School Safety and School Type as Determinants of Students' Academic Conduct in Colleges of Education in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

There has been a significant decline in students' academic conduct in Nigerian colleges of education, as indicated by chronic absenteeism, examination malpractice, lateness, and disregard for institutional regulations. This study investigates school safety and school type as determinants of students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria, aiming to provide evidence to inform policy and institutional improvement. A descriptive survey design was utilized, involving 1,222 second-year Social Studies students from 15 purposively selected colleges representing federal, state, and private institutions. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.816) and analyzed with descriptive statistics (means) and inferential tests (Pearson correlation, multiple regression) at $p < 0.05$. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between school safety and students' academic conduct ($r = .232$, $p < .01$); there is a significant positive relationship between school type and students' academic conduct ($r = .170$, $p < .01$) and ANOVA results show that this model is statistically significant ($F = 18.553$, $p < .001$), indicating that school safety and school type, along with other school factors, jointly influence academic conduct. Their combined effect highlights the necessity for comprehensive institutional improvements. It was recommended among others that safety measures in all colleges should be prioritized.

Keywords: School Safety, School Type, Academic Conduct, Academic Achievement

Introduction

The quality of education in tertiary institutions is closely linked to students' academic conduct, which includes their behaviour, attitudes, and engagement with learning processes. In colleges of education throughout southwestern Nigeria, increasing concerns about declining academic standards and student misconduct have prompted stakeholders to investigate the factors influencing student behaviour. Academic conduct encompasses adherence to institutional norms, regular attendance, examination ethics, and overall compliance with academic expectations (Porter, 2020).

School safety and school type are critical environmental factors that may influence students' academic conduct. School safety includes the physical, psychological, and social aspects of the learning environment, such as protection from violence, bullying, and harassment (Safe and Sound Schools, 2014). A safe environment allows students to concentrate on learning, which promotes positive academic behaviour. In contrast, unsafe conditions can result in anxiety, truancy, and disruptive conduct that negatively affect learning outcomes.

School type, whether federal, state, or private, is another significant determinant of academic conduct. These institutional categories differ in resource allocation, enforcement of disciplinary measures, student-staff ratios, and management approaches (Mehmet et al., 2019). Public institutions, especially federal colleges, often enforce more rigorous codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures than private institutions. Conversely, private institutions may offer better facilities and more individualised attention, resulting in different contexts for student behaviour.

Despite the significance of these factors, there is limited empirical evidence regarding their specific influence on academic conduct in Nigerian colleges of education. Previous research has generally examined student behaviour without isolating the effects of safety measures and institutional ownership. This gap highlights the need for focused investigation into how school safety and school type, both independently and in combination, determine students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Students' academic conduct in Nigerian colleges of education has deteriorated significantly, manifesting in chronic absenteeism, examination malpractice, lateness to lectures, and general disregard for institutional regulations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that examination misconduct rates range from 5-15% across various institutions, with some colleges reporting even higher figures. These behaviours compromise educational quality and undermine the credibility of teacher training programmes.

Although researchers have examined various factors influencing student behaviour, such as home background and peer influence, the specific roles of school safety and school type remain underexplored. Schools differ significantly in their safety provisions, ranging from basic security measures to comprehensive student welfare programmes, yet the effects of these differences on academic conduct are not well understood. Likewise, the varying impact of federal, state, and private institutional frameworks on student behaviour requires systematic investigation.

Existing studies have predominantly focused on secondary schools or universities, leaving colleges of education relatively unexplored despite their unique position in Nigeria's educational system. These institutions train future teachers who will shape subsequent generations; understanding the determinants of their academic conduct is therefore crucial for long-term educational development. Furthermore, previous research has rarely examined how school safety and institutional type interact to influence behaviour, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the educational environment's impact. This study addresses these gaps by examining school safety and school type as determinants of students' academic conduct in colleges of education across southwestern Nigeria, thereby providing evidence-based insights for policy formulation and institutional improvement.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine the influence of school safety on students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria

2. Determine the influence of school type on students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria

3. Assess the joint influence of school safety and school type on students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria

Research Hypotheses

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

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between school safety and students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between school type and students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

H_{03}: There is no significant joint influence of school safety and school type on students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Academic Conduct

Academic conduct encompasses students' behaviour patterns related to their educational pursuits, including attendance, punctuality, examination ethics, and adherence to institutional regulations.

Khair et al. (2016) conceptualized academic conduct as encompassing students' academic achievement, attendance at school and examination conduct. This multifaceted construct reflects students' commitment to education and active engagement in learning processes within the school environment.

Student academic achievement represents the level of success, progress, and performance in educational pursuits, considering factors such as grades, test scores, class participation, assignment completion, attendance at lectures, and adherence to school rules and regulations (Khair et al., 2016). Attendance in school reflects students' consistent and regular presence during designated hours, significantly impacting academic progress, social interactions, and overall involvement in school activities (Ayanwale, 2015).

Examination conduct refers to how students behave during assessments, demonstrating integrity, honesty, and ethical behaviour whilst following established rules that ensure fair and unbiased evaluation. Students are expected to avoid cheating, use only authorized materials, maintain appropriate behaviour in examination rooms, and adhere to time limits (Khair et al., 2016).

School Safety

School safety represents a comprehensive concept encompassing physical, psychological, environmental, and social dimensions of the educational environment. A safe school is one free from violence and distinguished by an environment where there is no perceived fear of the institution or its disciplinary procedures (Safe and Sound Schools, 2014). In safe schools, students, teachers, staff, and visitors can work together to enhance teaching and learning without fear of harm.

The term 'safety' refers to all efforts to keep the school community and its surroundings secure, enabling students to behave appropriately and exhibit good moral conduct (Applebury, 2021). This comprehensive approach includes addressing health concerns, mental wellness, fire safety, weather safety, building security, dangerous persons, bullying, environmental disasters, local crime, and traffic safety (Mubita, 2021).

Implementing comprehensive school safety and security policies is effective in preventing immoral conduct within colleges. Strong visitor management programmes reduce the risk of external misconduct on school premises. The use of badges or identity cards supports the prevention of misconduct, while fostering a positive school climate enhances academic conduct.

Additionally, measures to prevent bullying, harassment, and violence among college students contribute to improved moral and academic conduct (Mubita, 2021).

School Type

School type refers to the categorization of educational institutions based primarily on ownership and management structure. In Nigeria's tertiary education system, colleges of education are classified as federal, state, or private institutions. These categories differ substantially in funding sources, governance structures, and enforcement of regulations, resource allocation, and operational philosophies.

Public colleges of education, whether federal or state-owned, are more likely to implement codes of conduct, discipline, and punishment to manage students' academic and moral behaviour than privately-owned colleges (Ben et al., 2021). Public institutions tend to enforce rules and regulations more strictly, with better implementation of codes of conduct compared to private counterparts (Qobilova, 2021).

Private colleges of education frequently offer superior facilities and resources for teaching and learning, although they may adjust rules to accommodate student needs while maintaining essential standards. The profit-oriented nature of private institutions may affect lecturers' capacity to instil proper conduct, in contrast to public colleges (Okpo, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1985), provides a framework for understanding how students' intentions to engage in academic conduct are shaped by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. According to TPB, human behaviour is under control when there are no barriers that might prevent the intention to behave in a specific way.

In the educational context, students' attitudes towards academic conduct are influenced by their beliefs about the outcomes and consequences of their behaviour. Positive attitudes towards responsible behaviour may result in higher intentions to exhibit positive conduct, whilst negative attitudes serve as deterrents (Conner, 2020). Subjective normsstudents' perceptions of what their parents, teachers, and peers expect of themalso play crucial roles. Positive subjective norms related to responsible conduct encourage students to behave responsibly, whilst negative norms may steer them towards undesirable behaviour.

Perceived behavioural control addresses students' beliefs about their ability to perform specific behaviours, considering internal and external factors that may facilitate or hinder conduct. Students who feel in control of their behaviour are more likely to act responsibly, whilst those who perceive barriers to responsible conduct may be less inclined to engage in positive behaviour (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

School safety and school type influence students' perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. Safe school environments enhance students' confidence in their ability to focus on learning without fear, thereby increasing their perceived control over academic conduct. Similarly, different school types establish varying normative expectations through their disciplinary frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, shaping students' subjective norms regarding acceptable behaviour.

Empirical Review

School Safety and Academic Conduct

Research demonstrates significant relationships between school safety and students' academic conduct across various educational contexts. Safe learning environments free from violence and intimidation enable students to concentrate on academic pursuits, leading to improved attendance, participation, and examination ethics.

Mubita (2021) assessed the provision, quality, and adequacy of welfare facilities in selected schools, finding that adequate facilities contribute to positive learning environments and potentially foster security and well-being among students. This aligns with findings that school infrastructure quality and modernization significantly impact student progress, with students in modernized facilities performing better on key skills assessments than those in non-modernized buildings (Gatawa et al., 2021).

Safe and Sound Schools (2014) emphasized that school safety encompasses all efforts to keep the school community secure, addressing physical dangers, psychological threats, and social challenges. When schools address these multiple dimensions of safety, students exhibit better academic conduct, including regular attendance and adherence to institutional norms.

Applebury (2021) highlighted that safe schools enable students to behave themselves and exhibit good moral conduct by allowing them to abide by rules and regulations guiding behaviour in school activities. This creates conditions for better performance and moral uprightness. The

study noted that safety provisions directly influence students' willingness to engage positively with the learning environment.

Evidence shows that unsafe school conditions lead to anxiety, truancy, and disruptive conduct that undermine learning outcomes. Students experiencing fear or insecurity in school settings demonstrate higher rates of absenteeism and lower academic engagement (Mbevi, 2019). Conversely, comprehensive safety measures including physical security, anti-bullying programmes, and supportive disciplinary procedures correlate with improved academic conduct.

School Type and Academic Conduct

Research reveals mixed findings regarding the influence of school type on students' academic conduct. Some studies suggest that public institutions maintain stricter disciplinary standards, whilst others indicate that private institutions provide superior learning environments that support positive behaviour.

Mehmet et al. (2019) investigated the impact of school type on student academic achievement, finding significant differences between public and private institutions. The study revealed that school type influences students' conduct through differential resource allocation, teaching quality, and enforcement of regulations. Private schools' resource advantages sometimes translate into better academic outcomes, though this relationship is mediated by multiple factors.

Ben et al. (2021) found that public colleges of education are more likely to implement codes of conduct, discipline, and punishment to manage students' academic and moral behaviour than privately-owned colleges. Public institutions seem better at enforcing rules and regulations, with more consistent application of codes of conduct. This stricter enforcement may contribute to better academic conduct among students in public institutions.

However, Qobilova (2021) noted that private colleges often ensure sufficient provision of school facilities for better teaching and learning and good academic performance, though they may adapt rules to suit student needs. This flexibility, whilst potentially beneficial for learning, may create inconsistencies in behavioural expectations and conduct enforcement.

Campbell-Phillips (2020) explored socialization as a means of improving student morality behaviour, noting that different school types socialize students differently through their institutional cultures and management approaches. Federal, state, and private institutions create distinct normative environments that shape students' understanding of acceptable academic conduct.

Kassarnig et al. (2018) analyzed academic performance and behavioural patterns, finding that institutional characteristics including ownership type significantly influence both academic outcomes and conduct. The study suggested that the relationship between school type and conduct operates through multiple mechanisms, including resource availability, peer effects, and institutional culture.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for examining relationships among variables without experimental manipulation. This approach enabled a systematic description of how school safety and school type influence students' academic conduct within their natural educational settings.

Population and Sample

The population comprised all students in colleges of education across southwestern Nigeria, spanning six states: Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun, and Lagos. The sample consisted of 1,222 200-level Social Studies students selected from 15 colleges of education across the region. The Taro Yamane formula determined the sample size, with $n = N/[1 + N(e)^2]$, where N represents population size and e represents precision level (0.05).

Purposive sampling was used to select one federal, one state, and one private college from each state, where available, to ensure representation across institutional types. Simple random sampling was then employed to select individual respondents, providing each 200-level Social Studies student an equal probability of selection. Second-year students were chosen due to their sufficient institutional experience and availability, as final-year students were typically engaged in teaching practice.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled "School Safety and School Type as Determinants of Students' Academic Conduct." The instrument consisted of four sections: Section A addressed demographic characteristics; Section B focused on students' academic conduct; Section C examined school safety; and Section D assessed school type. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1), with reverse scoring applied to negatively worded items.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Face and content validity were established through expert review by Social Studies Education specialists. Corrections and recommendations were incorporated into the final instrument.

Reliability was determined through test-retest procedures with 50 respondents from colleges not included in the main study. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.816 indicated high internal consistency and acceptable reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval, the researcher and four trained assistants administered questionnaires across the 15 selected colleges over a one-month period. Courtesy visits were conducted prior to data collection to explain the study's purpose and secure cooperation. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, and all completed questionnaires were collected within the designated timeframe.

Data Analysis

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) examined relationships between variables (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Multiple Regression Analysis assessed joint influence (Hypothesis 3). Analyses used SPSS version 27 with significance set at the 0.05 level.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by School Type, Gender, and Age

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
School Type	Federal Colleges	872	69.5
	State Colleges	245	19.5
	Private Colleges	105	8.6
Gender	Male	285	22.7
	Female	969	77.3
Age (Years)	16–20	269	21.5
	21–24	810	64.6
	25 and above	157	12.5
Total		**1,222**	**100.0**

The sample comprised 1,222 respondents distributed across school types: Federal colleges (872, 69.5%), State colleges (245, 19.5%), and Private colleges (105, 8.6%). Gender distribution showed 285 males (22.7%) and 969 females (77.3%). Age distribution indicated 269 students aged 16-20 (21.5%), 810 aged 21-24 (64.6%), and 157 aged 25 and above (12.5%).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between school safety and students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

Table 4.11 (Extract): Correlation between School Safety and Academic Conduct

Variables	Academic Conduct	School Safety
Academic Conduct	1	
School Safety	.232**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between school safety and students' academic conduct (r = .232, p < .01). This correlation coefficient, though moderate, indicates that as school safety measures improve, students' academic conduct tends to improve correspondingly. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between school type and students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

Table 4.11 (Extract): Correlation between School Type and Academic Conduct

Variables	Academic Conduct	School Type
Academic Conduct	1	
School Type	.170**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between school type and students' academic conduct (r = .170, p < .01). Although the correlation is relatively modest, it indicates that institutional category significantly influences academic behaviour patterns. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant joint influence of school safety and school type on students' academic conduct in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

Table 4.17: School Factors and Students' Academic Conduct in Colleges of Education in Southwest, Nigeria

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.240	.057	.054	2.33685

a. Predictors: (Constant), School Type Total, Safety, Discipline, Student Staff Rel

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	405.252	4	101.313	18.553	.000
Residual	6645.887	1217	5.461		
Total	7051.139	1221			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Conductb. Predictors: (Constant), School Type Total, Safety, Discipline, Student Staff Rel

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	10.610	.269		39.387	
Discipline	.012	.032	.017	.387	
Safety	.154	.031	.225	4.934	
Student Staff Rel	-.052	.033	-.075	-1.551	
School Type Total	.062	.031	.083	1.956	

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Conduct

The multiple regression analysis revealed that school factors collectively explain 5.7% of the variance in students' academic conduct (R^2 = .057, Adjusted R^2 = .054). The ANOVA results show that this model is statistically significant (F = 18.553, p < .001), indicating that school safety and school type, along with other school factors, jointly influence academic conduct. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Examining individual predictors, school safety emerged as the most influential factor (β = .225, p < .001), demonstrating a significant positive relationship with academic conduct. This confirms that safety measures substantially contribute to responsible academic behaviour. School type

showed a marginally significant influence ($\beta = .083$, $p = .051$), suggesting that institutional category affects conduct, though less strongly than safety provisions.

The relatively modest R^2 value (.057) indicates that whilst school factors significantly influence academic conduct, they explain only a small portion of the total variance.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that school safety significantly influences students' academic conduct ($r = .232$, $p < .01$) confirms the essential role of secure learning environments in promoting responsible behaviour. Students who perceive their schools as safe in physical, psychological, and social terms demonstrate better attendance, greater engagement, and improved adherence to institutional norms. This result aligns with Mubita's (2021) assessment that adequate welfare facilities and safety provisions contribute to positive learning environments by fostering security and well-being among students. Schools that address multiple dimensions of safety, such as physical security measures, anti-bullying programmes, visitor management, and a positive school climate, create conditions that enable students to focus on learning rather than self-protection.

However, the moderate correlation coefficient (.232) indicates that safety alone does not determine conduct. Instead, safety serves as an enabling condition that is necessary but not sufficient for optimal academic behaviour. Students require secure environments in addition to supports such as effective teaching, positive relationships, and clear expectations to consistently demonstrate responsible conduct.

The significant relationship between school type and academic conduct ($r = .170$, $p < .01$), although modest, confirms that institutional ownership influences behavioural patterns. Federal, state, and private colleges establish different normative environments through their management structures, resource allocation, and enforcement mechanisms. These findings support Ben et al.'s (2021) observation that public colleges implement codes of conduct and disciplinary measures more effectively than private institutions. The perception that discipline is more easily enforced in public colleges (mean = 3.61) indicates that government oversight, standardized procedures, and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms facilitate consistent behavioural expectations.

This complexity is consistent with Mehmet et al.'s (2019) conclusion that school type influences outcomes through multiple mediating factors rather than direct effects. Institutional category shapes the context in which conduct occurs, but student behaviour ultimately results from

interactions among individual characteristics, peer influences, family background, and the school environment.

The significant joint influence of school safety and school type on academic conduct ($F = 18.553$, $p < .001$) demonstrates that these factors operate synergistically rather than independently. The model explaining 5.7% of variance indicates that whilst these school-level factors significantly affect conduct, they function within broader ecological systems including individual, family, and community influences. The emergence of school safety as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .225$, $p < .001$) within the model underscores the primacy of secure environments for positive behaviour. Regardless of institutional type, students require physical and psychological safety to engage productively with learning. This finding supports policies that prioritize safety infrastructure and programmes across all colleges of education.

The marginally significant influence of school type ($\beta = .083$, $p = .051$) suggests that although institutional category is relevant, its effects depend on the quality of implementation. Federal colleges may have stronger disciplinary frameworks, but actual conduct depends on the consistency of their application. Similarly, private colleges with adequate resources and committed management can maintain high behavioural standards despite differing governance structures.

The modest R^2 value (.057) indicates that academic conduct emerges from complex interactions among multiple factors. School-level variables provide important context, but student behaviour ultimately reflects the interplay of individual agency, peer dynamics, family influence, and broader sociocultural norms. This ecological perspective is consistent with Bronfen brenner's systems theory, which recognizes that behaviour results from nested influences across multiple levels.

These findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice. They indicate that improving academic conduct requires comprehensive approaches that address multiple determinants rather than relying on single-factor interventions. Schools should simultaneously enhance safety measures, strengthen disciplinary frameworks, build positive relationships, engage families, and address individual student needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study establishes that school safety and school type play important roles in shaping students' academic conduct in colleges of education across southwestern Nigeria. A safe school

environment encompassing physical security, psychological well-being, positive climate, and measures against bullying and harassment provides the foundation for students to engage responsibly with their studies, attend regularly, and uphold ethical standards.

School type also contributes meaningfully, primarily through differences in disciplinary enforcement and institutional culture. Public colleges, particularly federal ones, tend to maintain stricter and more consistent application of rules, fostering better conduct compared to private institutions, where commercial considerations sometimes lead to greater flexibility in enforcement.

When combined, these factors work together to create more supportive contexts for positive behavior. However, their influence is part of a larger picture involving individual, peer, family, and societal elements.

Enhancing safety across all institutions and strengthening disciplinary consistency especially in private colleges offers practical pathways to improve academic conduct. Given that these colleges train future teachers who will influence generations to come, creating safer and more disciplined learning environments is essential for advancing the overall quality of teacher education in Nigeria.

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