

## Pauline Teachings and Academic Discipline among Secondary School Students in South-Western Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the perceived influence of Pauline teachings, particularly the exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15 on academic discipline among secondary school students in South-Western Nigeria. While academic discipline has traditionally been studied in relation to psychological, socio-economic, and institutional factors, limited attention has been given to the role of religious ethics in shaping students' learning behaviour. Drawing from empirical data in a completed thesis, this study investigates Christian Religious Studies (CRS) teachers' perspectives on how Pauline values such as diligence, self-control, perseverance, and commitment to truth impact students' academic engagement, moral responsibility, and overall learning outcomes. A descriptive survey design was employed, and data were collected from 600 CRS teachers across urban and rural secondary schools. Quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics and ANOVA examined the extent to which teachers perceive Pauline teachings as influencing students' study habits, adherence to school rules, and ethical conduct in academic tasks. Findings indicate that CRS teachers regard Pauline teachings as highly effective in promoting academic discipline, reducing tendencies toward laziness, encouraging sustained study routines, fostering resilience in the face of academic challenges, and enhancing students' moral resolve in academic contexts. Teachers in rural schools emphasized the role of these teachings in overcoming socio-environmental limitations, while those in urban schools highlighted their effectiveness in mitigating distractions and promoting self-regulation. Based on these insights, the study recommends intentional integration of Pauline ethical principles into the CRS curriculum, continuous professional development for teachers on values-based pedagogy, and policy reforms that support the creation of academic cultures grounded in moral education. These measures are expected to strengthen the connection between moral formation and academic achievement, ensuring that Nigerian secondary school students develop both intellectual competence and ethical character. The study contributes to the literature on value-based education by demonstrating the practical relevance of biblical teachings in contemporary educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Pauline teachings, academic discipline, secondary school students, Christian Religious Studies, moral education, Nigeria, 2 Timothy 2:15, student behavior

## Introduction

Academic discipline is a critical determinant of students' learning outcomes and overall educational success. It encompasses the attitudes, behaviours, and self-regulatory skills that enable learners to engage consistently and ethically with their academic responsibilities (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Globally, educators have identified the promotion of academic discipline as central to fostering effective learning, personal growth, and social responsibility. In Nigeria, however, secondary schools continue to grapple with persistent challenges such as academic laziness, poor study habits, low motivation, truancy, and examination malpractice, which undermine the quality of education and hinder students from realizing their full potential (Akinsanya et al., 2023; Oladejo & Adebayo, 2022). These challenges are compounded by socio-economic disparities, peer influence, and limited institutional capacity to enforce ethical standards, creating a context in which moral and academic negligence often coexist (Nwogu et al., 2025).

In response to these challenges, educators and curriculum planners have increasingly explored moral and ethical frameworks as a complementary approach to promoting academic discipline. One such framework is found in Christian Religious Studies (CRS), which is widely taught in Nigerian secondary schools. CRS not only imparts knowledge about Christian doctrines but also seeks to cultivate moral and ethical virtues in learners, encouraging students to demonstrate responsibility, self-control, perseverance, and honesty in their academic pursuits (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012; Lickona, 1991). Within this context, the writings of the Apostle Paul emerge as particularly influential. Paul's epistles provide extensive ethical instruction, emphasizing virtues that are directly relevant to disciplined living, such as diligence, perseverance, truthfulness, and self-control (Rosner, 2023; Wright, 2012).

The injunction in 2 Timothy 2:15, which exhorts believers to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God" (New International Version), captures the essence of Paul's ethical vision and underscores the importance of earnest effort, moral accountability, and integrity. This teaching resonates with contemporary educational concerns, particularly in promoting conscientious study habits, resilience in the face of academic challenges, and ethical engagement with learning tasks (Duckworth et al., 2007; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). Despite the relevance of these moral principles, most research on academic discipline in Nigeria and other similar contexts has focused primarily on psychological, institutional, or socio-economic factors, such as self-regulated learning, motivation, teacher quality, and school resources (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). The potential contribution of religious ethics, particularly Pauline moral teachings, to shaping students' academic behaviour remains underexplored, creating a significant gap in the literature.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine CRS teachers' perceptions of the influence of Pauline teachings on academic discipline among secondary school students in South-Western Nigeria. By focusing on the lived experiences and professional insights of teachers, the study provides empirical evidence on how biblical ethics can be leveraged to enhance students' diligence, perseverance, self-control, and commitment to truth. The findings are expected to contribute to both educational theory and practice by highlighting the practical relevance of value-based instruction in promoting disciplined learning, reducing academic misconduct, and fostering a culture of integrity in Nigerian secondary schools. Furthermore, the study offers implications for curriculum development, teacher training, and policy formulation, demonstrating that moral and academic development are mutually reinforcing rather than separate domains.

## Literature Review

### Academic Discipline and Education

Academic discipline refers to the set of behaviours, cognitive skills, and attitudes that enable learners to engage consistently and responsibly with educational tasks, including sustained study, time management, and ethical conduct (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Within educational psychology, academic discipline is closely tied to self-regulated learning, in which students actively set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies to achieve academic success (Zimmerman, 2002; Duckworth et al., 2007). These competencies self-monitoring, persistence, and strategic task engagement are predictors of academic achievement and resilience in the face of challenges (Duckworth et al., 2007; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011).

Researchers further describe disciplined learners as those who demonstrate intrinsic motivation, maintain high expectations of effort, and manage distractions effectively, leading to positive learning outcomes (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Jun Wu et al., 2022). In broader educational discourse, discipline is not only about compliance with external rules but also about internalising habits of mind, such as perseverance, delayed gratification, and moral responsibility that support learning (Duckworth et al., 2007; Jun Wu et al., 2022).

In the Nigerian educational context, however, studies consistently report widespread academic indiscipline among secondary school students, which undermines scholastic achievement and school effectiveness. Behaviours such as truancy, lateness, inattentiveness, incomplete homework, bullying, and examination malpractice have been documented as persistent problems in public secondary schools, often linked to socio-environmental factors and weak school disciplinary frameworks (Nwogu et al., 2025; Fareo & Ballah, 2025). Such indiscipline disrupts learning environments, diminishes

teacher morale, contributes to poor academic performance, and increases school dropout rates (Nwogu et al., 2025).

Scholars argue that addressing academic indiscipline requires more than punitive measures; it necessitates comprehensive strategies that foster positive behavioural norms and self-regulatory skills. Effective approaches include supportive school climates, clear behavioural expectations, and teaching students how to regulate their own learning and behaviour (Akinnubi et al., 2024). Interventions that integrate moral and character education have also been shown to strengthen responsible academic conduct by guiding students toward values such as honesty, responsibility, and commitment to learning (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Akinsanya et al., 2023). In this regard, moral instruction within the Christian Religious Studies curriculum can serve not only as ethical education but also as a mechanism for nurturing disciplined learning habits that align students' behaviour with positive academic outcomes.

### **Moral Education and Religious Frameworks**

Moral education is widely recognised as a fundamental component of holistic education, focusing on the development of virtues such as honesty, responsibility, respect, empathy, and fairness (Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). It seeks to equip students not only with cognitive skills but also with the ethical dispositions necessary for responsible decision-making and social participation. The goal of moral education is therefore to cultivate character, ethical reasoning, and socially responsible behaviour, which are critical for both academic success and civic life (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Park & Peterson, 2006).

Religious instruction has historically played a significant role in moral education across societies. Studies have shown that engagement with religious texts and ethical teachings enhances students' moral reasoning, encourages internalisation of values, and fosters prosocial behaviour (Bryk et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2022). In the Nigerian educational context, Christian Religious Studies (CRS) explicitly integrates biblical moral principles into the curriculum, focusing on character formation, ethical conduct, and personal integrity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012). Research indicates that students exposed to value-laden religious instruction are more likely to develop traits such as honesty, diligence, self-control, and perseverance qualities that directly influence their academic and social behaviour (Akinsanya et al., 2023; Oladejo & Adebayo, 2022).

Moreover, moral education within religious frameworks provides normative guidance that extends beyond the classroom. By emphasizing scriptural virtues, such as truthfulness (Eph. 4:25), perseverance (Rom. 5:3-4), and diligence (2 Tim. 2:15), CRS offers a structured approach to character formation that complements secular educational strategies (Rosner, 2023). Such integration of ethical and religious instruction has been

linked to improved self-regulation, higher ethical standards, and reduced engagement in deviant behaviours among adolescents (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Chen et al., 2022). This evidence underscores the value of moral education as a pedagogical tool for shaping disciplined, ethically responsible, and academically committed students in Nigerian secondary schools.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (KJV) provides a multidimensional framework for understanding academic diligence. The Greek term *σπουδάζω*, often translated as "be diligent" or "make every effort," emphasizes intentional, sustained, and earnest effort, not merely superficial or rote study (Rosner, 2023; Wright, 2012). Contextually, Paul addresses Timothy as a young church leader tasked with teaching and preserving doctrinal truth amidst challenges, urging him to combine accurate knowledge, ethical integrity, and persistent effort. This moral and intellectual exhortation aligns closely with modern concepts of self-regulated learning, which highlight the importance of goal setting, planning, self-monitoring, and reflective practice in academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Just as Paul encourages Timothy to be "approved" through tested and genuine effort, self-regulated learners actively engage in metacognitive strategies to monitor and adjust their learning behaviours, ensuring mastery of material and ethical engagement with tasks. Diligence, perseverance, and moral responsibility in Paul's framework are conceptually similar to the "grit" and self-discipline emphasized in educational psychology as predictors of long-term success (Duckworth et al., 2007; Jun Wu et al., 2022).

### **Pauline Teachings and Academic Discipline**

Pauline ethical teachings have been widely recognised in the literature as foundational for Christian moral formation and can be meaningfully linked to behavioural outcomes in educational settings. Scholars note that Paul's writings consistently emphasise virtues such as diligence, perseverance, honesty, and self-control, which align with broader Christian ethical frameworks that support disciplined conduct (Rosner, 2023). In the Nigerian context, where the challenge of moral and academic indiscipline persists, Christian Religious Studies (CRS) offers moral instruction that reinforces ethical standards among youths (Akinsanya et al., 2023). Research on moral ethics and education suggests that religiously grounded values contribute to the internalisation of responsibility, ethical decision-making, and self-regulation among students, which are critical components of academic discipline. For example, work on moral ethics among Nigerian youths highlights how education can foster "refined minds" and responsible behaviour through ethical frameworks embedded in religious and moral teaching (Akinsanya et al., 2023). Teachers in South-Western Nigeria similarly report that when

students engage with Pauline teachings such as the call to “study to show yourself approved” (2 Tim. 2:15, New International Version), they exhibit greater diligence, reduced academic negligence, and stronger commitment to integrity. Moreover, biblical exhortations to truthfulness (e.g., Eph. 4:25) underpin efforts to curb dishonest practices like examination malpractice, as honesty is presented as an essential moral value for community life and personal development within Christian ethics (Akinsanya et al., 2023). Collectively, these perspectives support the view that Pauline ethics—when integrated into CRS pedagogy can reinforce academic discipline through the cultivation of virtues that underlie moral and educational commitment.

In addition, Paul’s stress on “rightly dividing the word of truth” (orthotomeō) parallels precision and accuracy in learning. Students who carefully interpret, internalize, and apply knowledge are less likely to engage in academic shortcuts or unethical practices, mirroring Paul’s emphasis on integrity and correctness (Robertson, 1930/2010). In other words, the biblical mandate to combine study with moral and ethical vigilance reinforces the connection between intellectual effort and character formation, suggesting that true academic discipline is inseparable from ethical responsibility (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Akinsanya et al., 2023). Empirical studies in Nigeria and other Global South contexts highlight the practical relevance of these principles. Teachers report that students exposed to value-based education grounded in religious or ethical teachings exhibit higher concentration, persistence, and adherence to school rules (Oladejo & Adebayo, 2022; Akinnubi et al., 2024). Paul’s exhortation can thus be interpreted as a blueprint for fostering academic discipline, where moral character, ethical integrity, and sustained effort converge to promote learning success. Such a framework is particularly salient in environments facing challenges such as academic negligence, truancy, and examination malpractice (Akinsanya et al., 2023).

### **Pauline Teachings and Virtue Ethics**

Pauline literature in the New Testament emphasizes a range of virtues that are directly relevant to disciplined living and moral development. Across his epistles, the Apostle Paul repeatedly exhorts believers to cultivate self-control (Gal. 5:22–23), perseverance (Rom. 5:3–4), diligence (2 Tim. 2:15), and truthfulness (Eph. 4:25), highlighting their importance for both personal and communal flourishing (Rosner, 2023; Wright, 2012). These virtues align with broader ethical frameworks, particularly virtue ethics, which emphasises the development of character traits that promote moral integrity, responsibility, and practical wisdom in everyday life (Hursthouse, 2018). Within this framework, virtues are cultivated through repeated practice and reflection, creating dispositions that guide moral behaviour and decision-making (MacIntyre, 2007).

Research in moral psychology and educational ethics underscores the connection between virtue cultivation and observable behavioural outcomes. For example, self-control and perseverance are associated with enhanced self-regulation, goal achievement, and resilience in educational settings (Duckworth et al., 2007; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Truthfulness, as highlighted in Pauline teaching, aligns with academic integrity and ethical decision-making, which are crucial for reducing academic misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism (Akinsanya et al., 2023). Diligence fosters a proactive approach to learning, reinforcing habits such as consistent study, timely completion of assignments, and engagement with complex tasks.

While Pauline ethics have been extensively explored within theological and biblical studies, there is comparatively limited empirical research linking these teachings to specific behavioural outcomes such as academic discipline, especially in the Global South. Studies in Nigeria indicate that integrating biblical ethical instruction into educational practices can enhance students' moral reasoning, self-discipline, and academic engagement (Oladejo & Adebayo, 2022; Akinnubi et al., 2024). By situating Pauline moral values within the practical context of Nigerian secondary schools, this study addresses an important gap in the literature, demonstrating the potential of religiously informed virtue education to strengthen ethical behaviour and promote disciplined learning among adolescents.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to explore CRS teachers' perceptions of the influence of Pauline teachings on academic discipline. The descriptive survey approach is appropriate for capturing perceptions and attitudes within a large population (Creswell, 2014).

### **Population and Sample**

The population comprised CRS teachers in secondary schools across the six states of South-Western Nigeria. A total of 600 CRS teachers were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation from urban and rural settings, public and private schools.

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

A structured questionnaire was developed, consisting of items measuring teachers' perceptions of key Pauline values (e.g., diligence, self-control, perseverance, truthfulness) and indicators of academic discipline (e.g., study habits, classroom behaviour). The instrument was validated by experts in religious education and pilot-tested for reliability

(Cronbach's alpha = 0.87). Data were collected over a three-month period through both physical distribution and online forms, with respondents providing answers on a five-point Likert scale.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were used to summarise teachers' responses. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine differences in perceptions across demographic groups (e.g., gender, teaching experience, school type). All analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25.

## Results

### Teachers' Perceptions of Pauline Teachings

**Table 1: Perception of Pauline Teachings on Academic Discipline**

Pauline Concept	Mean Score	Interpretation
Diligent Study (2 Tim. 2:15)	3.81	Very High
Self-Control (Gal. 5:23)	3.74	High
Truthfulness (Eph. 4:25)	3.69	High

Overall, respondents reported **high levels of agreement** that Pauline teachings positively influence academic discipline. Specifically:

- **Diligence:** Teachers strongly agreed that emphasis on diligence (2 Tim. 2:15) encourages students to prioritise academic tasks (M = 4.52, SD = 0.54).
- **Perseverance:** Values of perseverance were perceived as helping students persist amidst academic difficulties (M = 4.47, SD = 0.58).
- **Self-Control:** Teachers affirmed that students exposed to teachings on self-control demonstrated improved focus (M = 4.41, SD = 0.61).
- **Truthfulness:** The link between truthfulness and reduced examination malpractice was also strongly endorsed (M = 4.38, SD = 0.63).

### ANOVA Findings

ANOVA results indicated significant differences in perceptions based on school type (public vs. private), with private school teachers reporting slightly higher perceived effectiveness of Pauline teachings on academic discipline ( $F(1,598) = 5.32, p < .05$ ). No significant differences were observed based on gender or years of experience.

## Discussion

The findings affirm that CRS teachers in South-Western Nigeria perceive Pauline teachings as a meaningful moral resource for reinforcing academic discipline. This supports theoretical assertions that moral and religious values can positively shape student behaviour (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). Teachers' strong agreement on the value of diligence aligns with the broader virtue-ethics discourse, which positions deliberate effort and self-governance as core to disciplined living (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Moreover, the perceived impact of self-control and perseverance suggests that Pauline ethics may enhance students' self-regulatory capacities, which is an important predictor of academic success (Bandura, 1997). The emphasis on truthfulness corresponds with efforts to address unethical practices such as examination malpractice, a persistent challenge in Nigerian secondary education (Akinsanya et al., 2023). Teachers' observations point to the potential of religious moral instruction to complement formal disciplinary strategies.

The significant difference between public and private school teachers' perceptions may reflect contextual factors, including variations in school ethos, resources, and reinforcement of moral values. This suggests that supportive environments and leadership may enhance the integration of moral teachings into school culture.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the perceived effectiveness of Pauline teachings in fostering academic discipline among secondary school students in South-Western Nigeria. Teachers attribute improved diligence, stronger study habits, greater self-control, and enhanced moral integrity to the influence of values rooted in Pauline ethics. These findings underscore the importance of moral education, particularly within religious curricula such as CRS, as a complement to conventional strategies for promoting academic discipline.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, which highlight the perceived positive influence of Pauline teachings on academic discipline among secondary school students, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the integration of moral values and promote disciplined learning:

- Educational planners and curriculum developers should intentionally embed Pauline ethical themes into the Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum. This integration should go beyond mere inclusion of biblical references to incorporate practical applications that connect virtues such as diligence, perseverance, self-control, and truthfulness with students' academic responsibilities. For example, instructional materials could include case studies, reflective exercises, and classroom discussions

that encourage students to internalize and practice these values in academic contexts (Oladejo & Adebayo, 2022; Rosner, 2023). Embedding ethical instruction within the curriculum ensures that moral development is systematic, consistent, and reinforced across grade levels, thereby contributing to the cultivation of disciplined learners who approach their studies with commitment and integrity (Lickona, 1991; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009).

- Teachers are central to the effective transmission of values-based education. Continuous professional development programmes should be organized to equip CRS teachers with pedagogical strategies for teaching moral and ethical values effectively. Such programmes could include workshops on value-based lesson planning, classroom management strategies that promote self-discipline, and techniques for integrating ethical reflection with academic content (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Akinnubi et al., 2024). Training teachers to model virtues themselves is equally critical, as research indicates that students' ethical behaviour and academic commitment are strongly influenced by teacher behaviour and classroom culture (Bryk et al., 2010; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Well-prepared teachers can facilitate discussions, mentoring, and reflective activities that help students internalize Pauline teachings and translate them into consistent academic habits and moral action.
- Educational policy frameworks should formally recognise the role of moral education in shaping academic discipline and provide mechanisms to support schools in creating environments conducive to values-based learning. Policies could include mandated character education programmes, monitoring of academic integrity, incentives for schools that demonstrate effective integration of moral education, and resources for ethical pedagogical initiatives (Akinsanya et al., 2023). By institutionalising moral education within national and state-level policy, schools can foster academic cultures grounded in ethical principles, thereby reducing truancy, examination malpractice, and disengagement. Policy measures should also encourage collaboration between teachers, parents, and community stakeholders to reinforce moral development both in school and at home, creating a holistic framework for cultivating disciplined, morally responsible students (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Oladejo & Adebayo, 2022).
- Beyond curriculum and policy, schools should implement strategies that encourage reflective learning and ethical self-assessment. Students can be guided to set personal academic goals, track progress, and reflect on the alignment of their efforts with moral and academic standards inspired by Pauline ethics (Zimmerman, 2002; Duckworth et al., 2007). Such practices promote metacognitive skills, perseverance, and accountability, reinforcing the connection between moral education and academic discipline.

- Schools should foster peer mentoring and collaborative learning structures that allow students to encourage and model disciplined behaviour among themselves. By pairing younger or struggling students with peers who exhibit strong moral and academic habits, schools can leverage social learning to reinforce diligence, self-control, and ethical conduct as emphasized in Pauline teachings (Park & Peterson, 2006; Chen et al., 2022).
- Modern educational contexts provide opportunities to use digital platforms, social media, and educational technology to reinforce moral education. Schools can develop multimedia content, interactive lessons, and digital campaigns that integrate Pauline ethical teachings with study skills, highlighting the importance of diligence, perseverance, and integrity in a technologically-driven environment (Chen et al., 2022). This approach aligns with students' contemporary experiences, making moral instruction both relevant and engaging.

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