

Uniforms and Comfortable School Life

1. Motivation behind Research Paper

The theme of this essay is “comfortable school life and school uniform”, and I write about the school uniform problem from a health perspective. The motive why I chose this theme is from my experience. I have suffered from atopic dermatitis since a young age, and I always picked clothes which were made of skin-friendly or natural materials. I could wear clothes freely when I was in junior high school because my school did not have a school uniform. However, I have had to wear a school uniform since I entered high school. I did not want to wear a uniform because school’s uniforms were made of chemical fibre. I had to wear a uniform, so I did, and my skin was worse than before. Also, in conversations with friends and classmates, I noticed that some of them had the same problems as me. Therefore, I thought about the problems with school uniforms.

2. Introduction

The aim of this essay is to raise awareness about the problems with school uniforms from a health perspective and ensuring that every student has a comfortable student life by doing presentations and writing essays. Therefore, I asked the question, "can we make uniforms and plain clothes optional?" I thought that this would make school life more comfortable for all students. After asking this question, I made a presentation to the first and second graders during the week of

inquiry in June 2022 and held a session. The question was, 'what are the disadvantages of having a choice between uniforms and plain clothes? Some of the opinions that emerged were: "the image of the school will become worse, it will be a hassle to think of a personal uniform every day, I can leave early to go out and have fun, bullying will occur, and there would be no uniformity. Although so many disadvantages were mentioned in this session, a survey of schools across the country revealed that there are schools that offer a choice between uniforms and plain clothes, as well as schools that have a completely private uniform system. The question that arose was, "why are those schools able to be selective and private?" To answer this question, I made that, "it is because of the emphasis on student autonomy" I will explore this question by comparing the history of uniforms with the historical background of Japan, based on online information, books, surveys, and articles.

3. Results and Analysis

First, I researched how many schools in Japan allow students to attend school in plain clothes. According to Tetsuo Kobayashi's book, "What is a uniform?", all prefectural high schools in 26 prefectures in Japan have established uniforms. When I researched the percentage of students attending school in plain clothes in 21 other prefectures, I found that the figure was unusually high compared to other prefectures. That is Nagano Prefecture. The percentage of students attending school in plain clothes in Nagano Prefecture was 50%, and the next highest was 26% in Miyagi Prefecture. As you can see from here, Nagano Prefecture has a very high rate of students attending school in plain clothes, and half of the prefectural high schools were attended in plain clothes. Then why is the percentage of students

attending school in plain clothes so high in Nagano Prefecture? While researching which high schools in Nagano Prefecture began to have a plain clothes system, we found that most of the schools had converted to a plain clothes system at a common time. That was around the 1970s. At this time in Japan, student-led demonstrations, strikes, barricade occupations of buildings, and organised student movements against student life and politics were flourishing. High school students who took advantage of this atmosphere, led by the student council, were campaigning for freedom of dress and the abolition of school uniforms. These movements to abolish school uniforms raised the slogan "Uniforms are a symbol of student control," and the opinion that uniforms should be abolished because they are reminiscent of the pre war military and feudalistic Japanese society and are inconsistent with individuality and human rights. I also found a web article written by Mr. Mitsutaka Saito of NHK Nagano Broadcasting Station in 2022 about the activities of high school students at this time. This article was intended to address the question posed by viewers as to "why so many schools in Nagano Prefecture attend school in plain clothes," and it also described the process that led to the abolition of uniforms. According to Seiichi Momobayashi, a high school senior at the time, who was interviewed in the article, while there was an atmosphere at the time in which "this is how high school students should be" was imposed on them, high school students wanted to "decide their own affairs" and there was a trend in the times for them to participate and speak out in various matters in pursuit of freedom and autonomy. In addition, some high school students participated in the student movement that was active at the time, and its influence reached Nagano High School. Some students who believed that "school uniforms were a symbol of student control," surrounded the principal and teachers in the principal's office to demand freedom of dress and

voiced their claims and grievances, leading to the liberalisation of uniforms. And this trend then spread to other high schools in the prefecture. However, the debate about uniforms seems to have continued into the 2000s. Prefectural Iiyama High School, which merged twice, in 2007 and 2014, was one such school. When Iiyama Teruoka High School, which did not have uniforms, and Iiyama Minami High School, which did, merged, the uniforms were adopted for reasons such as "to give students pride in their school." Later, however, the integration with Iiyama Kita High School resulted in a disagreement over uniforms. The article included an interview with Fujio Watanabe, who was the principal of Iiyama Kita High School at the time of the integration. Mr. Watanabe said, "We solicited opinions from teachers on whether to make uniforms or not, and teachers who had a lot of experience in schools with uniforms said, 'You should wear uniforms well and follow the rules. Many of the teachers who had experience at schools without uniforms said that they could interact frankly with students because they did not have to pay attention to or instruct them about uniforms.'" After three years of discussions, Iiyama High School abolished uniforms. Mr. Watanabe said, "The new school's educational goals include 'developing the ability to think and explore on one's own' and 'fostering a spirit of independence and self-reliance. In that sense, we thought that free dress would be better suited to the new school than a set uniform. We wanted to provide an education that respects the individuality of our diverse student body."

The answer I have arrived at from the above is that many high schools in Nagano Prefecture do not have uniforms because they respect students' opinions and independence since the movement to abolish uniforms around the 1970s.

4. Conclusion and Future Problems

I thought that if all students could go to school in plain clothes, it would make school life stress-free for all students. And I researched. In this study, I learned that the influence of the student movement in the 1970s led to the uniform liberalisation movement, which resulted in the conversion of student uniforms to plain clothes. In Nagano Prefecture in particular, decades after the movement to liberalise school uniforms, the school rule of wearing plain clothes to school has not changed, and as many as 50% of prefectural high schools in Nagano Prefecture still do so. I found that this is because they respect the independence and individuality of their students. In the course of these exploratory activities, I also felt that the high school students of that era, when the movement to liberalise school uniforms took place, had their own opinions, and had the passion, determination, and energy to build up their schools by themselves, which is completely different from the mood of today's high school students.

5. Reflection

In this paper, I have researched the state of school uniforms based on my own experience. Before I did this exploration, I thought that making uniforms and plain clothes optional would solve the uniform problem in terms of health, gender, and hygiene. However, when I learned that there are many disadvantages to eliminating uniforms and that uniforms are a deciding factor in choosing the school of one's choice, I realised that we cannot simply abolish uniforms. If we try to reflect one opinion, we will end up belittling the other. A lot of time will be needed to reflect both sides' views and bring them to fruition. I would like to spread my research in order to make school life more comfortable for people who have the same problems as I do. In addition, I would like to think every day about what a uniform should look

like that can be worn comfortably by all people and is appropriate for today's age, while preserving the appearance of the uniform. I hope that readers of this paper will remember what they know about the uniform issue from a health perspective. I would also like them to consider the question, how can we create uniforms that are acceptable to all?

6. Work Cited

Tetsuo, Kobayashi. What is a school uniform? The history and thought. Japan: Asahi Shinsho, 2020. Print.

Ju-hee, Shon. "Visualization of Students' Emotions When They Wore High School Uniforms : A Text Mining Approach." The Japan Society of Home Economics Abstracts of research presentations. 2014. Print