Research Paper

Balancing the image and income: Organizational pride, corporate wear and employee remuneration conditions in institutions of higher learning

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between organizational pride and corporate wear under remuneration conditions within institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe through investigating the influence of employee remuneration on corporate wear, examining the impact of employee remuneration on organizational pride, analysing the influence of organizational pride on corporate wear, and assessing the mediating role of organizational pride in the relationship between employee remuneration and corporate wear. A quantitative research design was employed, using a purposive cluster sampling method to select participants from teaching and non-teaching employees in public institutions of higher learning. Data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire and were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Correlation and regression analysis tests were done to test the relationships among the variables of employee remuneration, organizational pride and corporate wear.

The study has found a positive relationship between remuneration and corporate wear and has established that organizational pride partially offsets perceptions of low remuneration. The study also found that organizational pride has a mediating effect on the relationship between employee remuneration and corporate wear. The study recommends that institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe should develop strategies that enhance organizational pride and address remuneration disparities and inequities to ensure that remuneration becomes competitive and fair.

Keywords: Corporate wear, organizational pride, remuneration, higher education.

1. Introduction

Institutions of higher learning are increasingly adopting corporate branding strategies as a means of strengthening their institutional identity, portrayal of professionalism, and as a means to foster unity among their employees and students (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022a; Thompson, 2023). One such noticeable strategy being adopted is the use of corporate wear. Corporate wear can be referred as a standardized attire meant to represent affiliation and pride in an institution (Sotak et al., 2024). This branding effort is often perceived as a visual symbol of organizational values and identity. Such values are intended to boost internal cohesion and to enhance external credibility perceptions (Sahin & Nasir, 2022). However, the use of corporate wear as a symbol of institutional pride raises critical questions when considered in relation to the issue of low remuneration at public universities. Zimbabwe's enduring low remuneration conditions not only affect the monetary needs of employees within public universities but also reduce employee morale and increase job dissatisfaction. These issues can weaken the stability within the public institutions as high employee turnover and disengagement among employees inhibit the performance and reputation of institutions of higher learning.

Institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe are operating under challenging socio-economic conditions. The economic environment is highly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), and is characterized by persistent financial instability, hyperinflation, and fiscal deficits. For over a decade, Zimbabwe has experienced economic instability and witnessed the collapse of its national currency, cash shortages, and stagnation in employee wages. Ndlovu et al. (2023) state that inflation in Zimbabwe was over 250% in 2023. Such high levels of inflation negatively impacted the purchasing power of public sector salaries. These macroeconomic constraints have made it difficult for government-grant subsidised institutions such as universities, to sustain their operations (Elton et al., 2023).

Underfunding has worsened the financial plight of state universities in Zimbabwe. In addition, government grants to state universities have declined over the past decade, which resulted in a situation in which institutions of higher learning depended on student fees to fund their operations (Chinyoka & Mutambara, 2020; Mubango & Muchowe, 2024). Operating in such budgetary constraints, it has become a problem for universities to offer competitive remuneration to their academic and administrative staff. This underfunding has resulted in a huge disparity between what academic lecturers at state universities in Zimbabwe earn compared to the regional averages in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) area. To put it into perspective, Mubango and Muchowe (2024) explored that lecturers in Zimbabwe earn the equivalent of less than USD $150 per month, which falls below the regional parity of USD $500 to $1000 when compared with neighbouring countries like Botswana and South Africa. This funding predicament has a negative effect on both the quality of education and the ability of universities to retain qualified personnel (Zishiri, 2025).

The end result of these cumulative economic challenges has led to low morale, employee demotivation, job dissatisfaction and loss of human capital through brain drain (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022b; Carmen & Balanga, 2024). Qualified and experienced academic professionals continue to migrate to countries with more stable economies in search of better remuneration and working conditions (Ndlovu et al., 2023). Those who choose to stay at local universities bear the brunt of unfavourable working conditions (Mpofu et al., 2024).

Within such a context, corporate branding strategies such as corporate wear may be disconnected from the realities experienced by university employees, which thereby questions the potential of corporate wear in promoting sincere organizational pride within institutions of higher learning. This disparity between expectations and compensation creates a sense of inequity, a tension that may undermine the intended outcomes of corporate image enhancement and the cultivation of organizational pride.

Organizational pride, which is defined as "the positive emotional attachment employees feel toward their institution", is often linked to perceived fairness, respect, and recognition (Deepa et al., 2025). According to research, when employees feel valued and fairly treated, they demonstrate high levels of engagement and the zeal to be identified with their organization (Simbula et al., 2023). However, in conditions of poor remuneration, as this paper argues, symbolic gestures such as corporate wear may be perceived as superficial. Instead of enhancing pride, such initiatives may expose the misalignment between institutional image-building and lived realities of employees (Seshasai & Balaji, 2025).

Under conditions of poor remuneration, the need to purchase corporate attire can further impose an additional financial burden on employees who would be already struggling to meet their daily needs. In cases where institutions mandate corporate wear without subsidizing its cost, employees may view such policies as unfair rather than being unifying. The paradox emerges when an institution emphasizes external image building through dress codes such as corporate attire while at the same time neglecting internal well-being of its employees through adequate remuneration (Akella et al., 2021). The situation becomes more complex in the context of African institutions of higher learning. These institutions are facing pressure to meet international standards whilst at the same time functioning within constrained financial budgets (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023). When universities adopt branding strategies such as corporate wear for brand imaging, but employee remuneration remains low, it is argued that such initiatives may be met with scepticism (Ikram et al., 2021).

Institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe recognize the significance of organizational culture and employee morale for their survival (Chikazhe et al., 2020; Makumbe, 2022; Shonhiwa, 2023). Corporate wear has emerged as a focal point in an attempt to enhance organisational pride (Abadi et al., 2021). However, the effectiveness of corporate wear in

promoting organizational pride in public institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe is challenged by the realities of low remuneration being experienced at these public institutions (Chimbunde & Jakachira, 2024). A dilemma is created: while it is noble to view corporate wear as a means to create a professional image and instilling a sense of pride among employees, low remuneration is predicted to undermine this effort (Zicari & Gamble, 2025).

Such a state of affairs may lead to disillusionment and disengagement among employees. This paradox raises critical questions about how institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe can effectively utilize corporate wear to bolster organizational pride under financial constraints (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022a). The dearth of research on the interplay between corporate wear and organizational pride under low remuneration conditions warrants a systematic study which explores these organisational dynamics. This overview raises critical questions: How does employee remuneration influence corporate wear among employees in institutions of higher learning?; how does employee remuneration impact organisational pride among employees in institutions of higher learning?; what is the influence of organisational pride on corporate wear among employees in institutions of higher learning?; and what is the mediating role of organisational pride in the relationship between employee remuneration and corporate wear among employees in institutions of higher learning?

2. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses development

This study is grounded primarily in the Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. In the context of institutions of higher learning, this theory helps explain how employees adopt institutional values and symbols such as corporate wear as expressions of professional identity and pride. Identity cues such as attire reinforce a collective institutional image, which can strengthen employee engagement through group cohesion.

However, to deepen the theoretical framing, we will extend the Social Identity Theory by the incorporation of the Organizational Identification Theory (OIT) by Ashforth and Mael (1989). This latter theory focuses more explicitly on how employees perceive and define themselves through their membership in an organization. The Organizational Identification Theory complements the Social Identity Theory by emphasizing internalization of organizational values and their impact on motivation and behaviour. The integration of SIT and OIT offers a complete architecture of examining how corporate wear functions as a symbolic artefact that mediates identity and belongingness, particularly in the context of extrinsic incentives such as low remuneration.

Recent contributions to the Organizational Identification Theory stress that identification is shaped not only by shared values but also by material and symbolic rewards (Rothbard et al., 2022). In the context of this study, low remuneration creates an identity strain, a strain that corporate wear and pride might cushion against. To integrate more recent research into the theoretical frame, we are referencing Eker and Cichocka (2024), who propose a dynamic framework of identification where identity is fluid, context-sensitive, and responsive to institutional narratives and socio-economic conditions. In this view, the act of wearing corporate attire becomes a performative strategy, especially under low remuneration. Employees use this performative strategy to assert professional dignity and institutional alignment.

Through this blended theoretical frame, this paper contributes to theory by examining how non-financial symbols, like institutional attire, serve as compensatory functions under low remuneration conditions. The framework also makes a contribution by theorizing organizational pride as a mediating mechanism that shapes how remuneration influences identity through visual cues such as corporate wear. While existing frameworks often treat pride as a static outcome of organizational culture, we position it here as a dynamic psychological shield that sustains commitment despite working under low remuneration. This mediating role expands our theoretical understanding of how identity, motivation, and symbolism interact, as shown in the following figure (Figure 1).
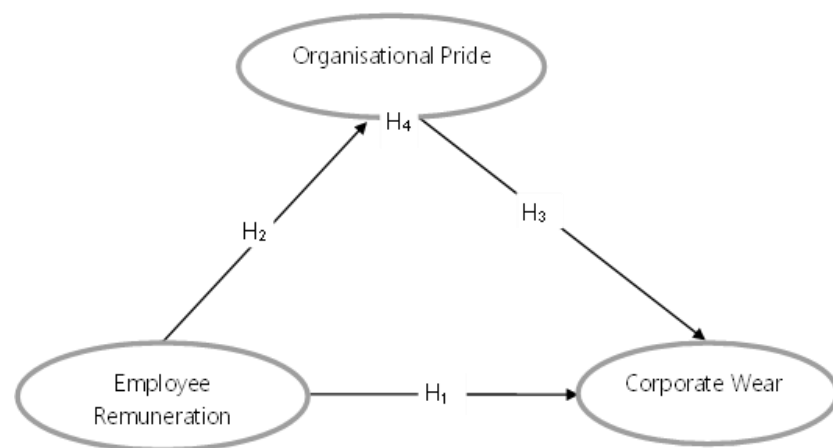
Figure 1. Conceptual framework. *Source: Authors' own.*

2.1 Organizational pride, its influence and outcomes

Organizational pride is a multi-layered construct which has a crucial role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviours within institutions, and even more so in the context of higher education. Organizational pride is the emotional attachment and positive feelings that employees experience toward their organization (Durrah et al., 2021). Studies have shown that organizational pride is influenced by a multitude of factors, including organisational culture, leadership styles, employee engagement, corporate social responsibility and green human resource management practices (Niazi et al., 2024; Trochmann et al., 2023). Conversely, organizational pride influences various employee attitudes and behaviours including organizational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, work engagement, and job security (Athanasiadou et al., 2024).

One of the primary dimensions of organizational pride is emotional pride, the affective component of pride which employees feel when they identify with their institution. Emotional pride occupies an influential role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviours within their organisations (Niazi et al., 2024). It is reported that employees who experience emotional pride feel proud of the accomplishments of their organisations and are more likely to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment, loyalty, trust in their management, and enhanced emotional well-being (Schaefer et al., 2024). Conversely, cognitive pride, which involves the beliefs of an employee and thoughts about their organization, is another important dimension of pride appearing in the literature. Cognitive pride encompasses how employees perceive the goals and values of their institution and its impact of their work efforts (Mittal & Kumar, 2025).

Cognitive pride plays a pivotal role in connecting organizational practices and employee perceptions in yielding positive organisational outcomes. Cognitive pride has been observed to serve as a mediator between various organizational initiatives such as corporate social responsibility and green human resource management (Athanasiadou et al., 2024; Youn & Kim, 2022). The essence of cognitive pride is evidenced in enhancing employee engagement: individuals who believe in their organization are more motivated to contribute to its success. In that sense, it is worth noting an observation by Yang et al. (2022) that the impact of pride on employee behaviour varies depending on the type of pride activated, in the context of what they termed as "authentic pride" and "hubristic pride". Authentic pride was observed to mediate the relationship between employee recognition and task performance as well as citizenship behaviour within organisations, whilst, in contrast, hubristic pride mediates these relationships.

Moreover, recent studies emphasize the context-dependency of organizational pride. Its effect increases in institutions where intrinsic motivators such as purpose, mission, and identity are emphasized over extrinsic ones like pay and promotion (Bashir et al., 2021; Bogren et al., 2020). This is particularly relevant for institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, where economic constraints challenge the effectiveness of traditional reward systems. Fostering

organizational pride may thus serve as a compensatory psychological mechanism, buffering the demotivating effects of low remuneration.

Not to be overlooked in the domain of organisational pride is its third dimension: behavioural pride. This influences the actions of employees and interactions within their organisations. Employees who experience high levels of organizational pride are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviours, such as collaborating with colleagues and advocating for their institutions (Yang et al., 2022). However, it has to be emphasised that the dimensions of organizational pride are interrelated: the three dimensions have a synergic effect, a strong effect in strengthening employee engagement and commitment (Ismail et al., 2022). Studies support the idea that organizations that actively promote organisational pride through employee recognition, positive leadership, and a clear mission can cultivate a culture of pride that enhances employee morale and retention (Niazi et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2022). Organizations that deliberately prioritize these aspects are more likely to realise improved employee outcomes and organizational performance.

2.2 Corporate wear and organisational identity

Corporate wear plays a significant role in shaping organizational identity and image, particularly within institutions of higher learning (Buckner et al., 2021). The attire employees wear, apart from reflecting the brand of an institution, communicates the values and professionalism of the institution to both internal and external stakeholders. There is evidence to suggest that corporate wear can enhance the perception of an institution's credibility (Aledo-Ruiz et al., 2022). Corporate wear is observed to foster a sense of belongingness among employees, a sense which in turn reinforces their identification with the institution (Moody, 2023). This sense of belongingness is essential in institutions of higher learning, where academic and supporting staff are often viewed as representatives of the values of the institution (Baron-Nixon & Hecht, 2023). Employees who wear corporate attire are reported feeling more professional and connected to the goals of their institutions (Pathan, 2023).

Moreover, corporate wear serves as a visual cue that reinforces institutional branding (Lyu, 2023). Studies indicate that corporate identity includes various elements such as brand identity, organizational culture, and values (Murár et al., 2024). Corporate attire is considered a vital element that influences this identity as well as gives first impressions and perceptions about an organization (Hester & Hehman, 2023). The consistent use of corporate attire in an institution can enhance brand recognition and unity within the organisation (Murár et al., 2024). Some scholars indicate that within organisations, employees play multiple communication roles, including acting as brand ambassadors and representing the corporate identity of the organisation through corporate attire (Amani, 2024). These findings suggest that institutions with well-defined corporate wear policies not only project a strong brand image but also enhance employee morale and institutional pride, as well as contribute to feeling more unified and engaged with the institutions (Pathan, 2023; Sotak et al., 2024).

Corporate wear has also been shown to positively influence self-perception and psychological states. Zartaloudi et al. (2023) and Sotak et al. (2024) found that employees who consistently wear institutional attire report higher self-esteem and team cohesion. The theory of enclothed cognition (Hester & Hehman, 2023) suggests that attire worn by employees can influence not only how others perceive them but also how they perceive themselves, which in turn affects confidence, productivity, and workplace conduct.

Moreover, the psychological impact of wearing corporate attire should not be underestimated; people rely on attire to make inferences about social categories, cognitive states, status, and aesthetics (Hester & Hehman, 2023). This suggests that corporate wear can enhance an individual's self-perception, self-esteem and confidence (Zartaloudi et al., 2023), which positively influences their interactions with their colleagues and students. Inversely, corporate attire can have an impact on how employees are perceived by their colleagues, clients, and their superiors in their professional relationships (Albarracin et al., 2024). Employees who feel good about their appearance are more likely to engage positively with their work environment, which leads to increased morale and productivity.

However, the effects of corporate wear are not uniformly positive. As Youn and Kim (2022) observe, responses to attire vary with age, gender, role, and cultural background. Some may embrace it as a source of pride, others may view it as constraining or performative, particularly when not accompanied by substantive support or when imposed without

consultation (Albarracin et al., 2024). These mixed views underscore the importance of inclusive and flexible attire policies in institutions of higher learning.

2.3 Low remuneration and its impact on employee outcomes

Low remuneration is a pervasive issue in institutions of higher learning, and it is more enduring in developing countries due to economic challenges (Dlamini & Dlamini, 2024). Employee remuneration plays a crucial role in influencing employee satisfaction and performance (Nantavisit et al., 2023). Inadequate compensation appears a major contributor to employee stress and anxiety across various occupations (Mo & Morris, 2024). This suggests that perceived inadequate compensation can lead to increased job dissatisfaction. The literature consulted suggests that the relationship between remuneration and employee motivation presents mixed results.

While it cannot be denied that employee motivation may be influenced by remuneration, research suggests that its impact is not direct. There is an interaction of other composite factors such as working conditions, job security, leadership style (Karaferis et al., 2022; Kong et al., 2022). When employees perceive disparity and inequity in their remuneration compared to prevailing industry standards, their motivation to engage in discretionary efforts, such as innovation and collaboration, diminishes. This can weaken the willingness by employees to exert themselves above their expected basic job requirements (Chikazhe et al., 2020; Clercq et al., 2021). Such a state creates a culture of minimal compliance rather than proactive engagement. Others are of the view that perceptions of distributive injustice in remuneration are linked to organizational deviance (Khattak et al., 2020). This observation further strengthens the conclusion that unfair remuneration can negatively affect employee behaviour and motivation.

Job satisfaction is considered to be influenced by an employee's perception of their compensation. Employees who feel inadequately compensated often experience higher levels of dissatisfaction with their jobs (Deshmukh et al., 2023). However, just as shown by results on employee remuneration and employee motivation, research on the relationship between low remuneration and job satisfaction yields mixed results. Some studies suggest a link between low remuneration and decreased job satisfaction (Dibiku, 2023). Conversely, other studies dispute the assertion that remuneration is always the most critical factor in employee job satisfaction, and insist that other factors such as positive relationships with supervisors, job stability, and personal development opportunities are also at play (Youcef, 2023). Bashir, Wright and Hassan (2021) reported an interesting result when they found that employees with high levels of public service motivation felt more engaged when they experienced high job prosocial impact but with low reward equity.

Recent literature highlights that the perceived fairness of remuneration, more than its absolute value considerably shapes employee reactions. Employees who feel respected and valued through non-financial means, such as recognition and inclusion in institutional decision-making, may maintain higher morale even under low pay conditions (Jo & Shin,2025). This has led to an interest in compensatory mechanisms, such as pride, identity, and symbolic rewards, that can offset dissatisfaction resulting from low remuneration.

In the context of higher education in Zimbabwe, where systemic underfunding and salary erosion have become enduring (Chikazhe et al., 2020), these findings are much relevant. Symbolic practices such as the institutionalisation of corporate wear and emphasis on organisational pride may operate as socio-emotional shields, shields that create meaning and status where financial incentives are inadequate. This aligns with the work of Bogren et al. (2020), who argue that in resource-constrained environments, affective and cognitive forms of identification become critical levers for retaining commitment and performance.

These mixed conclusions highlight that while low remuneration can contribute to decreased job satisfaction under certain conditions and contexts, its impact cannot be generalised across different settings. The impact of low remuneration varies across different work environments and cultures. However, where institutional interventions target employees' need for identity, esteem and belonging, the negative consequences of low pay can be mitigated. This conclusion strengthens the argument put forward in this paper: a strong sense of organisational pride through symbolic tools such as corporate wear offsets the sentiments of being underpaid (Bogren et al., 2020). This suggests that for some employees, particularly

those in the public service, factors other than compensation can mitigate the effects of inadequate remuneration or job dissatisfaction.

Based on insights gained from the reviewed literature in relation to employee remuneration, corporate wear and organizational pride, it is hypothesised that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between employee remuneration and corporate wear among employees in institutions of higher learning.

H2: Employee remuneration positively affects organisational pride among employees in institutions of higher learning.

H3: There is a positive relationship between organisational pride and corporate wear among employees in institutions of higher learning.

H4: Organisational pride mediates the relationship between low remuneration and corporate wear among employees in institutions of higher learning.

3. Methodology

The study used a quantitative research approach, and the population of this study was drawn from 1042 lecturers and administrators in 4 public institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Proportional cluster sampling method was employed to select research respondents to ensure that both lecturers and administrative employees within the selected institutions of higher learning were represented in relation to their groups and population sizes. This approach facilitated an understanding of how corporate wear impacts both teaching and non-teaching employees. For determining the sample size, Survey Monkey Calculator[1], an online sample calculator, was used after the required parameters were defined (confidence level, 95%, margin of error, 5%, population, 1042). The calculator gave a sample size of 281, which is deemed appropriate for achieving a power analysis adequate to statistically detect significant effects. A total of 281 questionnaires were distributed, with 200 completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 71.17%.

3.1 Non-response and bias management

The 81 questionnaire non-responses arose due to several issues. Firstly, some potential respondents declined to participate, citing work pressures, lack of interest, or just being sceptical about the study. It was also observed that apart from non-responding, some of the distributed questionnaires were either partially completed or returned blank. These actions rendered this group of questionnaires unsuitable for use. However, generally speaking, the questionnaire response rate in institutions of higher learning and local government authorities in Zimbabwe is relatively lower: take for example Rudhumbu (2022), who distributed 341 questionnaires and 149 were returned, which gave a response rate of 43.7%. The same could be cited in connection with Mutandwa and Hendriks (2022), who distributed 288 questionnaires and 220 were retuned, which thus yielded a response rate of 76%. Worse enough, in the scope of the study by Mutongoreni et al. (2024), where 200 questionnaires were distributed, only 77 were returned, which yielded a 39% response rate. This relatively low response rate may reflect broader challenges in survey-based research within the Zimbabwean context. This is pointed out as one of the weaknesses of the current study, and this constitutes a gap to use other alternative data collection methods in the scope of future studies.

Even so, two vital control measures were implemented in this study to address the potential threat of non-response bias. First, some follow-up reminders were sent to encourage participation. The follow-up strategy enabled the execution of the commonly used approach of comparing the responses of early and late respondents (Struminskaya & Gummer, 2020; Minderop & Weiss, 2022). A comparison of the two groups was done on key demographic variables such as age, role, and years of service and on a sample of the scale items. The comparison showed no significant differences between these two groups, which suggests that the views of those who responded later were not different from those who had responded earlier. This comparison gave the rational to conclude that non-response bias was minimal and as such did not meaningfully distort the findings.

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[1] https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/

3.2 Instrument development and validation

A structured questionnaire was used as data collection instrument. It was divided into three sections. Section 1 provided introductory information, including the purpose of the study, ethical assurances, and instructions for completion. Section A gathered demographic information (age, gender, role, educational qualifications, and years of service). Section B contained items measuring the three key constructs: employee remuneration, organizational pride, and corporate wear. Items used to develop the questionnaire were adapted from existing validated instruments in related research domains. The items of organizational pride were adapted from the works of Deepa et al. (2025); employee remuneration items were adopted from Mubango and Muchowe (2024); and items related to perceptions of corporate wear were drawn from Moody (2023) and were refined to fit the Zimbabwean public university context. The questionnaire was put under expert review by two Registrars – one was a Professor of business management and the other was a PhD holder in performance management – and also by three academic researchers familiar with organizational behaviour and human resource dynamics in public institutions in Zimbabwe. Their feedback prompted adjustments in wording, item clarity, and contextual relevance.

To ensure content and construct validity, a pilot study was conducted with 25 respondents. Feedback from the pilot test was used to revise unclear statements and to refine sequencing of the items under the latent constructs. On the data, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. No Items with factor loadings below 0.5 or with significant cross-loadings were identified in the test run.

3.3 Measurement, data structure and analysis

Each of the three key latent constructs was measured using multi-item scales. Employee remuneration has 5 items assessing perceptions of fairness, adequacy, and emotional impact of remuneration. Organizational pride was measured through 5 items measuring affective attachment to the institution, sense of belonging, and identification with the values of the institution. Regarding corporate wear, 5 items captured perceptions of appropriateness, symbolism, relevance, and impact on professional identity. All the items employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This design facilitated the quantitative assessment along the extent of agreement with each statement, thus enabling analysis of trends and associations. Data were coded and analysed using SPSS version 20 on descriptive statistics and correlation analyses. For the assessment of the mediation hypothesized in (H4), a regression analysis using SPSS, following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach for determining both direct and indirect effects, was used to test the mediation role of organizational pride in the relationship between employee remuneration and perceptions of corporate wear. Table 1 shows the constructs and items for the instrument used in data collection.

Table 1. Organizational Pride and Corporate Wear Survey Questionnaire. *Source: Authors' own*

Construct	Items	Sources
Corporate Wear	Wearing corporate attire enhances my professional image.	Buckner et al., 2021; Moody, 2023
	Corporate wear makes me feel more confident at work.	
	Dressing professionally reflects my commitment to my role.	
	Corporate attire is important for maintaining a professional environment.	
	Employees who wear corporate attire are perceived more positively by others.	
Organizational Pride	Pride is being associated with the institution.	Deepa et al., 2025
	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.	
	My pride in the organization motivates my work performance.	
	The institution's values align with my personal values.	
	Employees who show pride in their work enhance the positive atmosphere of the workplace.	

| Low Remuneration | Wearing corporate attire enhances my professional image despite low salary. Corporate wear helps me feel more valued at work, even with a low salary. Dressing professionally boosts my confidence even if my salary is low. Wearing corporate attire compensates for my feelings about inadequate pay. Corporate wear has a positive impact on my overall job satisfaction, regardless of my remuneration. | Mubango & Muchowe, 2024; Mo & Morris, 2024 |
| Organizational Pride, Corporate Wear and Employee Remuneration | Low remuneration inspires me to showcase my pride through corporate wear. Despite low remuneration, I am motivated to express my organizational pride by dressing professionally. My pride in the organization encourages me to maintain a strong professional appearance, even with low salary. My commitment to the institution drives me to wear corporate attire, regardless of my salary. Low remuneration enhances my determination to show a positive image through corporate wear. | Clercq et al., 2021; Lyu, 2023; Athanasiadou, et al., 2024 |

4. Findings

The following results include descriptive statistics in the form of means, standard deviations, and frequencies to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample in relation to the constructs of the study. Inferential statistics include correlation and linear regression analysis to accept or refute the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4.

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analysed to understand the composition of the sample. The demographic variables included age, gender, education level, employment type, employment category, and years of service in urban councils.

Table 2. Demographic Statistics of Respondents. *Source: Authors' own*

Demographic variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
Below 30	27	13
30-39	49	24
40-49	56	28
50-59	34	17
60+	34	17
Gender		
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
Education level		
Bachelor's degree	58	29
Master's degree	70	35
PhD	72	36
Employment type		
Contract	1	5
Permanent	199	99.5
Employment position		
Teaching Staff	155	77.5

Non-teaching Staff	45	22.5
Experience		
Less than 5 years	38	19
5-10 years	67	33.5
11-15 years	39	19.5
16-20 years	24	12
21 years and above	32	16

The age distribution of the respondents revealed a workforce predominated by mid-career employees, with 28% in the 40-49 age range, followed by the 30-39 age group (24%). The results indicated that older age groups (50-59, and 60+) make up 17% each of the sample. The results further showed that the under 30 age group represented 13% of the sample. The age demographics suggest that a considerable number of employees have the experience and can give valuable insights into workplace dynamics in relation to employee remuneration, corporate wear and organizational pride. The gender distribution showed a balanced distribution between male and female with 50% male and 50% female respondents. This split representation may yield diverse perspectives, different experiences and expectations regarding corporate wear and its impact on professional identity between genders.

The educational background of respondents reveals that 29% hold a Bachelor's degree, while the majority of the respondents hold advanced degrees with 35% having a Master's degree and 36% possess a PhD degree. The educational qualifications suggest that a substantial percentage (71%) of the workforce is well-educated, which is crucial for understanding the perceptions and implications of remuneration, organisational pride and corporate wear. The majority of respondents are permanent employees (99.5%), with 5% on contract. This mixture of employees suggests a stable workforce that is expected to have long-term commitments to their institutions. This long-term perspective may influence perceptions of organizational pride and corporate wear under low remuneration conditions. As established members of their institutions, they might associate professional attire with their identity.

The results indicated that the sample was composed of 77.5% teaching staff and 22.5% non-teaching staff. The high composition of teaching staff in the sample indicates that the perspectives captured in the study are greatly influenced by the perceptions of those directly involved in teaching. By being at the forefront of student engagement and institutional representation, teaching staff may have a strong sense of organisational pride, but at the same time they may experience more extensively the impact of low remuneration, hence the need of their perceptions on how organisational pride and corporate wear corporate can serve as a compensatory mechanism under low remuneration conditions. The experience distribution shows that 19% of respondents have less than 5 years of experience, while 33.5% have between 5-10 years. Only 19.5% have 11-15 years, 12% are in the age group 16-20 years, whilst 16% represent those with 21 years and above of experience.

The experience distribution of the sample ensured a representation across different tenure groups. This diversity is important for capturing varied perspectives on employee remuneration, corporate wear and organizational pride. The experience distribution may give important insights, with those less than 5 years with their respective institutions who may still be navigating their integration into the organizational culture of their institutions. Considering that professionals in their mid-career (33.5%) constitute the largest group of the sample, it is important to note that they may have a stronger sense of belonging and may view corporate wear as a necessary aspect of their professional identity and commitment to their institutions. At the same time, longer tenure employees, those in the range of 11-15 years and above with a combined representation (those with 11-15 years (19.5%) and over 21 years (16%)) indicates considerable institutional loyalty. Their insights can reveal long-term experiences with organizational pride and how corporate wear plays a role in maintaining their professional image. Also, employees across different experience tenure may respond differently to low remuneration. Those with fewer years of experience with their intuitions might be more flexible to low remuneration, while those employees with longer tenures may have stronger concerns about remuneration in relation to their experience and contributions to their institutions.

4.2 Reliability

Reliability is the measure of the internal consistency of the constructs in the study. A construct is reliable if the alpha (α) value is greater than .70 (Hair et al., 2013). Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The results revealed that the corporate wear scale with five items (α =.965), the organizational pride scale with five items (α = .962), and the low remuneration scale with five items (α = .953) were reliable. Similarly, the organisational pride, corporate wear and low remuneration scale with five items (α = .950) were also found reliable. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each construct confirm high internal consistency and reliability. Reliability results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results. *Source: Authors' own*

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Corporate Wear	5	.965
Organizational Pride	5	.962
Low Remuneration	5	.953
Organisational Pride, Corporate Wear and Low Remuneration	5	.950

4.3 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics was presented in the form of means, standard deviations, and frequencies in order to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample. The key variables of the study were assessed using means and standard deviations. The findings are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of key variables. *Source: Authors' own*

Variables	Std. Deviation	Mean
Corporate Wear		
Wearing corporate attire enhances professional image.	.939	3.92
Corporate wear makes me feel more confident at work.	.924	4.01
Dressing professionally reflects commitment to my role.	.926	3.97
Corporate attire is important for maintaining a professional environment.	.975	4.07
Employees who wear corporate attire are perceived more positively by others.	.983	4.11
Organizational Pride		
I take pride in being associated with my institution.	.920	3.96
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.	.901	4.04
My pride in the organization motivates my work performance.	.966	3.97
I believe my institution's values align with my personal values.	1.000	4.10
I believe that employees who show pride in their work enhance the positive atmosphere of the workplace.	.945	4.13
Low Remuneration		
Wearing corporate attire enhances my professional image despite low salary.	.966	3.96
Corporate wear helps me feel more valued at work, even with a low salary.	.921	3.98
Dressing professionally boosts my confidence even if my salary is low.	.902	3.90

Wearing corporate attire compensates for my feelings about inadequate pay.	.944	4.05
Corporate wear has a positive impact on my overall job satisfaction, regardless of my remuneration.	.831	4.05
Organisational Pride, Corporate Wear and Low Remuneration		
Low remuneration inspires me to showcase my pride through corporate wear.	.887	3.94
Despite low remuneration, there is motivation for me to express organizational pride through dressing professionally.	.803	4.06
Pride in the organization encourages me to maintain a strong professional appearance, even with low salary.	.848	4.02
Low remuneration enhances my determination to show a positive image through corporate wear.	.903	4.09
Commitment to the institution drives me to wear corporate attire, regardless of low salary.	.842	4.01

As shown in Table 4, the results for Corporate Wear indicated a general consensus among respondents regarding the positive impact of corporate wear on their professional image and confidence. With an average mean of 4.02, participants believe that corporate attire enhances their professional image, instils confidence, and contributes to a professional environment. The highest mean score (4.11) reflects the perception that corporate attire leads to more positive evaluations from others, which suggests that branding through attire is well-received despite low remuneration. For Organizational Pride, respondents expressed a strong sense of organizational pride, reflected in an average mean of 4.04. The highest score (4.13) indicates a belief that demonstrating pride positively affects the atmosphere of the workplace. The alignment of personal and institutional values (mean of 4.10) further reinforces the connection between individual identity and organizational culture. With regard to Low Remuneration, the respondents indicated that corporate wear plays a significant role in mitigating feelings associated with remuneration, with an average mean of 3.99. Notably, the item concerning corporate attire compensating for inadequate pay received a strong mean score (4.05), which suggests that attire serves as a psychological buffer against dissatisfaction related to remuneration. This aligns with the hypothesis that corporate wear can enhance job satisfaction even in low-paying conditions. Finally, for the combined three variables, the results revealed that low remuneration can act as a motivator for employees to express their organizational pride through corporate attire, with an average mean of 4.02. The highest mean (4.09) shows that commitment to the institution enhances professional appearance, which supports the hypothesis that organizational pride can offset negative feelings that may be aroused through inadequate remuneration. Employees perceive their attire as a form of pride, and attire is believed to enhance their professional identity despite working under low remuneration conditions.

4.4 Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics for this study include correlation, regression and mediation analyses to examine the relationships between the variables of employee remuneration, corporate wear and organisational pride.

To examine the relationships between the variables of employee remuneration, corporate wear and organisational pride, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated, as show in Table 5.

Table 5. Paired correlations between variables. *Source: Authors' own*

Variable Pair	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Remuneration and corporate wear	.801	<0.001
Remuneration and organisational pride	.921	<0.001
Organisational pride and corporate wear	.833	<0.001

The Pearson paired correlation of employee remuneration and corporate wear was found to have a strong positive correlation and be statistically significant (r = .801, p < .001). Hence H1 was supported. This shows that an increase in employee remuneration would lead to high positive attitudes towards corporate wear. Also, Pearson product correlation of employee remuneration and organisational pride was found to be strongly positive and statistically significant (r = .921, p < .001), which supports H2. An increase in employee remuneration would result in high organisational pride among employees. Similarly, it was found that there is a strong positive relationship of statistical significance (r = .833, p < .001) between organisational pride and corporate wear, which supports H3. This suggests that an increase in organisational pride would lead to high positive attitudes towards corporate wear.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to predict H1, H2, and H3. H1 tests if remuneration has a positive influence on corporate wear, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Regression analysis for H1, H2 and H3. *Source: Authors' own*

Hypothesis	Path	Beta Coefficient	R^2	F	P-value	Hypothesis supported
H1	REMU→CORPW	.801	.641	353.338	<0.001	Yes
H2	REMU → ORGP	.921	.848	1108.911	<0.001	Yes
H3	ORGP→CORPW	.833	.693	447.418	<0.001	Yes

The dependent variable corporate wear was regressed on predicting the independent variable employee remuneration to test the hypothesis. H1 was strongly supported. Employee remuneration significantly predicted attitudes towards corporate wear (β = 0.801, R2 = .641, p < 0.001). These results clearly indicated the positive effect of employee remuneration of attitudes towards corporate wear. H2: The hypothesis tests if organizational pride positively offsets perceptions of employee remuneration. Employee remuneration was regressed on predicting organisational pride to test the hypothesis. H2 was strongly supported (β = .921, R² .848, p < 0.001). The results indicated that organizational pride significantly accounts for the variance in perceptions of remuneration, highlighting organizational pride's crucial role in offsetting perceptions of being underpaid. H3: The hypothesis tests if organisational pride has a positive influence on corporate wear among employees. Corporate wear was regressed on predicting organisational pride to test the hypothesis. H3 was strongly supported (β = .833, R² .693, p < 0.001). The results showed that organizational pride significantly predicts employee perceptions towards corporate wear. The results reinforce the importance of promoting pride within institutions of higher learning.

Mediation was run to test H4 which hypothesized that organizational pride mediates the relationship between employee remuneration and corporate wear. To test this hypothesis, a series of regression analyses were conducted using SPSS with reference to Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach of determining direct and indirect effects. The summarised mediation statistics are shown in Table 7 and in the path diagram featured in Figure 2.

Table 7. Mediation Analysis Statistics for H4. *Source: Authors' own*

Effect Path	B	Std. Error	Coefficients B	P- value
REMU→CORPW	.849	.045	.801	<0.001
REMU → ORGP	.970	.029	.921	<0.001
ORGP → CORPW	.633	.101	.628	<0.000
REMU→ORGP→CORPW	.235	.106	.222	<0.028
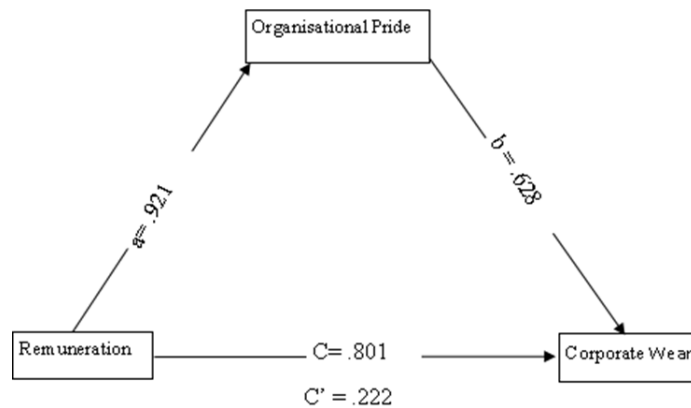
Note: Mediation equation, C= C' + A*B (.801 =.222 + .921 *.628)

Figure 2. Mediation Analysis Path Diagram for H4. *Source: Authors' own*

The direct effect of employee remuneration (REMU) on corporate wear (CORPW) was significant, β = 0.801, p < .001, which indicates a strong relationship. When organizational pride (ORGP) was introduced as a dependent variable, it significantly predicted ORGP (β = 0.921, p < .001). Organisational pride also predicted corporate wear (β = 0.628, p < .000). The total effect (combined direct and indirect influence of REMU on CORPW via ORGP) dropped to β = 0.222, but remained statistically significant (p = 0.028). The drop to β = 0.222 indicates partial mediation. Thus, H4 is partially supported, organizational pride act as a buffer, but does not fully absorb the impact of low remuneration on employee perceptions of corporate wear.

In summary, corporate wear was found to positively influence employee perceptions of professionalism, confidence, and unity. The high average mean scores indicate that employees perceive attire as a powerful symbol of institutional affiliation and pride. Employees reported a strong sense of belonging and alignment with institutional values, which in turn motivated their performance. Organizational pride emerged as a significant predictor of positive attitudes and professional behaviour, even under conditions of low remuneration. While corporate wear and organizational pride provide some psychological compensation, many respondents felt that these were insufficient to fully mitigate the negative effects of inadequate pay. Regression and mediation analyses confirmed that remuneration remains a critical factor in shaping employee attitudes. The mediation analysis revealed that organizational pride partially mediates the relationship between remuneration and corporate wear. This suggests that pride can soften, but not entirely bridge the gap caused by being underpaid. Variations in responses by age, gender, tenure, and job role highlight that the impact of corporate wear and pride is not the same across employee groups. Younger employees and newer employees may experience these elements differently compared to older or long-serving employees.

5. Discussion

This study found that corporate wear significantly improves employee perceptions of professionalism, confidence, and institutional unity. These findings echo Buckner et al. (2021) and Aledo-Ruiz et al. (2022), who argued that employee attire functions as a non-verbal communication tool that reinforces institutional values and professionalism. Moody (2023) and

Baron-Nixon and Hecht (2023) further support this by demonstrating how dress codes in academic institutions promote a sense of institutional pride and cohesion. The study extends this body of knowledge by highlighting how visual cues like attire serve as symbolic anchors, especially under challenging economic conditions. This adds depth to our understanding of the finding by Amani (2024) that employees act as brand ambassadors through corporate wear. Contrasting earlier studies that focused primarily on branding and external perceptions, the findings of this study show how corporate attire enhances internal morale and emotional connectivity of employees to an institution.

Organizational pride emerged as a strong predictor of motivation, positive work behaviour, and employee commitment, even in the face of low remuneration. This aligns with Durrah et al. (2021) and Schaefer et al. (2024), who emphasized that emotional pride contributes to loyalty and enhanced emotional well-being. The study also reinforces the findings of Ismail et al. (2022), who noted the synergistic effects of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural pride in fostering job satisfaction. However, the study reveals a critical contextual dimension by showing that organizational pride plays a buffering effect, particularly in economically strained public institutions. This contributes to the work of Bogren et al. (2020), who argued that symbolic and psychological incentives could temporarily mitigate dissatisfaction due to inadequate compensation. The finding also aligns with Yang, Jiang and Cheng (2022), who distinguish between "authentic" and "hubristic" pride. The findings of the study suggest that the pride evident among employees was largely authentic, and manifested in positive work behaviours and alignment with institutional goals. This highlights the psychological buffer effect of organisational pride in conditions of low remuneration.

While pride and corporate wear offer symbolic value, the study affirms that remuneration remains a critical structural factor in organisations. This is consistent with Nantavisit et al. (2023) as well as Mo and Morris (2024), who reported that inadequate compensation leads to stress and lower morale. Furthermore, the findings confirm Chikazhe et al. (2020) and Clercq et al. (2021), who found that perceived inequity in pay reduces motivation for discretionary behaviours like innovation and collaboration. In line with Khattak et al. (2020), the findings reinforce the link between remuneration injustice and organizational deviance. However, the study illustrates that organizational pride can soften, but not eliminate the negative effects of low pay. This finding positions the study at the intersection of psychological and economic theories of motivation, and provides a more holistic view of employee behaviour under low remuneration conditions.

The mediation analysis revealed that organizational pride partially mediates the relationship between remuneration and the psychological value attributed to corporate wear. This confirms findings by Athanasiadou et al. (2024) as well as Youn and Kim (2022), who demonstrated that pride can act as a mediator between institutional policies such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) or green HRM and positive employee attitudes. However, the study extends this line of thought by showing that even visual elements like attire are influenced by underlying material conditions, mediated through employee pride. This result adds a new perspective to our understanding of pride: understanding it not just as an outcome, but as a translational mechanism that connects remuneration to symbolic engagement.

The findings also identified demographic differences (by age, tenure, and role) in response to corporate wear and pride. This result adds complexity to the literature. While prior studies such as Pathan (2023) and Sotak et al. (2024) have touched on variations in employee perceptions, few have explored these distinctions under low remuneration conditions, or in a developing world academic setting. The study suggests that younger or newer employees in institutions of higher learning may find symbolic cues like attire more meaningful, while longer-serving employees prioritize financial recognition. This distinction enriches the literature on organizational behaviour by highlighting generational and contextual dynamics in identity formation and motivation. The findings position this study as a valuable contribution to both organizational behaviour theory and practice, especially in the public-sector and developing country contexts, where traditional motivational approaches such as competitive remuneration are often constrained.

While the results support the positive role of corporate wear and organizational pride in mitigating the effects of low remuneration, it is essential to examine these findings in the light of contradictory studies. For instance, Youcef (2023) argued that compensation may not be the most dominant determinant of job satisfaction, highlighting the role of supervisory relationships and developmental opportunities. In this study, however, low remuneration

clearly emerged as a demotivating factor, although moderated by organizational pride and professional identity expressed through corporate wear. This contrast suggests that in the context of Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning, where economic challenges and limited promotional opportunities are prevalent, non-financial motivators such as institutional pride and professional image become important.

Moreover, Bashir et al. (2021) found that individuals with high public service motivation remained engaged despite experiencing low reward equity, provided they perceived high prosocial impact in their jobs. Similarly, respondents in this study, particularly those with advanced degrees and longer tenure, demonstrated resilience. This group category finds pride in their institutions despite low remuneration. This suggests that employees in institution of higher learning in Zimbabwe may perceive their roles as socially meaningful, which cushions them against the negative psychological impacts of being underpaid.

This positive interpretation of corporate wear, however, must be viewed through an open mind. The impact of corporate wear on morale and identity is not uniform. Youn and Kim (2022) highlighted that individual differences, differences including personal preferences and organizational culture can influence the willingness of employees to embrace or reject corporate attire. This assertion is supported by the demographic data of this study. Having a balanced gender distribution (50% male, 50% female) and diverse age groups within institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe suggests the presents of varied perceptions. For instance, younger employees (13% under 30 years) may be more flexible and being experimental in their dress preferences compared to the 28% aged 40–49 years, who might prioritize traditional professionalism and institutional symbolism. Similarly, the same can be inferred concerning employees with less than five years of experience in institutions of higher learning (19%), who may view corporate wear as an imposed custom, while those with over 21 years of experience (16%) may internalize corporate wear as part of institutional identity.

Given these individual and cultural differences, claims about the universal benefits of corporate wear must be verified. For instance, cultural norms in Zimbabwe may reinforce formal dress codes as indicators of decency and professionalism, yet these same norms may not represent the views and beliefs of all employees equally. This becomes more apparent in reference to younger employees, who may be influenced by global perceptions and current trends towards less formal workplaces. Institutions of higher learning should therefore develop inclusive and flexible corporate wear policies, policies that accommodate institutional branding goals, personal comfort and their workforce's preferences.

5. Implications

The study has practical implications for leaders in institutions of higher learning and policy formulation. While corporate wear and organizational pride emerged as critical tools for enhancing employee morale under low remuneration conditions, their effectiveness depends on how these are integrated into the broader institutional support structures. Institutions of higher learning should move beyond symbolic branding initiatives and should invest in policies that distribute the psychological and social benefits of corporate wear equitably.

First, institutions should consider implementing subsidized or fully funded corporate wear programmes, particularly for those employees in low-paying positions. Findings from this study reveal that while employees take pride in professional appearance, the burden of purchasing uniforms can offset these morale gains. Subsidizing corporate attire, maybe by including them in staff welfare budgets aimed at reducing financial strain among the low-paid employees, may be a good idea. Such initiatives would enhance inclusivity within institutions.

Second, pride-building should be institutionalized through staff development initiatives, such as internal communication strategies that highlight employee achievements, and periodic team-building activities. Given the strong correlation between organizational pride and professional commitment, institutions should embed pride reinforcement into performance appraisal systems and leadership training programmes. Institutions of higher learning should take deliberate decisions and programmes that recognise and reward behaviour that aligns with their institutional values.

Third, human resource departments can adopt inclusive corporate wear policies, and ensuring that corporate attire is culturally appropriate and adaptable across age groups,

genders, and job roles. This would address the variations in how employees perceive and experience corporate wear, as revealed in the demographic data analysis.

Forth, institutional pride should be framed not only around image building but also around employee well-being and recognition. The findings of this study point to the paradox of image versus income; hence, institutional pride strategies must address these material conditions. There is also a need to activate bottom-up feedback channels within institutions of higher learning: channels that involve employees in the institutional decision-making process. This could nurture a deeper sense of ownership and belongingness among employees and their institutions.

Based on the findings of the study, actionable recommendations are proposed for policymakers, institutional leaders, and human resources practitioners in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Institutions of higher learning should implement subsidized corporate wear schemes, which should function as structured support schemes that provide corporate attire to employees at subsidized or at no cost. This could be done through adding the line item 'corporate wear' under employee welfare budget schemes or creating a scheme in the case of institutions that do not yet have such budget allocations. Priority should be given to supporting employees who are most affected by remuneration disparities.

In line with the findings of this study, perceptions on corporate wear vary by age, tenure, and gender. To cater for the tastes of differing groups, institutions of higher learning should form employee corporate attire committees. These committees should be tasked to ensure that the design process is consultative and should aim for an inclusive and participatory corporate wear process. Initiatives such as these can help in maximizing the psychological benefits of corporate attire while respecting individual choices and cultural preferences.

Institutions of higher learning should make deliberate efforts to benchmark salaries with universities in Southern Africa in order to ameliorate dissatisfaction arising because of low remuneration. Such benchmarking initiatives would form the basis for institutions of higher learning in lobbying for better funding and support through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development to the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion. The aim of such lobbying and bargaining exercises should be focused on attaining regional parity in salary levels of employees in institutions of higher learning.

State universities in Zimbabwe through their university councils and vice chancellors should advocate for targeted subsidies and incentives from the central government. Incentives such as housing allowances or rebate on duty for motor vehicle schemes, which are available to employees in the civil service, can contribute to enhancing job satisfaction without requiring immediate salary increases.

Institutions should establish pride scores metrics (HPSMs), metrics that measure the emotional connection employees have with their institutions. Such initiatives can be implemented through their human resource departments. Such organizational pride strategies can include recognition programmes, and participatory decision-making. Institutions of higher learning should formalize these pride enhancement schemes through annual organizational pride audits and pride-based key performance indicators (KPIs).

Institutions should organise regular workshops and seminars to inculcate professionalism among their employees in line with the study which found that corporate wear supports a sense of professionalism. These professional identity development workshops (PIDWs) should not only frame professional identity in appearance but should extend to areas such as ethics and performance. These workshops could be linked to the promotion and performance appraisal systems in these institutions of higher learning. Institutions should set up feedback mechanisms, such as annual surveys aimed at continuous evaluation, on the impact of corporate wear and pride initiatives. These mechanisms would ensure that policies on corporate wear remain responsive to and aligned with the evolving needs of employee and institutional values.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the complex relationship between corporate wear, organizational pride, and low remuneration conditions in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Findings revealed a paradox. While corporate wear instils a sense of unity, professionalism and pride,

its motivational effects are limited when employees perceive their remuneration as inadequate or unjust. The presence of corporate attire alone does not guarantee higher job satisfaction or morale, particularly in the contexts of economic hardship. However, the effect of corporate attire can be more felt when combined with other factors such as organizational pride, recognition, fairness, and inclusion. Within such as mix of factors, corporate wear can reinforce institutional identity and enhance organisational commitment.

Regression and mediation analyses showed that organizational pride partially mediates the impact of corporate wear on employee outcomes. This suggests that corporate wear acts more effectively as a symbolic prompt when it resonates with broader institutional values. Apart from broader institutional values, employees need to feel being sincerely valued. The study also highlighted demographic variations in perceptions of attire and pride. Such differences were observed through gender, age, tenure, and academic versus administrative roles. The study contributes to the body of knowledge by empirically examining how non-financial symbolic features interact with economic realities. The study exposed the implications of low remuneration conditions on corporate wear and organizational pride under in institutions of higher learning. The study extends the Social Identity Theory (SIT) by highlighting how identity indicators can both reinforce and conflict with lived workplace realities. The study also introduces a partial mediation framework which presents organizational pride as cushioning. However, organizational pride is not a full compensatory mechanism under low remuneration conditions.

The study offers practical and context-specific insights for leadership, policy-making, and future research into motivation, identity, and institutional branding. This study makes a unique contribution by empirically exploring the paradoxical coexistence of institutional branding. Institutional branding through corporate wear under low remuneration conditions is a topic that is underexplored in African academic contexts. Previous literature treated pride and attire as isolated variables. This study, however, conceptualizes corporate wear as a symbolic mediating artefact which enhances identity and masks inequity.

The study has merged the Social Identify Theory (SIT) and Organizational Identification Theory (OIT): the fusion of these two theories provides a more holistic model of how attire and pride operate across different demographic, positions, and emotional contexts. It also offers an African perspective on identity construction under resource-constrained conditions.

The findings of this study offer important insights, but they also open areas for further research that could deepen and broaden our understanding of the interaction between organizational pride, corporate wear, and low remuneration within the context of institutions of higher learning. Future research could embark on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of corporate wear on employee behaviour, commitment, and organizational identification. While this study captured perceptions at a single point in time, tracking changes over time could reveal whether corporate wear initiatives retain their positive impact or lose effectiveness. Such research could explore the durability of corporate wear as a morale-sustaining strategy in low remuneration conditions. There is need for qualitative research approaches, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore employee perceptions towards corporate wear, pride, and remuneration in greater detail. This would allow for the unpacking of personal experiences not easily captured through this quantitative survey.

The generalizability of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) needs to be examined for its applicability for cross-country comparative studies in different socio-economic and cultural contexts. Investigating how corporate wear and organizational pride interact in institutions of higher learning in other developing countries could reveal whether similar compensatory mechanisms for low remuneration exist, or whether other factors such as national culture or policy frameworks can alter these relationships.

Future studies could consider sectoral comparisons beyond public and private institutions of higher learning. Research might compare traditional universities with newly established institutions, where organizational culture and branding strategies may differ. These comparisons could help determine whether pride-building through corporate wear is more effective in certain types of institutions than others.

Moderation and mediation frameworks could be extended to examine additional variables such as gender, tenure, and employment category. This would build on the demographic findings of this study. Future researchers will have the opportunity to test whether corporate wear and organizational pride impact groups differently, which investigations could offer more targeted and inclusive policy recommendations.

While the study offers meaningful insights, the study acknowledges notable weakness in three critical aspects. The findings of the study are context-specific, as they have been drawn from institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. This specificity may result in the findings not being generalizable to private universities or other countries with different economic conditions.

The robustness of the research design was weakened by implementing a cross-sectional research design, which collected data at a single point in time, thus limiting the ability to infer long-term variations among the key variables of the study including corporate wear and organisational pride. This limitation could have been addressed through a longitudinal research design.

The use of self-administered questionnaires may have introduced some bias related to social desirability or subjective interpretation of constructs such as pride and remuneration. Such self-report measures could have given room for respondents to either overvalue or undervalue their perceptions, which may result in drawing wrong conclusions from the findings.

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