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Principals' Suspension Threat as Correlate of Academic Engagement and Adherence to School Regulation in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria: Gender and Age Assessment

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Abstract

This study investigated the principals' suspension threat as a correlate of students' academic engagement and adherence to school regulations in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria using gender and age as predictor variables. Four research questions were raised. Ex-post facto research design was adopted. The population comprised 5200 senior secondary two students in the 14 public secondary schools in Uyo, from which a sample of 725 was derived using a multistage sampling approach. The researcher's developed 'Suspension and Students Engagement and Adherence Scale (S-SEAS), was used for data collection after face-validated by three experts. The content assessment reliability approach was used to test for S-SEAS reliability, and the data generated was calculated using Cohen's Kappa statistics, which resulted in the estimate of 0.87. The collated data was analyzed using percentages, charts, means, and graphs. Results revealed that males were the majority (58.1%) in the study, while in terms of age, those within 16 years of age were the majority (69.1%). The majority of the sample assessed were suspended, especially in the cadre of males and those within 17-20 years of age. The categories of suspension were mostly from the classes, followed by those suspended from the school. Majorly, the reasons for the suspension were lateness to school, insubordination, and violence-related issues in order of prominence. Results showed that the contribution of suspension to the students' academic engagement (SAE) was low ($\bar{x}$=2.23). The extent to which suspension encourages male students' academic engagement was very low. It has been shown that the prevalence of utilization of suspension as a disciplinary approach in schools was high. The most often suspended set of students were the males, and those within 17-20 years of age experienced a greater number of suspensions. However, the effect of suspension was negative to the promotion of students' academic engagement but positive to students' adherence to school regulations. On the aspect of students' academic engagement, suspension affected the male more negatively than their female counterparts, and especially among the students aged 21 years and above. Concerning students' adherence to school regulations, suspension negatively influences older students (21 years and above). It is recommended, among others, that school managers (principals and teachers) should be strategic in understanding when, who, and how suspension should be administered to avoid its negative contributions in severing students' interest and student-staff relationships.

Keywords: Academic Engagement; Adherence to Regulations; Age; Gender, Suspension

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INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

The investment for quality education starts with creating a formidable learning environment that is most suitable for students' psychological balance. This is because students' balanced psychological wellbeing is a primary determinant of their nature and level of engagement in school activities. Quality provision of basic psychological balancing for students would not only facilitate zeal to improve attendance; it guarantees attention and interest and, as well, improves sustainable concentration and academic retention. Many studies affirmed the potential of establishing a quality psychological atmosphere in school to include improvement of their moral thinking and spiritual realm, formation of correct values regarding the life and world outlook, development of a scientific thinking mode, and promotion of comprehensive development of their physical and mental health (Ying et al., 2017, Xu, 2022). It can equally stimulate students' enthusiasm and prevent them from attrition (Xu, 2022). When the students' psychology is threatened or motivated, the resultant effect is either favourable or unfavorable. A situation that often resulted in attrition or attritional tendencies with other associating challenges such as fear, anxiety reactions, rising feelings of alienation, depression, frustration, aggression, and worst still, educational wastages (Pascoe et al., 2019, Philip et al., 2020, Rabbi & Islam, 2024). These highlighted challenges are prevalent in public secondary schools in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State despite the effort of government in formulating quality educational intervention programmes to cater to instructional facilities and equipment. Be that as it may, the situations in schools that clearly or may evidently have quality, human friendly environment with maximum psychological preference are students' academic engagement and their adherence to school regulations.

Students academic engagement revolves around the proactive and intentional involvement of the students in issues or activities that reinforces their commitment to learning and psychosocial development. Kassab et al. (2024) considered students' academic engagement (SAE) as active investment of students in both academic and non-academic experiences, which encompasses learning, teaching, research, governance, and community activities. Other studies summaries it as effort, commitment, and passion students put in for every academic and associated task for conscious and unconscious learning (Wang, 2025; Alrashidi, 2025; Yang et al., 2022). This SAE in school with quality psychological balancing facilitates sustainable behavioural patterns, emotional stability, enhances students' interest, and produces intense motivational zeal for improved educational outcomes. Studies eulogized the potentials of students' academic engagement to include the development of critical thinking skills, quality demonstration of perseverance, and the achievement of better education outcomes (Wang & Degol, 2017; Wang, 2025; Fredricks et al., 2016). The absence of such a quality psychological atmosphere in school may result in decline in students' motivations and resilience, increased feelings of alienation or disinterest, and the resultant attritional tendencies (Aprielieva et al., 2021; Eshun, 2024; Srivastava, 2019; Sorrenti et.al., 2024). However, when this unfortunate atmosphere is sustained, it is likely to result to frustration and aggression with associated consequences in deviant tendencies such as illicit drug intake, engagement in cult-related violence, involvement in examination malpractice, and poor academic performance (Mambra & Kotian; 2024, Kaur, 2025; Shokeen & Kumari, 2023). These depict aberrations to school regulations.

Students' adherence to school regulations is an indicator that attests to their adoptability to quality school-established psychological balancing. Many scholars relate students' adherence to school regulation (SASR) to, as the intentional and consistent compliance, obedience, and

conformity by students with the established rules, policies, and guidelines set by an educational institution, such as directives on academic integrity, safety, attendance, and behavioral norms, which significantly influences academic performance (Baluka & Namulondo, 2026; Mlay, et al., 2025; Mettoh, 2020). This adherence to school regulation (ASR) has the potential of guaranteeing students' security and safety; improves academic performance; promotes self-discipline; enhances learning environment; builds their wellbeing; and improves their time management effectiveness (Mettoh, 2020; Shokee, & Kumari, 2023; Mlay, et al., 2025). When SASR is shaken, it is likely that their interest has been shifted away from unfavourbale psychological atmosphere created in school. A situation that has the potency of undermining interpersonal relationships and hindering the collaborative learning environment essential for academic growth (Nagaratnam & Aravinthan, 2024; Mambra & Kotian, 2024; Srivastava, 2019).

A close observation of public secondary schools within the study area revealed cases of dropout and attrition, and incessant cases of bullying and cult-related violence, as well as massive engagement in examination malpractice and poor academic performance. These evidently point to the prevalence of students' academic disengagement and non-adherence to school regulations. The situation, in spite of the provision of educational law on discipline, is occurring in geometrical proportion, suspension in changing the narrative or promoting the challenges in schools.

Utilization of disciplinary measures is one of the approaches designed to curtail the rising level of these students-related challenges in schools. One of such measures of concern is the suspension. Suspension refers to the mandatory leave assigned to a student as a form of punishment that can last from one day to several weeks, during which time the students cannot attend regular lessons (Lukman & Hamadi, 2014). It is prominently related to seizures of students' privileges and rights to attend to academic activities with others within an appropriately assigned period. The concept of suspension can be categorized into two: suspension from school, suspension from classes, and suspension from co-curricular activities. The administration of suspension on students and the associated threats, according to some studies, encourage effective management of students' behaviour, promotes their adherence to the rules and regulations of the school, and could promote emotional intelligence, quality adjustability, and adaptation to school norms (Asongwe, 2023; Odili & Zeb-Obipi, 2024). It could equally leads to decreasing level of students' likelihood of further violations, ease teachers' stress, and allows learning to continue (Lukman & Hamadi, 2014). On the contrary, studies maintained that suspension of students may result in disruption of students' emotional security, promote a high rate of educational wastage, and contributes to juvenile delinquency due to feelings of alienation, frustration, and depression (Asongwe, 2023; Odili & Zeb-Obipi, 2024; Cholewa, et al., 2018). These challenges reinforced the fact that suspension can affect students' psychological equilibrium, thereby facilitating the movement towards engaging in academic activities and adherence to school regulations or moving away from AE and ASR. However, contentions and contradictions abound as to the effect of suspension on SAE and ASR (Monecah & Bernard, 2025; Pyne, 2019; Nkarichia, et al., 2020; Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019; Chit & Min, 2025; Chohan & Naz, 2025; Rios, 2011), with none assessing the implications of the suspension threat based on gender and age to assess whether it is responsible for the rising student-related psychosocial and psycho-academic challenges recorded in the study area. The incorporation of the two predictor variables in the study was because of the contentious influence they may have in differentiating individuals' responses and uniqueness to the issues of suspension, academic engagement, and ASR.

Gender without doubt, is an essential variable that could promote disparity or similarities among individuals or groups of persons. Tan et al. (2022) refer to gender as socially constructed norms that impose and determine roles, relationships, and positional power in society. Many studies acknowledged the difference between males and females, taking cognizance of their disparities in the aspect of biological, social, cognitive, and psycho-emotional buildup (Umeh & Udechukwu, 2019; Chaplin et al., 2015; Hamaideh, 2012; Galbally et al, 2024). One may argue that since females and males differ in the biological wiring, their responses to actions or discipline may equally differ. Razzak (2012) emphasized that female students respond to issues of discipline by adjusting favourably to suit the school norms. However, their position was rebuffed by empirical studies done by Odhiambo et al. (2017) and Simeon and Nnaa (2020), which revealed that disciplinary practices utilized could contribute positively to students' psycho-emotional balancing irrespective of gender. Nevertheless, studies showed that male and female students respond or react differently on issues of discipline (Odhiambo et al., 2017; Blum & Libbey, 2004; Pyne, 2019). The authors attribute these disparities to socialisation difference, emotional expression patterns which boys may externalize emotions (anger, defiance) while girls internalize emotions (sadness, guilt, anxiety); social status concerns and disparity in the consideration of social relationships and approval; self-identity, and communication styles. It could be equally linked to biological and developmental factors, emotional regulation, peer dynamics as well as cultural context (Bahago et al., 2025). Whether which position reinforces the aspect of SAE and ASR in the study area informed the contemplation for assessment.

Age is equally a predictor variable argued to play a significant role in explaining the similarities or differences among individuals. Considered as the length of time an individual exists on earth, age determines the level of experience, manner of appreciating regulations, and knowledge base of an individual (Crandall et al., 2022; Ojo & Adebayo, 2024; Fasbender & Gerpot, 2022). Zacher et al. (2019) and Fasbender and Gerpot (2022) inferred that age significantly contribute to an individual's physical growth, psychological development, social roles, experience, and overall life perspective. Adducing from this position, it could be said that younger individuals may see discipline as a way of molding behavioural pattern, shaping conduct, and reconfiguring attitude, values, and priorities. Studies done by Junaidi et al. (2021), Idiong et al. (2024) echoed that younger individuals considered discipline as a restrictive force imposed by adults, which is accompanied by fear. The authors maintained that older students tend to have a more mature, positive view of discipline, linking it to self-regulation, motivation, and character development (Junaidi et al., 2021; Idiong, et al., 2024; Mwangi, et al., 2017). Deducing from this position, one could say that as students mature, their perception of discipline moves from being an external, punitive restriction to an internal, necessary component of personal, social, and academic success. A situation that differs from the positions of Uchechi (2018) and Julius et al. (2025), which maintained that there is no disparities in students' responses or reactions to discipline.

Be that as it may, while no study was found that holistically assesses the joint effect of this suspension on students' AE and ASR based on gender and age, it becomes pertinent to close the gap. This was based on the need to proffer solutions to the rising level of students' psychosocial and academic challenges associated with students' academic disengagement and deviancy to school regulations.

Statement of the Problem

In Akwa Ibom State, one of the prominent and mostly utilized disciplinary practices in public secondary schools is the suspension. This is because corporal punishment, verbal reprimand, and manual labour are complained to exacerbate physical and emotional stress on students and school personnel (principals and teachers) and are also believed not to send quality signal to parents at home on the conduct of their wards. However, despite the subtle nature of suspension and the acclaimed positive implications on the students, evident are still profound ineffectiveness in promoting SAE and ASR. This is evident in the rising level of disruptive attitude displayed by the students in schools, disinterest in studies, and cases of attritional tendencies. While no statistics had been published on this direction based on gender and gender identity, it becomes pertinent to assess the status quo. This informed the empirical assessment of the present study.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose was to determine the principal suspension threat as a correlate of students' academic engagement and adherence to school regulations in Uyo local government area using gender and age as predictor variables. The specific purposes were to:

i. examine the difference in male and female students' AE when faced with a suspension threat.

ii. examine the difference students AE when faced with suspension threat based on age

iii. examine the difference in male and female students' ASR when faced with a suspension threat.

iv. examine the difference in students' ASR when faced with a suspension threat based on age.

Research Question

The following research questions were raised:

i. what is the difference in male and female students' academic engagement when faced with a suspension threat?

ii. what is the difference in students' academic engagement when faced with a suspension threat based on age?

iii. what is the difference in male and female students' adherence to school regulations when faced with a suspension threat?

iv. what is the difference in students' adherence to school regulations when faced with a suspension threat based on age?

Research Methods

The study employed an ex-post facto research design because it examined how a pre-existing, non-manipulated variable (suspension threat) influenced the outcome (students' academic engagement and adherence to school regulations)**.** The study was carried out within Uyo local government area. Uyo local government area is one of the 31 ocal government areas in Akwa

Ibom State, located within the south-southern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study area serves as the seat of power of Akwa Ibom State. Located within longitude 7°55′E and latitude 5°02′N, Uyo local government area experienced a geometric influx of persons from the rural and semi-urban localities of the state alongside the guests from other locations. Educationally, the area has the highest population of tertiary, secondary, and primary institutions in the categories of private and public schools. This perhaps resulted from the urban status of the study area and the belief that it has, invariably, every amenity essential for quality learning. Nevertheless, it is insinuated that the prevalence of disruptive tendencies, attritional tendencies, and the academic disengagement among the students are on the increase, thus, informing the choice of Uyo local government area for the study. Meanwhile, the researcher's choice of Uyo is also premised on the population of the students and the status of the area to serve as the prominent basis for generalization.

The population of the study comprised 5200 senior secondary two students in the 14 public secondary schools in Uyo local government area. Sample of 725 used was derived using a multistage sampling approach. In the first stage, a proportionate sampling technique was used to sample 50 per cent of the total public secondary schools. The actual participating schools were sampled using a randomization table. This resulted in the sampling of seven schools. The second stage involved sampling of 40 per cent of the students in each of the selected schools to have 725 as a sample using a proportionate sampling technique. Derivation of the respondents was done purposively as the students were willing to participate in the study.

The data used was primarily sourced using the researcher's developed suspension and students' engagement and adherence scale (S-SEAS). The S-SEAS was clustered into three sections: A, B, and C. Section A had five items: gender (male, female); age (below 16 yrs, 17-20 yrs, 21 yrs above); and closed-ended questions on whether the respondents have ever been suspended (optioned with yes, no), where the respondent was suspended from (optioned with school, class, or co-curricular activities), and the reasons for the suspension. The section B of the research instrument elicited information from the respondents on the likely implications of suspension on their academic engagement. This section had 10 items designed on a four rating scale of very high extent (VHE), high extent (HE), low extent (LE), and very low extent (VLE). Section C of S-SEAS elicited information on the implications of suspension on students' adherence to school regulations. This section had 10 items designed on a four point rating scale of very high extent (VHE), high extent (HE), low extent (LE), and very low extent (VLE).

The research instrument (S-SEAS) was face-validated by three experts in research. The face validation method was employed. This assisted in the examination of words, relevance, and appropriateness of the items in representing the study variables. This informed suitable modification, additions or removal of items not relevance for the final evolution of the valid research instrument. The informed consent of the experts and the respondents in the study as well as their confidentiality were sought officially using a written request.

The content assessment reliability approach was used to test for the S-SEAS reliability. This involved the inter-rater assessment with multiple coders assessing the content of the instrument to measure the consistency of their coding. The data generated was calculated using Cohen's Kappa statistics, which resulted in the estimate of 0.87, thus approving the S-SEAS as highly reliable. Data collection lasted for two days through the assistance of two ad hoc research experts employed by the researcher. At first, the students were briefed on the essence of the study. This was to intimate to them that the study is mainly for research and

academic purposes. Instant administration and retrieval approach was adopted for data collection. The collated data were analyzed accordingly using percentages, graphs, mean, a student's independent t-test, and analysis of variance.

RESULTS

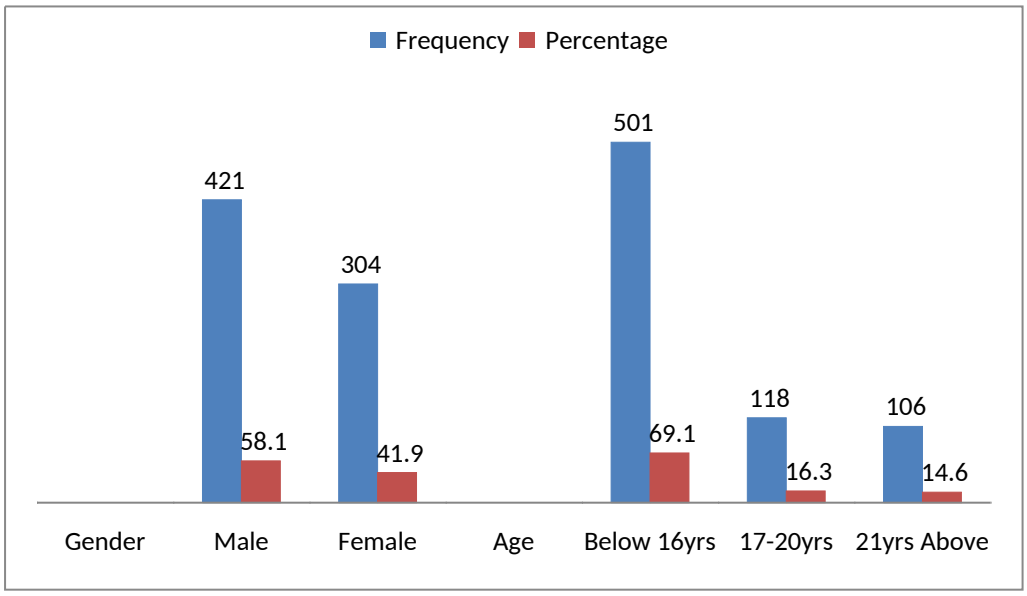


Figure 1: Respondents' Details

Figure 1 revealed that the majority of the respondents were males (58.1%), while the those within the years of 16 years and below were the majority (69.1%).

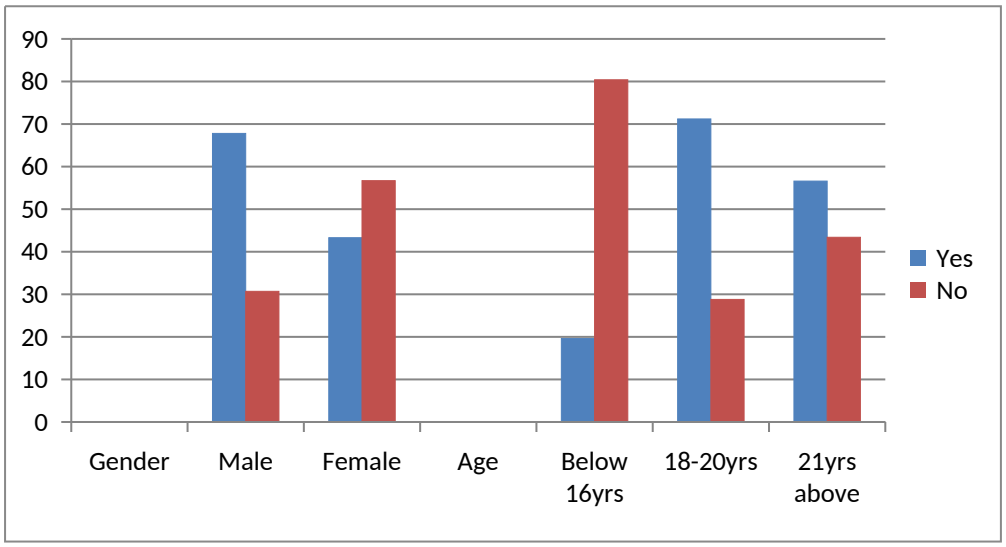


Figure 2: Percentage of Students that Were Once Suspended in School

Figure 2 revealed that majority of the respondents (70.3%) were once suspended in schools. This signifies that the rate of suspension in the study area is high. The percentage frequency was higher among the males (67.8%) as against the females (43.3%). Based on the age concern, it was shown that those within 18-20 years were the majority of those suspended

(71.2%), closely followed by those 21 years above (56.6%) with the lowest being those below 16 years of age (19.6%).

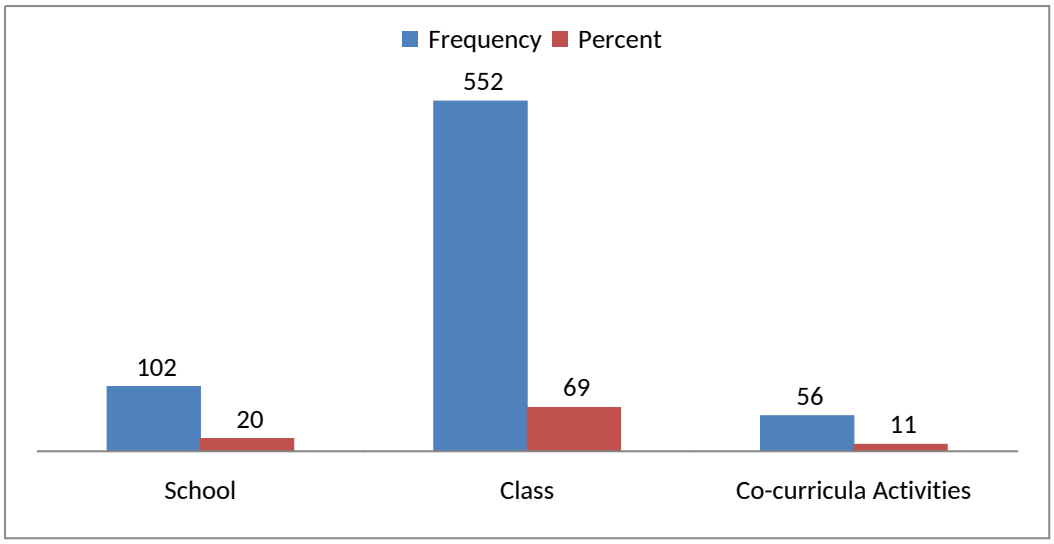


Figure 3: Categories of Suspension

Figure 3 indicates that majority (69%) of the respondents were suspended from class, followed by those suspended from school (20%), and the lowest number were those suspended from extracurricular activities.

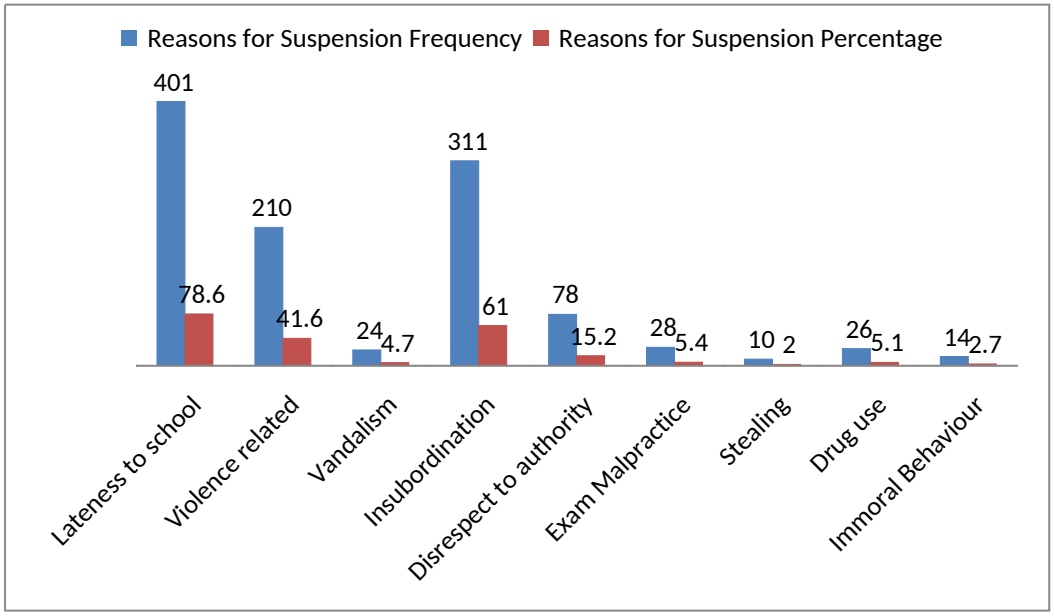


Figure 4: Reasons for Suspension

Figure 4 revealed that majority of the respondents were suspended due to lateness to school (78.6%), closely followed by insubordination (61%) and violence-related issues (41.2%).

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Table 1: Mean of the influence of suspension on academic engagement

Items Descriptions	Gender		Age		
Suspension threats	**Male ($\bar{x}$)**	**Female ($\bar{x}$)**	**16 yrs Below ($\bar{x}$)**	**17-20 yrs ($\bar{x}$)**	**21 yrs Above ($\bar{x}$)**
Promote concentration in school activities (PCSA)	2.06	3.02	3.62	3.15	2.92
Promotes interest in school activities (PISA)	1.21	2.42	2.82	2.42	2.19
Encourages proactive attention in school activities (EPASA)	2.45	1.34	3.20	3.12	3.00
Does not encourage fear (DEF)	1.75	1.20	2.91	2.42	2.11
Encourages zeal to commit to all school activities (EZCASA)	2.02	1.91	2.72	2.42	2.36
Promotes effective relationship with staff (PERS)	2.12	2.42	1.89	1.67	1.55
Strengthens bond between students and staff (SBBSS)	2.06	2.45	1.81	1.81	1.59
Improves assignment completion rate (IACR)	2.51	2.77	2.18	2.15	2.01
Encourages effort to tasks (EET)	2.01	2.41	2.61	2.55	2.00
Encourages asking questions when necessary (EAQWN)	1.72	2.51	1.61	1.52	1.29
Improves prompt response to task (IPRT)	1.82	2.19	2.61	2.15	1.99
Mean Points	1.98	2.24	2.54	2.31	2.09
Remarks	VLE	LE	HE	LE	LE
Average of mean by gender and age	**2.11**			**2.31**	
Average of all mean on the effect of suspension on AE			**2.23**		

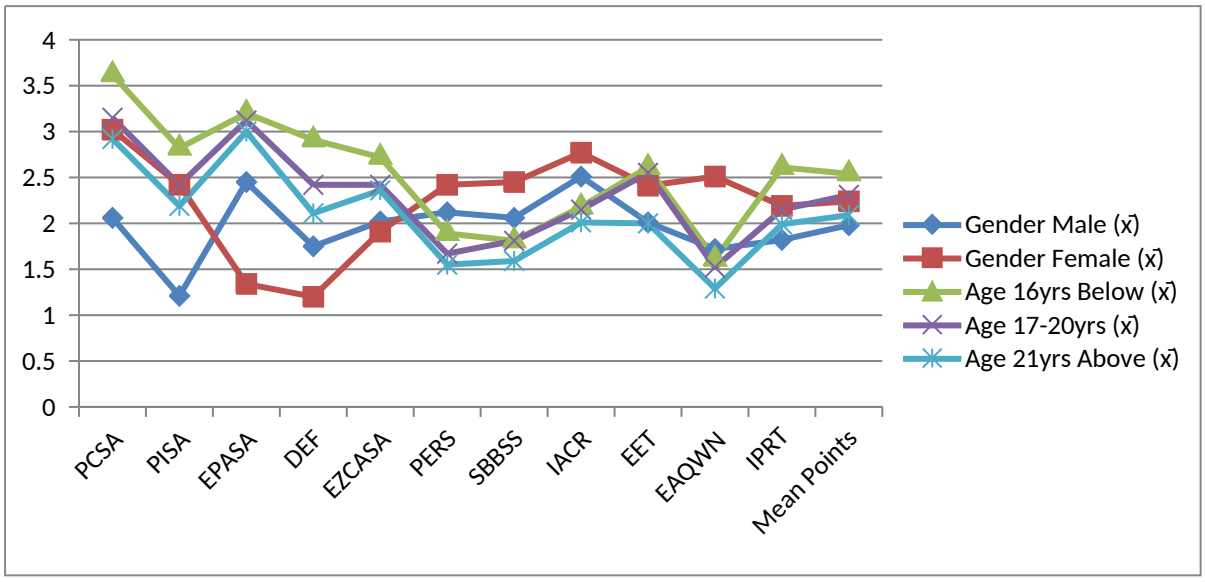


Figure 5: Mean of the influence of suspension on academic engagement

Table 1 and Figure 5 indicate the mean influence of suspension on the students' academic engagement. The results revealed that suspension influences negatively the academic engagement of the male students ($\bar{x}$=1.98) more than their female counterparts ($\bar{x}$=2.24). In regard to age, it was shown that suspension influences the respondents within the age range

of 21 years and above ($\bar{x}$=2.09) more than that of those within 17-20years ($\bar{x}$=2.31) and those 16 years below ($\bar{x}$=2.54), respectively. Assessing the influence of the suspension from the perspective of the rating scale, it was shown that suspension of 17-20 years remarkably undermined students' academic engagement of both genders (Male, $\bar{x}$=1.98, Female, $\bar{x}$=2.29). However, the influence was equally negative to students within the ages of 21 years and above and 17-20 years but relatively low among those within 16 years and below.

Table 2: Mean of the influence of suspension on students' adherence to school regulations

Items Descriptions	Gender		Age		
Suspension threats	**Male ($\bar{x}$)**	**Female ($\bar{x}$)**	**16yrs Below ($\bar{x}$)**	**17-20yrs ($\bar{x}$)**	**21yrs Above ($\bar{x}$)**
Promotes punctuality to school (PPS)	2.29	3.02	3.01	2.99	2.51
Promotes regular attendance in school (PRAS)	2.19	2.62	2.62	2.60	2.29
Encourage students to respect staff and peers (ESRSP)	2.10	2.98	3.72	2.59	2.42
Encourages students to submit assignment on time (ESSAT)	2.81	2.14	2.58	2.47	2.19
Discourages bullying (DB)	2.09	3.51	3.92	3.03	2.44
Discourages vandalism of school properties (DVSP)	2.36	3.21	3.93	3.11	2.62
Discourage stealing (DS)	2.71	3.52	2.82	2.01	2.00
Discourages drug use (DDU)	3.01	3.20	3.82	3.35	2.38
Discourage cult-related activities (DCA)	2.27	3.67	3.99	3.26	2.92
Discourages involvement in exam misconduct (DIEM)	1.91	2.45	2.52	2.41	2.00
Mean Points ($\bar{x}$)	2.34	3.03	3.30	2.78	2.38
Remarks	LE	HE	HE	HE	LE
Average of mean by gender and age	**2.69**			**2.82**	
Average of all mean on the effect of suspension on SASR			**2.76**		

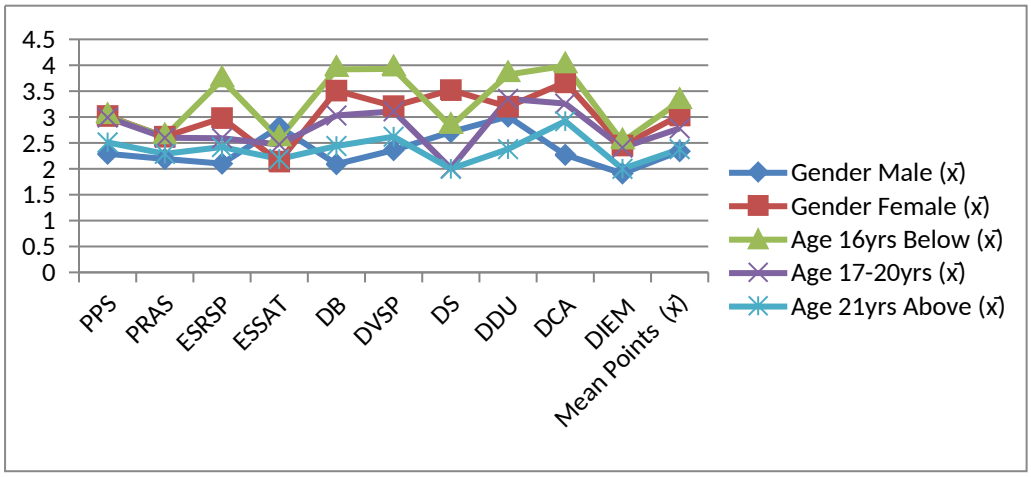


Figure 6: Mean of the influence of suspension on students' adherence to school regulations

Table 2 and Figure 6 indicate the mean influence of suspension on the students' adherence to school regulations. The results revealed that suspension influences negatively the adherence to school regulations among the male students ($\bar{x}$=2.34) but did not have much effect on their female counterparts ($\bar{x}$=3.03). In regard to age, it was shown that suspension influences the

respondents within the age range of 21years and above ($\bar{x}$=2.38) more negatively but has no remarkable influence on those within 17-20 years ($\bar{x}$=2.78) and those 16 years and below ($\bar{x}$=3.30) respectively. Assessing the influence of the suspension from the perspective of the rating scale, it was shown that suspension contributes remarkably to undermining students' adherence to schools' regulations, especially among the males above 21years of age.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Details of the Analyzed Data

The results of the analysis revealed that males were the majority in the study, while in terms of age, those within 16years of age were the majority. The majority of the sample assessed were suspended, especially in the cadre of males and those within 17-20syears of age. This explains the prevalence of social challenges in the school environment. The categories of suspension were mostly from the classes, followed by those suspended from the school. Majorly, the reasons for the suspension were lateness to school, insubordination, and violence-related issues in order of prominence.

Influence of Suspension on the Students' Academic Engagement Based on Gender and Age

Table 1 and Figure 5 indicated that the contribution of suspension to the students' academic engagement (SAE) was low ($\bar{x}$=2.23). Arising from the analyzed data, male students were greatly influenced negatively, especially in the area of undermining their interest in school activities, discouraging their zeal to ask questions when necessary, and promoting fear, as well as undermining their prompt response to tasks. In other words, the extent to which suspension encouraged male students' academic engagement was very low. In the aspect of the female, it was shown that suspension contributes a prominent negative influence in encouraging fear and discouraging proactive involvement in school activities. The disparity in the influence of suspension on SAE between males and females prominently relate to the fact that male students often place high value on their reputation within peer groups due to authority figures,, therefore, suspending them may damage their status and cause long-lasting embarrassment that is more internalized than that of their female counterparts. This is supported by a study done by Hemphill et al. (2014), which showed that **males** are expelled and suspended at higher rates **than** females. Similarly, on the factors that may likely be responsible for the difference, Bahago et al., (2025) supported that it could be linked to biological and developmental factors, emotional regulation, and peer dynamics as well as cultural context. Summarily, the extent of positive contribution of suspension in promoting SAE is low. This aligned with Liu's (2024) study, which revealed that school suspension deteriorated subsequent ratings of school environment among youth respondents. Further, an indirect effect between suspension and worsening of grades was observed, and this indirect effect resulted in low ratings of the school environment. Meanwhile, the midpoint of the influence of suspension on students' academic engagement was negative, although it differed according to gender. On the whole, suspension promotes fear, which has the impertinence to lead to disinterest in prompt engagement in academic matters or activities. The study findings aligned with studies done by Liu (2024) and Hemphill et al. (2014).

Table 1 and Figure 5 also showed that the extent of positive contribution of suspension in students' academic engagement by age is low ($\bar{x}$=2.31). The negative influence was great among those aged 21 years and above, with emphasis on discouraging them from asking

questions when necessary and undermining relationships with staff. Similar experience was found among the students, 17-20 years of age, though the negative influence of suspension was minimal as compared to those 16 years and below. In other words, the influence of suspension on SAE differs according to age with negative impact increasing as age increases. The findings contradicted the positions of Junaidi et al., (2021), Idiong et al., (2024); Mwangi et al., (2017) that younger individuals considered discipline a restrictive force imposed by adults, which is accompanied by fear, while the older students tend to have a more mature, positive view of discipline, linking it to self-regulation, motivation, and character development.

The implication of the results may emanate from the fact that as the students grow older, their self-images are fully developed and their desire for social reputation improves. In other words, the older the students, the greater the self-awareness and stronger concern for reputation. Even a small dent in this zeal can undermine their interest and sever established relationship. Nevertheless, the average contribution of suspension on SAE based on age was low, implying that suspension discourages students from asking questions when necessary as well as weakens bonds between the students and the staff. This finding corroborate the position of Jacobsen (2020) and Omulema, et al. (2015) that suspension is associated with increased socio-emotional problems, including greater discontinuity in friendship ties, based on changes in the respondents' friendship preferences and self-reports of their peers. The author equally maintained that the findings are also consistent with changes in perceptual measures of exclusion and greater involvement with substance-using peers.

Influence of Suspension on Students' Adherence to School Regulations Based on Gender and Age

The results as shown in Table 2 and Figure 6 indicated that the average positive contribution of suspension to students' adherence to school regulations was high ($\bar{x}$=2.76), implying that suspension can be used to enforce discipline in consonance with the established regulations. This perhaps is because it encourages the students to reflect on their behaviour, promotes students' awareness, and instills self-discipline to avoid embarrassment to self-reputation. This is supported by Mach (2023) that suspension and the help of the parents assist in building self-regulation and emotional control in students**.**

However, the extent of the contribution of suspension to male students was low ($\bar{x}$=2.34) as compared to female ($\bar{x}$=3.03). This may not be unconnected to differences males may have to psychological responses, social expectations, and behavioural patterns. Male students tend to socialize towards challenging authority, taking risks, and reacting emotionally instead of engaging more in self-reflection. These may predispose them to challenges of insubordination instead of conforming with the established school regulations like their female counterparts. The difference as revealed by the results corroborated with the position of Razzak (2012) that female students respond to issues of discipline by adjusting favourably to suit the school norms. This equally affirmed the position that male and female students respond or react differently on issues of discipline (Odhiambo et al., 2017; Blum & Libbey, 2004; Pyne, 2019)**.**

With regard to age difference, the results indicated that there were mean differences based on age with those 21years and above experiencing negative effects of suspension ($\bar{x}$=2.38, LE). In other words, there is a significant difference in the influence of suspension threat on students' adherence to school regulations based on age. The findings aligned with the studies conducted by Mach (2023) and Lacoe et al. (2019)**.** Though to a high extent of contribution, a

mean of 21 years and above was closely followed by 17-20years of age ($\bar{x}$=2.78, HE) and 16 years and below (3.30, HE), signifying that the higher the age, the more suspension tends to contribute negatively to the students' adherence to school regulations. The reason could be related to the psychological feeling of academic pressure which, when associated with missing classes, could increase frustration and aggression, which in turn may likely result in exposure to external non-academic influence with a resultant effect on the development of deviant behaviour. It could equally negate older students' identity development and critical view of authority rather than serving as an avenue for correcting behaviour as in the case of the younger students. This was supported by Junaidi et al. (2021), Idiong et al. (2024) position that younger individuals consider discipline as a restrictive force imposed by adults, which is accompanied by fear meant for character development.

CONCLUSION

Arising from the results obtained, it has been shown that the prevalence of utilization of suspension as a disciplinary approach in schools in Uyo local government area was high. The most often suspended set of students were the males, and those within 17-20years of age experienced greater numbers of suspensions. However, the effect of suspension was negative to the promotion of students' academic engagement but positive to students' adherence to school regulations. On the aspect of students' academic engagement, suspension affected the males more than their female counterparts, especially among the students aged 21years and above. Concerning students' adherence to school regulations, suspension negatively influences older students (21years and above). It is concluded that suspension threats contribute differently to students' academic engagement and students' adherence to school regulations based on gender and age. However, suspension contributions undermine students' academic engagement but relatively promote SASR. This underscores the variability of the effect of suspension on quality academic engagement.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

i. School managers (principals and teachers) should be strategic in understanding when, who and how suspension should be administered to avoid its negative contributions in severing students' interest and student-staff relationships.

ii. School managers should adequately study each of the students to understand the suitability of suspension in reshaping behavioural patterns rather than discouraging or undermining academic engagement and adherence to school regulations.

iii. Guidance and counseling should rather be utilised when appropriate instead of suspension. This will encourage the students to develop more interest than absolute utilization of suspension, which discourages SAE.

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