

Unmasking School Indiscipline: A Journey through Thematic Exploration of Literature

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.917PSY0067>

Received: 20 September 2025; Accepted: 28 September 2025; Published: 22 November 2025

ABSTRACT

Literature Review helps to situate a study in the context of already researched works on the topic. A lot has been written on the subject of school indiscipline. In this study, the writer conducted bibliographical research to explore literature from the period of 2015-2023 on the subject of school indiscipline, to help give understanding to the subject of school indiscipline and to aid future researchers on the topic of school indiscipline. The literature was sourced from books and prominent databases like Google and ResearchGate among others. The literature was reflected upon, discussed and implications drawn to guide the understanding of the subject of school indiscipline. The themes explored in the study were definitions of indiscipline, types of indiscipline acts in schools and causes of indiscipline in schools. The rest were nature and causes of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools, effects of indiscipline on academic performance and discipline policies of Ghana Education Service. Key implications drawn from the review included the need to see indiscipline as caused by both biological and environmental factors and the adoption of appropriate policies to address them.

Keywords: School, school Indiscipline, Discipline policy, Bibliographical research, Literature review

INTRODUCTION

A lot has been written and continue to be written on the subject of school indiscipline. Indiscipline is a behaviour that hampers the smooth and normal functioning of schools and by extension, society and hence needs to be controlled in any area of human life. In the school setting, maintenance of discipline in the school and the classroom, is critical for attainment of the goals and mission of the school. Thus, maintenance of discipline is an integral aspect of classroom management and an important aspect of Psychology of Education.

In this review, the subject of school indiscipline was selected for focus because of its topicality in school literature today. A lot of concerns have been expressed about increasing levels of school indiscipline these days in Ghana and elsewhere, and stakeholders of education and the general public have called for action to curb it (Ghanaweb, 2018; Ghanaweb, 2020a; Mansor et al., 2017; Njobvu & Simuyaba, 2020; Sottie, 2016). This review, therefore, was set off to explore, reflect and discuss some existing literature on school indiscipline so as to draw implications for stakeholders to understand and deal with the problem of school indiscipline. Furthermore, the review serves to put forward knowledge to guide future research works on the subject of school indiscipline.

METHODOLOGY

In this review, the literature on the subject of school indiscipline obtained from books and prominent databases like Google, Google scholar and ResearchGate were explored, to come out with this write up. The literature, which was from Africa and global context, mainly covered the period of 2015-2023. The obtained literature was read, reflected upon, narrated, and implications drawn based on it, with the aim of coming out with an organized body of knowledge on the topic of school indiscipline. The body of knowledge obtained was expected to give understanding to current and future researchers, the general public and educational stakeholders on the topic of school indiscipline.

Literature Themes

Six main themes were explored in this review to give understanding to the topic of school indiscipline. While some of the themes had a global outlook, some were specifically limited to Ghana, where the writer mainly targeted to guide the educational stakeholders with this review. The literature themes explored were definitions of indiscipline, types of indiscipline acts in schools, causes of indiscipline in schools and nature and causes of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools. The rest were effects of indiscipline on academic performance and discipline policies of Ghana Education Service.

Definitions of indiscipline

Indiscipline has been defined diversely by different authors. Most definitions take an authoritative stance and view children as people who are prone to disobey rules and regulations and hence should be forced to obey rules and regulations in society. Kagema and Kagoiya (2018), for instance, see indiscipline as non-adherence to rules and regulations, flouting of laid-down standards of behaviour and disregard for school authority. Silva et al. (2017) added to this by noting that, school indiscipline is lack of obedience to rules, which makes the delivery of instruction to pupils a challenge. Amaewhule and Nukan-Adebayo (2019), on the other hand, postulated that indiscipline is an unacceptable behaviour shown by someone or people in society. They further reiterated that it results from poor training of the mind and body, thus, resulting in the non-production of the proper control required of a person to perform required roles in the achievement of societal, organizational and personal goals. The conclusion from these definitions is that school indiscipline is denoted as an exhibition of behaviours against the course or goals of society or education, which prevents the attainment of the full expectations of education.

It must be noted that these definitions as enumerated above, aligns with the behaviourists position on human development. Behaviourists believe that the child is passive and needs to be stimulated in the environment to adhere to rules and regulations in society. Cognitivists however, see the child as an active organism in the environment who explores, experiments and questions rules and norms of society. Therefore, Jean Piaget, a key proponent of cognitivism stipulates that at the initial stages of life, man is at the amoral stage of morality where they lack moral sensibility. As they grow and experience rules and regulations in society, they get to the moral realism stage, where they believe that rules are sacred and should be obeyed at all cost. From the stage of adolescence, they move to moral relativism stage, where they believe that rules are arbitrary arrangements and agreements among members of society and could be changed at any time. To them, rules can be challenged or disobeyed at certain times, if the circumstances warrant that.

Indiscipline in school, therefore, manifests itself in several forms. Some include dishonesty, truancy, disobedience, lateness, examination malpractice, vandalism and deceitfulness (Amaewhule & Nukan-Adebayo, 2019). Others are alcoholism, disorderliness, stealing and bullying (Mareš, 2018). It must however, be noted that, even though these acts are seen as indiscipline acts in literature, not all of them can be classified as such. For instance, lateness to school can be attributed to long distance of walking or travelling to school. It can also be attributed to traffic. Similarly, inattentiveness might be due to Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), which is caused by imbalance in neurotransmitters, for which the child has very little overt control over.

Types of Indiscipline Acts in Schools

Several indiscipline acts go on in schools. A search through the literature indicates some of these acts reported in schools. These indiscipline acts, though numerous and varying, are somehow similar among schools across the world. Silva et al. (2017), in a study of public schools in Brazil, enumerated the following as some indiscipline acts common among students in Brazilian public schools: aggression, restlessness and inattentiveness, lack of respect for peers and teachers, insults and disobedience to school rules. The rest were noise making in class, laziness and absenteeism. In a report on acts of indiscipline in schools in Trinidad and Tobago, Cyrille (2022) brought out some acts similar and others different from the aforementioned indiscipline acts. The report indicated that acts like rudeness, disobedience to teachers, gambling, use of obscene words, failure to do homework, gang involvement, use of alcohol and illegal drugs and fighting were prevalent in

schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Hamalengo (2016) detected similar indiscipline activities in a study conducted in Zambia to determine the nature of indiscipline in public schools. The acts identified were insubordination to teachers, stealing, absenteeism, lateness to school and fighting. The rest were truancy, noise making and promiscuity.

Violence is one reported act of indiscipline in schools. Studies by Alzyoud et al. (2016), Johnson and Barsky (2020), Kodelja (2019), Lira and Gomes (2018), and Payton et al. (2017) demonstrated its existence in schools, more especially, in United States of America. The violence occurred in both students forming gangs and attacking each other or students attacking teachers. Price et al. (2016) did a study to learn about principals' perspectives on how to prevent school violence. They found that the causes of school violence were peer bullying and harassment, lack of mental health services and ease of students' access to firearms. They found that majority of cases were caused by poor parenting. The study could not recommend concrete solutions to the problem of school violence because of lack of evidence of solutions that work. In a similar study conducted in the United States of America, Kelly (2017) found that interventions such as the Olweus Bully Prevention Programme, Safe School Healthy Students, and Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support are effective in reducing school violence.

The conclusion of the forgoing discussion is that there are many forms of indiscipline in school. They include bullying, drunkenness, truancy, breaking of rules, stealing, absenteeism and drug use. They are common in all schools around the world and have great impact in reducing academic success on the part of pupils/students. Next in line in the discussion are some causes of indiscipline in schools.

Causes of indiscipline in schools

In the literature, there are various classification schemes for the causes of indiscipline. Therefore, not one agreed typology of causes of indiscipline is found in the literature. Several studies have been done across the world, in general, on causes of indiscipline and each has given some causes of indiscipline. Silva et al. (2017), in a study carried out in Brazil to find out teachers' conception on the causes of indiscipline in public schools and their possible interventions, grouped the causes of indiscipline into six (6). Individual issues, family issues, social issues and difficulty with school-family partnerships were among them. The rest were didactic/pedagogical questions and absence of religiousness. Of these factors that cause indiscipline, family difficulties was ranked as the leading cause followed by individual problems. Factors related to family problems were listed as lack of guidance from parents, bad behaviours learnt at home, lack of proper rules at home and domestic violence. Causes related to individual problems consisted of affective and emotional challenges of pupils, pupils' lack of concentration in class, laziness on the part of pupils and personality challenges. In terms of social factors, issues like media, lack of laws to regulate children and poor socio-economic conditions were noted as leading causes of indiscipline.

In a study in Malaysia by Mansor et al. (2017) to find out teachers' perception of how indiscipline could be managed among high-risk teens, the study found some causes of indiscipline similar to that of Silva et al. (2017) but classified the causes differently. This study, which was a qualitative case study, used interviews to get the opinions of ten school teachers and guidance counsellors. The causes of indiscipline were classified under home environment, peer influence, social environment, media and school culture. The study ranked the causes in terms of importance as listed above. First was home environment and followed in that order. In terms of home environment, the study found that factors like poor parental guidance and attention, broken homes and authoritative parental style are some causes of school indiscipline. Factors like peer reinforcement and support were mentioned as contributory to peer pressure. Lack of social amenities and ethnicity were the factors classified under social environment. On the side of the media, contributory factors mentioned were cinemas, television, internet and game centres. Game centres were singled out as a leading cause of truancy. Large class size and leadership styles were seen as high contributors to indiscipline under school culture and school leadership, respectively.

On the other hand, other research works have divided the causes of indiscipline into two categories: biological and environmental causes (Azeredo et al., 2019, Salakhova et al., 2016, Thompson & Morris, 2016). These studies list the biological causes as organic brain disease, brain injuries, chromosomal abnormalities,

malfunctioning of the central nervous system and disorder in endocrine gland. The environmental factors relate to lack of parental care, poor parenting style, child abuse, peer pressure, ethnicity, media and poor school environment. A look at the causes discussed and generally found in the literature indicates that the environmental factors are more emphasized in terms of causes of indiscipline. This might be due to the fact that the environmental factors are clearly seen and very common around us. The biological factors, however, often must be assessed and established medically as the cause of a particular indiscipline act.

Studies in Africa on the causes of indiscipline have not produced a widely different picture. The causes are similar although they are not classified in the same way. Poor parental upbringing was found to be the cause of deviant behaviours in a study of in-school adolescents in Kwara State in Nigeria (Esere, 2017). The study, which utilized 70 counsellor respondents purposively sampled, also posited that the presentation of rewards was the most effective way of addressing deviant behaviours. Thus, the study supports behaviour modification strategies like token economy, behavioural contracts and Premack principle among others, which utilize the reinforcement technique as a way of modifying behaviour.

Odebode (2019), in another study in Nigeria to look at the causes of indiscipline in the eyes of primary school teachers, found the following: societal factors, parental factors, school factors, governmental factors and students' factors. Causes in relation to student factors were laziness, lack of motivation, frustration, poor selfimage and peer pressure. In relation to governmental factors, the respondents indicated significant factors as inability on the part of government to provide jobs for school graduates, cancelation of corporal punishment, political interference and students involvement in political agitations. Societal factors mentioned were unreasonable emphasis on acquisition of wealth, social injustice, poor value system and unwholesome mass media. Harsh school rules, lateness of teachers, lack of proper guidance and counselling in schools, poor teacherstudent relationship and lack of extra-curricular activities were the school-related factors identified. Lastly, under parental factors, the respondents agreed that the major causes of indiscipline were poor home condition, poor parental relationship with children, parental separation and lack of parental provision of ward's basic needs. Societal factors were ranked first, with student factors being the last, in terms of the order of the causes. This indicates that respondents in the study largely perceived that indiscipline is societal and environment-induced rather than self-induced. There were no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of the reasons of indiscipline based on gender, school location, years of teaching or educational attainment, according to the study.

Studies in other African countries have indicated some similar and some different causes of indiscipline compared with the ones discussed above. Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2020) attested to the existence of indiscipline acts in South African schools. They identified teacher-based variables, learner-based factors, schoolbased factors and education-system-based factors as causes of school indiscipline in South African schools. The rest were parent-based factors and society-based factors. They went further to stress that in terms of the parentbased factors, four significant factors were determinants of students' level of indiscipline, namely, parents' example as models, their parenting style, stress level of the family and nature of relationship between parents and the school. The factors enumerated by Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2020) are just in line with factors listed by Odebode (2019) and Silva et al. (2017) as causes of indiscipline. The factors they listed are largely environmental rather than biological in cause.

Mwaniki (2018), in a study in Kenya focusing on causes of indiscipline among students, identified some indiscipline acts as drug abuse, sneaking to town without permission and stealing. The study found that common causes of indiscipline were overprotective parenting style, peer pressure and inconsistent punishment. From a look at this study, indiscipline was attributed to environmental factors just in line with a number of studies already considered. In yet another study in Kenya by Kagema and Kagoiya (2018) which looked at causes of indiscipline in basic schools in Nyeri Central Minor County, which utilized 91 teachers randomly sampled from 13 schools, the major causes of indiscipline identified were similar to those already discussed. The causes were social, psychological, economic and environment-related. Peer influence was identified as a key factor, affirming studies already reviewed as a significant cause of school indiscipline.

The summary of the forgoing discussion is that there are different factors that cause indiscipline in schools. Though they are many, they are common across schools in various countries. Even though studies indicate that

they are biological and environmental in cause, the literature stresses a lot on the environmental/social factors. As a result, a careful look at the factors enumerated above indicate that most of the causes are best explained by the social learning theory and cognitive learning theory. Factors related to peers, teachers and parents as well as other social influences, which run through all the literature reviewed, are best explained by these two theories of learning. The causes and nature of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools are not quite different from the ones discussed here from other countries of the world. They are discussed next in line.

Nature and causes of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools

Indiscipline acts are rampant in Ghanaian schools, which have raised a matter of concern. Lot of incidences of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools are recounted in the literature. Ofori (2018), in a study of 530 respondents made up of 120 teachers and 410 students in Abuakwa South Municipality to find out their perception of the growing incidence of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools, identified that acts of indiscipline perceived in Ghanaian schools include disrespect to school rules, wearing of unprescribed attire, failing to do class and home assignments, lying to teachers, and sexual relationship among pupils and students resulting in teenage pregnancies. Alcoholism, lateness, truancy and drug abuse were other acts identified by respondents. In terms of their perceptions of indiscipline, there was no substantial difference between teacher and student respondents. These acts of indiscipline found by this study are identified by other studies and newspaper reports as rampant in Ghanaian schools.

Gyapong and Subbey (2021) discovered several similar forms of indiscipline in Agona West Municipality, notably, Agona Swedru junior high schools. A total of 120 students were randomly selected for the study, which was a descriptive survey. The study revealed, in ranked order, the following as the commonest forms of indiscipline exhibited by the pupils: use of threatening and disrespectful language, absconding from school, frequent movement in class, disturbing in class, disobedience to teachers, improper use of school materials and lack of independent work. The rest were physical aggression, fighting and disorganization on the part of the pupils. A careful look at the above identified indiscipline acts indicates that, though they are problems in the school, some could be overcome with time when there is growth and development on the part of the pupils. Indiscipline acts like lack of independent work, frequent movement in class, disorganization on the part of pupils could be overcome that way. The rest might need other serious interventions. Gyapong and Subbey (2021) further identified the following as the common causes of indiscipline in the studied area: large school size and, hence, lack of effective control by school authority, factors at home, in the individual, in the family, at school, gender, ethnicity and peer pressure. Gender and ethnicity, which were identified by this study, were not found in the afore discussed causes of indiscipline. In relation to gender and ethnicity, it was realized that one ethnic or gender group tends to be hostile and treacherous in school to the other group, bringing about hatred and, at times, fighting among the various groups.

Gyan et al. (2015), in a study which utilized 150 students and 50 teachers who were purposively sampled to investigate the causes of indiscipline in Ghanaian senior high schools, outlined the following as some common acts of indiscipline: lateness, stealing, bullying, absenteeism and leaving school without exeat. The rest of the acts reported were lying to teachers, littering the school compound, destruction of school property, sexual misconduct, cheating in examination, alcoholism and fighting. The perception of the respondents in terms of the causes of these acts was that they were partly caused by school-based factors, parents, community, media and self-induced factors.

In terms of the nature of indiscipline acts in Ghanaian schools, a report on Ghanaweb (2018) recounts interviews conducted with several teachers on indiscipline in Ghanaian schools. The report mentioned acts like failure to do assignments and disrespect to teachers as some common acts of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools, which, to them, were occasioned by corporal punishment ban in schools. Another act of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools is vandalism or destruction of school property by school pupils. Reports such as Ghana News (2020), Citi Newsroom (2021), Ghanaweb (2020b), Newsghana24 (2020), Pulse.com (2016), Class Fm online (2020) and Graphic Online (2018) enumerate several acts of vandalism by students in Ghanaian schools and some actions taken to resolve them. Another indiscipline act in Ghanaian schools is truancy. Seidu et al. (2019) found this phenomenon as prevalent in Ghanaian schools and reported that it was much found in students who use alcohol, those who engage in physical fight and those who sustain injury. Furthermore, it is

more prominent in higher- than lower-grade students. They also identified that pupils whose parents engaged in checking their homework and collaborated with them in doing it reported being less truant. Another record of the high incidence of truancy is documented by Modern Ghana (2017). In this report, truancy and absenteeism were noted as very prevalent in Ghanaian schools, resulting in poor academic performance by pupils. This was mostly reported in public schools where the provision of basic school needs by parents is always a challenge. Acts of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools ranging from breaking of rules, breaking of school fence walls, use of hard drugs, physical fight and destruction of school and masters' property are confirmed in a report by Ghana News Agency (2021). The overall consequence of these indiscipline acts in schools would be a significant reduction in academic performance and other unpleasant consequences as enumerated next in line.

Effects of Indiscipline on Academic Performance

The effects of indiscipline cannot be overemphasized. Indiscipline tends to have a negative effect on school enrollment, school retention and teacher security, and results in an overall reduction in academic performance. Ofori et al. (2018), in their study on indiscipline and its effects on academic performance, documented that school indiscipline results in lack of concentration in class, lack of retrieval of lessons taught and high school dropout. All these lead to a reduction in academic achievement of pupils. Livumbase (2017) arrived at similar findings in his study of public schools in Kenya to find out the relationship between students' level of motivation and discipline on their academic achievement. He reports that lack of motivation and discipline significantly reduced the academic performance of students when their achievements at primary and secondary schools were compared. Thus, those with high academic performance at the primary school but became indiscipline at secondary school saw a reduction in their academic performance. Similarly, those with low academic performance performed even poorer at secondary school when they turned on the path of indiscipline.

In a study conducted in Nigeria, Enefu et al. (2019) looked at the impact of indiscipline on students' academic performance in Kogi State and came up with the findings that emphasized the negative impacts of school indiscipline. The study, which used questionnaire to solicit the information from 250 teachers, reported that school indiscipline mars the name of the institution, reduces academic performance of students and reduces the efficiency of teachers. The rest are reduction in efficiency of school managers and poor teacher-parent relationship. All these show that indiscipline in a school does not only affect the efficiency of the students but also parents and teachers. These findings were further buttressed by another study in Nigeria by Aliyu and Liman (2017) who utilized 320 teacher respondents to identify the effects, causes and forms of indiscipline seen in secondary schools in Bono State. The study underscored the fact that examination failures, poor academic performance, high school dropout, memory loss and lack of understanding of lessons taught in class are some effects of indiscipline in school. They further found that the effects of indiscipline did not vary in terms of gender of the respondents, indicating that the respondents (both male and female) were unanimous in agreement of the effects of indiscipline enumerated above.

Studies by Aliyu and Liman (2017), Enefu et al. (2019), Livumbase (2017) and Ofori et al. (2018) seem to agree on some common effects of indiscipline, most especially, poor academic performance and school dropout. A study by Adeniyi and Adedotun (2019) confirmed the link between indiscipline and academic achievement. In their study which focused on implications for counselling born out of the relationship between indiscipline and academic activities, it was indicated that there is a significant relationship between indiscipline and school academic performance, and that the higher the level of indiscipline, the lower the academic performance of pupils. This finding supports the findings in studies by Atunde and Aliyu (2019), Awor et al. (2016), and Simba et al. (2016). These studies in effect allude that school indiscipline significantly impacts negatively on students' academic performance. It can be summed from the forgoing discussion that school indiscipline has negative effects on goals of education and hence, necessary measures need to be employed to curb indiscipline in schools.

Discipline policies of Ghana Education Service

Over the years, the Ghana Education Service has issued discipline policies that have emphasized the subject of corporal punishment as well as other alternatives. These discipline policies are often enshrined in the teachers' code of conduct. In the past, in accordance with Ghana's Education Act of 1961, corporal punishment was permitted by Ghana Education Service in Ghanaian schools. The act stipulated that a person in authority at the school (e.g., the school head) could administer six strokes of cane on a pupil for committing any indiscipline act (End Corporal Punishment, 2020). However, following the abusive way corporal punishment was administered in schools, attempts were made to ban it in the 1970s but to little success (Boakye, 2007). Further attempts to prohibit corporal punishment in Ghanaian schools were made. However, the practice remained in schools on all occasions (End Corporal Punishment, 2020).

Ghana Education Service took a final decision in 2017 to prohibit all kinds of corporal punishment in schools, in accordance with Ghana's acceptance of international law in 1990, particularly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Children's Act of 1998 (Act 560) (Dery, 2017). In a policy by Ghana Education Service on corporal punishment contained in the Revised Teachers' Code of Conduct (2017), Ghana Education Service reaffirmed its ban on corporal punishment of all forms in schools. The policy stated, "teachers shall not administer any act of corporal punishment, or any act that inflicts physical pain on children or cause physical harm to children" (Ghana Education Service, 2017:17). This policy was further stressed in a letter written by Ghana Education Service in 2019 to all Directors of Education, which read that "the service had banned all forms of corporal punishment in schools" (Ghana Education Service, 2019a, p. 1).

Ghana Education Service has adopted positive discipline policy in place of corporal punishment for use in maintaining discipline in schools (Ghana Education Service, 2019b). Teachers are entreated to use the positive discipline and other alternative procedures to corporal punishment in disciplining pupils. The policy authorizes the Guidance and Counselling Unit of the Ghana Education Service to ensure the successful use of positive discipline in schools (Ghana Education Service, 2019b). It stands, therefore, that the current approved discipline policy of Ghana Education Service is the use of positive discipline strategy.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that several acts are classified as indiscipline acts in school. The literature depicts indiscipline acts as caused by biological and environmental factors. Though environmental factors are largely attributed to most of them in literature, biological factors which the child has little or no overt control over, also contribute to most of them. The literature has portrayed negative consequences of indiscipline and all efforts by way of policy and actions by stakeholders, should be put in place to control them. It is in this light that the current policy of indiscipline by Ghana Education Service should be supported in the country by way of curbing indiscipline in Ghanaian schools.

Implications For Educational Stakeholders

The following implications are drawn from the study as a way of understanding and influencing policies to curb indiscipline in Ghanaian schools:

1. Focus should be on both biological and environmental factors that cause indiscipline in schools in order to control them.
2. Children should not be seen in bad light as always disobeying rules in society. Some indiscipline acts are caused by covert factors that the child has little or no overt control over.
3. Schools must develop appropriate measures by way of behaviour modification strategies, to deal with both environmental and biological causes of indiscipline.
4. Indiscipline acts significantly reduce pupils' academic performance and necessary measures need to be mobilized to curb them.

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