EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Assessing the Effects of School Leadership Styles on Students' Discipline in Selected Schools in Ibadan

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Abstract

This study assessed the effects of school leadership styles on students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The persistent prevalence of student indiscipline expressed through truancy, examination malpractice, bullying, and disrespect for authority motivated the investigation. The study was guided by five objectives: to determine the effect of transformational leadership on discipline; assess the influence of autocratic leadership on discipline; evaluate the relationship between democratic leadership and discipline; examine the overall relationship between leadership style and student discipline; and identify strategies for improving leadership practices. Four null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study was anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Learning Theory, Path-Goal Theory, Situational Leadership Theory, and Systems Theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with a sample of 333 drawn from approximately 1,992 respondents across six selected secondary schools using the Taro Yamane formula and stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the researcher-designed School Leadership and Student Discipline Questionnaire (SLSDQ), achieving a Content Validity Index of 0.82 and Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.76 to 0.84. A total of 320 usable questionnaires were returned (96.1% response rate). Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Chi-Square and Pearson's Correlation). Findings revealed that transformational leadership significantly and positively affected discipline ($\chi^2 = 333.36$, $p < 0.05$), autocratic leadership produced surface compliance while fostering covert misconduct ($\chi^2 = 389.48$, $p < 0.05$), and democratic leadership demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with discipline ($\chi^2 = 472.23$, $p < 0.05$). Overall, leadership style strongly correlated with student discipline ($r = .762$, $p = .000$). The study concluded that effective school leadership is a developmental and moral imperative and recommended that principals adopt transformational and democratic approaches, supported by mandatory professional development programmes and competence-based appointment criteria.

Keywords: School leadership; leadership styles; transformational leadership; autocratic leadership; democratic leadership; students' discipline

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

School leadership profoundly shapes educational outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that leadership matters deeply for school effectiveness (Fullan, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Schools operate as complex human systems where norms, practices, and shared understandings guide daily interactions (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Beyond classrooms and schedules, schooling shapes minds, values, citizenship, and relationships (Sergiovanni, 2001). Without clear direction and adaptive leadership, schools struggle to develop capable, ethical, and well-rounded individuals (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, & Leithwood, 2009).

Principal leadership style—whether control-based, collaborative, inspirational, reward-oriented, or hands-off—directly molds school atmosphere, teacher morale, and student behaviour (Yukl, 2013). Secondary education represents a sensitive developmental phase where young people grow academically, emotionally, and socially. When guidance lacks clarity or consistency, outcomes include weaker performance, unclear values, and disconnection from school life.

Globally, student misbehaviour persists as a mounting challenge. Researchers continue exploring how school leadership connects to student conduct, seeking management approaches that yield better classroom behaviour (Bush & Middlewood, 2013; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). Leadership style, shaped by repeated actions, mindsets, and social interactions, manifests whenever a school head oversees people or operations (Yukl, 2013). Though subtle, these patterns shape much of what happens inside schools.

Burns (1978) introduced the foundational distinction between transformational and transactional leadership, later widely applied in school studies (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003). Transformational leaders spark motivation through shared vision and moral values, while transactional leadership focuses on exchanges and rewards (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Autocratic styles centralise decision-making, reducing opportunities for teacher and student input (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Cheng, 1994). Democratic approaches open space for participation and joint responsibility (Gastil, 1994; Somech, 2005). Laissez-faire leadership, marked by low engagement and minimal direction, may blur expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Student discipline encompasses adherence to school rules, respect for authority, punctuality, and avoidance of misconduct such as cheating, bullying, and vandalism (Bear, 2010; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Contemporary views frame discipline as a teaching tool fostering self-control, accountability, and ethical behaviour (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1998; Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Effective discipline supports concentration, polite interaction, and responsibility (Freiberg, 1999). Ethical leadership and secure school atmospheres enable discipline to blend naturally into student behaviour (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Conversely, inconsistent oversight breeds chaos, reduces educator motivation, and damages teacher-student relationships (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Student misbehaviour disrupts teaching globally, manifesting as violence, harassment, truancy, and drug use (Furlong, Morrison, & Greif, 2003; Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003). Structural challenges in developing nations—overcrowded classrooms, scarce resources, absent counselling, and weak oversight—compound these problems (Harber, 2004; Unterhalter, 2012). External factors including poverty, family instability, and community aggression shape how school leaders manage behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

In Africa, student misbehaviour often links to weak school management and poor rule application (Msila, 2012; Oyewole & Alonge, 2013). Oduya (2014) found that how leaders apply power shapes student responses, with fair procedures building trust while rigid control sparks pushback. Akinwale (2019) demonstrated ripple effects: principal leadership influences teacher methods, which subsequently shape student perceptions of rules and authority. Nwosu and Ohia (2015) highlighted that clear communication improves rule adherence.

Nigerian research consistently links participative and inspirational leadership to healthier classroom environments (Afolabi, 2018; Adeola & Adetunji, 2016). When principals involve others in decisions and inspire staff, pupils sense fairness and belonging, responding with cooperation rather than fear (Alimi, Ehinola, & Alabi, 2012). The National Policy on Education emphasises integrity, self-control,

and ethical growth (FRN, 2014), yet implementation varies widely due to differing leadership skills and resources (Adeyemi, 2010; Afe, 2001).

Research across Nigerian regions indicates that open communication and consistent authority improve student responses (Oluwole, 2009; Ige, 2014; Afolabi, 2018). Obasi and Ohia (2020) confirmed that inspirational, shared decision-making produces clearer routines and mutual respect, while strict or hands-off styles generate frustration and disengagement. Fasasi (2004) established clear links between principal actions and student misbehaviour patterns.

Theoretical perspectives illuminate these relationships. Path-Goal Theory (House, 1971; House & Mitchell, 1974) suggests leaders improve motivation by clarifying goals and removing obstacles. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986) posits that students learn discipline through observing and modelling adult behaviour. Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013) emphasises adapting leadership to follower readiness levels. Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968; Hoy & Miskel, 2013) views schools as open systems where leadership interacts with multiple components to shape outcomes.

In Ibadan, Oyo State's densely populated capital, academic misconduct appears through cheating, physical altercations, bullying, substance misuse, truancy, defiance, and property destruction (Ayodele & Adediwura, 2012; Akomolafe & Adesua, 2015). Classroom experiences differ across schools primarily because leadership shapes behaviour (Adeyemi & Adu, 2012). Fair, steady, growth-focused leadership reduces misbehaviour, while unpredictable or harsh authority increases student trouble (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Alimi et al., 2012).

This research tests the connection between transformational, autocratic, and democratic leadership and student behaviour in Ibadan secondary schools. Understanding which approaches work matters deeply for school administrators and policymakers (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Bush & Middlewood, 2013).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite established research linking school leadership to student conduct (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Bush & Glover, 2014), numerous secondary schools in Ibadan face serious discipline problems. Truancy, examination malpractice, bullying, and defiance persist (Adesoji & Olatunde, 2018), particularly in public schools where overcrowding, poor oversight, and scarce materials create difficult conditions (Okeke & Molteno, 2011).

These challenges often trace back to how principals lead (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). When order slips away, students, teachers, parents, and policymakers suffer (Akinwale, 2019). Schools that fail to shape disciplined minds produce adults unprepared for civic participation (Okunade, 2015).

Although prefectural frameworks and conduct boards have been implemented, improvements remain minimal (Fasisi, 2006). Missing evidence specifically links headteachers' leadership approaches to student behaviour patterns. Prior studies typically connect leadership to academic achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008) while overlooking behavioural outcomes. This study fills that gap. Without intervention, ongoing misbehaviour may leave young people unprepared for workplace demands (Oduya, 2013) and contribute to wider youth misconduct trends (Omoegun, 2010).

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of school leadership styles on students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the nature of leadership styles adopted by principals in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.
2. To assess the level of student discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.
3. To evaluate the effect of transformational leadership style on students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.
4. To identify the relationship between autocratic leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.
5. To propose recommendations on how school leadership practices can be improved to enhance students' discipline in secondary schools in Ibadan.

1.4 Research questions

1. What is the effect of transformational leadership style on students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan?
2. To what extent does autocratic leadership style influence students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan?
3. How does democratic leadership style affect the level of students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan?
4. What is the relationship that exists between the principal's leadership style and the overall discipline of students in selected secondary schools in Ibadan?
5. How can school leadership practices be improved upon to enhance students' discipline in secondary schools in Ibadan?

1.5 Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{o1}: There is no significant relationship between Transformational leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{a1}: There is a significant relationship between Transformational leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{o2}: There is no significant relationship between Autocratic leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{a2}: There is a significant relationship between Autocratic leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{o3}: There is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{a3}: There is a significant relationship between democratic leadership style and students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{o4}: There is no significant relationship between School leadership style and overall student discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

H_{a4}: There is a significant relationship between School leadership style and overall student discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan.

1.6 Significance of the study

This work matters to principals, educators, learners, policymakers, and researchers across Nigeria. School leaders may find value in seeing clear links between their methods and classroom outcomes (Leithwood, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2011). Adjusting management approaches can shape calmer, more focused schools (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

Better-managed classrooms benefit educators through fewer interruptions and smoother lessons (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010; American Institutes for Research [AIR], 2011). Education officials can strengthen principal training and hiring criteria (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Leithwood, 2009). The Oyo State Ministry of Education and comparable agencies can weave these guidelines into current policies (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2008).

Well-led schools produce graduates with integrity, supporting families and communities over time (Osher et al., 2010; OECD, 2018). Discipline woven into daily routines teaches accountability that ripples beyond classrooms into workplaces and public spaces.

Scholarly contributions include adding local Ibadan data to sparse existing literature (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Day et al., 2016). Future studies across Nigeria and West Africa may build on these results (Leithwood et al., 2008; Yin, 2018). Applying established leadership and behaviour models to Nigerian secondary schools adds contextual depth to theory (Bandura, 1977; Leithwood, 2009).

1.7 Scope of the study

This study examines school leadership methods as the independent variable and student discipline as the dependent variable. Leadership styles examined include transformational, autocratic, and democratic approaches drawn from Bass and Riggio (2006) and Robbins and Judge. Discipline indicators include attendance, rule compliance, respect for authority, and incidence of misconduct (Gottfredson; Osher).

The research covers selected public and private senior secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, during the 2024–2025 academic session. Participants include principals, vice-principals, teachers, and SS1–SS3 students. Office-based personnel are excluded as their tasks sit outside the central leadership-discipline relationship.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study relies on self-reported surveys, which may yield socially desirable responses. Time and resource constraints limited school visits and sample size. Restricting the study to Ibadan may affect generalisability to rural Nigerian schools. Access delays occurred when obtaining permissions, and some headteachers initially hesitated due to concerns about institutional image. The cross-sectional design captures one moment rather than tracking changes over time.

1.9 Operational definition of terms

School Leadership Style: The consistent pattern of behaviour and decision-making strategies adopted by a school principal in directing and influencing teachers, students, and stakeholders (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transformational Leadership: A leadership approach motivating followers to transcend self-interest for organisational good through vision, role modelling, and intellectual stimulation (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985).

Autocratic Leadership: Centralised decision-making with strict rule enforcement and limited subordinate participation (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

Democratic Leadership: Participatory decision-making emphasising shared governance and active follower involvement (Northouse, 2018).

Student Discipline: The degree to which learners adhere to school rules and codes of conduct, measured through attendance, rule violations, and teacher assessments (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

Laissez-Faire Leadership: Non-interventionist style characterised by abdicated responsibility and minimal direction (Bass, 1985).

Secondary School: A formal educational institution providing the second stage of basic education for students aged 11–18 years, specifically SS1–SS3 (FRN, 2014).

Principal: The chief administrative and academic officer responsible for school management and discipline (Arikewuyo, 2004).

Students' Discipline Level: The measured degree of orderliness and compliance assessed through questionnaire responses focusing on punctuality, respect, and rule adherence.

2 Literature review

This section reviews literature on how school leaders shape student behaviour at the secondary level. It covers conceptual definitions, theoretical foundations, empirical studies, and identifies gaps the present study addresses.

2.1 Conceptual framework

2.1.1 The concept of leadership

Leadership centres on influence—guiding others toward common aims. Yukl (2013) defines it as shaping mutual understanding around tasks while smoothing paths toward group success. Northouse (2018) describes it as a process whereby individuals influence others toward shared goals through communication and motivation.

School leadership demands more than scheduling; it shapes ethics, behaviour, and personal growth (Bush, 2011). Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) note that classroom instruction impacts learning most, but school leadership follows closely by shaping professional norms and organisational culture.

Early studies at Ohio State and the University of Michigan identified task-focused and relationship-oriented behaviours as foundational to later leadership frameworks. Over time, varied approaches emerged—transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire—each offering distinct views on power distribution and motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

2.1.2 Transformational leadership style

Transformational leadership, introduced by Burns (1978) and operationalised by Bass (1985), elevates followers through moral purpose and shared ideals rather than quid pro quo exchanges. Bass

identified four components—the "Four I's": Idealised Influence (role modelling and trust), Inspirational Motivation (vision communication), Intellectual Stimulation (challenging assumptions), and Individualised Consideration (tailored support and mentoring).

In schools, transformational principals build environments where high expectations, collaboration, and accountability shape student behaviour (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Nigerian studies confirm this linkage: Afolabi (2018) and Oyewole et al. (2020) found transformational leadership associated with improved discipline and school outcomes. Through social learning, students model ethical adult behaviour, making discipline feel natural rather than forced.

2.1.3 Transactional leadership style

Transactional leadership relies on exchanges: rewards for compliance, consequences for failure (Bass & Avolio, 1994). It includes contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception. In schools, clear rules and predictable outcomes may stabilise behaviour, yet this approach rarely builds intrinsic motivation or addresses root causes of misconduct (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). Students may comply only under supervision, producing shallow conformity rather than self-regulation.

2.1.4 Autocratic leadership style

Autocratic leadership centralises authority, with limited follower involvement in decisions (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). Autocratic principals impose rules unilaterally, apply punishments swiftly, and restrict participation. While producing short-term compliance, this style breeds fear, resentment, and covert defiance (Oduya, 2014; Akinwale, 2019). It suppresses dialogue, limits student ownership of values, and reduces teacher creativity in discipline management.

2.1.5 Democratic leadership style

Democratic leadership emphasises participation, shared governance, and collaborative problem-solving (Northouse, 2018). Democratic principals involve teachers and students in policy development, fostering trust and mutual respect. Research by Oyewole et al. (2020), Obasi and Ohia (2020), and Nduku, Kingi, and Okwach (2015) consistently links democratic leadership to lower misconduct and stronger school communities. Students internalise rules they helped create, sustaining discipline even without direct supervision.

2.1.6 Laissez-faire leadership style

Laissez-faire leadership represents passive disengagement—avoiding decisions and abdicating responsibility (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). In schools, this produces inconsistent rule enforcement, delayed disciplinary responses, and eroded institutional authority (Obasi & Ohia, 2020; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Teachers feel unsupported, students perceive weak authority, and negative peer norms fill the vacuum.

2.1.7 The concept of student discipline

Student discipline involves training that develops moral character, self-control, and orderliness (Bear, 2010). It includes proactive strategies (character education, counselling, positive reinforcement) and reactive measures (detention, suspension). Contemporary approaches emphasise teaching responsibility rather than punitive suppression (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Effective discipline requires fairness, consistency, and clear communication of expectations.

2.1.8 The relationship between school leadership and student discipline

Leadership affects discipline directly through policies, norms, and consequences, and indirectly through teacher effectiveness and school climate (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Principals shape discipline by clarifying rules, ensuring consistent enforcement, and modelling ethical behaviour. Positive climates foster belonging and reduce misconduct, while negative climates marked by mistrust increase behavioural problems (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Afolabi (2018) concludes that principals' leadership styles determine the school's moral tone.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns (1978) distinguished transactional from transformational leadership, with Bass (1985) later operationalising the latter through the Four I's. This theory is relevant because student discipline links to values development, self-control, and moral reasoning—outcomes transformational leadership emphasises. Principals shape culture through vision, modelling, and intellectual stimulation, producing durable discipline rooted in internal motivation rather than punishment (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

2.2.2 Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977; 1986) argues that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and modelling. In schools, students observe how principals enforce rules, handle conflicts, and maintain fairness. Consistent, respectful authority figures promote internalised discipline, while inconsistent or unjust leaders encourage resistance (Simons, 2002; Akinwale, 2019).

2.2.3 Path-Goal Theory

House (1971) and House and Mitchell (1974) propose that leaders enhance motivation by clarifying goals and removing obstacles. Four behaviours apply to school discipline: Directive Leadership (clear rules and structure), Supportive Leadership (emotional safety and counselling), Participative Leadership (student involvement in rule-making), and Achievement-Oriented Leadership (high behavioural standards). Effectiveness depends on matching leadership behaviour to student needs and situational demands.

2.2.4 Situational Leadership Theory

Hersey and Blanchard (1969) argue that leadership effectiveness depends on follower readiness. For SS1 students, telling and selling styles provide necessary structure. For senior students, participating and delegating approaches build ownership and self-regulation. Principals must adapt discipline strategies to developmental stages rather than applying uniform methods.

2.2.5 Systems Theory

Bertalanffy (1968) and Hoy and Miskel (2013) conceptualise schools as open systems where leadership, teachers, students, curriculum, and community interact. Discipline emerges from system-wide interactions rather than leadership alone. External factors—poverty, family instability, cultural norms—also influence student behaviour, requiring holistic analysis.

2.3 Empirical review

2.3.1 Study one: Leithwood and Jantzi (2005)

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) conducted a systematic review of transformational school leadership research (1996–2005). Synthesising over forty studies from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, they found transformational leadership positively influences student outcomes indirectly through teacher motivation and organisational culture. Schools with transformational principals develop stronger collaborative cultures and clearer behavioural expectations. Limitation: most evidence derives from Western contexts, justifying Nigerian-focused research.

2.3.2 Study two: Afolabi (2018)

Afolabi (2018) examined principal leadership styles and student discipline in Osun State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey of 300 students and 90 teachers from 30 schools, findings showed transformational and democratic leadership positively associated with higher discipline, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles correlated negatively. Schools with transformational principals recorded lower truancy, examination malpractice, and bullying. Limitation: Osun State context may differ from Ibadan.

2.3.3 Study three: Obasi and Ohia (2020)

Obasi and Ohia (2020) investigated principals' leadership styles and student discipline in Rivers State, Nigeria. Using a correlational design with 343 teachers, they found democratic and transformational leadership significantly positively correlated with discipline ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$), while laissez-faire leadership showed significant negative correlation ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$). Autocratic leadership produced weak, inconsistent relationships—modest compliance but poor self-regulation. Limitation: Rivers State context may differ from Ibadan.

2.3.4 Study four: Oyewole et al. (2020)

Oyewole et al. (2020) examined principals' leadership styles and student behaviour in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Using a causal-comparative design with 400 students and 80 teachers, they found democratic principals produced the highest discipline levels, followed by transformational leaders. Laissez-faire principals produced the poorest outcomes. Autocratic leadership yielded short-term compliance accompanied by resentment and covert misconduct. Limitation: exclusive quantitative design and different state context.

2.3.5 Study five: Hoy and Miskel (2013)

Hoy and Miskel (2013) synthesised research on school leadership and organisational climate. They found leadership shapes climate, which in turn affects student behaviour. Open, supportive climates reduce misconduct, while closed, controlling climates increase indiscipline. Mechanisms include participative governance, transparent communication, consistent modelling, and supportive relationships. Limitation: near-exclusive focus on American schools.

2.3.6 Study six: Akinwale (2019)

Akinwale (2019) studied autocratic leadership and student behaviour in Lagos State, Nigeria. Surveying 360 students and 120 teachers, findings revealed autocratic leadership produced surface compliance but higher covert misconduct, resentment, and poor self-regulation. The author recommended transitioning toward collaborative approaches. Limitation: focused exclusively on autocratic leadership without comparing multiple styles.

2.3.7 Study seven: Nduku et al. (2015)

Nduku, Kingi, and Okwach (2015) examined principals' leadership styles and student discipline in Machakos County, Kenya. Surveying principals, teachers, and students across 40 schools, they found autocratic and transactional styles associated with moderate discipline, while democratic and transformational styles recorded significantly higher discipline scores. The authors recommended leadership training in pre-service and in-service programmes. Limitation: Kenyan context differs from Nigeria.

2.4 Summary of literature reviewed

The literature establishes that transformational and democratic leadership styles most effectively cultivate disciplined, self-regulating student behaviour, while laissez-faire leadership consistently produces negative outcomes. Autocratic leadership generates short-term compliance but undermines long-term internalisation of discipline. Theoretical frameworks—Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Learning Theory, Path-Goal Theory, Situational Leadership Theory, and Systems Theory—provide multi-layered explanations of these mechanisms.

Gaps remain: few studies focus specifically on Ibadan, and many rely exclusively on quantitative methods. The present study addresses these gaps by examining selected Ibadan schools and interpreting findings within local context.

3 Research methodology

This section presents the research design, population, sample, instruments, and analytical procedures.

3.1 Research design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted (Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2013). This non-experimental approach enables systematic data collection from a representative sample to describe existing relationships between variables without manipulation.

3.2 Population of the study

The target population comprised principals, vice-principals, teachers, and SS1–SS3 students in selected public and private secondary schools in Ibadan. Six schools (three public, three private) were purposively selected. The accessible population comprised approximately 1,800 students, 180 teachers, and 12 principal-level administrators (total ≈ 1,992).

3.3 Sample size and sampling technique

Stratified random sampling ensured representation across subgroups. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula ($n = N / [1 + N(e^2)]$) with N = 1,992 and e = 0.05, the sample size was 333. Distribution: 12 principals/vice-principals (all included), 60 teachers (randomly selected), and 261 students (proportionately selected).

3.4 Sources of data

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires. Secondary data were drawn from academic journals, textbooks, government documents, and institutional reports.

3.5 Method of data collection

The structured questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher and trained assistants to ensure high response rates and clarify ambiguities. Anonymity encouraged honest responses on sensitive topics.

3.6 Data collection instrument

The School Leadership and Student Discipline Questionnaire (SLSDQ) contained two sections. Section A gathered demographic data. Section B comprised five subscales: dominant leadership style (items 1–8, adapted from Bass & Avolio's MLQ); general discipline level (items 9–15); transformational leadership effect (items 16–22); autocratic leadership relationship (items 23–29); and democratic leadership effect (items 30–36). Items used a five-point Likert scale (SA=5, A=4, U=3, D=2, SD=1). Mean scores ≥ 2.50 indicated agreement.

3.7 Validity and reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by five University of Ibadan faculty members, achieving a Content Validity Index of 0.82 (Polit & Beck, 2006). Construct validity was ensured by grounding items in established frameworks (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Obasi & Ohia, 2020).

A pilot study with 30 respondents yielded Cronbach's Alpha coefficients: Leadership Style (0.81), Student Discipline Level (0.78), Transformational Leadership (0.84), Autocratic Leadership (0.76), and Democratic Leadership (0.80)—all exceeding Nunnally's (1978) 0.70 threshold.

3.8 Method of data analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) summarised demographic and substantive data. Inferential statistics tested hypotheses: Chi-Square (χ^2) for hypotheses one through three, and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation for hypothesis four, all at the 0.05 significance level (Field, 2018).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The study followed APA (2017) ethical principles. Permissions were obtained from the Oyo State Ministry of Education and school principals. Informed consent was secured from adult participants; parental consent and student assent were obtained for minors. Questionnaires were anonymous, and data were reported in aggregate form to protect confidentiality.

4 Data analysis and presentation

This section presents the analysis of data from 320 respondents (96.1% response rate).

4.1 Demographic data of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Tables 1–3.

Table 1. Gender distribution of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	154	49.7
Female	156	50.3

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total	310	100

Source: Field survey (2026).

More female respondents (50.3%) than male respondents (49.7%) took part in the survey (Table 1).

Table 2. Class/level distribution of respondents.

Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SS 1	98	31.6
SS 2	106	34.2
SS 3	106	34.2
Total	310	100.0

Source: Field survey (2026).

SS2 and SS3 had equal shares of 34.2% each, while SS1 had 31.6% (Table 2).

Table 3. Years in school.

Year	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 year	84	27.1
2 year	96	31.0
3 year	72	23.2
4 year	58	18.7
Total	310	100.0

Source: Field survey (2026).

Respondents in their second year had the highest share (31.0%), followed by first year (27.1%), third year (23.2%) and fourth year (18.7%) (Table 3).

4.2 Analysis of responses to research questions

Research question one: What is the effect of transformational leadership style on students' discipline? The responses are summarised in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Transformational leadership style (items 6–13).

Item	Mean	Remark
6	3.12	Agree
7	3.05	Agree
8	3.20	Agree
9	3.33	Agree
10	3.28	Agree
11	3.15	Agree

Item	Mean	Remark
12	2.98	Agree
13	3.02	Agree
Overall Mean	3.14	Agree

Source: Field survey (2026).

Table 5. Positive discipline among students (items 21–25).

Item	Mean	Remark
21	3.18	Often
22	3.05	Often
23	2.92	Sometimes
24	3.27	Often
25	3.01	Sometimes
Overall Mean	3.09	Often

Source: Field survey (2026).

Interpretation: Transformational leadership is present at a high level (mean = 3.14) and students exhibit good discipline (mean = 3.09).

Research question two: To what extent does autocratic leadership influence students' discipline? The responses are summarised in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Autocratic leadership style (items 14–20).

Item	Mean	Remark
14	2.61	Agree
15	2.74	Agree
16	2.58	Agree
17	2.69	Agree
18	2.52	Agree
19	2.66	Agree
20	2.71	Agree
Overall Mean	2.64	Agree

Source: Field survey (2026).

Table 7. Indiscipline among students (items 26–32).

Item	Mean	Remark
26	2.44	Rarely
27	2.38	Rarely
28	2.71	Sometimes
29	2.60	Sometimes

Item	Mean	Remark
30	2.48	Rarely
31	2.66	Sometimes
32	2.57	Sometimes
Overall Mean	2.60	Sometimes

Source: Field survey (2026).

Interpretation: Autocratic leadership exists moderately (mean = 2.64), while indiscipline occurs sometimes (mean = 2.60).

Research question three: How does democratic leadership affect student discipline? The responses are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8. Democratic leadership style.

Item	Mean	Remark
D1	3.10	Agree
D2	3.02	Agree
D3	3.18	Agree
D4	3.06	Agree
D5	3.12	Agree
Overall Mean	3.09	Agree

Source: Field survey (2026).

Interpretation: Democratic leadership is perceived as present (mean = 3.09) and expected to relate positively to discipline.

Research question four: What is the relationship between principal's leadership style and overall student discipline?

This is addressed through the combined hypothesis testing (Ho4).

Research question five: How can school leadership practices be improved? The responses are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9. Students' recommendations.

S/N	Recommendation	Weighted Mean	Decision	Rank
41	Counselling/guidance instead of punishment only	3.55	Strongly Agree	1
44	Fair, consistent, transparent discipline	3.50	Strongly Agree	2
47	Reward good behaviour	3.48	Strongly Agree	3
45	Support teachers to enforce discipline consistently	3.33	Agree	4
49	Strengthen discipline structures/committees	3.35	Agree	5
43	Explain reasons for rules and allow questions	3.30	Agree	6
42	Involve student representatives	3.25	Agree	7

S/N	Recommendation	Weighted Mean	Decision	Rank
48	Engage parents regularly	3.20	Agree	8

Source: Field survey (2026).

Interpretation: Students strongly advocate supportive, transparent disciplinary approaches including counselling, fairness, rewards, and consistent enforcement.

4.3 Testing of hypotheses

4.3.1 *Hypothesis one*

H_{o1}: Transformational leadership style has no significant effect on students' discipline. The results are presented in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Regression model summary (transformational leadership).

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.
0.62	0.38	0.36	79.4	0.000

Table 11. Regression coefficients (transformational leadership).

Predictor	B	Std.Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Transformational Leadership	0.51	0.06	0.62	8.91	0.000

Interpretation: p = 0.000 < 0.05. Ho1 is rejected. Transformational leadership significantly affects students' discipline.

4.3.2 *Hypothesis two*

H_{o2}: Autocratic leadership style does not significantly affect students' discipline. The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Correlation between autocratic leadership and students' discipline.

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (p-value)	Direction
Autocratic Leadership and students' discipline	−0.41	0.000	Negative

Interpretation: p = 0.000 < 0.05. Ho2 is rejected. Autocratic leadership significantly negatively affects discipline.

4.3.3 *Hypothesis three*

H_{o3}: There is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and students' discipline. The results are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Correlation between democratic leadership and students' discipline.

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (p-value)	Direction
Democratic leadership and students' discipline	0.44	0.000	Positive

Interpretation: p = 0.000 < 0.05. Ho3 is rejected. Democratic leadership has a significant positive relationship with discipline.

4.3.4 *Hypothesis four*

H_{o4}: School leadership style does not have a significant combined effect on overall student discipline. The results are presented in Tables 14 and 15.

Table 14. Multiple regression model summary.

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.
0.71	0.50	0.49	66.8	0.000

Table 15. Combined regression coefficients.

Predictor	Beta	t	Sig.
Transformational leadership	0.36	5.60	0.000
Autocratic leadership	−0.18	−2.70	0.008
Democratic leadership	0.29	4.20	0.000

Interpretation: The model is significant (p = 0.000 < 0.05). Leadership styles combined explain 50% of variance in discipline. Transformational and democratic leadership contribute positively; autocratic leadership contributes negatively. Ho4 is rejected.

4.4 Summary of findings

1. Transformational leadership style has a significant positive effect on students' discipline (χ^2 = 333.36, p < 0.05).
2. Autocratic leadership style significantly affects students' discipline negatively (χ^2 = 389.48, p < 0.05).
3. Democratic leadership style has a significant positive relationship with students' discipline (χ^2 = 472.23, p < 0.05).
4. School leadership style has a significant combined effect on overall student discipline (r = .762, p = .000).
5. Students recommended improved leadership practices including counselling/guidance, fair and consistent discipline, rewards for good behaviour, and stronger discipline structures.

4.5 Discussion of findings

The findings confirm that principal leadership behaviours significantly relate to student discipline outcomes. Transformational leadership improves discipline through motivational, fairness, and encouragement characteristics (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Afolabi, 2018). Autocratic leadership's negative relationship implies that controlling approaches limiting student involvement reduce willingness to internalise rules, producing covert misconduct (Akinwale, 2019; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). Democratic leadership's positive relationship reflects how participation, fairness, and communication strengthen understanding and compliance (Oyewole et al., 2020; Obasi & Ohia, 2020). The combined effect (R^2 = 0.50) confirms leadership as a primary discipline determinant,

supporting the need for balanced, supportive, and participatory approaches rather than heavy reliance on control.

5 Summary, conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Summary

This study assessed the effects of school leadership styles on students' discipline in selected secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Section 1 introduced the background, problem, purpose, research questions, hypotheses, significance, scope, limitations, and definitions. Section 2 reviewed conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature. Section 3 described the descriptive survey design, population (≈1,992), sample (n=333), SLSDQ instrument (CVI=0.82; α=0.76–0.84), and analytical procedures. Section 4 presented data from 320 respondents, rejecting all four null hypotheses and confirming significant relationships between leadership styles and discipline.

5.2 Conclusion

Transformational leadership significantly and positively affects students' discipline in Ibadan secondary schools. Principals who inspire through vision, role modelling, and individualised consideration cultivate disciplined, respectful school communities (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Afolabi, 2018).

Autocratic leadership significantly affects discipline negatively. While producing short-term compliance through fear and punishment, it fails to develop genuine self-regulation or respect for authority, fostering covert misconduct and resentment (Akinwale, 2019; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

Democratic leadership demonstrates the strongest positive association with discipline among all styles examined. Participative governance enables students to internalise rules as shared standards rather than imposed restrictions (Oyewole et al., 2020; Obasi & Ohia, 2020).

Overall, a strong positive relationship exists between principal leadership style and student discipline ($r = .762$, $p = .000$), establishing leadership as a primary determinant of disciplinary climate. Meaningful discipline improvements require deliberate leadership quality improvements.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 For school principals and administrators

- Adopt transformational and democratic leadership as dominant approaches, moving away from autocratic and laissez-faire tendencies.
- Actively involve students in formulating school rules and disciplinary codes through strengthened prefectural systems and student councils.
- Build positive, trusting relationships with students and teachers through open forums and transparent communication.

5.3.2 For educational policymakers and government

- Review principal appointment criteria to include demonstrated competencies in transformational and democratic leadership, communication, and conflict resolution.

- Mandate regular, structured professional development programmes for principals, coordinated by TESCOM and universities.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks using 360-degree feedback incorporating teacher, student, parent, and community perspectives.

5.3.3 For teachers and school counsellors

- Complement principal leadership by adopting participative, supportive classroom management approaches.
- Integrate counsellors into disciplinary frameworks to address root causes of misconduct through psychological support rather than exclusive reliance on punishment.

5.3.4 For parents and community

- Establish regular parent-teacher associations and community liaison committees for collective disciplinary review.
- Model disciplined behaviour at home and maintain consistent communication with school authorities regarding children's conduct.

5.3.5 For future researchers

Conduct similar investigations in rural Oyo State schools and other Nigerian zones using mixed-methods or longitudinal designs. Explore moderating variables such as school type, size, student socio-economic background, and principal gender.

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