

BREAKING THE CYCLE: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO CURB INDISCIPLINE AND FOSTER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

This paper addresses the critical nexus between student indiscipline and academic underachievement in Nigerian schools. Confronting manifestations such as truancy and poor engagement, the study argue that proactive classroom management is the essential channel for a breakthrough. The analysis identifies the root causes of this crisis, including inconsistent teaching practices and socio-environmental factors, and demonstrates how they are compounded by poor classroom management. Central to our thesis is the evidence that teachers who employ empathetic, adaptable, and authoritative management strategies can create a disciplined environment where learning thrives. Ultimately, we assert that improving classroom management is not merely an administrative task but the cornerstone of educational reform. The paper concludes with targeted recommendations for teacher training, student support systems, and instructional leadership to cultivate the disciplined, engaging, and achievement-oriented classrooms that Nigerian students require.

Keyword: Indiscipline, Underachiever, Students & Classroom Management

Introduction

Historically, many schools were run by voluntary agencies, and this contributed to a strong culture of discipline. There was a sense of harmony within the school community, as principals, teachers, and students clearly understood and respected their individual roles and responsibilities. Likewise, parents and teachers shared common values regarding what constituted acceptable and desirable behaviour among students. The high level of discipline was obvious among secondary schools before the start of Civil War in Nigeria (Zubaidia, 2009). However, after the inception of the Civil War, it was quite glaring that most students became less disciplined. Hence, discipline has a vital role in the educational setting in Nigeria; hence, the need to examine the concept of discipline is

paramount. Discipline in schools refers to adherence to established rules and regulations, as well as the consistent maintenance of acceptable standards of behaviour. It reflects qualities such as self-control, moderation, and respect for both oneself and others (Ogunbanwo & Obateru, 2023). Any action or conduct that goes against these principles is regarded as indiscipline. Furthermore, a disciplined environment is a prerequisite for a smooth and productive academic session.

According to Onyije and Ojedapo (2010), there are numerous factors that cause indiscipline among students these include government nonchalant attitudes to education, parental factors and teachers' attitude, attributes that could result in gross disciplinary breaches and as such,

constitute indiscipline and results in underachievement among secondary school students. According to Ajayi and Oyetola (2023), indiscipline encompasses behaviours such as truancy, vandalism, disobedience, lateness, and violence all of which erode academic performance and institutional integrity. Indiscipline is a complex issue that manifests in various ways and stems from multiple causes. It carries different meanings and serves diverse roles across social, psychological, and educational contexts. Concerning its displays, Freire (2009) categorized acts of indiscipline into levels: the first includes general classroom disruptions, the second involves peer conflicts, and the third encompasses severe breaches like violence or delinquency. This classification helps educators and policymakers understand the varying degrees of indiscipline and tailor interventions accordingly. The persistent rise in such behaviours, including exam malpractice, cultism, and physical violence, suggests a systemic breakdown in moral and disciplinary standards in schools (Nwachukwu & Okezie, 2022).

According to Yaroson (2004), the issue of indiscipline cuts across every aspect of human life and has had deeply damaging effects on society. Gaustard (2005) explains that discipline in schools serves two primary purposes: to safeguard both staff and students, and to foster an environment that supports effective learning. However, when students engage in violent or criminal behaviour, such acts of indiscipline undermine these objectives and weaken the very foundation of education. It is therefore pertinent at this juncture to provide therapeutic measures to students' involvement in armed robbery, rape, cultism, examination fraud and much other unruly

behaviour which make headlines in our print and electronic media (Adebayo, 2021). The problem of indiscipline affects all schools irrespective of gender and school type though the degree and magnitude vary from school to school; a significant part of it can be traced to the level at which students will perform in their academics. Most of the time, underachievement is noticed when school is shut down due to unduly behaviours of students

Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent provides insight into the factors that contribute to student underachievement. Underachievers can be found in all segments of society, though they are often more common among culturally diverse groups, individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with learning difficulties. Several definitions of underachievement have been proposed, but Reiss and Park (2001) offer one of the most comprehensive. They describe underachievers as students who show a significant gap between their potential performance, often measured through standardized tests or assessments and their actual academic results, as reflected in grades and teacher evaluations. This discrepancy must be sustained over time and not solely attributable to a learning disability. In many cases, indiscipline plays a major role in this decline in academic achievement (Chukwuemeka & Okoye, 2023).

To address indiscipline effectively, teachers must first understand the individual characteristics and needs of their students. Good classroom management plays a vital role in promoting student participation and academic success (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Ibrahim & Alhassan, 2021). Since students vary in their abilities, backgrounds, and learning speeds,

teachers need to remain flexible and adjust their teaching methods accordingly. Although many teachers make efforts to tailor instruction for students with different abilities, their approach often changes when they encounter learners with special needs. Some teachers view these differences not as opportunities to improve instruction but as obstacles to effective teaching. However, such differences should be seen as essential factors that guide appropriate classroom adjustments.

Asiyai (2012) emphasized that education serves as a powerful instrument for transforming both individuals and society. Specifically, secondary education in Nigeria is designed to equip learners for meaningful participation in society and to prepare them for higher education. For individuals to live productively and contribute effectively to the social, economic, and political progress of their nation, they must acquire the right skills, values, attitudes, knowledge, and competencies that promote discipline and responsible citizenship (Oladipo & Adebayo, 2023). In today's Nigeria, the term 'indiscipline' has become ubiquitous, appearing in discussions across government offices, private organizations, politics, and all tiers of the education system. In secondary schools, various forms of indiscipline have become increasingly common. However, the challenge with the term lies in its interpretation while most people believe they understand what it means, their perceptions often differ depending on personal experiences and context. Indiscipline can be defined simply as a lack of discipline. From the foregoing, indiscipline is any form of misbehaviours which the students can display in the following ways: general disobedience to constituted authority, destruction of school property, poor attitude to learning, abuse of seniority, immoral behaviour,

drug abuse, stealing, lateness, truancy, being quarrelsome, use of abusive or foul languages, rudeness, gangsters or cultism among others as the forms of indiscipline in schools are inexhaustible.

Nwakoby (2001) described indiscipline as a form of misconduct that is not limited to physical actions but can also originate from a person's mindset. This suggests that indiscipline goes beyond visible behaviour; it can also be reflected in a student's attitude or disposition, where even their mood or state of mind may indicate elements of misconduct or disregard for expected norms. In the context of a school system, a student is said to be discipline if his behaviours, actions and inactions conform to the predetermined rules and regulations of the school concerned (Okonkwo & Fadeyi, 2021).

Indiscipline in Schools

School indiscipline has been over time an issue of concern for educators, policymakers and the public at large (Paul, 2009; Yusuf & Bello, 2023). Indiscipline is regarded as a behavioural disorder that qualifies as delinquent conduct, similar to lying, stealing, truancy, and other socially deviant behaviours. Such acts often result in significant emotional, psychological, and physical damage to both the individual and the school environment (Akinrinade & Adeosun, 2021). Zubaida (2009) highlights several forms of indiscipline among secondary school students, including truancy, lateness, cultism, drug abuse, disrespect, theft, rioting, and inappropriate sexual behaviour, among other social vices. These negative behaviours have gradually intensified over time, largely due to weakened disciplinary systems in schools. Similarly, Kounin (2008) observes that student indiscipline often appears in the form of disruptive and unruly conduct, such as violence,

street fights, hooliganism, habitual lateness, improper dressing, moral laxity, and gambling. These behaviours tend to occur both within the school environment and beyond it, reflecting a broader decline in moral and behavioural standards.

Parents play a critical role in shaping a child's behaviour. Unfortunately, many parents today have delegated their responsibilities, spending minimal time with their children. This lack of parental involvement contributes significantly to the moral decay observed among students (Ogunleye & Akanji, 2022). When children are not adequately guided at home, they are more likely to deviate from acceptable norms in school. In addition to parental factors, Kipropo (2012) argued that the broader society cannot be absolved of blame, as indiscipline is a reflection of deteriorating social values. The norms and ethics of society have been distorted, and students often mirror these societal issues in their behaviour. As Paul (2009) highlighted, a student who frequently gambles at school may have adopted the belief that hard work is not rewarded, and dishonesty is a viable means of success an idea learned from observing society's misplaced priorities (Eze & Ibrahim, 2022).

Looking at indiscipline in another dimension, it can be perceived that indiscipline among teachers and non-teaching staff in schools also contribute to gross misconduct by students as the student often think that what they are doing is right after all, if teachers can do it why can they not do it. For example, when teachers go on industrial action, absent themselves from work, insult each other in front of pupils, fall in love with students and steal school funds, this usually is copied by students resulting in indiscipline among the students. According to Ndakwa (2013)

there are some students who influence others to cause chaos and this happens when students meet with other students with different behaviours that negatively influence them. The influence of peer groups tends to grow stronger when family bonds are weak or unsupportive (Vishala, 2008). Ndakwa (2013) explains that when parents are mostly absent or emotionally unavailable, children often seek comfort and a sense of belonging from their peers. In many cases, they may gravitate toward groups that readily accept them, even if those groups engage in negative or unlawful behaviours. The influence of peer pressure, especially during adolescence, can greatly determine whether a student maintains discipline or not (Olaniyan & Musa, 2024).

Who are the Underachievers?

Underachievement represents a persistent mismatch between a learner's potential and actual academic performance. Reiss and Park (2001) define underachievers as students who exhibit a significant and sustained gap between expected performance often determined by standardized assessments and their observed outcomes, as reflected in grades and teacher evaluations. This discrepancy, they argue, must be consistent over time and not attributable to identifiable learning disabilities. In practice, actual achievement is more readily captured through tangible records such as report cards, academic transcripts, and teacher assessments. While educators aspire for all students to reach their potential, it becomes especially disheartening when a seemingly capable student consistently fails to meet expectations. Contrary to popular belief, underachievement is not simply the result of laziness, nor can it be attributed solely to low self-esteem, an irrelevant curriculum, family trauma,

depression, peer pressure, or conflicting parental messages. Rather, underachievement especially among gifted or high-potential students is typically caused by a confluence of school-based, family, and personal challenges (Alqahtani & Dodeen, 2023; Opoku-Asare & Essuman, 2021). Reiss and Park (2001) explored the wide range of negative factors that contribute to persistent underachievement among students. Some of these are school-related, such as frequent absenteeism, peer pressure, and limited participation in extracurricular activities, which often vary from one student to another. Others are linked to classroom dynamics, including mismatches between teaching methods and learning styles, or situations where teachers set unrealistic expectations, either too high for some students or too low for others. On a more personal level, many underachieving students struggle with mental, emotional, or behavioural challenges, including mood disorders, which further hinder their academic progress. Furthermore, many underachievers report having an external locus of control believing that life "happens to them" rather than them having agency to shape their outcomes and suffer from poor self-concept or low self-efficacy (Nguyen & Slavin, 2022). These multidimensional influences highlight that addressing underachievement requires a holistic approach one that considers emotional wellness, differentiated instruction, supportive classroom environments, and strong home-school collaboration

Classroom Management as Remedy to Underachievement

According to recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), indicated over three million student suspensions and over one hundred thousand expulsions, more recent trends

show only marginal improvements in behavioural outcomes emphasizing the need for stronger, more proactive classroom management approaches (NCES, 2023). A significant number of these disciplinary issues can be traced to ineffective teaching methods and poor classroom leadership. The ability of teachers to organize classrooms effectively and manage student behaviour is vital to achieving academic success. Although behaviour management alone does not guarantee high-quality instruction, it lays the groundwork for effective learning to take place (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Alhassan & Tanko, 2022). Inversely, highly engaging instruction can minimize but not entirely eliminate behavioural disruptions.

Classroom management involves creating a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages effective learning. Teachers use various management strategies to achieve this, including activities that strengthen teacher–student relationships and clear rules that guide student behaviour. Reactive and controlling measures should only be used when proactive management approaches fail. It is therefore essential to differentiate between preventive and reactive strategies. Preventive strategies are proactive, designed to avert behavioural issues before they occur, while reactive strategies are employed to address problems after they emerge (Yildiz & Ozdemir, 2020). Evertson and Weinstein (2006) define classroom management as the actions teachers take to foster academic achievement and socio-emotional learning in a supportive environment. These actions include:

1. Establishing positive teacher-student and student-student relationships.
2. Structuring instruction to maximize access and engagement.

3. Encouraging mutual respect and inclusiveness.
4. Setting high expectations.
5. Managing classroom time and routines efficiently.

To implement high-quality classroom management, teachers must develop caring, respectful relationships and align their instructional practices with students' diverse needs (Okeke & Sunday, 2023). Classroom management may be problematic in today's dynamic learning environments. Traditional styles of classroom management (more controlling, punishment, extra assignments, etc.) may not be the most effective strategies for managing classroom these days. A substantial number of school students respond positively to instruction, and interact appropriately with both peers and adults when classrooms are managed effectively (Everston, Emmer, Clements & Worsham, 2003). Stronge (2007) emphasized that effective classroom management goes beyond rules and punishment. It involves establishing a climate of respect, active engagement, consistency, and personalized feedback that collectively support student learning and growth.

Conclusion

Indiscipline remains a pervasive challenge among students in Nigerian secondary schools, particularly in public and community institutions. Its causes are multifaceted, ranging from peer influence and weak home structures to poor instructional practices and ineffective classroom management. Among these, poor classroom management has emerged as a critical factor contributing to both indiscipline and student underachievement (Ogunleye & Akanbi, 2023;

Alhassan & Tanko, 2022). When teachers lack the necessary training and support to manage classrooms effectively, students are more likely to disengage, misbehave, or underperform.

Furthermore, a teacher's academic competency and pedagogical approach directly influence their ability to maintain order, encourage participation, and foster a safe learning environment. A poorly managed classroom erodes not only discipline but also student motivation, academic interest, and social interaction—all of which compound educational inequality and academic decline (Okeke & Sunday, 2023). Therefore, addressing school indiscipline and underachievement requires intentional strategies focused on teacher development, classroom culture, and student guidance. Equipping teachers with robust support systems to master classroom management is not merely an option but a critical remedy for student disengagement and disruptive behaviour, one that paves the way for sustainable improvements in learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Proactive Management and Professional Development for Teachers:

School administrators should implement proactive strategies, including the regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching practices, to reinforce effective classroom management. Schools should also organize periodic seminars, workshops, and training sessions that emphasize modern classroom management techniques, emotional intelligence, and culturally responsive pedagogy (Ajayi & Adepoju, 2021; Yildiz &

Özdemir, 2020). These sessions will help teachers gain confidence, better understand their learners, and maintain discipline while enhancing academic engagement.

ii. Structured Support for Underachieving Students:

Students identified as underachievers should be systematically supported through school counselling services, academic mentoring, and differentiated instruction tailored to their learning needs. Trained guidance counsellors should provide psychosocial and academic interventions to address both emotional and behavioural issues linked to underachievement and indiscipline (Nguyen & Slavin, 2022; Opoku-Asare & Essuman, 2021).

iii. Recruitment and Retention of Competent Teachers:

Government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Education, should prioritize the recruitment, training, and retention of qualified teachers who possess both subject mastery and strong pedagogical skills. Teachers who are well-equipped to manage diverse learners and adapt their teaching strategies are less likely to experience breakdowns in classroom control and reduce instances of student indiscipline (Oladipo & Adebayo, 2023; NCES, 2023).

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