

SCHOOL ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND STUDENTS' DISCIPLINE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: Students' discipline remains a critical concern in many public secondary schools in Nigeria, as increasing cases of truancy, disobedience, bullying, examination malpractice, and other forms of misconduct continue to undermine effective teaching and learning. Although several factors have been associated with students' behavioural outcomes, the role of school organisational culture has attracted growing attention because of its influence on students' attitudes and compliance with school expectations. This study examined the relationship between school organisational culture and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, with particular emphasis on school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns within the school, and reward systems. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised teachers and Senior Secondary School I and II students in public secondary schools within the study area, from which a sample of 422 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Data was collected using the School Organisational Culture and Students' Discipline Questionnaire (SOCSDQ). The instrument was validated by experts, while its reliability coefficients, established using Cronbach's Alpha, ranged from 0.79 to 0.87. Data was analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant

positive relationships between school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns, reward systems, and students' discipline. The study concluded that a supportive organisational culture plays a vital role in promoting acceptable student behaviour and creating an environment that enhances teaching and learning. It is recommended that school administrators should strengthen fair enforcement of school rules, improve communication with students, and establish consistent reward systems that recognise positive behaviour.

Keywords: *School organisational culture, students' discipline, school rules enforcement, communication pattern, reward system, public secondary schools.*

INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most important instruments for national development because it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required for meaningful participation in society. Beyond academic achievement, schools are expected to nurture responsible, self-disciplined, and morally upright individuals who can contribute positively to their communities. The attainment of these educational goals, however, depends not only on the availability of qualified teachers and learning resources but also on the existence of a school environment that promotes acceptable behaviour and respect for institutional norms. Consequently, students' discipline has continued to attract considerable attention among educational administrators, policymakers, and researchers across the world (UNESCO, 2021; Hoy & Miskel, 2019).

Students' discipline is widely recognised as a prerequisite for effective teaching and learning. A disciplined school environment promotes orderliness, enhances classroom interaction, strengthens teacher-student relationships, and creates conditions that support academic success. Conversely, indiscipline disrupts instructional activities, weakens school administration, encourages violence and antisocial behaviour, and often results in poor academic performance. According to Hattie and Zierer (2019), schools characterised by positive behavioural climates provide greater opportunities for meaningful learning because both teachers and students can concentrate on instructional activities without unnecessary interruptions. Similarly, Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, and Rose (2018) observed that schools with strong behavioural support systems experience higher levels of student engagement, improved interpersonal relationships, and better academic outcomes.

Despite continuous efforts by governments and educational stakeholders to strengthen school discipline, incidents of student misconduct remain a persistent concern in many countries. Reports of bullying, truancy, classroom disruption, examination malpractice, vandalism, substance abuse, and disobedience to school authorities continue to challenge effective school administration (UNESCO, 2021). These behavioural problems not only interfere with teaching and learning but also undermine the moral and social objectives of education. The increasing complexity of these challenges has prompted scholars to shift attention from punitive disciplinary measures towards organisational factors within schools that shape students' behaviour and influence their willingness to comply with institutional expectations (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020; Day, Sammons, & Gorgen, 2019).

The Nigerian education system has not been immune to these concerns. Across many public secondary schools, administrators continue to grapple with issues such as absenteeism, lateness, cult-related activities, examination malpractice, bullying, disrespect for teachers, and destruction of school property. These challenges have raised questions about the effectiveness of existing disciplinary approaches and the institutional conditions under which students learn. Owan and Bassey (2021) argued that many disciplinary problems observed in Nigerian secondary schools are associated not only with students' personal characteristics but also with weaknesses in school management practices and organisational processes. Similarly, Etuk and Akpan (2020) maintained that schools with poorly coordinated administrative structures often experience greater difficulty in maintaining discipline because students receive inconsistent messages regarding acceptable behaviour and the consequences of misconduct.

School organisational culture has increasingly been recognised as one of the most influential factors in shaping students' behaviour and promoting effective school administration. Organisational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, traditions, and practices that influence how members of an organisation think, interact, and perform their responsibilities. Within the school setting, organisational culture determines how rules are implemented, how communication occurs, how achievements are recognised, and how teachers, students, and administrators relate to one another. Hoy and Miskel (2019) described school organisational culture as the collective pattern of assumptions, values, and practices that guide behaviour within educational institutions. Likewise, Schein (2017)

maintained that organisational culture provides the invisible framework through which organisational members interpret events and respond to challenges. Consequently, schools with strong and positive organisational cultures are more likely to create orderly learning environments where discipline is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than merely the enforcement of regulations.

Among the various dimensions of school organisational culture, the enforcement of school rules occupies a central position. School rules establish acceptable standards of behaviour and provide clear expectations for students regarding their responsibilities and conduct. However, the existence of rules alone does not guarantee discipline; their effectiveness depends largely on consistency, fairness, and transparency in implementation. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) argued that consistent enforcement of institutional policies promotes trust, accountability, and respect for authority among students. Similarly, Bear (2015) observed that disciplinary systems characterised by fairness and consistency encourage students to internalise acceptable behavioural standards rather than complying merely to avoid punishment. In contrast, inconsistent enforcement of school rules often creates perceptions of favouritism, weakens students' confidence in school leadership, and contributes to behavioural problems.

Communication patterns within the school also constitute an essential component of organisational culture. Communication provides the mechanism through which school goals, expectations, instructions, and feedback are transmitted among administrators, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Effective communication promotes mutual understanding, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and minimises conflicts arising from misinformation or ambiguity. According to Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2019), schools that encourage open, respectful, and timely communication tend to develop stronger organisational cohesion and greater commitment among staff and students. Similarly, Hattie and Zierer (2019) maintained that constructive feedback enables learners to understand behavioural expectations, evaluate their actions, and make appropriate adjustments where necessary. Where communication is ineffective or predominantly authoritarian, students may become disengaged, misunderstand school expectations, and exhibit behaviours inconsistent with institutional values (Wentzel, 2017; Osher et al., 2018).

Another important expression of school organisational culture is the reward system established to recognise and reinforce desirable behaviour. Reward systems communicate the values that schools seek to promote by acknowledging students who demonstrate discipline, responsibility, punctuality, academic commitment, and positive social conduct. Drawing on the principles of behavioural reinforcement, Skinner (1953) argued that behaviours followed by positive consequences are more likely to recur. Although contemporary educational practice places greater emphasis on intrinsic motivation, positive reinforcement continues to play an important role in encouraging desirable student behaviour when implemented appropriately. Deci and Ryan (2017) explained that recognition systems which support students' autonomy and competence strengthen intrinsic motivation and foster long-term behavioural development. Likewise, Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Leaf (2017) reported that schools with structured and equitable reward systems generally experience fewer disciplinary problems and more positive school climates than those that rely predominantly on punitive measures.

The persistence of disciplinary challenges in many public secondary schools within Calabar Municipality suggests that strengthening disciplinary measures alone may not produce the desired behavioural outcomes unless the broader organisational environment that shapes students' attitudes and behaviour is also examined. There is therefore a need to investigate how school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns, and reward systems jointly relate to students' discipline within the study area. Addressing this gap will provide empirical evidence capable of informing school administrators, educational planners, and policymakers on strategies for strengthening positive school culture and improving students' behavioural outcomes.

Against this background, this study examined the relationship between school organisational culture and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. Specifically, the study investigated the relationship between school rules enforcement practices and students' discipline, communication patterns within the school and students' discipline, and reward systems in the school and students' discipline. The findings are expected to contribute to existing literature on educational management and provide practical evidence for improving school leadership and disciplinary practices in public secondary schools.

Literature Review

School organisational culture and students' discipline

School organisational culture has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its influence on the effectiveness of educational institutions and the behavioural outcomes of students. The concept extends beyond written policies and administrative structures to include the shared values, beliefs, traditions, norms, and expectations that shape interactions within the school community. Schein (2017) defines organisational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions developed by members of an organisation as they learn to cope with internal integration and external adaptation. Within educational institutions, these shared assumptions influence decision-making, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and students' behavioural expectations. Hoy and Miskel (2019) similarly describe school organisational culture as the system of shared beliefs and values that guides behaviour and determines how educational goals are pursued.

Students' discipline is generally regarded as the willingness of learners to regulate their behaviour in accordance with established school rules, ethical standards, and societal expectations. Contemporary educational scholars argue that discipline should not merely be viewed as obedience enforced through punishment but as the development of self-control, responsibility, and respect for others (Bear, 2015; Osher et al., 2018). This perspective reflects the changing philosophy of school discipline, which places greater emphasis on preventive and developmental approaches than on punitive disciplinary practices. Schools that cultivate positive organisational cultures are therefore more likely to encourage students to internalise acceptable behavioural standards rather than comply solely because of fear of sanctions.

Within the context of this study, school organisational culture is conceptualised through three interrelated dimensions: school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns within the school, and reward systems. These dimensions represent practical expressions of organisational culture because they influence how behavioural expectations are established, communicated, reinforced, and sustained. Their combined effectiveness determines whether students perceive the school as fair, supportive, and well organised, thereby influencing their willingness to exhibit disciplined behaviour.

School rules enforcement practices and students' discipline

School rules provide the framework through which educational institutions regulate behaviour, maintain order, and promote an environment conducive to learning. Rules define acceptable standards of conduct while also outlining the consequences associated with misconduct. However, scholars consistently emphasise that the effectiveness of school rules depends less on their existence than on the consistency and fairness with which they are implemented (Hoy & Miskel, 2019; Bear, 2015).

Consistent enforcement of school rules communicates fairness and reinforces students' confidence in school leadership. When disciplinary measures are applied uniformly without discrimination, students are more likely to perceive school authorities as credible and legitimate. Conversely, selective enforcement often creates perceptions of injustice, weakens institutional authority, and encourages further acts of indiscipline. Leithwood et al. (2020) maintained that consistency in policy implementation strengthens organisational trust and enhances students' commitment to institutional values. Similarly, Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, and Sugai (2018) argued that clearly defined behavioural expectations combined with consistent implementation significantly reduce disruptive behaviours within schools.

Communication pattern within the school and students' discipline

Communication is a fundamental component of every educational organisation because it provides the medium through which information, instructions, expectations, and feedback are exchanged among school administrators, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Within the school environment, communication extends beyond the mere transmission of information to include the creation of mutual understanding, collaboration, and trust. Effective communication ensures that school policies, behavioural expectations, and institutional goals are clearly understood, thereby promoting orderliness and reducing unnecessary conflicts. Hoy and Miskel (2019) asserted that communication is the lifeblood of school administration because it facilitates coordination, decision-making, and the implementation of educational policies. Similarly, Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2019) argued that schools characterised by open and effective communication develop stronger

organisational commitment and greater cooperation among members of the school community.

Communication also strengthens interpersonal relationships within the school. Positive teacher-student communication encourages trust, respect, empathy, and emotional support, all of which contribute to students' willingness to comply with school regulations. Wentzel (2017) maintained that students who perceive their teachers as approachable and supportive are more likely to demonstrate responsible behaviour and remain committed to school activities. Similarly, Osher et al. (2018) reported that respectful communication promotes students' sense of belonging and reduces behavioural problems by creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Reward system in the school and students' discipline

Reward systems constitute an important behavioural management strategy through which schools recognise and reinforce desirable conduct among students. Educational institutions employ both tangible and intangible rewards to encourage behaviours consistent with institutional values and expectations. Such rewards may include verbal praise, certificates of recognition, academic awards, leadership responsibilities, public acknowledgement, privileges, or other forms of positive reinforcement. According to Skinner (1953), behaviours followed by favourable consequences are more likely to be repeated, making reinforcement a fundamental principle in behaviour modification. Although contemporary educational practice places greater emphasis on intrinsic motivation, positive reinforcement remains an effective strategy for promoting responsible behaviour when appropriately implemented (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

The effectiveness of school reward systems depends largely on fairness, transparency, and consistency. Students are more likely to respond positively when they perceive that rewards are based on merit rather than favouritism or personal relationships. Bear (2015) argued that equitable recognition of desirable behaviour strengthens students' commitment to school values and encourages self-regulation. Likewise, Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Leaf (2017) observed that schools with structured reward systems generally experience fewer disciplinary challenges because students become motivated to maintain behaviours that attract positive recognition.

Methods

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between school organisational culture and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between the independent variables (school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns within the school, and reward systems) and the dependent variable (students' discipline) without manipulating any of the study variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), correlational research is suitable for investigating relationships among naturally occurring variables.

The study was conducted in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The area is home to several public secondary schools administered by the Cross River State Secondary Education Board. These schools comprise students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, making the area suitable for investigating how school organisational culture relates to students' discipline.

The population comprised 1,413 respondents, consisting of teachers and Senior Secondary School I (SSS I) and Senior Secondary School II (SSS II) students in the selected public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality. Teachers were included because they play a central role in implementing school organisational practices, while students provided information regarding disciplinary outcomes.

A sample of 422 respondents, representing approximately 30% of the study population, was selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The sample comprised 92 teachers and 330 SSS I and SSS II students drawn from eight public secondary schools in the study area.

At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select eight public secondary schools based on their accessibility, functional administrative structures, and availability of SSS I and SSS II classes. Subsequently, proportionate sampling technique was employed to determine the number of respondents selected from each school in accordance with its population size. Finally, simple random sampling technique was used to select the students, while purposive sampling was adopted in selecting teachers who were directly involved in

school administration and disciplinary management. This combination of sampling techniques enhanced the representativeness of the sample and minimised sampling bias.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled School Organisational Culture and Students' Discipline Questionnaire (SOCSDQ) developed by the researcher following an extensive review of related literature. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A obtained respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items measuring the variables of the study.

Responses were obtained using a four-point Likert scale comprising Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

The completed questionnaires were screened, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics, while the study hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. The choice of PPMC was informed by the correlational nature of the study and the need to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationships between the study variables.

Results

Descriptive statistics indicated that respondents generally perceived school organisational culture to be favourable. School rules enforcement practices recorded a mean score of 16.10 (SD = 2.32), communication pattern within the school had a mean of 15.76 (SD = 2.41), while reward system in the school recorded a mean score of 15.94 (SD = 2.28). Students' discipline recorded a mean score of 30.88 (SD = 3.65), suggesting that respondents generally perceived students' disciplinary behaviour to be relatively satisfactory.

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: School rules enforcement practices do not significantly relate to students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality.

Table 1: Pearson correlation between school rules enforcement practices and students' discipline

Variables	n	r	p-value	Decision
School rules enforcement practices and students' discipline	410	.64	<.001	Reject H_0

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between school rules enforcement practices and students' discipline ($r = .64$, $p < .001$). Since the probability value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding indicates that schools characterised by consistent and fair enforcement of school rules tend to record higher levels of students' discipline.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : Communication pattern within the school does not significantly relate to students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality.

Table 2: Pearson correlation between communication pattern within the school and students' discipline

Variables	n	r	p-value	Decision
Communication pattern within the school and students' discipline	410	.61	<.001	Reject H_0

The analysis showed a significant positive relationship between communication pattern within the school and students' discipline ($r = .61$, $p < .001$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding suggests that effective communication among school administrators, teachers, and students contributes significantly to improved students' discipline.

Hypothesis Three

H_{03} : Reward system in the school does not significantly relate to students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality.

Table 3: Pearson correlation between reward system in the school and students' discipline

Variables	n	r	p-value	Decision
Reward system in the school and students' discipline	410	.66	<.001	Reject H ₀

The result further revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between reward system in the school and students' discipline ($r = .66$, $p < .001$). Since the probability value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result implies that schools operating structured and equitable reward systems are more likely to promote positive behavioural outcomes and improve students' discipline.

Summary of findings

The findings of the study revealed that:

1. School rules enforcement practices had a significant positive relationship with students' discipline ($r = .64$, $p < .001$).
2. Communication pattern within the school had a significant positive relationship with students' discipline ($r = .61$, $p < .001$).
3. Reward system in the school had a significant positive relationship with students' discipline ($r = .66$, $p < .001$).

The results demonstrate that the three dimensions of school organisational culture investigated in this study significantly contribute to students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrated that school organisational culture plays a significant role in promoting students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. Specifically, school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns within the school, and reward systems were all found to have significant positive relationships with students' discipline. These findings reinforce the view that the behavioural climate of a school is shaped not only by formal disciplinary

measures but also by the organisational values and practices that influence everyday interactions within the school community.

The first finding revealed a significant positive relationship between school rules enforcement practices and students' discipline. This suggests that schools where rules are enforced fairly, consistently, and transparently are more likely to maintain orderly learning environments and promote responsible student behaviour. Consistency in implementing school regulations enables students to understand behavioural expectations and appreciate that disciplinary measures are guided by principles of fairness rather than personal preference. When students perceive disciplinary procedures as equitable, they are more likely to develop respect for school authority and voluntarily comply with institutional regulations.

This finding is consistent with the submissions of Hoy and Miskel (2019), who argued that organisational effectiveness depends largely on the consistency with which institutional policies are implemented. It also corroborates the findings of Adeyemi and Femi (2021), Etim and Ekpenyong (2021), and Nwankwo and Obi (2022), all of whom reported that effective enforcement of school rules significantly reduced students' involvement in disciplinary problems. The finding further supports Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which explains that individuals learn acceptable behaviour by observing the consequences associated with their actions. When school authorities consistently reinforce acceptable conduct and apply appropriate sanctions for misconduct, students are more likely to internalise positive behavioural standards.

The second finding established a significant positive relationship between communication patterns within the school and students' discipline. This indicates that effective communication contributes substantially to maintaining discipline by ensuring that school rules, expectations, and responsibilities are clearly understood by students. Schools characterised by open communication create opportunities for dialogue, clarification, and constructive feedback, thereby reducing misunderstandings that often result in disciplinary challenges. Effective communication also strengthens interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, fostering mutual respect, trust, and cooperation.

The finding agrees with Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2019), who maintained that communication is central to organisational effectiveness because it promotes collaboration and shared understanding among members of an organisation. Similarly, Udo and Akpan (2021) found that effective communication significantly enhanced students' behavioural compliance in public secondary schools, while Ekanem and Bassey (2020) reported that communication barriers contributed to persistent disciplinary problems. The finding equally aligns with Bandura's (1977) proposition that learning occurs within social environments where individuals continually observe, interpret, and respond to information communicated by significant others. Thus, schools that maintain effective communication systems provide students with clear behavioural models that encourage positive conduct.

The third finding revealed a significant positive relationship between reward systems and students' discipline. This implies that recognising and reinforcing desirable behaviour encourages students to maintain acceptable standards of conduct and strengthens their commitment to school regulations. Reward systems motivate students by acknowledging responsible behaviour, punctuality, honesty, and academic commitment, thereby encouraging them to sustain behaviours that attract positive recognition. Such recognition also contributes to the development of self-esteem, school attachment, and intrinsic motivation to behave responsibly.

This finding supports the behavioural principles advanced by Skinner (1953), who argued that behaviour followed by positive consequences is more likely to recur. It is also consistent with the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan (2017), which emphasises that appropriate recognition enhances individuals' sense of competence and motivation. Empirically, the finding corroborates the studies of Eze and Nwachukwu (2021), Olawale and Jimoh (2020), Bello and Hassan (2019), and Eyo and Okon (2021), all of which reported that well-structured reward systems positively influenced students' discipline and improved school climate. The implication is that schools should complement disciplinary measures with deliberate strategies for recognising and reinforcing positive behaviour rather than relying exclusively on punishment.

Taken together, the findings indicate that students' discipline is influenced by the overall organisational environment created by school leadership. Schools that consistently enforce rules, communicate expectations effectively, and recognise positive behaviour are more

likely to develop disciplined students who willingly comply with institutional values and contribute to a peaceful learning environment. These findings underscore the importance of adopting a holistic approach to school management in which organisational culture serves as the foundation for promoting sustainable behavioural development and improving educational outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between school organisational culture and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, with particular emphasis on school rules enforcement practices, communication patterns within the school, and reward systems. The findings established that all three dimensions of school organisational culture had significant positive relationships with students' discipline. The study therefore concludes that students are more likely to exhibit responsible and acceptable behaviour in schools where disciplinary rules are implemented fairly and consistently, communication is open and effective, and positive behaviour is deliberately recognised and reinforced.

The findings further suggest that school discipline should not be viewed solely as a function of punishment or corrective measures but as an outcome of the organisational environment created by school leaders and teachers. A positive organisational culture provides students with clear behavioural expectations, strengthens their sense of belonging, and encourages them to internalise desirable values that support both academic and social development. Consequently, improving school organisational culture represents a practical and sustainable strategy for enhancing students' discipline and promoting effective teaching and learning in public secondary schools.

7.0 Recommendations

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

1. School principals should ensure that school rules and disciplinary procedures are enforced fairly, consistently, and without favouritism so that students develop confidence in the disciplinary system and willingly comply with established regulations.

2. School administrators should strengthen communication channels by promoting regular interaction among principals, teachers, students, and parents. Behavioural expectations, school policies, and disciplinary decisions should be communicated clearly and promptly to minimise misunderstanding and improve students' compliance.
3. Public secondary schools should establish structured and transparent reward systems that recognise students who consistently demonstrate good conduct, punctuality, honesty, leadership, and academic commitment. Such recognition should be applied fairly to encourage positive behaviour among all students.

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