DISCIPLINARY ISSUES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

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Abstract
Indiscipline among secondary students in Nigeria has become a persistent and worrisome challenge posing serious threats to effective teaching and learning process, as well as school administration. This paper discusses the social control theory as the primary theoretical framework upon which the paper was hinged. Examples of indisciplinary behaviours such as cultism, drug abuse, vandalism sexual abuse, cybercrime and open disobedience to authority were copiously highlighted. The implications for school management, with the overall aim of ensuring conducive school environment for teaching and learning was equally emphasized. It was suggested that appropriate reward system coupled with guidance and counseling service be taken seriously; in addition to having clearly stated and enforceable rules and regulations, as well as the introduction of technology for monitoring the school premises and activities.

Keywords: -Indiscipline, Cultism, Vandalism, Cyber Crime, Bulling.

Introduction
Education is seen, globally, as the mainspring of development of nations; it shapes the character, values, and innovativeness of the citizens. Discipline is situated at the heart of the educational process, providing the keystone for effective teaching, learning, and social interaction within and beyond the domain of the school. In Nigeria, secondary schools stand as' an exploratory intermediate stage where young minds experience intellectual, social and emotional development. However, in contemporary times, a disturbing trend of emerging disciplinary issues among students of secondary schooling level has raised remarkable worries for educators, policymakers, and, most critically, school administrators who take up the responsibility of making sure that order and balance are entrenched in the schools.

Even though disciplinary challenges were not traditionally uncommon in Nigerian schools, they revolved round mild negative behaviour like lateness, absenteeism, noise-making, or failure to perform assignments. In recent time, however, the issues have become very compounded, variegated and dreadful. Cases of bullying, cultism, drug abuse, vandalism, sexual misconduct, cyber-related crime, brutal conflicts, and open insubordination to authority are commonly reported. These problems mirror not only changes within the school context, but also the broader societal changes, including family unsettledness, exposure to social media, economic hardship, and the destruction of cultural values. Behavioural challenges such as these, do not only derange teaching and learning but also compromise the moral and psychological advancement of students thereby wearing away the wider goals of secondary education.

This situation presents a new set of difficulties to administrators of secondary schools. As stewards of management of the institutions, they are required to preserve discipline, apply policies, guarantee safe school environment, and promote a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. Meanwhile, they must struggle with scarce resources, disagreeing approaches to discipline, parental meddling, and the continuous need to strike a balance between punitive measures, with corrective and preventive strategies. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on child rights and inclusive education tends to raise the obligation on administrators to adopt approaches that are both legally sound and educationally effective.

It is on the premise of this, that expressing intellectual concerns about disciplinary issues among secondary school students in Nigeria is both timely and significant. It creates the opportunity to consider the unfolding patterns of indiscipline, consider their root causes, and assess the implications for effective school administration. More importantly, it opens the conversation on sustainable strategies that can empower administrators to respond proactively to the challenges identified, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the educational system
and ensuring that schools remain secure, orderly, and productive environments for learning. The purpose of this paper is to examine disciplinary issues among secondary school students which could hamper the academic programmes; and also proffer possible solutions to these anomalies.

Theoretical Framework

This work is guided by the Social Control Theory, propounded by Hirschi (1969). The theory posits that individuals conform to social rules and expectations when they are bonded to society through string attachments, commitment, involvement, and belief. Otherwise, when these bonds are weak or broken, the likelihood of deviant behaviour increases. Hirschi's four key elements of the theory succinctly include:

1. Attachment - the emotional and social ties an individual has with parents, teachers, and peers. Strong attachments promote conformity, while weak attachments increase the risk of deviant behaviour.

2. Commitment-the investment bf time, energy, and resources in conventional activities such as education. Low commitment reduces the perceived cost of misbehaviour.
3. Involvement - participation in legitimate activities that time and reduce the opportunities for deviance. Idle individuals are more likely to engage in misconduct.
4. Belief - acceptance of social norms and values as legitimate. When belief is eroded, rules lose their restraining power.

This theory is considered most suitable for the work because it offers a direct explanation for the indiscipline increasingly observed among Nigerian secondary school students. Many disciplinary problems- truancy, cultism, drug abuse, bullying, cyber-crime, and defiance - can be linked to weakened attachments to family and school, reduced commitment to education due to poor learning conditions and unemployment, limited involvement in positive school activities, and declining belief in moral and cultural values. The theory is also relevant for school administrators, as it highlights the social dimensions of discipline and shifts attention from punitive control to the restoration and strengthening of social bonds.

Concept of Discipline

Discipline is a concept used to describe the systematic cultivation of behaviour, values and norms that enable students to engage productively in the learning process and respect the rules, authorities, and rights of others. It borders not only on external regulatory mechanisms - such as rules, sanctions, and teacher supervision - but also internalized self-regulation, respect for norms, and moral responsibility (Imisioluwa, 2025; Usoudo, et al. (2023), Abang,et al. (2024). Studies in Nigeria describe discipline as a key determinant of academic achievement. Usoudo, et al. (2023) found that effective discipline combine with an appropriate reward system contributes significantly to principal's administrative efficacy. Similarly, Abang, et al. (2024) demonstrate that strong home behaviour control and religiosity correlate with lower indiscipline among senior secondary students in Cross River State, highlighting the moral and familial dimensions of discipline. Furthermore, Imisioluwa (2025) emphasizes the shift toward non-violent discipline strategies in Nigerian secondary schools, arguing that discipline rooted in positive reinforcement and mentoring relationships yields better student behaviour and respect, compared to corporal or punitive methods. Thus, discipline is not just about order, but about fostering self-control, moral growth, and safe, respectful, and conducive learning environment.

Encouraging discipline in schools needs an intentional combination of preventive, corrective, and supportive strategies that reinforces positive behavior of students, rather than adopting punitive control measures. It is pivotal to establish clear rules and expectations, consistent classroom management, and supportive teacher-student relationships that foster respect and accountability. Alonge and Momoh (2022), in their study on teachers' development programme and management

effectiveness In Bayelsa State, argue that teacher professional growth and capacity building enhance management practices, which in turn strengthen discipline and order in schools. Although their study focused on primary schools, the implications extend to secondary schools, where administrators and teachers equipped with modern classroom management techniques are better placed to cultivate discipline. Additionally, Momoh and Also he (2022), laid emphasis on the strategic sustainability in schools, through a synergy of effective leadership, staff training, and home-school collaboration. In short, beyond enforcement of rules, cultivating discipline in school requires strategic investment in teacher development, leadership effectiveness, and parental engagement to build a school culture where discipline becomes internalized value shared by all stakeholders.

In urban secondary schools, promoting discipline requires approaches tailored to the complexities of city contexts -high student density, socio-economic diversity, greater exposure to digital media, and frequent interaction with varied peer influences - which together demand proactive, relationship-based, and context-sensitive strategies. School leaders should combine clear, consistent, enforced rules with positive behaviour supports (recognition systems, mentoring, and restorative practices) and strengthen teacher capacity for classroom management through ongoing professional development; these measures reduce idle time, improve students' self-regulation, and foster a safe learning climate (Alonge & Ogeleka, 2022). More so, urban schools benefit from expanded extracurricular and community partnership programmes that engage students constructively outside class hours, and from deliberate home-school collaboration that aligns expectations between parents and educators. When discipline is approached as a holistic, developmental process focused on building relationships, skills, community -urban schools are better able to transform challenging behavior into opportunities for growth and learning.

For rural secondary schools, cultivating discipline engages strategies that accommodate the unique socio-cultural and logistical contexts of rural communities - such as longer distances to school, scarce resources, and stronger community-family ties. A recent study by Abidoye (2023) on indiscipline among the female secondary school students in selected rural communities of River State found that peer group pressure, weak school administrative policy, and low parental supervision are major contributors to indiscipline in rural areas. Therefore, school administrators should engage community leaders, strengthen parental involvement, and ensure clear, culturally appropriate administrative policies; training teachers in classroom management and providing counseling support are essential to promoting student respect and self-discipline when strategies are adapted to rural context and involve local values and stakeholders, they are more likely to succeed in fostering stable, respectful learning environment.

Generally, the absence of discipline indicates the presence of indiscipline, which may not be unconnected with certain factors. Research shows that indiscipline

among secondary school students in Nigeria is rooted in several multi-faceted causes, involving home, school, peer, and societal influences. For example, in his study of public secondary schools in Ogbomosho South, Oyo State, Adeyeye (2024) identified parental neglect, inadequate enforcement of school rules, and peer influence as leading causes of student misconduct such as truancy, disrespect for teachers, and examination malpractice.

These findings echo patterns seen in other studies, including exposure to unwholesome media content, overcrowded classrooms, and weak guidance and counselling systems, which reduce accountability and support for students. By understanding these root causes, school administrators can design preventive strategies that address not only student behaviour in the classroom but also in the broader environment influencing that behavioural pattern. Otherwise, when indiscipline is allowed to thrive, it will become a springboard for the emergence of certain issues for administrators to grapple with.

Disciplinary Issues Among Secondary School Students

Some of the disciplinary issues among secondary school students shall be discoursed below:

Bullying

There are series of disciplinary issues among secondary school students in Nigeria today; bullying assumes the front burner, emerging as a prominent disciplinary and public health concerns affecting Nigerian secondary-school students. It commonly manifests as physical and verbal aggression, peer theft, threats, and classroom victimization in the absence of teachers; recent large-scale surveys shows that roughly half of the students are reported to have experienced at least one form of bullying while substantial minorities admit to perpetuating it, with higher risk among younger (junior) students, those from rural areas, and students exposed to harsh parental discipline (Ighaede, Olawade, Odetayo, & Olawade, Ling, Odetayo, & Olawade, 2023). The behaviour not only undermines victim's and psychological wellbeing and sense of safety but also disrupts classroom order and academic engagement, making traditional punitive response without complementary punitive policies, teacher supervision, family-focused interventions, and school-wide anti-bullying programmes. Policy makers and school administrators should therefore treat bullying as an urgent disciplinary İssue requiring data-drive prevention strategies tailored to the local context.

Cultism

Another worrisome issue bothering on discipline in secondary schools in Nigeria is cultism and its related menace. It has become a very disturbing disciplinary challenge in Nigerian secondary schools, with its roots in peer group influence, weak parental supervision, and imitation of violent subcultures often observed in tertiary institutions. The incentives for luring secondary school students into cultism include the promise of protection, social recognition, and power, but the

outcomes of such involvement are observed to comprise violence, intimidation, examination malpractice, and disruption of the school's moral and academic climate. The presence of cult-related activities in secondary schools has been linked to fear, reduced academic performance, and a breakdown of discipline, thereby threatening the overall goals of education. According to studies in recent time, the fact that cultism is no longer restricted to higher institutions has been emphasized, buttressing that it has penetrated the secondary school system (Okorie & Onwe, 2021). The researchers canvass the need for urgent intervention through value re-orientation, effective counselling, and stronger collaboration among schools, family and law enforcement agencies.

Drug Abuse

Again, drug abuse has become a disturbing disciplinary issue among secondary school students in Nigeria. Indulgence in drug abuse has become growing phenomenon among secondary school students in Nigeria. Substances like cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and other psychoactive drugs are observed to be consumed in high volume by secondary school students. Peer pressure, curiosity, availability of drugs in the communities allegedly fuel this misconduct; most of the students involved in the act may not have been closely monitored by their parents. The effects of drug abuse usually include: poor academic performance, irregular attendance to class, disruptive behaviour both in and outside the classroom, aggression, truancy, and other deviant acts that undermine school discipline. Recent study shows that related substances are increasingly being abused among secondary school students in Nigeria, contributing significantly to moral decadence, poor learning outcomes, and increased cases of violence, thereby threatening the stability of the educational system (Abdu-Raheem & Adekeye, 2022).

Vandalism

The act of vandalism by Nigerian secondary school students is not less a challenge for school administrators than others. Vandalism, which has emerged as a disciplinary issue among the Nigerian secondary school students, commonly manifests in the willful destruction of school property like desks, windows, laboratory equipment, and toilet facilities. Some of the factors believed to be responsible for this act of damage by volition are peer group influence, frustration from poor learning conditions, inadequate supervision; it may also result from protest against school authority. Besides financial loss, the effects of vandalism may include disruption of the teaching-learning environment, reduced students' sense of responsibility, extinction of the culture of respect for public property. A recent study by Okoro and Ogbondah (2021) establishes that vandalism, transcends beyond being a form of indiscipline; it reflects deeper social and moral withering among adolescents; it calls for preventive strategies such as moral education, strengthened disciplinary measures, and active parental involvement.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual indiscipline also constitutes serious challenge for school administrators in Nigerian secondary schools. This misconduct ranges from inappropriate relationships among students to cases of harassment and exploitation involving peers or, in rare cases, adults within the school system. Exposure to sexually explicit media, lack of adequate sex education, peer pressure, and weak enforcement of school discipline are some of the factors that are observed to be responsible to the rising prevalence of this problem. The delinquency has far-reaching implications such as early pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, emotional trauma, and disruption of academic focus, all of which undermine the objective of secondary education. Recent studies have shown that sexual misconduct among adolescents in Nigeria schools is a growing concern that requires urgent multi-stakeholder intervention through comprehensive sexuality education, effective counselling, and strict enforcement of school regulations (Ugboma & Agulanna, 2022).

Cyber Crime

One of the commonest threats to discipline among secondary school students, today, is the rising wave of cyber-related crime, which is fueled by the increasing accessibility to smartphones, internet connectivity, and social media platforms. These have provided motivation for many students to engage in activities like cyberbullying, examination malpractice through online platforms, identity theft, and internet fraud (commonly referred to as "yahoo-yahoo"). These behaviours are often reinforced by peer pressure, the quest for quick wealth, and inadequate digital literacy or lack of proper monitoring by parents and teachers apart from violating school rules, cyber-related crime has a lot of other negative effects, which include: exposure to legal risks, distraction from academic focus, and promotion of negative culture (indiscipline) that compromises both moral and educational development. Olowu and Adebayo (2022), in their recent study, warn that the infiltration of cybercrime into secondary schools is on the rise and calls for urgent interventions, including digital citizenship education, parental supervision, and stricter school polices on internet use.

Brutal Conflict

“Brutal conflict” is referred to as severe, violent or highly disruptive clashes among students, or between students and staff. This social menace is increasingly identified as a serious disciplinary issue posing great challenge to administrators of secondary school in Nigeria. A mix of social, economic and systemic factors could be responsible for such conflicts. These can include: growing inequality, peer pressure or gang/cult influence, competition over scarce resources (e.g facilities, opportunity), weak enforcement of discipline policies, and sometimes provocation over real or perceived injustice. The results are usually serious: injuries, trauma, property damage, disruption of academic schedules/activities, absenteeism, fear among students and staff, and, in extreme cases, fatalities. Educational management scholars have started documenting these issues: for example, Ikhielea

(2024) notes that conflicts between students and teachers often heighten into violence when management fails to implement effective conflict resolution strategies, and recommends structured conflict-management training, inclusive school governance, and preventive disciplinary policies.

Flagrant Disobedience

Embedded in acts of insubordination are open defiance of authority, refusal obey school rules, speaking back to teachers, and other forms of disrespect. These vices are increasingly being observed among secondary school students in Nigeria. Momoh and Marchie (2023) note that ineffective conflict management by principals correspond with escalated tension and misbehaviour when students feel their grievances are ignored or when leadership lacks responsiveness. This suggests that insubordination often arises from students' misconduct, but from systemic weaknesses in school governance such as authoritarian leadership styles, lack of participatory decision-making, and insufficient mechanism for students to express their concerns. The consequences of insubordination include disruptions to teaching, lowered teacher morale, erosion of classroom discipline, and compromised academic performance. Effective strategies to address insubordination therefore involve leadership training, inclusive school policies, strengthening teacher-student relationships, and consistent, fair enforcement of rules.

Complication for School Management

Indiscipline has a number of challenges for administrators of secondary schools. At the fore of these challenges is a marked rise in the workload and stress level of the administrators. When there is a display of indiscipline, administrators will need to devote additional time and energy to managing the resultant conflicts, disciplinary hearings, record-keeping, initiating appropriate corrective measures. The escalation of Students' misbehaviour inevitably brings administrators into performing roles that are not necessarily part of their routine supervision schedule investigating incidents, mediating disputes, liaising with parents, and ensuring compliance with sanctions - which does not only lead to their engagement beyond the normal official working hours but also imposes emotional and psychological burdens. The consequences of this cumulative stress may include: weakened decision-making, reduction in job satisfaction, and compromised administrator's health, making it difficult to maintain effective leadership and sustain school discipline (Obiweluozor & Ogunbiyi, 2023).

More so, if indiscipline is allowed to thrive in secondary schools, it will create an environment where teaching and learning are seriously challenged, because engagement of students with instructional activities will become inconsistent; the effects of this development are seen in both students, teachers, and the administrator. Aibinuomo and Kennedy (2021), in their study, "Management of Disciplinary Problems in Primary and Secondary Schools in Nigeria", recorded the way certain behaviours - disrespect, extortion, sexual harassment, truancy, and

disruption of class sessions usually result in frequent interruptions, inability of teachers to cover the curriculum, and reduced attention spans among learners. What this implies is that the plan for instructional activities of the school is greatly challenged; such development, in turn, leaves the administrator with the option of planning remedial work to cover missed content and manage disengaged students. Dissipating energy and time for such course comes as a great challenge before administrators of secondary schools.

Furthermore, the norms and values that guide the behaviour of people within the school, as a social system is vital to the attainment of goals; and they regulate the actions and inactions of students, teachers, and management personnel, thus, it's a core responsibility of the administrators to ensure that these norms and values are preserved by ensuring that discipline is instilled in all. When indiscipline is allowed to spread within the school, it negatively affects school culture by causing it to deteriorate; the aftermath is that the shared norms, values, traditions, and expectations that support a positive learning environment are eroded. Atunde and Aliyu (2019), in their study of Prevalence, Causes and Management of indiscipline in Public Secondary School: llorin Metropolis in Focus, reported that increasing incidents of disobedience, classroom disruptions, and rule violations lead both teachers and students to behave in such a way that tends to label school rules as optional and not integral to school life; consequently, respect for authority is eroded while collective responsibility is weakened. For the administrator, such deterioration lead to loss of cohesion among staff and students, diminished moral climate, lower school pride, and difficulty in instilling positive role models; all these make it harder to maintain discipline, improve achievement, or foster a safe, inspiring environment.

In a secondary school environment where indiscipline thrive, academic performance is generally poor; this has a very serious implication for administrators. Behaviours, such as truancy, late coming, classroom disruptions and disobedience are such disturbances that can reduce instructional time and cause a decline in students' engagement. A comparative study by Nwogu, Ajewole, Balogun, Utoware, Olajide and Adieme (2025), titled, Impact of indiscipline on students' academic performance and school management strategies in Nigerian public secondary schools, established that indiscipline in Ekiti State public secondary schools is strongly associated with poor academic outcomes, with students, who were noted for regularly violating school rules, performing poorer, academically, than their counterparts who behaved well. The implications of this for school administrators is that they may be faced with: the responsibility of organizing remedial classes, lower school performance metrics, potential loss of funding, criticism from parents and educational authorities. Thus school leadership and organizational capacity may be strained.

Also, school administrators contend with safety and security concerns, as serious implications of indiscipline. Indiscipline among students can heighten to a level

where it breeds violence, theft, physical confrontations, intrusion, and other negative outcomes that threaten the wellbeing of staff and students. Udofia (2024), in his study, titled, school safety issues exhibited among secondary school students in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria: implications for educational management, found that reoccurring safety issues like fighting, vandalism, harassment, and unauthorized entry by students complicate the burdens of administrators in the quest for maintaining safe school environments. The cumulative effects of all such incidents include: serious anxiety among staff and students, increased absenteeism, demands for enhanced infrastructure perimeter fencing, CCTV etc.) - and increased resource allocation for security measures. The need to give attention to these demands compels administrators to divert attention from instructional development to safety management, which automatically becomes a priority. This can strain school budget and affect overall school development.

In spite of the prevailing negative implications of indiscipline, posing serious challenges to school administrators, it is trite to acknowledge that the situation equally serves as motivation for administrators to take crucial steps towards adopting leadership that is effective for correcting the resultant ills of indiscipline in the system. Thus, emphasizing the need for visionary school leadership. By exercising visionary, consistent, and fair leadership, secondary school administrators can promote firm disciplinary policies in the school, supervise teaching and student behaviour, as well as enhance school atmosphere where indiscipline does not find incentive to thrive. Nwogu, Ajewole, Balogun, Utoware, Olajide, and Adieme (2025), in their study, Impact of Indiscipline on Students' Academic Performance and School Management Strategies in Nigerian Public Secondary Schools, recommended effective leadership, better monitoring, fair disciplinary policy enforcement, and strong managerial oversight, as important measure for curbing indiscipline. Effective leadership - the type that is visible, participative, and accountable - helps administrators to envisage indiscipline, set expectations, support teachers, and repair disruptions quickly, thereby preserving academic integrity, morale, and school order.

Conclusion

For a successful school leadership to thrive in secondary school, discipline needs to be inculcated in the students because of the key role it plays in providing the basis for effective teaching and learning. School administrators are mindful of this fact, hence, they make conscious effort in promoting a school environment that consistently reinforces good conduct and wards off indiscipline; this administrative commitment must be sustained for the retention of positive school culture. However, there are emerging disciplinary issues - bullying, cultism, drug abuse, vandalism, sexual indiscipline, cyber-related crime, brutal conflict, and open defiance to authority - that are currently posing huge challenges to the administrators, in their effort towards cultivating discipline among the students: their workload and stress rise astronomically; the disturbance of teaching and

learning elicits their concern; deteriorating school culture makes their work more difficult; they are tasked with the responsibility of providing remedy for poor academic performance; safety and security issues become serious concerns, for which allocation of fund is necessity. Nevertheless, there is a reassuring dimension of the implications, which is the need for administrators to develop effective school leadership so that indiscipline, with its accompanying challenges, can be effectively addressed.

Suggestions

Arising from the foregoing discourse, the following suggestions are offered for mitigating the rising wave of indiscipline among secondary school students in Nigeria.

1. Enforce Clear Rules and Consequences- Administrators should ensure that clear rules are developed and clearly communicated to students, teachers and parents. Meanwhile, the consequences of breaking any rule should be fairly administered.
2. Provide Guidance and Counseling Services - Schools should engage the services of professional counselors; they can be helpful in guiding students through personal, academic, and emotional challenges that often lead them to acts of misconduct.
3. Use Reward and Motivation -Leadership of secondary schools should adopt the style of rewarding positive behaviour by encouraging, recognizing and praising students. On the other hand, constructive correction, rather than punitive measures should be adopted for discouraging negative behaviour.
4. Teachers Should Be Role Models-teachers should be encouraged to behave in such a way that models good character – displaying discipline, punctuality, and professionalism -to positively guide students in the process of character development.
5. Integrate Technology for Monitoring - CCTV cameras, biometric attendance systems and digital record keeping are some technological approaches that administrators can adopt to effectively monitor students behavíour.

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