

MANAGING STUDENTS' DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM BEYOND DISCIPLINE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE

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ABSTRACT: The study focused on the management of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State beyond discipline. Three research questions and three null hypotheses were raised and tested. The study is a qualitative and quantitative survey employing an ex-post facto design. The population comprised all public secondary school principals, teachers, and students in Delta State. There are currently 479 public secondary schools in Delta State, with 479 principals and 14,877 teachers. The sample for this study comprised 100 principals and 400 teachers from selected public secondary schools in Delta State. The Students' Disruptive Behaviour Beyond Discipline Questionnaire (SDBDQ) was designed to generate data to answer the research questions. The instrument was validated prior to its administration. It was pilot-tested with professionally trained teachers from two schools that did not form part of the main study. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability, yielding $r=0.87$ and $r=0.84$, respectively. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used to analyse the demographic data and the research questions, while inferential statistics, the independent samples t-test, were used to test the hypotheses. In conclusion, the persistence and complexity of disruptive student behaviours are classified primarily as verbal, physical, attentional, aggressive, and relational. Students' disruptive behaviour poses a significant challenge for the teaching-learning process in secondary schools. However, teachers who have had the privilege of undergoing professional preparation are expected to create a congenial atmosphere for teaching and learning to thrive. There is an urgent need to address students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State by adopting effective classroom management strategies that go beyond discipline.

Keywords: Managing, Disruptive Behaviour, Classroom, Discipline, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Disruptive behaviour in secondary school classrooms includes various actions that impede the learning process, such as verbal disruptions, defiance, tardiness, skipping class, physical aggression, and misuse of electronic devices. These behaviours are not isolated events; they often indicate deeper developmental, emotional, or environmental issues that adolescents experience as they undergo significant physical, social, and cognitive changes from ages 13 to 18 (Barkley, 2023). In the context of secondary education, where students are developing their identities and testing limits, such disruptions can quickly escalate, impacting not just the individual student but the overall class

environment. Conventional disciplinary strategies, such as suspensions, detentions, or verbal warnings, aim for immediate correction but often overlook underlying causes, leading to recurring disruptions and strained relationships between teachers and students (Anderson & Bushman, 2022).

Disruptive behaviours are alarmingly prevalent in secondary schools, supported by both global and national data. Classrooms characterised by frequent disruptions typically have reduced time for academic activities, and students in those environments often score poorly on achievement tests (Ingersoll & Smith, 2013). Moreover, managing disruptive behaviours consumes significant teaching time, detracting from educational instruction. Issues related to discipline, such as disruptive behaviour and violence, also contribute to heightened stress and burnout among teachers (Smith & Smith, 2016).

Research indicates that effective classroom organisation and behaviour management skills are crucial to retaining new teachers in the profession (Browsers & Tomic, 2020). New educators require effective strategies for managing disruptive behaviour; those struggling with discipline typically experience higher levels of frustration and stress and are less effective. Balancing classroom organisation with the need to address disruptive behaviour is essential for achieving academic success (Gordon & Browne, 2014).

Moreover, disruptive behaviour is not just a matter of a student's mischief; it can significantly hinder learning for the entire class. A single disruptive student can impede their own learning and that of their peers, creating uncomfortable situations for teachers, students, and parents alike. Therefore, this issue has become a serious concern for educators, who seek effective methods to address it and protect the learning environment for all (Brophy, 2022). Borich & Tombari (2024) define disruptive behaviour as actions that prevent both teachers and students from effectively engaging in the educational process. According to Good & Brophy (2022), students have an inherent right to a safe and respectful learning environment, making disruptive behaviour a disciplinary issue that requires serious attention.

However, since corporal punishment was banned in schools, teachers have faced challenges as students, aware of the legal protections against such measures, have claimed immunity from physical discipline, resulting in an increase in both the frequency and severity of disruptive behaviours. This situation highlights the urgent need for laws and strategies aimed at reducing disruptive behaviour and its effects on classroom management. Thus, managing students' disruptive actions involves more than mere discipline; it requires fostering a supportive environment that promotes positive behaviour. Understanding the root causes of disruptions, for instance, academic difficulties, emotional challenges, or a need for attention and addressing them through targeted interventions and support are essential (Anderson & Bushman, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Managing students' disruptive behaviour in secondary school classrooms poses a significant challenge for educators as the banning of corporal punishment in schools has extended beyond traditional disciplinary measures to encompass a complex interplay of factors, including students' motivation, emotional well-being, academic struggles and societal influences. Despite the

implementation of disciplinary policies, disruptions persist, impacting not only the learning environment but also the academic achievement and social development of all students. There is a pressing need for a more holistic approach that addresses the root causes of disruption, fosters positive relationships and promotes a supportive learning environment, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all students in secondary schools in Delta State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Examine the types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State.
2. Determine the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State.
3. Establish approaches of managing students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom beyond discipline in secondary schools in Delta State

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in the study:

1. What are the types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State?
2. What are the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State?
3. What are the approaches of managing students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom beyond discipline in secondary schools in Delta State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The study is theoretically grounded in Social Learning Theory as propounded by Bandura (1977). Social Learning Theory is a psychological framework that explains how people learn new behaviours, attitudes and knowledge by observing and imitating others. The theory posits that learning is a cognitive process that occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. People learn by observing others, including family members, peers, teachers, and even media figures. Learners may imitate the behaviours they have observed, especially if they perceive the model as similar to themselves or if the behaviour is rewarded. Teachers can model positive behaviours such as respect, empathy and problem-solving. Social Learning Theory provides valuable insight into how people learn and adopt behaviours. However, by understanding the principles of SLT, educators can create supportive learning environments that promote positive behaviours and attitudes.

Types of Students' Disruptive Behaviour

Recent research underscores that disruptive behaviours are not solely individual shortcomings but are shaped by contextual elements such as family dynamics, school environment, and socio-emotional challenges following the pandemic. (Gordon & Browne, 2014) utilising systematic

reviews, empirical research, and meta-analyses to categorise various forms of disruptive behaviour. It emphasises their prevalence, classifications, gender differences, and implications, particularly in primary and secondary school settings. The literature typically classifies disruptive behaviours into several overlapping categories, often based on how they present, their severity, and their effects on the classroom. A prevalent framework distinguishes among verbal, physical, attentional, and relational disruptions, and recent studies have enhanced these categories using observational data and teacher feedback (Anderson & Bushman, 2022).

However, the literature consistently categorises disruptive behaviours into several overlapping types, often based on their manifestations, severity, and classroom impact. A common framework distinguishes between verbal, physical, attentional, and relational disruptions, and recent studies have refined these categories using observational data and teacher reports. Below is a table summarising key classifications (Wangdi & Namgyel, 2022).

Table 1: The classification of disruptive behaviours

| Category | Description | Examples |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Verbal Disruptions | Oral interjections or communications that interrupt instruction or peer focus. | Talking out of turn, interjections, and arguing with teachers. |
| Physical/Motor Disruptions | Bodily movements or actions that hinder order. | Out-of-seat behaviour, fidgeting, and throwing objects. |
| Attentional/Off-Task Behaviours | Lack of engagement leading to indirect disruption. | Daydreaming, sleeping, using devices inappropriately. |
| Aggressive/Oppositional Behaviours | Hostile or defiant actions toward others or authority. | Bullying, defiance, physical aggression. |
| Relational/Social Disruptions | Interactions that undermine group cohesion. | Teasing, exclusion, gossip. |

However, disruptive behaviours erode academic performance and contribute to the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Teachers report burnout, with 30% of teaching time lost to management in some contexts. Peers suffer indirect harms, including reduced engagement and heightened anxiety. Long-term, unaddressed disruptions correlate with lower college enrolment and earnings (Lohmann, 2024).

Causes of Students’ Disruptive Behaviour

Disruptive behaviour among secondary school students, including verbal outbursts, defiance, off-task behaviour, tardiness, aggression, and inappropriate use of technology, poses considerable challenges for classroom management and student performance. To understand its origins, one must consider a complex interplay of biological, psychological, environmental, and systemic influences. Adolescence involves significant neurodevelopmental changes that contribute to many of these disruptive behaviours (Ingersoll & Smith, 2023). The prefrontal cortex, which is crucial for impulse

control, decision-making, and self-regulation, develops more slowly than the limbic system that governs emotional reactions and reward-seeking behaviours.

This developmental lag may lead to increased impulsivity and risk-taking in adolescents, manifesting as classroom disruptions such as defiance or inattentiveness. Beauchaine and McNulty (2013) note that low levels of autonomic arousal, indicated by reduced heart rate variability, are linked to externalising behaviours like aggression due to compromised emotional regulation. Psychological issues like mental health disorders and emotional dysregulation also play a significant role in disruptive behaviour. For example, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often coexists with disruptive behaviour disorders (DBDs), affecting 25–50% of adolescents with DBDs; this can result in impulsivity that leads to interruptions in class. Anxiety and depression, frequently undiagnosed, may display as defiance or withdrawal, which can be misinterpreted as deliberate misbehaviour. Students who face sensory processing challenges may react negatively to classroom overstimulation rather than from disobedience.

Furthermore, low self-esteem and poor frustration tolerance can worsen these behaviours as adolescents may express disruptive actions to conceal insecurities or gain peer acceptance. Deficiencies in social-emotional learning (SEL), such as an inability to identify or manage emotions, are also significant contributors (Good & Brophy, 2022). Environmental factors, including family dynamics, peer relationships, and socioeconomic status, are also crucial. According to social learning theory, adolescents often mimic behaviours observed in tumultuous or conflict-ridden home settings where aggression or disobedience are reinforced. For instance, inconsistent parenting or exposure to domestic strife can heighten the likelihood of externalising behaviours. Moreover, peer influence is critical; adolescents may engage in disruptive behaviours to gain social status or fit in with delinquent peer groups, particularly in secondary schools where social hierarchies are prominent. Socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty or housing instability, can further exacerbate disruptive behaviours by increasing stress and limiting access to mental health support (Barkley, 2023).

More so, school-level factors have a significant impact on disruptive behaviour. Large class sizes and inflexible curricula often do not meet diverse learning needs, leading to disengagement and resulting in off-task behaviours. The National Centre for Education Statistics

(2020–21) reports that 32% of teachers identify student disengagement as a leading cause of disruptions. The relationship dynamics between teachers and students are also influential; authoritarian or inconsistent approaches to classroom management can escalate minor misbehaviours into conflicts. Cultural discrepancies and implicit biases can further complicate the situation. Moreover, zero-tolerance policies, which are still common in some educational settings, tend to prioritise punishment over proactive measures, leading to increased dropout rates without reducing recidivism (Beauchaine & McNulty, 2013).

Approaches to Managing Students' Disruptive Behaviour

Disruptive behaviours in the classroom, such as being off-task, making verbal outbursts, displaying physical aggression, or refusing to comply, create significant obstacles to effective teaching and

learning. These behaviours often lead to diminished academic engagement, increased stress for teachers, and disproportionate disciplinary measures, particularly affecting marginalised students. Traditional punitive measures, such as suspensions, often worsen these problems by not addressing underlying issues like emotional dysregulation, trauma, or unmet social needs, which can perpetuate exclusionary cycles. This literature review emphasises evidence-based alternatives that go beyond standard disciplinary actions, focusing on proactive, relational, and skill-building strategies (Alperin et al., 2023).

However, among these alternatives are Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices, social-emotional learning (SEL), and trauma-informed approaches. These strategies aim to create inclusive environments, boost student resilience, and enhance outcomes such as fewer disruptions, improved academic performance, and stronger relationships (Fadus et al., 2024). PBIS is a multitiered, evidence-based framework implemented in over 25,000 U.S. schools, focusing on proactive methods to teach, reinforce, and monitor positive behaviours rather than solely punishing disruptive behaviour. It consists of three tiers: universal supports for all students, targeted interventions for at-risk groups, and intensive individualised plans for ongoing issues. Clear behavioural expectations are established through explicit instruction, visual cues, and consistent reinforcement through praise or rewards, helping to create predictable routines that minimise disruptions. Group-based supports, such as check-in/check-out systems, allow students to track their goal behaviours with adult feedback to manage moderate disruptions. Functional behaviour assessments and individualised plans are based on data-driven adjustments (Beauchaine & McNulty, 2013).

Restorative practices prioritise relational repair over punitive responses, treating disruptions as chances to restore community and accountability. Grounded in restorative justice, these practices focus on open dialogue to address the impact of harm on relationships, involving facilitated discussions in which students can share their viewpoints, emotions, and proposed solutions, such as community-building circles or harm circles following incidents. The use of "I" statements (e.g., "I feel concerned when...") allows students to express their feelings without placing blame, and training students to resolve minor conflicts independently is encouraged (Allen, Fonagy & Bateman, 2018).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) incorporates direct instruction in competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, turning disruptions into teachable moments on topics like identifying emotions (e.g., using mood meters) and self-regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing). SEL can be woven into transitions and academic activities, exemplifying skills like empathy and conflict resolution (Bitsko, 2022). Trauma-informed care acknowledges how negative experiences (e.g., abuse, loss) can manifest as challenging behaviours, prioritising safety, trust, and empowerment over punitive measures. This approach includes establishing predictable routines, providing sensory supports (e.g., calming spaces), and offering choices to prevent potential triggers. Co-regulation through teacher modelling of calm behaviour and resilience-building strategies (e.g., strengths-based feedback) is emphasised, alongside non-exclusionary responses that integrate PBIS and SEL strategies (Allen, Fonagy & Bateman, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative and quantitative survey employing an ex-post facto design. The population comprised all public secondary school principals and teachers in Delta State. There are currently 479 public secondary schools in Delta State, with 479 principals and 14,877 teachers. The sample for this study comprised 100 principals and 400 teachers from selected public secondary schools in Delta State. The Students' Disruptive Behaviour beyond Discipline Questionnaire (SDBDQ) was designed to generate data to answer the research questions. The instrument was validated prior to its administration. It was pilot-tested with professionally trained teachers from two schools that did not form part of this study. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability, yielding $r=0.87$ and $r=0.84$, respectively. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyse the demographic data and the research questions, while inferential statistics (Independent samples t-test) were used to test the hypotheses.

RESULT

Table 2: Response to the types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State

| Types of Disruptive Behaviours | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | STD |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----|------|------|
| Oral interjections or communications that interrupt instruction or peer focus. | 167 | 180 | 97 | 56 | 3.30 | 1.25 |
| Bodily movements or actions that hinder order. | 100 | 210 | 84 | 106 | 3.85 | 0.98 |
| Lack of engagement leading to indirect disruption. | 223 | 140 | 55 | 82 | 2.85 | 0.86 |
| Hostile or defiant actions toward others or authority. | 150 | 160 | 40 | 150 | 3.78 | 1.02 |
| Interactions that undermine group cohesion. | 83 | 250 | 77 | 90 | 2.67 | 0.81 |

Table 2 shows the responses to the types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 3: Response to the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State

| Causes of Disruptive Behaviours | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | STD |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| Mental health conditions | 200 | 142 | 78 | 80 | 3.21 | 1.34 |
| Emotional dysregulation | 80 | 250 | 80 | 90 | 2.98 | 0.80 |
| Anxiety and depression | 135 | 150 | 83 | 132 | 3.48 | 0.92 |
| Peer interactions | 133 | 60 | 150 | 157 | 2.88 | 1.23 |
| Family dynamics | 123 | 182 | 103 | 92 | 2.94 | 0.96 |

Table 3 shows the responses to the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 4: Response to the approaches of managing students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom beyond discipline in secondary schools in Delta State

| Approaches to Managing Students' Disruptive Behaviour | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | STD |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports | 145 | 138 | 101 | 116 | 3.45 | 1.72 |
| Restorative practices shift from punitive responses to relational repair | 90 | 198 | 111 | 101 | 3.78 | 1.82 |
| Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) | 150 | 167 | 88 | 95 | 2.88 | 0.96 |
| Trauma-informed care | 200 | 108 | 130 | 62 | 2.98 | 0.93 |
| Resilience-building | 177 | 150 | 73 | 100 | 2.94 | 1.68 |

Table 4 presents responses on approaches to managing students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom beyond discipline in secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 5: T-test analysis of types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State

| Sex | N | Mean | STD | DF | t | p |
|------------|----------|-------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Male | 211 | 3.67 | 0.90 | 5 | 0.045 | 0.003 |
| Female | 289 | 3.88 | 0.92 | | | |

A descriptive analysis on the types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State. The statistics in the table showed mean scores of 3.67 and 3.88 respectively, standard deviations of 0.90 and 0.92. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 6: T-test analysis on the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State

| Sex | N | Mean | STD | DF | t | p |
|------------|----------|-------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Male | 211 | 2.88 | 0.78 | 5 | 0.015 | 0.005 |
| Female | 289 | 2.90 | 0.85 | | | |

A descriptive analysis of the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State. The statistics in the table showed mean scores of 2.88 and 2.90 respectively, standard deviations of 0.78 and 0.85. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 7: T-test analysis on approaches of managing students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom beyond discipline in secondary schools in Delta State

| Sex | N | Mean | STD | DF | t | p |
|------------|----------|-------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Male | 211 | 3.21 | 1.65 | 5 | 0.010 | 0.002 |
| Female | 289 | 2.98 | 0.94 | | | |

A descriptive analysis of the approaches to managing students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom beyond discipline in secondary schools in Delta State. The statistics in the table showed mean scores of 3.21 and 2.98, respectively, and standard deviations of 1.65 and 0.94. The null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study spotlighted types of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State. The findings revealed that disruptive behaviours are not merely individual failings but are influenced by contextual factors like family environment, school climate, and post-pandemic socio-emotional disruptions. In support of this, Lohmann (2024) noted that disruptive behaviours erode academic performance and foster a "school-to-prison pipeline." Teachers report burnout, with 30% of teaching time lost to management in some contexts. Peers suffer indirect harms, including reduced engagement and heightened anxiety. Long-term, unaddressed disruptions correlate with lower college enrolment and earnings.

The study also examined the causes of students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State. The findings showed that disruptive behaviours including verbal outbursts, defiance, off-task activities, tardiness, aggression, and inappropriate technology use pose significant challenges to classroom management and student outcomes. Understanding its causes requires examining a complex interplay of biological, psychological, environmental, and systemic factors. In this regard, Good & Brophy (2022) and Barkley (2023) asserted that psychological factors, including mental health conditions and emotional dysregulation, significantly contribute to disruptive behaviour. Comorbid disorders like attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) lead to impulsivity-driven disruptions like blurting or off-task behaviour. Anxiety and depression, often undiagnosed, can manifest as defiance or withdrawal, mistaken for intentional misbehaviour. For instance, students with sensory processing issues may act out due to classroom overstimulation, not defiance. Low self-esteem and poor frustration tolerance exacerbate these issues, as adolescents may use disruptive acts to mask insecurities or gain peer approval. Social-emotional learning (SEL) deficits, such as the inability to recognise or regulate emotions, are also critical.

Environmental influences, including family dynamics, peer interactions, and socioeconomic conditions, are pivotal. Social learning theory posits that adolescents model behaviours observed in chaotic or conflict-ridden home environments, where aggression or noncompliance is reinforced. For example, inconsistent parenting or exposure to domestic conflict increases the likelihood of externalising behaviours. Peer influence is equally significant; adolescents seeking social status may engage in disruptive acts to gain attention or align with deviant peer groups, particularly in secondary schools where social hierarchies intensify. Socioeconomic stressors, such as poverty or housing instability, increase the prevalence of disruptive behaviours, as they heighten stress and reduce access to mental health resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the persistence and complexity of disruptive student behaviours are classified primarily as verbal, physical, attentional, aggressive, and relational. Students' disruptive behaviour

poses a significant challenge to the teaching-learning process in secondary school classrooms. However, teachers who have had the privilege of professional preparation are expected to create a congenial atmosphere in which teaching and learning thrive. There is an urgent need to tackle students' disruptive behaviour in secondary schools in Delta State by adopting practical approaches to classroom management beyond discipline.

Recommendations

The study recommended revising teaching strategies in the context of students' disruptive behaviour to prevent it and minimise its impact. Seminars for parents, teachers, and students may be arranged on the topic of disruptive behaviour to highlight the impacts, remedies and repercussions of students' disruptive behaviour. Some standing operating procedures may be introduced at the national level as remedies to disruptive behaviour. The heads of schools may set some rules and regulations for disruptive behaviour, which may help the teachers as rigid supports and guidelines.

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