

## MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS' ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The paper takes a cursory look at the management of students' ethical behaviour and discipline in public senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. It highlights the crucial role of teachers in moulding students' character and fostering a positive school environment. The paper also sheds light on effective strategies for managing students' ethical behaviour and promoting discipline in the classroom. The paper concludes that management of students' ethical behaviour significantly impacts discipline in public senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. By setting clear expectations, building positive relationships, modelling ethical behaviour and implementing restorative practices, teachers can effectively manage students' ethical behaviour. It is then recommended that clear code of conduct should be made accessible to teachers, students and parents; teachers should be provided with regular development training; guidance and counselling services should be made available for students struggling with ethical issues as well as communicating with parents on issues concerning their children.*

**Keywords:** Management, Ethical Behaviour, Discipline, Public Senior Secondary Schools.

### Introduction

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' ethical behaviour and maintaining discipline within educational institutions. Effective management of students' ethical behaviour is crucial in public senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria as it directly impacts the overall learning environment and student outcomes.

According to Naziev (2017), education is the continuously passing on to the succeeding generations of socially meaningful experience that has been socially ordered and regulated. In order to fulfil the goals and objectives of education, discipline must be instilled in pupils as well as ethical behaviour control in the school environment.

An important strategy for fostering a supportive school atmosphere is discipline. According to Eshetu (2014), discipline is both a worry to instructors and a fundamental prerequisite for successful teaching and learning in schools. According to Grossman (2020), discipline is the process of establishing clear expectations and boundaries and applying them consistently in a way that fosters learning, growth and development. According to Omote, Thinguri and Moenga (2015), indiscipline is defined as any activity that is incorrect and not commonly acknowledged as right in a setting or community. It is also characterised as a lack of discipline. Disobedience, truancy, tardiness, immoral attitude, bad learning attitude, destruction of school property, test malpractice and cultism are few examples of actions of indiscipline that might prevent students from achieving well in their academics. A system of values, norms, or rules that directs human behaviour is known as ethics. According to Gregory (2019), ethics is the study of morality; actions which are morally right, morally wrong or morally neutral. Morally right actions should be done while morally

wrong actions should be avoided. Also, according to Elechi (2015), an ethic is a standard or moral conviction that affects how individuals act and think. Ethics are viewed as codes of conduct that a person or an organisation decides as proper or inappropriate.

However, ethics seems to be the central notion to which all others are related. For instance, a certain instructor may find it difficult to command the class due to their phlegmatic disposition, which might have major ethical ramifications or encourage unethical behaviour on the part of the students. In a manner similar to this, instructors' control over their ethical behaviour will have a significant influence on how well-behaved their children are.

There is, therefore, a growing concern about the lack of emphasis placed on teachers' management of students' ethical behaviour which can have a negative impact on students' learning outcomes and the general school environment once discipline is not well managed. Thus, a look into the management of ethical behaviour and discipline in secondary schools is necessary.

This paper therefore examines:

1. the relationship between management of students' ethical behaviour and discipline among public senior secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria
2. the influence of teachers' management of ethical behaviour on discipline among public senior secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The following questions guided the paper:

1. What is the relationship between management of students' ethical behaviour and discipline among public senior secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria?
2. How does teachers' management of ethical behaviour influence discipline among public senior secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria?

The observations of this paper would be useful for all parties involved in education. Policymakers, Non-Governmental Organizations, parents, educators, students and other various education stakeholders would be more concerned with the hiring of qualified and experienced teachers in Lagos State as a consequence. It is also predicted that the positions canvassed in this paper would broaden students' understanding of discipline, improve the personality traits of teachers in public senior secondary schools in Lagos State and throughout Nigeria and lay the groundwork for further research in this area of interest. Moreover, the paper demonstrates the importance of bridging the gap between Lagos State students' ethical behaviour and discipline across the State.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ethical Behaviour**

Ethical issues are concerned with what is right or wrong, good or bad and how people use those information to decide their actions in the real world. There are some ethical issues which include; social inequality, cheating, uniformity, bullying, grading examination, special treatment and social diversity.

### **Management of Ethical Behaviour**

Students' ethical behaviour refers to the moral principles and values that guide students' actions and decision-making in academic settings. Promoting students' ethical behaviour requires a collaborative effort between educators, parents, and the wider community. It

involves teaching and modeling ethical values, providing guidance and support, and creating a school culture that values integrity and ethical conduct.

Ethical behaviour involves treating others with respect, regardless of differences in backgrounds, opinions, or abilities. Students should show respect towards their peers, teachers, administrators, and staff members. This includes listening attentively, valuing diverse perspectives, and refraining from bullying, discrimination, or harassment.

Ethical behaviour requires students to take responsibility for their actions and their impact on others. This includes attending classes regularly, being punctual, meeting deadlines, and completing assignments to the best of their abilities. Students should also take ownership of any mistakes or shortcomings and work towards rectifying them. Discipline encompasses a holistic strategy for nurturing self-directed conduct, incorporating the establishment of explicit standards, offering constructive input and establishing a conducive atmosphere that motivates individuals to assume accountability for their personal growth and educational progress." (Zimmerman, 2019). Students should value honesty and truthfulness in their interactions with others. This means being truthful in academic work, communication, and personal relationships. Students should not engage in lying, cheating, or any form of deception. According to Niu, Zhao, & Wang, (2019), the management of students' ethical behaviour refers to the deliberate and systematic efforts of educational institutions to promote ethical conduct and prevent unethical behaviour among students.

Students should develop the ability to make ethical decisions by considering the consequences of their actions on themselves and others. This involves critical thinking, empathy, and weighing different perspectives before making choices. In the words of McCabe, Trevino, Butterfield & Youngblood (2018), the management of students' ethical behaviour involves the development and implementation of policies, programmes and practices that promote ethical decision-making, prevent unethical behaviour, and create a culture of academic integrity in schools.

Students can demonstrate ethical behaviour by being role models and leaders in their school community. They can promote ethical values, support their peers, and actively participate in activities that promote fairness, inclusivity, and positive change. Lickona & Davidson (2005) explained management of students' ethical behaviour encompassing the use of ethical leadership, character education, peer influences and other strategies to promote ethical behaviour among students and prevent ethical violations.

Promoting students' ethical behaviour requires a collaborative effort between educators, parents, and the wider community. It involves teaching and modeling ethical values, providing guidance and support, and creating a school culture that values integrity and ethical conduct. By encouraging and reinforcing ethical behavior, we can help students develop the moral compass necessary for success in academics, personal relationships, and future endeavours.

### **Discipline**

Student discipline is a concept that refers to the rules, regulations, and practices implemented in educational institutions to promote a safe and conducive learning environment. It involves instilling self-control, responsibility, respect, and appropriate behavior among students. Zimmerman (2019) viewed discipline as a holistic strategy for nurturing self-directed conduct, incorporating the establishment of explicit standards,

offering constructive input and establishing a conducive atmosphere that motivates individuals to assume accountability for their personal growth and educational progress. Discipline plays a crucial role in the development of students' character, academic growth, and over-all well-being. It helps create a structured environment where students can focus on their studies and reach their full potential. Establishing clear behavioral expectations is essential for maintaining discipline. These expectations may include rules regarding punctuality, dress code, respect for teachers and peers, and appropriate language. Grossman (2020) opined that discipline involves establishing distinct guidelines and limits, and persistently implementing them in a manner that encourages education, evolution and advancement.

Recognizing and rewarding positive behaviour is an effective way to encourage students to adhere to the discipline policies. Praising and acknowledging students' efforts and achievements can motivate them to continue exhibiting good behaviour. Henderson & Mapp (2018), believes discipline entails utilizing positive reinforcement, clear communication and reliable consequences to steer individuals towards exhibiting responsible and respectful conduct.

### **Students' Discipline**

Discipline should be consistently enforced among students to ensure fairness and prevent favoritism. Consistent enforcement of rules helps students understand the consequences of their actions and encourages them to make responsible choices. In the words of Bradshaw and Leaf (2019), "Students' discipline indicates the strategies, approaches, and guidelines employed by educators and school administrators to encourage desirable conduct, as well as to address and rectify incidents of misconduct among students." When students violate disciplinary rules, appropriate consequences should be implemented. Consequences may include verbal warnings, detention, loss of privileges, or even temporary suspension. It is important that consequences are fair, proportionate to the offense, and aimed at correcting behavior rather than merely punishing students. Effective communication between teachers, administrators, and parents is crucial in maintaining discipline. Regular communication helps parents stay informed about their child's behaviour and allows for collaboration in addressing any disciplinary issues that may arise.

Alongside discipline, schools should also focus on character education. Teaching students values such as honesty, integrity, empathy, and responsibility can help foster a positive school culture and encourage students to make ethical decisions. Emmer & Stough, 2001 view discipline in students as the deliberate and systematic efforts to promote appropriate behaviour, prevent inappropriate behaviour, and respond to misbehaviour in a manner that is fair, consistent, and effective.

Bradshaw, Mitchel & Leaf (2001) view students' discipline as the use of positive behaviour interventions and supports (PBIS), restorative justice practices, cognitive-behavioural interventions, and other strategies to prevent and remediate instances of misbehaviour among students.

Is "discipline" concerned with preventing misconduct or with punishing it? The word, discipline, according to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, refers to both prevention and remediation. It can be "training that is expected to produce a specified character or a pattern of behaviour" or "controlled behaviour resulting from such training"; but it can also be "punishment intended to correct or train."

Although some educators view disciplinary activities as irritating intrusions into school life, Discipline in this context means teaching the child certain rules of life. The expectation from the child is to adapt and internalize these rules for himself/herself.

### **Factors Affecting Students' Ethical Behaviour:**

Several factors influence students' ethical behaviour in public senior secondary schools. These factors include the quality of teaching, teacher-student relationships, peer influence, parental involvement, and the school's disciplinary policies. Byrne (2010) identified family influence, personal conscience, religious beliefs, friends/acquaintance as some of the factors that can affect ethical behaviour. Factors affecting students' ethical behaviour can vary depending on various individual, social, and environmental factors.

1. **Personal Values:** Personal values play a crucial role in shaping an individual's ethical behavior. Students with strong moral values are more likely to exhibit ethical behaviour in their academic and personal lives.
2. **Parental Influence:** The ethical behaviour of students is significantly influenced by their parents or guardians. The values and ethical standards upheld by parents can have a lasting impact on students' behavior and decision-making.
3. **Peer Influence:** Peers also play a significant role in shaping students' ethical behaviour. Students often conform to the norms and values of their peer group, which can either promote or inhibit ethical behavior.
4. **Educational Environment:** The educational environment, including school policies, curriculum, and overall climate, can impact students' ethical behavior. Schools that emphasize and promote ethical values are more likely to foster ethical behaviour among students.
5. **Role of Teachers:** Teachers serve as role models for students and can influence their ethical behaviour through their actions and teachings. Teachers who demonstrate and promote ethical behavior are more likely to inspire students to behave ethically.
6. **Technology and Social Media:** The advent of technology and social media has introduced new challenges in promoting ethical behavior among students. The influence of online platforms and exposure to cyberbullying, plagiarism, and unethical content can impact students' ethical decision-making.
7. **Cultural and Societal Factors:** Cultural and societal norms can shape students' ethical behaviour. Different cultures may have varying standards and expectations when it comes to ethic conduct, which can influence students' behaviour.

Teachers have the opportunity to positively impact students' behaviour through effective management strategies.

### **Role of Teachers in Managing Students' Ethical Behaviour**

1. **Setting Clear Expectations:** Teachers need to establish clear behavioural expectations and communicate them to students. This includes outlining ethical standards, rules, and consequences for non-compliance. Gorica and Filip (2021) recommended that to manage students ethical behaviour, clear and agreed rules of conduct defined by the participation of all students in the class should be set at the beginning of the school year as these are the foundation for building trust and confidence for all students in the class.
2. **Building Positive Teacher-Student Relationships:** Developing positive relationships with students helps to foster mutual respect and trust. Teachers who genuinely care about their students' well-being can influence their ethical behaviour positively. Nishioka

- (2019) stated that positive teacher student relationship lead to increased cooperation and engagement in the classroom and this can invariably encourage ethical behaviour.
3. **Effective Communication:** Teachers should employ effective communication techniques to address behavioural issues promptly. Open and honest communication channels help students understand the impact of their actions and encourage them to make ethical choices. Climans (2021) opined that good communication can improve behaviour and attitude
  4. **Modelling Ethical Behaviour:** Teachers serve as role models for students. By consistently demonstrating ethical behaviour themselves, teachers can inspire students to adopt similar values and behaviours. The teacher is an important role model for students. Gorica and Filip (2021), teachers are role models and for them to encourage student empathy, they need to show compassion and respect, and in all situations to be willing to listen and understand others - in communicating with students, parents, and colleagues.
  5. **Implementing Restorative Practices:** Restorative practices focus on repairing harm caused by misconduct, rather than solely punishing students. Teachers can implement restorative practices to help students understand the consequences of their actions, learn from their mistakes, and make amends. McCluskey (2018) is of the opinion that restorative practice can transform unethical behaviour in students, stating the importance of engagement with students, parents and the community.
  6. **Encouraging Positive Reinforcement:** Recognizing and rewarding ethical behaviour reinforces its importance and encourages students to continue making ethical choices. Scott, Jain and Cogburn (2023), affirm that positive reinforcement works exceedingly better and faster in managing students ethical behaviour than punishment.
- Simba, Agak and Kabuka, (2016) in their work titled "Impact of discipline on academic performance of pupils in public primary schools in Muhoroni Sub-County, Kenya" found out that 37.7% of class eight students in public primary schools in Muhoroni had below-average academic performance. In addition, discipline level influences academic performance level.
- According to Hoven, Templeton and Ribbers (2020), the meta-analytic analysis integrated the findings of 171 empirical investigations that looked at university students' ethical behaviours done between 1983 and 2018. The writers defined ethical behaviour as acts and intents that follow moral standards such as accountability, honesty, integrity, and fairness. According to the review, there is a somewhat favourable association between ethical intention and ethical behaviour, with a mean correlation of 0.35 between the two domains. The research also discovered a number of other factors that influence students' ethical behaviour, such as moral identity, ethical atmosphere, perceived organisational fairness, and ethical leadership.
- The review's overall conclusion is that university students often display good ethical intents and behaviours. However, the authors also pointed out that a variety of factors, such as personality characteristics, contextual circumstances and cultural norms, may have an impact on students' ethical behaviour. The authors advised that in order to fully comprehend the intricacies of students' ethical behaviour, future research on ethical behaviour among university students should take these issues into account.

## **Conclusion**

Management of students' ethical behaviour significantly impacts discipline in public senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. By setting clear expectations, building positive relationships, modelling ethical behaviour, and implementing restorative practices, teachers can effectively manage students' ethical behaviour. Additionally, recent studies and references emphasize the importance of ethical behaviour and its positive influence on students' discipline. It is crucial for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers to prioritize strategies that promote ethical behaviour and discipline in educational settings.

## **Recommendations**

The researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Clear code of conduct that outlines expected ethical behaviour and disciplinary consequences for students for any violation should be developed. This should be easily accessible to students, parents, and staff members.
2. Regular meetings and forums to discuss and reinforce the importance of ethical behaviour and discipline should be conducted.
3. A system of positive reinforcement to recognize and reward students who consistently exhibit ethical behaviour should be implemented. This can include certificates, awards, or public recognition in school assemblies.
4. Counselling and guidance services for students who may be struggling with ethical behaviour or facing disciplinary issues should be provided. Trained counsellors can help identify underlying causes and provide appropriate support and guidance.
5. There should be consistent enforcement of disciplinary rules and consequences for any violations. This sends a clear message that ethical behavior is expected from all students and that there are consequences for misconduct.
6. Parents and the local community should be involved in promoting ethical behaviour and discipline. This can be achieved through parent-teacher associations, community outreach programmes, and workshops geared towards instilling values and ethics.
7. Regular professional development opportunities should be provided for teachers to enhance their skills in managing student behaviour and discipline. This can include workshops on effective classroom management techniques and strategies for promoting ethical behaviour.
8. Peer mentoring programmes should be implemented where older students act as mentors for younger students, guiding them on ethical behaviour and providing support when needed. This can create a positive culture of peer influence and support.
9. Restorative justice practices, such as mediation and conflict resolution techniques, should be implemented to address disciplinary issues. These practices focus on repairing harm caused by misconduct and promoting understanding and empathy among students.
10. Continuous monitoring and evaluation should be established. This can involve regular surveys, feedback sessions, and data analysis to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.

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