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## **Perceptions of Ghanaian Students about the Influence of Drug Use on Academic Performance**

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### **Abstract:**

*Drug use among adolescents have shown to have significant influence on their health conditions and it has implications on adolescent's physical, cognitive and intellectual developments. These effects result from the devastating problems continued use of drugs have on consumers. Statistics from the Narcotics Control Board in Ghana shows that more than 35,000 adolescents in Ghana use various kinds of drugs. It is worthy of note that most of these adolescents are students of various Senior High Schools in Ghana. Findings from other parts of the world have shown that continued use of drugs causes poor academic performance. However, findings about this phenomenon is sparse in Ghana and very little has been done to address the issue. As a result of this, the study sought to understand Ghanaian student's views on the influence of drug use on academic performance. Out of the 90 respondents, 88.89% agreed that drug use negatively affected performance but 8.89% disagreed. Most students indicated that drugs keep students away from class, it has negative health implications, it causes students to lose concentration in class and it makes students disrespectful to their teachers. According to the students, these factors culminated into their reduction in academic performance. Also, the students held the view that peer pressure mostly influenced drug use, followed by advertisement and the death of a parent. The study concludes by recommending to policy makers in Ghana to pass policies in the country to prevent the use of drugs among students. Finally, the study suggests that national studies related to the topic under investigation should be conducted in order to provide a more generalisable knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *Drug use, adolescents, Ghana, academic performance*

### **1. Introduction**

Improving academic performance appears to be a significant goal for educational institutions around the world. This is because most educational institutions are assessed based on the academic performance of their students. During the period of adolescence, the physical, intellectual and emotional developments of the youth are challenged. Rogers (2013) has identified that many of the behaviours in adolescence may have an influence on their adulthood and drug use is typically initiated during adolescence (Lynskey & Hall, 2000). Issues related to health are especially important because they may affect not only physical but cognitive and intellectual developments (Cox *et al.*, 2007). Of major concern is the effects of drug use and the evidence available that it contributes to academic failure (Diego *et al.*, 2003). Statistics from the Narcotics Control Board (2015) shows that more than 35,000 youths in Ghana engage in the use of drugs and a large number of these youth are in school. This means that they are at risk of being affected by the use of drugs while in school. Considering this problem, there is a dearth of knowledge in Ghana concerning the effects of drug use on student's academic performance, from the views of students themselves. Consequently, the present study addresses a significant gap in the Ghanaian research literature by seeking student's perceptions on the influence of drug use on academic performance.

#### *1.1. Statement of the Problem*

The situation of drug use in Ghana has become one that is difficult to handle and control. Partly because most drug users in Ghana engage in the act in secret. Consequently, the health implications for engaging in this malpractice worsens for them and this is more so in Kumasi where the abuse of drugs have increased. Regardless of this, very little studies have been conducted in Ghana to ascertain the impacts of drug use on student's academic performance.

### 1.2. Research Questions

- What are the drugs students use?
- What are the causes of drug use among students in Ghana?
- Does drug use have an effect on the scores of students?
- What are the measures to alleviate drug abuse among the students?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Effects of Drug Use on Students

Past studies have shown that drug users are low academic achievers (Diego *et al.*, 2003). Drug users remember 10% less of what they have studied than others who do not use drugs (Egerton, 2015). More so, there is evidence that cannabis interrupts learning by impairing reading, thinking, comprehension, verbal and Mathematic skills (NACADA, 2002). Students are expected to be responsive to undertake tasks and assignments given to them in school in order to excel. However, students who use drugs are unable to keep up with these responsibilities and this makes them fall behind in school. As a result of the intake of drugs, these students fail to do assignments, become lazy, demonstrate low productivity and inability to work effectively (Lynskey & Hall, 2000). This is because using drugs regularly can cause loss of memory and judgement which could make learning difficult. Moreover, Egerton (2015) has observed that consistent drug use could lead to loss of the short term memory which can cause students to forget things and hardly concentrate in class. Because drugs alter the coordination of information negatively, during exams the users of drugs are unable to remember what they learned while they were drunk.

A literature review conducted by Lynskey and Hall (2000) asserted that cannabis use is associated with lower grade point average, less satisfaction with school, negative attitudes to school and poor school performance. The use of drugs makes students go through a lot of discipline problems which keeps them away from class while they take on punishments. Egerton (2015) found that students who use drugs have 93.7% rate of absenteeism, 78.1% school dropout rate and 82.5% probability of sneaking out of school. A study by Barry *et al.* (2010) in the United States revealed that as student's engagement in alcohol use heightened, their aspirations for education decreases. Also, their study confirms what was found by Egerton (2015) that students who use drugs are generally truant and noisy in class.

Further, students who use drugs engage in some other behaviours in class which are against the conducts of a school. Cox *et al.* (2007) contend that students who use drugs demonstrate strange mood swings, display negative behaviours, are argumentative, they act aggressively and do not seem happy and are normally anxious and destructive. Some of the behaviours drug users engage in include disobeying their teachers, engaging in bullying, inciting others to defy teachers, breaking school rules and regulations, fighting with other students, engaging in the stealing of school properties and cheating in exams. These behaviours were found from the study conducted by Egerton (2015) in Kenya and has been highlighted by Barry *et al.* (2010). There is no gainsaying by indicating that these behaviours exhibited by drug users contribute to their poor academic performance in school.

Also, students with low performance generally associate themselves with deviant peers who are substance users (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). This is because the intrinsic motivation available to most low performers is mild which reduces their self-esteem. A number of students with low academic performance engage in binge drinking and Cox *et al.* (2007) have found that binge drinking causes low grades. However, they indicated that low grades are more significant for marijuana and alcohol users, this has also been established by Diego *et al.* (2003). From these findings, it appears that marijuana has a much more negative effect on memory and reasoning than other substances.

Moreover, students who abuse drugs perform poorly because of the damage drugs have on the brain. Alcohol use has been linked to reduction in brain functioning (Deas *et al.*, 2000; DeBellis *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, underage drinkers are at high risk of neurodegeneration, especially on the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning. This implies that heavy drinking that culminates into drunkenness could lead to cognitive and intellectual impairments which can have adverse effects on academic performance. This can have a consequence on adulthood. Even though alcohol use has been associated to poor academic performance (DeSimone, 2010), some researchers posit that there is no relationship between alcohol use and academic performance (Dee & Evans, 2003).

### 2.2. The Relationship between Drug use and Academic Performance

Although the link between drug use and academic performance is not clear, most researchers argue that there is an indirect relationship between drug use and academic performance. There have been several debates on the relationship between substance use and academic achievement. Some researchers argue that academic problems precede drug use. This is because poor academic achievers are more likely to skip school, engage with deviant peers and be disrespectful to their teachers. This may create a social system which perpetuates drug use (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Further, low academic achievers are more likely to associate with peers who abuse drugs and it has been indicated that peers have a significant influence on the lives of adolescents.

On the other hand, some researchers also argue that increase use of drugs contributes to low academic performance, especially when motivation is low (Cox *et al.*, 2007). This is because students with poor academic performance are less likely, than their counterparts with higher performance, to place value on academic achievements.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Study Area, Design and Sampling

The study was conducted at the Kumasi Senior High Technical School (KSTS), a Senior High School (SHS) in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The school is a coeducational institution and has a student population of over 1,500. The school comprises of male and female teaching and non-teaching staff. KSTS is located within the Patasi community in Kumasi. Substance abuse has been a common practice among the people of Patasi, therefore the researchers identified this area for its compatibility with the research aims and objectives.

This study adopted the survey research design in order to answer questions from past behaviours, characteristics or experiences. The study population included 250 students in SHS 3, the students were in their senior year. The stratified sampling technique was used in selecting 90 students for the study, aged 16 to 25. This sampling procedure was adopted in order for the study sample to be a true representation of the population. The population under investigation were initially divided into three strata, each stratum included 50 students. The first stratum constituted 20 females and 30 males, the second stratum included 25 females and 25 males while the third involved 10 females and 40 males. KSTS has a greater proportion of its students as males which resulted in the stark difference between the sex of participants. After the stratified sampling technique was used to group the strata, the random sampling was used to collect data from the participants. In doing so, 30 students were randomly selected from each of the three strata culminating into 90 research participants. Neuman (2007) has argued that in the stratified sampling method, the researcher has control over the relative size of each stratum, making it a valid representation of the population under study. This method made it possible for the researchers to assert that the sample size is a true representation of the students of KSTS.

#### 3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were administered to the students at the KSTS. The questionnaire was constructed in the English Language and included both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 20 students from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. The students included 12 males and 8 females. Questions in the pre-test questionnaire were structure and focused on the effects of drug abuse on the student's performance in school. The pilot study revealed that 40% of the students abuse drugs and 80% held the view that abusing drugs negatively affected academic performance. The pilot study provided a basis for amending questions for the main study.

Results for the study were obtained using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics used in this study was in the manner of the univariate technique using percentages and frequencies. This analysis method was adopted because it would be suitable to answer questions pertaining why students abuse drugs and the effects it has on their academic and social development. The data were analysed with the assistance of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software.

#### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

A written consent was sought from the head of the senior high school. Before seeking the participation of students in the study, they were debriefed on the study's purpose and aims. They were assured that they would maintain anonymous and confidential throughout the study. Finally, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study without any consequences.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Sex of Participants, Participants' Level in School and Family Situation

With regards to the sex of respondents, data gathered from the 90 students showed that 55 were males and 35 were females. In percentage terms, 61.11% were males while 38.99% were females.

Data for this study were collected from a group of SHS students in Kumasi. Out of the 90 research participants, 30 (33.33%) were in first year, 27 (30%) were in their second year while 34 (37.77%) were in their third year. This shows that majority of the participants were seniors, hence, they were knowledgeable on the topic under investigation.

Out of the 90 research participants, 62 representing 68.89% were living with their mothers. Also, 16 participants representing 17.78% were living with their fathers while 12 (13.33%) were living with others including friends and nonrelatives. This shows that most of the participants live in single families, being cared for by their mothers or fathers. This participant characteristic had an influence on the study's results as children from single families are more likely to use drugs than their counterparts from a two-parent family.

#### 4.2. The Kinds of Drugs Students use and the Causes of Drug Use

One of the research questions for the study was to find out the kinds of drugs students use. Knowing the drugs used by students would help researchers, educationists and health professionals understand the consequences that are introduced by the consumption of those drugs. This is because some specialised drugs have specific effects on its consumers. The findings on the kinds of drugs students use are presented in Table 1.

Kind of drug	Frequency	Percentage
Alcohol	41	45.56
Indian hemp	37	41.11
Cocaine	12	13.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 1: The kinds of drugs students use

Results from Table 1 show that 41 (45.56%) of the students had the view that alcohol was the dominant substance abused by students, 37 (41.11%) indicated that students used Indian hemp and 12 (13.33%) stated that students engaged in the use of cocaine. This implies that alcohol, more than the other drugs, is readily available to the students. More so, the alcohol is cheaper for the students and they are able to acquire it in larger quantities compared to the other drugs. This was followed by Indian hemp which recorded 37 (41.11%) responses from the students as a drug which was also common. This means that students are at risk of encountering the devastating effects including violent behaviours and the negative health implications that comes with consuming alcohol and Indian hemp.

The first objective of the study was to determine the causes of drug use among students in Ghana. Determining the cause of drug use helps facilitate intervention strategies meant to alleviate or control the use of drugs among people. More so, understanding the cause of drug use helps to determine cost-efficient and effective mechanisms in dealing with the problem. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Peer pressure	44	48.89
Advertisement	24	26.67
Death of parent	18	20.00
Divorce	1	1.11
Imprisonment	1	1.11
Others	2	2.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 2: The causes of drug use among students

From the responses above, 44 (48.89%) of the participants were of the opinion that peer pressure influenced students to use drugs, 24 (26.67%) agreed that drug use was caused by advertisement. Also, 18 (20.00%) of the students agreed that drug use was caused by living in single-headed homes which results from the death of a parent, 1 student each held the view that children living with divorced parents and children who have served a term in prison have a greater likelihood of using drugs. Few (2.22%) students agreed that the use of drugs among students is influenced by the environment, personality and ignorance about the dreadful effects of drug use on the person. These findings show that most students who abuse drugs are influenced by factors within the environment including peer pressure and advertisement, as this culminated into 75.56% of the responses. This was followed by those who stated that losing a parent could result in drug use. The students (20.00%) believed that living in a single-headed home or living as an orphan was a causative factor.

#### 4.3. Influence of Drug Use on Student's Scores in School and Measures to Alleviate Drug use among Students

The main aim of the study was to determine the influence of drug use on student's academic performance. The researchers assessed this by collecting data from the student on their perception on drug use and its influence on the scores of students in school. There is no gainsaying that the score students attain in school represents a good measure for determining one's academic capabilities. Table 3 presents findings from student's views on whether drug use has an influence on their scores.

Level of agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	65	72.22
Agree	15	16.67
Undecided	2	2.22
Disagree	8	8.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 3: Student's level of agreement on whether drug use influenced their scores

Table 3 shows that a higher number of the students 80 (88.89%) held the view that using drugs negatively affects one's performance in school. Also, 2 (2.22%) of the students could not make a decision on the question while 8 (8.89%) students held the view that drug use does not have a negative effect on student's academic performance. This means that the students believe there is an inverse relationship between drug use and academic performance. That is to say that, the more drugs students consume, the lesser their academic performance. The students provided reasons for either agreeing or disagreeing to the research question. These have been presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Using drugs keep students away from school	19	23.75
Using drugs has negative health implications	19	23.75
Drugs causes students to lose concentration in class	35	43.75
Using drugs makes students disrespectful to teachers	7	8.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 4: Student's reasons for agreeing that drugs negatively affected performance

From Table 4, 19 (23.75%) of the students who agreed that drug use had a negative effect on academic performance stated that using drugs increases absenteeism in school and this contributes to reducing academic performance. This is because the student will not be able to keep up with the subjects taught in class since they would be absent. Also, 19 (23.75%) students stated that drug use had negative health effects on students and that does not help them in their studies. Further, 35 (43.75%) students indicated that using drugs negatively affects concentration in class. Concentration in class is useful to enhance academic performance in school. For this reason, students who use drugs perform poorly in school because their performance in school would be affected since the drugs alter their concentration. Finally, 7 out of the 80 students who agreed that drugs negatively affect student's academic performance held the view that drug users are disrespectful to their teachers and that makes the student dislike the subject of the teacher in question.

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Drugs can keep you up at night to study for long hours	8	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 5: Student's reasons for disagreeing that drugs negatively affected performance

From Table 5, it is obvious that all (100.00%) the students who disagreed that drug use had a negative influence on academic performance held the view that drugs can serve as performance-enhancing ingredients for students. Thus, this would help them cover more areas on their subject which would put them ahead of their counterparts who do not use drugs.

Due to the devastating effects of drug use on the physical, cognitive and physical developments of adolescents, this study sought to identify student's responses to the need for measures to alleviate drug use. Specifically, the students were asked whether laws should be passed in Ghana to prevent the use of drugs. 70 students, representing 77.77% held the view that laws should be enacted in the country to prevent the use of drugs among students. Most of the students within this category agreed that drug use has a negative influence on the academic performance of students. Finally, 20 students, 22.23% indicated that there should be no laws to regulate the use of drugs among students. Students within this category held the view that drugs do not have negative effects on the performance of students, rather, it facilitates the student-learning experience.

## 5. Discussion

The present study has revealed Ghanaian student's perceptions on the kinds of drugs used by adolescents, the causes of drug use among students in Ghana, the effects of drug use on the scores of students in school and whether laws should be passed in Ghana to prevent the use of drugs among students. This study has found that most students in Ghana use marijuana and Indian hemp. This finding is supported by Brown-Acquaye (2001) who has also indicated that marijuana is the major drug abused among the youth in Ghana with the age at onset being from 10 to 12 years. This is an unfortunate situation in Ghana since Diego *et al.* (2003) have revealed that marijuana has a more significant effect on academics than the other drugs. This means that Ghanaian students who use drugs are at risk of the damaging effects of marijuana.

Further, this study found that peer pressure has a significant influence on student's decisions about whether or not to use drugs. This is not surprising as Rogers (2013) has identified that adolescence is a period where peers tend to influence the behaviour of each other. More so, Simmons-Morton and Farhat (2010) has observed that peer relationships can create behavioural problems in adolescents because of the influence of peers in the decision making of their colleagues (Albert *et al.*, 2013). This increases in situations where there is peer group homogeneity. This is to state that students with friends who are drug users are more likely to be drug users themselves.

This study also revealed that the next factor which caused student to use drugs was advertisement. This has been confirmed by Snyder *et al.* (2006) who have seen that youth who saw more alcohol advertisement consumed more. This implies that Ghanaian students who watch adverts related to the use of drugs are more likely to indulge in drug use. This phenomenon, therefore, is likely to reflect in their poor academic performance. Further, this study has found that living with a single parent as a result of the death of one's caretaker leads to drug use. This is because adolescents in this condition are not adequately mentored to take on positive roles in society. Hence, most Ghanaian students living in single-headed homes are at risk of becoming drug users.

A major objective of this study was to find out the views of students in Ghana about the influence of drug use on academic performance. This was achieved by seeking the student's perceptions about the impact of drug use on their scores in schools. Studies related to this research objective is scant in Ghana. Most respondents in this study agreed that drug use negatively affected performance in school. The reasons they gave for this have been illuminated in the extant literature. For example, the students indicated that drug use causes absenteeism (Egerton, 2015), it had negative health implications and makes one lose concentration in class (Cox *et al.*, 2007). Finally, the students stated that drug use makes students disrespectful to their teachers (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). King *et al.* (2006) and Balsa *et al.* (2011) further confirm this by arguing that continued use of drugs by students is significantly

related to reductions in grades in school. It appears that the main reason for this relationship between drug use and academic performance results from the effects drugs have on the brain and memory. Although a number of students indicated that drug use negatively affected academic performance, very few students disagreed by stating that drugs keep one awake to enhance studies for long hours. This has been reiterated by Dee and Evans (2003).

Finally, because most researchers agree that drug use among adolescents has a negative effect on their performance in school, the present study sought to seek student's views on the need for laws in Ghana to prevent the use of drugs among students. Most respondents preferred the idea of the introduction of laws in Ghana to regulate the use of drugs among adolescents, particularly students. This is because the students agreed drug use had a negative impact on student's performance. Currently, there are no laws in Ghana to control or prevent the use of drugs among students.

## 6. Conclusion

Most respondents held the view that drug use had a negative impact on academic performance. This is because of the antisocial and deviant behaviours introduced by the consumption of drugs including absenteeism, disrespectfulness to teachers, disturbance in class and noise making during class hours. This implies that students who engage in the use of drugs have difficulty controlling behaviours in school which reflects in their decrease in desire for educational attainments. It was also revealed that peer relationships influence drug use among students and this is largely based on peer homogeneity. This study showed that engaging with peers who are drug users increases the likelihood of drug usage. Study findings have revealed that most respondents on the introduction of laws to regulate the consumption of drugs among adolescents. This would go a long way to promote academic success in educational institutions in Ghana.

## 7. Recommendations

1. Considering the effects of drug use on academic performance among students in Ghana, there is the need for laws in the country to regulate the use and consumption of drugs among students.
2. The various Senior High Schools in Ghana should introduce regulations to manage prohibit the use of drugs. More so, the educational curriculum content should include teachings related to the health implications of drug use and how that affects not only physical but intellectual and cognitive developments.
3. National studies related to this study should be conducted to provide a more accurate generalisable knowledge on the topic under investigation.

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