



DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELLING AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Discipline is essential for the effective functioning of universities, as it promotes order and supports academic and developmental goals. However, cases of indiscipline such as examination malpractice, drug abuse, destruction of property, confrontations, and defiance of authority are increasingly prevalent, raising concerns among stakeholders. This study examines disciplinary procedures in universities, their causes, manifestations, and implications for management and guidance counselling. The study identifies several factors contributing to student misconduct, including poor parental upbringing, peer influence, ineffective supervision, inconsistent enforcement of rules, societal moral decline, overcrowded





classrooms, lack of student engagement, and socio-economic pressures. To address these issues, universities adopt disciplinary measures such as reporting misconduct, preliminary investigations, summoning students, disciplinary committee hearings, deliberations, Senate approval, communication of decisions, implementation of sanctions, and the right to appeal. Findings reveal that when disciplinary measures are applied fairly and consistently, they correct deviant behaviors while fostering accountability, respect for authority, and responsibility among students. The study stresses that effective disciplinary approaches should be rehabilitative rather than purely punitive, with strong implications for both management and guidance counselling. Administrators are urged to establish clear policies, enforce rules consistently, and integrate counselling and support programs that address the root causes of misconduct. Ultimately, aligning discipline with developmental objectives enables management and counsellors to strengthen institutional values, enhance academic excellence, and promote holistic student development. Thus, disciplinary procedures should be regarded not only as corrective tools but also as vital strategies for nurturing responsible future citizens.

Keywords: Student Indiscipline, University Management, Guidance Counselling, Academic Development

Introduction

Education is a vital tool for national development as it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to contribute meaningfully to society. The establishment of educational institutions is primarily aimed at achieving specific goals and objectives, with the expectation that they will develop learners in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Nwokonko & Obona, 2024; Obona et al., 2024). Kingsley et al. (2025) affirms that no nation can advance without a solid foundation in education. In Nigeria, education is broadly classified into: primary, secondary, tertiary, adult and non-formal education (Obona, Isong & Eji, 2025; Amagboruju et al., 2025). Tertiary education represents the highest stage of formal learning, designed to provide advanced knowledge, specialized training, and professional competencies essential for individual growth and societal advancement. It comprises various branches such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and professional or monotechnic institutions. This study focuses particularly on disciplinary procedures for students in tertiary institutions, with focus on the university.

Discipline is a fundamental aspect of human life. It guides behavior, shape character, and ensure harmonious coexistence within humans in particular and society at large. Without discipline, without will be less interesting because individuals and groups will struggle to achieve personal goals or contribute meaningfully to collective progress. Thus, the importance of discipline in the context of education cannot



be over-emphasized. Absence of discipline results in lack of dedication, weak relationship among students' and poor academic performance in classroom as well as internal and external examinations (Obona et al., 2024; Sule 2013; Obona & Sampson, 2019). This is because, proper discipline will help the students not just to acquire knowledge but also to develop self-control, responsibility, and respect for established norms.

The university as higher education institution plays a pivotal role in not just transmitting knowledge but moulding responsible global citizens. This makes student discipline particularly crucial as it can help to preserve campus order, protect academic integrity, and uphold the institution's reputation. In tertiary institutions, student discipline becomes even more critical, as these institutions serve as training grounds for future leaders and professionals. Disciplinary procedures, therefore, provide structured mechanisms to regulate student conduct, address acts of misconduct, and reinforce institutional values, thereby ensuring a safe, orderly, and productive learning environment. However, for disciplinary to be effective, it must follow established procedure.

Concept of discipline and students' disciplinary procedures

In the context of the university system, disciplinary procedures for students refer to the set formal rules, and processes established by a university to regulate behavior, ensure compliance with academic standards, and address cases of misconduct among students. Indiscipline, simply put, is the absence of discipline. Omote, Thinguri, and Moenga (2014) describe it as any act regarded as wrong or socially unacceptable within a given environment or community. Similarly, Agbowuro and Dakama (2016) define indiscipline as any form of misconduct exhibited by students or teachers in the school setting. Such misconduct may manifest in various ways, including disobedience to constituted authority, vandalism of school property, poor learning attitudes, abuse of seniority, laziness, immoral acts, drug abuse, theft, lateness, truancy, lack of cleanliness, use of foul language, cultism, or other forms of gangsterism (Omote et al., 2014). Mintah (2011) defines them as action taken in response to unsatisfactory performance or behavior.

Discipline procedures are designed to promote orderliness, protect the rights of students as members of the academic community, and uphold the values of integrity, responsibility, and respect toward staff and management of the university. According to Wedaga (2012), they provide a clear framework for regulating the behavior of the workforce. Disciplinary procedures involve clearly defined codes of conduct, reporting mechanisms for infractions, fair investigation processes, and the application of appropriate sanctions or corrective measures, ranging from warnings and counseling to suspension or expulsion, depending on the severity of the offense. They also includes setting clear behavior expectations, consistently applying rules, managing conflicts, and promoting accountability.



Purpose of students' discipline

Discipline is indispensable for the proper functioning of educational institutions and the broader society, as it provides the foundation for achieving institutional goals. Without discipline, order collapses and learning environments are disrupted. Unfortunately, universities are increasingly facing alarming levels of indiscipline. Dogbe, Segbefia, and Chireh (2022) report that order in many institutions is gradually being replaced by chaos, making indiscipline the prevailing norm in classrooms. Evidence from schools and media reports reveal alarming cases of student misconduct, including confrontations, vandalism, abusive language, sexual immorality, drug abuse, examination malpractice, theft, and defiance of regulations. The increasing cases of students' indiscipline have remained a serious problem in school system in Nigeria and other parts of the world (Ugwu et al., 2016). Beyond undermining institutional values, these acts of indiscipline threaten academic integrity, compromise the safety of school environments, and weaken the overall quality of education.

The main objectives of disciplinary procedures for students are to uphold peace and stability within the academic community, encourage positive conduct, and secure compliance with institutional policies and standards. Furthermore, they serve to nurture essential values such as honesty, accountability, respect, and self-control, while discouraging repeat offenses and fostering students' personal development, ethical growth, and preparation for responsible citizenship. This corresponds to the submission of Obona et al. (2024) that the goal of discipline is to foster an organized, respectful atmosphere conducive to learning, productivity, promoting accountability and maintaining institutional harmony. Similarly, Ewah (2017) maintain that discipline should be constructive, aiming to help teachers improve performance or correct behavior, rather than serve as punishment. The persistence of such issues raises urgent need to identify the causes of indiscipline and the disciplinary measures to curb the menace.

Causes of indiscipline among students in universities

Student indiscipline in universities does not occur in isolation. Often, they occur as a result of a combination of personal, institutional, and societal factors (Onuigbo, 2016). Understanding these root causes is essential for developing effective strategies to promote discipline and academic integrity. This session addresses these factors.

1. Poor parental upbringing

Parental upbringing plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and behavior. According to Ampofo (2016), the causes of indiscipline included parents or guardians. Similarly, Onuigbo (2016) lamented that parental failure to train their children, broken homes or polygamous homes, children deprived of parental care and supervision among others are the social factors that cause disciplinary problems in schools. When children are raised in environments where guidance, supervision, and moral





instruction are weak or inconsistent, they often develop behavioral deficiencies that manifest in indiscipline within school settings. Inadequate parental involvement—such as permissive or neglectful parenting styles, lack of monitoring, or absence of role modeling—creates a vacuum in moral and social development. This absence of strong parental influence increases the likelihood of students engaging in misconduct, ranging from truancy to more serious infractions like drug abuse and examination malpractice. Olaitan, Mohammed and Ajibola (2013) revealed that parental/home influence are the causes of disciplinary problems. Hence, effective parenting remains a cornerstone for instilling discipline and responsibility in young learners.

2. Peer group influence

Adolescents and young adults are particularly susceptible to peer influence, as they often seek acceptance and validation from their social groups. While peer groups can encourage positive academic engagement, they can also lead students toward deviant behaviors when negative influences dominate. According to Olaitan et al. (2013) peer group influence causes disciplinary problems among students. Ampofo (2016) confirms that peer influence is a strong predictor of misconduct, as students tend to conform to group norms—even when these norms conflict with institutional rules. Therefore, peer influence remains one of the most powerful determinants of discipline among students.

3. Inadequate student supervision

Effective supervision in school is vital for maintaining discipline. When teachers fail to and schools neglect close supervision, students often exploit the absence of control to engage in misconduct. Weak supervisory structures reduce accountability and provide opportunities for behaviors such as truancy, vandalism, and dishonesty to thrive. Studies have shown that indiscipline is strongly correlated with poor home environments and lax institutional monitoring (Mussa, 2015; Obona et., 2024). According to Moye (2015) revealed that unbiased appointment of capable and effective principals, and effective monitoring of schools will ensure discipline in the school system. This underscores the importance of close supervision by both parents and teachers to reinforce rules, provide guidance, and ensure students remain focused on academic and moral development.

4. Poor enforcement of school rules

The presence of rules alone is insufficient to ensure discipline; their effective and consistent enforcement is equally important. In many educational institutions, rules and regulations exist but are either poorly implemented or selectively applied. Mussa (2015) emphasize that inconsistent punishment is one of the causes of indiscipline among students. Such inconsistencies undermine the authority of school management and embolden students to disregard regulations without fear of consequences. When sanctions for misconduct are delayed, lenient, or inconsistently applied, students perceive indiscipline as



tolerable or even permissible. Strong enforcement, on the other hand, deters misbehavior and reinforces institutional values, making it an indispensable tool in sustaining discipline.

5. Societal moral decay

The decline of moral standards within society inevitably affects students, who mirror the values they observe in their communities. Machumu and Killugwe (2013) maintain that discipline should be used as a process to build strong societal and behavioural ethos. Exposure to societal ills such as corruption, dishonesty, and immorality often normalizes such behaviors among students. The mass media, especially social media, has further amplified this challenge by exposing young people to violent, vulgar, and antisocial content (Ampofo, 2016). Consequently, behaviors such as sexual immorality, drug use, and open defiance of authority are becoming increasingly common among students. The erosion of cultural and communal values has therefore created an environment where indiscipline flourishes.

6. Overcrowded classrooms

School size and overcrowding in classrooms is a persistent challenge in many institutions and directly contributes to student indiscipline (Ampofo, 2016; Obona et al., 2024). When class sizes exceed manageable limits, teachers struggle to maintain control, monitor individual behavior, and engage students effectively. Large class sizes increase noise levels, distractions, and anonymity, making it difficult to identify and correct misconduct. Additionally, overcrowding limits opportunities for teacher–student interaction, leaving many learners disengaged and more likely to misbehave. Onah (2015) mentioned that poor sitting arrangement, lack of interest in subject matter, overcrowding in the classroom, inconsistent parenting, hunger, health conditions, repeating the same class, lack of motivation from the teacher, and lack of recreational time were the causes of disruptive behaviours. Thus, classroom population plays a critical role in either promoting order or encouraging indiscipline.

7. Lack of student engagement

Student engagement is central to academic success and good conduct. However, study confirm that unhealthy relationship between teachers and students lead to indiscipline (Ampofo, 2016). When students are actively involved in learning, they are less likely to engage in disruptive behaviors. However, in environments where teaching methods are monotonous, learning is passive, or students feel disconnected from the academic process, disengagement sets in. Disengaged students often seek alternative outlets for their energy, which can manifest as truancy, inattentiveness, or even aggression. A lack of engagement therefore weakens students' sense of belonging and personal responsibility, making them more vulnerable to indiscipline.



8. Socio-Economic pressures

Socio-economic conditions have a profound impact on students' behavior. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often face multiple stressors such as poverty, unemployment in the family, exposure to crime, and lack of educational resources. These challenges can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and susceptibility to misconduct. For instance, students under economic strain may resort to theft, examination malpractice, or absenteeism as coping mechanisms. Additionally, financial hardships may push some students into antisocial networks, thereby reinforcing indiscipline. Addressing socio-economic inequalities is therefore vital to curbing indiscipline in schools.

Effect of student indiscipline

Student indiscipline poses serious challenges to both learners and the school system. It disrupts the smooth flow of academic activities and creates an environment of distraction, disorder, and insecurity. Moles cited in Dogbe et al. (2022) observed that even the less dramatic student indiscipline problems negatively affect learning. It weakens the authority of teachers and administrators, making it difficult to enforce rules and uphold institutional standards. For students, engaging in acts of indiscipline often results in poor academic performance, damaged character, and exposure to punitive measures such as suspension or expulsion, which may hinder their future prospects. Kpeglo (2003) proved that students' indiscipline affects academic performance. According to Afful-Broni (2004), if students' issues are not quickly dealt with and it leads to student indiscipline, their academic work will be adversely affected.

In the long run, unchecked indiscipline can foster deviant behaviors that extend beyond the school environment, leading to criminal tendencies or reduced opportunities in life. At the institutional level, persistent cases of indiscipline may tarnish the reputation of the school, discourage enrollment, and diminish public confidence in its ability to nurture disciplined, responsible, and productive citizens. This position is supported by Gaustad cited in Dogbe et al. (2022), who summarily explained that students' indiscipline defeats the twin goals of school discipline to ensure safety of staff and students, and to create an environment conducive for learning. Therefore, it is necessary to mitigate the rising cases of indiscipline. To do so, university institutions have to adopt various preventive and rehabilitative disciplinary approaches aimed at correcting misconduct and deterring future occurrences.

Disciplinary measures for addressing student indiscipline in university

The purpose of disciplinary procedures in schools is not merely punitive but largely corrective, as they aim to promote responsibility, integrity, and respect for institutional values among students. According to Olaitan et al. (2013), Bacal, as cited in Ekpe (2018), addressing disciplinary challenges requires schools to establish and communicate a clear code of conduct for both staff and students. Universities, being institutions for learning and character development, function within established rules and





regulations that govern student behavior. To promote fairness, transparency, and accountability in addressing cases of misconduct, they implement structured disciplinary processes. These processes are typically outlined in the Students' Handbook or Code of Regulations and align with the principles of natural justice.

1. **Reporting of alleged misconduct:** The disciplinary process begins with a formal report of a student's alleged misconduct. Such misconduct may include examination malpractice, academic dishonesty, indecent behavior, cultism, or destruction of property. Reports are usually submitted by lecturers, hall wardens, security officers, or fellow students to the Head of Department, Dean of Students' Affairs, or the Registrar for documentation and initial attention.
2. **Preliminary investigation:** The appropriate authority carries out a preliminary investigation to determine whether the allegation has merit. This stage helps to eliminate frivolous claims. If the case is found credible, it is forwarded to the Students' Disciplinary Committee (SDC) or the Senate Committee on Discipline.
3. **Summoning the student:** The accused student is issued a written query or a formal invitation to appear before the disciplinary committee. The communication specifies the allegations, as well as the date, time, and venue of the hearing, while also informing the student of their right to prepare a defense or present witnesses.
4. **Appearance before the disciplinary committee:** During the hearing, the committee—typically composed of senior academic and administrative staff, and in some cases, a student representative—listens to both sides. The accused student is given the opportunity to respond to the allegations, present evidence, and call witnesses, thereby upholding the principle of fair hearing.
5. **Deliberation and recommendation:** After the hearing, the committee deliberates privately on the evidence presented and determines appropriate recommendations. Possible sanctions may range from a warning, reprimand, and restitution to suspension or expulsion, depending on the severity of the offense.
6. **Submission of report to the senate or committee:** The disciplinary committee submits its findings and recommendations to the University Senate, which serves as the final approving authority. The Senate may uphold, amend, or reject the committee's recommendations.
7. **Communication of decision:** The student is formally notified in writing of the Senate's decision. The letter clearly states the punishment (if any), the duration of the sanction, and the conditions for reinstatement.
8. **Implementation of sanction:** When sanctions such as suspension or expulsion are approved, they are immediately enforced, often requiring affected students to leave the university and return official property. Punishment, as Dogbe et al. (2022) observe, is intended to reduce the recurrence of undesirable behavior, consistent with the "law of effect," which suggests that actions followed



by satisfaction are reinforced, while those linked to displeasure are diminished (Mukherjel, 1978, as cited in Alhassan, 2000). Suspension, in particular, is a corrective and preventive disciplinary measure that temporarily excludes a student from academic and social activities due to serious misconduct. According to Ukpong (2017), it is applied in cases of grave infractions that disrupt institutional order, following due investigation. Suspensions may be short- or long-term, serving to enforce discipline, protect the learning environment, and promote compliance with school rules.


9. **Right to appeal:** Students are usually given the right to appeal to higher authorities such as the Vice-Chancellor, the Governing Council, or even external legal channels. Appeals are entertained only if there is new evidence, a breach of procedure, or disproportionality in the punishment awarded.

When applied fairly and consistently, these procedures not only uphold institutional values but also help students develop responsibility, self-discipline, and respect for authority, thereby contributing to a safe and productive learning environment.

Implications for management and guidance counselling

Effective disciplinary procedures require university management to move beyond punitive approaches and adopt strategies that balance discipline with student development. Management must ensure that rules and sanctions are clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and free from bias to build trust and fairness in the system. Furthermore, disciplinary policies should be integrated with student support systems such as counseling, mentorship, and skill-building programs to address the root causes of misconduct. Administrators also have the responsibility of training staff in conflict resolution, fostering an inclusive institutional culture, and engaging parents and community stakeholders in reinforcing values. By adopting a rehabilitative rather than purely punitive model, management can safeguard institutional values, reduce recidivism, and create a more conducive environment for academic excellence and holistic student development.

The study has important implications for guidance counselling in universities. Since disciplinary issues often stem from underlying personal, social, and academic challenges, guidance counsellors play a crucial role in addressing the root causes of student misconduct. Counsellors can provide preventive interventions through orientation programs, moral and life-skills education, and regular counselling sessions aimed at building students' self-control, responsibility, and respect for authority. They are also vital in offering rehabilitative support to offenders by helping them reflect on their actions, develop coping strategies, and reintegrate positively into the academic community.



Student mentorship serves as a vital component of guidance counselling by fostering academic, social, and emotional support systems for learners. Pairing students with older peers or adult mentors provides continuous monitoring, encouragement, and direction, particularly for those facing academic or personal challenges. Mentorship programs can be tailored to at-risk learners or implemented broadly across the school population to enhance engagement, retention, and overall well-being. Evidence indicates that such programs are especially beneficial for first-generation students, learners with emotional difficulties, and those at risk of dropping out (Le, 2024). Peer and near-peer mentoring models further contribute by reducing stress and promoting pro-social behavior through positive role modeling, while adult mentors help students navigate school structures, access resources, and build resilience. Consequently, mentorship within the framework of guidance counselling not only strengthens students' academic success but also supports their holistic development. Therefore, collaboration between counsellors, university management, and disciplinary committees ensures that disciplinary procedures are not only corrective but also developmental, thereby fostering a more holistic approach to student growth and institutional harmony.

Conclusion

Disciplinary procedures in universities are central to maintaining order, promoting academic integrity, and nurturing responsible citizenship among students. The challenges posed by student indiscipline ranging from poor academic performance to the erosion of institutional values underscore the urgent need for well-structured and consistently enforced disciplinary mechanisms. This study has highlighted that indiscipline arises from multiple causes, including poor parental upbringing, peer influence, weak supervision, ineffective enforcement of school rules, societal moral decay, overcrowded classrooms, lack of student engagement, and socio-economic pressures. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that combines preventive, corrective, and rehabilitative strategies.

Measures such as warnings, punishments, suspensions, restitution, mentorship programs, and inclusive decision-making not only correct misconduct but also instill accountability, responsibility, and respect for institutional norms. Effective disciplinary procedures go beyond punitive actions. They aim to shape students' character, strengthen institutional harmony, and prepare learners for future leadership and societal contribution. Therefore, universities must remain committed to implementing fair, transparent, and constructive disciplinary processes that ensure a conducive learning environment and safeguard the quality of education.





Recommendation

1. Universities should establish comprehensive codes of conduct that clearly outline acceptable behavior, disciplinary expectations, and the consequences of misconduct. These codes should be actively communicated to students through orientation programs, handbooks, and digital platforms to promote awareness and compliance.
2. Institutions should implement a step-by-step disciplinary framework that begins with corrective approaches such as counseling and warnings before moving to more severe sanctions like suspension or expulsion.
3. Universities should invest in mentorship and counseling programs that provide academic guidance, emotional support, and behavioral monitoring. Such services can help address underlying causes of indiscipline, reduce recurrence of misconduct, and promote students' holistic development.
4. Students should be represented in disciplinary committees to ensure fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in decision-making. This participatory approach builds trust between students and administrators and enhances acceptance of disciplinary outcomes.
5. Instead of relying solely on punitive actions, universities should adopt restorative practice such as restitution. This approach focusses on accountability thereby fostering character development and a positive behavior modification.

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