical, and political dimensions. The 20th century was a period of significant social and political upheavals, during which pedagogical theories evolved, influencing perceptions surrounding the use of school uniforms (Gellner, 1983). As an educational practice, the school uniform consistently functioned as a tool for reinforcing discipline and shaping the collective identity of the school, while also contributing to the reduction of social disparities among students by promoting a sense of equality and integration within the school setting. The aim of uniformity was to promote shared value frameworks and strengthen students' sense of collective identity, regardless of their social or economic background (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Moreover, the adoption of standardized attire operated preventively against visible social distinctions, diminishing the visibility of inequality and fostering a feeling of belonging to the school community.

However, from a sociological perspective, the school uniform is not limited to symbolizing uniformity, it also functions as a mechanism for reproducing existing hierarchical relationships and disciplinary practices within the school environment, reinforcing the normative character of the institution. Dress codes, often imposed by the school system, do not merely act as tools of assimilation, but also mirror social class and the hierarchies preserved in the wider social structure (Lynch, 1989). In more rigid educational environments, such as private schools, the school uniform served to reproduce a structured, class-based system that reinforced the perception of "lower" and "upper" social positions, thus bolstering the notion of social conformity. Conversely, in public schools, despite the presence of uniforms, the influence of

emerging pedagogical movements that emphasized individuality and creative expression introduced a more flexible view of school attire, shaping the way students experienced their interaction with the educational institution (Apple, 2004).

The divide between public and private education becomes particularly evident in the implementation of dress codes. In private schools, strict uniform enforcement was closely tied to traditional values and the maintenance of social hierarchies, often aiming to highlight their aristocratic character and facilitate social differentiation among students (Marginson, 2007). In contrast, public schools tended to relax uniform requirements, especially with the rise of progressive pedagogical theories and the aspiration for equality and solidarity among the student population (Dewey, 1916). The relaxation of dress codes after World War II reflected broader social and political reforms that emphasized personality development and independent thought, values in direct opposition to the rigidity and discipline of the past (Chisholm, 2004).

European influence in the colonies was undeniably decisive in shaping the educational systems and social structures of occupied regions. In the field of education, the imposition of school uniforms became one of the most characteristic mechanisms of colonial policy. The uniform did not merely function as a tool for social conformity and discipline; it was also directly linked to the imposition of Western values and the social hierarchy promoted by colonial regimes (Said, 1978). As a symbol of authority, the school uniform reinforced distinctions between colonizers and the colonized, serving not only as an instrument of social conformity but also as a means of emphasizing inequality. In colonial societies, the mandatory student uniform was the outward expression of colonial dominance, making clear who belonged to the ruling class and who to the subjugated. The strict enforcement of dress codes in schools was designed to promote and reinforce a uniform image that accentuated the divide between the worlds of colonial power and the oppressed communities.

Notably, even after the formal independence of former colonial nations, the persistence of school uniforms in many cases highlights the enduring legacy of colonialism in education. Despite younger generations' efforts to cast off the remnants of the colonial past, the uniform remained a deeply embedded symbol of the social and cultural identity shaped during the colonial era. The continued use of school uniforms in these countries, despite their independence, demonstrates how colonial educational models and institutions became deeply rooted in the educational and social fabric, continuing to influence both educational practices and social relations (Césaire, 2000).

3.0 MODERN EDUCATION AND STUDENT ATTIRE

Student attire in modern European education continues to be a subject of ongoing debate and policy formation, as social and educational perceptions influence the adoption of dress regulations. Despite the general trend toward abolishing traditional school uniforms in public schools, the need for a dress code remains significant. The removal of the school uniform does not imply the complete absence of dress restrictions, as most public schools maintain an informal or formal "dress code" that determines what is deemed acceptable within the school environment. In today's context, these informal appearance rules focus on maintaining decorum and seriousness within schools without suppressing individuality. Unlike in the past, the application of these rules is not primarily aimed at achieving uniformity but at promoting responsibility and respect for the educational space. Rather than eliminating social or economic

differences, dress codes aim to create an environment where students feel that their appearance does not hinder social interaction, while also allowing them to express their personal identity (Lingard, 2014).

These informal dress codes seek to preserve a sense of community and reduce social differences that could be accentuated by students' clothing. Their implementation underscores the necessity of balancing individuality and collective social identity, highlighting that absolute freedom in dress is not always compatible with the goals of schooling. While students are largely free to express themselves through their attire, this freedom exists within a regulatory framework that ensures the seriousness of the school setting and reinforces the professional dimension of school life, emphasizing awareness of education's institutional significance (Jackson, 1990).

Dress code regulations also touch on issues of social standing. In private schools, for instance, the maintenance of uniforms functions not only as a tradition but also as a means of social distinction, positioning the school as a space for the development of students' social skills and the reinforcement of the prestige associated with elite education (Kotthoff & Merki, 2012). By contrast, public schools' dress codes often aim to establish a more equitable environment, where personal expression can coexist with the preservation of a shared identity.

The continuing need for a "dress code" is linked to the understanding that student appearance encompasses not only aesthetics but also the moral and social dimensions of schooling as an institution. Through dress regulations, schools aim to ensure that all students live in an environment that upholds social order and the principles of collective behavior, while avoiding social discrimination or the reproduction of stereotypes (Lingard, 2014; Lynch, 1989). Attire in modern education is not merely a matter of appearance but also a tool for socialization and guiding students toward the values and norms of both school and society at large.

The divide between public and private schools is evident: in private institutions, uniforms continue to serve as symbols of prestige and tradition. Their use in such settings reflects the social and political values of the respective society, reinforcing class distinctions and social hierarchies. Conversely, public schools, with less rigid dress codes, focus more on fostering student individuality and creativity, with the aim of promoting equality and avoiding social stereotypes (Jackson, 1990).

The link between attire and educational policy becomes even more apparent when considering the continued use of uniforms in schools that adhere to traditional or aristocratic values. In contrast, schools that promote progressive pedagogical approaches generally allow greater flexibility in dress, reflecting the values of individuality and creativity. This distinction is closely tied to how society perceives the school as a social institution. Where traditional values and class hierarchies prevail, the school uniform reflects a need for discipline and conservatism; in contrast, where school communities are oriented toward personal development and freedom of expression, attire serves as a tool for social equality and personal creativity (Lynch, 1989).

These differences are further reinforced by the impact of societal changes and shifts in family values. In today's society, students are exposed to a multitude of influences: media, social networks, and fashion, that often challenge traditional views on attire. Nevertheless, despite the desire for self-expression, school authorities maintain the need for dress codes to ensure

equity and limit the social inequalities that can emerge through clothing (Kotthoff & Merki, 2012).

In contemporary educational contexts, the school uniform remains a contentious issue, carrying strong social and political implications, especially in multicultural and democratic environments such as those that have evolved in Europe since the 1980s. Despite the general trend toward abolishing mandatory uniforms in public schools, the discussion surrounding student attire remains highly relevant. Dress regulations continue to be enforced, even in the absence of uniforms. Though often informally established, such rules help preserve a school culture that integrates discipline and a sense of seriousness into the learning environment, with all the accompanying social and cultural implications (Lingard, 2014; Halstead & Xiao, 2023).

According to the growing social dimension of student attire, progressive pedagogical theories developed in the second half of the 20th century contributed to shaping a new educational model influenced by demands for greater social equality and personal freedom. The abolition or optional status of school uniforms in many countries is directly linked to the desire to strengthen student individuality and freedom of expression (Bourdieu, 1984). However, freedom in dress does not necessarily imply the absence of rules or standards. On the contrary, in most public schools, even in the absence of mandatory uniforms, dress codes remain in effect, outlining what is acceptable within the school context. These regulations, though often unwritten and partially informal, serve to maintain a serious and professional school atmosphere, allowing students to focus on learning without distraction from excessive or inappropriate attire (Kozol, 2012).

Beyond the issue of individuality, the social dimension of school attire today also involves efforts to eliminate inequalities arising from economic differences among students. Clothing, as a common denominator across the student body, can reduce the visibility of disparities based on family income and foster a sense of equality among students (Sullivan, 2001). Yet this argument remains controversial, as critics argue that school uniforms do not address the roots of social and economic inequality. Rather, they represent a superficial solution that fails to address deeper societal problems. In an era where social distinction manifests in many forms, the school uniform may act as a symbol of compliance with specific norms while potentially overlooking real social dynamics and the need for meaningful change (Bauman, 2001).

Comparisons with other regions of the world offer valuable insights into the use of school uniforms. In the United States, the use of uniforms has declined significantly, with some exceptions in certain schools, which claim that uniforms help reduce school violence and increase school discipline. However, many American schools still enforce strict dress codes that restrict certain garments or accessories to ensure the smooth operation of the school environment (Gentile & Imberman, 2012). In Asia, especially in countries like Japan and South Korea, school uniforms remain common practice, with students wearing traditional uniforms as a sign of respect for the school institution and the values of discipline and societal respect (Kariya, 2018). These countries adopt a stricter and more conservative approach, promoting attire as a means of social cohesion and the maintenance of order within the educational context (Sullivan, 2001).

This comparison highlights the cultural and social differences in the perception and application of school uniforms, revealing the complex relationship between attire, social class, and

educational goals in each country. While Europe tends to move toward greater acceptance of individuality and freedom of dress, the Asian approach remains more rigid and tradition oriented. This indicates that, despite the variations, the school uniform and related dress regulations continue to play a significant role in shaping school culture, the social environment, and discipline within the contemporary educational landscape.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS – CRITICAL REVIEW

The evolution of student attire in Europe reflects a complex and ongoing trajectory, shifting from the imposition of strict regulations and standardized uniforms toward a more individualistic and liberal approach to clothing, a development closely tied to broader social and educational transformations. The transition from the rigid observance of school uniforms, which remained a component of educational tradition until the second half of the 20th century, to a more flexible and diversified treatment of attire corresponds with wider socio-political changes. In Europe, the abolition of mandatory school uniforms in many countries mirrors the strengthening of human rights, individuality, and social equality, elements that underpin modern democratic societies (Avis, 1997). Despite this transition, dress regulations persist, albeit in varied forms across different member states, sustaining the significant influence of school culture and social order on educational reality.

Observing the trajectory of social development allows us to understand the broader process of social freedom, which unfolded primarily from the mid-20th century onwards. This period is marked by a series of social and political movements in Europe and elsewhere, during which societies increasingly demanded freedom of expression and recognition of diversity. The strengthening of democratic processes and the growing public participation in decision-making laid the groundwork for weakening traditional educational regulations, which were rooted in strict dress codes. Nonetheless, the abolition of mandatory school uniforms does not equate to complete freedom in attire. On the contrary, dress codes continue to shape student appearance through restrictions on specific garments or accessories, with the aim of maintaining decorum and respect within the educational space (Barton & Armstrong, 2007).

The gradual adaptation of dress codes is closely linked to the social contradictions that have emerged in the era of globalization. The enhancement of personal expression, which characterizes contemporary education in Europe, often conflicts with the need for social cohesion and equality. While strict dress codes can promote a sense of unity within the school environment, they can also accentuate differences among students, especially for those unable to follow popular fashion trends or afford the attire that aligns with current expectations (Nabirye & Okwir, 2025).

The varying approaches to student attire across global educational systems demonstrate that the school uniform can function either as a tool of social uniformity or as a symbol of freedom and self-expression. These geographical differences are not merely administrative or aesthetic but reflect deeper pedagogical and ideological traditions that shape the type of education and socialization promoted. In this light, clothing becomes an indicator of how each society perceives the relationship between individuality and collectivity within the school setting (Gentile & Imberman, 2012).

Dress policy in schools remains a site of negotiation between personal expression and collective values. The existence of dress regulations, whether through formal uniforms or subtler appearance protocols, is not simply a remnant of conservatism, but often reflects broader societal goals such as respect, discipline, or social cohesion. Freedom of choice of clothing may be interpreted as a sign of progress and respect for individual identity; however, it is not inherently neutral or universally accepted in every public or institutional setting. In some educational cultures, attire serves as a means of behavior regulation and adherence to a common code of respect, whereas in others, it becomes a space for negotiating social norms and individual desires. The diversity of these approaches underscores that student appearance cannot be assessed independently of the historical, political, and cultural coordinates that shape it.

Looking ahead, the future of student attire in European education raises questions about how to navigate the tension between individual expression and the demands of social cohesion. The evolution of educational policies in conjunction with the shifting social conditions of the 21st century intensifies the need to revisit regulatory frameworks concerning student appearance. Attire, as a symbolic and socially constructed code, remains a mechanism for mediating the relationship between the individual and the school, between freedom and structure, between conformity and differentiation. The reconsideration of established norms does not aim to eliminate regulation, but to adapt it to a framework that reflects contemporary values of inclusion, respect, and collective coexistence.

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