

PRINCIPAL'S DISCIPLINARY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC
BEHAVIOUR IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between principals' disciplinary intervention strategies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated the relationship between principals' leadership style, school policies, and students' academic behaviour. A correlational research design was adopted. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, which has 270 public secondary schools. The population comprised 8,313 teachers in the 2024/2025 academic session. A sample of 249 teachers (3%) was selected using a multistage sampling technique involving clustering, proportionate, and simple random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Principals' Disciplinary Strategies and Students' Academic Behaviour Questionnaire (PDSSABQ), structured on a four-point Likert scale. Face validity was established by three experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Uyo. The instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a high positive and significant relationship between principals' leadership style and students' academic behaviour ($r = .77, p < .05$), and between school policies and students' academic behaviour ($r = .79, p < .05$). The study concluded that effective leadership style and well-implemented school policies significantly influence students' academic behaviour. It recommended consistent policy enforcement, adoption of participatory leadership styles, strengthened collaboration among stakeholders, and policy reforms to enhance school discipline.

KEYWORDS: Disciplinary Intervention Strategies, Leadership Style, School Policies, Academic Behaviour, Secondary Schools, Akwa Ibom State.

INTRODUCTION

Academic behaviour refers to the observable actions, habits, and attitudes that support effective learning in school. It includes regular attendance, punctuality,

attentiveness in class, active participation in lessons, completion of assignments, respect for school rules, and responsible study habits (Credé and Kuncel, 2023). Academic behaviour goes beyond intellectual ability; it reflects the willingness of students to engage positively with learning activities. When students display proper and acceptable academic behaviour, teaching and learning become smooth and productive. Classrooms are orderly, instructional time is fully utilized, teachers are able to focus on lesson delivery, and students show commitment to their academic tasks. As noted by Sambo, Sunday & Ekpo (n.d) Classroom instruction does not just occur by chance. It is properly planned and executed in order to facilitate learning. Such an environment promotes concentration, cooperation, self-discipline, and improved academic outcomes.

A school where students demonstrate good academic behaviour is usually calm, organized, and purpose-driven. Students attend classes regularly, submit assignments on time, avoid disruptive conduct, and show respect for teachers and peers. There is minimal interruption during lessons, and teachers are motivated to give their best. In such schools, there is a culture of responsibility and mutual respect. This kind of environment supports not only academic success but also the moral and social development of learners. Sambo & Sunday (2024) He emphasized that the availability, relevance and adequacy of these facilities contribute to students' performance while unattractive school buildings, crowded classrooms, nonavailability of playground, flower beds and surroundings that have no aesthetic beauty can contribute to poor achievement. Schools are important institutions of socialization where learners develop values, attitudes, and life skills that shape their behaviour. Therefore, positive academic behaviour is essential for achieving the goals of secondary education.

However, the situation in many public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State appears to be different. There have been growing concerns about poor academic behaviour among students. Reports indicate frequent absenteeism, lateness to school, low classroom participation, truancy, inattentiveness, examination malpractice, and other disruptive behaviours. These behaviours reduce instructional time and weaken the teaching-learning process. Weak study habits, lack of concentration, and irregular attendance have been linked to poor performance in external examinations such as the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination conducted by WAEC and the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination conducted by JAMB (Okebukola, 2024). When students fail to develop proper academic behaviour, their academic achievement suffers, and the overall image of the school declines.

In addition to poor study habits, the prevalence of social vices in some secondary schools has further complicated the issue of academic behaviour. Acts such as bullying, substance abuse, cultism, vandalism, and violence have been reported in some schools (Owan, 2021). These behaviours create fear, distraction, and instability within the school environment. When students feel unsafe or disconnected from the school system, they are less likely to concentrate on their studies. Teachers may also spend more time managing misbehaviour than teaching. As a result, the quality of instruction declines, and students'

academic engagement weakens. These challenges show that academic behaviour is not only a student issue but also a school management concern.

At this point, the role of the principal becomes very important. A principal is the chief administrative and instructional leader of a secondary school. According to Nwachukwu, (2025) the principal is responsible for planning, organizing, directing, and supervising all school activities. As the head of the school, the principal sets the tone for discipline, establishes school policies, and ensures that rules are followed. The principal's decisions and actions influence teachers, students, and the entire school climate. In matters of discipline, the principal is expected to create and maintain an environment that supports learning and acceptable behaviour.

Discipline is a vital element in achieving proper academic behaviour. Discipline refers to the system of rules, guidelines, and corrective measures used to guide students toward acceptable conduct. It helps students develop self-control, responsibility, and respect for authority. Without discipline, there will be disorder, disruption, and confusion in the school. Hattie (2021) notes that when students fail to respect school rules, teachers struggle to maintain control, leading to reduced instructional time and poor concentration. Similarly, Gurr (2020) emphasizes that indiscipline lowers student engagement and weakens academic focus. Therefore, maintaining discipline is not merely about punishment; it is about creating a stable and supportive learning environment.

To ensure discipline, principals employ various disciplinary intervention strategies. Disciplinary intervention strategies are systematic actions and measures used by school administrators to prevent or correct undesirable behaviours and promote positive conduct. These strategies are designed to foster order, responsibility, and a safe school environment. Effective disciplinary intervention reduces classroom disruptions and encourages students to develop constructive academic habits. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2021) affirm that principals who apply effective leadership styles and consistently enforce policies create disciplined environments that promote positive learning behaviours.

Among the many disciplinary intervention strategies available to principals is leadership style. Leadership style refers to the manner in which a principal directs, guides, and influences members of the school community. It includes how decisions are made, how discipline is enforced, and how expectations are communicated. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2020), leadership style shapes the school atmosphere and influences student outcomes. A principal's leadership style determines whether discipline will be strict and authoritarian, participative and democratic, or inspirational and transformational.

Different leadership styles influence academic behaviour in different ways. Autocratic leadership involves strict control and unilateral decision-making. Although it may produce immediate compliance, it can create fear and resentment among students and teachers (Bush, 2022). Laissez-faire leadership, on the other hand, provides minimal guidance, which may lead to lax discipline and poor academic engagement (Robinson et al., 2019). Democratic leadership encourages participation and shared decision-making, promoting responsibility and cooperation (Hallinger and Murphy, 2020). Transformational leadership inspires and motivates students and teachers through a shared vision,

encouragement, and moral example. Research shows that transformational leadership is particularly effective in promoting discipline, reducing behavioural problems, and enhancing academic outcomes (Leithwood and Sun, 2020; Sun and Leithwood, 2021).

Transformational Leadership Theory, introduced by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), explains how leaders can inspire followers to achieve higher levels of motivation and morality. The theory highlights four key elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In the school context, a principal who models integrity, motivates staff and students, encourages creative problem-solving, and supports individual needs is more likely to foster positive academic behaviour. Thus, leadership style is not only about authority but also about influence and example.

Closely linked to leadership style are school policies. School policies are formal rules, guidelines, and procedures developed to regulate behaviour and ensure order within the school. They provide a framework for decision-making and help maintain consistency and fairness in discipline (Smith and Johnson, 2021). Clear and well-enforced policies help students understand what is expected of them and the consequences of misconduct. Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015) argue that consistent policy enforcement is essential for maintaining order and preventing confusion. School policies cover areas such as disciplinary rules, academic standards, welfare provisions, and student support services. Disciplinary policies outline acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and specify consequences for violations (Harrison, 2022). Academic policies regulate attendance, assessment, and examination procedures (Miller, 2023). Welfare and support policies address students' social and emotional needs, promoting a safe and inclusive environment (Johnson and White, 2021). When these policies are properly implemented, schools experience fewer cases of violence, absenteeism, and misconduct (Green, 2023).

The principal plays a central role in the development, implementation, and evaluation of school policies. As Wang et al. (2020) note, the principal must ensure that policies are effectively enforced to create a conducive learning environment. This involves collaborating with stakeholders, ensuring fairness, providing staff training, and monitoring policy outcomes (Walker, 2023). When policies are weak or inconsistently applied, students may become confused or emboldened to misbehave. Inconsistent enforcement of rules has been shown to negatively affect students' academic engagement and discipline (Adeyemi and Adebayo, 2020). Despite existing efforts to manage discipline in secondary schools, poor academic behaviour continues to be observed in many public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Although studies have examined leadership style and school discipline in other states such as Lagos, Enugu, and Anambra (Adebayo and Oyetade, 2020; Eze and Chukwu, 2022; Nwankwo, 2021), there appears to be limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on the relationship between principals' disciplinary intervention strategies, particularly leadership style and school policies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Most previous studies have examined these variables separately or within different socio-cultural contexts. This backdrop makes the present study necessary. Akwa Ibom State has its unique educational and social realities, and findings from other

states may not fully apply. There is a need to examine how principals' leadership style and school policies, as disciplinary intervention strategies, relate to students' academic behaviour within this specific context.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Poor academic behaviour has always been prevalence among secondary school students in Nigeria, it is manifested in truancy, low concentration, lateness, examination malpractice, and general apathy toward learning. These behavioural lapses seem to undermine academic achievement and weaken the moral foundation of schooling. In Akwa Ibom State, reports from schools and educational stakeholders indicate that many students appear to exhibit declining study habits, poor concentration, and disruptive tendencies that interfere with effective teaching and learning.

Although school discipline is intended to promote responsibility and guide students toward desirable academic conduct, the persistence of poor academic behaviour suggests that the disciplinary intervention strategies adopted by some principals may be ineffective or poorly managed. Many principals seem to adopt authoritarian or laissez-faire leadership style instead of those that inspire positive behaviour. Others appear to neglect school community partnership in disciplinary matters, choosing to act independently rather than collaborate with teachers, parents, and the wider community. In some schools, rather than cultivating a sound school climate based on trust and mutual respect, principals seem to allow environments where fear, hostility, and disorder prevail. Similarly, instead of formulating and enforcing clear school policies that provide consistent behavioural guidelines, some implement weak or inconsistent rules that encourage misconduct.

Furthermore, some principals seem to overlook proactive intervention measures that could redirect students toward positive academic engagement. As a result, disciplinary practices in many schools appear to remain punitive rather than corrective, leaving students discouraged and disconnected from learning. These lapses may not only intensify indiscipline but also erode students' motivation and academic focus. Despite several studies on school management, school environment and discipline, there still seems to be limited empirical evidence on how principals' disciplinary intervention strategies influence students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Hence, this study sought to fill this gap.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between principals' disciplinary intervention strategies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the relationship between:

- i. Principals' leadership style and academic behaviour of students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. School policies and academic behaviour of students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were answered in the study.

- i. What relationship exist between principals' leadership style and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. What relationship exist between school policies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.;

- i. Principals' leadership style does not significantly relate with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. School policies does not significantly relate with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study would be beneficial to principals, teachers, students, parents, educational policymakers, school counsellors, support staff, researchers, and the wider community.

To the Principals, the study would provide evidence-based insights on how leadership style, school policies, school community partnerships, and intervention programmes influence discipline and foster positive academic behaviour. It would guide principals in adopting more effective strategies to create safe and conducive learning environments. On the other hand, the findings of this study would help teachers understand the influence of school disciplinary climate and policies on student behaviour and highlight the importance of collaborating with principals, parents, and the community to promote positive behaviour.

School counselors would benefit from the findings of this study as it will help align counselling programmes with principals' leadership approaches to better support at-risk students and address behavioural challenges. Students would benefit from a disciplined school climate where intervention strategies helps create a safer, supportive environment, reducing social vices and enhancing focus, engagement, and positive academic behaviour. Again, findings would emphasize the role of parental involvement in reinforcing school policies and positive behaviours, including supporting life skills and awareness programmes, helping them in knowing their own part to play. Insights from the finding would help educational policymakers and would inform the development and refinement of policies on school discipline, student welfare, and intervention strategies, ensuring more effective frameworks for promoting positive academic behaviour. The study would also contribute to scholarly knowledge in educational management, discipline, and intervention strategies, serving as a reference point for future researchers in related studies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Design of the Study

The study adopted a correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to determine the degree of relationship

between principals' disciplinary intervention strategies and students' academic behaviour without manipulating the variables. It also helped to establish how variations in principals' management of discipline related to changes in students' academic behaviour.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The state has 31 Local Government Areas and over 270 public secondary schools managed by the State Ministry of Education and the State Secondary Education Board. The state faces notable challenges relating to student indiscipline and poor academic behaviour, making it suitable for the study.

Population of the Study

The population comprised 8,313 teachers from all the 270 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State during the 2024/2025 academic session (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 249 teachers (3%) was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Schools were clustered into three senatorial districts. Twenty-seven schools (10%) were selected proportionately and through simple random sampling. Thereafter, 249 teachers were selected proportionately from the sampled schools.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Principals' Disciplinary Strategies and Students' Academic Behaviour Questionnaire (PDSSABQ). The instrument was scored using a four-point Likert scale.

Validation of the Instrument

Face validity was conducted for the instrument. To establish, the validity, the instrument was given to three experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Uyo for validation. During the validation process, two items were restructured, but none of the items were deleted. Their suggestions were incorporated into the instrument before the final copy was produced for use in collecting data for the study.

Reliability of the Instrument

Internal consistency reliability was conducted for the instrument and the reliability was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.86, confirming internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered and retrieved immediately with the assistance of four research assistants. Out of 249 copies, 244 were returned (98% return rate).

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 significance level with SPSS version 22.

RESULT

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between principals’ leadership style and students’ academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Table1: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship Between Principals’ Leadership Style and Students’ Academic Behaviour

Variables	n	r	Remark
Principals’ Leadership Style	244	.77	High Positive Relationship
Students’ Academic Behaviour			

The result in Table 1 indicates the relationship between principal’s leadership style and students’ academic behaviour in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. As shown in the table, the r-value of .77 indicates a high positive relationship between principal leadership style and students’ academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This implies that as principals adopt more effective leadership style, students are more likely to exhibit positive academic behaviour

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between school policies and students’ academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship Between School Policies and Students’ Academic Behaviour

Variables	n	r	Remark
School Policies	244	.79	High positive relationship
Students’ Academic Behaviour			

The result in Table 2 indicates the correlation between school policies and students’ academic behaviour in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. As shown in the table, the r-value of .79 indicates a high positive relationship between school policies and students’ academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This implies that when effective school policies are formulated and implemented, students are more likely to exhibit positive academic behaviour.

Hypothesis 1

Principals’ leadership style does not significantly relate with students’ academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on relationship Between Principal's Leadership Style and Students' Academic Behaviour

Variables	n	r	p-value	Decision
Principals' Leadership Style	244	.77	.000	Significant
Students' Academic Behaviour				

The result in Table 3 shows the calculated r-value of .77 for the relationship between principal's leadership style and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State is significant. This is because the p-value of .000 is less than .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that principals' leadership style does not significantly relate with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State is rejected. This implies that principals' leadership style significantly relates with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

School policies does not significantly relate with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Correlation Between School Policies and Students' Academic Behaviour

Variables	n	r	p-value	Decision
School Policies	244	.79	.000	Significant
Students' Academic Behaviour				

The result in Table 4 shows that the calculated r-value of .79 for the relationship between school policies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State is significant. This is because the p-value of .000 is less than .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that school policies does not significantly relate with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State is rejected. This implies that, school policies significantly relate with students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

FINDINGS

- There is significant relationship between principals' leadership style and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- There is significant relationship between school policies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Principals' Leadership Style and Students' Academic Behaviour

The finding revealed a significant positive relationship between principals' leadership style and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This suggests that the way principals lead directly shapes students' discipline, motivation, and engagement in learning. Leadership style sets the tone for behavioural

expectations within the school. Principals who adopt transformational or democratic approaches tend to promote collaboration, fairness, and shared responsibility, which encourage students to internalize positive academic and social behaviours. This finding aligns with Leithwood and Sun (2020), who reported that transformational leadership strengthens discipline and academic engagement through motivation and trust. Hallinger and Murphy (2020) similarly found that democratic leadership fosters participatory environments that enhance accountability and self-regulation. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2021) also observed that supportive leadership improves school climate and student commitment to learning. However, the result contradicts Adeyemi (2018), who found no significant relationship in Ondo State, and Omoregie (2019), who linked autocratic leadership to student hostility. These differences may be due to contextual variations. Overall, the finding underscores leadership style as a key determinant of students' academic behaviour.

School Policies and Students' Academic Behaviour

The finding revealed a significant relationship between school policies and students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This indicates that the nature and implementation of school policies strongly shape how students behave and engage in academic activities. Clear, well-designed, and consistently enforced policies provide structure, fairness, and order, which encourage students to attend classes regularly, complete assignments, and adhere to school rules. This result agrees with Brown (2022), who noted that effective policies promote discipline and positive behaviour, and Davis and Thomas (2021), who found that strong disciplinary policies are linked to better academic outcomes. Williams and Carter (2023) also observed that well-implemented policies foster accountability and reduce behavioural problems by creating a safe and supportive environment. However, the finding contrasts with Okafor (2020) and Mensah and Boateng (2021), who argued that policies alone may not influence behaviour without consistent enforcement and positive school culture. O'Neill and Burke (2020) further warned that overly rigid policies may lead to resentment. Overall, the study suggests that school policies positively influence academic behaviour when applied fairly, consistently, and with empathy.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that principals' disciplinary intervention strategies play a decisive role in shaping students' academic behaviour in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The way principals lead and the structure of school policies together define the behavioural climate of the school, which in turn influences students' discipline, engagement, and commitment to learning. Academic behaviour is therefore not an isolated student issue but a reflection of the leadership direction and policy framework guiding the school system.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Principals should ensure that school policies are clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and periodically reviewed to align with students' developmental needs and current disciplinary challenges.
- Teachers should support principals in the consistent implementation of school policies and model positive academic behaviour in the classroom.
- Students should be encouraged to actively participate in school activities, respect established rules, and develop self-discipline, recognizing that positive academic behaviour contributes to their academic success and personal development.
- Parents should collaborate closely with school authorities by reinforcing school rules at home and supporting disciplinary measures aimed at improving students' academic behaviour.
- Policymakers should develop and strengthen policies that promote effective school leadership and fair disciplinary frameworks.
- School counsellors should design and implement counselling and behavioural intervention programmes that complement school policies and leadership efforts, helping students develop self-regulation, responsibility, and positive academic habits.

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