

Discipline at a Crossroads: The Rise and Reform of Student Indiscipline in Ghanaian Senior High Schools

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Abstract

This study evaluates increasing indiscipline in senior high schools in Ghana, investigating its socio-ecological drivers, policy gaps, and academic impacts. The major contributors are peer influence, poor teacher-student relationships, and weak parental supervision. The findings also reveal that bullying, truancy, and academic dishonesty are connected to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate counselling, and socioeconomic pressures. It compares the post-corporal punishment disciplinary gap with restorative justice. The study recommends setting up a National Positive Discipline Policy, a student-staff discipline committee, community-parent partnerships, and training teachers in trauma-informed approaches. It underscores the need for a collaborative, non-punitive approach to align school rules with youth realities.

Keywords

School Indiscipline, Socio-Ecological Drivers, Restorative Justice, Positive Discipline Policy

1. Introduction

Increased inappropriate behavior among students has been associated with issues such as the excessive use of social media, parents not prioritizing supervision, and specific parental policies (Gottfredson et al., 2020). In Ghana, indiscipline in senior high schools has attracted immense public attention from all stakeholders. Educators, the public, and policymakers have frequently seen media reports on students disobeying school rules, unlawful protests, examination malpractices, and violent behaviors (Patrick & Adade, 2020). Suspensions, corporal punishment,

and detentions are some measures introduced by the Ghana Education Service (GES) to curb school indiscipline. Studies suggest that poor parental involvement, peer pressure, and social media influence contribute to the problem (Ofori, 2018).

The general conversation about school discipline has moved from corporal punishment to promising behavior interventions and restorative justice (Skiba et al., 2014). However, to date, Ghana largely depends on the conventional style of instilling discipline, which casts doubt on the effectiveness of these approaches in today's changing environment.

School indiscipline occurs when students behave contrary to the established rules in the school, disrupt teaching and learning, and impair educational institutions' moral and academic environments (Akyina & Heeralal, 2024). These actions include minor misconduct, such as making noise in the classroom, being late, and improper dressing. There are also major misbehaviors, such as bullying, substance abuse, and destruction of property. Indiscipline is a multidimensional issue caused by personal, institutional, and sociocultural factors, making it a regular obstacle in both advanced and developing countries (Ofori, 2018). From a psychological perspective, indiscipline may originate from poor self-control, fluctuating emotions, or disregard for authority (Baumrind, 1991). From a sociological perspective, indiscipline can stem from peer pressure, the collapse of the family system, and, to a larger extent, a disorganized society (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Indiscipline among Ghana's senior high school students has been linked to a decline in respect for authority, access to negative media influences, and indecisive implementation of school rules (Ampofo, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires multidimensional approaches, combining strict disciplinary measures with counseling, involving parents, and policy restructuring to promote a vibrant school atmosphere (OECD, 2019). In recent years, the rise of irresponsible student behaviors in senior high schools has become a global concern. Indiscipline among students is manifested in various ways, including loitering, physically or emotionally causing pain to fellow students, and failure to recognize authority (Baafi, 2020). Studies show that this behavior is not limited to any specific geographical setting but is a global issue affecting both advanced and developing countries (Osher et al., 2016). A report by the National Centre for Education Statistics (McFarland et al., 2019: p. 191.) shows that there is an upward trend in school violence and uncontrolled behaviors, while similar trends have been observed in African countries like Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria (Adeyemo & Adeleye, 2018; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010).

Improved technologies, specifically the unsupervised constant use of social media, have introduced new forms of indiscipline such as cyberbullying and excessive irregular behavior on the internet (Magis-Weinberg et al., 2021). Additionally, sudden and massive changes in parenting style from authoritarian to soft parenting approaches have been linked to the decline in respect for school authority figures. Most situations force schools to either forego corporal punishment or

risk facing legal consequences (Gershoff, 2017).

The effect of increasing indiscipline goes beyond the four corners of the classroom. Indiscipline affects academic performance, school security, and long-term student development (Gottfredson et al., 2020). Given these global trends, there is an urgent need for evidence-based strategies to address student indiscipline, particularly in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, where educational systems face additional resource constraints (UNESCO, 2022).

The objective of this research is to identify the socio-ecological drivers of indiscipline in Ghanaian senior high schools, to evaluate the efficacy of Ghana's disciplinary policies against restorative justice models, to quantify the academic cost of indiscipline, academic performance, and teacher attrition rate, and finally, to co-design interventions with stakeholders using a participatory approach.

This study seeks to answer four questions: What are the main reasons students misbehave in Ghanaian senior high schools? Does the current punishment style in Ghanaian senior high schools yield the expected outcome? Does students' misbehavior affect academic performance? What can be done to reduce indiscipline in senior high schools?

2. Literature Review

Indiscipline refers to willingly and constantly deviating from regularly established norms, rules, and expectations, which can cause disruption and an insecure environment.

2.1. Behavioral Indiscipline

Fighting and the use of abusive language often originate from conflicts between peers and unresolved misunderstandings. These behaviors can be associated with violence at home or in communities. From a psychological perspective, certain indisciplined behaviors like bullying have been linked to prolonged psychological effects on victims, including anxiety and depression (Olweus, 1993). Alcohol abuse, cigarettes, and illicit drugs are other forms of indiscipline. Studies in Ghana have revealed that peer pressure, stress, and poor supervision play a significant role in the rising use of substances among adolescents (Doku et al., 2012). This attitude impedes academic performance and causes a rise in dropouts and involvement in criminal activities.

Disobeying teachers and people in authority in school indicates a greater decline in school discipline. Popular acts of indiscipline include verbal insults and failure to obey.

A second-year student from Seventh Day Adventist Senior High School at Bantama in the Ashanti Region went to school with a loaded gun and accidentally shot her classmate in the face (Gyimah, 2025).

A first-year student at Kinbu Senior High School in the Greater Accra Region was stabbed to death during a confrontation with a schoolmate. He died at the hospital due to the severity of the injuries (Quaye, 2025b).

2.2. Academic Indiscipline

Academic indiscipline among senior high school students comprises intentional behaviours that weaken the learning environment and institutional norms, such as truancy and refusal to complete assignments. Truancy is mainly associated with disengagement or external pressure and correlates with nonperformance in academic work and higher school dropout rates (Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

Cheating, facilitated by exam-centric cultures and technological equipment, mirrors individual strain (Dyer et al., 2020) and structural breakdown in assessment design.

The West African Examination Council has been raising concerns about increased examination malpractice. In 2023, 18,504 students were engaged in various forms of misconduct and cheating (Adu-Asomaning, 2025).

2.3. Digital Indiscipline

Digital indiscipline among senior high school students includes behaviors such as cyberbullying and inappropriate use of social media during school hours, which interrupt teaching and learning and also cause unsafe environments.

Cyberbullying involves the use of any form of digital space to make life uncomfortable for others, mainly resulting in psychological and physical harm, leading to a decline in academic performance and suicide in extreme cases (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). The inappropriate use of social media during school hours, such as unapproved phone use in classrooms, accessing content that is not education-related, and recording others without their knowledge, weakens academic attention and discipline (Aggor et al., 2020). The rate at which students become attached to social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, X, Facebook, and WhatsApp disrupts students, limiting their engagement with academic work and increasing indisciplined behaviors.

A final-year student at Wa T. I. Ahmadiya Senior High School was stabbed with a knife after video recording a mate without seeking his consent (Quaye, 2025a).

2.4. Theoretical Framework to School Indiscipline

2.4.1. Social Control Theory (SCT)

Indiscipline is likely to be observed when bonds crack. Hirschi classified social bonds into four major elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. This theory helps to understand the causes of indiscipline among Ghanaian senior high school students, particularly in less privileged schools, where students do not recognize the importance of establishing bonds (Figure 1).

The Role of Teacher-Student and Parent-Child Relationships. “Attachment” refers to the emotional bond students form with authority figures, such as teachers and parents. Students show signs of excellent behavior in school when positive relationships support them (Hirschi, 1969).

Students are likely to feel isolated from school authority figures, increasing the possibility of undisciplined behavior when students experience little or no bonding.

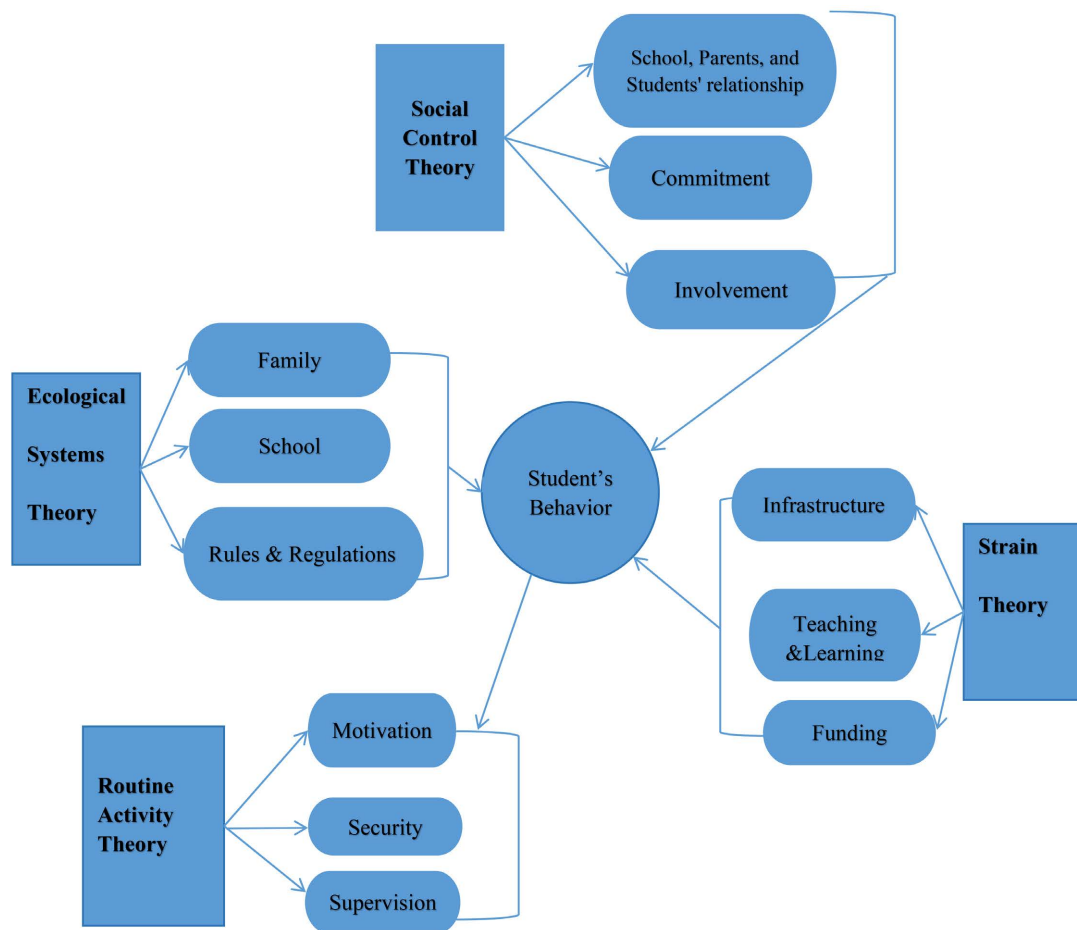


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for students' behavior.

Educational Aspirations and Future Prospects. Commitment is the attachment students create to academic success, which is the only road to achieving success in the future. Students who understand that excelling academically is the only way to succeed are more likely to obey school rules and regulations (Hirschi, 1969). The increasing graduate unemployment rate in Ghana and the limited opportunities available for individuals with excellent academic achievements undermine students' commitment to academic success (World Bank, 2023). Students from low-income families, schools with inadequate resources, and those in rural communities doubt the need to work diligently for academic success, resulting in apathy and disengagement (Nur, 2024). Without clear motivation to obey school rules and regulations, students may put a premium on long-term gratification instead of rebelling against school authority.

Participation in school activities. Involvement is when students willingly participate in school activities such as sports, debate, clubs, or academic societies. Students who participate in extracurricular activities at school have limited time to engage in undisciplined behaviors (Hirschi, 1969). However, many schools focus much on classroom work, paying little attention to after-school activities due to a lack of resources or funding (Shugerman, 2013). In schools located in rural com-

munities, students have inadequate options for productive engagement, which may lead to boredom and enough spare time that may be used to engage in misconduct (Bailey, 2021). The Ghana education system's overprioritization of examination success often neglects the need to encourage students to participate in nonacademic activities, further limiting their opportunities for good behavior.

2.4.2. Ecological Systems Theory (EST)

Ecological Systems Theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in 1979. The theory details a comprehensive structure for understanding how various environmental layers mold student behavior, including school indiscipline. Bronfenbrenner posits that an embedded hierarchy of systems, extending from the immediate environment to a larger environment, influences individual growth. To properly understand misconduct among students, Ecological Systems Theory explains how the different ecological levels contribute to behavioral outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Immediate Environment. Bronfenbrenner states that this consists of direct exposure to students' daily life, such as interactions with teachers, peers, and family members. Weak relationships between teachers and students, inhumane punishment, or peer influence can trigger indiscipline (Osher et al., 2016). Traditional methods of teaching, which are authoritarian, persist. This approach may provoke defiance, while unsupervised children at home may exhibit certain behaviors unacceptable to society.

Interconnections. Poor interaction between schools and families, such as poor parent-teacher relations, can cause barriers to enforcing discipline measures and enable poor behavior (Epstein, 2018). Community involvement in education is traditional in Ghana. A decline in parental engagement in school administration may further erode behavior control.

External factors affect students indirectly. Some circumstances are beyond students' control. Structures intended to promote development in society may unintentionally lead to adverse outcomes. Educational policies, school district policies, mass media, and employment opportunities all exert varying degrees of influence on students. Introducing the Free Senior Secondary School policy (FSHS) brought about overcrowding, resulting in teachers working extra hours to address the rising indiscipline among students (Matey, 2020).

2.4.3. Routine Activity Theory (RAT)

Routine Activity Theory can best explain how the environment and situational factors contribute to indiscipline among senior high school students. This theory states that unacceptable behaviors occur when three conditions are met: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Motivated Offenders. Research revealed that students' failure to engage in various authorized school activities is likely to shift their attention to indisciplined actions. A South African study by Lumadi (2024) showed that students struggling

academically are more likely to be engaged in rioting, supporting Routine Activity Theory's emphasis on offender motivation. A report by the Ghana Education Service in 2019 indicated that 62% of students who perform below academic standards are involved in indisciplined behaviors.

Suitable Targets. Multiple studies have revealed that school infrastructure has a greater impact on how students conduct themselves: insufficient lighting and poor security increase theft risk by reducing visibility and surveillance. Schools with fencing and inadequate street lighting are more likely to experience intruders, vandalism, and theft (Fennelly & Perry, 2018). This study confirms Astor et al.'s international findings that "hot spot" locations such as unsupervised bathrooms contributed to 68% of school discipline acts.

Absence of Guardianship. Poor supervision and the absence of security personnel or monitoring systems increase the risk of indiscipline among students (Welsh & Farrington, 2009). Schools in Ghana that are experiencing overcrowding struggle to monitor students' behavior.

2.4.4. Strain Theory

The theory posits that misconduct arises when social systems create inconsistencies between the prescribed cultural norms and the necessary structures to achieve these goals (Merton, 1938). Individuals may intend to adopt illegitimate means, such as cheating and rebellion, to succeed when there are systematic obstacles to achieving success (Agnew, 2001). This situation arises when schools lack adequate resources to meet the high expectations of students working hard to succeed in their academic endeavors, or when students do not possess the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed reasonably.

Examination malpractices keep rising, especially during the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), as students are expected to excel to gain admission into tertiary education amid inadequate teaching (Tindan & Chrisantus, 2024).

2.5. Trends in Student Indiscipline

Everyday acts of indiscipline among senior high school students in Western countries include cyberbullying, substance abuse, and disrespect in the classroom (OECD, 2019). The digital revolution has amplified student misconduct worldwide, with social media enabling cyberbullying and classroom distractions. These challenges are primarily linked to the decline in teacher authority and the rise of social media's influence on students' behavior (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Schools have adopted several measures to mitigate these challenges, such as restorative justice programs and mental health support policies. Strict school hierarchy and society's expectation to perform academically create students who quietly isolate themselves from school activities and subsequently drop out (Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

Indiscipline in the Sub-Saharan region differs from that in other regions. Countries such as Kenya, Liberia, Zimbabwe, and Chad regard students' truancy, re-

sistance to traditional punishment, and exam malpractice as major misconduct (UNESCO, 2022). The problems manifesting in the Sub-Saharan region result from multiple factors, including overcrowded classrooms and dormitories, unqualified teachers, and contradictions between traditional and modern child protection laws (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010).

Several factors, including sociocultural and economic changes, as well as shifts in educational policies, have influenced indiscipline in Ghanaian schools over the years.

Pre-independence education enforced strict discipline, often corporal punishment (Akyeampong, 2010). Missionary schools were famous for their intolerance of undisciplined behavior. The education system in Ghana has continued to use these traditional punishment methods; however, schools have struggled to implement alternative disciplinary measures since the Ghana Education Service introduced a ban on corporal punishment in 2017 (Quansah et al., 2022).

These behaviors weaken academic outcomes and school safety, necessitating urgent intervention.

Ghanaian senior high school students face multiple disciplinary obstacles, including truancy, substance abuse, disrespect towards authority figures, examination malpractice, and cyber misconduct. Truancy is primarily linked to students who feel disconnected from their school. These students prefer staying out of school. Substance abuse among senior high school students has increased dramatically. Alcohol, tramadol, and weed usage have skyrocketed due to peer pressure and stress (Appati et al., 2025). A significant cultural shift has emerged that places little priority on good behavior and rewards for positive conduct. Leaked exam papers originate from schools competing to increase or retain national recognition, creating pressure among students and teachers.

2.6. Factors Contributing to Indiscipline in Ghanaian Senior High Schools

Poverty is one of the significant barriers to accessing education. Socioeconomic factors have a significant impact on how a student behaves. Truancy is commonly observed among students from low-income families, as students have to provide for their financial needs, thereby skipping school to engage in informal work (Aful-Broni & Sekyi, 2014). The inability of parents to provide learning materials for their children increases both frustration and disengagement. Urban communities have high divorce rates. This has brought about a decline in parental supervision, allowing children to live life unsupervised. Children are more likely to engage in undisciplined acts when not under parental control (Msacky et al., 2024).

School-related factors such as teacher behavior, favoritism, and harsh criticism influence students' behavior, which can cause them to isolate themselves from academic and extracurricular activities, potentially provoking them to engage in undisciplined acts (Zaki et al., 2023). Free senior high school has resulted in classroom overcrowding, reducing teacher-student bonding and making it difficult for

teachers to manage misconduct effectively. Schools lack the right approach to address misconduct after the ban on the traditional style of punishment (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). A culture of tolerating misbehavior, such as insult, theft, and truancy, has made indiscipline a norm. The sociocultural shift in the Ghanaian way of life has significantly diminished the emphasis on respect for authority among the youth, as communities now adopt a culture of individualism.

The emergence of smartphones and social media has worsened the challenges of indiscipline. Students do not perform well in class when they spend too much time on their phones instead of paying attention in the classroom during lessons (Gath et al., 2024).

2.7. Research Gap

Although various researchers have studied the prevalence and different forms of indiscipline in Sub-Saharan African schools (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Afful-Broni & Sekyi, 2014), most available literature remains descriptive and is centered mainly on administrators or teachers.

There is little emphasis on the socio-ecological drivers, such as family background and school environment, influencing student indiscipline in Ghanaian senior high schools (Skiba & Losen, 2016). More importantly, students' voices are often not recognized when formulating school discipline policies, despite growing calls for inclusive and democratic school governance (Morrison et al., 2005).

While restorative justice has gained traction internationally (Braithwaite, 2002, 2016), its application in senior high schools in Africa remains underexplored, particularly in terms of feasibility and effectiveness compared to the punitive model (Woods & Stewart, 2018). The literature also shows few studies that apply strong data-driven methodologies, such as correlation analysis and regression modelling, to evaluate the effect of indiscipline behaviors on academic performance and teacher well-being (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

There are few studies on co-designed interventions involving various stakeholders, students, administrators, teachers, and parents within the Ghanaian context (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Woods & Stewart, 2018). This study addresses these gaps by combining qualitative insights with statistical analysis to provide a holistic, evidence-based understanding of the drivers, impacts, and reform opportunities related to student indiscipline.

3. Methodology

3.1. Population and Sampling

This study explored senior high school students in Ghana using a two-phase mixed-methods sampling approach. In the quantitative phase, 20 public and private senior high schools were randomly selected across the 16 regions. Five students and two teachers from each school were surveyed.

For the qualitative phase, five well-disciplined students and five students known

for indiscipline, alongside 10 teachers, five school administrators, and ten parents, were purposefully selected. Deliberate attempts were made to ensure gender balance and equitable representation of boarding, day, mixed, and single-sex schools, as well as urban and rural settings.

3.2. Research Instruments and Operationalization of Theoretical Frameworks

The survey instrument was theoretically grounded in four complementary frameworks, namely **social control theory, ecological systems theory, routine activity theory, and strain theory**. Each framework was operationalized through multiple Likert-scale items adapted from prior empirical studies and contextualized to the Ghanaian senior high school environment.

Social Control Theory was operationalized using four constructs:

Attachment. This measures the relationships that exist between teachers and students, as well as parental closeness.

Commitment. This is the measurement of the perceived future benefits of education and the assessment of academic aspiration.

Involvement. This concerns engagement in after-school activities and respect for school rules.

Ecological Systems Theory was measured across environmental levels. Microsystem variables captured peer influence and teacher behavior; mesosystem variables assessed parent-school communication; exosystem variables reflected school overcrowding and policy effects related to the Free Senior High School program; and macrosystem variables measured perceptions of national discipline policies and sociocultural norms.

Routine Activity Theory was operationalized through items measuring motivated offender characteristics (academic disengagement and boredom), suitable targets (availability of digital devices and unsecured school spaces), and absence of capable guardianship (levels of supervision, security presence, and monitoring systems).

Strain Theory was captured through items assessing academic pressure, examination stress, perceived inequality of opportunity, and resource inadequacy, leading to behaviors such as cheating, truancy, and defiance.

This theoretically grounded operationalization strengthened construct validity by ensuring that the survey items directly reflected the study's conceptual framework.

3.3. Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using in-person, paper-based questionnaires administered during school hours. This method was selected to maximize response rates and minimize non-response bias, particularly given uneven internet access across schools.

Qualitative data were gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews

conducted in designated quiet spaces within school premises for students, teachers, and administrators, and in participants' homes or agreed locations for parents. Interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, and multiple regression models. Regression analyses controlled for student age, gender, school type, boarding status, and self-reported socioeconomic background.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis was conducted manually, beginning with open coding of transcripts, followed by axial coding to generate themes. Manual coding allowed close engagement with participant narratives and contextual sensitivity.

Document analysis covered three consecutive academic years (2021/2022, 2022/2023, 2023/2024) prior to the data collection period to identify behavioral trends.

3.5. Gaining Ethical Consent

Written and verbal consent were secured from teachers, administrators, and parents. Verbal consent was witnessed and formally recorded for student participants. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

4. Results

4.1. Ecological Drivers of Indiscipline

The students' and teachers' survey data show that peer pressure and family background are the main drivers of indiscipline.

The students' responses from **Figure 2** highlight the most common misconduct. The use of smartphones and unauthorized devices tops the chart, showing that the majority of students no longer obey the "no phone" rule.

Pearson correlation analysis found a moderate positive link between poor parental supervision and truancy ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). Multiple regression modeling also showed that peer influence ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) and low parental involvement ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of indiscipline, explaining about 41% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.41$).

Administrators backed up these findings by showing us lists of students caught cheating during examinations and records of confiscated unapproved devices. Parents talked about their experiences, a parent said, "I was called to a meeting because my daughter fought with a teacher." These events show how complicated it is for schools and families to affect students' behavior.

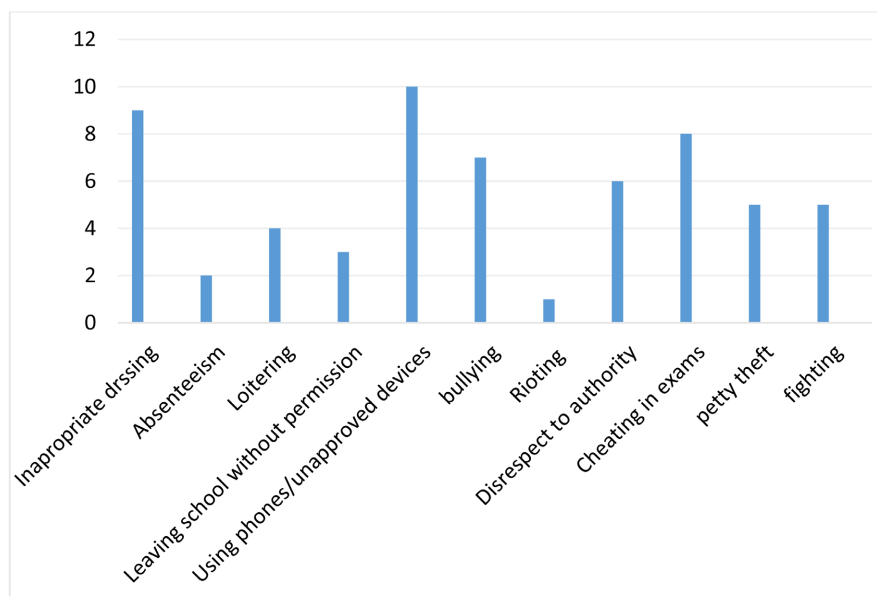


Figure 2. Revealed prevalent misconducts.

4.2. Efficacy of Ghana's Disciplinary Policies vs. Restorative Justice Models

There is a weak but significant link between frequently using corporal punishment and committing the same offense ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$). It suggests that, while punishment may make students obey the rules in the short term, it may not stop them from breaking them again. Administrators stated that policies have been implemented without significant involvement from parents or students, resulting in reduced effectiveness. As shown in **Table 1**, Interviews showed that most parents were content with corporal punishment and agreed it is the best way to enforce discipline. However, none of the parents knows about restorative justice. Administrators said they were open to using restorative methods to address problems like bullying and theft.

Table 1. Average total number of punishments, and types of punishment per year.

Year	Corporal Punishment	Suspension	Expulsion	Manual Labor	Counseling	Warning Notice	Total
Year 1	308	110	-	16	5	198	637
Year 2	526	820	-	483	14	631	2474
Year 3	719	896	-	72	14	834	2535
Total	1553	1826	0	571	33	1663	5646

Note: Year 1 represents the 2021/2022 academic year, Year 2 represents the 2022/2023 academic year, and Year 3 represents the 2023/2024 academic year. Data were extracted from official school disciplinary records covering three consecutive academic years preceding the 2024/2025 academic year.

4.3. Academic Cost of Indiscipline and Teacher Burnout

Document analysis of school records showed a consistent trend: students involved

in repeated disciplinary infractions often had lower academic performance over the three years studied (**Figure 3**).

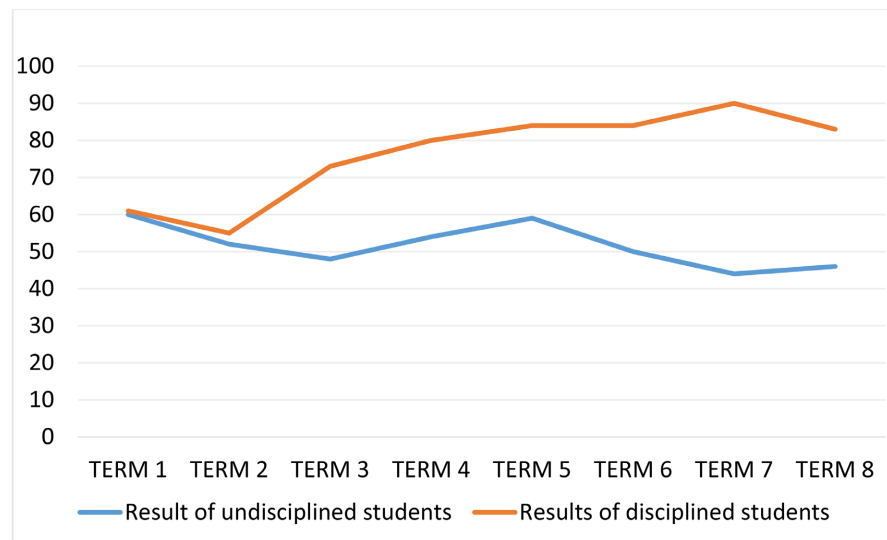


Figure 3. Average end of term examination results (1st year-3rd year).

Teachers admitted to providing less academic support to students who repeatedly violate school rules. They acknowledged “teacher burnout” caused by frequent student indiscipline, a finding corroborated by a positive correlation between teacher stress and time spent on discipline ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$).

Parental responses aligned with these findings. Parents indicated that they had to hire private tutors to compensate for missed lessons due to truancy, emphasizing the socioeconomic costs of indiscipline.

4.4. Co-Designing Interventions Using a Participatory Approach

Teachers admitted that positive relationships between teachers and students could help reduce indiscipline. The teachers agreed that school rules should be enforced strictly and that parents should be more involved in disciplinary matters. Most teachers (73%) indicated they had already participated in discussions about discipline policies and were willing to work with students and parents to create policies to promote good behavior.

Regression modelling showed that a favorable relationship between teachers and students could reduce indiscipline by up to 25%. Students wanted to be involved in creating school rules; most students (85%) said they were willing to support making the rules, and 83% thought the rules were stringent and outdated, especially regarding cell phone use. “It is 2025; why are we not allowed to use our phones?” one student asked.

Forty percent of administrators asked for more school counsellors; another 40% suggested that the Ghana Education Service (GES) lead workshops on non-punitive discipline techniques. According to 66% of teachers, extracurricular activities

are essential for keeping students busy and avoiding indisciplined behavior. Some documented school initiatives included getting students to help each other, encouraging parents to visit the school, and making Parent Teacher Association (PTA) activities more welcoming.

5. Discussion

5.1. Socio-Ecological Drivers of Indiscipline

The study shows that indiscipline in Ghanaian senior high schools is a complicated problem caused by social, family, and school factors. Regression analysis showed that peer pressure and poor parental involvement are two statistically significant factors that lead to indisciplined behavior. Students' behavior supports Bronfenbrenner's idea that multiple systems shape behavior.

The qualitative data show that school hierarchies, bullying, and poor supervision at home lead to indiscipline. These studies support earlier ones that state peer acceptance of bad behavior and weak institutional control are significant issues in teen education (Twenge, 2017).

5.2. Efficacy of Ghana's Disciplinary Policies vs. Restorative Justice Models

The study shows that schools still use corporal punishment, warning notices, and suspensions, even though they do not produce the desired outcome. The fact that punishment leads to repeat offenses suggests that these methods do not change behavior; they respond to it.

Teachers and parents do not know much about restorative justice. However, administrators said they wanted to use restorative practices more because there is a gap between institutional interest and implementation capacity, a systemic barrier that needs to be fixed through structured reforms, such as GES-led restorative justice training programs.

5.3. Academic Cost of Indiscipline and Teacher Burnout

Regression and document analysis show that undisciplined students perform poorly in school. Some students have a harder time getting assistance because teachers only help well-behaved students. Teacher burnout, caused by the time spent enforcing discipline, affects teaching time and the quality of teaching.

This finding is similar to concerns worldwide that teachers will leave and not want to work at schools where misconduct is rampant (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). It makes emotional exhaustion even worse when dealing with bad behavior without enough help from the school.

5.4. Co-Designing Interventions Using a Participatory Approach

Stakeholders mentioned that they support participatory ways of handling discipline. Teachers, administrators, students, and parents agreed that changes need to

be made, but they need to be made involving all parties. Regression models show that even small changes in how teachers and students get along could lead to a significant shift in behavior. Let students help make rules because they want them to be fair and proper, specifically about cell phones. Initiatives that could make schools more welcoming and respectful are suggested by administrators, such as hiring more counselors and giving them more training.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to draw attention to the rising discipline issues in senior high schools. Specific questions were posed to stakeholders to unravel the causes of indiscipline and solutions to address these challenges. After analyzing the data, regression analysis showed that peer pressure and weak parental involvement explain 41% of the differences in student indiscipline ($R^2 = 0.41$). National policies are needed to address both school-level and family-level interventions.

Recent rampant stabbings and rioting in senior high schools across the country are clear evidence that traditional approaches to managing indiscipline are not producing the desired outcome. A typical example is the temporary closure of the Zuarungu Senior High School in the Upper West Region after violent clashes and arson between students from two ethnic groups (Tiroog, 2025).

Ghana Education Service (GES) should stop overreliance on corporal punishment, which does not change behavior very much ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$), and instead use restorative justice methods like peer mediation, community service, and conflict resolution programs.

A National Positive Discipline Policy (NPDP) should require all senior high schools to use restorative frameworks.

Programs that help teachers build their skills should be given top priority. The study's data show that 26% of teachers know nothing about restorative justice. The Ghana Education Service should fund yearly training workshops on restorative justice, trauma-informed teaching, and ways to de-escalate misunderstandings.

The Ministry of Education needs to hire more school counsellors, one counselor for every 500 students. This will help teachers deal less with behavioral problems.

To deal with overcrowding, which is indirectly linked to student misbehavior, the Free Senior High School policy should be reviewed to ensure that enrollment aligns with the available resources.

The regression results show that better relationships between teachers and students could reduce indiscipline by up to 25% ($p < 0.05$). This shows how important the approach to discipline is to explore and prevent, and not just to punish.

Schools should set up Student-Staff Discipline Committees that meet regularly to review and change school rules to ensure that they are fair and current.

Teachers should stop corporal punishment and start using positive behavioral

interventions. Students could lead a “Discipline Awareness Week” to encourage responsibility, empathy, and respect.

Document analysis of school records showed that misbehaving students often have too much free time. Schools should add more extracurricular activities to keep students busy and productive.

The findings showed a significant correlation between weak parental supervision and truancy ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), confirming the importance of parental involvement in maintaining discipline.

The GES should launch a National Parental Engagement Program (NPEP), requiring schools to hold biannual parent-teacher workshops focused on positive discipline strategies and adolescent development.

Parent-teacher associations (PTAs) should be revitalized and reinforced to establish a strong bond between the community and the school.

Communities could form School Oversight Committees with representatives from youth, religious leaders, and traditional leaders to assist schools in monitoring after-school indiscipline.

As part of a pilot “Parent Volunteer Program,” parents could take turns supervising extracurricular activities or helping with non-academic mentoring.

Public campaigns on TV, radio, and social media should emphasize the results of studies like this, particularly the detrimental academic impact of indiscipline, to change public perceptions toward positive, non-punitive disciplinary practices.

7. Limitations and Future Research

While the document analysis covered 2021-2024, the study’s cross-sectional design in 2025 means that stakeholder perceptions and some cited incidents reflect that specific moment. A truly longitudinal design tracking the same cohorts over time would provide stronger causal evidence.

The study’s sample size ($N = 100$ students across 20 schools, averaging 5 students per school) limits the statistical power and generalizability of findings at the school level. While the mixed-methods design adds contextual depth, future studies should employ larger, stratified samples to improve representativeness. The cross-sectional design precludes causal claims; longitudinal research is needed to trace the long-term impact of indiscipline and the efficacy of interventions like restorative justice. Finally, reliance on self-reported data for behaviors like substance use may be subject to social desirability bias.

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Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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