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Perceived Causes and Effects of Moral Decadence among Some Selected Senior High Schools in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana

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Abstract:

This research investigated the perceived causes and effects of moral decadence among some selected senior high schools in the Kumasi Metropolis. A total of 321 respondents from three senior high schools in the metropolis of Kumasi were taken. Means and standard deviations were used when evaluating the study results. The results showed that the immoral problems experienced in the study area were exam malpractice, drug abuse, bullying, truancy and illicit sexual activities. The study also revealed that parental carelessness, peer influence, watching immoral films, unregulated media landscape where media content is not censored, and poverty were contributing to the causes of moral decadence. The research also showed the negative impact of moral decadence on senior high school students. The outcome also revealed that the steps to combat moral decadence were the establishment of rules and regulation, parental supervision and school counselling, school authorities to be of good moral, moral leadership and education. The study recommends the need for the schools to periodically organize seminars and workshops for teachers and students, vigorous counselling sessions should be held for the students and parents should be empowered through awareness creation on the dangers of irresponsible parenting.

Keywords: Moral decadence

1. Introduction

Unethical practices in Ghana are common among students from elementary to tertiary. According to Agyekum and Gambrah (2011), unethical actions or misconducts are not acceptable, as these activities do not meet with the rules and regulations of any educational institution in the country. It is postulated by Charlton and David (1993) that senior high schools are one specific stage of the educational system in a nation where all kinds of unethical activities are very widespread and tend to aggravate. Agyekum and Gambrah (2011) further states that students at this point are swept up in all kinds of unethical activities such as occultism, consuming obscene content, breaking school laws, rioting, drinking, substance addiction, and so on. Becker, Englermanns and Thomas (1997) added that instead of the school agitating persons with intellectual achievement and spiritual aptitude, the reverse is the truth and has catastrophic implications for the students themselves and the entire nation.

It is believed that morality socially upholds principles, concepts, ideals and actions, laws and regulations that culture deems reasonable, correct and appropriate and under which members of community are tied (Muraino & Ugwumba, 2014). The concise concept of morality, according to Gert (2012) defines morality as a collection of actions placed forth by some group; even a community; and a normative meaning focused on the premise that what is moral should have a code of ethics promoted by a culture and should be adopted as a guide to action by representatives of that community.

Odeh (2013) believed that the absence of maintaining solid morals in our culture is moral decadence. For their part, Muraino and Ugwumba (2014) proposed that moral decadence is the phenomenon of acting in a way that shows poor moral values. In a given culture it implies massive decline in fundamental standards. In this sense, moral decadence tends to be a decline in society's moral norm. It appears to deteriorate or fail in maintaining our ideals, principles, norms and ethical practices in society. Afuye (2015) described the types of moral decadence as; cultism, malpractice of test, underage abortion, exploitation of students, sexual assault, selling of 'degree,' presentation of students, substance addiction, improper clothing, etc. According to Elliott and Voss (1974), Henggeler (1989) students with high academic performance are expected to be less likely to indulge in unethical conduct than students with poorer academic accomplishment.

Similarly, Voelkel, Quaife, Leinwand and Barst (1999) also pointed out those students with negative learning encounters are more prone to participate in unethical behavior such as dropping out of school.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Senior high school students historically recognized for moral integrity and strong academic results are now synonymous with the insane atmosphere of malpractice testing, fighting, school abuse, use of offensive language on teachers and other types of unethical problems. The most alarming is the number of students engaged in examination malpractice. Test malpractice, according to Anzene (2014) has progressed from plain giraffe, where students sometimes stretch their necks to see what they want to translate from the texts of certain students to a number of complex strategies. Any of them include; writing very brief summaries on pieces of paper, body parts or on materials used at the site.

Other research studies by Jones and Espey (2008) have shown that the sexual interaction among students is on the rise and frequent among students in most institutions of the second cycle. Sexual intercourse among adolescents has culminated in increased cases of unplanned pregnancy, and ultimately dropouts from school (Mlyakado, 2013). Statistics by Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (2008) also showed that 10.1 percent of teenage pregnancy was reported in the Western area of Ghana for those between the ages of 15 and as many as 12.7 percent of the same age group had begun childbearing.

In addition, Ghana's most comprehensive work on drug usage by high school students undertaken by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasized that the average age ranged from 14-19 years at first application of substances (MOH, 2003). The results revealed that medications more widely consumed by students involved tobacco, nicotine, weed, methamphetamine, tranquilizer and heroin, and thus concluded that such narcotics were frequently used at school or at home.

In addressing the prevalence of moral decadence, studies conducted have focused on elements regarding the concept of moral decadence in isolation. For example, a study conducted by Nkyi (2014) and Enose, Omondi, Atieno, and Gaudencia (2014) emphasized drug abuse in isolation while, Mlyakado and Neema (2014) conducted a study on sexual immorality as element of moral decadence to the neglect of other critical components of moral decadence. It is, therefore, important that a study of this form has become necessary as it primarily considers multiple elements of moral decadence such as examination malpractices, illicit sexual activities, bullying, sexual harassment, drug abuse, and truancy and how these elements affect the lives of the students. It is in this context that this thesis aimed to investigate among some selected senior high schools in the Kumasi metropolis the potential causes and consequences of moral decadence.

1.2. Research Questions

This study was designed to address the following questions:

- What forms of moral decadence are common among senior high school students in the Kumasi Metropolis?
- What are the perceived causes of moral decadence among senior high school students in the Kumasi Metropolis?
- To what extent does moral decadence affect senior high school students in the Kumasi Metropolis?
- What are the measures to put in place for curbing moral decadence among senior high school students in the Kumasi Metropolis?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Social Learning Theory

In 1997 Albert Bandura propounded the social learning theory. According to Ormrod (1999), Albert Bandura is one of the main proponents of this theory. The principle of social learning lays emphasis on the implications of staring at the example of someone whose action is then repeated. The theory of social learning claims that learning takes place within social situations and contexts. The theory further examines how individuals profit from each other according to Ormrod (1999) and incorporates similar principles such as interpretation, imitation and modeling behaviour.

According to the social learning theory, behaviour is dictated by the thought mechanisms of an individual, the atmosphere and the action itself. This implies that although affected by the external conditions, individuals decide their own actions. The theory of social learning emphasizes the role of observer learning about the existence and effect of models. This suggests the students engaging in unethical activities are more likely to have acquired the actions from their setting (Ormrod, 1999). It is believed that students learn through emulation of the aggressive actions and activities exhibited through adults and instructors (Ormrod, 1999). Bandura and Walters (1963), on social learning and personality formation believed that visual models can be portrayed, rather than actual models, by oral, written directions, pictorially, or by a mixture of verbal and pictorial instruments. Pictorially presented models are shown in movies, television or other audio-visual displays while those in books are portrayed as fictional characters.

The implication of this theory is that from their homes and peers, students who misbehave in schools are likely to have learned this behavior. Most of the factor's pupil may participate in unethical activities such as substance usage or vandalism of school properties may be that others do so, so if they may not replicate the conduct, they will be thrown out of their peer group. Children who frequently observe these actions among adults or between adults and children can experience antisocial or unethical behaviour (Docking, 1980). In fact, most definitely abusive students from communities where wife-beating happens (Atieno, 2014). Soet (2005) claimed that most senior high school student who usually read

novels, magazines, and watch television, they are most likely to be influenced by the characters they imitate. Parents and teachers become role models for kids as they mimic just what they are doing. It is firmly insisted by Mbiti (2007) that adults would note in particular that their lifestyle is like a textbook that the youth read on a regular basis. Therefore, it is important to remember that the students learn from their peers and adults as well as parents by modeling and observation. Moral decadence among students is induced mainly by copying or imitating those poor habits witnessed and praised by peers and the community (Atieno, 2014).

2.2. Empirical Review

Oghuvbu and Okpilike (2012) conducted a study on the common ethical and moral challenges at the Abraka-Nigeria Delta state schools. The study's key aim was to define and evaluate unethical behaviors and potential approaches to eliminate unethical behaviors in the schools of the Delta State. The survey design was adopted in the research. A questionnaire of twenty items was given to 3000 participants. Two investigative questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Using mean scores and standard deviation, data was analyzed. The research showed that school strike action, test malpractice, substance misuse, truancy, and damaging property of the school were immoral actions observed in the colleges. The study suggested that the development of laws and regulations and the delivery of lessons in ethics instruction may be forms of minimizing immoral behaviour in classrooms. This study is closely related to the present study in the sense that both admit to moral decadence observed in the lives of senior high school students.

Ogunsanya (1999) carried out an investigation on the causes of moral decadence among the youth in the Egbeda Local Government Area in Lagos State. The goal was to figure out the causes of moral decadence among young people in Lagos State's Egbeda Local Government Region. Questionnaire was used to collect data for the analysis. Samples were obtained with a minimum with six hundred respondents. The findings showed that the triggers of moral decadence among youth in local government in Egbeda include: parental neglect, peer group, social media control, and sexually transmitted disease spread due to sexual immorality. The study suggested that parents strive to educate their children in the Lord's manner, and invest time with them in education. Parents should have an eye on what type of buddies their kids have. The latter analysis is relevant to the present research, as both discuss a growing social issue. The difference between the studies is that the above study is restricted to the youth in Lagos state while the present study is limited to senior high schools in the Kumasi Metropolis.

Anih (2014) carried out a study on the impact of moral instruction on the social adjustment of junior secondary school students in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area. The analysis was motivated by five test questions, and one null hypothesis. For the review the ex-post facto test method has been adopted. A sample was selected including 48 teachers and 300 students. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer questions about the research. The study's main results revealed that moral education molds the character of the students and introduces them to societal change and helps them develop moral principles. The results ultimately revealed that schools don't adequately provide spiritual education. The thesis is linked to the present one in the way that all agree to the need for the school curriculum to inculcate spiritual education. The distinction is that while the present research was centered on senior high schools, the latter analysis was based on primary schools.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The usage of descriptive survey approach was therefore utilized in quantitative study design. A positivist model is the foundation of quantitative method. This approach and design were the best most suitable means to better explore the persistent of moral decadence among students in the senior high schools in the Kumasi Metropolis.

3.2. Study Population

The research target population comprises all senior high school 2 students in selected schools in the Kumasi metropolis. The accessible population for the study consisted of senior high school 2 students in the three selected schools namely Asanteman senior high school, Adventist senior high school, and KNUST senior high school. The three schools were chosen because considering the geographical and economic nature of the Kumasi Metropolis, human and vehicular traffic is a big issue to deal with, hence the sample for the study was selected conveniently as possible as suggested by Frankel and Wallen (2002) who postulate that time and energy should be considered in choosing the sample for a study.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

In the collection of the schools in research purposeful sampling was used. The researcher purposively chose the schools that were within the Metropolis center. Thus, in the cycle three schools were chosen. However, proportional sampling procedure was used to obtain the sample size for each school. The proportional sampling method was used because the researcher needed to ensure that the different schools were reflected equally in terms of their class size. Easy random sampling was used to pick the students for research at various colleges. Simple random sampling was deemed most suitable because it provides equal likelihood to an item in the population to get into the sample; and all choices are independent of each other (Kothari, 2004).

3.4. Instrument

The questionnaire was the principal tool used to obtain the study results. The questionnaire was built on the basis of the research questions and the study's main variables. The data collecting instrument was a questionnaire of 36 objects that was organized in the Likert Scale Model. In the Likert Style Scale, respondents were asked around four degrees of agreement or disagreement to address every object. The score point ranged from 1-4 and are Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Agree-3, and Strongly Agree-4.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher had been requesting approval from the school heads. Students were given a letter of invitation and approval, asking their permission to engage in the research. Both students were informed that their involvement in the research was voluntary, non-invasive, and was unlikely to inflict any physical damage, and privacy and confidentiality were ensured.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data were evaluated using tools for the Social Sciences Statistical Service (SPSS version 22.0). Means and standard deviations have been used to evaluate the data in.

4. Results

4.1. Research Question 1

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Persistent examination malpractice	321	2.85	1.055
Drug and substance abuse by students	321	2.83	.966
Bullying of juniors by seniors	321	3.10	.924
Truancy	321	2.64	1.097
Sexual harassment	321	2.15	1.047
Destroying of school properties	321	2.34	1.103
Involvement in illicit sexual activities	321	2.70	1.052
Indecent dressing among students	321	2.44	1.078
Occultism practised among students	321	2.43	1.123

Table 1: Forms of Moral Decadence Are Common among Senior High School Students in the Kumasi Metropolis
Source: Fieldwork (2018)

The result in Table 1 shows that persistence occurrence of examination malpractice by students (M=2.85; SD=1.055), drug and substance abuse by students (M=2.83; SD=.966), bullying of juniors by seniors (M=3.10; SD = .924), truancy (M=2.64; SD=1.097), and involvement of students in illicit sexual activities (M=2.64; SD=1.097) were identified as forms of moral decadence common among senior high school students.

4.2. Research Question 2

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Careless attitude of parents	321	3.13	.933
Pampering of children by their parents	321	2.38	1.061
Peer influence	321	3.17	.917
Watching immoral films	321	2.88	1.061
Poverty	321	2.66	1.087
Unregulated media landscape where media content is censored	321	2.62	1.053
The love of money	321	2.43	1.026
Lack of teacher professionalism	321	2.44	1.086

Table 2: Causes of Moral Decadence among Senior High School Students in the Kumasi Metropolis
Source: Fieldwork (2018)

The result in Table 2 shows that careless attitude of parents (M=3.13; SD=.933), peer influence (M=3.17; SD=.917), watching immoral films (M=2.88; SD =1.061), unregulated media landscape where media content is not censored (M=2.62; SD=1.053) and poverty which makes students indulge in immoral behaviours (M=2.66; SD=1.087) were perceived as causes of moral decadence among senior high school student.

4.3. Research Question 3

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Teachers spent instructional hours in controlling moral decadence and this may result in syllabus not being completed	321	3.12	.885
Uncontrollable attitude towards alcoholic drinks creates room for deadly diseases like, lung cancer and brain cancer	321	3.13	.394
Sexual immorality and the spread of contagious diseases	321	2.91	1.043
Smoking and abuse of drugs can lead to mental disorder among students	321	3.08	.994
Drug abuse is capable of turning the individual into a radical and violent person	321	3.09	.937
Truancy negatively affect educational achievement of students	321	2.89	1.035

Table 3: To What Extent Does Moral Decadence Affect Senior High School Students in the Kumasi Metropolis?
Source: Fieldwork (2018)

The result in Table 3, reveals that teachers spent instructional hours in controlling moral decadence among students ($M=3.12$; $SD=.885$), uncontrollable attitude towards alcoholic drinks creates room for deadly diseases like, lung cancer and brain cancer ($M=3.13$; $SD=.394$), sexual immorality and the spread of contagious diseases ($M=2.91$; $SD=1.043$), smoking and abuse of drugs can lead to mental disorder among students ($M=3.08$; $SD=.994$), drug abuse is capable of turning the individual into a radical and violent person ($M=3.09$; $SD=.937$) and truancy negatively affect educational achievement of students ($M=3.08$; $SD=.994$) were identified as effect of moral decadence on senior high school students.

4.4. Research Question 4

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Establishment of rules and regulation	321	3.36	.731
Parental supervision and school counselling	321	3.06	.979
Positive teacher and student's relationship	321	2.43	1.085
Involvement of teachers and students in making rules and regulations	321	3.28	.797
Facilities for games and sports	321	2.38	1.059
School authorities to be of good morals	321	3.14	.909
Moral leadership and education	321	3.11	.937
Emphasis on extracurricular activities	321	2.45	1.041
Parents Teachers Association (PTA)	321	2.46	1.053

Table 4: Measures to Put in Place for Curbing Moral Decadence among Senior High School Students in the Kumasi Metropolis
Source: Fieldwork (2018)

In Table 4, the result shows that establishment of rules and regulation by head teachers ($M=3.36$; $SD=.731$), involvement of teachers and students in making rules and regulations ($M=3.28$; $SD=.797$), parental supervision and school counseling ($M=3.06$; $SD=.979$), school authorities to be of good morals ($M=3.14$; $SD=.909$) and moral leadership and education ($M=3.11$; $SD=.937$) were identified as measures for curbing moral decadence among senior high school students.

5. Discussions

The findings of table 1 revealed that persistence occurrence of examination malpractice by students, drug and substance abuse by students, bullying of juniors by seniors, truancy, and involvement of students in illicit sexual activities were the forms of moral decadence common among senior high school students in the Kumasi Metropolis. This result is compatible with the argument made by Charlton and David (1993) who claimed that the senior high schools are one specific stage of the educational system of a country where all kinds of unethical activities are quite prevalent and tend to aggravate. According to Agyekum and Gambrah (2011), students at this point are swept up in different kinds of unethical activities such as occultism, viewing and reading pornographic films, breaking school laws, rioting, drinking, substance addiction, and so on.

With regards to the causes of moral decadence among senior high school students, the result of the study showed that careless attitude of parents, peer influence, watching immoral films, unregulated media landscape where media content is not censored and poverty which makes students indulge in immoral behaviours were causes of student's moral

decadence. This observation was consistent with that of Ndakwa (2013) as he concluded that, if parents are mostly absent, children will often switch to their peer groups for social help and frequently switch to a community that supports them even though the community is engaged in immoral or harmful behaviors and for certain young people, the desire for association or closeness is often stronger than the urge to do the right thing. Parents are still disregarding their responsibility for the proper education of their children, so they invest less time with these youngsters, which contributes to the moral laxity that most students exhibit (Madziyire, 2010).

The results further revealed that that teachers spent instructional hours in controlling moral decadence among students, uncontrollable attitude towards alcoholic drinks creates room for deadly diseases like, lung cancer and brain cancer, sexual immorality and the spread of contagious diseases, smoking and abuse of drugs can lead to mental disorder among students, drug abuse is capable of turning the individual into a radical and violent person and truancy negatively affect educational achievement of students were the effect of moral decadence on senior high school students. The study is in accordance with Finn, Schrodtt, Witt, Jernberg, Elledge and Larson (2009) results, which quoted a poll of 805 representatives of the American Teachers Union Association, stating that 17 percent of teachers spent around four hours a week regulating unethical conduct, while an further 19 percent of teachers spent two or three hours a week to immoral behaviour. This is in accordance with Matsimoto's (2000) results which claimed that bad success is the result of moral decadence on the teaching and learning cycle. This is so more time is expended on administrative issues, fewer time is spent on teaching and this results in the inability to complete the syllabus, thus the insufficient training of students.

The findings on the measures for curbing moral decadence revealed that establishment of rules and regulation by head teachers, involvement of teachers and students in making rules and regulations, parental supervision and school counseling, school authorities to be of good morals and moral leadership and education were the measures for curbing moral decadence among senior high school students. This result confirmed that of Evertson, Emmer and Worsham (2000) who claimed that a guideline establishes basic norms or principles of conduct and that offering the students a simple set of guidelines about what is acceptable would be a big start towards creating a healthy classroom and school atmosphere that will be free of the students 'unruly behaviour'. The conclusion is similar to Sherter and Stone's (1980) discovery that school therapy works on the particular issues and desires of pupils or adolescents and lets them develop healthy habits and unlearn the undesirable ones so that they can become confident and be able to cope with potential disputes.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The prevalence of moral decadence among senior high school students should not be overlooked because moral decadence among students could lead to students being traumatised, low academic performance, school dropout and reduction in literate population. It is however concluded that the presence of these could be attributed to moral decadence. The following recommendations were given:

The study advises that school administrators, teachers and students be sensitized to the negative effects of moral decadence on students by means of lectures, conferences, talks and symposia because this may go a long way in minimizing the problem. The Ghana Education Service should also establish training programmes for pre-service and in-service personnel that are adapted to the school setting and keep teachers up-to-date with new techniques in coping with spiritual decadence problems for children.

Parents will be inspired by the development of knowledge about the risks of reckless parenting. This will be achieved at parent teachers' association meetings where parents will be informed regarding the importance of effective and appropriate home schooling for their children and the apparently beneficial consequences of participating in their wards' lives. The Educational Directorate may control material in the media environment in cooperation with government entities who are in charge of the media. This can aid with caution in presenting advertising information and understanding potential consequences on the teenager.

The Directorates of Education and the head teachers ought to improve counselling facilities in schools for children. It could go a long way to avoiding a scenario in which the world might lose much of its population in the immediate future, because moral decadence might cause certain students to drop out and become drug addiction.

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